

Working with migrants and refugees during the COVID-19 crisis (15 April)



Chartered
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Housing

Coronavirus (COVID-19) may be particularly worrying to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, not only those who are social housing tenants but the many living in the private rented sector or in asylum accommodation. Worst affected are likely to be those who are sleeping rough or sofa-surfing, especially if they can't access housing or benefits because they have 'no recourse to public funds' (known as 'NRPF').

This fact sheet is intended to help those working with people with different kinds of immigration status, whether they are tenants or come to you for advice. It is based on the information provided by the [housing rights website](#), run by CIH and BMENational for migrants who need help and for advisers who need detailed guidance on eligibility for housing and benefits.

The fact sheet looks separately at help for those with no recourse to public funds, for migrants with longer-term permission to be in the UK and more generally for all non-UK nationals.

This fact sheet explains changes that affect England, Wales and Scotland. Please look at the housing rights [coronavirus page](#) for regular updates. For Northern Ireland, Housing Advice NI has [specific guidance for migrants](#) in various languages.

Helping people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

NRPF normally means having no access to benefits or social housing. People with NRPF can be in a variety of circumstances putting them at risk during the crisis, for example:

- Migrant workers from outside Europe in low paid jobs - may be forced to work even when ill (see this [briefing](#) on the issue)
- Lone parents who are working - who may lose their job or be unable to work now that schools are closed, and may be ineligible for benefits.
- People with unclear immigration status (e.g. asylum seekers appealing against a decision) who are sharing with friends - may be asked to leave because of the crisis.

- Rough sleepers who can't access normal hostel accommodation.
- Asylum seekers who cannot work or receive benefits but are supported by the Home Office while their applications are processed.

At the start of the crisis, [60 organisations wrote to the prime minister](#) setting out the steps needed to tackle NRPF. Some of these have been put in place (see next page). The NRPF Network has published [guidance for local authorities](#) (pdf) about the support they should give to people who don't have access to public funds. The House of Commons Library has [published a briefing](#) on the issue.

Guidance for:

- England
- Wales
- Scotland

COVID-19
FACT SHEET #9

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Extra money for local services

Governments are providing extra money for local services, with a specific emphasis on tackling rough sleeping and NRPF:

- The Westminster government is providing English local authorities with £1.6 billion to provide extra services and has directed them to use part of these funds to provide rough sleeper accommodation (see below). Funding allocations to each council are shown [here](#). This money does not count as 'public funds' and can therefore be used to help those with NRPF.
- The Scottish Government has [announced](#) £350 million of funding for community wellbeing. Councils [are advised](#) to take a 'public health response' to meet the accommodation and other needs of people with NRPF.
- The Welsh Government [has announced](#) an initial £30 million extra funding for local authorities with 'no restriction on provision for those with no recourse to public funds'.

Helping rough sleepers and sofa-surfers

People may be sleeping rough or in other insecure accommodation (sofa-surfing, sleeping in a car) for many different reasons, one of which can be because they are migrants who have no access to public funds. In London, around half of rough sleepers are non-UK nationals, many with NRPF. Of course, people with NRPF are at least as vulnerable as anyone else to the coronavirus. For this reason, various government measures have been put in place:

- **England.** The government [wrote to local authorities on March 27](#) requiring them to find appropriate accommodation for all rough sleepers and other vulnerable people 'by the end of the week'. It also urged them to 'utilise alternative powers and funding to assist those with no recourse to public funds who require shelter and other forms of support due to the COVID-19 pandemic'. Many are using hotels to do this via their homelessness teams. In London, [Street Link](#) helps connect rough sleepers to local services.
- **Scotland.** The Scottish Government has provided [£300,000 for rough sleeper](#)

[accommodation](#) in hotels in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Glasgow City Council says it is [providing hotel accommodation](#) for all rough sleepers.

- **Wales.** [Cardiff City Council](#) is using the WG funding to provide emergency accommodation and meals for rough sleepers at a hotel and a YMCA hostel.

Hostels and day centres

There is [government guidance](#) for hostel or day centre providers of services for people in England experiencing rough sleeping. Welsh Government guidance is [here](#) and Scottish Government guidance [here](#) (pdf). CIH has produced [good practice guidance](#) (pdf, updated March 25) for those running temporary accommodation and day centres.

Single parents and NRPF

One reason for having NRPF is because the person entered the UK as the spouse of a UK national from whom she/he is now separated. Even if the spouse is caring for children who are UK nationals, she/he may not have had sufficient time in the UK to receive indefinite leave to remain and be eligible for benefits. Now, as working single parents, their income may be at risk because they lose their job or are unable to work because schools have closed.

A group of single parents is [taking court action](#) to try to get these restrictions lifted.

Free schools meals have been extended to a wider range of families including those with no recourse to public funds. Details [here](#).

Asylum accommodation

In [a letter to the Red Cross](#), the government announced that - at least until the end of June - asylum seekers whose claims have been decided will not be required to leave supported accommodation, whether or not their claim is rejected.

This means that if an asylum seeker receives a positive decision on their application, for the time being they will not have to leave Home Office-provided accommodation. However, councils are recommended to assist any who decide to leave during this period, as otherwise they could be faced with numbers requesting

homelessness help after the crisis ends, all with only 28 days or less in which to find housing.

Other asylum seeker issues

Guidance for asylum seekers and those supporting them is available from [ASAP](#). They have [guidance correct at March 27](#) (pdf) and this will be updated. The Home Office has paused its asylum interviews and are currently exploring alternative ways to conduct these (possibly by increasing the use of video links). The Refugee Council has [a news page](#) on COVID-19 which is regularly updated. Casework advice on asylum support can also be obtained from [Refugee Action](#).

Domestic abuse victims

Domestic abuse is reported to have worsened during the crisis and the government has now issued [specific guidance](#) (April 11). However, according to [a letter signed by 22 organisations](#), victims may not be receiving the help they need. Refugees may either be full or may turn away migrant women with no access to public funds. [Government advice](#) does not cover NRPF cases. The government [has said](#) that part of its £750 million 'boost' for charities will go towards domestic abuse services.

[COVID-19 guidance](#) is provided by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance. Southall Black Sisters has a [last resort fund](#) for people in these circumstances.

Modern slavery victims

People recognised as modern slavery victims will be [allowed to stay in government-funded safe accommodation](#) for the next three months.

Reporting conditions and visa extensions during the crisis

After lobbying by Migrants Organise and the Helen Bamber Foundation, reporting conditions have been [temporarily paused](#). This means that people who have to regularly report to immigration authorities no longer have to do so and will be advised by text message when reporting recommences. In addition, [visas are extended](#) for those unable to leave the UK during the crisis.

Helping people with longer-term permission to be in the UK

Benefits and pensions

Changes have been made to universal credit and other benefits during the crisis. There is [government guidance on the changes](#) - it is updated regularly. A [CIH fact sheet](#) (pdf) explains the measures and is also being updated. Please check these for general guidance.

Here are some extra points about how the changes affect migrants:

- A European national (someone from the EU or from the other countries in the European Economic Area) who is living here and becomes sick with the virus, and who is self-employed or in paid employment when they do so, keeps their self-employed/worker status while incapable of work. They should pass this test if self-employed and they claim benefits, or if they are working and receive statutory sick pay.
- Those receiving universal credit and/or jobseeker's allowance as a worker who retains his/her status aren't limited to six months benefit: they are treated as a worker for as long as they are incapable of work - for detailed advice see our housing rights [advisers' page on benefits](#).
- If someone enters the UK while on a contributory sickness benefit from their home country, the home country is still responsible for paying it. But if someone starts work in the UK then the DWP is responsible - in some cases even if their earnings are below the national insurance threshold.

Document checks for new lettings in England

Under the 'right to rent' rules, private landlords in England have to check tenants' documents before starting a new tenancy (and housing associations must do this too, when they make lettings from their own lists). The government is not relaxing the checks themselves, but landlords no longer need to see original documents. According to [Home Office guidance](#):

- checks of applicants' eligibility to rent can now be carried out by video calls
- applicants can send scanned documents by email or mobile app.

However, landlords will have to repeat the checks in the normal way when the crisis ends, re-checking any tenancies that began after March 30.

EU Settlement Scheme applications

EU nationals resident in the UK have until 30 June 2021 to apply for Settled Status, and some social landlords have been helping tenants who find the application process difficult.

Applications continue to be processed but will take longer than usual. Some of the support services and application routes have temporarily changed:

- **Settlement Resolution Centre (SRC)** - The SRC will no longer answer phone calls but will respond to email enquiries and provide a call back function when required. Emails from support organisations will be prioritised where possible.
- **ID document scanner locations** - are suspended.
- **Postal route for submitting Identity evidence** - This is currently suspended. All documents already sent in will be returned as quickly as possible. Applications can still be made online using the "EU Exit ID Document check app".
- **Grant-funded voluntary and community sector organisations** - Some have been suspended but may provide support in other ways, e.g. via telephone and online. Check with individual organisations for details.

There are still 15 months before the deadline of for applications. Additional support is available to those who cannot easily apply online through [Assisted Digital](#), which offers assistance over the phone.

Check the housing rights [Brexit page](#) for details of changes during the crisis period.

Refugee resettlement

Refugee resettlement, through which local authorities accept people from refugee camps for housing and support in the UK, has been [temporarily suspended](#). New arrivals will be postponed until at least April 20.

Helping all migrants understand and deal with COVID-19

Health guidance for migrants on COVID-19

Doctors of the World have provided guidance for patients about the virus in [more than 40 different languages](#). DotW also runs [clinics in London](#) where migrants can get assistance without being asked about their immigration status. You can also make use of [Share Docs Not Cops' Health Cards](#) so that everyone knows their rights and entitlements to accessing healthcare, and find out what care is chargeable, and what is exempt.

Mutual aid groups

Together with Medact, Docs Not Cops, and JCWI, Migrants Organise has put together a [guide for mutual aid groups](#) who are supporting migrants during the pandemic, with useful resources and links for more info.

Emergency grant funding - voluntary groups

- Crisis has a [UK-wide fund](#) to assist groups working in the homelessness sector during the crisis.
- There is a list of organisations of all types offering grants during the crisis at [GrantsOnline](#).

Official sources of information

- The Whitehall government has set up [a page with links to government guidance for local authorities](#), which is regularly updated.
- The Welsh Government has [a similar page](#) with sections on housing and benefits.
- In Scotland, Cosla has [a page of guidance](#) on migrant-related issues for local authorities.

Other national sources of information

- The Refugee Council's [COVID-19 page](#) has an excellent summary of issues relevant to asylum seekers and refugees.
- Refugee Action has produced the [Coronavirus Asylum Handbook](#) which is updated by users.
- Free Movement has [a webpage](#) which summarises COVID-19-related immigration changes: it is being updated as further changes occur.
- Wilsons Solicitors have also produced [a guide to immigration changes](#) resulting from COVID-19.
- Shelter has [a new advice page](#) which is being updated regularly.
- Mutual Aid for Refugees has a [directory of resources for migrants](#) which is being regularly updated.
- The Centre for Homelessness Impact has [a guide on homelessness topics](#), split between England, Wales, Scotland and N Ireland.

Other regional sources of information (England). These include:

- North West [Strategic Migration Partnership](#)
- North East [Migration Partnership](#)
- Yorkshire [Migrant Information Hub](#)
- West Midlands [Strategic Migration Partnership](#)
- East Midlands [Strategic Migration Partnership](#)
- East of England [Strategic Migration Partnership](#)
- South East [Strategic Partnership for Migration](#)
- South West [Strategic Migration Partnership](#)
- London [Mayor's guidance for non-UK nationals](#)

Please let us know of any developments that should be included here (email policyandpractice@cih.org with any suggestions).