



**SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES**

Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities
Department for Levelling up, Housing
and Communities
2 Marsham Street
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5 September 2023

Dear Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities,

RE: Changes to the move-on period for newly recognised refugees

We are writing as organisations representing refugees or concerned with homelessness to urge you to reverse the recent changes to the process for people who have been recognised as refugees and are obliged to leave asylum support accommodation. These changes are already driving people who have recently received their refugee status into destitution and homelessness, instead of getting the support and protection they are entitled to.

As a result of the changes, many refugees who have been granted refugee status in recent months are now being given just seven days' notice that they need to leave their accommodation. This is causing severe hardship for refugees, as well as placing unnecessary pressures on local authorities who are already facing challenges finding accommodation for other groups. We are finding that local authorities have not been told of the new arrangements, meaning that they are not ready to respond quickly.

The significant number of refugees already made homeless by this change is also placing huge pressures on the voluntary sector, including refugee hosting and housing schemes, and mainstream homelessness services.

The demands are quickly becoming unsustainable. It is already inevitably leading to increased rough sleeping, undermining government targets to end it.

For many years the Home Office has recognised that it is impossible for someone to secure alternative accommodation, find employment, open a bank account or apply for welfare benefits until they receive their Biometric Residence Permit (BRP). That is why the department's policy has been that the 28-day "move-on" period starts when a person receives their BRP – indeed several Home Office ministers have relied on that policy when arguing against calls to extend the move-on period.

Even with that policy in place, it is extremely difficult for refugees to find housing and get financial support within the 28 days. Over many years civil society organisations have collected and published evidence that 28 days simply isn't sufficient for newly recognised refugees to navigate the various complex processes they encounter.

Among other things, that evidence has highlighted how the government's Homelessness Reduction Act recognises that at least 56 days are usually needed to find accommodation for those at risk of homelessness. Additionally, Universal Credit has a built-in 35 day delay before a first payment is made. These processes are incompatible with the 28 day move-on period.

The recent changes worsen this situation by starting the 28 days when someone receives a grant letter telling them their protection claim has been accepted, instead of when they receive their BRP. There is usually a minimum delay of between 7 and 10 days between the receipt of the grant letter and a BRP being delivered, meaning someone will already be well into the 28 days before they can even start to engage with the processes that are vital for them to avoid homelessness and destitution. Many local authorities will also only begin to provide homelessness prevention services once someone has received a discontinuation letter informing them their asylum support will end or the notice to quit.

This situation will only get worse if, as the government intends, the backlog of asylum claims is processed more quickly and therefore more people become eligible for homelessness assistance.

Receiving refugee status should be a time of celebration, but these changes are leaving individuals, including children, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and survivors of human trafficking, facing a huge crisis just when their status is finally clarified.

We urge you to abandon these changes to the move-on period and instead work with local authorities and voluntary sector organisations to ensure people are able to access the services they need. To do this, the government should:

- Commit to immediately reversing the changes so all refugees have a minimum of 28 days before they're required to leave their accommodation.
- Ensure that refugees receive all their documentation at one time. Specifically, someone should receive their refugee grant letter, their BRP, the letter containing the date when their asylum support will end, and the notice to quit their accommodation on the same day. In line with recent Home Office policy, the 28 day notice period should never begin before someone has received their BRP.
- Issue clear guidance to local authorities that a newly recognised refugee is at risk of homelessness from the moment they receive notification of the decision on their asylum claim and so are eligible for homelessness prevention support from that time. Local authorities should not require the notice to quit or the letter stating someone's entitlement to asylum support will end before providing assistance.

- Provide devolved governments, local authorities and support organisations with the guidance and data necessary to enable them to fully support people so that they can successfully navigate the move-on period.
- Ensure accommodation providers adhere to the two working day notification period to inform the local authority that they have been notified by the Home Office that it is ceasing support for any service user following a positive decision to their asylum application.
- Stagger the 7 day notices to quit that people are now receiving and work with statutory services and civil society organisations to manage the increase in demand for support.

Finally, we urge you to commit to working towards extending the move-on period to at least 56 days, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act and the application for Universal Credit.

We would be very happy to meet with you or your officials to discuss the matter in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Enver Solomon, CEO, Refugee Council

Polly Neate, CEO, Shelter

Bridget Young, Director, NACCOM (the No Accommodation Network)

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Paul Hook, Director, Asylum Matters

Mike Adamson, Chief Executive, British Red Cross

Matt Downie, CEO, Crisis

Kerry Smith, CEO, Helen Bamber Foundation

Gavin Smart, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Housing

Sonya Sceats, CEO, Freedom from Torture

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Dr Sarah Crowther, CEO, Refugees in Effective and Active Partnership (REAP)

Phil Davis, Director, Hope Projects

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Sarah Teather, Director, Jesuit Refugee Service UK

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Will Sutcliffe, Chair, Bradford City of Sanctuary

Rosie MacPherson, Artistic Director & Joint CEO, Stand and Be Counted Theatre

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Registered office: Gredley House, 11 Broadway, Stratford, E15 4BQ, United Kingdom.
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