

## Support for refugees in England

December 2019

### Executive Summary

The Refugee Council is one of the largest organisations devoted to supporting refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. We provide a range of services for children and adults, and also work with them to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed by decision-makers.

A wealth of research and our extensive experience delivering integration services for refugees indicate that a two-tier system of Government support has developed based on the way in which refugees arrive to the UK, whether via resettlement or through the asylum route. This occurs even though refugees, regardless of their mode of arrival, are assessed for protection based on the same criteria.

Resettled refugees are provided with a comprehensive package of support backed by Government funding and tailored to individual needs. Conversely, newly-recognised refugees have no such comparable support. Evidence shows that this, in addition to systemic barriers, directly leads many newly-recognised refugees to become homeless and destitute just at the point when they have been recognised by the Government in need of protection.

We strongly believe the current system whereby one cohort of refugees is provided with intensive, Government-funded support while the other is not must change without delay. We therefore have the following recommendations in two categories:

A. Policy changes that can be implemented immediately:

1. Newly-recognised refugees should be awarded a **cash grant upon receipt of status** in-line with the amount received by resettled refugees.
2. Government should encourage the **establishment of Private Rented Sector schemes** for refugees.
3. Guidance for **Integration Loans should be improved** so newly-recognised refugees can use them for integration purposes rather than crisis situations.
4. **Improved coordination between the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions**, and other government departments, to support a smooth transition into mainstream services for newly-recognised refugees.

B. Structural changes to government policies to improve the move-on period:

1. The 28-day **move-on period should be abolished** and asylum support should not be terminated until an alternative form of income has been secured.
2. Government should introduce a **National Refugee Integration Strategy** for refugees drawing on lessons and best-practice from resettlement programmes and other services.

# Refugees in the UK

Refugees arrive to the UK via one of two routes: they will have either been brought to the UK directly from another country through a Government resettlement programme; or, they will have gone through the asylum process after having arrived in the UK and submitting a claim for asylum.

People seeking asylum who can show that they would otherwise be destitute are offered accommodation on a no-choice basis, just £5.39 of subsistence support per person per day,<sup>1</sup> and are effectively banned from working.<sup>2</sup> Upon receipt of status, newly-recognised refugees have only 28 days – known as the ‘grace’ or ‘move-on’ period – to leave their asylum accommodation and access mainstream services, such as bank accounts, new housing, and income from employment or welfare. The introduction of a 35-day assessment period for Universal Credit has made it impossible for refugees to access welfare support within the move-on period unless they apply for a repayable advance payment, which consequently forces them to start off their new lives in debt.

In 2018, approximately 10,000 people seeking asylum were granted protection by the Government.<sup>3</sup> Around 5,000 refugees per year are resettled to the UK via the Government’s three main resettlement schemes: the Gateway Protection Programme, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), and the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). The latter one is focused on resettling refugees from the Middle East and North Africa region. As of 2020, the Government will consolidate these three programmes into one scheme which will resettle about the same number of refugees but from conflicts across the globe.

Despite differing reception conditions depending on their mode of arrival to the UK, both newly-recognised and resettled refugees are granted protection on the basis of the same needs and as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention.<sup>4</sup> Once someone has been recognised as a refugee in the UK, they are entitled to the same services as British citizens, including the right to access all welfare benefits and other statutory support.

## Refugee Council’s work with refugees

The Refugee Council has significant experience successfully delivering integration support to both resettled refugees and to refugees who went through the asylum route. The former is through delivery of the Government’s three largest resettlement programmes, while the latter is through our holistic integration service called New Roots, of which we are the lead partner.

We have been delivering Gateway in Yorkshire and Humberside since 2004. We began delivery of VPRS in the same region shortly after the Government introduced it in 2015. In early 2016, we started delivering VPRS in Hertfordshire, as well as delivering VCRS in both regions soon thereafter. Moreover, in the summer of 2019 we began providing support to Syrian refugees in the London borough of Lewisham through delivery of VPRS. We plan to continue these services for resettled refugees under the Government’s consolidated scheme from 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.asaproject.org/uploads/Factsheet\\_1 - section\\_95.pdf](http://www.asaproject.org/uploads/Factsheet_1 - section_95.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> People claiming asylum are only allowed to work once they’ve been waiting longer than 12 months for a decision on their claim. They are only able to apply for jobs listed on the Government’s Shortage Occupation List.

<http://lifttheban.co.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> Asylum table as\_02\_q (volume 2): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2018/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to>

<sup>4</sup> The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who has fled their country and, ‘owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion’ is unable to return to or be protected by that country.

For over a decade, we have provided a Holistic Integration Service based in London which supported newly-recognised refugees to make the challenging first steps toward integration. In October 2018, additional Home Office funding enabled us to expand the provision and geographic location of this service with a new project called New Roots in London, Leeds and Hull. A key component of New Roots focuses on providing specialist casework to newly-recognised refugees for financial stability, settled housing, health and mental health, and other crisis issues. Nevertheless, this service is much more limited in scope and capacity than Government-backed resettlement support services are, with many newly-recognised refugees living in areas that do not have this or other appropriate services available.

## Refugee Council's research on integration

Our research in recent years has been focused on the barriers to integration, primarily in regard to newly-recognised refugees and the move-on period. It explores the numerous difficulties newly-recognised refugees encounter when trying to access basic and mainstream services with only 28 days before having to leave the asylum support system. We have found that the asylum system and lack of support following receipt of status leads the majority of these refugees to become homeless and destitute.

The first such report, published in 2014 and titled *28 Days Later: Experiences of new refugees in the UK*, identified the specific issues that refugees experience when trying to access income and accommodation during and immediately after the move-on period. Newly-recognised refugees are likely to face language barriers and difficulty navigating the complex welfare system. In addition, having not had access to employment and savings while seeking asylum means that securing accommodation in the private rented sector can be a particular challenge for newly-recognised refugees. This report also found that frequent delays in receiving the necessary documents from the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) exacerbated these experiences.

In 2016, we published *England's Forgotten Refugees*, which highlighted that the same issues were still prevalent. This report also began to document the difference in the type of support and financial assistance provided to help integrate resettled refugees and the 'cliff edge' that newly-recognised refugees face during the move-on period. As a result, we called for a number of improvements to the Government's support of refugees who have been through the asylum system, many of which are outlined below in our policy recommendations.

Similar themes of homelessness were found in our survey from 2017 *Refugees without Refuge*. None of the 54 respondents had secured accommodation in the 28 day move-on period. Even with the advice and support of our Holistic Integration Service, refugees who were not allocated housing through the local authority (on the basis of 'priority need') were simply not able to find the necessary funds nor required references and proof of income to enter the private rented market.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees published a report in the same year, *Refugees Welcome? The Experience of New Refugees in the UK*, which not only confirmed the findings of our previous research, but also emphasised the emergence of a two-tier system amongst Government-backed integration support programmes for refugees in the UK.

Others have added to this wealth of evidence with research supporting our conclusions, including the British Red Cross<sup>5</sup> and NACCOM.<sup>6</sup> The most recent research from the British Red Cross on this issue, *Still an Ordeal: The move-on period for new refugees* from December 2018, documented the new structural

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/refugee-support/move-on-period-an-ordeal-for-refugees.pdf>

<https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/refugee-support/still-an-ordeal-move-on-period-report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NACCOM-Homelessnesss-Report\\_2018-05-20\\_EMAIL.pdf](https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NACCOM-Homelessnesss-Report_2018-05-20_EMAIL.pdf)

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barriers introduced by Universal Credit and its 35-day assessment period, which leaves newly-recognised refugees with no choice but to become either destitute or in debt.

## Varied integration support for refugees

Our experience in supporting both newly-recognised and resettled refugees confirms the findings of our research and indicates that a two-tier system of Government-backed integration support has developed for refugees based on their mode of arrival to the UK.

Government resettlement programmes provide intensive, needs-based support with dedicated funding allocated to aid the early integration of resettled refugees. The funding package for VPRS and VCRS is especially comprehensive, including special allocations of funding for children's education, secondary healthcare in the case of exceptional need, and accessing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and associated childcare costs.

Notably, as part of this scheme, local authorities source and secure furnished accommodation for refugees prior to their arrival so it is ready to be 'lived-in' from day one. This includes a welcome pack of groceries with basic necessities.

Following arrival, resettled refugees receive: a cash grant per person to cover the period between arrival and sourcing alternative income; support to register with health, education, ESOL, welfare, and other essential services; and individually tailored advice and guidance from a named caseworker for at least 12 months, including support with accessing employment.<sup>7</sup> Generally, casework support is provided through face to face and telephone appointments, outreach, home visits, and drop-in surgeries, with professional interpreters where needed.

Since the move to Universal Credit, the Home Office increased the cash grant given to resettled refugees eligible for Universal Credit from £200 to £300 per person. This was in recognition that it takes longer to receive a first benefit payment under Universal Credit than under legacy benefits, and it is therefore reasonable to provide an additional £100 to help ensure this cash grant covers the resulting longer period between arrival and receipt of benefit payments.

Even before arrival, resettled refugees benefit from pre-departure cultural orientation delivered by the International Organisation for Migration, which gives a basic overview of what refugees can expect when they come to the UK.

In stark contrast, those refugees who come through the asylum route have historically been provided with much more limited support, if any at all. Between 2008 and 2011, the Government funded a programme for newly-recognised refugees called the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES). Newly-recognised refugees were automatically referred into this service from the Home Office. It helped refugees to navigate the move-on period by offering 12-months of support to access housing, education and welfare services, as well as employment.

Since 2011, there has been no comprehensive Government support service for newly-recognised refugees. The Government has instead piloted a number of small initiatives intended to alleviate the issues posed by the move-on period. These include the Post Grant Appointment Service (PGAS) and Local Authority Asylum Liaison Officers (LAASLOs), with the latter offered only in specific regions.

The PGAS, delivered by the Home Office, was established to help newly-recognised refugees overcome barriers in making a first appointment to apply for benefits at the Job Centre by liaising between and making the appointment with the DWP on the refugee's behalf. The Government's evaluation of PGAS

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<sup>7</sup> VPRS and VCRS receive up to five years of gradually reducing casework support.

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confirmed that even with the intervention of the PGAS service, without an advance payment, refugees claiming Universal Credit had to wait longer than 28 days to receive their first payment.<sup>8</sup>

From 2019, the Home Office has contracted Migrant Help, an independent charity, to provide a basic level of advice and guidance to all newly-recognised refugees for 28 days from receipt of status, which includes taking over the service provided by PGAS. As this service is limited to 3 to 4 telephone appointments over just 28 days (with some exception for outreach), it does not replace the full level of support offered by RIES.

The LAASLO pilot was developed to 'facilitate the smooth transition of new refugees from government-supported accommodation into mainstream society during their 28-day "move-on" period.<sup>9</sup> There are 35 LAASLOs across 19 local authorities.<sup>10</sup> LAASLOs are jointly funded by the local authority and the Controlling Migration Fund for a two-year period from 2018-2020 and future funding has yet to be announced.

The LAASLO model is very welcome, but an official evaluation has yet to be published (current Government plans indicate this will be completed towards the end of the pilot in 2020). This is the only one of the above programmes which offers support with accessing housing, but until an evaluation is published it is unclear if support alone is enough to help refugees overcome this barrier within such a short timeframe. Furthermore, since it is currently only offered in a select few local authorities, newly-recognised refugees outside of these areas do not have access to the service and cannot benefit from its support.

Despite these efforts, newly-recognised refugees continue to experience homelessness and destitution, likely because the above pilots are limited in scope and/or geographic reach. PGAS only focused on helping refugees make a first appointment at the Job Centre; the Migrant Help service is relatively light-touch and only offered during the move-on period; and, LAASLOs are only funded until 2020 and are not offered nationally.

Resettled refugees face the same difficulties in adjusting to life in an unfamiliar country, despite the intensive advice and support they receive as part of Government resettlement programmes. Nevertheless, they do not face periods of homelessness and destitution. This is because the Government recognises that information, advice, and guidance are not sufficient to enable integration for new refugees. Rather, material support in the form of a cash grant and sustainable accommodation procured by the local authority are the foundation needed for advice and guidance to be meaningfully supportive. This illustrates that simply providing advice and guidance to newly-recognised refugees will not resolve the structural issues associated with the move-on period that lead to homelessness and destitution.

## Policy recommendations

It is important to recognise that resettled and newly-recognised refugees may be coming from the same countries, are likely fleeing the same conflicts, and are awarded protection on the same basis. Whilst we appreciate that refugees have different levels of independence and resilience which can vary depending on circumstances as well as personal characteristics, it is clear that the structural issues newly-recognised refugees face during the move-on period inhibit their ability to access accommodation and income, and thus a stable foundation from which to rebuild their lives in safety. As a result, the transition from asylum support to mainstream services is highly likely to result in a period of homelessness and destitution for newly-recognised refugees, and stands in stark contrast to the services provided to resettled refugees.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/work-and-pensions/Correspondence/190603-PGAS-report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/171123%20LAASLO%20job%20description\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/171123%20LAASLO%20job%20description_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/19-million-funding-for-councils-to-boost-integration>

We have therefore developed the following policy recommendations based on the considerable insight we have gained from our extensive research, as well as our experience delivering services to both groups, in order for the Government to begin to redress the imbalance that has resulted from the current two-tier system of integration support. We encourage the Government to continue the transformational work they offer to resettled refugees, and to implement best practice learned from these programmes into the move-on period for newly-recognised refugees.

The following policy recommendations are organised by two categories: changes that could be implemented immediately, and structural changes to government policies to improve the move-on period.

## Policy changes that can be implemented immediately:

### **1. Newly-recognised refugees should be awarded a cash grant upon receipt of status in-line with the amount received by resettled refugees.**

As outlined earlier, while awaiting the outcome of their claim, many people seeking asylum are reliant on asylum support to meet their immediate needs. Asylum support generally consists of accommodation on a no-choice basis and subsistence payments of £5.39 per person per day. Nearly all people seeking asylum are not allowed to work while in the asylum system. This means that upon receipt of refugee status, it is highly unlikely that they will have been able to build up savings to be used in paying a deposit for a private rented tenancy.

Newly-recognised refugees need key identity documents in order to access services, such as bank accounts, welfare and employment. These include a National Insurance number (NINO) and Biometric Residence Permit (BRP, an identity card containing information about entitlements and immigration status). Following successful advocacy by the Refugee Council and others, the government began including NINOS on the back of BRPs (as opposed to sending them each separately and at different times), and now starts counting the 28 days from receipt of the BRP rather than from the day status is granted. Nevertheless, delays in receiving these documents can occur and these cause undue hardship to newly-recognised refugees attempting to access immediate and necessary services.<sup>11</sup>

Bank accounts are another barrier to accessing income for refugees. Due to their previous living situation in asylum accommodation, refugees often do not have appropriate proof of address documents to open a bank account, such as utility bills or tenancy agreements. Until recently, refugees were able to use letters about their legacy benefits from the DWP. Since the move to Universal Credit, the DWP no longer sends documentation proving receipt of benefit, thus removing one of the limited options refugees had for proof of address in opening a bank account.

Although some refugees are successful in obtaining employment within the move-on period, it is still unlikely that their initial wages will be enough to cover their immediate costs and to pay a deposit for private accommodation. For those who must apply for welfare benefits, the design of Universal Credit ensures that it is impossible for newly-recognised refugees to access income without first going into debt by getting an advance payment. Furthermore, research has shown that advance payments are not a panacea: refugees are often unaware they can access them, and having a bank account is a requirement of receiving one.<sup>12</sup>

Resettled refugees receive a one-off cash grant of £300 per person upon arrival (unless receiving legacy benefits, in which case it is £200) as it is recognised that there will be an unavoidable gap in income from

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/refugee-support/still-an-ordeal-move-on-period-report.pdf>

arrival to accessing welfare or employment. This grant has been instrumental in supporting refugees, especially in the era of Universal Credit. Such a grant would be invaluable for newly-recognised refugees who are not only facing the same wait times for Universal Credit, but are also crucially in need of accommodation.

We recommend that whilst the move-on period remains limited to 28-days, newly-recognised refugees should receive the same one-off cash grant as resettled refugees do to assist their transition into mainstream welfare support or employment.

## **2. Government should encourage the establishment of Private Rented Sector schemes for refugees.**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) came into force in April 2018 and it places new legal duties on local authorities in England to prevent or relieve homelessness.<sup>13</sup> Key changes to the original statutory rehousing duty include: extending the period that someone can be deemed as being 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 to 56 days; duties of prevention apply to all people eligible for public assistance in the UK, regardless of priority need status, local connections, or intentionality; and specified bodies must inform local authorities about individuals who they think may be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Refugees are not given prior notification of when their asylum claim will be determined, and as such, cannot plan head for the transition out of asylum accommodation. Consequently, with just 28-days to find new accommodation, it is unlikely that newly-recognised refugees will be able to benefit from the full 56-day period that someone can be deemed as being 'threatened with homelessness' under the HRA. Asylum policy has not been updated to align with this new legislation, similar to how it has not been updated to align with Universal Credit.

Few PRS schemes exist to ease the specific and unique transition from asylum accommodation to the private rented market. We believe that deposit grants or loans should be made available to refugees as soon as their status is confirmed, at a level sufficient to rent accommodation in the private sector. The HRA should, in theory, provide an opportunity to monitor to what extent local authorities are meeting the needs of homeless refugees; we recommend bespoke measures to ensure these specific needs are being met, particularly in areas where there is a substantial amount of housing provision for people in the asylum system.

We therefore recommend that whilst the move-on period remains 28-days, the Government encourages the establishment of PRS schemes for refugees, using funding opportunities attached to the HRA. This will help ensure that refugees have greater opportunities to secure tenancies in an affordable manner.

## **3. Guidance for Integration Loans should be improved so newly-recognised refugees can use them for integration purposes rather than crisis situations.**

The Home Office offers Integration Loans for refugees upon receipt of status. The guidance states that these loans were established to ensure that 'those refugees with the greatest integration needs were able to get financial assistance to obtain a specific item or activity that would assist with their integration into the UK.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>[https://england.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/1494871/Homelessness\\_HRA17\\_Implementation\\_Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1494871/Homelessness_HRA17_Implementation_Brief_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>14</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/410929/Updated\\_loan\\_guidance\\_2015\\_v1\\_8.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/410929/Updated_loan_guidance_2015_v1_8.pdf)

Research indicates that Integration Loans are not meeting their policy objective.<sup>15,16</sup> As one of the most urgent needs for newly-recognised refugees is finding accommodation, Integration Loans are increasingly being used to prevent homelessness by paying for a portion or full deposit. The right to adequate housing is recognised in international law as a human right,<sup>17</sup> and as such, should not be considered an aspect of integration so much as a necessary component of living in safety.

Evidence from our services also points to other issues with Integration Loans.<sup>18</sup> Some refugees wait longer than 10 weeks for their loan application to be processed; amounts are rarely, if ever, greater than £500. With only 28 days to find accommodation, Integration Loans are not even meeting the need for housing, let alone activities that could aid integration such as vocational training courses.

We recommend that the target time for processing an application for an Integration Loan must be less than the length of the move-on period. The level allocated for a loan should take account of costs of local private rented accommodation and decisions should be monitored.

#### **4. Improved coordination between the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions, and other government departments, to support a smooth transition for newly-recognised refugees into mainstream services.**

Newly-recognised refugees are affected not only by Home Office policies but also by other government policies, particularly from the DWP. Since the move-on period encompasses many basic aspects of life, such as housing, welfare, employment, and banking, it is crucial that government departments work together to ensure the transition from asylum support to mainstream services is as smooth as possible. Even small changes made by coordinated government departments have the potential to make significant improvements to the experiences of newly-recognised refugees.

An example of recent efforts made by the Home Office and DWP exemplifying the benefits of improved coordination between these departments was a change in policy related to BRP cards. As mentioned earlier, NINOs are now printed on the back of BRP cards when they are issued. Previously, people seeking asylum had to apply for a NINO while in the asylum system and it was issued separately to a BRP once they received status. Our 2014 report highlights the significant issues and delays that this process caused.<sup>19</sup> The new policy was introduced in January 2018 and it has successfully reduced one of the frictions in the move-on process.

The PGAS is another example where the Home Office and DWP have worked together to try to help refugees overcome barriers in accessing the Job Centre to submit claims for welfare benefits. Although this pilot did not address the gap between the move-on period and the Universal Credit assessment period, it shows both willingness and capability for government departments to successfully collaborate.

In the future, we encourage the DWP, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and other government departments such as HM Revenue and Customs, to develop their respective policies in tandem with the Home Office's asylum and refugee policies.

A crucial way this could be done is by applying the principles of the DWP's 'managed migration' process for those moving from legacy welfare benefits to Universal Credit. The DWP applies transitional protection

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/refugee-support/still-an-ordeal-move-on-period-report.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0004/0316/APPG\\_on\\_Refugees\\_-\\_Refugees\\_Welcome\\_report.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0004/0316/APPG_on_Refugees_-_Refugees_Welcome_report.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS21\\_rev\\_1\\_Housing\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/7935/England\\_s\\_Forgotten\\_Refugees\\_final.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/7935/England_s_Forgotten_Refugees_final.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/1769/28\\_days\\_later.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/1769/28_days_later.pdf)

to these cases to ensure they are not financially worse off once on Universal Credit.<sup>20</sup> A similar scenario should apply to those leaving asylum accommodation and accessing mainstream income sources, whether this is from welfare or employment.

For example, where a newly-recognised refugee has made a claim for benefits, their asylum support should not stop until the first full welfare payment has been received by the applicant. Likewise, for those who have secured employment within the move-on period, asylum support should not be stopped until they have received their first full set of earnings. This would serve to ensure newly-recognised refugees do not experience a gap in income.

Moreover, improved coordination between government departments should involve discussions around the recommendations in this paper, including providing newly-recognised refugees with a cash grant upon receipt of status in-line with what resettled refugees receive, and establishing PRS schemes specifically for refugees. Other DWP policies such as the benefit cap, two-child limit and disability benefits assessment processes, also directly and adversely affect refugees.<sup>21</sup> We recommend that these policies be revised by taking into consideration the needs of refugees in the UK, and in cooperation with the Home Office.

## Structural changes to asylum and refugee policy:

### **1. The 28-day move-on period should be abolished and asylum support should not be terminated until an alternative form of income has been secured.**

The policy recommendations made above, although strongly encouraged, do not address the underlying causes of homelessness and destitution among newly-recognised refugees. Access to regular income and secure accommodation are the two most pressing issues this group faces, and these are exacerbated by the short period of time allowed by the move-on period.

The HRA recognises that 28 days' notification of eviction is no longer long enough to ensure the prevention of homelessness, and the 35-day waiting period for Universal Credit – and inconsistent provision of advance payments – means that it is nearly impossible to receive a first benefit payment within the current move-on period. The intentions behind these legislative reforms do not tally with current asylum policy, and it is time that this changes.

We recommend abolishing the 28-day move-on period. This will remove the high likelihood of newly-recognised refugees becoming homeless or destitute. It will provide the time necessary to wait for identity documentation, which in turn overcomes the barriers to opening a bank account, thus allowing for the payment of welfare benefits or income and the subsequent ability to pay a deposit on a secure tenancy.

We also recommend that the Home Office should maintain asylum support until newly-recognised refugees have secured an alternative form of income. This should be done as outlined above, through improved coordination between the Home Office and the DWP, HM Revenue and Customs, and other relevant government departments.

This recommendation also aligns policy affecting newly-recognised refugees with resettled refugees who receive accommodation and monetary support from the day they arrive in the UK. The value of this type of reception has been shown through the success of government resettlement programmes, and its principles should be implemented for newly-recognised refugees as a matter of urgency.

<sup>20</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-07-22/debates/8111667B-E194-41D6-9496-FE1E870225E6/UniversalCreditManagedMigration>

<sup>21</sup> <https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/All%20Kids%20Count%20report%20FINAL.pdf>

## **2. Government should introduce a National Refugee Integration Strategy for refugees drawing on lessons and best-practice from resettlement programmes and other services.**

Refugees have experiences of trauma, persecution, and violence, regardless of how they have arrived to the UK. Granting of refugee status is recognition of these experiences and of the need for protection. Although refugees have different levels of independence, resilience, and capabilities, all should be afforded the same opportunities to rebuild their lives in safety. Whether refugees claimed asylum or were resettled should not impact the type of support available for their integration.

As stated in our 2016 report, 'the Government's flagship resettlement programme for Syrian refugees demonstrates that Ministers clearly understand that refugees need specialist support to integrate into British society if they are to successfully begin rebuilding their lives.'<sup>22</sup> This is applicable for newly-recognised refugees and should be acted upon as such.

We therefore recommend the Government introduces a National Refugee Integration Strategy for all refugees drawing on lessons and best-practice from resettlement programmes and other services such as the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy in Scotland.<sup>23</sup> This strategy would be similar to the previous Refugee Integration and Employment Strategy, and should be flexible enough to ensure those facing specific barriers can be supported to access all services to which they are entitled.

Although we welcome the progress made through the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy in recognising the specific needs of newly-recognised refugees, it is a broad strategy encompassing a number of varied communities.<sup>24</sup> We therefore encourage the development of a national strategy which particularly addresses the immediate crisis issues faced by newly-recognised refugees, one that also includes a tangible programme of support as outlined below.

The National Refugee Integration Strategy should include intensive support for at least 12 months in-line with what is offered to resettled refugees, and should outline plans for providing support with:

- access to education, ESOL, health and mental health, and other essential services,
- employment and vocational training services,
- social and community well-being initiatives,
- and with a particular focus on supporting refugees' transition from the asylum system to an alternative form of income and accommodation

To ensure such a programme is properly resourced, a similar level of funding as that provided for resettlement programmes should be allocated to the implementation of this strategy. This should be in addition to a cash grant for newly-recognised refugees which is in-line with what resettled refugees receive.

Our experience supporting the integration of refugees as well as extensive research indicates that an abolition of the 28-day move-on period, a one-off cash grant, and comprehensive support and guidance with accessing secure accommodation, alternative income, and mainstream services, would decrease the incidences of homelessness and destitution among newly-recognised refugees. At the point when refugees should be able to feel relief and joy by the Government's acknowledgement of their experiences and need for protection, it is imperative they are then offered appropriate support to integrate. The above recommendations would go a long way in ensuring newly-recognised refugees no longer face a terrifying cliff-edge, and instead feel welcomed and supported to rebuild their lives in safety.

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<sup>22</sup> [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/7935/England\\_s\\_Forgotten\\_Refugees\\_final.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0003/7935/England_s_Forgotten_Refugees_final.pdf) pg. 7

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/working-for-change/new-scots/>

<sup>24</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/777160/Integrated\\_Communities\\_Strategy\\_Government\\_Response.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777160/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Government_Response.pdf)