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

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people have been temporarily protected from homelessness due to two key emergency measures**:** a suspension of evictions from asylum accommodation 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, has allowed Local Authorities to accommodate everyone at risk of homelessness, regardless of immigration status or No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions.

**As the UK starts to lift restrictions and government departments wind down emergency measures, the risk of street homelessness faced by people who have been refused asylum and others with NRPF once again becomes acute. Destitution is always unacceptable and during the pandemic the risks associated with it have become clearer than ever.**

**The present situation**

Evictions from asylum accommodation for people refused asylum have been paused for the majority of the Covid-19 pandemic but [are expected to resume in the near future](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/25/home-office-drops-plan-to-evict-thousands-of-migrants-during-pandemic).

**Why does this matter?**

**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 charities, faith and community groups to avoid street homelessness. The voluntary sector safety nets for people in this extremely difficult situation have always been fragile, but provision is even more difficult to guarantee due to Covid-19. **Specialist homelessness charities and faith and community groups are grappling with gaps in bedspaces, capacity and funding as they reconfigure services in light of changing public health advice and** [**guidance**](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-provision-of-night-shelters)**.**

**It is also vital to recognise that with support and advice, a large proportion of people who have been refused asylum are eventually granted leave to remain**; the latest Home Office figures show that [39% of asylum appeals are allowed](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/top-10-facts-about-refugees-and-people-seeking-asylum/), while of the 427 people who were appeal rights exhausted and moved on from NACCOM members in 2019/20, [53% secured refugee protection or re-engaged with statutory or asylum support.](https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NACCOM-ImpactReport_2021-02-04_DIGITAL-updated-Feb-2021.pdf) For some people, returning to their country of origin may be something they consider, but the reality is that for many people it is simply not safe [nor practical](https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/refugee-support/cant-stay-cant-go-webready.pdf) for them to do so. To make decisions about their next steps and engage with services, people need — at the very minimum — a roof over their head.

**Additionally, there** [**remains significant uncertainty about long term Local Authority provision for people with NRPF**](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5342/documents/53217/default/)**, including those who have the NRPF condition attached to their visa and all others who are unable to access public funds due to insecure migration status**. In England, various tranches of [funding have been made available](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-covid-protections-for-rough-sleepers-and-renters) to prevent rough sleeping but [charities and Local Authorities have consistently reported that these do not go far enough](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/243806/the_impact_of_covid-19_on_people_facing_homelessness_and_service_provision_across_great_britain_2020.pdf). In 2020, [medical and homelessness organisations wrote 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, whilst the Mayor of London called for an [urgent suspension of ‘immigration based’ exclusions from welfare and homelessness assistance](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-calls-for-compassion-for-homeless-migrants#x_x__ftn1). As [recent legal action has shown](https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2021/03/high-court-rules-councils-can-lawfully-accommodate-street-homeless-people-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds-will-the-government-now-provide-proper-guidance/), people with NRPF remain at acute risk of exclusion from shelter and support without a lasting change of approach.

**Failure to provide adequate shelter and safety for all people regardless of their immigration status is always unacceptable and the immediate and long-term impact of homelessness on individuals is immeasurable.** As Sam, an expert by experience supported by NACCOM, [explained to the Housing Communities and Local Government (HCLG) committee in December 2020](https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/1429/pdf/), *‘I was sofa-surfing for over a year, trying to find accommodation. I really struggled to access services due to no recourse to public funds, and I ended up sleep-deprived for weeks in a fast-food restaurant. This period was really scary and a difficult time for me, and I remember asking myself, “Will I ever feel safe?”’*

In the context of Covid-19, data shows that people from [Black and minoritised communities](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892376/COVID_stakeholder_engagement_synthesis_beyond_the_data.pdf), people living in areas of [multiple deprivation](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/updatingethniccontrastsindeathsinvolvingthecoronaviruscovid19englandandwales/deathsoccurring2marchto28july2020#main-points), and [people who are homeless](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600%2820%2930396-9/fulltext) are at heightened risk of contracting Covid-19, whilst significant barriers [remain in place for many people from migrant communities to receive the vaccine](http://www.vaccineforall.co.uk/). **In a just recovery from the pandemic, everyone deserves to feel safe and no one should be left behind.**

In July 2020, a [Home Affairs Select Committee report detailed some of the safeguards that would need to be put in place before evictions could safely recommence, including consultation with key stakeholders such as local authorities.](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2171/documents/20132/default/) Despite this, throughout the pandemic **engagement with key stakeholders has been minimal**, with the Home Office [failing to consult](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/home-office-asylum-evictions-immigration-b1721887.html) Local Authorities on their decision to resume cessations in September 2020, and providing no details on [either the nature of Public Health advice](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-30/109423) or their assessment of [the equalities duty](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-07-09/71801) regarding cessations for people with a negative asylum decision.

**The Home Office’s plans to restart evictions into homelessness have been met by** [**opposition from many voices across the UK**](https://asylummatters.org/2020/10/12/take-action-to-stopasylumevictions/); in September 2020, this included Local Authorities (including [Glasgow City Council](https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/18770559.susan-aitken-tells-priti-patel-asylum-seeker-eviction-plan-disastrous-glasgow/) and [Leeds City Council](https://migrationpartnership.org.uk/political-support-from-lcc-to-help-halt-home-office-evictions/)), members of Parliament, [elected Mayors](https://twitter.com/MayorJD/status/1313955773182083072?s=20), and hundreds of organisations across the migration and homelessness sectors[.](https://twitter.com/MayorJD/status/1313955773182083072?s=20)This is unsurprising given that when the Home Office forces people into homelessness, it is Local Authorities, local communities and voluntary groups who are left to try and fill the gaps. [Local Authorities who participate in asylum dispersal](https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/greater-manchester-leaders-open-statement-to-the-home-office-on-asylum-seeker-evictions-policy/) want to welcome people seeking asylum and help them rebuild their lives, but they can only do this effectively if the Home Office changes these policies and works collaboratively with communities to improve the system and fund it fairly. Despite the clear [toll of current policy](https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/greater-manchester-leaders-open-statement-to-the-home-office-on-asylum-seeker-evictions-policy/) on individuals and communities, the Government’s [New Plan for Immigration](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/972517/CCS207_CCS0820091708-001_Sovereign_Borders_Web_Accessible.pdf) contains proposals that could [strip away](http://www.asaproject.org/uploads/Overview_of_2016_IA_and_AS_08-04-21.pdf) the very limited government support available to people who have received a negative decision, and will also increase the number of people subject to NRPF and vulnerable to destitution and homelessness.

**What needs to happen: no return to business as usual**

When the UK first introduced initial lockdown measures, the Home Office was quick to act to suspend evictions and support people seeking asylum to remain in accommodation. This was the right thing to do, allowing people who would otherwise be homeless to follow public health guidance, stay at home and stay safe. **The fact that these steps were taken has shown us what is possible; we cannot now go back to normal when ‘normal’ means life lived on the street and in destitution for so many people in our society. As we rebuild, we strongly urge the UK Government to ensure a just and humane transition from emergency measures and put a permanent end to policies that cause homelessness and destitution.**

We recommend that the Home Office:

* **Maintains the pause on evictions from asylum accommodation until sufficient safeguards are in place to prevent street homelessness and ensure no-one is evicted into homelessness as a result of emergency measures ending.**
* **Ends No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions** and works with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and relevant housing departments for constituent nations of the UK to provide adequate funding and clear guidance for local authorities to support everyone at risk of homelessness in their communities.
* **Ensures the UK asylum system is fairer, functions better,** **and does not create homelessness and destitution** so that at all stages of the asylum system, people are provided with safe, dignified accommodation in areas where legal advice, community support and healthcare is easily accessible.

We also believe that if the Government is serious about ending street homelessness, all proposals in the [New Plan for Immigration](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration) that fail to safeguard against this must be scrapped.