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April 2022

How is the housing sector responding to the crisis in Ukraine?

In the April issue:

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Helping Ukrainian refugees - what you need to know

Since the war began on February 24, around five million people have left Ukraine, most now hosted in adjoining countries like Poland. What is the UK doing and should it do more? The newsletter looks in detail at the response to the crisis.

Don't forget to look at the housing rights website's page on [Help for Ukrainian refugees](#) which is being regularly updated with practical guidance.

A long way from home - Planning for Ukrainian refugees

With displaced Ukrainians finally reaching our shores, Derek Long offers some starters to help practitioners and policymakers welcome them.

How many Ukrainians can we expect overall ?

This will depend on how the conflict and UK's policies develop. To date ([April 14](#)), 56,500 applicants have secured visas out of 94,700 who have applied; just 16,400 visa holders have arrived in the UK.

For context, these applicants would more than double the 37,530 Ukrainian-born residents in the 2021 England and Wales census (Scotland has perhaps 1,500 more and Northern Ireland 400). The applicants so far are three times the UK's 19,000 Vietnamese 'boat people' and twice the 27,000 Ugandan Asians we welcomed in 1972. Unlike those arrivals, 90% of displaced Ukrainians are, so far, women and children.

So when people ask why there are new faces in the supermarket queue, it will be worth remembering that we have welcomed *proportionately* similar inflows before.



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Where will the refugees go?

As *West Side Story* reminds us, waves of in-migration tend to flow into large cities where communities are already established. Most will be attracted to London because about half of the Ukrainian-born people in the UK already live there. But this will not be the whole story.

Although London's Ukrainian community doubled over the past decade due to economic migration, its capacity to house refugees is limited by the numbers of singles and young families likely to arrive, especially as skilled worker or student visa holders cannot sponsor their relatives.

The [Homes for Ukraine](#) scheme will broaden the distribution. An estimated 50,000 Ukrainian heritage population may attract some arrivals to places such as the Midlands, north Manchester, Bradford, Bolton, and Nottingham. Others will, of course, go to where sponsors are available.

Providing decent homes

Providing decent housing will be a challenge in a hard-pressed market. We must resist the temptation of placing refugees in unpopular private rentals in challenging neighbourhoods, where many asylum seekers are currently housed. Unlocking the doors of marginal Airbnbs and forgotten living spaces over shops will only create greater problems downstream. More social housing is essential. Housing associations and councils should be enabled to respond quickly.

The sponsor scheme

The open door offered by over 100,000 households is a heart-warming reminder that we once housed the *Kinder* transportees, the Windermere children in 1945 and British evacuees. Sponsoring a Ukrainian 'guest' attracts a £350 per month 'thank you' (not rental) payment. The £10,500 per person allocation to councils is a start, but is only guaranteed for a year. Councils will have to deliver [safeguarding and housing quality](#) checks from scratch and step in if guests' rent-free placements fail. Some of DLUHC's [guidance to lodgers](#) may apply, but it is unclear how much and what status 'guests' will have (in self-contained accommodation, for example, will they have a tenancy?). The first ministerial teleconference with councils had more questions than answers.

As a former council leader, I was struck by the quiet way some faith communities went about supporting Syrian asylum seekers. It is not a given. But well-regulated mainstream faith groups may be able to unlock resources and networks to assist hard-pressed authorities and third sector groups.

Health needs to be a key part of our welcome

Ukrainian arrivals will have free access to the NHS! Health services were relatively well-organised in Ukraine. However, the government [highlights](#) some real challenges. While most refugees will be healthy, there are relatively high levels of TB (drug-resistance is an issue) and Hepatitis C. Typhoid is always a factor in war zones. Also, like some of its neighbours, Ukraine had a relatively low (35%) immunisation rate against Covid-19. So, ensuring physical health needs further emphasis in the guidance alongside support for traumatised individuals.

A long way from home

A successful visa application entitles the holder to three years' stay. The £350 'thank you' payment lasts up to 12 months. The Home Office policy towards Ukrainian asylum is currently unwritten. We are still a long way from a settled response to this tragedy.

Derek Long is a Director at the housing market analysts, [arc4](#).

Assessing accommodation offers under the Homes for Ukraine scheme

Tim Summers, principal environmental health officer for South Derbyshire, explains some of the issues that environmental health officers are taking into account.

Environmental health officers are well-placed to manage situations which might be deemed a civil emergency. As with Covid-19, these are opportunities to actively contribute to and support our communities. We won't always get it right and at times we might feel that we are driving square pegs into round holes. Nevertheless, we learn and adapt!

A key conundrum in South Derbyshire has been the notion of a 'light touch' accommodation inspection. Officers are programmed to use a 'whole house' approach and to specify remedial action when necessary under the Housing Acts. At first, I thought that a 'light touch' would be easy to determine, in fact it proved quite the opposite. This is what we ended up considering to be essential:

- Smoke alarms on each storey. Battery smoke alarms are to be installed within a communal area (hall or landing) to each storey of the property, with mains-wired alarms for larger properties.
- If any unlawful loft and basement conversions - would be revisited by a senior officer for follow up.



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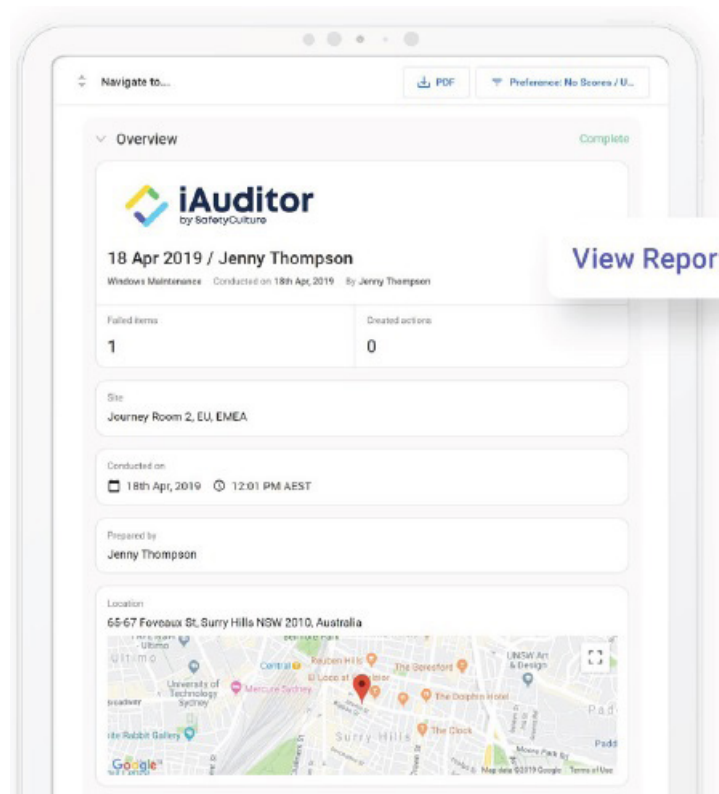
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- Falls between levels - low window openings, particularly in premises with infants and children with the installation of restrictor stays and safety fasteners if necessary.
- Electrical - visual electrical checks within bedrooms occupied by the guests, simply to ensure no obvious problems, and a look at the consumer unit to ensure 'relatively' up-to-date circuit breakers - or otherwise it requires corrective action.
- Carbon monoxide detection in any rooms with open flue appliances - log burners, etc. - and no sleeping in rooms where the main heating provision is via an open flue appliance (although I understand that a gas safety certificate is now recommended).
- Heating: assuming the sponsor pays the bills (one hopes), only a bedroom needs a check to ensure adequate space heating.
- Amenity: the basics, food preparation, washing machine, bathing facilities, etc.
- Space and crowding - some latitude will be required. We clearly need to ensure that very small rooms aren't crowded, but inspectors need to take a view in context of the total occupation, the property size, amenity and ages of the guests. I get the sense that guests might prefer to sleep in close quarters, at least initially. We may need to take a step back on this point and consider matters of trauma, and someone's desire to keep their loved ones close, particularly in an unfamiliar place.

An important turning point in Derbyshire was that environmental health officers agreed to undertake the safeguarding component of the home visit, with guidance from social care departments. The checks include evidence of hoarding, hygiene considerations and any indicators of drug and substance abuse. The property and safeguarding checks could be integrated into one document.

The environmental health service manager in North East Derbyshire, Matt Finn, offered to convert the inspection form into an app format which could be used by anyone with a mobile device. Matt worked up the form over a weekend into *iauditor* - intuitive and simple to use. We will make the template available to anyone who wants it (contact tim.summers@southderbyshire.gov.uk).



Guidance from DLUHC and questions that still need answers

Local authority officers (including Tim Summers, above, and LGA and CIH) met with DLUHC on April 6. There was general agreement that inspections require a lot of professional judgement and that a statement of minimum standards would be useful.

In many areas (e.g. Devon) councils are working together to create a joint approach. Many are combining accommodations checks with safeguarding but others are having separate checks. Some are adopting a 'red flag' approach when making accommodation checks (e.g. hosts who say they are looking for an unpaid cleaner, or who are known rogue landlords). The LGA encourages everyone to share good practice on their [hub](#).

Here are some of the concerns being raised:

- Properties are being inspected quickly - one urban council with over 400 potential sponsors expects to have visited them all by Easter. Any errors in approach will already be embedded in the system.
- Ukrainians are already presenting as homeless - sometimes because the system hasn't picked up that accommodation has been rejected as unsuitable, but a family has been sent there anyway. LGA has conducted a snapshot survey of homelessness presentations.



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- Some families are destitute because they haven't received the initial payments.
- Overcrowding is a tricky issue – families may want to be together even if this means what would normally be an unacceptable level of sharing.
- Most authorities are taking a pragmatic approach – pointing out safety issues and only failing the worst properties. Questions were raised about liability in these cases though, especially where Category 1 safety hazards are found.
- Staffing issues are arising in rural authorities with small environmental health teams – some councils are using overtime and charging costs to the special funding being offered.
- One issue is use of empty properties (e.g. second homes), where 'guests' may later become tenants: some councils are asking for requirements such as gas and electrical safety certificates, resulting in refusals in some cases.
- Another issue is use of properties in 'selective licensing areas' – are they exempt or not?
- All councils are concerned that families who 'fall out' of the scheme should be rematched, rather than be treated as homeless. Systems to do this are not yet in place.
- Councils described pragmatic approaches to keeping families where they are, to avoid the use of expensive temporary accommodation, e.g. paying initial utility bills where families are in empty properties.
- Councils only get the extra government money if they outsource services, which is unfair if, for example, they redeploy staff.

DLUHC is feeding information through the Strategic Migration Partnerships – councils are encouraged to maintain contact with them. Meetings between councils and DLUHC, coordinated by LGA and involving CIH, will continue.

Homes for Ukraine – two views from Scotland

The Scottish Refugee Council's head of policy, communications & communities, Gary Christie, looks at how Homes for Ukraine could be improved.

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The scenes we are continuing to see unfold in Ukraine are deeply shocking. We've seen thousands of members of the public make incredibly generous offers to open up their homes through the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

But at the same time as it is asking the general public to step up, the UK government is stepping back from its moral and legal obligations to properly support people arriving to the UK.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme requires Ukrainians to be matched with private sponsors before they are allowed to travel here. The Scottish Government's 'super sponsor' scheme will act as the sponsor for 3,000 Ukrainians initially, removing the requirement for the public to name an individual they wish to house. Through the scheme, people will be provided with initial temporary accommodation before moving on to longer-term housing, drawing on the offers from the Scottish public.

We believe this is a more rational and streamlined approach as responsibility for showing people from Ukraine a warm welcome cannot rest solely on members of the public who are offering accommodation. Undoubtedly, we will see private sponsorship offers that fail in the long term or families not able to accommodate their loved ones they are so desperate to bring to safety.

But the warm welcome Scotland wants to show people is still dependent on Home Office bureaucracy to arrange visas. We're sadly hearing several reports of visas being processed incredibly slowly. This sluggish and meagre response simply isn't fit for a crisis of this magnitude.

Ireland moved quickly to bring in a visa waiver for people from Ukraine, allowing them to reach safety first and think about paperwork later, a welcome any of us would surely hope to be met with if we were forced to flee our homes. The EU also voted to adopt a temporary protection directive allowing Ukrainians to live and work in any EU state visa-free for three years.

In continuing to require visas, the UK is not only an





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international outlier, but is slowing down the process of reaching safety for people who are only looking to rebuild their lives. This is nothing short of shameful.

The fact is, when families are fleeing, there's simply no time to stop to apply for a visa. This is the reality which the UN Refugee Convention was set up to recognise. It's unconscionable that the UK government is choosing this moment in history to tear up its compliance with this incredibly important piece of international law, by pushing its Nationality & Borders Bill through parliament. This bill would make it a crime for somebody fleeing Ukraine, Afghanistan or any conflict around the world, to reach the UK off their own back to claim asylum.

We are deeply worried that the UK Government is moving towards a patchwork of international protections, formed of a few very targeted schemes to bring people to safety. But the reality is, people will always fall through the seams of these schemes. This is why the universal right to protection is so precious, and why it must be defended vigorously.



This is what refugee hosting looks like

Robina Qureshi of Positive Action in Housing reflects on what 'hosting' means now that it is playing such an important part in helping Ukrainian refugees.

Jo Haythorwaite, a retired Glasgow librarian, has hosted around 13 guests through Positive Action in Housing's Room for Refugees Network. Here she is pictured with some of the people who have stayed with her over the years. We find it humbling and inspiring when someone agrees to accept a guest into their

home. We have seen rich, warm relationships develop, that endure on an equal footing, with love and warmth and memories, years after the hosting ends.

At the same time, this is very much a response to failure. Government failure. So it is jarring when we see the Minister for Levelling Up celebrating this as some wonderful new innovation they came up with. Like celebrating the opening of a new food bank.

The reason people took refugees into their homes is because of government policy which made refugees destitute. Child refugees continue to drown in the Aegean sea. Hundreds of thousands of people are left to freeze in refugee camps in Europe. [The Aegean Boat report](#) has reported thousands of human rights abuses since it began in 2015, at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis. And thousands of Afghans are left to languish in cramped hotel rooms. Before that, several thousand refugees were crowded into hotels throughout the pandemic, and are now moved between hotels, and different countries, at whim.

The hosting model of [Room for Refugees](#) and other hosting networks run by charities up and down the country is grounded in providing shelter for free while an individual or family resolves their status.

It is not about a media frenzy, breakfast television appearances, financial incentive or forcing hosts and guests to tolerate each other for six months. It is not about mass registers gathering your personal data. It is not about finding refugees on questionable social media pages with no concept of risk or safeguarding. Criminal gangs and traffickers of sex, labour and organ harvesting get their intelligence from these pages. It is not about an individual advertising themselves to get shelter.

So take a look again at the picture on the left. Refugee hosting doesn't belong with a government department using it as a smokescreen for keeping war refugees out. It belongs to the UK charity sector who know about developing projects based on vocation, dignity and humanity.



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Government plans come under scrutiny

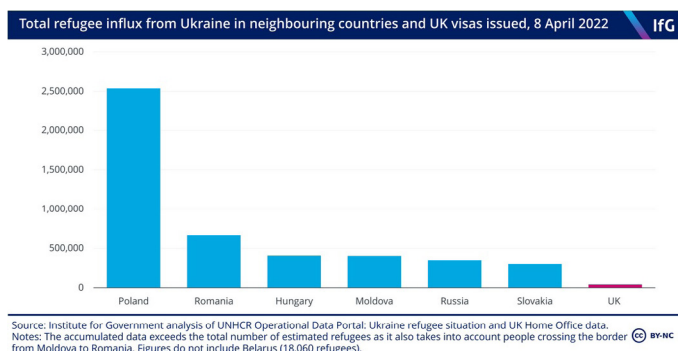
The media are full of criticisms of the government schemes to take in Ukrainian refugees. Writing in *The Independent*, May Bullman says ministers are being urged to remove 'needless bureaucracy' and allow refugees to apply to the Homes for Ukraine scheme from within the UK, and to provide local authorities with funding for those arriving under the family scheme, for which there is currently no support.

In *The Times*, a 'government insider' is [quoted](#) as saying that the visa situation will 'get worse before it gets better', and this is why the second phase of the scheme, which will allow companies and organisations to offer accommodation and to boost the numbers, will not be introduced quickly.

In *The Guardian*, Rafael Behr [describes](#) his own efforts to sponsor a friend of a friend. 'Mobilising the goodwill and spare rooms of the British public was a neat idea in theory that gets untidy on inspection of practicalities', he says. 'The task falls mostly to local councils, which have to worry about host suitability, standards of accommodation, school places for children who might also need support for trauma. There will be pressure on services that are already rationed by budget cuts.'

The scheme is 'happening mostly in circumvention of the Home Office, deemed more an obstacle than a partner'.

Home secretary Priti Patel apologised 'with frustration' over delays in Ukrainians arriving in the UK under visa schemes. However, [speaking to The Independent](#), she denied claims that visa requirements are causing unnecessary problems, insisting the UK will 'absolutely see changes in numbers' as work continues.



More questions on the crisis in Ukraine

- **What happens if Ukrainians arrive in the UK from Ireland?** So far some 21,000 Ukrainians have travelled to Ireland since the crisis, but what happens if they subsequently decide to come to the UK? *Free Movement* [explains](#) that they cannot rely on protection under the Common Travel Area that benefits Irish citizens, but must regularise their status as soon as possible after arriving if they are to avoid the 'hostile environment'.
- **How come my Ukraine Scheme visa doesn't last three years as promised?** *Free Movement* [looks at](#) the way the two main schemes are working. Ukrainians applying may appear to be granted less time in the UK than they were promised. Applicants are told that they can stay in the UK for 'up to three years', but applicants must jump through one or two minor, if inconvenient, hoops before they receive the full three years.
- **What is the position of Roma people in Ukraine?** Ukraine's Roma communities do not have equal access to protection, aid and evacuation. Roma Support Group has signed an [international statement](#) calling for proper support for Ukraine's Roma people. Their [latest newsletter](#) gives an overview of Roma in Ukraine. Activists have compiled a [Padlet](#) providing information and updates specific to Roma in Ukraine.
- **What will happen to African and Asian people trapped in Ukraine?** *Consortium News* [looks at](#) the plight of over 76,000 people from Africa, India and elsewhere, who were studying in Ukraine, and are subject to 'degrading and inhumane' treatment as they try to escape the country.





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The Nationality & Borders Bill returns to the Commons



The controversial Nationality & Borders Bill is expected to return to the House of Commons just after Easter, with MPs voting on it as early as April 20. In the House of Lords, Conservative peer Lord Cormack summed up the frustration with the government's approach, saying they 'dismissed amendments that had been carefully argued and, in many cases, passed by large majorities'.

Rowan Williams [says](#) in *The Times* that the government should be 'ashamed' of the bill. 'One of the most morally questionable things we can do in any context', he argues, 'is to punish people who are already victims. It cannot be said too often that the overwhelming majority of those who seek asylum in the UK do so because of threats serious enough to force them into taking appalling risks'.

The Refugee Law Initiative [looks in detail](#) at the bill's planned two-tier refugee system. It says that far from solving the problems of the current system, it will only 'make it even more complex, bureaucratic, costly and unworkable'. It will exponentially increase the number of decisions that the Home Office has to take each year and the number of legal challenges. It will make it far more difficult for refugees to integrate, by making their stays shorter and more uncertain.

A report from Together with Refugees, [A Bill at What Price?](#), puts the annual cost of the bill to the taxpayer at £2.7 billion (see graphic).



Key changes in 'right to rent' checks

From 6 April, Biometric Residence Card, Biometric Residence Permit and Frontier Worker Permit holders have to prove their right to rent using the Home Office online service only; a physical document is no longer acceptable. This means that landlords are no longer able to accept a physical document as proof of right to rent, even if it shows a later expiry date. The official [Landlords' Guide to Right to Rent Checks](#) has been updated and the issue is discussed further in the next article. [Free Movement](#) [explores](#) the wider implications of the change.

[Law for Life](#) has produced a new step-by-step guide on starting a tenancy and right to rent checks. Publication has been delayed as Law for Life's guide links to government guidance for tenants which has not yet been updated to take account of the April changes. But once it is available you can find it [here](#) with some of Law for Life's other housing guides.

A new but not necessarily improved right to rent

David Smith, a partner at JMW solicitors, explains the changes in the 'right to rent' document checks.

The right to rent has been a controversial topic in the private rented sector in England (it does not yet apply to the rest of the UK). During the Covid pandemic the scheme has been considerably altered. First it was altered directly to allow for checks to be done remotely using scanned documents instead of requiring originals. Second, as the UK's departure from the EU took hold, the right to rent was modified to remove the preferential access enjoyed by EEA nationals and to embrace the EU Settlement Scheme.

This April 6 saw more changes with a new code of practice coming into effect and [a revised code of guidance](#). The movement is very much towards online checks. Biometric residence cards and permits, and frontier worker permits, are now unacceptable for right to rent checks. Anyone presenting one will have to be checked using the [online service](#), also used to check EEA nationals with settled or pre-settled status.

Not wanting UK and Irish nationals to be left out, the Home Office is also going to have an online checking process for them. However, it is not putting them into a government system. This is undoubtedly a political decision which recognises the fact that Conservative backbenchers would not stand for anything that looked like an ID card or government ID system. To get around this, the government is going to agree with third party



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organisations (Identity Service Providers or IDSPs) that they can carry out ID checks on British and Irish tenants. This will require the tenant to register with the IDSP who will provide agents and landlords with a check using Identity Document Validation Technology (IDVT).

What is not clear is whether tenants might potentially have to register with multiple ID checking services as there are bound to be several in the market. It also potentially opens up a new avenue of discrimination as those tenants who cannot register easily or elect not to will find it harder to rent a property, because agents will want to deal with tenants that they can quickly check with minimal risk. This new service is delayed until September and so British and Irish nationals will continue to use current mechanisms until then. One could be forgiven for thinking that this was what the Home Office should have been doing right from the start, but it is probably better late than never.

There is also a tightening of the rules around EU nationals using documents from Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man or using the EU Settlement Scheme. Landlords will now have to validate their documents using the Home Office landlord checking service. The [B5JSSK approval service](#) will also continue and I suspect that this will be the future for an increasing number of countries.

Tied to these changes will be a renewed code of practice on the avoidance of discrimination in right to rent checks, to reflect the wider spread of checking mechanisms. The underlying principle remains that checks should be limited to establishing the right to rent and should not be used for other purposes. In practice it is almost inevitable that those people who do not fit easily into one of the approved checking mechanisms will be affected by the practical difficulties in carrying out checks.



'Right to rent' shows how little has changed since the Windrush scandal

John Perry, writing in Inside Housing, argues that little has changed on right to rent despite recommendations from an official review.

Has the Home Office learnt from the Windrush scandal? Two years ago, it published [a report](#) by Wendy Williams describing the damage it had done to the lives of thousands of people who grew up in the UK after coming here as children. Many had lost their homes and jobs, found themselves ineligible for benefits or were refused help when they became homeless. Calling for 'fundamental changes' to the Home Office's culture, Williams made 30 recommendations, many relating to what the Home Office now calls its 'compliant environment' but is better known as the 'hostile environment' because of its deterrent effect on people coming to the UK. Her [latest report](#) marks the Home Office on its progress, and Williams says it has only carried out eight of her 30 proposals.

The 'right to rent' scheme – the document checks on people applying for rented accommodation – was the focus of a 50-page case study in her first report. Williams said the Home Office didn't properly consider the scheme's risks for ethnic minorities; it went ahead after others pointed out the risks and it ignored the evidence presented to it. CIH was quoted as having warned the government back in 2013 that document checks would be discriminatory. CIH added that many people legitimately living in the UK might not be able to produce the required documents – which is exactly what happened to many of the Windrush victims.

It is not as if there has been no official criticism of the right to rent. Back in 2018, the Home Office's own inspector criticised it for lack of evidence that it was deterring 'illegal' immigrants. A year later, the High Court ruled that right to rent causes racism and is unlawful, in a case brought by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants. Then the Court of Appeal agreed that forcing landlords to check migration status has encouraged discrimination. Evidence was presented that many landlords favour tenants with typically 'British' names, accents and skin colour.

Williams' first report concluded that the right to rent should be part of a full review of the policies that led to the Windrush scandal. But two years later, she criticises the Home Office for being 'slow' to evaluate the hostile environment. Having called for a more 'compassionate' approach, she finds 'limited evidence' that it has been put in place and that change is being introduced in a structured way across the department.



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As part of this wider review, the right to rent was to have been reassessed by Autumn 2021. Apparently, this review has now taken place but it has not been published. Nor have 'external experts' been involved, as Williams said they should.

If anything, the right to rent has been made more stringent since Williams started her work, since its full force now applies to European nationals who before 2021 could access rented accommodation much more easily. Now they can only show their status digitally: many landlords find this unconvincing, which is not surprising as they face hefty penalties if they fail to make proper checks. The Home Office is being taken to judicial review by the official body monitoring the post-Brexit rights of European nationals living in the UK.

Wendy Williams says 13 times in her new report that she is 'disappointed' with the Home Office's response to her review two years ago. She says that promises to transform its culture have been broken. It will soon be a decade since the right to rent was first proposed and since the government received the first warnings about its likely consequences. If there has been an official review, it should be published. We should be able to judge whether lessons have really been learned from the terrible hardships caused to the Windrush generation and others. Doesn't the damage caused by right to rent - as many independent observers believe - far outweigh any benefits?

Latest news on tackling destitution

A new report from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, [We also want to be safe](#), shines a light on the devastating experiences of undocumented people during the pandemic. People who lost their jobs were left with no income at all, barred from the public safety net and forced to rely on friends or charities to survive. Many said their homes were overcrowded, making self-isolation impossible. And years of hostile environment policies in the NHS have taken a toll, with many undocumented migrants now afraid to go to the doctor or to access vaccines.



Faced with Covid, the government should have done everything in its power to ensure people have the support they need, says JCWI. Instead, the Home Office prioritised its hostile environment over public health, putting lives at risk.

After lobbying by CIH and other organisations, the government's [official inquiry](#) into the government response to the pandemic now includes housing and homelessness and Immigration and asylum among the topics to be covered.

Non-British rough sleepers still being targeted for deportation

Following from [previous issues](#) of the newsletter, [evidence again suggests](#) that some charities and local authorities are passing on the personal data of homeless people, which could lead to them being forcibly removed from the UK. According [Liberty Investigates](#) and the *Observer*, referrals were made by 11 councils including Gloucester and Leeds, a housing provider called Keystage Housing, and three charities, one of which has since withdrawn from the scheme. The Home Office will not reveal how many of the people referred to its Rough Sleeping Support Service since October 2020 have been forcibly removed from the UK.

Lifting 'no recourse' conditions for migrants would lead to social and economic gains

A group of LSE academics [argues](#) that lifting 'no recourse' conditions for migrants would lead to greater social and economic gains, especially for children. They point out that living on low income has devastating and long-term effects on children's education, health, wellbeing, and on their life chances as well as on their parents' life chances. The gains would be of lifelong value not only to them but to the communities into which families will integrate, and to society more widely.

'Hostile' - a documentary on the huge damage the hostile environment does to people's lives.

Farrukh Sair has lived for 19 years in the UK and worked for the NHS. In Sonita Gale's new documentary, [Hostile](#), Sair explains why he still has his NHS lanyard: "It reminds me I have been part of something good," he says. Clinging on to this evidence is important to Sair because elsewhere in his life things are not going so well. He has had to spend more than £50,000 on Home Office visa fees and legal bills to try to regularise his immigration status and is still fighting for the right to remain. Both his children were born here, but the whole family face removal if his most recent application is refused later this year.



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The EU Settlement Scheme – problems continue

‘This system was created for people with easy lives’

The Public Interest Law Centre’s Kasia Makowska [explains](#) how getting pre-settled or settled status often isn’t the end of the story in terms of securing clients’ rights to housing and welfare support. She advises people at high risk of homelessness, including rough sleeping. Many lack basic computer literacy and access to technology, while others speak little or no English. She sets out the problems they have in showing their eligibility because many housing officers and charity support workers are still unclear about how to check an EU citizen’s immigration status online. Vulnerable people are missing out on welfare support and some are being trapped in destitution.

How secure is pre-settled status for EU citizens after Brexit?

The Migration Observatory [looks at](#) the challenges faced by more than two million people who hold pre-settled status and need to apply again to get full settled status. It discusses the obstacles they face: ‘For some... the process will actually be harder than it was the first time around,’ researcher Dr Marina Fernandez-Reino [told The Independent](#). ‘While most applicants will find the process very straightforward, more vulnerable groups could struggle’, she said.

The NRPF Network has [new guidance](#) on what councils need to consider when a person with pre-settled status is ineligible for benefits. It looks at eligibility, what support they may still be able to claim and what can be done to avoid destitution.

Important victory in fight against unnecessary red tape for European nationals

On March 10 there was a significant [judgment](#) in a Law Centre Northern Ireland case about the requirements for some EU citizens to have comprehensive sickness insurance (CSI) to qualify for a right to reside in the UK for benefits purposes. [Free Movement points out](#) that the case means that huge numbers of EEA nationals have been wrongly refused welfare benefits and housing assistance, resulting in destitution, homelessness, and in some cases being forced to leave the UK.

Some EU nationals who have applied to the EU Settlement Scheme and are waiting for a decision may now be able to show eligibility for benefits in the meantime, for example by relying on permanent residence status that would not otherwise have been recognized. People with pre-settled status may now have more routes available, e.g. as a self-employed person or student.

More rules changes affecting European nationals take effect soon

The right to claim certain benefits for European nationals with limited leave ends on 3 May 2022. Up to that date, nationals from states that are members of the European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance (ECSMA) or the European Social Charter (ESC) could claim pension credit, housing benefit and/or council tax rebate without it affecting their immigration status even if their leave has a ‘no public funds’ condition. The ECSMA/ESC member states are North Macedonia, Turkey, and most of the EU/European Economic Area member states.

The benefits affected are state pension credit (SPC) and housing benefit (HB). The right to claim council tax rebate (CTR) in England and Wales also ends but this is postponed until 1 April 2023. The concession was already fairly limited in scope because new claims for SPC/HB can only be made by people aged 66 or over. A similar rule used to apply to people aged under 66 claiming universal credit (UC) and applied to most work permit holders who lost their job or whose earnings were reduced. But the right to claim UC was ended for new claims from 1 January 2021.

These rule changes do not affect existing claims, so claims for UC made before 1 January 2021 and claims for SPC/HB made before 3 May 2022 can continue for as long as the person is entitled. New claims for CTR can also be made up to and including 31 March 2023.

Migration – the changing picture

It’s just over a year since the rules changed drastically for potential migrants from Europe. How has this affected migration patterns since then? It is no surprise that arrivals from Europe have fallen, but it is more surprising who has replaced them. Jonathan Portes shows in [UK in a changing Europe](#) that the UK immigration system is rapidly re-orientating from Europe to the rest of the world, especially South and South-East Asia. He suggests that these changes will be a central focus of debate on immigration for years to come.



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Asylum – latest news on accommodation and other issues

Huge cost of housing asylum seekers in hotels

The Independent [reports](#) that the cost of housing asylum seekers and Afghan refugees in hotels is almost £5 million a day. The department is spending £127 on hotels per person each day, or more than £1.7 billion each year. Around 25,000 asylum seekers are being held in hotels together with 11,000 Afghan nationals. Homes had been found for 4,000 Afghan refugees by February this year.

Footnote: The CIH assesses the cost to government of providing a social rented home at slightly more than £4,000 per year, as against the cost of keeping a person in a hotel of over £46,000 per year.

Slow progress in housing people from Afghanistan

The slow progress in housing people from Afghanistan is prompting comparisons with the swifter responses to helping Ukrainians. 'As a British Afghan, I'm a little jealous', argues [Nelufar Hedayat](#) in *The Guardian*. 'Seven months since Kabul's fall, my family are still pleading for help', he says. 'Has the world forgotten this ongoing humanitarian crisis?'

Far from an enthusiastic welcome, charities have accused ministers of giving thousands of Afghans who fled to Britain the 'cold shoulder' while they wait for permanent housing. [According to The Independent](#), Afghan families are still living in a 'nightmare'. The government calls on landlords with suitable properties to submit offers via its [housing portal](#) so councils can match them to families.

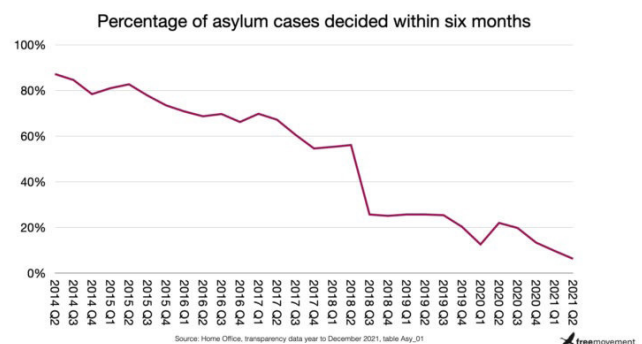
The Law Society [warned in February](#) that Afghan citizens evacuated to the UK last summer are facing limbo as their interim immigration papers expire. It urged the Home Office to take immediate action to provide evidence of people's rights to rent a home, open a bank account or find work.

UK's asylum system goes from bad to worse

In *Free Movement*, Colin Yeo [assesses the state](#) of the asylum system. Last year saw an increase in asylum claims, but the stand-out problem is the time it takes for decisions to be made. The backlog of asylum seekers waiting more than six months for a decision to be made on their case has trebled since Priti Patel became Home

Secretary in 2019. At the end of 2021, there was a backlog of 83,535 cases awaiting an initial decision for asylum claims made since 2006. Over 80,000 asylum seekers awaiting decisions now need accommodation or other support.

Surprisingly, there is now a record level of approvals – 72% of initial decisions in 2021. Nevertheless, Yeo concludes that the asylum system is now in a 'parlous state'. He adds that 'What the Home Secretary does not say, is that it was she who broke it'.



Newcastle project finds community better than detention for asylum claims

The BBC [reports](#) that a pilot project funded by the Home Office finds it more humane and less expensive to support asylum seekers in the community rather than in detention centres. Newcastle-upon-Tyne charity [Action Foundation](#) supported 20 women in a community setting in the city. It found the women, mostly previous detainees from the Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, experienced more stability and better health, at half the cost of holding them in detention.

Asylum seeker accommodation problem to be eased – by deporting people to Rwanda

After initial uncertainty about the details of the government plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, it emerged that any claim they make for asylum in the UK will be judged inadmissible. Those sent to Rwanda will mainly be single men, they will have to apply for asylum in Rwanda and will no longer be subject to UK law after they arrive there.

The Times had [pictures](#) of the hostel (currently charging £19 per night) where they will be housed while any claims for asylum are assessed by Rwandan authorities. The scheme, [heavily criticised](#) by the UN refugee agency, faces major legal challenges.



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Building knowledge and skills for fairer outcomes in homelessness applications

Law for Life is a London-based legal charity working to ensure everyone has the knowledge, confidence and skills they need to secure access to justice. With funding from Trust for London, it runs a two-year programme building legal capability of community groups on housing and homelessness law.

Over a decade of austerity cuts have left local authorities without adequate funding to provide housing support. This has led housing departments to make difficult choices about priorities for access to accommodation. Some categories of people, such as families with children, are offered emergency housing almost automatically. Others, such as single homeless people, people with mental health needs, those released from prison, need to pass a 'vulnerability assessment' to prove that, if made homeless, they will be significantly more vulnerable than an 'ordinary person'. These have become a contested terrain with fears that assessments are used to limit the numbers getting accommodation.

Our [information guide](#) for those supporting people at risk of homelessness advises on the help people should receive and how to deal with local authorities. At the guide's launch, solicitor Eleanor Solomon from Anthony Gold discussed the importance of effective vulnerability letters to support applications. They should be written by health specialists and clearly explain how, 'if made homeless, the applicant would be significantly more vulnerable than an ordinary person in the same position' (the legal test for vulnerability). The guide outlines what an effective letter should cover and has tips for approaching health specialists.

Strong vulnerability letters are needed because many councils now outsource medical assessments to private companies. Over a third use a company called Now Medical, that provides medical opinions quickly and cheaply without the applicant being visited by a doctor. These opinions are perceived to 'downplay' the seriousness of people's health condition yet are often relied on by local authorities when refusing assistance.

Barrister Nicholas Nicol of One Pump Court [provides insights](#) on challenging unfair decisions. Islington councillors Sue Lukes and Diarmaid Ward explained

their council's decision to stop using Now Medical in favour of in-house assessments by an occupational therapist (although this transition hasn't fully taken place yet, and Islington is still using NM in some cases).

Refugees show the way in Coventry



Sam Abdo with his colleague Hafssa Al Rahmani, who is originally from Iraq

Sam Abdo, a former refugee, settled in Coventry, now welcomes new arrivals in the city.

When I arrived from Amouda, Syria, three-years ago, I had no idea what life had in store for me or where it would take me, but I can safely say that it's worked out well since I arrived in the United Kingdom. I arrived in Coventry in 2019 through the UK Resettlement Scheme and I have gone on to rebuild my life by achieving academic qualifications such as my GCSEs, whilst also securing a job as a business support officer in Coventry City Council's Migration Team.

I am responsible for several projects: providing financial and administrative assistance, organising meetings, processing critical data, and providing advice and guidance on the plight, needs and feelings of new arrivals as they begin their integration journeys here in Coventry.

I find myself in quite a unique position as a former refugee, because those who helped me to resettle and integrate, are also the ones I now call colleagues and friends. My own lived experience as a former refugee was instrumental in why I applied, as the job allows me to combine my skills and qualifications with my desire to support those who are most vulnerable; people who now find themselves in my former shoes.

Refugees in a new land need support from all sides to give them a sense of security and allow them to become active members of their new society and integrate more quickly. My own experience is vital in my day-to-day work as the advice I provide - along with the advice of other former refugees in the team such as Abdal Ali - enables the team to deepen its

How to

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people and those
threatened with
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understanding of the needs of new arrivals and give more tailored support to each individual.

Doing so is much more than just my paid, legal obligation through my job, I believe it is a moral obligation as a human being.

Being resettled in Coventry also holds a special place in my heart. Coventry is a well-known city of peace and reconciliation, something it is extremely proud of now that it has welcomed and resettled over 900 people. The place that embraces you after you've been lost, the land that makes you feel safe and welcome after being in danger, is a place to call home. And this is why Coventry is now my home.

A final word: can we offer a kinder and more compassionate welcome to refugees?

John Delahunty, CEO at housing association Innisfree, and one of our sponsors, argues that social landlords can do more to help those fleeing conflict and persecution overseas.

I started to write this piece on the day Russia invaded Ukraine. The voice that is coming through in these first words is full of emotion – it's much louder than my professional/technical work head.

From news coverage, the clip of a father settling his small daughter's hair under her hat as he puts her on a bus to safety – he's staying behind to fight – brought tears to my eyes. The intimacy of that simple, everyday act brings up visceral memories of me with our own children: Joel, Isaac, Grace and Martha.

And I've experienced feelings like this before. In August last year, watching the desperate attempts of families trying to leave Afghanistan, I felt frightened just imagining if that were our family.

Remembering the image of the three-year old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, whose body washed up on a beach in Turkey in 2015, still makes me feel desperately sad and angry. We've a photo of Isaac at that age, in shorts and t-shirt, deep in sleep – just as Alan should have been.

It is unarguable that as housing professionals we do things that tackle a whole range of social injustices, whether it be homelessness, race inequality, poverty, domestic abuse – the list goes on, and includes support for refugees.

I often spot the 'somebody' driving these activities in organisations, sometimes a practitioner or a board member or a chief executive; sometimes still doing it

now, sometimes in the history of an organisation – a founder or first staff member.

Like I do now, I think they felt the need to help another person, family or community to have a better life. And yes, we have converted those feelings into mission and strategy and delivery plans – but it doesn't take away that basic human connection to want to help another.

So, if you have strong feelings about what's going on in the world now, I have three ideas to share that show that we do have the bandwidth in social housing to help refugees.

Campaigning: We don't need to reinvent any wheels here – we could support an existing campaign. The [Together with Refugees](#) campaign is a coalition founded by a range of bodies calling for a kinder, fairer and more effective approach to supporting refugees. Having spoken to the campaign, there's a natural priority for them in working with the government and the Home Office in particular, but they would welcome the knowledge and expertise of our social housing sector as accommodation issues are always significant for refugees. Room for a few of our policy bods? An outlet for some of our comms colleagues too?

Community Sponsorship: This is a resettlement programme with local people at its heart. Originally from Canada, the scheme was launched in the UK by the Home Office and groups have sprung up across the UK. In the first five years more than 100 groups welcomed more than 500 refugees. Like some other housing providers, Innisfree provided a house for a Syrian family under the scheme and that inspired me to develop a group in my hometown of Northampton.

Could you help with: advice about accommodation in your area for a group? A meeting space? Making a property available? Find out more from [Reset](#) the community sponsorship learning hub.

Contracting: Home Office contracts for asylum accommodation and support valued at £4 billion over 10 years only involve private providers like Serco and Mears. Could there be another way? Can we get some of our big housing brains on this one?

For Innisfree, our Irish roots mean that we have an understanding of what it's like to be from another place – and sometimes not be so welcome. As social housing organisations, let's all give a kinder and more compassionate welcome to refugees.

Fáilte.

This was originally published by [Campbell Tickel](#).

What does a kinder and more compassionate welcome mean in practice? The Muha family from Syria, who lived under canvas in a refugee camp for years, [told the BBC](#) that they found it in Wales.



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Other news

Hundreds stripped of British citizenship in last 15 years

Free Movement [found](#) that at least 464 people have had their citizenship removed since the law permitting this practice was relaxed 15 years ago. *The Independent* reports that a British man left stateless in 2017 has had his UK citizenship restored after a lengthy court battle. The 40-year-old was stripped of his citizenship shortly after he flew to Bangladesh for the birth of his daughter. Supposedly he was guilty of criminal activity, but when pressed the Home Office could produce no evidence to back their claim.

New study into domestic abuse victims with no access to public funds

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner has [announced](#) new research on support for survivors of domestic abuse who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). It will be conducted over six months to June 2022 and will provide an estimate of the numbers across the UK who have NRPF. The commissioner's report [Safety Before Status](#) found that NRPF means that many migrant survivors of abuse are unable to access safe accommodation and are forced to stay with their abuser or face homelessness.

Devolved ministers challenge 'restrictive' UK immigration policy

Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland ministers claim that processes for skilled workers to come to Britain are 'inflexible, costly and bureaucratic' and 'exclude many of the key workers that we need, many of whom have been crucial during the Covid-19 pandemic'. Their

[letter](#) to UK immigration ministers says there are 'severe labour and skills shortages' in all four nations of the UK and that the UK government has failed to work with devolved administrations to tackle the problem.

Losing Myself: Mental Health in a Hostile Environment

Migrants Organise and Speak Up Radio are proud to present a series of [six-monthly podcasts](#), which highlight the mental health impact of the immigration system and the hostile environment policies.

Do you need to know about 'local connection' and 'reasonable preference'?

The House of Commons Library has a [short guide](#) to housing allocations systems in England.

Signposts to a better immigration policy?

The Fabian Society published [Blue Arrivals](#), a report by Thom Brooks, himself a migrant, on what a fairer immigration system should look like.

The housing rights website is sponsored by Metropolitan Thames Valley, Innisfree and Tamil Housing



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The newsletter is produced at CIH by John Perry with help from Sam Lister. We are grateful to all the contributors to this issue, named in each of the articles. Anyone interested in contributing can contact john.perry@cih.org.

Do you have any comments on this newsletter?

Send them to policyandpractice@cih.org

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