

Coronavirus: Supporting people with no recourse to public funds or housing

Lift rules that prevent everyone accessing life-saving support and accommodation during this crisis, regardless of their immigration status.

Context

During this global public health emergency, it is vital that we remove any barriers currently in place for people who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and enable them to access housing. The social distancing, self-isolation, and material support inherent to any socially effective and therefore public health response must apply to everyone in our communities. Everyone should have access to safe accommodation, support, health services and basic necessities including food and utilities.

Currently people from abroad who are not entitled to help from the council will not get housing assistance. If a council decides that a household is not eligible for housing assistance, it currently has no further duty to help them, regardless of the rest of their circumstances. If the council has already provided the household with temporary accommodation, they can be asked to leave. Access to public funds may also be refused and this leaves people destitute, homeless and extremely vulnerable to contracting coronavirus, which in turn will put others at risk in our communities.

People with NRPF in Scotland are usually supported by charities until they can stabilise their immigration status. A number of organisations provide emergency accommodation, such as volunteer homes and winter night shelters, and some of these facilities are shutting. We are particularly concerned about shared accommodation with shared bathroom and cooking facilities, which is not suitable as it does not allow people to self-isolate or to be able to socially distance themselves.

What and why we are calling for this

During this health emergency people are likely to be facing even more difficulty accessing advice services, many of which are shutting their doors and paring down to telephone and online digital services, which are already potentially difficult for this group of people to access.

Many [EEA Nationals in Scotland](#) might also be in a very precarious position if they have been in work, but have now lost their job due to coronavirus. EEA Nationals may be considered ineligible for housing and benefits if they are not 'Exercising Treaty Rights', so for EEA nationals to be eligible for assistance they must be workers, self-employed, family members of workers etc. They may be able to retain their rights as a worker, but it is very complicated to prove their work status, even more so where jobs have been cash in hand.

Solution

SG and all local authorities must do everything within their power to ensure that those who are subject to immigration control will not face barriers in accessing safe and suitable accommodation, funding and essential services during this health emergency. There should be no discrimination in the delivery of these services.

We are calling on Scottish Government to ensure that Local Authorities have the necessary guidance and resource to provide assistance (including accommodation) to people with no recourse to public funds, and where necessary shall use the power to advance well-being. ¹

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2003/1/section/20>

Protecting asylum seekers in Glasgow and across all asylum dispersal areas in the UK

Context

We are faced with truly exceptional circumstances and there is a pressing need to mitigate the associated risks to public health that would arise from evictions in asylum accommodation during this period.

What and why we are calling for this

Shelter Scotland is working with a coalition of organisations who support refugees in Glasgow. We are all seeking assurances directly from the Home Office that no evictions will be carried out, and that there should be no immigration enforcement raids at asylum accommodation during this health emergency.

We are strongly recommending that financial support should be guaranteed for all in asylum accommodation. This should be irrespective of whether asylum support has been discontinued previously. There should be a comprehensive and reliable package of support, with no interruptions to, and full continuity of essential services and provisions, particularly food and utilities (water, gas, and electricity). We are also calling for clear arrangements for necessary and emergency repairs that can be conducted safely, minimising coronavirus risk for all parties: residents, staff and contractors. There must also be clear information and practicable access to local health advice and services

Solution

We are calling on the Home Office to stop all evictions and raids at asylum accommodation and to make sure all asylum seekers receive financial support and have access to required services.