

Keys to the city:

How the next Mayor of London can help end refugee homelessness

FEBRUARY 2021



SUPPORTING AND
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REFUGEES

The Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is the leading charity in the UK working directly with refugees and supporting them to rebuild their lives. We also speak up for refugees using our direct work as an evidence base, and ensure refugees have a stronger and more influential voice in decisions that will affect them. We have had a dedicated Private Rented Scheme supporting refugees in London since 2012.

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Acknowledgements

Report written by Seb Klier.

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Further information

For more information about supporting single refugees who are threatened with homelessness, see the Refugee Council's guide, **'Making homelessness applications for refugees in England'**

Summary

Many new refugees in London are very likely to face homelessness immediately after they acquire refugee status. This is a result of having only 28 days to find secure housing before they are evicted from asylum accommodation, in combination with major barriers to accessing private tenancies.

In particular, the high up-front cost of a tenancy deposit means the vast majority of homes in the private rented sector are unavailable. New refugees have no savings as they cannot work during their asylum claim and live on very low levels of support prior to an asylum decision.

Every day, the Refugee Council works with people in this situation. We run a Private Rented Scheme that supports new refugees into secure, privately rented tenancies. For these refugees, usually their only long-term housing option is a home in the private rented sector.

The report sought to establish how much support was offered to refugees in this situation, and found there was very little at local authority level. We issued FOI requests to all London local authorities, but the results show there is a massive gap in service provision for this vulnerable group.

To further understand the barriers that new refugees face, the Refugee Council also analysed data from the last two years of its Private Rented Scheme – namely 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2020, looking at the outcomes for 160 refugees. Taking into account the unique circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic, we considered outcomes 'pre-pandemic' and 'during pandemic'. The results showed that the majority of refugees struggled to secure a tenancy, even with bespoke support.

Key findings

- Over the past 2 years, nearly all (98%) of new refugees approaching the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme were homeless.
- Less than half (48%) of refugees were able to access a private tenancy through the scheme, even with specialist support that it provides. This rose to almost two thirds (62%) for new refugees using the service during the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Of those unable to access a private tenancy, about one in eight (13%) were sofa surfing and almost one in six (16%) were in homelessness hostels or temporary hosting schemes. Almost one in twenty (4%) of those who could not access a tenancy remained street homeless.
- Only one fifth (20%) of refugees accessing a tenancy were able to secure funding for a deposit, while all others were limited to a small range of tenancies that did not require one.
- Only three local authorities could confirm that they had supported refugees into the PRS in the last year. In those cases, the numbers of refugees helped was 30, 5, and 3.

Key recommendations

1. The next Mayor should commit to establish a City Hall fund that can provide support for the up-front cost of a tenancy deposit. Local authorities and the voluntary sector would be able to refer refugees to this fund – with clear qualifying criteria – ensuring that it provided a consistent approach across the city, regardless of the local authority in which a new refugee lives.
2. In conjunction with this financial support, the Mayor should look at how better tenancy support can be provided to new refugees, through pre-tenancy training, access to information and understanding of rights, and closer working with local authorities. Support must be available to ensure deposits are protected, with information about how deposit protection schemes function.





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Introduction

Last year, many thousands of people living in London were granted asylum, or moved to London after acquiring refugee status. Shockingly, though, one of the first documents that new refugees receive is an eviction notice. For although the majority of people seeking asylum in the UK live in Government-supported asylum accommodation throughout their claim, once they acquire refugee status they are given just 28 days to find a new home and an alternative source of income. The difficulties they face within this process mean that large numbers end up homeless.

Organisations working with homeless people in London have noted an increase in people using their services who have been in the asylum system. For example, data from homelessness charity Crisis's London Skylight Centre shows that the proportion of clients who had 'nowhere to live after leaving asylum accommodation' rose from 3% in 2014/15 to 15% in 2016/17.¹

When someone in London is granted asylum, they face a crisis situation as the lack of integration support for new refugees intersects with the London housing crisis. This is particularly acute for those new refugees seeking to find a private tenancy. Private renters number more than 2.7 million in the city, and the sector is the growing tenure of Londoners in poverty.² Conditions in the PRS are the worst of all tenures, and the housing is insecure – eviction from a private tenancy continues to be the leading cause of homelessness.³

In this harsh environment, thousands of London's new refugees struggle to find a new home. The Refugee Council has previously highlighted why newly-recognised refugees so commonly find themselves homeless, and struggle when trying to find a private rented tenancy.⁴ The Refugee Council also runs a Private Rented Scheme which helps to improve access to private tenancies for new refugees, yet that scheme only has capacity to support a tiny fraction of those who may need it.

As a result of the ban on working during an asylum claim, and the low level of financial support provided to those in the asylum system, almost all refugees will be without any savings when they get a positive asylum decision. This means the typical up-front cost of a private tenancy, which can be well over £1,000 when a deposit and rent in advance is included, is simply beyond their means.

Furthermore, ensuring that a Universal Credit (UC) claim is in place – and coordinated with the new landlord so that the housing element is paid – is just not realistic within the 28-day timeframe after which asylum support is ended. This is unavoidable, because there is a minimum 35-day wait for a first UC payment after an application is made.

Yet the next Mayor of London has the means to intervene to change this situation, simply by establishing a fund that would cover the cost of tenancy deposits for new refugees.

Although a tenancy deposit is an insurmountable cost for nearly all refugees as individuals, the establishment of a Mayoral fund to cover the costs of a deposit for new refugees would be relatively low. New refugees are ready to contribute to London's economy, add to its incredible culture, and fulfil their own ambitions. But none of that is possible without a stable home. When the coronavirus pandemic first struck London, we saw that quick and decisive policy could make sure everyone had a roof over their head, when that was really needed. The next Mayor needs to show a similar proactive commitment to preventing refugee homelessness. By creating a Mayoral private rented sector scheme, with a fund for tenancy deposits, they will make inroads towards ending the housing crisis, and support people from across the world who have fled conflict and persecution. That is surely something all candidates can support.

¹ See <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/the-plan-to-end-homelessness-full-version/solutions/chapter-12-ending-migrant-homelessness/>, table 12.3.

² See <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/poverty-and-housing-tenure/>

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/923123/Annual_Statutory_Homelessness_Release_2019-20.pdf

⁴ See <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Good-Practice-Guide.pdf>

The experiences of new refugees looking for homes in London's private rented sector

The Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme has been in operation since 2012. Every year it works with 120 new refugees to support them in finding sustainable tenancies in the private rented sector (PRS). However, due to the barriers that new refugees face to private renting, particularly in London, it typically only places one third of those it supports into a private tenancy.

Our Private Rented Scheme was created to support homeless refugees that had no priority need for accommodation and therefore were not being housed by the local authority. Since then, new duties to support homeless people have come into force (see Appendix B for more information on the prevention and relief duties).

Unfortunately, as these new duties do not necessarily mean accommodation will be provided by the local authority, and due to the multiple barriers refugees face in accessing support from local authorities, we have seen no reduction in the need of homeless refugees approaching our services.

In addition to the Private Rented Scheme, the Refugee Council delivers a housing project for single refugee women, providing a temporary home in a shared social housing property, and then supporting those refugees into tenancies in the private rented sector. However, even with support from trained advisors on both projects, the structure of London's private rented sector combined with the circumstances in which refugees are looking for homes, means that many refugees will often find it very difficult or impossible to quickly find a new tenancy.

To illustrate the kinds of issues that refugees in these circumstances face, we analysed the data of 160 refugees who passed through the Private Rented Scheme in the two-year period from 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2020.

This allowed us to assess trends over time, but importantly, also gave us figures for two different periods, in recognition of the exceptional circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic, when Government temporarily changed housing and homelessness policy to protect public health.

To that end, we considered data within two periods that we have termed 'pre-pandemic' (1/11/2018-16/3/2020) and 'during pandemic' (17/3/2020-31/10/2020).

Overall access to the private rented sector

A number of trends emerged. In the pre-pandemic period, less than half (48%) of refugees using our service were able to access a private tenancy through the scheme. This rose significantly for new refugees using the service during the pandemic, to about two thirds (62%).

We believe this rise is the result of a number of factors, particularly the increased willingness of landlords to offer up properties that would otherwise be empty and the Government's increase in Local Housing Allowance levels in April 2019, making more properties affordable to those on welfare benefits.



Photo by Sam Van Busse on Unplash

What the pre-pandemic figures show, worryingly, is that even with tailored support, less than half of new refugees trying to access the private rented sector were able to. This was in spite of receiving tailored advice from specialist advisors, on a scheme that has relationships with landlords across London who are used to letting to new refugees.

Although the increase in the proportion of tenancies formed during the pandemic was welcome, in that period it still meant more than one in three could not find a suitable private tenancy. With many thousands of people being recognised as refugees each year in London, and not able to access Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme, we would expect the outcomes for the wider population of new, single refugees to be even worse.

Other destinations for refugees who cannot find a tenancy

We also analysed what happened to those refugees who were not able to access a private tenancy through our scheme.

Although we did not have data for the destinations of all those who passed through the scheme, over the two-year period, of those that we know were unable to access a private tenancy, about one in eight (13%) were sofa surfing and almost one in six (16%) were in homelessness hostels or temporary hosting schemes.

Typically this latter group will have been supported by the Refugee Council onto these schemes, otherwise they may well have been in even more precarious circumstances. Almost one in twenty (4%) of those who could not access the PRS remained street homeless.

This level of housing instability has a number of negative consequences. Most obviously, those in insecure housing are more at risk of street homelessness in the future, because they are living in temporary situations than can change quickly, with little protection or legal redress.

Different elements of integration are severely undermined without secure housing. Access to employment and education is affected for those who do not know where they will be living in the long-term. Until someone has some certainty over where they will be living – at least in the medium-term – it is very difficult for them to plan ahead, and start to be part of the local community.

Tenancy deposits

The vast majority of refugees that the Refugee Council supported were able to enter the private rented sector without a tenancy deposit, as a result of our direct advocacy with landlords who agreed to forgo that requirement.

Given that tenancy deposits continue to be ubiquitous in the private rented sector, just trying to find a tenancy which does not require a deposit closed off most private tenancies in London to the refugees we worked with. Refugee Council advisors will try to support refugees to access funding for tenancy deposits, but given the range of barriers to doing so, it is often more worthwhile trying to find private tenancies that do not require a deposit. Only one in five (20%) of refugees accessing a private tenancy were able to do so with a tenancy deposit, and with a wide variation of values, ranging from £100 to £2,610.

A number of refugees were able to access an integration loan from the Home Office. However, the maximum amount acquired was £500, which will often not be enough for a full deposit. The waiting time for an integration loan can also be lengthy, and loans must be paid back through future welfare benefits payments. Advisors at Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme report that integration loans are usually not in payment before a refugee's asylum support has been terminated, when they leave their asylum accommodation.

Other refugees were able to access deposits by applying to grant-giving bodies, with support from the Refugee Council. However, we know that the resources of these organisations are limited, making this a completely unsustainable route for the wider refugee population. In addition, these bodies have certain qualifying conditions for applicants, meaning that large numbers of refugees are simply not eligible to apply to them anyway.

Solutions

Given that new refugees find themselves in a wide range of challenging circumstances when they leave asylum support in London, a number of reforms are needed to end homelessness amongst this group. However, as most private tenancies require a deposit, something that is unaffordable for almost every refugee, there is a strong case that this should be a priority for the next Mayor of London. A tenancy deposit can be a long-term investment, to be used across multiple homes and tenancies, so can support secure housing for refugees in the long-term.

If the Mayor could commit to a central fund for tenancy deposits, established and administered by City Hall, it would change the options currently available to new refugees, and start to prevent homelessness. Refugees will be supported by different organisations, councils, and individuals, but they will all invariably lack money for a deposit. A fund, to which they could be referred, would fill a clear gap in current support in London.

Housing advice and support such as pre-tenancy training would still remain essential, and could be facilitated by different partners, in conjunction with the grant of a deposit. This would need oversight of deposit protection, and information for refugees about how to retain their deposit at the end of a tenancy. Such a fund would start to bring more coherence and consistency across London to the support that new refugees receive.

As the next section shows, homelessness support into the private rented sector varies greatly across London boroughs, leading to a postcode lottery for refugees in the city. This is something which the Greater London Authority, as a coordinating and pan-London body, could start to resolve.



Photo by Bruno Figueiredo on Unsplash

The gap in private rented sector support for refugees in London

Schemes to support vulnerable groups into the private rented sector have become commonplace since the PRS was deregulated in the 1980s, and as more and more people have lived in the sector. Despite this, though, there remains a real gap in provision in London for new refugees.

Alongside the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme, there are other projects run by charities in London that support new refugees, each with limited capacity. In addition, many local authorities run their own PRS schemes, which allow them to support homeless people under their purview, although they do not have a focus on refugees, or accompanying specialist knowledge.

From previous research conducted by the Refugee Council, we also know that the level and kind of support varies between local authorities. To better understand provision across London, and to show how the GLA could fill the gap, we undertook research to show what support is currently in place.

To that end, we issued Freedom of Information requests to all the London boroughs, asking them a range of questions (see methodology for full details). Of those councils we asked, we received substantive replies from 27, which varied in length and detail.

Interaction with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

In their answers, a number of boroughs referred specifically to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 as the legislation governing their actions, rather than having additional criteria that were specific to their PRS scheme.

With the new prevention and relief duties on councils that result from the Act, the schemes should be less restrictive in terms of who will be supported. However, it is also clear that many of these schemes are being used in new ways, and supporting a wide range of households, including families. This may mean that lone refugees are less likely to be prioritised.

As previously mentioned, the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme works solely with new refugees who have not been able to be supported into housing through their local authority, so we know that the Homelessness Reduction Act is not covering all those in need.

Types of support

26 local authorities confirmed that they operated a PRS scheme, and the one without a specific scheme still made clear that it sought to work with private landlords, providing financial incentives to house homeless people.

Two councils stated that they used Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to support people into the private rented sector, paying for things like deposits or rent in advance. DHPs come from a cash limited budget, allocated to councils by central government, and based on a calculation of need in that area. They are used to meet housing costs for those who need them. Typically they have been used by councils to make up shortfalls in income for social tenants because of the removal of the spare room subsidy – typically known as the bedroom tax, and where rents are higher than is paid in benefits through local housing allowance (for private renters).

In order to qualify for a DHP, you must be either in receipt of, or entitled to receive, Housing Benefit or Universal Credit including the Housing element. As is clear by their name, DHPs are entirely discretionary – renters have no right to them, and they are allocated on a case by case basis.

Given their use in supporting a wide range of housing needs, their discretionary nature, and concerns that the funding allocations to councils are not adequate, DHPs cannot be seen as a sustainable route for providing tenancy deposits for those who need them in London, even though they are sometimes used in that way.

Eligibility and access for refugees

Responses from councils showed that the eligibility criteria for support through a PRS scheme varied by borough, and was sometimes unclear. Across the boroughs, eligibility for each scheme was defined as wider than having a 'priority need', and all said they would accept single people provided they met other eligibility.

Furthermore, most said that they would accept refugees onto their scheme, but some showed a lack of understanding around refugee status and eligibility for public funds, which suggests this is not a group they commonly support.

Indeed, a number of local authorities said that refugees were not eligible for housing assistance, an error which also reflects the experience of people the Refugee Council works with when they seek support from the council, and which is indicative of a particular barrier that refugees face when trying to secure housing.

This was further reflected in the answers that local authorities gave when they were asked directly about the numbers of refugees they support. Unfortunately only three local authorities had any record of the number of refugees supported through their schemes; the number in the last year were 30, 5, and 3.

When we consider this in combination with the experience of our frontline services, it indicates that there is a gap in support that is not currently covered by local authority PRS schemes in a number of boroughs in London. This is despite the fact that most new refugees face homelessness 28 days after receiving a positive asylum decision.

Scale of support and capacity

The numbers of people supported in each borough varied considerably, as did the level of financial support available. Often figures were not fully disaggregated, so it was unclear what proportion of those supported into the PRS did or did not have a 'priority need'. However, a number of local authorities made it clear that their schemes were generally to support those with a 'priority need', meaning they would be unlikely to support many of the people that the Refugee Council works with on its Private Rented Scheme.

The borough that engaged with the most people through its PRS scheme supported 811 people, but 7 local authorities supported fewer than 100 people, with the lowest figure being 43. Different local authorities will face different housing caseloads, and the number of refugees living in an area will differ, so some variation is expected.

Nonetheless, it shows that new refugees will face very different levels of support, in terms of the number of private tenancies created, depending on where in London they live when they receive their refugee status.

Support with tenancy deposits

Finally, we asked what level of tenancy deposit and associated costs each scheme provided – and again saw significant variation. Often this figure was not available, but the average cost ranged from £1,354 to £3,642, which would have a significant effect on the number of properties a new refugee could potentially access.

Some schemes only covered the cost of a deposit while others also supported with rent in advance, and then others made incentive payments directly to landlords. While this lack of consistency is explainable, it creates a confusing and difficult picture for new refugees, and further underlines how different their experience can be, depending on the local authority that is supporting them.

The overall result is that new refugees are not being supported into the private rented sector by local authorities despite the clear need. As previously stated, **over the past 2 years, nearly all (98%) of new refugees approaching our Private Rented Scheme were homeless.**



Emmanuel*, a newly-recognised refugee living in North London

You know, there is the period where you wait for your (*asylum*) decision, you go through the process of interview and scrutiny and then a long waiting period. But you get your status and you're excited that, ok now at least I have some stay, I can get on with my life.

But then, you get another knock when you have to transition to the mainstream. You start from scratch.

You have no resources to be independent, to allow you to go out to look for accommodation that I can stay in. You have no foundation to get started, and go and look for yourself.

At one stage I had given up, as I had limited time, I only had 28 days, so I ended up in a hostel. I had to move out [*of asylum accommodation*], first they extended it, then extended it again [*because of the halt on evictions during the coronavirus pandemic*], it was quite a tricky period for me.

Adonis (*at the Refugee Council*) came through for me, he got me the accommodation without having to pay a deposit. That was another issue, that most of the places wanted a deposit, and also if you were on benefits they did not want to listen to you, and didn't even give you a viewing. All my attempts to look for accommodation were in the private rented sector.

Almost all of them rejected me, no one gave me a chance. The ones who didn't reject me at first, when they found out I was on Universal Credit they eventually told me they couldn't accommodate me.

I applied to roughly 30/40 landlords, as well as leasing agencies, stuff like that. I got a lot of information from the local council on where I can look. I was sending emails, doing viewings, calling. I was doing all of this from the hostel. I had to do it all on my phone, because I had no access to a computer.

If Refugee Council wasn't there to support me, I would have been homeless, that's for sure. I didn't have any money, my UC had not kicked in yet, I don't have any family. I know some people from church, I have some community, but no one that I was so close to who could take on the responsibility of a grown person. I didn't know what I was going to do. I would have been sleeping under a bridge somewhere.

Most of them, when you call they ask you 'Are you married? Are you working? Where are you working? How old are you?' They wouldn't even tell me if any properties are available, they just look at your profile and that's it.

I didn't know where I could stay, London is so big, and apart from Croydon [*where the Home Office is*], I don't know any other place.

It is like you're in the middle of the sea, trying to get to shore. But it's also an exciting and cosmopolitan city. But also frightening, and you have no information to help you.

* Name has been changed.

Conclusion and recommendations

For many years, research has shown that newly-recognised refugees are at a high risk of homelessness. The 28-day transition period from asylum accommodation to mainstream provision throws them into a crisis situation for which they are wholly unprepared.

Without savings or a job, and often facing a language barrier, they are required to navigate the complexities of a welfare benefits and housing system of which they have no experience, all within the space of a month. Universal Credit provides a full payment five weeks after application, a timeframe that is not aligned with the transition period, often making homelessness inevitable.

Having dealt primarily with the Home Office during their asylum claim, they receive minimal support from that department,⁵ other than a referral to the job centre. They must then navigate new processes via the job centre and the local housing authority.

This report shows that trying to find a private tenancy in London is a further complexity, and one that throws up huge barriers. Alongside the difficulties that refugees will face because of the language barrier and a lack of familiarity with the rental market, landlords are often unwilling to let to people on welfare benefits, or rents are at levels that are too high for that group.

New refugees are unaware of what is available, and are vulnerable to being forced into poor-quality housing out of a lack of knowledge or because of the urgency of their situation.

Yet the most consistent and undeniable barrier to even being able to access most privately rented properties for refugees is the cost of a tenancy deposit, which is still a key feature of how London's PRS operates. New refugees will not be able to raise the level of money needed for a deposit by the point at which they are homeless, both because they have not been able to work during their asylum claim, and because of the 35-day wait for welfare benefits.

Although there is no easy way to calculate the average cost of a deposit, because it is based on the size of a property and level of rent, it will certainly be many hundreds of pounds, and closer to £1000 with rent in advance.

If we want new refugees in London to be truly welcomed, and given the best opportunity to integrate in the city, we have to recognise this reality and provide support for those seeking homes in the private rented sector. The next Mayor should take a number of steps to ensure this support is adequate and consistent across London:

Recommendations:

1. The next Mayor should commit to establish a City Hall fund that can provide support for the up-front cost of a tenancy deposit. Local authorities and the voluntary sector would be able to refer refugees to this fund – with clear qualifying criteria – ensuring that it provided a consistent approach across the city, regardless of the local authority in which a new refugee lives.
2. In conjunction with this financial support, the Mayor should look at how better tenancy support can be provided to new refugees, through pre-tenancy training, access to information and understanding of rights, and closer working with local authorities. Support must be available to ensure deposits are protected, with information about how deposit protection schemes function.

⁵ Newly-recognised refugees receive a referral to the job centre, from Reed in Partnership, the Home Office's sub-contracted partner in this area.



Appendix A: Methodology

Refugee Council data

To consider trends about the newly-recognised refugees who had been supported by the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme, we took data from the last two years of the project in the most recent period that data was available – namely 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2020. In total, we analysed data from 160 refugees, looking at numbers relating to:

- People in London accessing our services because of upcoming or current homelessness
- People with homelessness problem that are looking to access the private rented sector
- People with homelessness problem that are looking to access the private rented sector and have been able to access a tenancy
- People with homelessness problem that are looking to access the private rented sector and have failed to access a tenancy
- Of those asking for support for a tenancy deposit, the average cash amount needed to pay for a tenancy
- Common destinations of people unable to access the private rented sector and numbers ending up at these places
- Length of time from seeking supporting to accessing a private rented sector tenancy

Local authority data

To find out about the support provided by London local authorities to homeless refugees seeking to access the private rented sector, we asked the following questions via a Freedom of Information request to each London council. We received replies from 26 of the 32 local authorities.

Does the Council operate a scheme which can provide assistance to people who are not Council or Housing Association tenants to find suitable private rented accommodation via any of the following, and if so which:

- (a) rent deposits
- (b) bonds to landlords
- (c) rent in advance?

If the Council does operate such a scheme which of the following eligibility criteria apply for a person to be accepted onto the scheme, either singly or in combination:

- (a) a requirement for the person to have a local connection, and if so how is this defined
- (b) a requirement for the person to have children, or be pregnant
- (c) a requirement that the Council has accepted that the person is or will become homeless and is in priority need?

Are single people accepted onto the scheme and if so what eligibility criteria apply?

Have refugees been accepted onto the scheme and if so how many in the last year?

How many people have been assisted in the past year and what was the average financial value of the assistance?

Appendix B: What support can a local authority provide to refugees, and what is the role of the private rented sector?

Refugees are eligible for support from a local authority's housing office if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness in the next 56 days. Local authorities must assess an applicant's circumstances to see how they meet certain criteria - the outcome of this assessment dictates what duties a local authority will owe to each applicant. For a more detailed description of these criteria and duties please see our [guide on making homelessness applications for refugees in England](#). In summary, the duties include:

Prevention duty - if a refugee is threatened with homelessness in the next 56 days the local authority has a duty to take reasonable steps to help prevent them from becoming homeless. Unfortunately for new refugees who are homeless due to the termination of their asylum support accommodation, it is not possible to prevent the termination of such accommodation. Although they may choose to, the authority is not obliged to provide accommodation under this duty. Such steps might involve offering a private rented tenancy, or providing assistance with a rent deposit to help the applicant obtain accommodation in the private rented sector.

Relief duty - if a refugee is homeless, the local authority has a duty to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure accommodation that is available for at least 6 months. Although they may choose to, the authority is not obliged to provide accommodation under this duty, only to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure accommodation that is available for at least 6 months. Such steps might involve offering a private rented tenancy, or providing assistance with a rent deposit to help the applicant obtain accommodation in the private rented sector.

Main housing duty - if a refugee is homeless, not intentionally homeless and has a priority need for accommodation, the local authority has a duty to secure that suitable accommodation is provided for the applicant and anyone that might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant. To have a priority need for accommodation, a refugee must meet criteria, which includes: they are pregnant; they reside with dependent children; they are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason. If a local authority has reason to believe that a homeless refugee might have a priority need for accommodation, they also have a duty to provide interim accommodation pending the outcome of their main housing duty assessment.

Many homeless refugees do not have or cannot prove a priority need for accommodation, so although they can approach local authorities for support the authorities are under no duty to provide them with accommodation. The Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme in London specifically works to support those refugees who will not be accommodated by the local authority.

Over the past 2 years, 98% of new refugees approaching the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme were homeless, and this rose to 100% during the pandemic. There is evidently a role for the London private rented sector in accommodating homeless refugees, as local authorities in London have not been able to address homelessness amongst so many new refugees.



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