**‘*Everyone Out?*’: preventing migrant homelessness during Covid-19 and beyond**

**Overview**

Destitution and homelessness have been built in features of the UK immigration system for some time. However, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people were temporarily protected from homelessness due to two key measures**:** a suspension of evictions from asylum accommodation and the continuation of financial support by the Home Office; and the ‘Everyone In’ policy directive from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) which, alongside equivalent measures from devolved governments, allowed Local Authorities to accommodate everyone at risk of homelessness, regardless of immigration status or No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions.

**As these emergency measures end, people with NRPF and those who have received a negative decision on their asylum claim, are at acute risk of homelessness. This would not be acceptable under normal circumstances, but in the context of rising COVID infection rates across the UK, and winter around the corner, it is manifestly unsafe.**

**The present situation**

**The Home Office has taken the decision to resume discontinuations of support and evictions for people with a negative asylum decision in England** [from the 15th September](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/asylum-seekers-evictions-home-office-coronavirus-second-wave-b486062.html), with plans to resume in Scotland and Wales at a later unspecified date. The Home Office has not provided exact figures on the number of people who will be affected by this decision, and there has been no clarity about what will happen to people who cannot leave the UK after the 14 or 21 day notice period. The outcome for many people is likely to be street homelessness. **The decision to restart evictions will force thousands of people into destitution and risk the creation of a significant population of people forced to sleep rough.**

In answer to a Freedom of Information request, the Home Office stated that cessations would be further paused ‘in local authorities subject to regional restrictions/lockdown’. However, it is clear that **cessation letters and eviction proceedings are ongoing in areas in local lockdown**, such as [Liverpool](https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/home-office-eviction-policy-leaving-19066828?fbclid=IwAR19WETuqlzz-jxefZQ1Xo2KpHEnjXWMG0d9MDZVpnBSFdPI2BzEQ7yGsBU) and [Greater Manchester](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/asylum-seekers-eviction-lockdown-coronavirus-home-office-b913200.html).

**People living on asylum support have very few protections against eviction once their asylum claim is refused and a cessation letter is issued.** They have no recourse to public funds, and are forced to rely on the support of charities, faith and community groups to avoid street homelessness. With support and advice from the third sector, a large proportion of people who have been refused asylum go on to appeal the decision and are eventually granted leave to remain; for example, the latest Home Office figures show that [45% of asylum appeals are allowed](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/asylum-applications-fell-by-40-during-lockdown/). However, **charities that provide temporary housing support to people with NRPF and refugees who would otherwise be homeless have reported reduced capacity to provide advice and support, and uncertainty about how emergency accommodation such as night shelters can open safely in the context of COVID-19**. These factors make it extremely difficult for local organisations to respond and adapt to the needs of people that may be requiring emergency support in the months ahead.

**Additionally, there remains significant uncertainty about long term Local Authority provision for people with NRPF**. In England, ‘Everyone In’ funding ended in June, with additional funding available through the [Next Steps Accommodation Programme](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/next-steps-accommodation-programme-guidance-and-proposal-templates?utm_campaign=1946852_Move%20on%20funding%20update%20July%202020&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotmailer&dm_i=3R33,15Q78,52OD3O,43WII,1) though it is not clear how much of this will be available for people with NRPF. [Crisis](https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/government-announces-support-package-for-people-rough-sleeping-this-winter-crisis-response/) has raised concerns further recent funding announced by the Government (in October) falls short of the necessary action needed to keep everyone safe from street homelessness during the winter, and [medical and homelessness organisations have written to the Prime Minister](https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/latest-news/medical-bodies-and-homelessness-organisations-sign-letter-to-prime-minister-warning-of-risk-to-life-without-action-to-protect-people-sleeping-rough-this-winter/) warning of significant ‘risk to life’ without bold and decisive action.

The Home Affairs Select Committee [report into Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 institutional accommodation](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2171/documents/20088/default/) recommended that ‘*Before taking any final decision to remove temporary support for asylum seekers, the Home Office and its accommodation providers must engage and consult closely with Public Health England, devolved governments, Strategic Migration Partnerships, asylum dispersal councils and local public health units to ensure that any changes do not place individuals at any risk or overwhelm other statutory support services.’* Despite this, **engagement with key stakeholders appears to have been minimal**; for example, Hull City Council note the Home Office’s ‘*lack of consultation, pre-planning or prior engagement with local authorities*’ on this issue in their recent [submission to the Public Accounts Committee](https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/12512/pdf/), highlighting that the Home Office has undertaken ‘*no engagement or consultation with local or regional Public Health around possible impacts for the city*’. Glasgow City Council have also [written to the Home Secretary](https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/18770559.susan-aitken-tells-priti-patel-asylum-seeker-eviction-plan-disastrous-glasgow/) saying that to resume evictions ‘*in the current climate in the city would be dangerous, would put numerous people at risk and would be disastrous for community relations in the city.*’

**The Home Office’s plans have been met with** [**opposition from many voices across the UK**](https://asylummatters.org/2020/10/12/take-action-to-stopasylumevictions/)**, including local authorities, hundreds of organisations across the migration and homelessness sectors, and** [**elected Mayors Andy Burnham, Steve Rotheram and Jamie Driscoll.** In their words, ‘*people in our communities are being left out of crucial measures to prevent homelessness. People who have sought sanctuary in our towns and cities, and others with no recourse to public funds, are all at risk of street homelessness and destitution.*’](https://twitter.com/MayorJD/status/1313955773182083072?s=20)

**What needs to happen**

The emergency measures the Government, local authorities, devolved governments took at the beginning of March to protect people seeking asylum from homelessness have successfully kept people safe. As one person supported by an organisation in the NACCOM network who was at risk of street homelessness before he was able to access temporary accommodation explains, *‘I was panicking, when I heard if you have an underlying health condition you are more likely to die. So I thought I was going to die, it was very worrying, very dangerous.’* Removing this support now risks fundamentally undermining the progress made over the past months.

The Immigration Minister, Chris Philp MP, has said in response to [Parliamentary questions](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-21/92788) that measures to keep people seeking asylum safe from eviction over the summer were only ‘*temporary measure(s) which would be brought to an end as soon as it was safe to do so.*’ Withdrawing accommodation from people seeking asylum in the middle of the second wave of a deadly pandemic is clearly unsafe, especially given the well evidenced [disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people from Black and Minority Ethnic](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892376/COVID_stakeholder_engagement_synthesis_beyond_the_data.pdf) (BAME) communities.

To continue to protect everyone from homelessness and COVID-19, the following measures must be implemented immediately by the Home Office, and the housing departments for all constituent nations of the UK:

* **The Home Office must halt their plans to resume evictions for people who have been refused asylum, and further extend protections from evictions in the devolved nations.** No-one should have their financial support or accommodation withdrawn until they have been able to access alternative provision. People in asylum accommodation must be provided with adequate advice and support to help them progress their legal case, or transition into settled accommodation, employment or mainstream benefits;
* A fully funded duty for Local Authorities to provide emergency accommodation to all those with nowhere safe to stay, regardless of their immigration status, in line with Crisis’ [Emergency Legislation](https://www.crisis.org.uk/get-involved/home-for-all/noticeboard/home-for-all-emergency-legislation/) campaign.
* An end to No Recourse to Public Funds conditions, including for those without leave to remain.