

# UK homeless charities call for suspension of 'reckless' eviction of asylum seekers

Growing numbers face a winter of destitution as the Home Office withdraws accommodation provided during first lockdown

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A study published in The Lancet in September found that, during the first lockdown, 266 deaths and 1,164 hospital admissions had been averted under the 'everyone in' scheme. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

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Homeless charities are calling for evictions of asylum seekers to be suspended as growing numbers are being left destitute as winter approaches.

While many asylum seekers were temporarily accommodated and tested for Covid-19 during the first lockdown under the [government's "everyone in" scheme](#), the Home Office [restarted evictions in September](#). This group has no right to work and no recourse to public funds or statutory homelessness services.

Renae Mann, director of asylum housing network Naccom, said: "The government has made it clear that Covid-19 still presents a very real public health risk, yet it continues to evict people from asylum accommodation into homelessness. This is reckless and completely disregards the danger these evictions pose to the individuals themselves and the wider public.

"Many winter night shelters in our network are closed this year because of the risks posed by Covid-19 in these settings, and drop-in services are also either closed or have sharply reduced capacity."

Tinashe, an asylum seeker from Zimbabwe, was temporarily accommodated in Brighton during the first lockdown, but received an eviction notice in September.

"The housing manager came to me and said I need to leave because they have to make way for someone else," he said. "They removed my clothes and put them in storage, then they took away my keys and said I need to go. There was nothing I could do – I had to go back to the streets."

Sleeping rough in doorways has affected his health, and diabetes has left him with poor eyesight.

"At night, it's really bad," he said. "I can see if somebody is there, but not who it is. I realised it's better to just be awake at night, walking around, and then I can sleep in the daytime in the park. It's a very scary thing being on the streets, but now there's also the virus, and I could get it any time, any place."

Tinashe was referred to charity St Mungo's through Brighton-based [Voices in Exile](#), and now has a hostel bed.

“There’s a shower, food – even a microwave,” he said. “They said I can stay here until I get asylum accommodation, but I don’t want to leave. I want to take all precautions to make sure I am here, that I am safe.”

Petra Salva, a director at St Mungo’s, said Tinashe’s case shows what can be done. “It is even more vital now as we enter the winter months to ensure that we prevent people being put at further risk. If the government is serious about its commitment to ending rough sleeping for good, I urge it to introduce policies which protect everyone, including non-UK nationals, from the increased risk of destitution.”

Stewart Wheatley from Voices in Exile says his caseload has rapidly increased since September.

“What we’re talking about is getting someone a bed. We’ve got a legal obligation to do that but, time and time again, it proves impossibly difficult for my clients to access that help,” he said.

“It seems like the government had a pot of money to house people during the first lockdown back in the spring but now that’s run out, it doesn’t really know what to do with the no recourse [to public funds] community.

“They can’t just leave them on the streets, and the argument from the government that refused asylum seekers are making themselves destitute by not going back to their country is a red herring – it doesn’t stand up during a pandemic. Whether someone has no recourse to public funds is totally irrelevant – it’s about responding to an immediate public health risk.”

Tinashe was fortunate, but charities are concerned about those falling through the cracks. Mercy, an asylum seeker from Nigeria, received an eviction notice in mid-October.

“No one explained why – one day the support just stopped,” she said. “First they took away the money, then I got a letter telling me I need to leave my house within 21 days. A man came to change the lock on the door and he said if I don’t go, the police will come for me and remove me

back to my country.”

Mercy’s asylum claim was refused in August and is currently pending an appeal. [Home Office](#) policy states that asylum seekers must remain accommodated until the outcome of an appeal.

“Now I don’t sleep,” she said. “My head feels empty and I cry – crying all the time, like a baby ... I feel really terrible. I have nowhere to go, I have no one in this country. The Home Office, they treat us like animals – it’s not right that they are making us live like this.”

A [study published in The Lancet in September](#) found that, during the first national lockdown, 266 deaths and 1,164 hospital admissions had been averted due to the provision of temporary accommodation and widespread Covid testing for homeless people.

Dr Binta Sultan provides healthcare to destitute asylum seekers in London: “We didn’t see any new cases among our patients over the summer, but now, with evictions from asylum housing taking place and homelessness on the rise, the health of those on the streets looks to be getting far worse,” she said. “The homeless have very specific health needs and require sufficient treatment; that should be a priority, particularly coming into winter.”

Rick Henderson, chief executive of charity Homeless Link, said: “The support available for people with no recourse to public funds varies across the country, including the total withdrawal of support in some areas. For many homelessness services, it is clear this is an issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.”

The Home Office says it ensures that all those who receive a negative asylum decision remain accommodated while they take steps to return to their country of origin. “We are fixing our broken asylum system to make it firm and fair,” a spokesperson said. “We will seek to stop abuse of the system while ensuring it is compassionate towards those who need our help, welcoming people through safe and legal routes.

“We offer assistance to enable failed asylum seekers to leave the UK through our voluntary return service and provide accommodation to those using the service until the return arrangements are complete.”

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