



**OUR  
HOME,  
OUR  
RIGHTS!**

**BRIGHTER FUTURES  
HOUSING MANIFESTO**

# BRIGHTER FUTURES

We are Brighter Futures, a group of young people aged 18 to 30 years old who have migrated to the UK and who come together, have fun, build a family in London and speak up for the rights of young people like us. We are fighters for justice and change. We want to transform the way the UK sees young migrant people and challenge the hostile environment's effects on our lives.

Brighter Futures is a partnership project led by Praxis Community Projects and Kazzum Arts. Our Home, Our Rights! has been supported by Praxis, the AHRC Stay Home Stories Project, the Centre for Public Engagement, Queen Mary University of London, Kazzum Arts, Teresa Hare Duke and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and abr.dn.

# INTRODUCTION

The effects of the housing crisis can be felt across the UK population, however communities who have migrated to the UK are disproportionately affected. With plans to deport people to Rwanda, expand detention camps and accommodation estates, the government is focused on policies that are increasingly hostile and force young people to live in unsafe and inadequate conditions.

We believe that there must be safe housing for all, that the unique needs of young people should be considered, and that solutions that provide opportunities for people to integrate and thrive, rather than cause further harm, are within reach. We will explore three core issues we would like to change within asylum accommodation.

## We believe that:

1. Everyone has the right to privacy and should not be forced to share a room.
2. Everyone should have a safe and clean home, with access to a working kitchen.
3. Young people should not be forced to move away from their support network and services.

We want to increase awareness about the reality of housing experiences for young people who have migrated to the UK; challenge decision makers in government who are pushing an increasingly hostile housing policy; and inspire others to join our cause and find tangible solutions that do not include mass accommodation centres.

While this manifesto focuses on asylum accommodation, the key issues and lessons shared are transferable across the housing sector. We hope that anyone working within social housing, hosting, homelessness and the private sector will listen and use this report to ensure that our collective work to tackle the housing crisis will provide safe housing for all.

# 1. We believe that everyone has the right to privacy and should not be forced to share a room.

*“At 21, I was moved into a small room, with two single beds for myself and another young person. With one small window and very little space, it felt like there was no room to breathe. I would lie there all night feeling my body tense every time I heard them turn over or go to the toilet. She was a stranger to me, yet we were forced to sleep opposite each other. We couldn't even speak the same language, the only thing we shared was our sadness, it would pass from one to the other, I couldn't even cry alone.”*

*“In hotels and hostels, we are monitored as if we were in detention centres. When we go out, we are searched, when we come in, we are searched. In some hostels you can share a room with six other people! It should not be a luxury to have a room of your own.”*

While navigating the hostile environment, you can feel like you have no choice or control. It's important to have some privacy and agency over yourself, your movements, your space. However, your privacy can be breached through the extensive controls and monitoring in asylum accommodation and through forcing two or more strangers to share a room.

## Controls and Monitoring

Within asylum accommodation, you can be extensively monitored. Your attendance is taken every day; you cannot stay away for more than two nights; you must tell them where you are going, give the address and who you are seeing, and you cannot bring guests over or have any control over who can come in or out. This can quickly make you feel trapped and overwhelmed. You can feel like you are being watched and the inflexible rules can increase your feelings of isolation.

## Sharing A Room

There are many housing situations in which people who have migrated to the UK can be forced to share rooms with individuals they do not know. This can happen in hostel style accommodation where dorms are used to house 6 people in one room; in army barracks where you can be housed with hundreds of people divided by curtains; or in Houses with Multiple Occupation (HMOs) where two people can be forced to share a room and up to five people can share a bathroom and kitchen.

While the government uses terms such as 'contingency', 'initial', or 'interim' to imply that the length of stay in these accommodations are short term at 3-4 weeks, we have been stuck in these situations for months, even years. Long-term stays in these conditions are hazardous, as they can negatively affect your physical and mental health. Overcrowding can increase stress and anxiety, your heart rate and blood pressure, the spread of infectious diseases, and can decrease your ability to concentrate or sleep. Children and young people in crowded homes are more likely to 'be stressed, anxious and depressed, have poorer physical health, and attain less well at school'. Little control over your personal space and who has access to yourself, and your belongings can cause fear and exhaustion as you have no safe space.

You are reminded of this lack of privacy and safety every time someone knocks on your door, every time your 'roommate' breathes or coughs, or goes to the toilet. They are a stranger to you, they speak a different language, are of a different age, culture, faith etc. Persistent noise caused by an unknown individual sharing your room can quickly become unbearable. The government's Housing Health and Safety Rating System clearly acknowledges the detrimental effects of noise pollution. They state that 'seemingly inconsiderate noises, especially at night are intolerable' ii. While their risk assessment focuses on noise caused by other residents through walls or from outside traffic, the same logic applies to room sharing with a stranger. In these tight conditions, tensions begin to rise and there can be a breakdown of relationships and increased chances of bullying. This is why the government's plans to expand accommodation that mirrors army barracks and detention centres is a significant concern as there will be mass overcrowding.

## Privacy and Sharing. Our Recommendations:

Young people who have migrated to the UK must feel safe and have control over themselves, their movements and who has access to their home, safe space and belongings.

1. There must be an end to all room sharing in asylum accommodation.
2. Residents in asylum accommodation should be allowed to stay where they wish overnight for more than 48 hours.
3. Housing providers in asylum accommodation should provide an adequate communal area where residents can bring guests.
4. Asylum accommodation providers should stop monitoring our every movement.

## 2. We believe that everyone should have a safe and clean home, with access to a working kitchen.

*"I would dream about the mould spreading across the wall, feeling it crawling across my skin. The smell would make me sick, taking over my nose. I would imagine it spreading across my lungs."*

*"People like me have lived in hotels where there is no kitchen, they go to buy food and put it in microwave. They don't ask what you want, you eat what they give you and you do not have the right to bring food from outside. You must eat as much as you can for breakfast because you don't know what you will eat for lunch. You have no choice."*

All accommodation should be free from hazards to residents' physical and mental health, however many young people who have migrated to the UK are forced to live in conditions that are unclean and unsafe. Dwellings do not have adequate facilities, do not meet the standards laid out by the Home Office and providers are failing to keep up with repairs.

## Failing Standards

In Asylum Accommodation, housing standards focus on three categories: safe, habitable and fit for purpose, which must be maintained and repaired in a timely manner. If a dwelling is deemed unsafe it must be fixed within four hours, uninhabitable within 24 hours and unfit within 21 working days.

However, repairs are consistently delayed, leaving us in inadequate and unsafe conditions. From mould to lack of electricity and gas, we have made reports for maintenance that have not been resolved well past the committed time frame. We have had no electricity, heating or hot water in winter, left to make calls after calls to fix the problem and still no solution. The Refugee Council also found that there were examples of delays in addressing urgent repairs that had been reported and given repair tickets through the Advice Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE), this includes lack of heating and broken windows.

Quality of housing standards affects residents' immediate and long-term health outcomes iii. The HHSRS highlights that mould growth can threaten individuals mental and physical health, including allergies and issues with breathing ii. Poor heating and ventilation can exacerbate respiratory and cardiovascular disease vi. Long-term stays in these conditions and constantly fighting for necessary repairs can be exhausting and traumatising.

## Kitchen Facilities

Within hotels, hostels or B&B style accommodation there is no kitchen access. Instead, they provide the same three meals every day. While meals are assessed by a nutritionist to provide a balanced diet with the necessary calories, the Refugee Council has observed an increase in residents reporting weight loss and inadequate food provisions for children. Alternative food plans for dietary requirements or allergies are meant to be available, however we found that alternative meals can be increasingly hard to access. The repetitive food and lack of choice add to the feeling of being trapped and there are no ways to find alternatives. There are no facilities to safely store food so you cannot even find, make or store healthy alternatives.

### Safe and Clean Home. Our Recommendations:

1. There needs to be investment in accommodation that is safe and clean and keeps residents safe from physical and mental harm.
2. Maintenance and repairs must be responded to and completed within the committed time frame.
3. All accommodation must have access to a functioning kitchen and a place to safely store food and heat food.
4. There needs to be a public inquiry into housing standards across social housing, asylum accommodation and private renting.
5. There needs to be a universal housing standard for all. The Decent Home Standard should be applied to asylum accommodation and become a requirement not an aspiration.

## 3. We believe young people should not be forced to move away from their support network and services.

*“I could be sent to Doncaster today, to Portsmouth tomorrow, to anywhere in the UK. You have to leave your community, family, friends, organisations to go where the Home Office sent you, where you have no ties.*

*“The home office wanted me to move to Manchester. How could I move to Manchester? I couldn’t even point it out on a map. I only lived in London; I had never stepped a foot outside London since I moved to the UK. It was all I ever knew and the only family I had ever known. Here I was again without any choice, stuck in a broken system, scared for the future.”*

As a young person who has moved to the UK away from your family, you find another family in your friends and community. The roots you grow in your local area give you strength and help you to keep going and survive all the battles you must face. The constant threat of being pulled away from your support network wears you down and keeps you in survival mode instead of using your energy to build a future. At any moment you can be sent to an unknown area, away from everything you know.

Asylum accommodation centres on a core principle of ‘no choice’, unless the Home Office agrees that you meet the extenuating circumstances to be based locally. However, eligibility has become increasingly hard to achieve, even if young people meet multiple criteria. For example, you must show that your medical treatment cannot be accessed at your future address. A complete lack of medical access is unlikely as the NHS is available across the UK, but this perspective excludes the dangerous disruptions caused by transferring someone to a different NHS trust or locality. There may be long waiting lists that affect treatments or changes in services. It ignores the effects on any mental health support as we can be (re)traumatised by having to re-tell our story or finding and building a relationship with a new doctor or therapist. It can also be hard to remain in London due to your education, as children and young people are expected to transfer schools unless they have started studying for their GCSEs and A Levels.

This can be exceptionally disruptive to our education no matter the age or level, there can be waiting lists and delays in transfers that leave us without

schooling for long periods of time. These transfers also require a confident ability to navigate public services and complete school transfer applications and support through these processes is not available to everyone.

While the move away from our community, health providers and places of education can be detrimental, the Home Office can also send us into areas unable to provide adequate support to settle and thrive. When allocating dispersal accommodation, the Home Office will look at availability, cultural compatibility, health and education services and risk of social tension.

However, young people can struggle to access community support, places of worship, ESOL classes, public transport, legal advice. We can be thrown into situations that are isolating, with no community support or routes to integrate. This is yet another reason why the government's plan to expand accommodation centres is a concern, residents will be moved to inappropriate mass accommodation, far away from their community and support system into areas ill equipped to support their needs.

## Moving Accommodation. Our Recommendations:

1. Home Office criteria for not moving someone to dispersal accommodation far away should consider:
  - a. A young person's access to their community and the length of time they have stayed in initial accommodation to put down roots.
  - b. Disruptions to young people's education, health and wellbeing and medical treatment that would cause harm.
  - c. Whether they want to move or where they want to move to.
2. Locations for dispersal accommodation must meet NACCOM's Dispersal Criteria: that all locations should have safe accommodation, adequate legal aid, thriving voluntary sector, community cohesion, information sharing, trauma informed mental health support, safeguarding framework, ESOL, public transport and move on support.
3. The government must stop their plan to expand asylum accommodation centres and invest in local communities ready and willing to support refugees, asylum seekers and people who have migrated to this country.



## CONCLUSION

While this manifesto focuses on asylum accommodation, we hope the key lessons are embraced across the housing sector. As young people who have migrated to the UK, we have suffered from inadequate accommodation and should not be excluded from any effort to tackle the housing crisis. We believe there must be safe housing for all, the government must stop their plan to expand inadequate asylum accommodation centres and invest in suitable housing embedded within local communities ready and willing to support people who have migrated to this country.

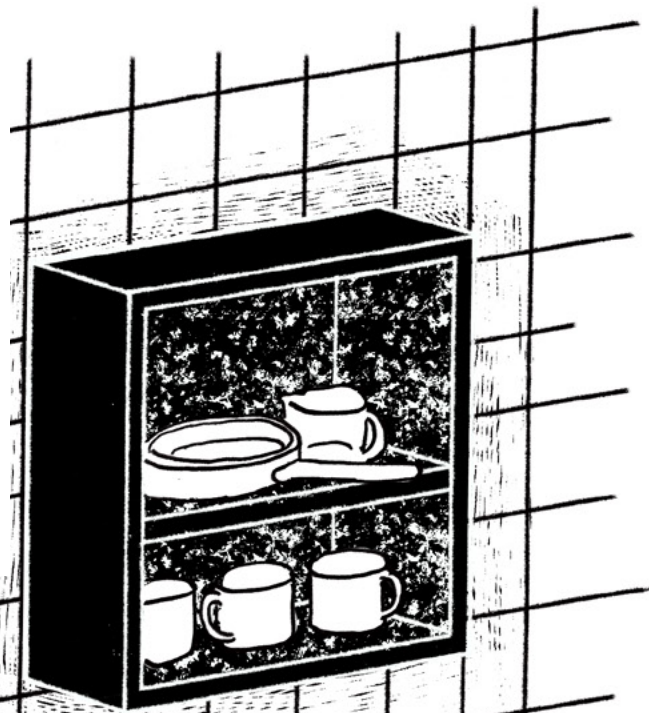
The home office must end room sharing, allow residents to stay overnight for more than 48 hours, provide adequate communal areas for guests and stop monitoring our movements. Long-term stays in overcrowded shared rooms, with persistent noise pollution, can have far-reaching effects on young people's physical and mental health and make us feel trapped and out of control.

There needs to be investment in accommodation that is clean, keeps residents safe from physical and mental harm, and has access to a functioning kitchen. Maintenance and repairs must be responded to and completed within the committed time frame. We can no longer live in accommodation that fails to meet the standards laid out by the Home Office and their contracted accommodation providers.

The Home Office's criteria for not moving a young person to dispersal accommodation far away should consider a young person's access to their community and the length of time they have stayed in initial accommodation; the disruptions to young people's education, health and wellbeing and medical treatment; whether they want to move or where they want to move to; and if the location they are being sent to has the capacity to provide adequate care and support. As young people who have moved to the UK, we live under the constant threat of being moved far away from our support network, keeping us in survival mode. We need to use our energy to build a bright future for ourselves and not just for survival alone.

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# OUR HOME, OUR RIGHTS!

## BRIGHTER FUTURES HOUSING MANIFESTO

This manifesto has been written by Brighter Future members, volunteers and staff at Praxis and Kazzum Arts. We have collected information for this manifesto using our own experiences, interviews with frontline immigration staff at Praxis; and research from government reports, guide and briefings and from organisations that are fighting for housing rights. This manifesto is accompanied by a poetry collection written by Brighter Futures which can be found here [www.brighterfutureslondon.co.uk/projects/our-home-our-rights](http://www.brighterfutureslondon.co.uk/projects/our-home-our-rights). The manifesto is designed and illustrated by Kathryn Corlett.

“We are here to build a brighter future. ‘Ki akoko aḷe wa s̄an ju owur̄o wa lo. May our nighttime be better than our morning.’ This means that no matter how hard things are now, your life and future can be better, and you should never give up”.

– Brighter Futures

