

# Number of refugees evicted into homelessness triples in wake of Home Office asylum change

At least 1,500 people became homeless in less than three months, as new Big Issue figures reveal scale of refugee homelessness crisis

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The number of refugees becoming homeless after leaving asylum accommodation has tripled after controversial changes to Home Office policy, The Big Issue can reveal, as fears that thousands will be forced onto the streets by Christmas appear to be coming true.

Almost 1,500 refugees were assessed as homeless between August and October, up from 450 in the same period last year.

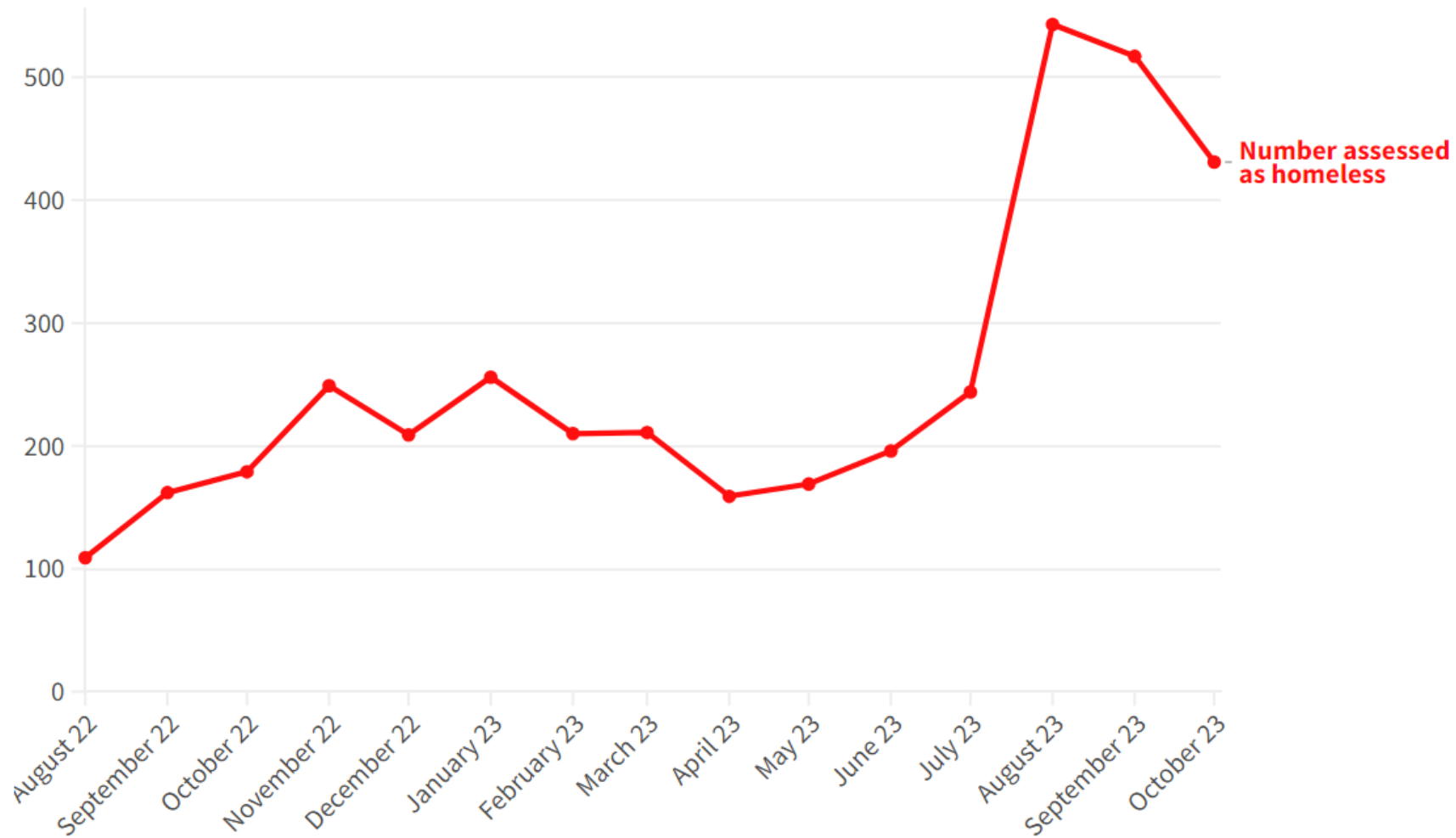
The spike is thanks to changes to the way the move-on period – a “grace period” given for newly-recognised refugees to leave Home Office accommodation – is handled, as well as an influx of decisions as the government tries to clear the backlog.

**The Big Issue has been investigating the impact and extent of the crisis. Read more of our reporting here:**

- ['We're living in a nightmare': Iraqi refugee family evicted into homelessness has lost 'all sense of safety' in UK](#)
- [Shadow minister slams 'chaotic and incompetent' Home Office over refugee homelessness crisis](#)
- [Allowing asylum seekers to work will help tackle growing refugee homelessness crisis, says Scottish government minister](#)

# Refugee homelessness has skyrocketed after Home Office changes

Number of households homeless after leaving Home Office accommodation



Source: Big Issue Freedom of Information requests • Figures for October 2023 do not cover whole month, and so true figure is likely to be higher



Already-stretched councils are being hit hard. Bradford saw a sevenfold increase. Leicester almost tripled. There was a fivefold increase in Coventry.

Manchester saw 80 become homeless in this period, Leeds 70, Sheffield 85, Blackburn 83, and Sandwell 85.

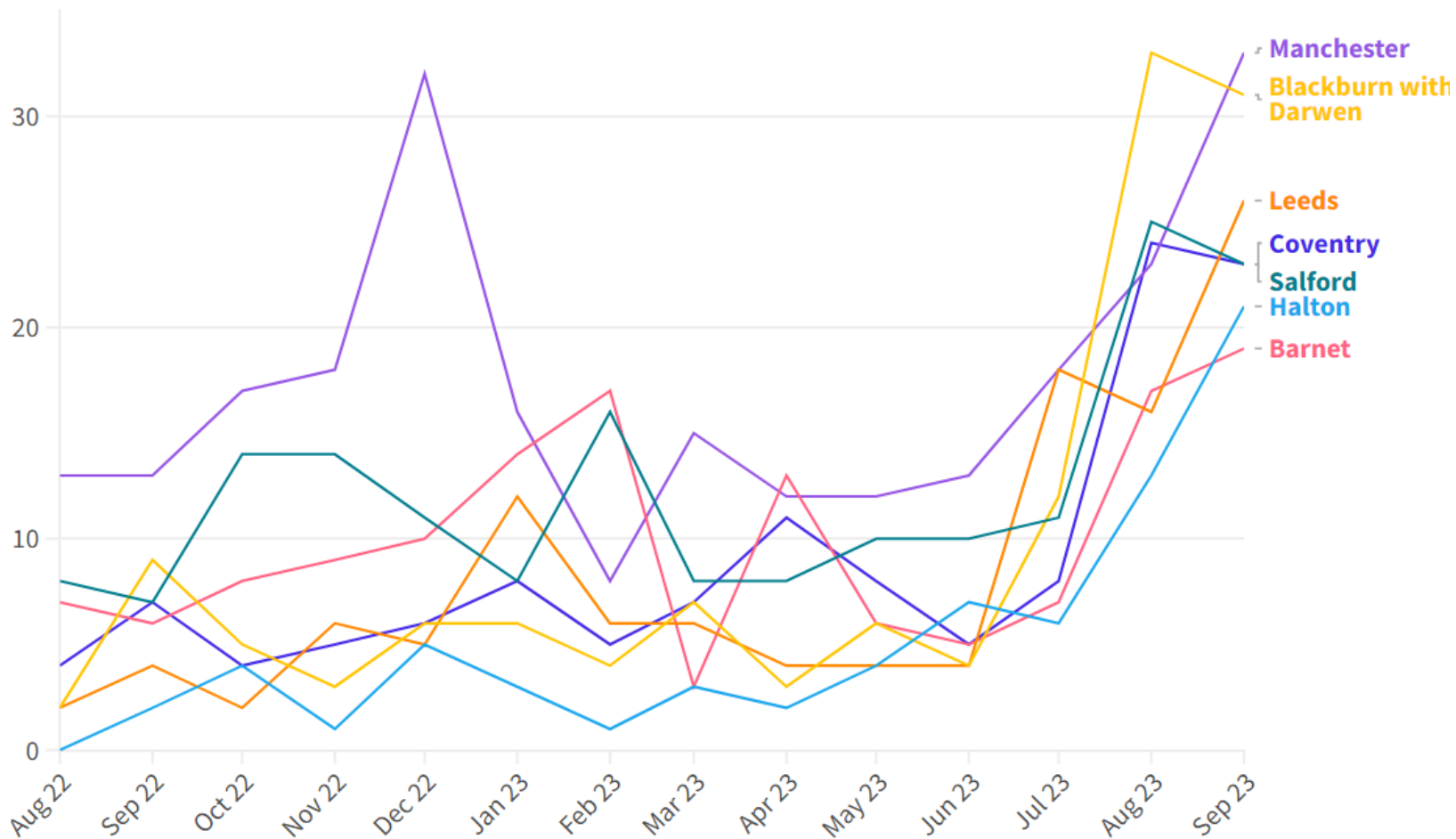
Kama Petruczenko, senior policy analyst at the Refugee Council, said the figures showed an asylum system forcing people into poverty.

“It’s worrying to see such a sharp increase in the number of refugees presenting as homeless after leaving their asylum accommodation, and estimates have shown that the issue is likely to become much worse in the coming months,” Petruczenko told The Big Issue.

“These are people whose lives have been on hold for years, who have been unable to work and accumulate savings, and who often lack proper networks of support as they leave the asylum system and start their new lives in the UK.”

Charities have been sounding the alarm over the influx, and The Big Issue has been reporting fears from councils that thousands would be homeless by Christmas. These numbers provide a sign this is playing out – and that the crisis is having an impact across the country.

## Councils are seeing demand skyrocket as refugees are evicted into homelessness



Source: Big Issue FOI requests • Households assessed as homeless after leaving Home Office accommodation, selected councils



Using Freedom of Information laws, we asked 100 councils with the most supported asylum seekers, how many households were assessed as homeless (in technical terms, owed the relief duty under the housing act) after leaving Home Office asylum accommodation.

A total of 52 local authorities supplied data, which covers the period up to mid-October. Many provided data on households – which may contain more than one person – while the figures do not cover those who simply dropped out of the system.

By contrast, across the whole of England, 3,830 households were assessed as homeless after leaving asylum accommodation in the year to March 2023. At this rate, a figure of 1,491 is what the whole country – made up of 333 local authorities – could expect to see in around four and a half months. Instead, just 50 councils have had to deal with this level of need in under three months.

Bridget Young, director of NACCOM, a network of frontline charities that offer support and accommodation to refugees and people in the asylum system, said: “The alarming spike in homeless refugees since August 2023 is now turning an already challenging situation into a full-blown homelessness crisis in our cities and communities.

“This is in the midst of a wider housing crisis, when levels of homelessness and destitution are on the rise across the board”, said Young, who said NACCOM’s members have seen a 50% increase in demand.

“While it’s essential for people to move on from asylum hotel accommodation into more appropriate, community-based housing, this can only be done with time, consideration and the right support – not by evicting people into homelessness.”

The Home Office says it has reduced the backlog of legacy cases by 59,000 from November 2022 to October 2023. As these decisions are made, refugees living in asylum accommodation provided by the Home Office are told to leave.

Local authorities, already facing a severe shortage of temporary accommodation, are finding it impossible to provide them with somewhere to live. It's creating tension, as councils complain of a lack of support and information. MPs on the Public Accounts Committee found the Home Office "is failing to engage meaningfully with local authorities on decisions that affect their residents and already strained public services".

They added: "Worryingly, the lack of coordination between the Home Office and local government means the Home Office is competing with councils and their partners to secure accommodation, driving up prices and exacerbating the homelessness challenges that local authorities already face."

The Home Office says refugees are still getting 28 days once their asylum claim is granted. But charities have warned that a change in August to the way this is handled means, in practice, just a week is often being afforded, increasing the risk of homelessness.

Our data shows the homelessness figure doubled from July to August.

In fact, even 28 days is not enough to prevent homelessness, say charities.

"Alongside other charities and organisations in the refugee sector, we have been calling for the move-on period for new refugees to be extended, to ensure that local authorities are given enough time to step in and provide the necessary support," said Petruczenko.

Lengthening the move-on period to at least 56 days would help setting new refugees up for success and allow them to thrive in their new communities."

Alongside this, NACCOM's Young wants people to receive all their papers at once – so all have at least 28 days to find somewhere.

“We urge the government to commit to ensuring that people leaving asylum support receive all their documentation at once, and to provide all refugees with at least 28-days from the date they receive their notice to quit before their asylum support ends,” she said. “It’s also essential that the government works with the voluntary sector and local authorities to ensure people can access adequate and timely support.

“Ultimately, only the introduction of a 56-day move-on period in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act, along with substantial investment in affordable housing and an immediate commitment to unfreeze the local housing allowance, will significantly mitigate the risks of homelessness that new refugees face when leaving the asylum system.”

A Home Office spokesperson said: “Once someone is informed that their asylum claim has been granted, they get at least 28 days’ notice to move on from their asylum accommodation.

“Support is offered to newly recognised refugees by Migrant Help and their partners, which includes advice on how to access Universal Credit, the labour market and where to get assistance with housing.

“We work with local authorities to help communities manage the impact of asylum decisions.”