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# Housing rights

Your quarterly newsletter from the housing rights website

Summer 2023

**O**ur summer newsletter kicks off with news of a campaign led by CIH - to persuade the government to drop its plan to allow new asylum accommodation to be provided in a multi-occupied property, without being licensed. We and 140 other organisations wrote to ministers with our concerns about the dangers to occupants, especially the fire risk.

This issue covers the latest developments with the government's Illegal Migration Bill and - after Refugee Week in June - celebrates the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Windrush landing. It also, of course, looks at the problems the Windrush generation's families still face.

We cover the latest on refugees from Afghanistan, Ukraine and Sudan, and again look at the state of the asylum system - the claims backlog, the use of hotels, and the other (sometimes bizarre) alternatives the government is considering to house asylum seekers.

We revisit a regular topic - right to rent checks - and have guest contributions on safe housing for women, how to improve the asylum system and a report on a housing association providing housing for those with no access to public funds.

We wrap up with the usual miscellany of advice services, legal cases and other news items.

Our thanks to all the contributors to this issue, named in each of the articles. If anyone is interested in contributing to future issues, please email [john.perry@cih.org](mailto:john.perry@cih.org).

As always, we encourage you to share this edition with anyone you know how works in this area. And if you haven't already, please click [here](#) to subscribe and receive the newsletter direct to your email inbox each quarter.

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*The Housing rights team*

## CIH leads the campaign against cuts in asylum accommodation standards

### Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) organises an open letter to government ministers urging them to drop their planned rule changes

On May 16, the *Guardian* reported that the government was planning to remove basic housing protections from asylum seekers under new rules designed to move tens of thousands out of hotels and into the private rented sector. Under the new rules, the licensing requirements that apply to houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) would no longer apply to new asylum accommodation where, instead, standards would only be enforced via the contractual conditions on accommodation providers. The change was being made without any consultation.

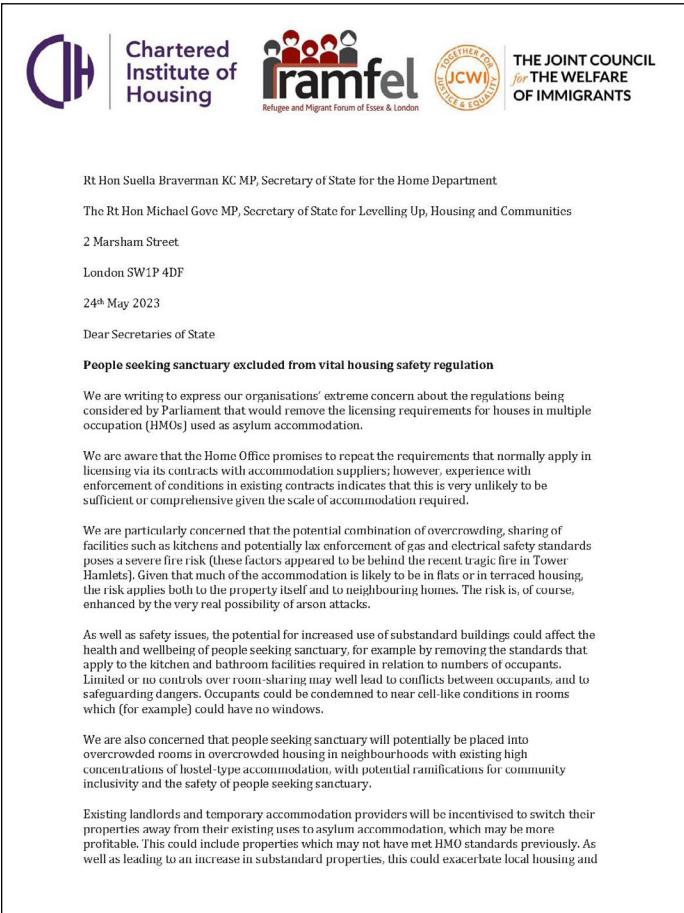
Very concerned about this watering down of standards and the increased risks to occupants, especially the risk of fire, CIH drafted an open letter to the home secretary and to Michael Gove, the levelling-up minister, arguing that the rule changes should not go ahead. We made contact with other organisations concerned with the issue, began to exchange assessments of the implications of the proposed changes and drafted a letter opposing them. As well as CIH, organisations that took the lead in organising the letter included the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), Ramfel (Refugee & Migrant Forum of Essex and London), NACCOM (The No Accommodation Network), Shelter, Crisis, the Migration Foundation, Law for Life and Safer Renting. Within a few days, 140 organisations had signed [the letter](#), and it was sent on May 24.

In the letter, CIH chief executive Gavin Smart pointed out:

*“The licensing regulations for houses that are multi-occupied are designed to keep people safe, especially safe from fire. They need to apply to everyone, including people seeking sanctuary in the UK. That’s why we’re calling on the government to drop its proposal to exempt asylum accommodation from the HMO licencing arrangements.”*

The letter noted that the strain on the asylum accommodation system is due to excessive delays in asylum decision-making and the fact that those seeking asylum are not allowed to work. It urged the Home Office to address these problems rather than deny people seeking sanctuary the basic accommodation rights that should be afforded to all tenants.

JCWI’s Mary Atkinson said: “This government is essentially proposing a two-tier system of housing,



with fundamental human rights for people born here but not for those who come here seeking safety. This is outrageous. Everyone deserves a home that is decent and safe – by stripping away these protections for people seeking sanctuary, this government is putting people’s lives at risk. It must instead act to quickly and fairly process asylum claims, and make sure local authorities are properly resourced to provide safe housing for all who need it.”

The letter urged government to redouble efforts to ensure that asylum accommodation is safe, healthy and secure, rather than removing HMO licensing requirements.

A month later we received [the reply from both secretaries of state](#), which considered our arguments in detail, but rejected them.

Shortly afterwards, the [Fire Brigades Union](#) joined the campaign to change the government’s mind. The union said that exempting sites for asylum seekers from the rules that apply to other buildings could lead to the tragic loss of life and injury. It warned that firefighters

would be forced to risk their safety to save those placed at risk by the removal of basic fire health and safety regulations.

CIH also lobbied members of the House of Lords prior to its debate on a proposed amendment to the government’s Illegal Migration Bill, which (if it were adopted) would annul the planned change in licensing rules. CIH’s arguments were used in [the debate](#). The government rejected the amendment, although at the time of writing there is still a pending vote on the regulatory change in the House of Commons, and CIH has combined with several other organisations to produce [a briefing for MPs](#), to assist them when the debate takes place.



### Could there be a successful legal challenge against the government’s measures?

As well as leading on the campaign to contest the changes when they were passing through parliament, CIH has also been working with solicitors Duncan Lewis and barristers Doughty Street Chambers to help in a legal challenge if the planned regulations go through. CIH has provided a detailed witness statement for the case. Lawyers from the same firms took part in the recent court case dealing with the government’s policy to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda.

The challenge is on behalf of a group of asylum seekers who might be at risk if the protection given by the licensing of HMOs is removed from the accommodation they may occupy in future (if sent there on a “no choice” basis by the Home Office).

Lawyers argue that any measure to reduce minimum regulatory protection requires “justification and careful investigation” as many asylum seekers are vulnerable and have experienced trauma.

They say that there is no evidence the home secretary has carried out any sort of “careful investigation” into whether the new draft regulations provide safe and appropriate accommodation for asylum seekers. They add that the justification for exempting asylum seekers from HMO safeguards, which is that the government wants to speed up access to new accommodation for asylum seekers, is “irrational” as it is possible to accommodate people in an HMO while a licence application is pending. As the *Guardian* reported, the lawyers call the new rules “a charter for unscrupulous landlords”.

The legal action calls on government – both the home secretary, Suella Braverman, and the levelling up, housing and communities secretary, Michael Gove – to withdraw or suspend the draft regulations pending further inquiry into their impact.



Shelter explains why it backed the letter opposing the changes in HMO licensing

Deborah Garvie, policy manager at Shelter explains the background to the joint letter to ministers. This is an edited version of her [original blog](#).

HMO licensing was introduced in 2004 following decades of campaigning by Shelter and private tenants' groups. It was primarily introduced to protect people in HMOs from [much higher fire risks](#), following a fatal fire in Clanricarde Gardens, Notting Hill. But it took another 21 years of campaigning to finally get HMOs licensed.

Shelter successfully campaigned for accommodation offered to people seeking asylum to be included in the HMO licensing scheme and recommended Home Office procurement of accommodation must not undermine local authorities in improving housing conditions.

This followed [our investigation](#) into HMOs used to accommodate people seeking asylum, which found a shocking 86 per cent were unfit for the number of occupants and households in over 80 per cent of HMOs were exposed to unacceptable risks of fire. We provided this information to an inquest following a fatal fire in the late 1990s, where mother died trying to save her children. They were a Roma family seeking asylum from violence in Eastern Europe.

Now, just as the government is finally about to [enact greater protections](#) for social tenants, promised following the Grenfell Tower fire, they are removing the vital protection of HMO licensing for potentially thousands of people in private HMOs contracted by the Home Office to accommodate people seeking asylum. Have no lessons been learned?

The [government says](#) it's introducing the regulations "to temporarily remove barriers that cause a delay or challenge in acquiring sustainable and cost-effective contingency accommodation for asylum seekers." It claims local HMO licensing standards (e.g. minimum room-size standards) "limit supply by restricting the number of people that can be housed in each property and drive the cost to the taxpayer."

Put simply, vital housing health and safety legislation is being rolled back to allow the Home Office to cram more people into HMOs, which will - in turn - bring down the cost of providing accommodation. Cost is considered more important than enforcement of safety standards.

- HMO licensing is a strong enforcement regime because it places a statutory requirement on:
- HMO landlords to make themselves known to the local authority, apply for a licence and meet its conditions, including being a "fit and proper landlord" and fire safety standards.
  - HMO landlords to pay licence fees to the local authority, which provides them with the resources to licence, inspect and enforce standards.
  - Local authorities to licence, inspect and take enforcement action where HMO landlords fail to comply.
  - HMO landlords who fail to comply to be given heavy fines, served with rent repayment orders and (ultimately) refused an HMO licence.

Therefore, there are strong incentives for both HMO landlords and local authorities to make sure health and safety standards in HMOs are met. There are no such incentives for landlords to comply with the standards required in Home Office contracts.

So, we're very worried that the tough enforcement created by HMO licensing will no longer apply to people seeking asylum, who can be more vulnerable to fire risks for a variety of reasons, including a risk of anti-immigrant arson attacks.

These changes could also make things much worse for other people. For example, the higher rates per property available by cramming people into a Home Office HMO could exacerbate the housing emergency by incentivising landlords to convert family homes, increasing the number of residents in some blocks or streets, and making it even more difficult for families in some areas to find an affordable home. Or landlords could pull out of offering properties to councils for use as temporary accommodation for homeless people.

The appalling fire at Grenfell Tower showed us what can happen without proactive enforcement of strong fire safety standards. Crowded HMOs can be death traps when fire takes hold.

Latest on the government's Illegal Migration Bill

**A**s we write, the government's [Illegal Migration Bill](#) is at report stage in the House of Lords and after the Commons considers any amendments, the bill is expected to become law in July.

CIH supports [Together with Refugees](#) which is coordinating responses to the bill and suggests [actions that individuals and organisations can take](#). It also provides [a range of messages](#) that can be used in response to the bill (this is updated as the bill progresses). The International Rescue Organisation has a [good summary](#) of the bill. The government has a page of [useful statistics](#) which give the background to the bill.

Here are some recent comments on the bill:

- **The Joint Committee on Human Rights warns** that the Illegal Migration Bill would deny access to the asylum system to the vast majority of refugees, in breach of a number of binding international human rights obligations, if it was passed in its current form. Committee chair Joanna Cherry KC said it was "overwhelmingly clear" that the plans breach the European Convention on Human Rights, Refugee Convention and other international obligations. "Most people fleeing persecution or conflict have no safe and legal way of getting here," she added.

**The committee's report ends with this comment:**

*"We conclude that this Bill breaches a number of the UK's international human rights obligations and risks breaching others. The Home Secretary herself has been unable to certify that the Bill is compatible with convention rights. We therefore urge the government to consider our conclusions and recommendations in order to address the human rights incompatibilities within this Bill. We suggest, in the Annex to this report, ways in which this Bill could be amended."*

- **The "illegal migrants plan" could cost £6 billion over two years.** The [BBC says](#) the Home Office estimates it will have to spend between £3 billion and £6 billion on detention facilities, and ongoing accommodation and removals if the Bill becomes law. A senior government source described it as one of the main pressures on public spending. The Treasury is backing the policy, but there is concern among insiders that costs associated with the controversial bill are escalating. Home Office sources acknowledged that the Bill's implementation would be expensive and complex, with one admitting that getting the whole process working would be a "major logistical challenge".

- Best for Britain points out that the home secretary [can't answer questions](#) on how much the Illegal Migration Bill will cost and says "she doesn't even have an estimate."
  - **The Bill could lead to 3,000 asylum seekers deported each month** according to a Home Office briefing paper [quoted](#) by the *Guardian*. It says the government has drawn up plans to remove 3,163 asylum seekers every month from January, and asks "where will they go?"
  - **The Migration Observatory suggests** that the government is giving up on returning refused asylum seekers to their home countries. This is because "people who have made asylum claims, and who—under the current system—would have been refused, would not be returned to their country of origin." In recent years, most people who had made an asylum claim prior to their enforced removal or voluntary departure from the UK went back to their home country, not to a safe third country.
- For example, India has typically ranked in the top 15 most common countries of nationality for asylum applicants in the UK, including small boat arrivals. Yet Indians typically have a low asylum success rate at initial decision: four per cent in 2022. India is not on the list of safe home countries. Therefore, under the Bill, Indians' asylum claims will not be considered. If their claims are not considered, they will not be removed to India.
- Returning much higher numbers of people who receive negative asylum decisions to their home countries is, in theory, feasible. The Bill implicitly abandons the idea of doing this. If people in this situation cannot be removed to safe countries—something the UK does not have a track record of doing—the UK will end up accommodating and supporting them indefinitely. For more discussion, see [UK policies to deter people from claiming asylum](#).
- **What will implementation of the Bill look like in practice?** Lawyer Colin Yeo [looks ahead](#). He says any deterrent effect will depend on new arrivals knowing about the provisions beforehand, and he is sceptical that they will, or will in any case invent news ways to circumvent them, for example making greater efforts to arrive undetected.
- The government is planning to detain many more people than currently happens, with limited capacity to do so. As a result, many may have to be released into the community and may "disappear". In short, Yeo paints a picture of a Pandora's box the government is opening, with considerable uncertainty as to what's inside.



## What will the Illegal Migration Bill mean for housing?

*The Bill will “create a new homeless population”*

Bridget Young, the director of [The No Accommodation Network \(NACCOM\)](#), explained in the *Big Issue* [how the Bill would increase homelessness](#).

According to [recent evidence published by the Refugee Council](#), an estimated 192,670 people could have their claim for refugee protection deemed inadmissible – not even considered – within the first three years of the legislation passing. People in this position will be unable to have their asylum claims processed, but will also be prevented from working, and in most cases cannot be removed from the UK due to the lack of returns agreements in place with other countries.

*“Caught in this predicament, they will effectively be locked out of society, stuck in limbo and forced to endure an indefinite period of extreme hardship, poverty, and potential exploitation. The inevitable outcome for many people seeking asylum would be homelessness and destitution.”*

Disengagement from the asylum system is likely to increase, as will the number of people who choose to disappear into the community upon arrival rather than risk presenting themselves to the authorities. Those who do this will be dependent on informal support networks and at greater risk of exploitation.

With no pathway to move forward and rebuild their lives due to their “inadmissible” status, Bridget Young concludes that the Bill looks set to create an entirely new homeless and precariously-housed population, increasing the likelihood of people rough sleeping on our streets and in our communities and undermining the government’s manifesto pledge to [end rough sleeping in England by 2024](#).

## Government says it will tighten access to council housing waiting lists

More than 1.2 million households are waiting for social housing and about one in ten of those given a home are non-UK nationals, with the figure considerably higher in areas with more migrants.

Under current rules, foreigners with visas giving them indefinite leave to stay in Britain are eligible for council housing, alongside refugees and those on schemes such as Homes for Ukraine. Existing guidance also recommends that people should have lived locally for two years before they qualify for social housing.

Ministers [have told](#) *The Times* that the rules are not strong enough, amid public concern about record immigration levels. However, as is clear from [the housing rights website](#), the rules are already restrictive. Unless the government plans to curb eligibility for people who have lived in the UK for many years, but do not have citizenship, it is very difficult to see how they could be made any tighter without being challenged on grounds of discrimination.



## Small boats, deportations to Rwanda and “safe and legal” routes

### Setback for government Rwanda plan

The government was hit with a blow against their plans to send undocumented asylum seekers to Rwanda by a Court of Appeal judgment that one aspect of the plan is illegal. Judges found the critical problem was that Rwanda’s assurances about the treatment of those arriving there could not be relied on. However, they did not oppose other aspects of the plan, meaning that the government may hope for a favourable verdict when the case goes to the Supreme Court.

*Free Movement* [summarised](#) this aspect of the decision:

*“Importantly, the majority [of the judges] did not hold that the UK was obliged to decide the asylum claims of refugees who arrive within its jurisdiction; they held that Rwanda was not a safe country to which to send refugees to have their claims decided. The judges do not rule out the possibility of refugees being removed to a genuinely safe country.”*

It went on to say that the referral to the Supreme Court will take several months and that, after that, an appeal to the European Court of Justice is likely. And there are more reflections on the case from *Free Movement* [here](#).

Despite these delays, the *Guardian* later [reported](#) that around 24,000 asylum seekers have already had

letters warning of their likely deportation to Rwanda. The notice of intent is to send the person to a safe third country instead to have their claim determined there. The only country the UK has an agreement with to do this is Rwanda, but because of the continuing legal proceedings these cases have become part of the Home Office’s record backlog.

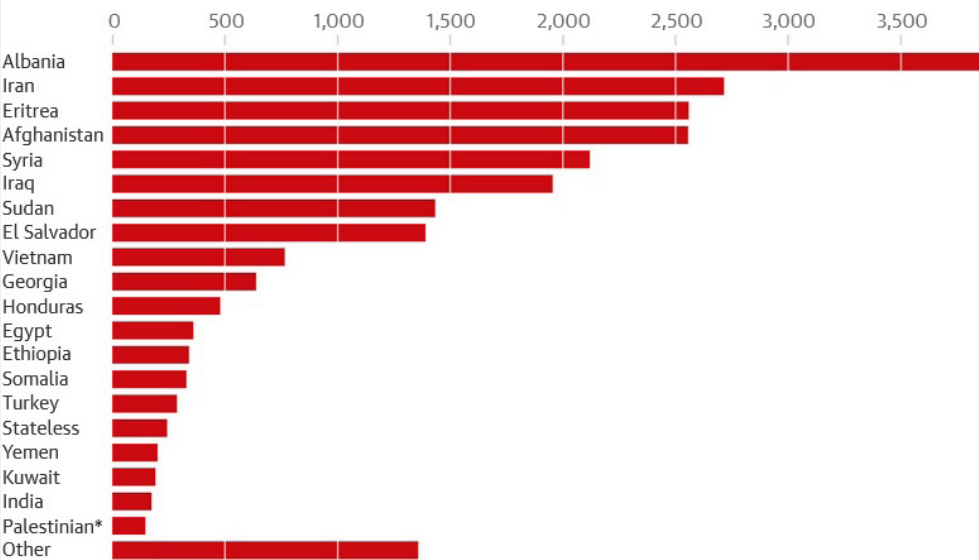
Many of those who have received letters are not from safe countries. While the top nationality is Albanians with 3,859 notices of intent issued, also in the top ten are Iran with 2,715, Eritrea with 2,558 and Afghanistan with 2,555 (see chart below).

Tirana Hassan, writing in the *Financial Times*, says that the UK government is maintaining a convenient silence about Rwanda, while well aware of the human rights issues that arise. For example, refugees there have been shot at and killed for protesting against cuts in food rations.

The government has published its [economic impact assessment for the Illegal Migration Bill](#) and its Rwanda plan. It reveals that Rwanda will be paid approximately £105,000 per refugee received, on top of the lump sum of £120 million already paid. The net cost to the UK appears to be about £63,000 per refugee, that is comparing the extra costs of the new scheme with the costs of supporting someone and assessing an asylum claim in the UK.

### The number of asylum seekers being considered for forced removal to Rwanda

Notices of intent issued, by nationality, 1 January 2021 to 31 March 2023



Guardian graphic. Source: Home Office. Note: \*Occupied Palestinian Territories



### Is Rishi Sunak's "Stop The Boats" plan really working?

Along with the measures in the Illegal Migration Bill, the prime minister has made [five pledges for 2023](#), one of which is to stop small boat arrivals.

Solicitor Colin Yeo asks this question in his [new blog](#). He says there are some limited signs of success, but this probably has nothing to do with the Illegal Migration Bill. Numbers of crossings are down, but this may well be due to bad weather, more active deterrent work by the French police or people finding more clandestine routes. He points out those arriving in small boats do so intending to declare themselves to the authorities when they arrive, so the numbers doing so a pretty accurate. Once people think there is no advantage in reporting to the authorities (because of the threat of being sent to Rwanda), they will find other means. Sunak's plan may hide the problem of irregular crossings, but not solve it.

After this analysis was written, the *Daily Express* [reported](#) that the number of small boat crossings in June 2023 (3,824) was significantly higher than the previous June (3,140).

### Banning "small boats" may increase the dangers, not reduce them

In *openDemocracy*, [Nicola Kelly argues](#) that the home secretary should go to the French camps to see why people get in small boats.

*"With no safe routes and dire conditions in the refugee camps of northern France, what choice do people have?"*

She visited Dunkirk to meet people attempting to reach the UK by small boat. She saw the ways in which the £63 million package from the government is being used by French police patrols to destroy boats, slashing through them and forcing people to sleep in bus

shelters, soaked through, after a failed attempt to cross the Channel. The increased police presence is now pushing people further round the coastline – in some cases, as far as Normandy – to make longer, more dangerous crossings.

Kaveh Khezri [told his story](#) about crossing the channel to *Metro*: "I found out about the Home Office's Rwanda plan the day before I crossed the English Channel by boat." He adds: "I would like to see the government make it clear who is eligible for protection, then provide safe routes for those people to get here."

And in another story, this time [told to openDemocracy](#) by Ibrahim Khogali, the author explains how if the legislation had applied ten years ago, he would not have survived. "I came to the UK in a small boat. Suella Braverman wants you to think I had another option, but she's lying."

The supposedly safe, legal asylum routes are so inadequate that a toddler died after waiting years to be resettled. Iraqi refugees who have spent years stuck in Turkey [told openDemocracy](#) they understand why some turn to smugglers. They gave an example of a child dying while the family was waiting to use a so-called "safe" route.

### More on "safe and legal routes"

JCWI [points out](#) that the government makes a lot of claims about providing "safe and legal routes," saying people should wait in situations where their lives are at risk and wait to get resettled. But the figures don't lie – the UK resettles only a handful of people each year, and the limited number of schemes remaining are not fit for purpose. Refugee resettlement fell by [77 per cent in the last year](#). And by 25 May this year, we had only resettled 40 people under the key resettlement route for Afghans since it was opened in January 2022. This is currently the only open route for at-risk Afghans who were not evacuated out when the Taliban took over Afghanistan

and didn't work with British forces in Afghanistan. This means the government is forcing marginalised groups like queer people and women's rights activists to wait years on end in Afghanistan or risk their lives in small boats to seek sanctuary here.

*The Guardian* [reveals](#) data obtained by Ramfel showing that 1,386 refugee family reunion applications rejected by the Home Office were overturned on appeal between 2019 and 2022, 66 per cent of the total of 2,106. Only a third of Home Office decisions to reject family reunion visas were upheld by judges.

Nick Beales from Ramfel, said:

*"Suella Braverman and her colleagues insist people should use 'safe routes' to come to the UK, yet in practice such routes barely exist. That the vast majority of these refusals are overturned on appeal, year on year, raises serious concerns about the quality of Home Office decision-making. A further lengthy appeal process is also not an adequate safeguard when people applying to join family here are often extremely vulnerable children, living in an unsafe environment and at risk of trafficking, exploitation, or kidnapping."*

### Rishi Sunak's migration plan "based on demented assumptions"

*The Times* [points](#) out that "illegal" migration will have to fall dramatically to below 10,000 a year if Rishi Sunak's legislation to stop the boats is to be put into action, internal Home Office modelling shows. But it adds that officials believe the plan is based on "demented assumptions" and were "despairing" about the practicalities of implementing the Bill.

The official added that they knew of the evidence that hostile policies did not change migrants' behaviour, and this contradicted repeated government assertions that they had to remove the "pull factors" for migrants, such as the low chance of being deported or the availability of illegal work.



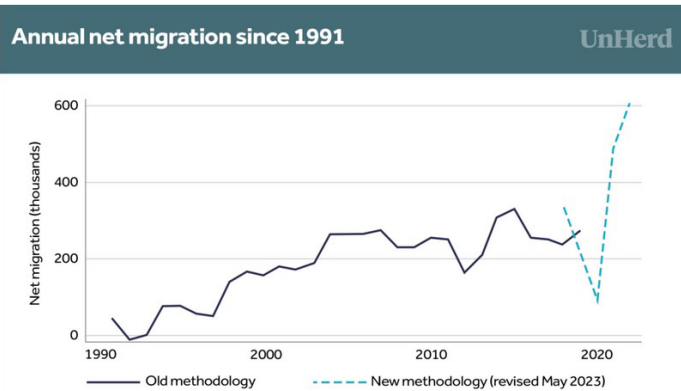


## Migration reaches a record high – has it peaked?

### Net migration reached record levels in 2022

CIH's John Perry comments on the new figures, drawing from analysis in the latest *UK Housing Review*.

Contrary to projections, there was a remarkable increase in net migration in the year to June 2022, which reached 504,000, around 331,000 higher than the year before and nearly double the previous record. Then, when the next set of figures were published on 25 May, something strange happened. It turned out that the real net migration figure for the year ending June 2022 had been much higher than reported, at 606,000 (see chart).



Source: UnHerd

But stranger still, the estimate for the year to December 2022 was the same, 606,000. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) explains this by saying that it has now included asylum seekers in the figures for the first time, and that net migration peaked in September 2022, and then began to fall.

These nuances were missed in media comments on the figures, of course, although some heat was removed by the prior work of the spin doctors, who had suggested that the December 2022 total might be as high as one million.

One has to sympathise with the ONS trying to reconcile very different datasets, including factoring in ‘small boat’ arrivals, knowing that the caveats to their figures will be lost in acrimonious political debate. Nevertheless, these changes confirm the *UK Housing Review*’s judgement of the ‘uncertainty of future migration patterns’.

Sober commentators have also advised against assuming that 2022 represents a ‘new normal’. Madeleine Sumption, director of the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, [said](#):

*“These unusually high net migration levels do not have a single cause but result from several things happening at once: the war in Ukraine, a boom in international student recruitment and high demand for health and care workers.”*

*“It is very difficult to predict future migration patterns, because surprising developments can disrupt them. For example, a few years ago, none of the forecasts suggested migration would rise above 500,000—not least because they did not anticipate the war in Ukraine. With that caveat, there is no reason to assume that net migration would remain this high indefinitely.”*

Despite the caveats about recent increases in net migration, it seems unlikely that levels will fall below the ONS long-term projection of 200,000 annually, despite the current home secretary’s ambitions. Several factors are at play, including:

- The continued demand for labour, with industry calling for a relaxation of the rules.
- Irregular migration.
- A sequence of conflicts across the globe—most recently in Sudan—forcing people to move.
- The climate crisis.

For example, [ministers are under pressure](#) from farmers to allow more people into the country to harvest food crops. Fruit and vegetables have been rotting in the fields, and some farmers have gone out of business, as there are not enough people willing to pick them. And Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, [told Channel 4 News](#) that the UK government needs more immigration to help fill the capital’s “massive number of job vacancies”.

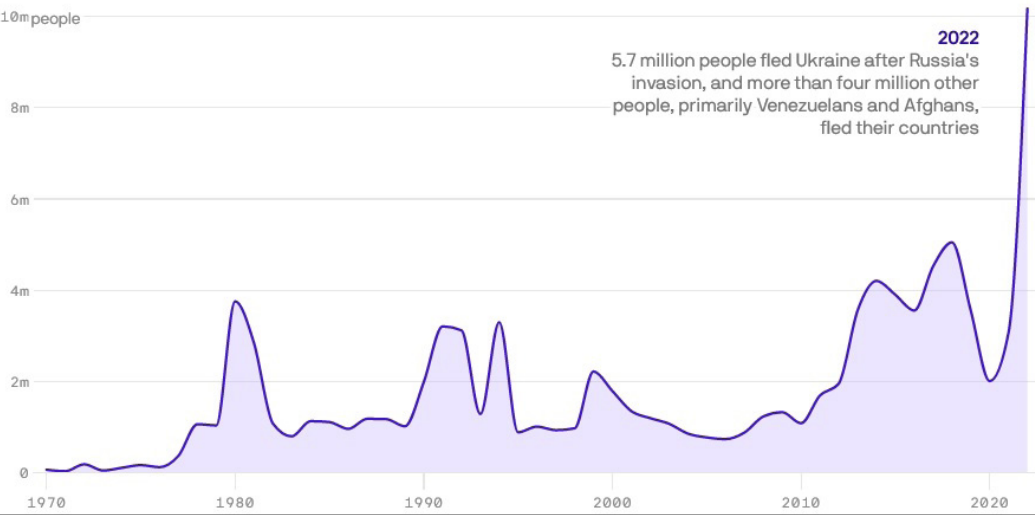
Where does this leave government targets to cut the numbers? Last year, Suella Braverman revived David Cameron’s ambition to reduce numbers to below 100,000. UK governments have been making promises to cut migration numbers since at least 2005, and Colin Yeo has [a useful twitter thread](#) looking at how the targets developed, and whether they were ever achieved (answer: “no”). It is based on [a longer analysis](#) in his blog *We Wanted Workers*.

Perhaps seeing the writing on the wall, the prime minister has recently [revised the target](#) to set a new goal of bringing migration down below the level he “inherited”, which was about 500,000 net arrivals a year when he took office. This, if undramatic, at least seems more realistic.

### More refugees worldwide, figures show

#### Refugees, asylum-seekers and people in need of international protection displaced

Annual reported estimates; 1970–2022



[Axios provides new statistics](#) showing that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, other conflicts like those in Syria and Sudan, and climate-fuelled crises have pushed the number of people displaced by war, persecution, violence, human rights abuses and other events to a record 110 million (see chart above). Figures come from a recent UN refugee agency [report](#).

The upward trend of forced displacement comes as humanitarian response plans and budgets remain [severely underfunded](#). The right to asylum is also “under threat” in some places, and a rising number of factors have made it even harder to provide protection to those most in need, according to UNHCR.

Last year exposed the unequal treatment of different refugee groups. Nations have been lauded for welcoming Ukrainian refugees with open arms, but some of those same countries have also been [criticised](#) for closing their borders to displaced people from other places.

The new UNHCR report is “quite an indictment on the state of our world,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi told reporters. “We are constantly confronted with emergencies.”

### How many refugees does the UK resettle compared to other European countries?

During an interview on *Sky News*, immigration minister Robert Jenrick MP claimed that the UK is “second only to Sweden” in the number of refugees accepted through resettlement schemes, and “fourth in the world” in the number of people taken “from the United Nations”.

[Full Fact examined](#) this claim. It concluded that the UK is second only to Sweden among EU+ countries in the number of refugees accepted through official resettlement schemes, and fourth in the world. However, other European countries have resettled more refugees relative to their populations, as well as more asylum seekers.

[In a briefing](#) published last year, the Migration Observatory analysed the number of people given protection under resettlement schemes in Europe, as a proportion of the population of the country where they resettled. [These data](#) show that, between 2008 and 2021 the UK was eleventh among EU+ countries (the 27 EU countries, plus Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and the UK) for the number of refugees accepted under resettlement programmes relative to its population, resettling approximately 4.98 refugees per 10,000 people. By comparison, Norway settled 31.21 refugees per 10,000 people—the most of any EU+ country relative to its population.

Mr Jenrick appeared to make another wrong step when in the House of Commons he [made the extraordinary claim](#) that there are no refugees in Scotland. The Scottish Refugee Council said: “The minister is either knowingly lying or is not aware that Scotland welcomes thousands of people seeking sanctuary each year. We are not sure which is more concerning.” [Full Fact](#) has [more on the story](#).



## The Windrush anniversary and Refugee Week



**T**he month of June saw a combination of events: “World Refugee Day” (June 20), the UK’s “Refugee Week” (June 19-25) and the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush (June 22).

Writing in *Mintpress News*, Ramzy Baroud – the editor of *The Palestine Chronicle* – [commented on the irony](#) of politicians celebrating World Refugee Day, then blaming the victims. He points out that while it is convenient to blame people smugglers for the 23,000 migrants who have died or gone missing when attempting to cross the Mediterranean, the real causes – such as war and violent displacement – are unresolved.

### CIH “asks” of government at the start of Refugee Week

CIH marked the start of Refugee Week by stating that “everyone seeking asylum or arriving as refugees in the UK must have access to decent and secure accommodation.” Our key asks of government are to:

1. Build on the success of “Homes for Ukraine” to assist all those arriving from conflict
2. End the use of barracks, barges and other substandard accommodation
3. Include people from abroad in the drive to end rough sleeping and to help victims of domestic abuse
4. Hand back the task of accommodating asylum seekers to local authorities and give them the resources to do it
5. Stop the discriminatory “right to rent” checks on tenants of private rented property.

## CIH celebrates the anniversary of the Windrush landing but says a generation has been betrayed

Writing in *Inside Housing*, CIH president Lara Oyedele, whose family was part of the Windrush generation, [said the government was failing them by refusing to abolish the “right to rent.”](#)

Seventy-five years ago this month, people from Caribbean countries disembarked from the Windrush when it reached the port at Tilbury in Essex. They were emblematic of arrivals from various Commonwealth countries over a period of several years.

But they were unaware that, although they might settle happily in the UK, decades later many in their families would lose their homes and jobs. What would eventually become the “Windrush scandal” was the direct result of the “hostile environment”: the complex set of Home Office rules intended to curb “illegal” immigration that were first set out in 2012.

It’s now six years since the scandal started to emerge in the media, and almost four years since the government [published the review](#) by lawyer Wendy Williams describing the damage it had done to people’s lives. Yet her most important proposals remain unimplemented. Why is it taking the Home Office so long to act?

Wendy Williams made 30 recommendations. She called for a full review of the hostile environment measures – both “individually and cumulatively”. The previous home secretary, Priti Patel, presenting the report to parliament in March 2020, promised that “everyone at the Home Office will be asking the difficult questions needed to ensure that these circumstances can never arise again”.

But [last year](#) Ms Williams marked the Home Office on its progress and judged that it had carried out only eight of her 30 proposals. Since then, even that limited progress has ground to a halt.

Current home secretary Suella Braverman is backtracking on Ms Patel’s commitment. In January she scrapped some of the recommendations that her predecessor had accepted. Patrick Vernon, who is organising this year’s 75th anniversary celebrations of the Windrush arrival on 22 June, said: “For the home secretary to be backsliding on government commitments to set right the injustices of the Windrush scandal – particularly in this anniversary year – is a slap in the face for those communities.”

One of the main issues looked at by Ms Williams was the “right to rent” scheme – the document checks on people applying for rented accommodation. In her first report, it merited a 50-page case study.

Ms Williams said the Home Office went ahead with the scheme despite many pointing out the risks. The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) was quoted by Ms Williams as having warned the government beforehand that document checks would be discriminatory. The CIH also warned 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.

The CIH’s criticisms, of course, were not the only ones. As the Windrush scandal emerged, the Home Office’s own inspector said there was little evidence that right to rent was deterring “illegal” immigrants. Then the High Court ruled that the rent checks were causing racism and were unlawful; the Court of Appeal agreed, but unfortunately the case went to the Supreme Court, which decided that the discrimination wasn’t severe enough to make the rent checks illegal.

Ms Williams called for the right to rent to be reassessed, and the review was eventually [published](#) in February. It found “clear examples of discriminatory behaviour” but no “systematic” unlawful discrimination. But the research did not involve prospective tenants who are likely to experience discrimination.

The findings are also at odds with the Home Office’s own [overarching impact assessment](#) of the hostile environment which found indirect discriminatory impacts of hostile environment policies, including right to rent, on the basis of nationality and colour.

So, in England at least, the right to rent stays in place, despite the considerable role it played in the Windrush scandal. Indeed, it has been made more stringent, since its full force now applies to European citizens resident in the UK who now have to prove their status digitally: many landlords find this unconvincing, which is not surprising as they face hefty penalties if they fail to make proper checks.

Ms Williams said 13 times in her 2022 report that she was “disappointed” with the Home Office’s response to her review. She said that promises to transform its culture had been broken. Now the home secretary gives the impression that she wants the environment created by the immigration rules to be more “hostile”, not less.

Earlier this year [the government promised](#) that a new taskforce will use “every available power” to ensure “only those eligible can work, receive benefits or access public services”. Far from learning the lessons from the Windrush scandal and the Wendy Williams review, the government seems determined to toughen the rules that caused the scandal in the first place.

Instead, they should listen to what their own research has told them: the “right to rent” rule is discriminatory, limits the housing choices available to vulnerable people, and should be abolished.





It's 75 years since the arrival of the Windrush - what happened to the families that it brought to the UK?

CIH's John Perry looks at how the "Windrush scandal" developed.



On 22 June 1948, the HMT Empire Windrush docked in Tilbury, Essex, bringing 1,027 passengers to the UK from Caribbean islands such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. They had been encouraged to come to the UK because of post-war labour shortages. These arrivals were the first of the "Windrush generation", people who came from the Caribbean and other parts of the Commonwealth to the UK, between 1948 and 1971, when immigration laws changed. One of two people still living who were on the Windrush, Alford Gardner, who was 22 at the time, [described his experience](#) for Sky News. Children of the Windrush generation, born in the UK, naturally assumed they were British. Indeed, the 1971 Immigration Act gave Commonwealth citizens already living in the UK "indefinite leave to remain".

When, decades later, the "Windrush scandal" began, it had two main causes. One was that the Home Office had no proper records - because it had thrown away the landing cards of those arriving. But for many people this didn't matter until they - or their children - had to prove their right to be here. Some were affected by "right to work" checks introduced in 2006, but far more discovered their unclear status when the government toughened up immigration laws by creating the

"hostile environment" as an attempt to curb "illegal" immigration, starting in 2016. As Wendy Williams said in her official review of the scandal, this change was made "with a complete disregard for the Windrush generation".

Media stories highlighting the problems began to appear in 2017. By April 2018 the scandal had become a political crisis leading to the resignation of the then home secretary, Amber Rudd, and in May a review was announced, to "learn the lessons" from the scandal. Williams presented her report in March 2020. Among 30 recommendations was a call for a full review of the "hostile environment".

Among the many disastrous consequences for the Windrush generation, one that Wendy Williams focussed on was the loss of their homes, often because of the imposition of "right to rent" rules - the document checks on people applying for rented accommodation. These were the focus of a 50-page case study in her report. Williams said the Home Office didn't properly consider the scheme's risks for ethnic minorities; it went ahead after the CIH and others pointed out the risks and it ignored the evidence presented to it. I recall going to a meeting with the Home Office to express our concerns that the scheme would be discriminatory and that many people would not be able to produce the required documents.

The right to rent began in the West Midlands in December 2014 and - despite objections - was extended to the rest of England (but not so far the other UK countries) in February 2016. Since it began, there has been consistent evidence of discrimination by landlords on race or nationality grounds. While in some cases the reason may be racism, undoubtedly many landlords simply prefer applicants with British passports because of the difficulty of checking other, more complicated immigration

documents. Landlords face stiff fines and even jail sentences if they knowingly fail to make the checks.

Exactly how far the rent checks affected the Windrush generation is unknown, because the Home Office does not monitor the scheme's effects (one of the criticisms of it made in the Williams report). One specific case was reported to Williams of a Windrush generation member who lost their home because of fire and was unable to rent a new one, because they had no passport (and until then they had had no need of one).

In 2020, *The Guardian* newspaper, largely responsible for uncovering the Windrush scandal in 2017 and 2018, published [50 brief case studies](#) of the scandal's victims. Many of these had become homeless, whether because of the right to rent or as a result of similar rules in the social rented sector. Bevis Smith, now aged 64, lost his home when he was admitted to hospital with a serious heart condition, and had to sofa-surf after he was discharged. Winston Robinson (62), Renford McIntyre (66) and George Poleon (66) became homeless when they lost access to benefits. Edward Bromfield (64) lost his council tenancy because of his unclear status.

While finally, and slowly, the victims of the Windrush scandal are being compensated and their immigration status regularised, there remain perhaps half a million people in the UK who face similar problems but receive little help. For example, many older people have no passport and might find it difficult or costly to prove their entitlement to be in the UK. Warnings have been made about another Windrush-scale scandal that could affect people from the European Union who have long been resident here. Most will have been aware of the need to regularise their status but a proportion may not, or may have been too scared to declare their position to Home Office staff. They

may own their homes and face no problems, but what if their circumstances change and they suddenly need to rent?

One of the key issues highlighted by Wendy Williams was the lack of sympathy she found among the staff who had dealt with the Windrush generation's traumatic experiences. It was the then home secretary, Theresa May, who dubbed the legal framework she began to develop in 2012 the "hostile environment". But the hostility had been growing for years and continues today. If the current home secretary, Suella Braverman, can talk about migrants not sharing our "values" and "abusing the generosity of the British people", there seems little prospect of the fundamental changes demanded by Wendy Williams taking place. The lessons of the Windrush scandal may have been learned, but many of them look set to be ignored.

Shortly after this was written, reports in *The Guardian* indicated that the government is winding up the units it set up to implement the recommendations of the review that followed the Windrush scandal. Staff say "there's a lot still to do" and worry the decision signals "rolling back" on promises of change.

Windrush victims who were made homeless now try to get compensation

A victim of the Windrush scandal who spent years fighting for a UK passport after being "locked out" of Britain says he is now homeless after being denied help by the Home Office, *The Independent* reveals. Delroy Foster, who came from Jamaica to Britain as a baby with his parents in 1960 before moving to the US, says he was denied entry in 2018 and spent five years trying to get a passport.

Now back in the UK with the correct documents, he claims the Home Office team set up to help Windrush victims is not providing support. Mr Foster spent much of his adult life in the US and Canada, and sought to return to the UK in 2018, but says he was wrongly denied entry and told he was not a British citizen, so he moved back to Jamaica. Last year, a Windrush campaigner took up his case and he was eventually granted the right of abode.

Upon arriving in the UK in October 2022, Mr Foster was placed temporarily in a Travelodge by the Home Office's Vulnerable Persons Team (VPT) after describing spending nights sleeping rough and riding the bus to keep warm. But despite being granted his British passport in April, he says he no longer gets help from the VPT and has applied for Windrush compensation. Mr Foster is currently sleeping on a friend's sofa while trying to get back on his feet. The 63-year-old former building contractor says he is unable to get a job to support himself while he has nowhere to live.

In [a different story](#) in *My London*, Fitzroy Maynard, who ended up homeless because he could not prove his right to work in the UK described his lengthy experience with the Windrush compensation scheme as "worse than hell."

Human rights charity Praxis, which has helped Mr Maynard and others, said the compensation scheme "only adds serious insult to serious injury" for victims of the scandal, and called on it to be made independent from the Home Office.

Praxis chief executive Sally Daghliah said: "Perhaps unsurprisingly, the department that shredded thousands of lives is now failing at compensating its victims for the hardship they had to endure.

"The compensation scheme should be removed from the hands of the Home Office and managed by an independent body working closely with the communities affected, providing a simplified and speedy process with expert, independent representation available for claimants."





More on the Windrush generation

- *The Morning Star* [points out](#) that the racism experienced by those arriving on the Windrush continues today. The [British Future think tank](#) surveyed the “state of the nation” of public attitudes on race identity and prejudice. It found that while the majority of ethnic minority respondents said Britain is a better place for them to live in comparison with other major Western nations, a huge 67 per cent said that people like them face discrimination daily. One-fifth of respondents said it was worse and 17 per cent of white respondents and 10 per cent of ethnic minority respondents disagreed that everyday racism was rife for black and Asian people.
- Windrush victims challenging the Home Office over inadequate or missing compensation are being denied justice because they can’t get help with legal bills, [openDemocracy reveals](#). As well as being ineligible for legal aid under new rules introduced in 2012, they are being rejected from the separate safety net scheme of “exceptional case” funding. The Legal Aid Agency says Windrush claimants do not qualify for exceptional case funding because compensation is not a human rights issue. Instead, they are directed to what is essentially just a service to help fill in the complex forms.
- Alford Gardner was 22 when he made the crossing from Jamaica to the UK in 1948. He described it in [an interview](#) with Sky News.
- The scandalous injustice of Windrush – that Black British citizens who had every right to remain in the United Kingdom were classed as “illegal immigrants” and criminals – continues to be a painful legacy for thousands still waiting for compensation due to them, writes [Noah Anthony Enahoro](#) in *The Independent*.

With each passing year, each celebration of Windrush Day, and each mention of “celebration”, “commemoration” and “contribution”, the harrowing and ongoing injustice visited on the children of Windrush remains, he says. funding. The Legal Aid Agency says Windrush claimants do not qualify for exceptional case funding because compensation is not a human rights issue. Instead, they are directed to what is essentially just a service to help fill in the complex forms.

*“During today’s anniversary, we can’t let the celebrations and commemorations whitewash the fact that the Windrush scandal’s injustice continues to have a painful legacy for thousands of people. The politicisation of celebrations hides the racial hate that fuelled the policies that led to such great suffering.*

*“Underneath it all, nothing has changed, but the veneer is being polished while the voices of the suffering are drowned out by officially sanctioned and orchestrated celebration.”*

- Hengameh Saroukhani, who has been working on archives about the Windrush arrivals, [writes](#) in *The Conversation*:

*“Today, as Windrush scandal victims, and survivors, continue to emerge...It is not the romance of the Windrush we should remember, but the untended racial injustices that have endured since the ship’s arrival.”*

- *Free Movement* [offers a short guide](#) to the legal position and history of the Windrush generation. It concludes:

*“The Windrush generation had entered the United Kingdom as British subjects. While they were living here, most had become citizens of independent Commonwealth countries when those countries became independent. They were legally resident all that time, confirmed by the Immigration Act 1971, but they had no proof. Their British subject status was eventually taken away by the 1981 Act.*

*“Today, everyone seems to have forgotten the power and significance of what it meant to be a British subject. We have also collectively therefore forgotten how controversial it was to take away the right of entry and residence from British subjects. After all, we would normally expect a national of a country to be able to enter and reside in that country.”*

Latest news on refugees from Afghanistan, Ukraine and Sudan

The housing rights website page on [Help for Ukrainian refugees](#) is being updated regularly with the latest government guidance and other news. Please check it to stay up to date (and let us know if anything needs changing by emailing [policyandpractice@cih.org](mailto:policyandpractice@cih.org)). Changes to housing and benefits eligibility for refugees from Ukraine, Afghanistan and (in more limited cases) Sudan are posted on the [page advising migrants](#) and the more detailed page for [advisers](#). See also the equivalent pages for Scotland [here](#) and [here](#).



Families from Ukraine seek safety in Hungary (photo: UNHCR)

Home Office accused of being “unashamedly racist” towards Sudanese refugees

The crisis in Sudan [began in April](#) and immediately led to an exodus of people from Khartoum who feared being caught up in the fighting. The UK acted by evacuating UK nationals but has not offered any wider help in response to the crisis.

The final evacuation flight left in May, crystallising concerns that the UK government has adopted a segregated immigration policy. No safe and legal routes have been made available to help Sudanese refugees flee and there is no sign of an announcement outlining a new scheme to deal with the fallout of the conflict.

*The Guardian* [says](#) that the Home Office has been accused of operating an “unashamedly racist” refugee system after refusing to offer people a safe and legal route to the UK, in stark contrast to the schemes offered to those escaping the war in Ukraine. It adds that “experts increasingly believe the explanation for such contrasting approaches is the skin colour of those fleeing the two countries.”

Caitlin Boswell, policy and advocacy manager for the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) said:

*“The racism of the UK’s immigration system couldn’t be more clear, with this government drawing policies affecting people seeking safety along stark racial lines. At the same time, ministers are using unashamedly inflammatory and far-right language, whipping up hatred towards black and brown migrants.”*

Immigration minister Robert Jenrick was asked about the plight of people in Sudan not helped by the government’s very limited evacuation scheme. He replied: “The best advice clearly would be for individuals to present to the UNHCR.” Home secretary Suella Braverman also advised people to apply through the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). But following these comments, the UNHCR issued a statement stating that “there is no mechanism through which refugees can approach UNHCR with the intention of seeking asylum in the UK”.

*Full Fact* [point out](#) that there are “minimal” routes by which vulnerable refugees from countries other than Afghanistan can be resettled in the UK, but none by which people fleeing violence in Sudan can “apply” for asylum in the UK specifically through the UNHCR, as Ms Braverman appeared to suggest. In other words, they cannot ask the UNHCR to be resettled in the UK rather than in another country.

Pages of the housing rights website have been updated to cover the limited arrangements for those who have been helped to escape the violence in Sudan, for example the adviser page on refugees (for [England and Wales](#) and for [Scotland](#)). The Migrant Champions Network (see the [spring newsletter](#)) has a [detailed briefing](#) prepared by housing rights contributor Sue Lukes.

In *The Times*, [Kwajo Tweneboa](#) argues that there is a huge disparity between the treatment of refugees of colour and Ukrainian refugees.



## Afghan refugees fear homelessness as landlords refuse to rent to them

The Home Office is ending hotel accommodation for Afghan refugees evacuated in 2021 who were promised help to settle in the UK. The government has failed to support them and reneged on their promise, *says openDemocracy*, and now thousands face homelessness as they struggle to find homes.

Officials said the refugees should start looking for their own places to rent on property search websites like Zoopla – breaking a promise to find them settled accommodation. But several have now told *openDemocracy* they have been given no support to navigate the rental market, and that letting agents stop replying to them after

finding out they are refugees.

Ahmed, one of those spoken to, had been living in a hotel with his family, including his nine-month-old son. He enquired about more than a dozen properties and made six-hour round trips for viewings before finally having an offer accepted. He and his wife then travelled two hours to London to submit all the required paperwork and identification to the letting agent.

When it came to paying the deposit, Ahmed told the letting agent that the council and the Home Office would provide it. At that point, the landlord changed their mind. "The letting agent informed me

that the landlord is not able to rent the house to us because they are questioning whether we will be able to afford the rent in the future. My guarantor even offered to help pay six months' rent in advance but they still rejected us," he said.

The council told Ahmed it could not pay the deposit money directly to him. Meanwhile, he has been told by the Home Office he has until August to vacate the hotel he and his family of eight have been staying in. "It's completely unrealistic. What about Afghans who don't have a guarantor? If they expect people to leave this hotel in three months' time you will see thousands on the streets," he said.

### "We don't have the housing," councils warn

Councils across the country are warning that Afghan refugees may be left homeless as there is not enough time to find homes for all those living in bridging hotels ahead of the upcoming deadline, senior councillors *warned the Local Government Chronicle*.

Council officials told No 10 and Home Office civil servants that about 8,000 Afghan refugees, allowed into the country in 2021 under the slogan Operation Warm Welcome, are due to be evicted from hotels as early as August because of a government deadline, yet have nowhere to go.

More than 400 Afghan refugees are in *hotels in Essex*, where Colchester Borough Council has asked the government to "immediately extend the hotel stays". In Chelmsford, Afghans staying in a hotel received letters in May saying they were needed to "quit" the property by August 9. The letter said if they had not left by this date they "will be a trespasser and the secretary of state for the Home Department, shall be at liberty to evict you from the property".

Eddie Campbell, from Essex Integration, a project which supports Afghans in hotels, said they called letting agents regarding 60-70 properties per week, but "less than 1 per cent will actually take a family on".

*"[There are] a number of issues - people are not in work, they don't have a guarantor and the agent and landlord just doesn't want to take a risk."*

*He added that "about 50 per cent of them... will have to present themselves as homeless to their local council or [another] one of their choice".*

### Government encourages offers of accommodation to Afghan refugees

Local councils are creating incentive schemes to help make private rental accommodation available to families and individuals who have arrived under the two main resettlement schemes. Here is some of the information *published by DLUHC*:

- Private persons offering five or fewer properties must **complete the property offer form** for each property they offer.
- Everyone else, including landlords of houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) and any organisations must email [HousingPortal@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:HousingPortal@levellingup.gov.uk) with this information:
  - Contact name
  - Telephone number
  - A brief description of the properties being offered.

DLUHC aims to respond to offers within five working days.

Government guidance on the support available to Afghan refugees is *here*. If anyone offers support to Afghans other than entire homes, they can visit *Help refugees who have come to the UK from Afghanistan* for more information.

#### Stop press!

The government **confirmed on July 4** that it is still committed to the August deadline to move Afghan refugees out of hotels, despite considerable qualms expressed by local authorities.

## Afghan refugees unable to reach the UK

Reports continue *to appear in The Independent* of Afghan people under threat from the Taliban because of their work with UK agencies who are unable to safely leave the country. Mechanics, labourers and chefs are among those who have been rejected by the Ministry of Defence's Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (Arap) scheme, set up for those who helped British forces during the war.

Sarah Fenby-Dixon, an Afghan consultant for the NGO Global Witness, said the Arap process was "leaving behind hundreds of people who worked bravely and proudly for UK forces. The Taliban do not ask for a CV; they know that these people worked with UK forces."

### Self-help guide to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy

The Afghan Pro Bono Initiative has prepared a *self-help guide* to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy. The guide is available in *English, Dari and Pashto*.

The guide is aimed at giving Afghan people and their families the tools to pursue their Arap application, including a review after refusal, on their own if they do not have a lawyer or legal advisor to help them. The guide is not a replacement to receiving legal advice or representation, but it provides a lot of information and tips about the application process.

### Homelessness among Ukrainian refugees now exceeds 5,000 households

The Ukraine Scheme *homelessness statistics* released each month give an update on the long-term consequences of accommodating Ukrainian refugees. Monitoring of progress through regular data publication (even if incomplete) highlights where the government and local councils are doing well, and where they are not.

The total number of Ukrainian households recorded by local authorities as owed a homelessness prevention or relief duty by mid-June 2023 was 6,285. In some places, there are over 100 households owed a duty: 120 in South Oxfordshire, 115 in Shropshire, 164 in Wandsworth and 182 in Richmond upon Thames.





## Asylum claims - the backlog grows

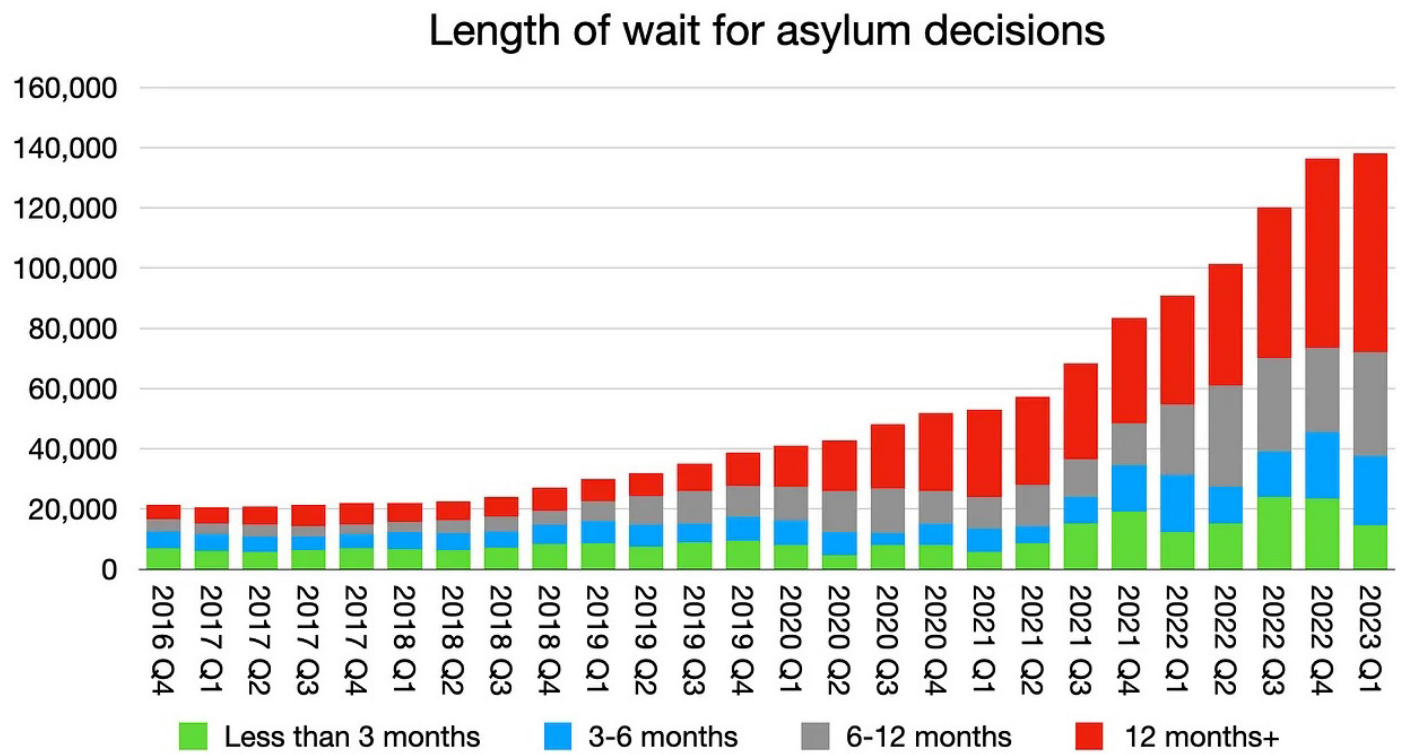
### Latest asylum statistics show the Home Office is failing on all fronts

Colin Yeo writes in *We Wanted Workers* that "...the asylum system has been overwhelmed. Not by new arrivals but by mismanagement. The people arriving to claim asylum are overwhelmingly refugees and whether the government likes it or not they will, eventually, build new lives for themselves in this country. Three out of four asylum decisions are grants of asylum, and half of those rejected go on to win their appeals." He goes on to summarise why the process is not only inhumane but also expensive:

*"There are now tens of thousands of refugees who have been waiting for longer than a year for an initial decision. This is really expensive because they are not allowed to work, and so have to be supported by the government. Because the backlog was allowed to grow, the Home Office ran out of ordinary asylum accommodation long ago and has had to resort to using hotels.*

*"The NAO report shows that officials have managed to force up prices by bidding against one another and that asylum support costs rocketed to £3.6 billion this year, more than double the cost last year. The international aid budget has been plundered in order to fund this but can only legally be used for the first year of support after arrival, meaning that the Home Office is going to have to slash its costs elsewhere or get new money from the Treasury."*

Yeo goes on to argue that "...the asylum system is not beyond repair. All it requires is competent focus on the boring day job instead of being distracted by pointless gimmicks."



Source: Home Office, Immigration and Protection transparency data year to March 2023, table ASY\_02

### Refugee Council shows how the asylum backlog could be cut

In a new report on the asylum backlog, the Refugee Council points out that:

- Granting protection to people from five countries with high asylum grant rates– Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Sudan and Syria–could end 89 per cent of hotel use overnight and save over £5 million a day.
- Half the people accommodated in Home Office hotels are from just these five countries.

The report also calculates that 10,630 backlog cases need to be resolved every month between now and December if the prime minister is to meet his target for cutting the backlog. That equates to 354 cases a day or one case every four minutes.

While the Home Office has recruited more caseworkers to deal with the backlog and has promised to continue to recruit, staffing levels have recently dropped. According to the National Audit Office there

were 1,333 decision makers in post on 1 January. By 1 May the figure was 1,280. Of the current number only half are currently making decisions and only 140 have been fully trained and are able to work independently.

The rate of cases concluded is much lower than three years ago, when there were about half the number of decision makers but almost the same number of decisions being made every month.

### Annual cost of Britain's asylum system hits £3.6 billion, National Audit Office says

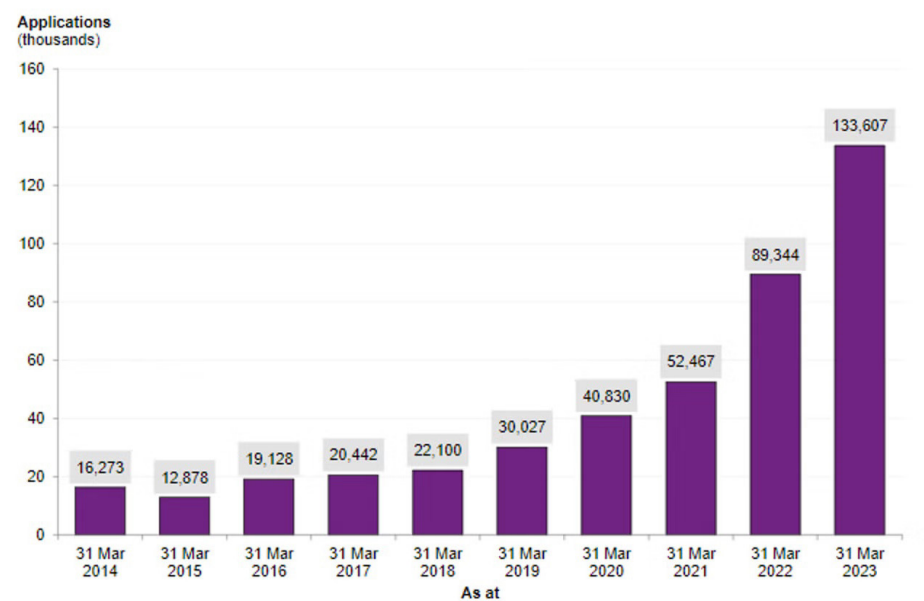
Government is not on track to achieve the full benefits of its asylum transformation programme and it is not clear whether its efforts to clear the backlog of applications are sustainable, according to a new report by the National Audit Office (NAO).

The asylum and protection transformation programme report also found that the Home Office spent approximately £3.6 billion on asylum support costs in 2022/23, nearly double the amount in 2021/22, and £2.2 billion more than the Home Office's funding for its Asylum and Protection Group.

One factor behind the mounting costs is delays in asylum decision-making. The percentage of asylum applications taking more than six months to process has been increasing. At the end of March 2023 almost 75 per cent of people who had claimed asylum waited more than six months for an initial decision – a total of 129,000 people – compared to 43 per cent at the end of March 2017 and 61 per cent at the end of March 2020.

The NAO also found that the Home Office is failing to meet its targets

Figure 6: Number of applications awaiting an initial decision, as at 31 March 2014 to 2023<sup>1,2</sup>



to secure enough accommodation. In March 2022 the Home Office set an ambitious target to find 500 additional beds a week by October 2022. That was reduced to 350 beds per week between April 2023 and March 2025, but in the year to April 2023 it found fewer than 50 additional beds on average per week, and it is now looking to reduce its target again.

The Home Office plans to provide local authorities with around £283 million to incentivise them to make more accommodation available. However, in 2022/23 it only paid out £11.4 million owing to difficulties

in securing accommodation. The Home Office is failing to work effectively with local authorities, which has strained relationships and undermined work on procuring accommodation.

*Free Movement* says that the NAO report "does not make pretty reading." It points out that the "new" backlog is anticipated by the Home Office itself to reach 84,000 by the end of this year. Almost all of whom, according to the Illegal Migration Bill, will never have their asylum claims considered and must be supported pending their supposed removal to Rwanda.



## Failings in Home Office’s “flawed” asylum system revealed in UN report

At the end of May, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) published a [lengthy and damning report](#) into the UK’s system for screening asylum seekers and handling applications. It says that Home Office staff are working commendably under very difficult circumstances, but are being hampered in the performance of their duties by a flawed, inefficient and unnecessarily complicated system. As a result, there is a need for significant change.

For example, the vast majority of Home Office staff spoken to by UNHCR said they had had no training or very limited training on how to spot vulnerability or indicators of trafficking, and they received no specific safeguarding training. It also said that Home Office staff were “frustrated” at being barred from considering small boat cases immediately when “it was inevitable that these cases would be determined in the UK.”

The report called for the government to “re-evaluate policies” that are slowing down asylum processing, “in particular with regard to inadmissibility decisions that merely leave asylum seekers in limbo at a higher cost to the UK government.” Recommendations are made throughout the report as to how the system could be improved.

## Hong Kong asylum seekers affected by the UK applications backlog

The *Guardian* [covers the plight](#) of more than 100 Hong Kongers who have arrived in the UK to claim asylum, rather than arriving with visas. The BNO immigration route was open to anyone born before 1 July 1997, when Hong Kong was handed over from British to Chinese rule, who had registered for BNO status, along with their partner or spouse and eligible dependents. That excluded many young people, who were often at the frontlines of the protests, unless they came with a BNO parent (the scheme was expanded in November 2022).

The *Guardian* talks to “Lawson” whose parents had not applied for BNO status, so he became an asylum seeker. But two years later, living in asylum-seekers’ hotel accommodation, he says that his time in the UK has been “a disaster” as he continues to be left in limbo, not knowing whether he will be deported or granted asylum.

Although many exiled Hongkongers see themselves as political refugees, very few choose to claim asylum. It is a last resort behind the BNO route or getting a job or student visa.

Between 2020 and 2022, there were 184,916 asylum applications to the UK, of which only 259 came from Hongkongers.

Tens of thousands of Hongkongers have found a haven in the UK thanks to the BNO scheme. But for others it is a different story. “I came here to seek safety,” says one of them. “But, not only for Hong Kong people, the entire system [for refugees] is far too unsafe.”



## Asylum – the continuing controversy of the use of hotels

### “Is this a hotel or a prison?”: Life as an asylum seeker in Home Office accommodation

“Is this a hotel or a prison?” Omer says as he describes his life in Home Office accommodation, [talking to the Big Issue](#). He came to the UK as an asylum seeker more than three years ago, and he’s been bumped from one temporary accommodation to another ever since. He is far from alone. Asylum seekers like Omer are put in overcrowded rooms while their applications are considered, beds separated by makeshift curtains with cloth on a string, stuck in a monotonous routine “reliving their trauma and worried about the people they’ve left behind”, the Labour MP Helen Hayes says.

Food is bland and makes few adjustments for health conditions such as diabetes or other dietary requirements, if any at all. Many people’s health is affected and children refuse to eat. The majority have fled horrors at home, only to spend months and even years stuck in crowded Home Office accommodation.

Around 50,000 asylum seekers are living in “initial accommodation” in the

UK, which includes hotels, according to [official government statistics](#) as of December 2022. This is nearly 20 times the number of people in December 2019.

Omer came to the UK in 2019, having fled Saudi Arabia due to tensions around his Eritrean ethnicity. “I found myself without any choice,” he says. “I left my family. I started my plan to stay in the UK. I didn’t have any experience or relationship with people in the UK. I didn’t know how to claim asylum.”

He was put up in Barry House, an initial accommodation in East Dulwich, south London. “It was in very bad condition,” Omer said. “It was a very crowded building. They didn’t have space for people. There were four bedrooms and five beds in each one. They said someone had to sleep on the floor until they got us an extra bed. Unfortunately, that was me.”

### Asylum seekers “abused and intimidated by staff in Home Office hotels”

Asylum seekers staying at Home Office hotels in and around Liverpool are alleged to have been harassed, humiliated and subjected to verbal and emotional abuse from senior hotel staff, according to an [investigation](#) for the *Observer*.

Sources working for the Home Office subcontractor Serco have described what they believe is a culture of “institutional abuse” at five Merseyside hotels where violent far-right protests took place in February. On one occasion, senior Serco staff chased an asylum seeker diagnosed with schizophrenia into his hotel room, rattled the handle and shouted abuse at him from behind the locked door. It is understood that the managers were aware of his condition.

A source said:

“You’ve got someone with paranoid schizophrenia being told: ‘If I see you outside, you’d better run’, then kicking his door to intimidate him and laughing about it when he got distressed.”

“Sometimes people go hungry because they’re not making enough food and running out of it quickly,”

the source continued:

“They’re told to make 160 meals for about 225 people, so not everyone gets to eat.”

In June, the *Financial Times* [reported](#) that Serco expects its profit to rise by 4 per cent to £245 million, because of “robust” demand for its immigration services.

Then in July, the Home Office [told the Public Accounts Committee](#) that it is actually paying for 5,000 so-far-unused hotel rooms.

Simon Ridley, the Home Office’s second permanent secretary, told MPs it had created “ringfenced hotels” to stop Manston [the migrant centre - see page 27 of the newsletter] from becoming overcrowded again.

“We have ringfenced hotels where we can move people quickly as an overflow out of Manston before coming into the permanent estate,” he said.

“We’ve got a buffer of as close to 5,000 beds as we can have so we always have an outflow. We’re carrying a large number of empty beds in order to let us move people out.”



Report on the experiences of asylum seekers in hotels

Migrant Voice’s new report **No rest. No security** looks at the multitude of ways in which the asylum system systematically dehumanises those in it and creates an atmosphere of cruelty, leaving them in limbo.

As one asylum seeker told us:

“Recognise that we are human beings. We are good people”

Poor care leading to miscarriages, lack of edible food, rat and mouse infested accommodation, lack of clothing leaving some in their underwear for days on end, threats of deportation to Rwanda by staff in hotels, the litany of failures goes on and on.

Through the voices of those directly affected, a unique picture has emerged of what it is really like to live in Home Office-requisitioned hotels, and potentially in other forms of contingency accommodation such as former military camps.

Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions were rampant, with some asylum seekers reporting 24 people having to share one toilet and another of having to share one shower with people from two floors. In some cases people were placed ten to a room, and one asylum seeker was left for a year in a windowless room measuring only two metres by two metres.

“Not having privacy in the room and very bad quality of food and not having enough money even for bus and tube tickets ... I got depressed,” a survey respondent said about their situation.

The report recommends:

- Investment needs to be made into providing suitable accommodation within communities.
- People must be provided with privacy, and the ability to live their lives in dignity.
- People living in hotels for long periods should have access to use of kettles, microwaves and fridges, or access to cooking facilities.
- Hotel staff, or staff in other types of accommodation, must be instructed to treat residents with respect and dignity and should receive trauma-informed training.

“I want a decent, humane life, work and to live in peace only,” said another asylum seeker in a hotel.

Asylum seekers left to “sleep on street” in London’s Whitechapel

According to the *Evening Standard*, 30 asylum seekers were left to sleep on the street in Whitechapel after refusing “unsuitable” accommodation from the Home Office. The group were brought to the hostel in Whitechapel at 9pm, when some were then told they needed to share single rooms with four people, without beds or bedding, according to a charity worker at the scene. A Home Office contractor tried cramming asylum seekers four to a room, in tiny single rooms without beds.

Instead, they slept outside overnight, said Abdi Hassan, founder of Coffee Afrik, an outreach charity working in east London. The group had been moved from a hotel in Ilford, he said. Pictures showed people on makeshift cardboard beds outside the hostel, surrounded by luggage.

The leader of Westminster City Council expressed his concern in a letter to the **home secretary** after asylum seekers were placed in the borough “without appropriate accommodation or support available.” He added that the government’s demand created “safeguarding and health risks” and noted that “leaving them on the street for multiple nights is not an alternative.”

As *openDemocracy* **pointed out**, Clearsprings, the private firm that left asylum seekers to sleep on the street, made £28 million profit last year.

Protests against use of hotels in Wales

Use of hotels to accommodate asylum seekers has been a hot topic on the BBC news pages in Wales. The folk singer behind Welsh language anthem Yma o Hyd has urged people to stop using his song to protest against the housing of asylum seekers. Dafydd Iwan’s 40-year-old song has seen renewed popularity after being adopted by Wales football fans. But the singer has said its use by other groups “must stop”. It follows reports the song was used at an event opposing the housing of asylum seekers at **a hotel in Carmarthenshire**.

The local council says it is **extremely worried** by the plan to house asylum seekers in the hotel, which it says could involve “in excess of” 300 asylum seekers. **Five boulders were placed** at the entrance of a hotel in one recent protest.

**Stop press!**

As we were about to publish the newsletter, the House of Commons Library published a new briefing on the alternatives to hotel accommodation: **Asylum accommodation: hotels, vessels and large-scale sites**.

Are asylum-seeking children returning to hotels?

In several reports, the *Guardian* carries the news that asylum-seeking children **are to be accommodated in hotels again**, even though in June the immigration minister Robert Jenrick **assured parliament** there “are no unaccompanied young people in hotels whatsoever.” Later in June it also **reported** that a lone child aged nine had been placed in a Brighton hotel.

At the moment, 66 children are **stopping missing** from hotels in Brighton, and the government **faces legal action** by charity **ECPAT UK** because of its neglect of these children. Here is a **clip** from *Channel 4 News* about what might have happened to the missing children.

*The Brighton Argus* **looked at** incidents of children forced into slavery after leaving Brighton hotels. Local people have been **demonstrating** against Home Office



policy, calling for children to be in homes, not hotels.

ECPAT UK points out that there is an agreement between Kent County Council, the Department for Education and the Home Office which sanctions the abdication of responsibility by Kent County Council to perform their mandatory duties to unaccompanied children. This agreement has been in place since September 2021, completely devoid of public knowledge or scrutiny.

Local authorities are legally responsible for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children living in Home Office-run hotels, **a family court judge has ruled**. Children who

arrive in the UK without a parent or carer are entitled to protection under the Children Act 1989 which means they are entitled to the same support from their local council as all other children in care, judge Mrs Justice Lieven told the Family Division of the High Court.

The decision was made **in a ruling**, published on June 9, following two hearings, held in March and April after children’s rights charity Article 39, backed by the Good Law Project, sought a wardship application for 66 children who were reported to have gone missing from a Home Office-run hotel in Brighton and Hove in January.

Meanwhile, *The Guardian* **says** that top medical bodies have called for an urgent meeting with ministers after suggesting that tens of thousands of children could be locked up indefinitely if the Illegal Migration Bill, which has been going through parliament, becomes law. They warn that children could develop post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts and other mental and physical risks and have added that detaining minors would cause “unimaginable levels of harm”.

The Refugee Council is running **Families Together** – a campaign to change the UK’s immigration rules so that refugee children can bring their parents to join them here in



**A Warm Welcome**

A blueprint for supporting displaced children seeking protection in the UK

By Mida Randles, Senior Policy Advisor for Refugee and Migrant Children, Barnardo's  
June 2023

Supported by

British Future, Coram, NSPCC, The Children's Society

safety, which is the case in most other countries. During Refugee Week 2023, Barnardo’s published **A Warm Welcome**, which outlines a blueprint for supporting displaced children seeking protection in the UK.

Warning that hotel closures will lead to homelessness

Mayor Andy Burnham and other leaders in Greater Manchester **warned** *Inside Housing* that the government’s “short-notice” closure of hotels housing Afghan refugees could increase homelessness in the city region.

In a letter to home secretary Suella Braverman and levelling up secretary Michael Gove, Mr Burnham and other leaders set out their concerns on the government’s asylum and immigration policy and the impact it could have on homelessness and rough sleeping.

The letter said that residents of Greater Manchester’s four bridging hotels have begun to receive their 90-day notices to quit.

It said local teams were “working tirelessly” with local authorities to prevent any further impacts on homelessness and rough sleeping but added that the “severe shortage of truly affordable housing”, especially for larger households, and the “short timescales” given, make this “an extremely difficult task”.

Greater Manchester has the highest national share of people owed a homelessness duty due to being required to leave Home Office accommodation. At 5 per cent, this is double the national rate.

The letter said there had been a “concerning direction of travel in asylum and immigration policymaking over many years,” adding that policies such as the Illegal Migration Bill “leave local government and the voluntary sector to pick up the pieces”.



## Councils take action against barracks, cruise ships and barges used as asylum accommodation

### Mounting costs of the new accommodation arrangements

Press reports appear almost daily on the options the government is exploring – and then often rejecting – as it searches for alternatives to hotels yet cannot find sufficient normal housing in which to accommodate asylum seekers. It is publishing [factsheets](#) on each of the new sites being identified for asylum accommodation, so far covering:

- Northeye Residential and Training Establishment, on the outskirts of Bexhill.
- The Ministry of Defence Wethersfield site in Braintree, Essex.
- RAF Scampton, a Ministry of Defence site in Lincolnshire.
- The Bibby Stockholm barge, to house 500 asylum seekers at Portland Port.

The *Daily Mail* [reported](#) that a government plan to house asylum seekers on board a cruise ship in Liverpool has been scrapped after port officials refused permission for the controversial scheme to proceed. Home secretary Suella Braverman wanted to put 500 men aboard the vessel while a decision about their future was determined. But the Birkenhead plan has been abandoned after Peel Ports objected to the proposal.

The costs of the new arrangements are mounting. The Independent previously revealed a [£1.6 billion contract had been handed to barge operator Corporate Travel Management](#), without competition, to provide the Bibby Stockholm barge and two more barges to go to undisclosed locations.

The *Independent* also [reports](#) on the costs of health services. A private company is to be awarded a £1.1 million contract to provide health care at the RAF Wethersfield site. The NHS trust said it was making the agreement without any competition “for reasons of extreme urgency”, after being told 1,700 asylum seekers would be moved there.

Meanwhile, on June 25, over 100 detainees [occupied](#) the courtyard inside Harmondsworth immigration removal centre to demand access to healthcare, which they say has been denied to them, including in instances of self-harm.

The costs of policing barge accommodation and other new forms of housing asylum seekers could also be [very high](#), according to *The Independent*. Police have calculated they need huge sums for each new ship or site to cover additional patrols, and deal with anticipated protests by anti-refugee groups and extremists. The three large vessels to house asylum seekers, plus two military bases and a former prison so far announced, will all be in different police force areas.

### New Report – Napier Barracks: the inhumane reality

Problems with the Napier barracks in Kent have featured in previous newsletters. The Jesuit Refugee Service worked with people placed there from when it was repurposed as asylum accommodation in autumn 2020. In September 2021, the government deployed emergency powers to extend the site’s use for another five years, despite significant criticism of facilities at the site, including a judgment from the High Court declaring them inadequate. Use of emergency powers also avoided consultation with the local community.

The Service’s new [report](#) describes the effects upon people who have fled hostilities, abuses and life-threatening situations. It exemplifies how placing asylum seekers into remote camps is a punishing, confusing, often re-traumatising experience for those who endure it. The government plans to make sites like Napier the new normal for asylum accommodation, and this report demonstrates how profoundly destructive that would be.



### Manston migrant centre at risk of disorder and disease, inspectors say

The Manston processing centre in Kent is another that has featured in previous newsletters. Inspectors have warned the centre could more disease and disorder if the number of detainees increases, as expected in the summer, [according](#) to the *BBC*. The HM Inspectorate of Prisons report comes after the Manston processing centre struggled to cope with an influx of people last autumn.

Chief Inspector Charlie Taylor said it must be “an absolute priority” for the Home Office to take action. The Home Office said staff had been “working relentlessly”. Suella Braverman is facing the “real danger” that conditions for asylum seekers held at Manston processing facility will once again become inhumane and dangerous, he [told](#) *The Guardian*.

The report follows an unannounced inspection in February of short-term holding facilities in Kent for people who cross the channel in small boats. Inspectors returned to Manston processing centre, Western Jet

Foil and the Kent Intake Unit after a visit last summer highlighted “emerging risks”.

Later in the year, a backlog of migrants at Manston led to thousands of people being housed in tents, amid overcrowding and outbreaks of disease. In the latest report, inspectors said medical services at Manston had “improved substantially” and there were other improvements, including with day-to-day management.

But it also said there continued to be a lack of effective leadership and no evidence the most vulnerable were being consistently identified or provided with the right support. It said there was no proper oversight of the use of force or violent incidents and that staff were distant in their interactions with migrants.

It concluded that it must be an “absolute priority for the Home Office to ensure enough on-site staff and onward accommodation, so that migrants pass through Manston without delay.”

### Allowing asylum seekers to work would add over £1 billion to the economy

Analysis from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), [shared](#) with *inews*, reveals the vast cost of current policy to the UK economy, finding that allowing all asylum seekers in the UK to work could:

- Add £1.6 billion to the UK’s annual GDP
- Save the Government a total of £6.7 billion each year
- Increase tax revenue by £1.3 billion each year.

Many MPs threw their weight behind a policy change, with Tory MP Ben Everitt saying the analysis showed “just how beneficial” scrapping the ban could be, “not just by doing the right thing and supporting vulnerable people like the compassionate country that we are, but also in savings to the taxpayer.”

Max Mosley, an economist at NIESR, said that the analysis was the first to simulate this policy change with the use of a globally recognised macroeconomic model.

*“This allows us to include potential knock-on effects and gain a much broader understanding of what would happen to the economy if asylum seekers were able to work.”*

According to government research, the UK has the most restrictive policy of any comparable country. In EU member states, asylum seekers are allowed to access work after nine months waiting for a decision. In Canada, asylum seekers can work immediately, and in the US they are eligible to work after six months.

### Asylum seekers with disabilities “abandoned” in former Essex care home

The Home Office has been accused of abandoning 55 asylum seekers with a range of severe disabilities and life-limiting conditions at a former care home in an Essex seaside town. The asylum seekers, who fled various conflict zones including Sudan and Afghanistan, are struggling with a range of health conditions they have suffered from since childhood or life-changing injuries suffered in war zones.

One told *The Guardian*:

*“Everybody is suffering in this place. It used to be a care home but now there is no care. We are free to come and go but to me, this place feels like an open prison. We have just been left here and abandoned.”*

### Barges may not save money, anyway

Housing asylum seekers on a barge will save less than £10 a person a day, according to the report [Bibby Stockholm – At What Cost?](#) from the NGOs Reclaim The Seas and One Life To Live.

It gives estimated costings of the barge the Home Office is planning to use in Dorset to accommodate asylum seekers. It concludes that the most generous saving the Home Office can make is £9.28 a person a day, compared with hotel use.



Working towards a better asylum accommodation system

Emma Birks of Asylum Matters writes about a new briefing from Asylum Matters and NACCOM.

Reading the news about accommodation for people seeking asylum, it could appear that the Home Office only wants to pursue housing them in quasi-detention barges like the Bibby Stockholm, which is due to be docked at Portland Port in Dorset, or in military barracks such as those at RAF Scampton. Granted, this is an agenda which the Home Office is pursuing and one that the migration sector is currently campaigning against.

Something that garners fewer column inches, however, is the Home Office’s parallel plans to widen asylum dispersal accommodation. The regional dispersal policy was introduced in the year 2000 and as a general rule, it was agreed that people seeking asylum should be accommodated in areas where there is a greater supply of suitable and cheaper accommodation.

Over the subsequent two decades, dispersal accommodation has only been in areas where the local authority agreed to house people seeking asylum, with approximately half of local authorities participating. People in dispersed accommodation typically only receive £45 a week to cover food and essentials such as clothing and toiletries, meaning they often rely on additional supplementary support to survive, including from voluntary services and local authorities.

In 2021, six West Midlands local authorities decided to suspend their participation in asylum dispersal because they believed that they were no longer able to meet the needs of people seeking asylum that had been moved

into their cities. When the Home Office did not allow this, the local authorities launched legal action over what they called an “unfair” and “fundamentally flawed” asylum accommodation system.

In April 2022, the Home Office informed local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales that they would all become asylum dispersal areas. This would, according to ministers, allow people seeking asylum who are currently accommodated in hotels to be moved to more appropriate and cost-effective dispersed accommodation. To facilitate local authorities meeting the support needs of people seeking asylum moving into their area, and to mitigate the impacts on local services, the UK government committed to providing £3,500 grant funding to local authorities, for each new dispersal bed.

Working together, Asylum Matters and NACCOM have created a joint briefing, Principles for Dispersal, which is aimed at voluntary sector organisations who are interested in working with their local authorities and other partners, so as to improve asylum dispersal in their local area. It includes a series of principles for good asylum dispersal and case studies of successful partnerships between local authorities and voluntary sector organisations. It can act as a checklist for new dispersal areas to work towards and gauge best practice from those that are more established.

The briefing supports the Asylum Matters campaign #CommunitiesNotCamps and NACCOM’s work to #EndDestitution.



Do landlords understand right to rent checks?

Private landlords in England are required by law to make “right to rent” checks on all new tenants, to establish that their immigration status allows them to take a tenancy. The article below from the Tenancy Deposit Scheme website summarises a recent report looking at how the system is working.

The government recently released an evaluation of right to rent checks, delving into how landlords understand and use the right to rent process. The government used mystery shoppers alongside direct research with landlords to uncover the trends. Here are the key takeaways from that research and what opportunities this represents for agents.

How many landlords use letting agents to conduct right to rent checks?

The government’s research highlights that the majority of landlords use letting agents to carry out their right to rent checks, at 64 per cent of those surveyed. Only 29 per cent of landlords attempt to carry out the checks themselves, with others using referencing services directly.

Landlords that use letting agents or outsource for another service to do the checks on their behalf, said that they did so due to:

- The time they save
- The hassle they avoid
- The ability to hand responsibility to another body.

Are private landlords aware of right to rent checks?

The government’s research shows that 79 per cent of private landlords were “aware” of the right to rent scheme in January 2021 – with a big increase in awareness since 2020.

While 53 per cent would consider themselves to be “well informed” about the checks, the research also shows that 16 per cent of the landlords were uncertain of the changes to the right to rent guidance during Covid-19.

Self-managing landlords not using an agent to help them reference their tenants – particularly with small portfolios – or that weren’t part of a landlord membership organisation

were even less aware of how to conduct checks. The report highlights that this group’s reliance on word-of-mouth and media means that their understanding is “incomplete”.

How do landlords normally find information about right to rent checks?

There is government guidance on how to complete right to rent checks. However, only 54 per cent of landlords said that they’d read at least one of the documents available from that site – and 66 per cent said that they got information from a source other than the government site.

Letting agents were cited by 36 per cent of landlords as a source of information about completing the checks, while only 28 per cent of landlords had accessed no information about the checks.

Do landlords like right to rent checks?

More than half of landlords surveyed said that they had a “positive opinion” about the checks. Those that felt well informed about how to conduct checks unsurprisingly also felt more positively about the checks. The reasons behind those positive thoughts varied. Twenty-eight per cent thought that the checks were a “worthwhile idea”, while 17 per cent felt that it adds an extra layer of security. Sixteen per cent said that the checks help ensure their tenants are legitimate.

However, there was some negative feedback about the checks. Forty-two per cent of landlords surveyed feel that the burden of immigration checks shouldn’t sit on their shoulders – a sentiment that increased since 2020, coinciding with new rules around Brexit.

How can letting agents use these insights to support their landlords – and attract new ones?

The knowledge that letting agents hold on right to rent checks is yet another opportunity to demonstrate the value that they can bring to landlords. Under the legislation, landlords that let to someone that doesn’t have the right to rent could face fines of up to £3,000 – or even a prison sentence – if they didn’t follow the government guidance.

With fraud in the referencing process on the rise, new technologies such as Identity Document Validation Technology can help agents complete the checks, offering their landlords an extra layer of security. Agents would also benefit from the time saved in not needing to check the documents of their British or Irish applicants in person with this technology.

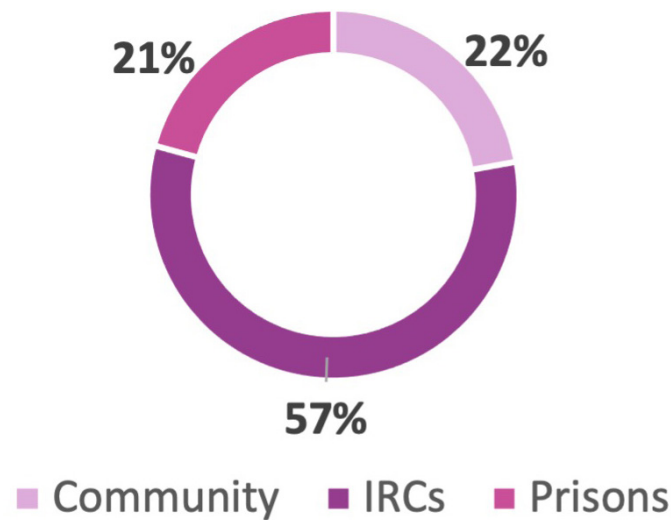
This expertise and the new technologies helping agents stay compliant with right to rent checks are therefore a strong argument when helping landlords understand the need for the support of a letting agent.



## Safe housing for migrant women

Katy Swaine Williams, Safe Housing policy lead at Hibiscus, describes a new project at Hibiscus Initiatives.

Hibiscus is a leading UK organisation supporting Black, minoritised and migrant women in contact with the criminal justice and/or immigration systems. Hibiscus works with both men and women in immigration detention, and only with women in the rest of its services. The charity provides holistic, practical and emotional support to women in prison, in immigration detention and in the community, with an expanding policy team. We work through a key worker model, with group activities at our specialist women’s centre in North London.



From May 2022-April 2023, Hibiscus’ project workers supported a total of 839 women. Of these, 479 were supported by teams in Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs), 186 were supported in the community, and 174 were supported in prisons.

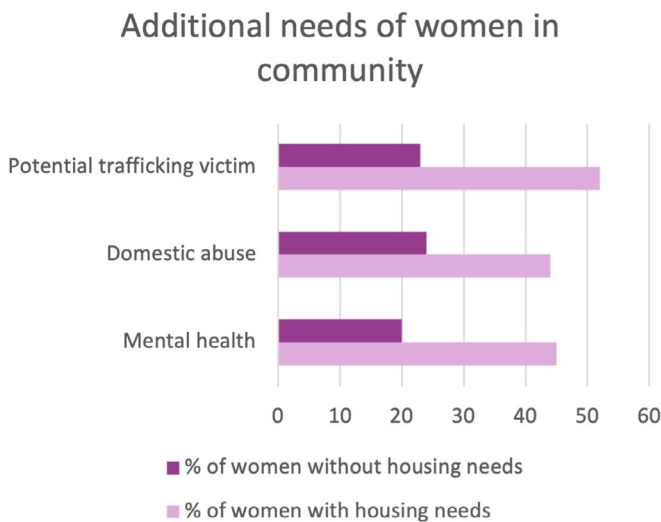
In addition to the challenges faced by the wider community amid a crisis in housing and the cost of living, migrant women are also severely impacted by the “hostile environment” policy. This prevents those with insecure immigration status from working, renting, accessing health services and claiming benefits.

Migrant women who leave prison and immigration detention are likely to become homeless. Many women Hibiscus works with are trafficking victims or have experienced other forms of violence against women and girls. Some are living in destitution. Many others are in accommodation which is shared and, or, temporary, and unsuitable for women in recovery from trauma. For those with children, frequent moves and long distances from school are disruptive. Home Office accommodation for asylum seeking women is frequently overcrowded and of poor quality, and there are not enough spaces in safe houses. For women who receive refugee status, they find themselves in temporary accommodation, facing a long wait for social housing.



This year we have embarked on a new three-year project, funded by the Oak Foundation, to expand our service delivery and policy work to improve housing outcomes for migrant women. We aim to empower migrant women to partner in creating change, to improve practice on the ground and to influence law and policy makers to introduce reforms. This includes sharing evidence from our own caseload about the impact on migrant women and children of current laws and policies.

Of the 186 women supported by our community team from May 2022-April 2023, 77 presented with housing needs. About half of these 77 women have no recourse to public funds. The graph below shows some of the additional factors that arise for these women both as a result of their housing needs and as a barrier to safe housing.



Of these 77 women:

- 35 women (45 per cent) presented with mental health needs (compared to 20 per cent of those without housing needs)
- 40 women (52 per cent) are victims of trafficking/ modern slavery (compared to 23 per cent of those without housing needs)
- 34 women (44 per cent) have experienced domestic violence or gender-based violence (compared to 24 per cent of those without housing needs)

Further barriers include the need for interpreters and cultural mediation, racism and lack of access to legal aid solicitors to assist with complex immigration-related and housing matters.

At a recent focus group, women identified the most basic requirements for them to feel safe in their accommodation:

- Security (i.e. functioning door locks, restrictions on who can enter the building)
- Privacy (i.e. private rooms, not having to share facilities, having a space to heal)

*“Not having somewhere safe [to live] is slowing my recovery - if you’re constantly experiencing new trauma how can you deal with it as new ones keep coming up?”*

We will be consulting frontline organisations this autumn to draw on others’ expertise and experience, and we aim to work collaboratively across the immigration, housing, VAWG and criminal justice sectors to make a difference for these marginalised women and their children. Please contact us to find out more or tell us about your work.

For more information contact Katy Swaine Williams: [katysw@hibiscus.org.uk](mailto:katysw@hibiscus.org.uk)



Positive stories about assisting refugees and other migrants

Soha and the Oxfordshire Homeless Movement house homeless people with no recourse to public funds

Jude McCaffrey, head of housing at SOHA in South Oxfordshire, explains how they are making a contribution to solving the housing needs of people who cannot pay rent

Homelessness and rough sleeping are complex issues, further compounded when people have no recourse to public funds. Soha Housing, an Oxfordshire housing association, partnered with local charities, Oxfordshire Homeless Movement, Aspire, Connection Support, and Asylum Welcome to offer housing at a peppercorn rent to homeless adults prevented from working or claiming benefits.

Soha, as a registered provider, cannot grant tenancies directly to people unable to claim UK benefits.

To support the project with low-cost housing, Soha talked to our colleagues at Broadland Housing in Norfolk. We adapted their successful model and leased five homes to Aspire on a peppercorn rent. These five homes provided 12 bedspaces to adults with no recourse to public funds. The project has supported nine people in gaining settled status and to move onto social rent tenancies and create capacity for incoming homeless people.

The security of a home enables the residents to work with Asylum Welcome and gain settled UK status. This then allows the residents to work or claim benefits.

In addition to providing financial assistance, the partnership can also provide other forms of support. Asylum Welcome led on support with immigration status and gaining settled status, while Connection and Aspire offered day to day tenancy support and skills for managing a home, as well as help in getting back to work.

In joining this partnership, Soha also saw a crucial role in providing advocacy on behalf of homeless people. For example, talking to other housing associations about adopting policies that make it easier for homeless people to access housing and other resources.

By working with partnerships that provide support services to homeless people, housing associations can help to ensure that homeless people have a safe and stable place to live. This can help to improve the lives of homeless people and help to reduce the costs associated with homelessness.

Syria civil war refugee speaks out on new life in Brighton

The Brighton Argus interviewed a Syrian refugee who has settled in the town. Chadia Bchir, her husband Mazen and her two children fled their home in Damascus, Syria, after it was destroyed in the war. She said: "People were very exhausted, tired and sad. We used to have a good life in Syria before the war, but during the war, I lost my house and I had to move to find a safer place for my children."

Chadia and her family came to Brighton in 2016, where they were welcomed with open arms and supported by the local community. She said: "Lots of people helped us and my children. They were very friendly and helpful and supported me a lot."

With support from the International Rescue Committee, Chadia was offered a job working as a dinner lady at Varndean College. She said: "I was very happy because I could help my children and become more confident." Although the family have lived in Brighton for many years, Chadia said she still thinks of Syria as her home, with her mother, brother and sister still living in the country despite the ongoing conflict.

Welcoming refugees into our home has enriched our lives

A letter in the Guardian urges people to allow asylum seekers to stay in their homes, as this person did:

"We first did this in 1973, when we welcomed a family of three Uganda Asians to live with us. It was one of the richest experiences of our lives, and we are still in touch with the family. The daughter, then a disoriented teenager whom we were able to get back on her feet and into education, has just retired as a consultant anaesthetist. Since then, we have welcomed a family of three from Iran, and others from Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Nigeria and elsewhere."

The writer recommends the experience to those "who have the capacity and can afford it. Yes, flexibility, consideration and tolerance are needed on both sides, but these are far outweighed by the richness and pleasure that we have gained from the experiences."

Meanwhile, Gary Lineker received an award for hosting refugees, via Refugees at Home.

Community sponsorship of refugees arriving under resettlement schemes

The UK Community Sponsorship scheme was launched in July 2016. The scheme allows community groups to support refugee families directly and aims to help them become self-sufficient and integrated members of the community. Community Sponsorship groups are made up of local volunteers who commit to welcoming and supporting a refugee family in their neighbourhood. Community Sponsors find a home for the family, greet them at the airport, and then work with them over a one-year period to learn English, access education or employment, and settle into life in the community.

This scheme is open to support families under the UK Resettlement scheme or the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme. For example, East Midlands Councils report that 38 individuals have been resettled by the Community Sponsorship Scheme in their region.

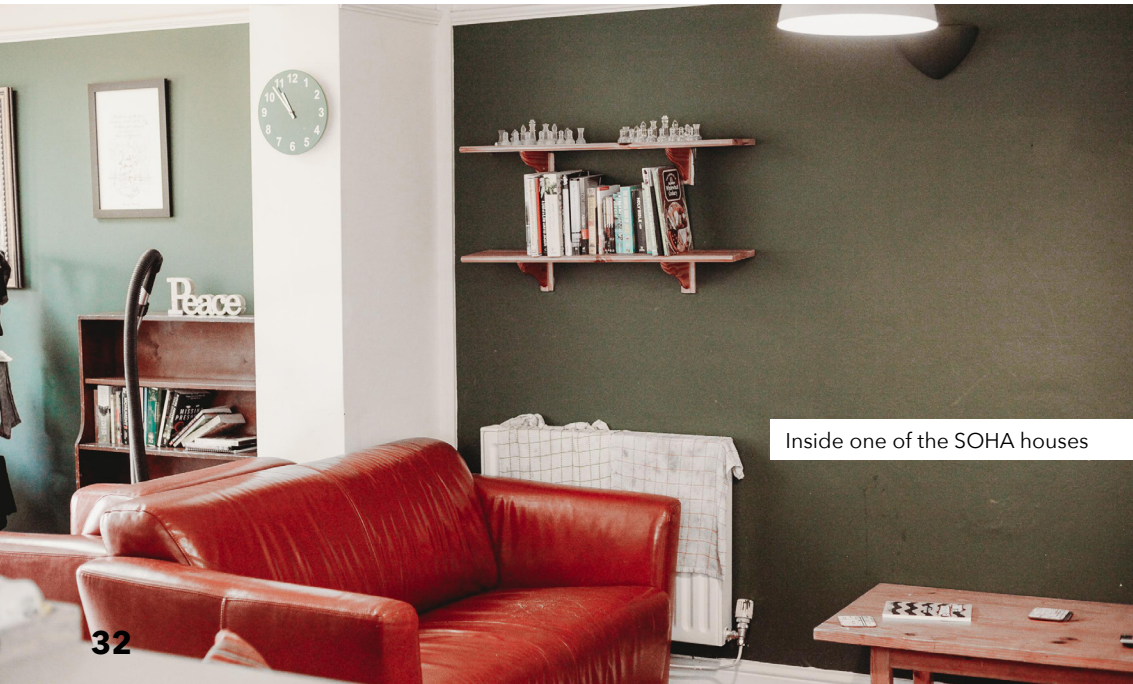
Introduction to Community Sponsorship events happen regularly online. To find out more, or to register to join, visit: [Reset UK: Community Sponsorship](#).

The summary above is from East Midlands Councils: with RESET UK they have started to develop a networking event for community sponsorship groups who are either in the early stages of setting up, have put in their application or have got a family resettled within the East Midlands to join together to share best practice.

The contact for the event is Joshua Aspden, [Joshua.Aspden@emcouncils.gov.uk](mailto:Joshua.Aspden@emcouncils.gov.uk).

More news of positive steps to help migrants

- Derbyshire Dales District Council has added further to its council housing programme with eight new affordable homes - three of which are currently sheltering refugees from Ukraine. Six are social rent properties and the other two are shared ownership. The council is using the government's Local Authority Housing Fund to provide the accommodation for the Ukrainian families, who arrived in the UK via resettlement and relocation schemes. The £2 million government grant means the council can buy 18 homes this year to be used initially by refugees - and these three are among ten bought so far.
- Thanet council announced plans to buy nine homes for Ukrainian and Afghan refugee families. They were given funding as part of a national £500 million scheme offered to 182 local authorities deemed to have the greatest need, in order to purchase properties in their area to accommodate Ukrainian and Afghan refugee households for an initial period of three years.
- More than 7,000 youngsters in Ayrshire have participated in free school football sessions throughout the academic year, thanks to a Kilmarnock FC team bolstered by new coach Emmanuel Ayobami. Born in Nigeria, Emmanuel joined the community team in March following a period of time in Ukraine where he played and coached professionally. Through the Football for All programme, he has become a big hit with pupils across the region, particularly fellow Ukrainian refugee, Artem, who has thrived in sessions since the pair first met at the start of a six-week block at Kilmaurs Primary.
- A refugee from Afghanistan who survived torture by the Taliban told the Shropshire Star that he hopes to be selected as Labour candidate for the Shrewsbury constituency, in the next election. "I am a British success story," he said, "and I want to help make this country the confident, forward-thinking place it was when I first arrived here."





Advice and other services - latest news

Advice services from Settled

Settled’s [Ukraine advice service](#) is increasingly busy in connecting with consulates, councils and national and grassroots charities. In the last month Settled has recruited and trained 15 new Ukrainian speaking volunteers. In addition to the recruitment, the direct route they have established with the Home Office is often enabling quick and successful outcomes for clients.

As with Settled’s European Union Settlement Scheme services, they also advise Ukrainian people with issues accessing their rights once here: including benefits, education, and move-on accommodation (or lack of). Housing is a huge challenge that Settled spoke about at the All Party Parliamentary Group on homelessness earlier this year, and in national media at the first [anniversary](#) of the war.

The EUSS Roma service also “goes from strength to strength.” Assen Slavchev, himself Bulgarian Roma (and previously a volunteer), sees phenomenal numbers of Roma beneficiaries in his weekly surgery at Edmonton, South London; as well as in Luton, and by phone and email. Because of challenges of illiteracy and lack of trust amongst many in this community, face to face work is particularly important with Roma people.

Settled recently worked with the Roma Voice Centre to create [a short video](#) - in Romanes (with English subtitles) - briefly summarising the service, and emphasising the need for people to convert from EUSS pre-settled to settled status, once eligible, with our support if needed.

*Yuliia Ismail from Settled spoke at Housing 2023, CIH’s annual conference in June, you can see an interview with her [here](#).*

Roma communities” housing project launched

The [Roma Support Group](#) announces the launch of a new housing project, [Romano Kher](#). It aims to support Roma migrants at risk of or experiencing homelessness in the UK to access and maintain sustainable housing and to influence public policy, strategies and practice in response to Roma housing needs.

“Romano Kher is an incredibly timely project. We will help Roma communities to fight against discrimination and systemic housing accessibility barriers, which have exacerbated since Brexit. Through this project we will also challenge current housing policies at the local and national level, so that they can reflect the realities of our communities and respond to their needs.” Tania Gessi (Romano Kher Coordinator)

The housing and homelessness issues we plan to tackle through this project include:

- Gatekeeping issues: discrimination and lack of information/ misinformation from local Housing Departments
- Systemic accessibility barriers to the housing register for social housing
- Unsafe housing and disrepair problems
- Lack of joined-up approach to address homelessness and, or, rough sleeping at local level between the homelessness sector and local authorities
- Discrimination against Roma people from letting agencies.

Libraries of Sanctuary

Public libraries play an important role in welcoming refugees and people seeking sanctuary in our communities. [Libraries of Sanctuary](#) is a network of librarians, library staff, community groups and book lovers who are raising awareness of the issues facing people in the asylum system, offering support and participation opportunities, and contributing to a culture of welcome in the wider community.

The Library of Sanctuary award recognises and celebrates the libraries that go above and beyond to show solidarity and welcome. Any library can apply for the award. [West Berkshire libraries](#) have just won one.

Yorkshire and Humberside has a new refugee integration forum

The regional [Refugee Integration Forum](#) is a new strategic forum promoting refugee integration throughout Yorkshire and Humber.

Over 40 leaders and key stakeholders from a wide range of sectors across the region were invited to become forum members. These include representatives of local authorities, the voluntary and community sector, the Home Office, employment, education, housing, the police, health and wellbeing, arts and culture, sport and leisure and those with lived experience as refugees. You can find out more about their current membership [here](#).





## Other migration news

### Delays accessing universal credit for claimants with national insurance

A challenge has been made by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) to the DWP’s policy that they will not make payments of universal credit (UC) or advances until a claimant has a national insurance number (“NINo”) as opposed to simply having applied for one.

CPAG filed a judicial review claim on behalf of Ms Bui. The matter was linked with a separate judicial review filed on behalf of Ms Onakoya (the second claimant) (represented by Central England Law Centre) and the two cases were heard jointly before a three-judge panel on 20 May 2022. [Judgment](#) was given by the Upper Tribunal on 19 July 2022, dismissing the applications for judicial review.

The claimants applied for permission to appeal, and this was granted by the Court of Appeal on 5 December 2022. The case was heard by the Court of Appeal on 30 March 2023 and judgment given [in favour of the claimants](#) on 25 May 2023. The Court held at para 79 of the judgment:

*“The scheme of the [advance payment] provisions contemplates that in a case where a claimant’s claim has not yet been determined and the claimant is in need the Secretary of State will consider whether it appears likely that the conditions of entitlement are met; and it seems to me that this is just as much so in a case where the claimant does not have a NINo as in the case when they do. In my judgment therefore the Secretary of State’s practice in never considering whether this is likely in a case where the claimant does not have a NINo is flawed.”*

CPAG advises that if you or someone you are advising does not have a NINo and after claiming UC have not been offered a New Claim Advance or have been refused a New Claim Advance, please get in touch by emailing [jrproject@cpag.org.uk](mailto:jrproject@cpag.org.uk). Additionally, if you or someone you are advising has been waiting longer than five weeks since you claimed UC and have not yet received your NINo or received any UC, please also get in touch.

### Somali families bring legal action after being on waiting list for years

The *Local Government Lawyer* [reports](#) that the London Borough of Tower Hamlets is carrying out an investigation of claims of corruption and racism made by a group of Somali families who are taking legal action after what they have said has been a wait of many years for adequate housing. The case was the subject of [a feature](#) in the *Observer*.

Dozens of families claimed they had been systemically removed from housing waiting lists by Tower Hamlets due to their race, and some had been placed in severely unfit and unsafe homes that posed health risks. Most of those now taking legal action had spent long periods on the waiting list, some more than a decade.

### Permission granted to challenge lawfulness of the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession and how it applies to those with pre-settled status

Central England Law Centre’s client (GN) has won her first court battle to challenge the way she and other survivors of domestic abuse who have pre-settled status are treated by the government when they first flee from their abusive partner.

The initial claim was made in March 2023 and the home secretary had been required to respond but failed to do so. In the absence of a response, permission was granted by the court on 12 June 2023 on the basis that the claim is arguable and should proceed to a final hearing. The Secretary of State is now required to give a detailed response to the claim by 17 July 2023.

GN was subjected to alleged domestic violence at the hands of her husband resulting in the breakdown of the relationship. Because GN holds pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme she is unable to make an application for limited leave to remain with recourse to public funds under the DDVC rules and/or indefinite leave to remain as a victim of domestic violence. These applications are, with some limited exceptions, only available to victims of domestic violence who hold limited leave to remain as a partner under Appendix FM of the Immigration Rules.

The DDVC would have granted GN leave to remain for three months and the ability to access essential services such as welfare benefits and housing assistance. Instead, GN was left destitute and forced to rely on support from her local authority.

Central England Law Centre is arguing that GN is being treated less favourably than those able to apply under the DDVC and DVILR rules and that this difference amounts to discrimination.

For more information about the case see the news article [here](#).

### Migrants Organise wins legal action



[Migrants Organise](#), the charity advocating for the rights and welfare of migrants and refugees, has received an apology and damages following defamatory accusations made by *Talk TV* and its host, Mike Graham. He made false and damaging assertions on his show, *The Independent Republic of Mike Graham*, and in tweets in June 2022, which characterised Migrants Organise and its dedicated efforts to support migrants and refugees in inaccurate and harmful ways.

Recognising the gravity of the defamatory statements and the potential harm they could cause to Migrants Organise’s reputation and work, the charity pursued legal recourse. After negotiations, *Talk TV* and Mr Graham agreed to publish an apology stating that they “accept there wasn’t a factual basis” to allegations that Migrants Organise “facilitated fraud and terrorism”.

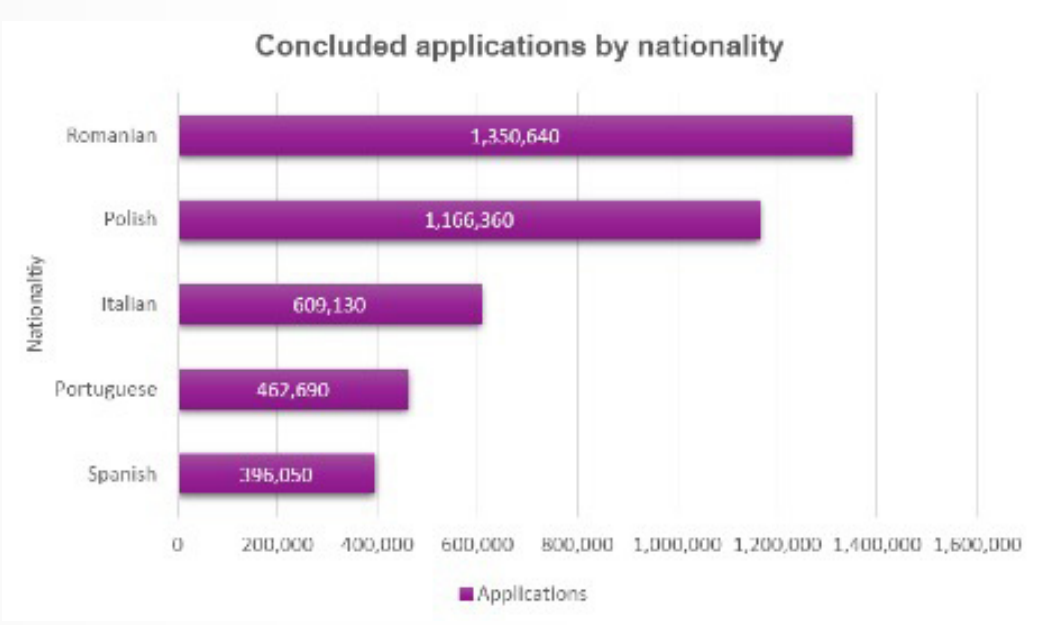
In addition to [the apology](#), News UK Broadcasting Ltd agreed to pay Migrants Organise their legal costs and substantial damages.

### Latest statistics on the EU Settlement Scheme

By the end of 2022, seven million applications had been received under the EU Settlement Scheme, nearly all of which had been concluded. Across nationalities, the highest number of applications received were from Romanian, Polish and Italian nationals (see chart).

Romanian nationals accounted for a third of all applications received from 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2022. Of the total of concluded applications, 531,080 were from non-EEA nationals.

Full details on the EUSS can be accessed [here](#) and the quarterly statistics can be found [here](#).



### Potential modern slavery victims sent packing as new UK borders act bites

Modern slavery experts are [quoted](#) by *openDemocracy* as blaming the government’s borders law for a sharp drop in the number of potential victims being offered protection. Just 58 per cent of initial decisions by the Home Office’s modern slavery protection system, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), were successful in the first quarter of 2023 according to figures released this month. A year ago, the figure was 89 per cent.

Similarly, the number of positive final decisions, made later in the process, has dropped from 92 per cent in early 2022 to 75 per cent in early 2023. These are the highest rejection rates from the NRM since at least 2014, the furthest back the available data goes.

*“Rather than providing a source of hope for victims, the Nationality and Borders Act is making it harder for people to access support,”*

Lucy Symington, a parliamentary officer at Anti-Slavery International, told *openDemocracy*.



## More news shorts

- Praxis calls on the government to scrap the “10-year” route to settlement.** Praxis delivered a petition with almost 14,000 signatures, demanding a simpler and less costly route to settlement. People feel that they “don’t belong” and are insecure, even though many may have British children.
- Asylum claims being considered without face-to-face interviews.** As reported in the Spring newsletter, asylum claims are being considered from a range of nationalities via a lengthy questionnaire. This policy initially applied to adults from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria and Yemen. In June it was expanded to include claims made from before 28 June 2022 until 7 March 2023 and it was also expanded to include claims made by Sudanese people on or after 28 June 2022. Refugee Action has a [range of resources](#) to help those who are advising people who are filling the questionnaires.
- What is the Common Travel Area and how does it work?** *Free Movement* provides a [briefing](#) on the Common Travel Area - the arrangement that enables passport-free and legal travel between the United Kingdom (including Northern Ireland), the Republic of Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands for British and Irish citizens and migrants with lawful status. You can also find more about this and how it affects housing and benefits entitlements on the housing rights website’s pages on British and Irish citizens in [England and Wales](#) and in [Scotland](#).
- Legislation on British citizenship rights.** The government has introduced the British Nationality (Regularisation of Past Practice) Bill, intended to confirm people’s British citizenship rights following the change in the Home Office’s position concerning how British nationality law applied to people born to EU citizen parents in the UK. For up-to-date information on the bill, visit the Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens (PRCBC) [website](#).







# Do you have any comments on this newsletter?

send them to [policyandpractice@cih.org](mailto:policyandpractice@cih.org)

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First Floor, Rowan House, Westwood Way, Coventry, CV4 8HS



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