

## Home Beyond the Home Office?

### Evicted from asylum accommodation into the UK housing crisis

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In the context of a long-term national housing crisis, leaving an estimated 17.5 million people in the UK without a safe and stable home, refugees escaping disaster now find themselves catapulted into a broken system. With insufficient housing options, the enormous relief of being recognised as a refugee is rapidly overtaken by the acute stress of having to find a new place to live.

During the asylum process most people are [dispersed](#) to housing or mass accommodation centres run by Home Office subcontractors. Typically, 28 days after the issue of their Biometric Residence Permit, refugees have to leave this accommodation. An ongoing SOAS-funded project with Oxford-based organisation [Asylum Welcome](#) is mapping the challenges that asylum seekers face, and working to improve housing guidance.

To set up the essentials of their new life, refugees must open a bank account; apply for and start receiving universal credit and/or find a job and start working and earning; *and* find a new place to live—all within a month, as mandated by the UK Government.

#### ***Finding Housing is a Major Challenge***

People on low incomes face a tough housing landscape in the UK, with massively over-subscribed council and social housing, [scarce availability and affordability of private rented accommodation](#), and landlords avoiding tenants on universal credit. **Refugees are particularly disadvantaged.** While seeking asylum, they are usually prohibited from working, so they cannot accumulate deposit and first rent payment funds. [Right-to-rent regulations](#) created by the UK's [hostile environment](#) immigration policies have had a chilling effect on private landlords' willingness to rent to foreign nationals, compounding [structural racism](#). Additionally, refugees must navigate an unfamiliar system, often across language barriers, involving digital platforms central to accessing mainstream support and housing. Securing appropriate housing within the mandatory 28-day period is a major feat.

### ***Log-Jammed Local Government and Charitable Support Systems***

At the main asylum accommodation centre in Oxfordshire, currently housing some 240 single men predominantly in their 20s and early 30s, Home Office evictions have become a major challenge. Asylum Welcome has seen a surge of people getting refugee status since October, typically without a job or savings to fall back on, often with limited language and digital capabilities, and facing housing discrimination based on race, age and gender.



*Public Domain Pictures*

If newly-recognised refugees applying for council support are deemed '[Priority Need](#)' (typically because they have serious physical or mental health conditions), they should be allocated temporary accommodation—but this is usually only confirmed shortly before or on the date of eviction. Surging homelessness, limited temporary accommodation and county-wide shortage of stable and suitable private rented or social housing is forcing the already cash-strapped Oxford City [Council](#) to source hotel accommodation at considerable cost to fulfill its legal homelessness duties.

Meanwhile, those *not* deemed Priority Need are merely signposted to websites, basic guidance, and low-income council deposit schemes—and told to crack on with finding a room. Despite their own best efforts, and the volunteers supporting them, many do not find private rented housing before they are forced to leave the asylum accommodation centre. Occasionally, people find a hostel bed via oversubscribed local homelessness organisations, but increasing numbers of young men have to seek refuge with friends or acquaintances, stay with volunteer [hosts](#), or are forced to sleep rough.

This reflects the wider picture nationally, with a [239% increase](#) in households needing homelessness support, after eviction from Home Office accommodation between 2021-2023. Government efforts to clear the asylum backlog, whilst welcome, have not been accompanied by sufficient co-ordination with mainstream systems, heaping yet more pressure on [local authorities and the voluntary sector](#).

### ***Serious Damage Needing Urgent Attention from Central Government***

Most obviously, street and hidden homelessness attacks people's dignity and well-being, increases vulnerability to violence, and causes a deterioration in mental and physical health. But more generally, on top of prior distress in countries of origin, and the rigours of the asylum process, the housing predicament is severely undermining refugees' ability to start the new phase of their life in the UK in a positive way, establishing and maintaining connections, getting a job or studying English.



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Progress at the local level is possible—Oxfordshire-based Asylum Welcome is learning, from accompanying individuals in their private rented housing searches, how to support people through these processes, developing more effective guidance; liaising with local government; and engaging with landlords county-wide on these issues. But a central response is necessary to manage this urgent challenge.

### **Policy Implications**

After months or years of enforced passivity, newly recognised refugees must suddenly move incredibly fast to avoid becoming homeless.

- Timely asylum-claim processing and an asylum support system that considered integration from day one (giving access to English Language provision in the first six months after claiming asylum, allowing people to work during the first year of claiming asylum) would substantially ease the transition from life in asylum accommodation to life in the community.
- Mainstream local bureaucratic systems there to support people in poverty and at risk of homelessness are underfunded, and [fail to keep pace](#) with the gruelling 28-day time frame imposed on newly recognised refugees. Charities have long been calling for a [move-on period of 56 days](#), to align with homelessness legislation regarding the period during which local authorities have a duty to help *prevent* homelessness among those at risk and give people time they sorely need to secure housing.
- The housing predicament of refugees is part of a much deeper and wider [housing crisis](#), allowed to develop by government, in which the demand for housing is outpacing supply, costs are outpacing incomes, and an acute shortage of affordable housing is leaving increasing millions unsafe and unstable. This urgently needs addressing.

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