



BRIEFING PAPER: SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE DEBATE ON ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION, 10 SEPTEMBER 2025

Shelter Scotland exists to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society. We work in communities to understand the problem and change the system. We run national campaigns to fight for home.

Scotland is in the grip of a devastating housing emergency that damages lives every day. The Scottish Government and UK Governments must take urgent and radical action to reduce the number of children living in temporary accommodation, deliver the social homes we need, and uphold and enforce people's lifeline housing rights. We cannot normalise a situation which sees over 10,000 children in temporary accommodation, laws being ignored on a daily basis, Scotland's three largest local authorities being in systemic failure in their homelessness services, and 13 local authorities declaring housing emergencies. Political and market failure has led to this situation, and it is long overdue for politicians to take the emergency actions needed to reverse decades of decline.

The broken and biased housing system in Scotland entrenches existing inequalities in Scotland, and systemic racism is a defining feature of Scotland's housing system. Action is needed to reduce the impact of this racism – and this includes standing against racist attitudes which are seeking to weaponise the housing emergency in order to terrify and attack those who require Scotland's support.

Facts and definitions

Recent debates around the asylum system, refugee rights and homelessness have regrettably led to misinformation being widely shared.

This has been particularly true of local connection legislation, which was suspended with parliamentary approval in 2022, during this parliamentary session. **These changes to local connection legislation are completely unrelated to the issue of refugee homelessness** – the changes did not alter rules for whether people recently granted refugee status can move to Scotland from elsewhere in the UK, or between Scottish local authorities. **Those leaving the asylum system are not deemed in law to have formed a local connection to any area, and thus have always been able to move to a local authority of their choosing.** This legislation is completely separate to the removal of 'priority need', which has been abolished in Scotland since 2012.

The reasons for people choosing Scotland are varied, including having friend, family or community connections to Scotland. Scotland's ageing population also requires migration in order to sustain our public services and economy, and it is a stated policy of the Scottish Government to attract more people to Scotland. Attracting people from other parts of the UK, which has traditionally been a challenge for Scotland, can help tackle some of the impending challenges we are facing in our services and economy, and managing this effectively could reap positive outcomes for Scotland as a whole.

Additionally, the UK's draconian and **complex asylum system has one certainty at its heart – that people will experience homelessness once the decision is made on their case.** As the

Home Office manages asylum housing and asylum cases, their decisions have an impact on Scottish local authorities, who are given almost no notice that these decisions are being made. Preventing people from working while they await their claim, and then evicting them from their accommodation within 28, or 56, days of the decision on their claim, leaves people with almost no support.

This UK Government policy is homelessness by design.

People, and local authorities, are being deliberately failed by that intentionally broken system. Those with the least power in our society are not the problem, government failure is.

The failure to meet the backlog in the asylum system has arrived at the same time as Scotland's homelessness system is broken and we are in a national housing emergency and local housing emergencies. These structurally broken systems have caused the weaponisation of the housing system, and people are being failed as a result.

Our asks

We reiterate our calls for the UK Government to:

- **Put an end to the 'hostile environment' policies which have caused untold harm and hardship across the UK**
- **Provide adequate funding to local authorities to ensure they are able to meet the housing needs of refugee and asylum populations, including additional funding for local authorities facing the largest demand on services**
- **Embed a truly anti-racist approach to migration and asylum throughout government, particularly within the Home Office, so everyone is able to get the help and support they need, with dignity and humanity at the heart of policymaking.**

We also call on the Scottish Government to take immediate and emergency actions to ensure everyone has a safe, secure place to call home, by:

- **Committing to long-term investment in social homes post-2026**, including a commitment to deliver the homes needed over the next parliament to reduce affordable housing need, and providing the funding needed to achieve this.
- **Ending failures to provide temporary accommodation** by providing local authorities with all the resources they need to uphold housing rights.
- **Reducing the number of children being harmed in unsuitable, unsafe and unending temporary accommodation** by the end of this parliament.
- **Reaffirming the commitment to Scotland's existing housing and homelessness rights** framework and no rolling back of these lifeline rights.
- **Restating that the housing emergency has not been caused by Scotland's minoritised ethnic communities, migrants, refugees or asylum seekers.**

Scotland's housing emergency is the result of decades of failure across our housing system, and our asylum system has been broken by a decades-long race to the bottom in efforts to undermine the rights of those seeking sanctuary in the UK.

Further attacks on those with the least power in our society will not solve any of our social ills. It is the responsibility of our elected MSPs and MPs to find solutions that work for Scotland, that uphold our obligations under international law, and to ensure that any debate on this issue is factual, accurate, and avoids spreading misinformation which will be weaponised by increasingly emboldened racist voices in our society.