

# Rabbis briefing: The ‘move-on’ period

## What is the ‘move-on’ period?

Under the Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999, people waiting for a decision on their asylum claim can receive housing and financial support to meet essential needs.

If their claim is successful, this support then continues for a further 28 days. This is known as the ‘move-on period’ and gives people just four weeks to find an alternative to Home Office support. During this time, they must secure housing, and either gain employment, or access mainstream welfare support. This is particularly difficult given that government policy prevents people seeking asylum from working while their claims are being processed.

## What challenges does this present?

This policy leaves new refugees vulnerable, giving them insufficient time to navigate complex processes.

Particular issues arise from:

- **Time constraints.** The 28-day period is often inadequate for new refugees to secure housing, employment, and benefits. These obstacles are also heightened by language and cultural barriers.
- **Delayed documentation.** Delays in receiving essential documents like the Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) hinder new refugees from opening bank accounts, securing jobs, and applying for benefits, consequently exacerbating the risk of destitution.
- **Risk of homelessness.** New refugees are at high, and growing, risk of homelessness. Data from NACCOM shows that the number of refugee adults who faced homelessness rose by a **staggering 99%** in 2023/24.



## What have politicians done?

- **Policy changes.** In an effort to clear the backlog, the previous government made a series of changes to the asylum decision process in August 2023. These reduced the move-on period to as little as seven days in some cases, leading to increased homelessness and widespread criticism.
- **Return to previous policy.** In December 2023, due to the backlash, the government reinstated the policy that starts the 28-day period upon receipt of the BRP.
- **Parliamentary debates.** The previous government rejected calls to extend the move-on period. However, in July 2024, new Minister of State (Home Office) Dame Angela Eagle indicated that the Government would consider a policy change.

## Views from the frontline

The current move-on period also places significant pressure on councils. HIAS+JCORE has recently discussed the policy with a number of local authorities – all emphasised serious concerns about it.

Many reported that they have insufficient resources for asylum accommodation, face challenges with housing shortages, and have

**966%**

The increase in rough sleeping amongst people who had left asylum support between May-December 2023 (Homeless Link, 2024).

**35**

Days it takes new applicants to receive their first Universal Credit payment – one week longer than the current ‘move-on’ period.

**£7m**

The annual net benefit the UK could see from doubling the ‘move-on’ period (British Red Cross, 2020).

limited capacity to manage the overwhelmed asylum system in their boroughs.

All of these issues have been exacerbated by the 28 day move-on period. Councils state that this creates a “cliff edge” for new refugees, and subsequently, many local authorities are advocating for a 56 day period that would allow them more time to provide necessary support services.

## What policy changes do we need?

- **Extend the ‘move-on’ period.** Many organizations, including the British Red Cross, Refugee Council, and others, support extending the move-on period to 56 days to align with the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- **Improve the system.** New refugees must receive their BRP promptly. There should also be more joined up work between the Home Office and other agencies, to ensure more efficient and all-encompassing support.

These changes are crucial for better integration, and reducing destitution and the risk of homelessness in new refugees.

## Reflections from a Jewish perspective

One of the most dramatic episodes in the Biblical book of Exodus is the attack on the Children of Israel by the army of Amalek. We are told:

*“Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; How he met you by the way, and struck at your rear, all who were feeble behind you, when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God” (Deuteronomy 25:17-18).*

Much is said about the cruelty of Amalek, and it is not difficult to see why. They target the weak and the weary.

But one thing that stands out for me, is that Amalek strikes all those who were ‘*feeble behind you*’. It is suggestive here that there were people

whom the Children of Israel had left behind and who were therefore extremely vulnerable. Of course, had they been included, and not allowed to be at ‘your rear’, this would not have stopped Amalek’s attack.

At the same time, there surely is a learning here that if we allow people to drop behind, and become more vulnerable, they will be more exposed to hate.

As this briefing makes clear, there are serious difficulties relating to the ‘Move-on period’.

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work and have no recourse to public funds. If they are finally given refugee status to remain in the UK, they are then given 28 days to leave government accommodation and find housing and work, or apply for benefits.

Many fall into destitution. We are effectively turning refugees into an underclass, a group that is left behind, and therefore a group that is easily targeted by far-right hate, as we recently saw across England and Northern Ireland.

This situation parallels the moral lesson from the Amalek story: if society allows refugees to drop ‘*behind you*’ they become more susceptible to harm, including homelessness, destitution, and hate.

Drawing on this ethical perspective and our Jewish teachings, it becomes clear that integrating refugees into the community is not just a matter of policy but a moral imperative.

By providing adequate support and extending the move-on period to at least 56 days, we can prevent refugees from being left behind. Together we must face societal challenges, rather than placing the burden on those seeking refuge.

*Rabbi David Mason, Executive Director, HIAS+JCORE*

## Learn more

Contact David Mason, Executive Director, HIAS+JCORE: [david.mason@hiasjcore.org](mailto:david.mason@hiasjcore.org)

HIAS+JCORE is a registered UK charity, number 1132666. Visit [hiasjcore.org](https://www.hiasjcore.org) to find out more.