**Standing together for a future in which everyone feels safe (July 2021)**

*“Will I ever feel safe?”’* This is a question that Sam asked herself when she was forced to sofa surf for over a year, whilst being unable to access vital support services or accommodation during the process of seeking protection in the UK. Sam has now been recognised as a refugee and shared her experiences of being homeless when she had insecure immigration status at a [Parliamentary Select Committee in December 2020](https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/1429/pdf/). But it is a question that many more people will be asking over the coming weeks, months and years, if hostile Government policies towards people seeking protection are not challenged, and the harm they cause is not recognised.

With a roof over their head and support to resolve legal, and other, issues, people who have an insecure immigration status can live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives in local communities, as [NACCOM members (](https://naccom.org.uk/projects/)charities and faith groups across the UK accommodating people facing homelessness because of their immigration status) and people with lived experience testify. But capacity to provide this support, which was never enough to meet need prior to the pandemic, has become increasingly stretched. At the same time, Government changes could push people into greater insecurity.

**The impact of immediate changes in policies on people facing destitution:**

Despite High Court [legal action](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/nov/06/home-office-high-court-asylum-seeker-evictions-coronavirus) and pressure from [people with lived experience](https://www.itv.com/news/calendar/2020-12-10/government-branded-irresponsible-as-asylum-seekers-left-not-knowing-when-they-may-be-evicted), [Local Authorities](https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/greater-manchester-leaders-open-statement-to-the-home-office-on-asylum-seeker-evictions-policy/), [Metro Mayors](https://twitter.com/MayorJD/status/1313955773182083072?s=20), [parliamentarians](https://www.rampproject.org/news/nrpfoped), [faith groups](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/07/home-office-urged-to-halt-evictions-of-refused-asylum-seekers) and [charities](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/27/home-office-to-resume-evicting-some-asylum-seekers-with-immediate-effect), the temporary [pause on evictions](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/27.03.20-Chris-Philp-Letter.pdf) from accommodation for people with a negative asylum decision (in place since March 2020) is now being lifted. The immediate consequence is fear and confusion for [thousands of people](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/25/home-office-drops-plan-to-evict-thousands-of-migrants-during-pandemic) likely to be forced into homelessness. Those who remain in the UK, but who no longer qualify for asylum support, could face rough sleeping, starvation, and exploitation.

This is because people with insecure immigration status, including those who have been refused asylum, fall under the Government’s ‘No Recourse to Public Funds’ (NRPF) policy, which cuts people off from basic state support because of their immigration status. During the pandemic, calls for its suspension have come from [individuals with lived experience](https://www.praxis.org.uk/campaigning), [parliamentarians](https://www.politics.co.uk/comment-analysis/2020/12/03/covid-crisis-demands-safety-net-for-all/), the [Local Government Association](https://www.bigissue.com/latest/councils-plead-with-ministers-to-lift-no-recourse-to-public-funds-policy/), [charities](https://www.jcwi.org.uk/no-recourse-to-public-funds-public-health-risk-destitution), [medical groups](https://www.jcwi.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a135b52c-e9d0-469c-aad8-3dde31aec7a1) and [faith leaders](https://naccom.org.uk/uk-faith-leaders-call-for-home-office-to-halt-asylum-evictions-open-letter-to-the-home-secretary/). In addition, evidence of how it [forces people into risky situations to survive](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/a-lifeline-for-all-summary.pdf) have led [Parliamentary Select Committees](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmworpen/178/17807.htm) to recommend changes. However, the policy remains in place and with it, an uncertain future for many.

Some people acutely aware of this uncertainty are those who have been accommodated temporarily by councils under [Government directives known as ‘Everyone In’ (issued early on in the pandemic](https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-housing-of-rough-sleepers-during-the-covid19-pandemic/)). Recent [legal action clarified the powers (within a public health emergency) that councils can use to house people with](https://www.lawstop.co.uk/events-and-media/) NRPF, but the extent to which such powers can or will be relied upon as lockdown measures ease is unclear. Some Local Authorities continue to accommodate people with NRPF but this is not the case everywhere. Indeed, [charities](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5342/documents/53217/default/) and [researchers](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343774922_Research_report_Local_Authority_Responses_to_people_with_NRPF_during_the_pandemic) argue that [variation in council responses](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZvNQCD1XDazwQZ48mOYzbgaARr7lDzFv/view?usp=sharing) has been commonplace throughout the pandemic, an issue which could be mitigated with clearer [guidance](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/) for councils to support people with insecure status and sustainable [funding](https://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/news/accommodating-rough-sleepers) to meet need.

Alongside supporting people with insecure status to meet immediate needs such as food and shelter, the Government could do more to resolve barriers around legal advice and support, to help people make the steps they want towards safety. Instead, changes have been made to the immigration rules [that put some people who are rough sleeping at risk of removal from the UK](https://www.pilc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PILC-info-sheet-rough-sleeping-as-ground-for-refusal-v.-November-2020.pdf). These have sparked concerns that [people with insecure status will fear approaching services for support](https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/latest-news/joint-statement-condemning-uk-plans-to-remove-rough-sleepers/), and led to the launch of [Homeless Link’s campaign for councils to oppose the policy](https://www.homeless.org.uk/stand-against-rough-sleeping-immigration-rules). It is significant that such steps are being taken by the Government at the same time as the [deadline passes for EU citizens to apply for settled status](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics), with the [number of people with insecure immigration status expected to rise](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jun/16/hundreds-of-thousands-of-eu-citizens-in-uk-risk-uncertain-status-from-1-july) in the months ahead.

**How future policies could make things worse:**

Following a [brief and controversial consultation process earlier this year](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/30/sham-200-groups-criticise-uk-government-consultation-on-refugee-policy), the Government has announced plans to change the immigration system under the [Nationality and Borders Bill](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nationality-and-borders-bill-factsheet/nationality-and-borders-bill-factsheet). If enacted, such plans could drastically increase poverty and injustice for many, with evidence from the coalition ‘[Together with Refugees’](https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/) demonstrating that [two in three women and children](https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/news-story-women-and-children-abandoned-by-proposed-refugee-rules/) who are currently accepted as refugees would be turned away under the new proposals.

The UK immigration system can and should support people seeking protection but plans outlined in the legislation do the opposite. The introduction of a ‘temporary protection’ status, which would differentiate between individuals based on how they arrive in the UK, will force people into risky situations to survive without any assurance of safety. Meanwhile, proposals outlined elsewhere in the [New Plan for Immigration](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration/new-plan-for-immigration-policy-statement-accessible) to support people recognised as refugees fall woefully short of addressing [longstanding concerns](https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NACCOM-Homelessnesss-Report_2019-06-18_DIGITAL.pdf) about [homelessness](https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/refugee-support/the-costs-of-destitution.pdf?la=en&hash=DB934CFE514C3B732C80E8EDF2FBC08DD746F42C) after the 28 day move on period.

Other concerning aspects of the Bill include proposals to limit access to legal advice, reduce appeal rights and speed up removals of people who have been refused asylum, all of which will extend the Hostile Environment and increase injustice and destitution. NACCOM members and people with lived experience testify how the combination of accommodation, support and (where possible) good legal advice can enable people who have had their asylum claims refused to live a healthy and fulfilling life in their local communities. Members can also demonstrate that with support, many people eventually [see their protection rights recognised](https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NACCOM-ImpactReport_2021-02-04_DIGITAL-updated-Feb-2021.pdf), with recent government records showing that since 2015, [14,151 people have had their protection claims recognised after initially being refused](https://darkenedroomweb.wordpress.com/2021/05/04/justice/?fbclid=IwAR1YP0y2EBmmzvNMcCeMszftDxLB9wncbD9jhqPFYz8sN7BXsEUBwDOCMFM).

A separate concern around destitution and injustice relates to plans [to consult Local Authorities](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration/new-plan-for-immigration-policy-statement-accessible) on ending support for families who have been refused asylum. Such plans (initially included in the 2016 Immigration Act but not enacted) have been [met with alarm](https://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/news/new-plan-for-immigration) because they are at odds with evidence that with support, people can find pathways out of destitution. Indeed, evidence from the NRPF network shows how with advice and assistance, [82% of families supported by Local Authorities last year were granted leave to remain](https://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/news/nrpf-connect-data-report-2019-20).

The Government has an opportunity to collaborate with communities and councils to improve the immigration system and fund it fairly. But to do this, they must recognise the role they play in creating injustice and destitution, improve decision making and ensure better legal advice and support. As part of the [Together with Refugees](https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/) coalition we are calling for a humane approach to people seeking safety, and as part of this, we need to challenge any policy that [could worsen someone’s ability to live a healthy, fulfilling life in their local community](https://naccom.org.uk/new-plan-for-immigration-consultation-we-are-deeply-concerned-about-both-the-consultation-process-and-impact-of-the-legislature/). **Will you stand with us for a safer future for everyone?**

**Recommendations**

To the Home Office:

* **Commit to ending the Hostile Environment by scrapping all policies which punish people seeking safety, including No Recourse to Public Funds, eviction into homelessness from asylum accommodation, and the recently introduced rough sleeping rule changes.**
* **Ahead of any changes in legislation, commit to meaningfully consult people living under immigration control to assess the impact of changes to policy with the aim to prevent harm and reduce destitution.**
* **Ensure safeguards throughout the asylum process that guarantee people somewhere safe to live, in communities where they can access free, independent legal advice, healthcare and support networks.**
* **Publish the Equality Impact Assessment of the policy regarding asylum evictions and conduct an evidence review of the health impacts on people who do not leave the UK after being issued with an eviction notice.**

To the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG):

* **Provide adequate funding and clear guidance for Local Authorities to support anyone at risk of homelessness, regardless of their immigration status.**
* **Work across government departments (national, local and devolved) and with people with lived experience of destitution to learn from changes introduced during the pandemic and develop a UK wide rough sleeping prevention strategy that supports, and does not exclude, people under immigration control.**

To Local Authorities and Members of Parliament:

* **Stand against the implementation of legislation and policies that punish people seeking safety.**
* **Advocate for more and better support for people at the end of the asylum process, including families, to prevent destitution.**
* **Engage with voluntary sector organisations and people with lived experience of destitution to learn from changes introduced during the pandemic and build learning from this process into local strategies to prevent destitution.**
* **Support** [**the Together with Refugees coalition**](https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/) **and the** [**One Strong Voice**](https://www.onestrongvoice.org.uk/petition.html) **campaign.**
* **Support Homeless Link’s** [**#SupportDon’tDeport**](https://www.homeless.org.uk/stand-against-rough-sleeping-immigration-rules) **campaign and** [**City of Sanctuary’s Local Authority Network**](https://la.cityofsanctuary.org/information/information-for-la)**.**