

**Embargoed until 0000 31/01/17**



## **Shocking conditions in asylum housing revealed ahead of parliamentary report**

- **Migrant Voice research in West Midlands reveals 'systematic neglect' in asylum seeker accommodation**
- **Respondents tell stories of infestations, chronic disrepair and intimidation**
- **Government urged to review standards and inspect housing providers**

As Parliament's Home Affairs Select Committee presents its findings on housing for asylum seekers, advocacy charity Migrant Voice has released a dossier on poor conditions. The report, centring on dozens of respondents in Birmingham and the West Midlands, reveals reports of routine disrepair, lack of hygiene, and inappropriate behaviour from officers acting for housing providers.

The report shows over half of respondents stating that their accommodation was unclean, and that they were not provided with cleaning equipment. 44% reported infestation including mice, rats and bedbugs. 50% recorded delays in response to repair requests, including repairs to the electricity and water supply. Only 22% said they felt satisfied with their accommodation, and of those some respondents gave only the reason that it was preferable to street homelessness.

Meanwhile just 11% of respondents felt they had positive interactions with housing provider staff. Many reported feeling intimidated and under scrutiny from housing officers, including instances of knocking without entering, threatening and aggressive behaviour, and sexual harassment. Just 16% of respondents felt physically safe in their accommodation, with many reporting stress or depression.

Typical comments include, "I can't stop crying and I cannot eat because of the mouldy smell. I am 5 months pregnant and I am scared that I have to raise my child in this way with dirt and vermin", "I feel that anything could happen and G4S would not put necessary measures in place to ensure my safety" and "I am not allowed to do what I want to do, my human rights are taken away from me."

Migrant Voice are calling on housing providers to publicise and enforce minimum quality standards, make complaints procedures and operations more transparent, and ensure swift responses to urgent repair requests. It is also seeking a guarantee from the Home Office to review housing contracts for value for money, and provides asylum seekers the option of finding their own preferred accommodation at the same or cheaper cost.

### **Migrant Voice director Nazek Ramadan said:**

"The stories we have heard are deeply worrying. People have come to a country where they hoped to find a welcoming sanctuary from persecution, and instead have told us that they found themselves subject to filthy conditions, abuse, and systematic neglect.

The cost of poor housing to physical health, mental health and life chances is well documented. So is the cost to the public purse of picking up the tab for substandard accommodation.

Everyone – migrant or citizen – deserves a decent, functioning home. We hope that the Home Office and providers adopt our recommendations to improve conditions for some of its most vulnerable residents."

**Ends**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. The report in full is attached to this email. Our research is also quoted in the Home Affairs Select Committee's report, released 31/01/17
2. Interview opportunities with Migrant Voice's director and/or respondents for the report will be considered on request
3. Migrant Voice is a migrant-led organisation established to develop the skills, capacity and confidence of members of migrant communities, including asylum seekers and refugees. It supports migrants to amplify their voice and secure representation in the media and public life.
4. A further contemporary story on the issue of asylum seeker housing can be found here: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jan/24/g4s-filmed-asylum-seekers-in-their-own-homes-without-consent>

For more information about this release please contact [press@migrantvoice.org](mailto:press@migrantvoice.org)