

Everyone Out?

Preventing evictions into homelessness from asylum accommodation during COVID-19 and beyond.

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 migrants have temporarily been 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) alongside equivalent measures from devolved governments which allowed local authorities to accommodate everyone at risk of homelessness, regardless of immigration status or No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions.

These measures have successfully brought people inside during the pandemic and have undoubtedly protected people who have accessed emergency accommodation. However, these are 'emergency' measures and while MHCLG have announced that evictions from the private rental sector will remain suspended, the Home Office have indicated that asylum evictions may resume from the end of June.

This has led to a concern that we will face a 'cliff edge' where thousands of people could be made homeless from asylum accommodation without recourse to public funds. This would be a public health disaster while the pandemic is ongoing, and a significant failure of public policy if we were to create a new population of people facing homelessness after having shown that it can be avoided.

We cannot go back to normal when 'normal' means life lived in crisis and destitution for so many people in our society. We must retain the protections provided for people while the pandemic is ongoing and secure a just transition from emergency measures to a longer-term settlement. If it is unjust to make someone homeless or destitute during COVID-19, it is also unjust to do so in the transition out of lockdown or beyond the pandemic. The fact that these steps have taken place have shown us what is possible; there should be no place for homelessness and destitution in the UK. We must demand a permanent end to policies that cause homelessness and destitution.

What have we achieved so far?

In response to the pandemic, advocacy groups and local and devolved governments were successful in securing key changes to Home Office and broader government policy that have meant greater protection for migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum during the crisis. These include:

- The suspension of all evictions from asylum accommodation to be reviewed at the end of June 2020.
- Continuation of asylum support following a grant, or refusal, of status to be reviewed at the end of June 2020.
- Increased access to asylum accommodation and support via Section 4 due to COVID-19 situation.
- The 'Everyone In' initiative in England and equivalent measures by the housing departments of the Scottish and Welsh governments, instructed and provided limited ring-fenced funding to local authorities to provide all homeless people with accommodation, including those with NRPF.

- Evictions from the Private Rental Sector initially suspended for 3 months (England and Wales). This review was announced on the 5th June 2020, when [MHCLG announced](#) that it would be continued for another 2 months, until at least 23rd August 2020.

A full list of changes to the asylum and immigration system in response to COVID-19 is available [from the Refugee Council](#).

The present situation

At present, the measures outlined above are all temporary, enacted in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

The Home Office has stated that the current arrangements around asylum accommodation and support will be under review before the end of June (the current cut-off date). There is significant uncertainty over the review - it is unclear what the timeline, process and mechanisms of the review will be, who will be consulted as part of it and when and how the decision will be made and communicated. To date, we have had [no further announcement from the Home Office](#). Given that the review is due to be completed by the end of June, this is of extreme concern.

Some recipients of Section 4 support have already received letters stating that their support will be discontinued unless they can provide evidence to support their case by the end of the month, although it is unclear whether this is routine or indicative of an intention to stop providing support.

Funding for the 'Everyone In' initiative has ceased, with the Minister for Homelessness stating that they are moving 'into the next phase' with the focus on offering all those accommodated a single service offer. However, there are concerns that people with NRPF will be directed to ['voluntary repatriation'](#) to their countries of origin as a single service offer, rather than provided with further holistic support.

The [Welsh Government](#) has made a public commitment to continue to support those who have been housed during the pandemic and the [Scottish Government](#) has publicly called for the lifting of NRPF conditions. However, while housing policies are devolved, asylum accommodation is not, and there is a risk that the Home Office, without properly consulting with devolved governments, will undermine efforts in the devolved nations to maintain homelessness provision and public health protections.

Migrants and people seeking asylum now face huge uncertainty over their financial situation and whether they will still have a roof over their head in a few weeks' time. This uncertainty at an already stressful time is unnecessary, and the prospect of withdrawing support during a deadly pandemic is unacceptable.

What needs to happen now

In order to avoid the 'cliff edge' and continue to protect everyone from COVID-19, the following measures must be implemented immediately by the Home Office, and the housing departments for all constituent nations of the UK:

- No evictions into homelessness from asylum accommodation for at least the next 12 months or longer while COVID-19 poses a public health risk. 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;
- The Government must introduce a new duty for local authorities to provide immediate emergency accommodation to all those with nowhere safe to stay, regardless of whether they have a priority need, a local connection, are considered intentionally homeless, or are not

eligible for support because of their immigration status. For more detail on this specific ask, please see Crisis' recent briefing: [Home For All](#).

Beyond these emergency commitments, to guarantee a just transition and end destitution, the UK Government must commit to:

- End No Recourse to Public Funds conditions for everyone, including those without leave to remain, so that everyone in need of housing and support is able to access it;
- Increase funding to local authorities to respond to the demand for housing and continue to house and support everyone who needs it;
- Issue clear assurances that data will not be shared between local authorities and the Home Office for immigration enforcement purposes;
- Long term changes to asylum support provision so that no-one leaving asylum accommodation is evicted into homelessness;
- A full cross-departmental review of policies and measures introduced during COVID-19, involving key stakeholders from the public, community and voluntary sector;
- Transparency from the Home Office and housing departments about the status of current measures and any reviews, including full, meaningful consultation with devolved governments, local authorities, the Voluntary and Community Sector and those living in asylum accommodation in post-crisis planning and discussions at all levels.

For further information on this briefing, contact either:
Mabli Jones / info@asylumatters.org
Lucy Smith / lucy@naccom.org.uk