



SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES

# KEYS TO THE CITY

2024

Ending **refugee homelessness** in London

# Acknowledgements

The Refugee Council would like to thank the following organisations for providing data and insight to this report: Refugees At Home, West London Welcome and London Councils.

Report written by Woodren Brade with special thanks to Chloe Morgan, Integration Projects Manager at the Refugee Council and Adonis Magma, Private Rented Scheme Senior Casework Coordinator at the Refugee Council for their input and support.

This report was funded by Trust for London.



# Executive Summary

**Homelessness and destitution among newly recognised refugees in London are on the rise. This growing crisis is a result of systemic failure – the process refugees face while transitioning through the so-called ‘move-on’ period is dysfunctional by design, and discriminatory in delivery. Upon receiving refugee status, only 28 days are allotted to find secure housing before eviction from asylum accommodation.**

The insufficient time period puts refugees at high risk of homelessness and destitution as they move from asylum support to mainstream social security support. This precarious situation is exacerbated by the fact that refugees are very likely to have no savings, as they cannot work during their asylum claim and live on very low levels of support prior to an asylum decision.

Usually, the only long-term housing option for this group of refugees is a home in the private rented sector. But major barriers to accessing private tenancies are impossible for most to overcome. In particular, the high up-front cost of a tenancy deposit means most homes in the private rented sector are unavailable.

Every day at the Refugee Council we work with people in this situation through a [Private Rented Scheme](#) that supports new refugees into secure, privately rented tenancies.

Since its inception in 2012, this scheme has significantly improved the lives of many refugees by facilitating their transition to a sustainable, long-term home. But given the scale of this issue, the Refugee Council doesn't have capacity to support all those who need it.

**We want to see an end to this crisis. This is within the means of the relevant authorities.**

## WE ARE CALLING ON:

- **The next Mayor of London** to establish a fund that would cover the cost of tenancy deposits for new refugees.
- **The Government:**
  - To extend the move-on period to at least 56 days, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act and the application for Universal Credit.
  - To list the Home Office as a body with a legal duty to refer people at risk of homelessness to local authorities.

**In 2021, we published [Keys to the City: How the next Mayor of London can help end refugee homelessness](#).**

The report set out the massive gap in service provision for this vulnerable population at the local authority level. To further understand the barriers that new refugees face, the Refugee Council analysed data from its Private Rented Scheme, looking at the outcomes for 160 refugees. The results showed that many refugees struggled to secure a tenancy, even with bespoke support.

**This update presents our latest data and analysis showing a dramatic rise in homelessness for newly recognised refugees.**

Despite the continuing effort from charities to provide bespoke support to this group, it is becoming even more challenging for refugees to enter the private rental sector.

Our recommendations to the London Mayor in 2021 were not taken up.

This report reiterates these recommendations and adds crucial new proposals for national Government and local authorities on what essential steps need to be taken to end homelessness for people newly granted refugee status: this would ensure that they start their new life in the UK with a secure and stable home and it would reduce expenditure on homelessness support.

# Key findings

Charities and local councils have seen an unprecedented rise in homeless newly recognised refugees. This is caused by changes to the Home Office process in August 2023 and exacerbated by the increase in the number of asylum decisions resulting from the work to clear the backlog in asylum claims.

- **The Government's own statistics show:**
  - There has been a **239% increase**<sup>1</sup> in the number of households requiring homelessness support from local authorities after being evicted from Home Office asylum support accommodation in the two years to September 2023.
  - There has been a **265% increase** in the number of households owed a relief duty and a **188% increase** in households owed a prevention duty.<sup>2</sup>
- **The Home Office's statistics<sup>3</sup> show:**
  - Between July and December 2023, **50,845** people were granted protection having made an asylum claim. This is the highest number of grants on record and is a **400% increase** from the same time period in 2022.
- **In 2022 and 2023<sup>4</sup>:**
  - **Only 56%** of refugees using the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme were able to access a private tenancy through the scheme.
  - **Only 3%** of refugees accessing a private tenancy were able to do so with a tenancy deposit.
  - **97%** of refugees who approached the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme were homeless. This rose to **100%** in 2023.
- **When approaching the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme<sup>5</sup>:**
  - Over 2022 and 2023, the most common situation refugees were in was street homelessness.
  - In 2022, **one in five** refugees were street homeless. This rose to two in five in 2023.
  - Detailed data shows that refugees who were street homeless **increased by 75%** from 2022 to 2023.

1 Refugee Council analysis of [Government statistics relating to statutory homelessness in England: July to September 2023, table A2P, A2R.](#)<sup>1</sup>

2 Ibid

3 Refugee Council analysis of [Government statistics relating to asylum applications to December 2023, table Asy\\_D02.](#)

4 Refugee Council analysis of statistics from Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme spanning a two-year period from January 1st, 2022, to December 31st, 2023, analysing data from 115 refugees.

5 Ibid



# Key recommendations

## PRIVATE RENTAL SECTOR

### The next Mayor should:

- Commit to establishing a City Hall fund that will 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. This would ensure that there was a consistent approach across the city, regardless of the local authority in which a new refugee lives.
- In conjunction with this financial support, the Mayor should provide better tenancy support for new refugees, through pre-tenancy training, access to information and understanding of rights and closer working with local authorities. Support must be available to guarantee deposits are protected, with information about how deposit protection schemes function.

### The Government should:

- Introduce a 9-month grace period on the benefit cap for newly recognised refugees; this would be in line with the 9-month grace period from the benefit cap given to those who have recently stopped working or had their earnings go down.<sup>6</sup>

As most people seeking asylum are not allowed to work during their asylum claim, new refugees are currently not able to benefit from this grace period. A 9-month grace period would give newly recognised refugees time to establish an independent and sustainable means of living by securing accommodation.

It would also give refugees time to initiate the process of seeking exemption from the cap, either through securing work or successfully applying for a disability or sickness benefit.

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6 [Benefit cap: When the benefit cap affects your Universal Credit payments - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/benefit-cap-when-the-benefit-cap-affects-your-universal-credit-payments)



## MOVE-ON

### The Government should:

- **Commit to working with local authorities**, devolved Governments, support organisations and people with lived experience to make sure refugees can successfully navigate the move-on process. Key to this will be **extending the move-on period to at least 56 days**, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act and the application for Universal Credit.
- **List the Home Office as a body with a legal duty to refer people at risk of homelessness to local authorities.** This would mean that local authorities would be provided with accurate figures and details of how many homeless refugees they will need to support so that they can produce forecasts. It will also allow local authorities the full 28 days to prepare homelessness support and allow support organisations to have the information passed down to them.
- **Provide refugees with all their documentation at the same time.** Specifically, someone should receive their refugee grant letter, their Biometric Residence Permit (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 is 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 they provide assistance.
- **Deliver a consistent approach** to providing 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.
- **Enforce accommodation providers' adherence** 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 on their asylum application.
- As the Government continues to clear the asylum backlog, the notices to quit that people are now receiving **should be staggered** and the Government should work with statutory services and civil society organisations to manage the increase in demand for support.



# The rise of refugee homelessness in London

The speeding up of Government decision making – in an effort to clear the backlog in asylum claims – has meant more people are receiving their refugee status and entering the move-on period than ever before. This period refers to the time a person has to “move on” from their Home Office support once they have received a decision on their asylum claim.

The increase in decisions, combined with the Government significantly reducing the move-on period in August 2023, has resulted in an unprecedented rise in newly recognised refugees facing homelessness.

The Home Office’s statistics<sup>7</sup> show that between July and December 2023, **50,845** people were granted protection having made an asylum claim. That is the highest number of grants on record and is a **400% increase** from the same period in 2022.

While not all those 50,845 people will have been receiving accommodation and financial support from the Home Office, a significant proportion will have been in receipt of such assistance. The recent [Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration inspection on asylum casework](#) reports that out of the legacy backlog claims (asylum claims made pre-28th June 2022, before the introduction of the Nationality and Borders Act<sup>8</sup>) **12,799 claimants (46.94%)** were recorded as being in receipt of asylum support.

**It is positive that people are finally being recognised as refugees but there has been a lack of planning and foresight on the part of Government to guarantee Departments, local authorities and civil society can support people effectively.**

**Many charities in the refugee sector have reported seeing an increase in homeless refugees approaching their services:**

- Across the UK, almost **1,500 refugees became homeless** between August and October 2023, a three-fold increase on the same period last year, according to Freedom of Information requests from Big Issue<sup>9</sup>.
- Across the UK, Refugees at Home have seen referrals to their service for homeless refugees almost triple, jumping from **330 referrals** between August 2022 and January 2023 to **898 referrals** in the same period between August 2023 and January 2024.
- In London, West London Welcome reported they have seen referrals rise dramatically with **55 newly recognised refugee homelessness cases** in 4 months (September to December 2023). Prior to September 2023, West London Welcome only had on average 1 newly granted refugee facing homelessness every three months.

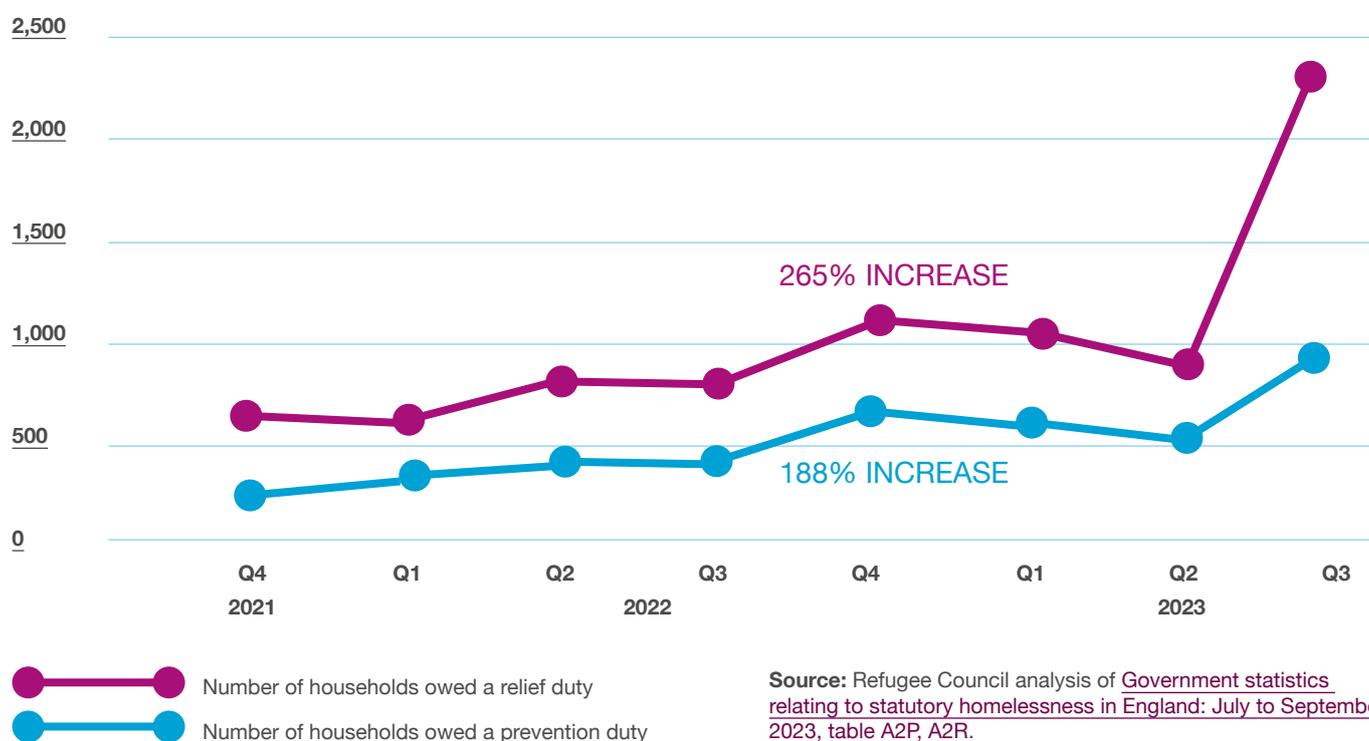


<sup>7</sup> Refugee Council analysis of [Government statistics relating to asylum applications to December 2023, table Asy\\_D02](#).

<sup>8</sup> [Nationality and Borders Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Number of Refugees Evicted into Homelessness Triples \(bigissue.com\)](#)

Number of households owed prevention and relief duties in England after being required to leave Home Office asylum support accommodation in the two years ending September 2023



The Government’s own statistics show that in the two years ending September 2023, there has been a **239% increase** in the number of households requiring homelessness support from local authorities after being evicted from Home Office asylum accommodation. This breaks down to a **265% increase** in the number of households owed a relief duty and a **188% increase** in households owed a prevention duty<sup>10</sup> (see Appendix B for more information on the prevention and relief duties).

**In London, the number of refugees rough sleeping has risen steeply:**

- London Councils report a **234% rise** from September 2023 to January 2024 of people rough sleeping who had recently left Home Office asylum accommodation (**311 people**)<sup>11</sup>. **Over 90%** of these people had received a positive refugee decision.
- During 2022 and 2023, the most common situation refugees were in when approaching the Refugee Council’s Private Rented Scheme was street homelessness.
- When approaching the Refugee Council’s Private Rented Scheme<sup>12</sup>:
  - Over 2022 and 2023, the **most common** situation refugees were in was street homelessness.
  - In 2022, **one in five** refugees were street homeless. This rose to **two in five** in 2023.
  - Detailed data shows that refugees who were street homeless **increased by 75%** from 2022 to 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Refugee Council analysis of [Government statistics relating to statutory homelessness in England: July to September 2023, table A2P, A2R](#).

<sup>11</sup> [Hundreds of refugees sleeping rough in London amid dramatic spike in homelessness, March 2024 | London Councils](#)

<sup>12</sup> Refugee Council analysis of statistics from Refugee Council’s Private Rented Scheme spanning a two-year period from January 1st, 2022, to December 31st, 2023, analysing data from 115 refugees.

# Barriers for new refugees looking for homes in London's private rented sector

When someone in London is granted asylum, they face a crisis situation with the chaotic move-on process (set out in detail in section: *The move-on period for newly recognised refugees*) and lack of integration support for new refugees intersecting with the London housing and cost of living crises. This is particularly acute for those new refugees seeking to find a private tenancy.

The number of Londoners in poverty living in the private rented sector (PRS) has **increased by 65%** between 2004 and 2022<sup>13</sup>. The conditions in the PRS are among the most concerning and unstable in England and the loss of a private tenancy is a leading trigger of homelessness in England.

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.

Alongside the difficulties that refugees will face because of unaffordable rents, language barriers and a lack of familiarity with the rental market, landlords are often unwilling to rent to people on social security benefits. 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.

The most consistent barrier 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. The ban on working during an asylum claim, and the low level of financial support provided to those in the asylum system mean almost all refugees will be without any savings.

To make matters worse, the benefit cap has been frozen<sup>14</sup> and is becoming more severe. As a result, by April 2024, the benefit cap will be worth **£10,000 less** for those in London than it was at its introduction in 2013<sup>15</sup>. 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 the means of new refugees.

The significantly inadequate length of the move-on period means that securing a Universal Credit (UC) claim – and coordinating with the new landlord so that the housing element is paid – is completely unrealistic 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.

<sup>13</sup> [Housing | Trust for London](#)

<sup>14</sup> [The benefit cap- an unhappy anniversary.pdf \(cpag.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Catastrophic caps • Resolution Foundation](#)



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

## REFUGEE COUNCIL'S PRIVATE RENTED SCHEME

The Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme has been in operation since 2012. It was created to support homeless refugees who did not have priority need for accommodation and therefore were not being housed by the local authority. The support through our scheme includes pre- and post-tenancy support to help individuals find appropriate accommodation and sustain their lease over longer periods. It also includes the cost of securing a rental deposit through charitable trusts, working with landlords to remove deposit requirements, or providing direct rental deposits.

### CASE STUDY: Ruth\* (name changed for privacy)

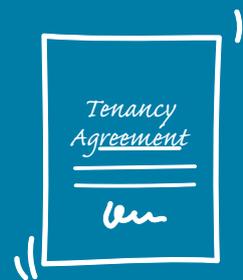
Our client secured private shared accommodation with support from the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme.

Ruth was in the UK asylum system for two and half years before she was recognised as a refugee. After receiving refugee status, Ruth was evicted from her asylum accommodation and became homeless. She received support from people from her community who allowed her to stay with them but had to constantly move from one house to the other, changing places every week. Ruth was experiencing high levels of distress as her unstable housing situation exacerbated symptoms of trauma caused by her previous experiences. She urgently needed the stability of a place to call home.

Three months after receiving her status, Ruth was referred to the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme. Ruth went through the scheme's initial assessment to understand her needs and discuss her housing options. She was also invited to a pre-tenancy training to improve her understanding of the housing system in the UK and learn more about her rights and responsibilities throughout the tenancy.

- The Scheme supported Ruth to understand her housing options, how to access private rented accommodation and learn about her rights and responsibilities as a tenant.
- The Scheme assessed Ruth's needs and sought to secure private women-only shared accommodation, as living in mixed-gender accommodation would not be suitable for her.
- The Scheme liaised with the landlord to arrange a viewing and supported Ruth to create the tenancy. Ruth moved in a month after approaching the scheme.

The accommodation has given Ruth the space she needs to process the significant life changes she has endured, and provided the safety and security required to move on and begin the process of settling in the UK.



The Scheme sourced the deposit and first month of rent for Ruth's private shared accommodation.

The Scheme helped the client to add housing costs in her Universal Credit account and supported her with additional documents required for Universal Credit.

The Scheme continued working with the client to provide other in-tenancy support.

Since the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme started, new duties to support homeless people have come into force (see Appendix B for more information on the prevention and relief duties).

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, there is still a vast number of homeless refugees who need the help of the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme. However, the scheme only has capacity to support a tiny fraction of those who may need it.

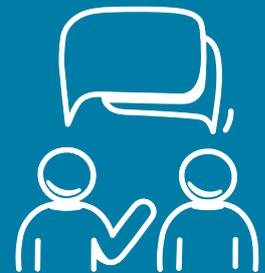
## Testimony:

Adonis, Private Rented Scheme Senior Casework Coordinator at the Refugee Council, reflects on the difficulty that this harsh environment puts our clients in:

“ People come from a very long and difficult journey. When they get their grant of asylum, they should at least have access to the basic things they need. Having their decision letter, they will come with great hope to have somewhere they can finally call home, and when the reality of the challenge hits, it has a very big knock-on effect on people's mental health and their confidence; they feel desperate.

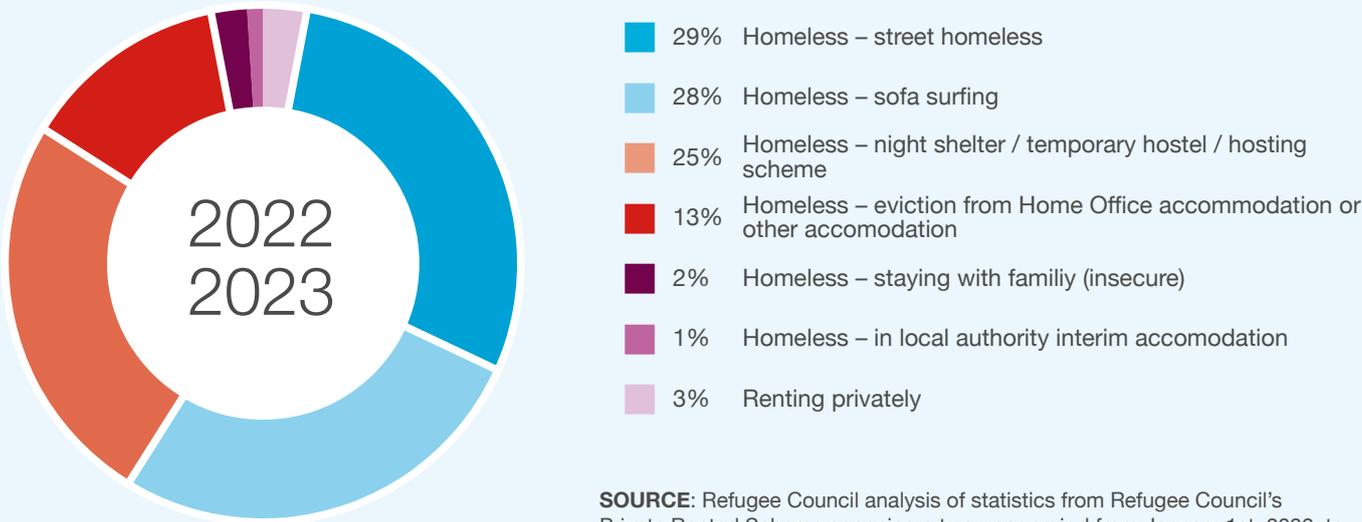
We have to deal with that every week, people in desperate situations. Their only route is to access help through places like the Refugee Council, and this assistance cannot happen overnight due to all the barriers and the factors such as the benefit cap, needing a deposit and difficult landlords.

When we can't give someone a definitive answer of when they will have a home, this is very difficult for us. It will take time, not because we don't want to help but because of how the system is. Helping them with a deposit will be a great step in the right direction. ”



To illustrate the kinds of issues that refugees in these circumstances face, we analysed the data of 115 refugees who passed through the Private Rented Scheme in the two-year period between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2023.

**Type of accommodation client were in when they approached Refugee Council’s Private Rented Scheme between 2022 and 2023:**



**SOURCE:** Refugee Council analysis of statistics from Refugee Council’s Private Rented Scheme spanning a two-year period from January 1st, 2022, to December 31st, 2023, analysing data from 115 refugees, relating to the type of accommodation clients were in when they approached Refugee Council’s Private Rented Scheme.

**When newly recognised refugees approach the Refugee Council’s Private Rented Scheme, they are in a very vulnerable state and have nowhere else to go. We analysed the type of accommodation clients were in when they approached the scheme<sup>16</sup>:**

- Across 2022 and 2023, **97% were homeless** and the **remaining 3%** were in private rental accommodation with very precarious conditions.
- During 2023, the statistics **rose to 100%** homelessness when approaching our scheme.
- Across the two years, the most common situation people were in when approaching our scheme was street homelessness.
- In 2022, **one in five refugees** were street homeless. This rose to **two in five** in 2023.
- Detailed data shows that refugees who were street homeless **increased by 75%** from 2022 to 2023.
- The table above shows a breakdown of other types of homeless accommodation clients were in between 2022 and 2023, all of which place refugees in very vulnerable living circumstances.

Housing instability has serious negative consequences. People in insecure housing face a higher risk of future homelessness due to rapidly changing temporary situations with little protection or legal redress. Secure housing is vital for positive integration as it affects access to employment, education and local community engagement.

<sup>16</sup> Refugee Council analysis of statistics from Refugee Council’s Private Rented Scheme spanning a two-year period from January 1st, 2022, to December 31st, 2023, analysing data from 115 refugees.

## OVERALL ACCESS TO THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

In 2022 and 2023, **only 56%**<sup>17</sup> of refugees using our service were able to access a private tenancy through the scheme. This is a decrease from our previous report that showed that during the pandemic, **62%** were able to access a private tenancy.<sup>18</sup>

This reduction reflects the increasingly challenging context: since the last report, the cost of living and housing crises have worsened, causing further barriers to finding affordable housing.

What the figures show, worryingly, is that even with tailored support, only half of new refugees trying to access the PRS were able to. This was despite receiving tailored advice from specialist advisors on a scheme that has relationships with landlords across London who are used to letting to new refugees.

The structure of London's PRS, 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.

With many thousands of people being recognised as refugees each year in London, and not able to access the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme, we would expect the outcomes for the wider population of new, single refugees to be far worse.

## TENANCY DEPOSITS

**Only 3%**<sup>19</sup> of refugees that the Refugee Council supported who were able to access a private tenancy were able to do so with a tenancy deposit. The remaining majority did not need a tenancy deposit owing to our direct advocacy with landlords who agreed to forgo that requirement.

Given that tenancy deposits remain 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 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.

This illustrates the need for increased support for refugees to access deposits. The Home Office integration loan falls short, capped at £500, often inadequate for a complete deposit. The waiting time for an integration loan can also be lengthy and the loan isn't typically disbursed before asylum support ends.

Furthermore, loans must be paid back through future social security benefits payments, meaning refugees start off in debt.

## THE GAP IN PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES IN LONDON'S POSTCODE LOTTERY

The number of homeless refugees approaching charities for help clearly shows that the system isn't functioning and that, despite the continuing efforts from charities to provide bespoke support to this group, it is extremely challenging for them to enter the private rental sector.

The Refugee Council's original report in 2021 exposed the vast gap in service provision at the local authority level for newly recognised refugees facing homelessness.

The evidence showed that new refugees being supported into the private rented sector varied greatly across London boroughs, leading to a postcode lottery for refugees in the city.

This is still an issue which the Greater London Authority (GLA), as a coordinating and pan-London body, could start to resolve.

<sup>17</sup> Refugee Council analysis of statistics from Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme spanning a two-year period from January 1st, 2022, to December 31st, 2023, analysing data from 115 refugees.

<sup>18</sup> Refugee Council analysis of statistics from [Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme between 2018 and 2020](#).

<sup>19</sup> Refugee Council analysis of statistics from Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme spanning a two-year period from January 1st, 2022, to December 31st, 2023, analysing data from 115 refugees.

# Solutions – Tenancy deposit scheme

Given that new refugees find themselves in a wide range of challenging circumstances when they leave asylum support in London, a variety of reforms are needed to end homelessness amongst this group, including the Government making structural changes to the move-on system as set out in the next section of this report.

However, the next Mayor of London has the means to practically intervene to make a difference simply by establishing a fund that would cover the cost of tenancy deposits for refugees in London.

When the coronavirus pandemic first struck London, the “everyone in” approach showed how quick and decisive policy could make sure everyone had a roof over their head.

The next Mayor needs to show a similar proactive commitment to preventing refugee homelessness by creating a Mayoral private rented sector scheme that covers all London boroughs, with a fund for tenancy deposits.

Such initiatives for people in need of tenancy support already exist, and the next Mayor can build upon them:

- The Refugee Council has recently received new funding from the GLA to support our Private Rented Scheme to take on referrals of homeless refugees from participating rough sleeping outreach teams. The funding includes some provision which can be used for tenancy deposits that directly addresses this issue. This funding started in January 2024 and will be a source of learning as we incorporate funds for tenancy deposits into our casework model. However, the funding is only available to referrals from participating boroughs, leaving many refugees without support.
- When the Homes For Ukraine scheme was set up in March 2022 to facilitate the accommodation of Ukrainian refugees displaced by the conflict, various councils<sup>20</sup> took proactive steps to extend tenancy deposit support to Ukrainians transitioning from their sponsor’s homes to the private rental sector. This support was aimed at those who couldn’t pay the upfront lump sum of the deposit and first month’s rent, providing one-off payments rather than loans.

**A solution is needed that sees a broader approach with more joined-up coordination between stakeholders, which would guarantee support is available for every refugee who needs it.**

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 refugees would be relatively low. The financial support required to secure a tenancy deposit for one newly recognised refugee in London is usually the cost of one month’s rent.

Newly recognised refugees who find a home in the private rental sector move into either shared or self-contained housing.

The monthly cost for this accommodation in London is determined by the Local Housing Allowance<sup>21</sup> (LHA) rates for the financial year 2024 to 2025<sup>22</sup> (see Appendix C for a breakdown of these rates). For the London Mayor to provide a central fund for tenancy deposits, the financial support for each refugee provided would be:

1. For shared accommodation: a range from £549.85 (the cheapest London LHA area) to £829.81 (the most expensive London LHA area)
2. For a 1 bed house: a range from £950 (the cheapest London LHA area) to £1,439.97 (the most expensive London LHA area)

<sup>20</sup> [Homes for Ukraine rent deposit scheme | Hertfordshire County Council; Homes for Ukraine: Future accommodation options – www.kingston.gov.uk](https://www.kingston.gov.uk)

<sup>21</sup> The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates is the maximum amount of housing benefit that a private renter can claim to assist with rent. The rates are based on the 30th percentile of each area

<sup>22</sup> [Indicative Local Housing Allowance rates for 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

The deposit arrangement could be facilitated directly between City Hall and the landlord, ensuring that City Hall recovers its expenditure at the conclusion of the tenancy. A tenancy deposit can be a long-term investment, to be accessed multiple times and used across multiple homes and tenancies, which would support secure housing for refugees in the long-term to ensure that refugees don't fall back into homelessness.

If the Mayor focused strictly on providing rental deposits, it is essential that pre- and post-tenancy support could be facilitated by different partners and other local infrastructure, 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.

A centralised tenancy deposit fund remains essential, irrespective of whether the Government follows the voluntary sector's crucial call to extend the move-on period to 56 days.

Even with an extended move-on period, the provision of support to cover tenancy deposits remains critical for refugees to effectively embark on their new journey towards stability and security.

Such a fund to which refugees could be referred would fill a clear gap in current support in London and start to bring more coherence and consistency across London to the support that new refugees receive, making significant progress towards ending the refugee homelessness crisis, and supporting people from across the world who have fled conflict and persecution.

**That is surely something all candidates can unite behind.**



# Recommendations

## THE NEXT MAYOR SHOULD:

**Commit to establishing a City Hall fund that will 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. This would ensure that there was a consistent approach across the city, regardless of the local authority in which a new refugee lives.

In conjunction with this financial support, the Mayor should provide better tenancy support for new refugees, through pre-tenancy training, access to information and understanding of rights and closer working with local authorities. Support must be available to guarantee deposits are protected, with information about how deposit protection schemes function.

## THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

**Introduce a 9-month grace period on the benefit cap for newly recognised refugees.**

this would be in line with the 9-month grace period from the benefit cap given to those who have recently stopped working or had their earnings go down<sup>23</sup>.

As most people seeking asylum are not allowed to work during their asylum claim, new refugees are currently not able to benefit from this grace period.

A 9-month grace period would give newly recognised refugees time to establish an independent and sustainable means of living by securing accommodation. It would also give refugees time to initiate the process of seeking exemption from the cap, either through securing work or successfully applying for a disability or sickness benefit.

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<sup>23</sup> [Benefit cap: When the benefit cap affects your Universal Credit payments - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/benefit-cap-when-the-benefit-cap-affects-your-universal-credit-payments)



# The move-on period for newly recognised refugees

The barriers of the private rental sector are exacerbated further by the inhumane and dysfunctional move-on system. While someone is waiting for a decision on their claim, they are eligible for accommodation and financial support of £7.03 a day provided by the Home Office if they would otherwise be destitute. If that person's asylum claim is granted by the Home Office, they then have 28 days in which to "move on" from their Home Office support.

Extensive research from voluntary sector organisations including NACCOM<sup>24</sup>, British Red Cross<sup>25</sup> and the Refugee Council<sup>26</sup> has highlighted that a **28-day move-on period is insufficient** and sets newly recognised refugees up to fall into crisis.

Faced with a cliff edge and no support to find new housing, open a bank account, and secure income, among other activities needed before being evicted, many refugees are at **significant risk of homelessness**.

- Universal Credit payments take at least **five weeks** to arrive.
- **Refugees often lack the two proofs of address** needed to set up a bank account which is needed to apply for Universal Credit.
- **28 days is not consistent** with the 56 days for local authorities to prevent homelessness set out by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 or the minimum 35-day wait for a first payment under Universal Credit.

There are **four essential documents** new refugees receive, but the current process is not functioning in a streamlined way and these documents **do not arrive together**:

1. The asylum decision letter.
2. The BRP, required to source employment and housing. It is usually received between seven and 10 days after the asylum decision letter is received.
3. The notice to quit asylum accommodation. It can be received at any point, but it must give a minimum of seven days' notice as set out in regulation 22 of the Asylum Support Regulations 2000.
4. The separate letter from the Home Office, telling someone that their entitlement to asylum support is ending. It can be received at any point.

<sup>24</sup> [NACCOM-Homelessness-Report\\_2018-10-24.pdf](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Still-an-Ordeal-summary.pdf \(naccom.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>26</sup> [England\\_s\\_Forgotten\\_Refugees\\_final.pdf \(refugeecouncil.org.uk\)](#)



**In August 2023, the Home Office made significant changes to the move-on process that further increased the challenges facing newly recognised refugees.**

They brought forward the time when the 28-day move-on period begins to when a person's decision is served, rather than when they get their BRP.

Additionally, since August, the majority of notices to quit asylum accommodation seen by the Refugee Council and others have been for periods closer to the **minimum 7 days** allowed by the asylum support regulations, with some cases of notices to quit being served with as little as two days' notice. Both these changes effectively cut the time people can source alternative accommodation, explaining the steep rise in refugee homelessness.

The Home Office has now reverted to the pre-August 2023 position of giving newly recognised refugees 28 days' notice of their support stopping from when they receive their BRP (rather than from the decision letter).

Although the Home Office claimed that the shorter notice period was only provided in August, the Refugee Council and other charities were seeing short notice evictions happening well beyond that timeframe as reflected in the statistics above.

**Reverting back to the 28-day period is not enough. At the very least, the move-on period should be aligned with the Homelessness Act, which legislates for 56 days' notice.**

Receiving refugee status or leave to remain should be a time of celebration, but the hostile move-on policies and practices are already leaving individuals, including children, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and survivors of human trafficking, facing a moment of significant crisis just when their status is finally clarified.

Once someone has their refugee status, they should be supported to take the next important steps in their life in the UK.

To achieve this, the Home Office must work with local authorities and voluntary sector organisations to make sure people are able to access the services they need.



Home Office

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## Testimony:

YAHYA is 25 years old and from Sudan where he grew up in a refugee camp. His father was killed in 2008. He hasn't heard from his mother and siblings since April 2023 and is very worried about them. Yahya waited almost three years before receiving a positive decision on his asylum claim; he was then told to leave his accommodation with only a week's notice. He was sleeping on the street for around ten days.

“

When I received my decision, that I have leave to remain in the UK, I decided to study, to do a motor vehicle course, to be a mechanic. But after I received an eviction letter from the Home Office, it was hard, I was living on the street...I had to leave the asylum accommodation in one week. It's not long enough. If it was longer I would have time to apply for more. If I don't come to college, my attendance will be a problem. It's very stressful.

In the morning I had to wake up on the street and go to college, it was so hard, more than one week I was sleeping on the street, before I approached the Refugee Council and got help from them.

For almost ten days I was sleeping rough. When I was sleeping on the street, some people they can grab your bag, when you have some important papers inside, your ID and your decision papers.

All night I couldn't sleep, I tied my bag onto my body. I know so many refugees who are sleeping on the street, still they don't get any help. One of my friends has been there more than a month - people from Eritrea and Sudan.

I don't think the system is good, everything becomes hard for refugees. It's going to get harder, people don't get help, it's going to take months, and I hope they can help. It's the winter time and it's not good for the body, it's very tough...People don't understand what we're going through, if they knew, they'd help us more, but they don't know exactly.

We're going through difficulty, but it's not in the news, no one is caring about them, like they were in the first weeks of the war. For me, I hope they can make it easier. I hope to develop myself, to do something in the future, to help others.

”



# Recommendations:

## THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- Commit to working with local authorities, devolved Governments, support organisations and people with lived experience to make sure refugees can successfully navigate the move-on process. Key to this will be **extending the move-on period to at least 56 days, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act and the application for Universal Credit.**
- **List the Home Office as a body with a legal duty to refer people at risk of homelessness to local authorities.** This would mean that local authorities would be provided with accurate figures and details of how many homeless refugees they will need to support so that they can produce forecasts. It will also allow local authorities the full 28 days to prepare homelessness support and allow support organisations to have the information passed down to them.
- **Provide refugees with all their documentation at the same 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 is 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 they provide assistance.
- **Deliver a consistent approach to providing 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.
- Enforce accommodation providers' adherence 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 on their asylum application.
- **As the Government continues to clear the asylum backlog, the notices to quit that people are now receiving should be staggered** and the Government should work with statutory services and civil society organisations to manage the increase in demand for support.



# Appendix A:

## METHODOLOGY

### Refugee Council data

To examine trends among newly-recognised refugees assisted by the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme, we analysed data spanning a two-year period from 1 January 2022, to 31 December 2023. In total, we analysed data from 115 refugees, looking at numbers relating to:

- People in London accessing our services because of upcoming or current homelessness
- People with homelessness problems that are looking to access the private rented sector
- People with homelessness problems that are looking to access the private rented sector and have been able to access a tenancy
- People with homelessness problems 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
- The type of accommodation clients were in when they approached Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme

# 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 local authority is not obliged to provide accommodation under this duty. Such steps might involve offering a private rented tenancy, or assisting 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. Steps may include facilitating private rented tenancies or helping with rent deposits for housing in the private sector.

**Main housing duty:** if a refugee is homeless, not intentionally homeless and has a priority need for accommodation, local authorities have a duty to secure suitable accommodation for them and their dependents. Priority need criteria include pregnancy, residing with dependent children, or vulnerability due to old age, mental or physical health issues or other special reason. Local authorities are also obligated to provide interim accommodation if there's reason to believe the refugee might have a priority need 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. Between 2022 and 2023, 95% of new refugees approaching the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme were homeless, and this rose to 100% during 2023. There is evidently a role for the London private rented sector in accommodating homeless refugees, given the challenges faced by local authorities in addressing homelessness among the influx of new refugees.

# Appendix C:

Monthly Indicative LHA rates for the financial year 2024 to 2025 (see [Indicative Local Housing Allowance rates for 2024 to 2025](#))

	Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) LHA rate (£)	1 bed LHA rate (£)
Inner East London	699.5	1,439.97
Inner South East London	650	1,295.53
Inner South West London	684.98	1,419.98
Central London	829.81	1,439.97
North West London	621.33	1,100.00
Outer East London	561.32	1,199.98
Outer North East London	549.85	1,000.01
Outer North London	594.99	1,150.01
Outer South East London	599.99	1,049.98
Outer South West London	591.52	1,199.98
Outer South London	569.31	950
Inner West London	759.98	1,349.98
Outer West London	576.31	1,000.01
Inner North London	708.27	1,439.97

Contact us at the Refugee Council,  
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**SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES**