



# From Safety to Stability:

Access to move-on  
accommodation after refuge

“ I should be focusing on the  
emotional support of my residents,  
but it takes a back seat to arguing  
with housing. ”

## Author

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Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. For 50 years, Women's Aid has been at the forefront of shaping and coordinating responses to domestic abuse through practice, research and policy. We empower survivors by keeping their voices at the heart of our work, working with and for women and children by listening to them and responding to their needs.

We are a federation of 183 organisations which provide over 300 local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. We provide expert training, qualifications and consultancy to a range of agencies and professionals working with survivors or commissioning domestic abuse services and award a National Quality Mark for services which meet our quality standards.

We hold the largest national data set on domestic abuse and use research and evidence to inform all our work. Our campaigns achieve change in policy, practice and awareness, encouraging healthy relationships and helping to build a future where domestic abuse is no longer tolerated.

Our support services, which include our Email Service, Professionals' Service, the Survivors' Forum, the No Woman Turned Away Project, the Survivor's Handbook, Love Respect (our dedicated website for young people),

the national Women's Aid Directory and our advocacy projects, help thousands of women and children every year.

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## Executive Summary

This report investigates access to move-on accommodation for survivors who are leaving refuge. We explore this by presenting data from the On Track national dataset and focus groups with frontline workers from seven refuge services. The report answers the following research questions.

### **1. What is the availability of move-on accommodation for survivors leaving refuge and in what ways has this changed since 2018?**

In this report, we found that refuge services face three main barriers to sourcing move-on accommodation for their residents which have caused the length of time survivors spend in refuge to increase and the types of move-on accommodation they access to change. Over the past five years, the national housing crisis has depleted local authority housing stocks and made the private rental sector inaccessible for most refuge residents. Social housing has become the only viable option for move-on accommodation. The Domestic Abuse Act (2021), and associated statutory guidance, protects survivors' housing rights, however, refuge workers are often left "battling" against inconsistent applications of the legislation by local authority housing teams. Survivors with additional support needs experienced further delays due to a lack of suitable housing. This is particularly the case for residents who are non-British nationals, have a physical disability or large families.

#### Key findings:

- The average length of stay in refuge has increased for all residents, especially for those who moved into social housing. As we see in this report, this increase reduces spaces available for survivors fleeing abuse and puts additional strain on refuge services. There was an overall increase of 50 days in the average length of stay in refuge between 2018-19 and 2023-24. For residents who moved into social housing, the average increase was nearly two months (59 days).
- More refuge residents are moving into social housing and fewer to the private rental sector. During the past five years, the proportion of residents leaving refuge to go into social housing has increased by 10.1% to nearly half of all residents and the proportion moving into other temporary

accommodation increased by 7.6%. In the same period, the proportion entering the private rental sector has almost halved (decreased from 13.3% to 5.6%).

## **2. How does the availability of move-on accommodation impact refuge services and survivors?**

The delays in accessing appropriate move-on accommodation have several impacts on refuge services and the survivors they support. Many survivors are unable to move out of refuge at the appropriate time when their immediate domestic abuse support needs have been met, and the intense support of refuge is no longer needed. Refuge services' capacity to meet demand for all women and children attempting to access refuge has therefore been even further reduced.

### Key findings:

- The biggest increase in length of stay was between the financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24 which resulted in 114 fewer survivors being supported in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23.
- To accommodate the changing needs of residents and lengthy stays in service, refuge workers regularly provide support outside their specialisms, such as around housing, immigration and mental health, which they are not recognised or resourced for. The necessarily restrictive rules of a refuge also become more difficult to manage when residents' domestic abuse needs change over time. These conditions, as well as having to "battle" with local authority housing teams, can lead to a demoralised and burnt-out workforce affecting the wellbeing and physical health of refuge staff.
- For refuge residents, the increase in length of stay primarily impacts them by disrupting the process of recovery, affecting their wellbeing and resulting in some residents feeling dependent on the safety measures in refuge, and in some cases returning to a perpetrator(s). The lack of control survivors felt over their housing options mirrors the controlling relationship they are fleeing by creating dependence on local authority housing teams and impeding their ability to re-gain independence.

- For children and young people specifically, the increased length of stays significantly disrupts their school experience, education, and wellbeing.

### **3. What conditions lead to positive move-on outcomes?**

An effective working relationship with local authority housing teams was the most common contributing factor to positive move-on experiences. Experiences were also improved when the housing team had a specialist domestic abuse worker or staff with specialist domestic abuse training who are able to work better with refuge staff due to their relevant knowledge and expertise of legislation and domestic abuse.

Key findings:

- Refuge services provide formal and informal training to local authority housing teams to improve move-on outcomes for their residents.
- Effective relationships with the local authority housing team and/or domestic abuse housing officer enables the consistent implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and the statutory guidance.

Delayed access to move-on accommodation prevents refuge services from operating as emergency, temporary accommodation for survivors who are fleeing abuse. Improving access to all forms of move-on accommodation, but particularly social housing, is crucial to ensuring that all survivors have access to life-saving support.

### **Recommendations**

1. All local authority housing teams undertake regular and specialist domestic abuse training
2. Implement measures to recognise the need for a country-wide approach to move-on and adopt a Whole Housing Approach to domestic abuse to improve access to all housing tenures.
3. Invest in refuge services on a multi-year basis across the country at a minimum of £222m, rising with inflation, demand and population changes, will ensure there are enough bedspaces to meet the level of need, supporting all survivors who need to access these life-saving services.



## Foreword

*From Safety to Stability: Access to move-on accommodation after refuge*, published by Women's Aid, explores the mobility of domestic abuse survivors as they leave temporary refuge accommodation and look to rebuild their lives in longer term housing. The report uses data from Women's Aid's On Track national dataset on how the length of time survivors who access move-on accommodation spend in refuge has changed over the past five years. This is a unique insight into the experiences of survivors and the issues refuge services face which was only possible thanks to the contribution of our member services and On Track users to this valuable resource.

Specialist refuge accommodation is a lifeline for many women and children fleeing abuse, as they provide not only immediate safety, but also a holistic and supportive environment for them to begin healing from the trauma they have experienced. Being able to move on from these temporary spaces, and re-establish a life away from fear, is an important part of the recovery journey for survivors. Sadly, as this report identifies, multiple barriers have drastically reduced access to affordable move-on accommodation, delaying survivors' recovery and further impeding refuge services' capacity to meet the demand for their support.

This report evidenced that over the past five years, the average length of stay in refuge increased by 50 days. This increase was felt the most by those moving into social housing, who had to wait even longer. Refuge workers interviewed for this report highlighted that a key driving factor for this change is the national housing crisis, which has depleted local authority housing stock and left the private rental sector almost completely inaccessible to survivors. Increased private rental prices mean that women and children moving on from refuge have no choice but to wait for local housing authorities to find them suitable social housing. For survivors with specific housing needs, this wait is even longer, with appropriate accommodation even harder to identify and secure.

This dependency on local housing authorities raises serious concerns among frontline workers in the domestic abuse sector, who suggested in the focus groups for this report that local authority housing teams are frequently unaware of the

legal rights domestic abuse survivors have to housing. The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) placed a statutory duty on local authorities to provide survivors with safe accommodation, which includes move-on accommodation and social housing. This report shows gatekeeping and negligent behaviour from housing teams in councils is resulting in this duty being failed across the country. Survivors' ability to re-gain personal and financial independence is negatively impacted, and refuge workers are left overstretched, working outside their specialisms and unable to accommodate survivors who are waiting to access refuge.

It takes immense courage for survivors of domestic abuse to flee, but barriers to accessing long term and stable accommodation creates further risks to the safety of women and children. Refuge services are an essential steppingstone in the process of fleeing, but they are not long-term solutions and must not be seen as that by local authorities. It is important that the government recognises that improving access to move-on accommodation is essential to their commitment to halving violence against women and girls in the next 10 years.

## Introduction

Through our national datasets, On Track (OT) and Routes to Support (RtS), Women's Aid has seen the impact of the lack of available move-on accommodation on refuge services' ability to meet the demand for their support. This is primarily seen through the decline in refuge vacancies posted on RtS and the increase in the length of time survivors are spending in refuge visible in OT data.

In this research, we are looking to understand these trends in the national datasets further as well as identify other trends relating to move-on, particularly how issues with sourcing suitable move-on accommodation are affecting services' capacity.

The report answers the following research questions:

- What is the availability of move-on accommodation for survivors leaving refuge and in what ways has this changed since 2018?
- How does the availability of move-on accommodation impact refuge services and survivors?
- What conditions lead to positive move-on outcomes?

## Context

Domestic abuse is by its very nature a housing issue. Every step of a survivor's experience of abuse and journey to recovery is shaped by their access to safe accommodation. Housing (or lack thereof) is used as a tool for coercive control affecting a survivors' ability to leave a perpetrator and can contribute to survivors returning to perpetrators (End Violence Against Women and Girls, 2024; Surviving Economic Abuse, 2024; Women's Aid, 2022; Women's Aid, 2020).

When seeking safe accommodation, survivors will often turn to refuge services. A refuge is supported accommodation for those experiencing domestic abuse where residents will receive a planned programme of therapeutic and practical support from specialist domestic abuse keyworkers and can access peer support from other residents (Women's Aid, 2025). Refuges operate as a national network of safe accommodation, recognising the need for refuges to be accessible across local authority boundaries to save lives (Bowstead, 2015). When refuge residents no longer require the intensity of support that is provided by a refuge, move-on

accommodation provides the opportunity to leave service whilst still having access to support, including access to social housing (UK Government, 2024).

As an accommodation-based support service, refuges are significantly impacted by, what previous research has termed, the 'national housing crisis'. The national housing crisis is characterised by a shortage of social housing<sup>1</sup>, an unaffordable and insecure private rental sector and a sharp increase in house prices compared to incomes (Kiberd & O'Connor, 2024; Women's Aid, 2020). Refuge residents are increasingly unable to access move-on accommodation and are spending longer in refuge (Women's Aid, 2019; Women's Aid, 2025). Living in any type of temporary accommodation for extended lengths of time can hinder survivors' paths to recovery by creating dependence on safety measures. This situation is further exacerbated by the complex and time-consuming housing and bidding systems to access accommodation (ONS, 2024). Increased length of stay has also created new challenges for the running of refuge services, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as 'bed blocking'<sup>2</sup>. Women's Aid has previously established the link between increasing length of stay in refuge and the reduction in refuge capacity. In 2023-24, the number of refuge vacancies posted to RtS declined by 27.0% since 2019-20, suggesting that a lack of move-on accommodation is impacting refuge services' capacity on a national scale (Women's Aid, 2025).

## Methodology

To assess the availability of move-on accommodation for survivors leaving refuge services, we collated data from four sources. These were the On Track national dataset, data from Routes to Support, a survey of nine refuge services and focus groups and interviews with representatives from seven refuge services.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://england.shelter.org.uk/support\\_us/campaigns/social\\_housing\\_deficit](https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/social_housing_deficit)

<sup>2</sup> Although this term summarises the difficulties with moving residents on from refuge bedspaces, some within the sector do not use this term because it implies that the problem is caused by the residents themselves, rather than recognising the structural barriers they face when attempting to find move-on accommodation.

## About the On Track dataset

On Track is Women's Aid's bespoke case management and outcomes monitoring system and is currently used by over 100 local domestic services. On Track records client information such as demographics, support needs and experiences of abuse. Where organisations and service users consent, this data contributes to an anonymised national dataset held by the research team at Women's Aid.

The dataset contains information on over 200,000 survivors, making it the largest dataset in the country on the experiences of survivors accessing domestic abuse services. The dataset provides us a vital national picture on domestic abuse service use, referral patterns and outcomes of support. The dataset is crucial in informing Women's Aid's research, campaigning, and policy work.

For more information about On Track, please visit our website:

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/ontrack/>

If you need support for domestic abuse, please visit our *I need support* page on our website for further resources: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/>

## On Track

In this report, data is presented from 34 refuge services across England which have contributed to the On Track national dataset since 2017. The dataset contained information on 9,857 stays in refuge between the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2018 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2024. Of these, 5,623 residents completed a programme of therapeutic and practical support and had a planned exit from the service. 86.2% of these residents were rehoused as part of their support. The analysis focuses on the length of stay for these residents to explore how access to move-on accommodation has changed

over time. Change over time was assessed by comparing the length of stay in refuge for survivors who completed a programme of support in each financial year between 2018-19 and 2023-24.

## Routes to Support

This report also uses data from Routes to Support<sup>3</sup> on the number of bed spaces available across England on the 1st of May of each year since 2018. This data was taken from the sample of the 34 refuge services discussed above. We compared this to the On Track data to investigate how the number of clients supported in each financial year compared to the number of bedspaces in the sample, and how this has changed over time.

## Survey

To build on the findings from analysis of the On Track data and help us shape our qualitative work, we reached out to the 34 refuge services in the sample with a survey. This survey contained questions about their experiences with the availability of move-on accommodation and enabled them to sign up to participate in focus groups. We received nine responses from the survey.

## Focus groups and interviews

Out of the survey respondents, representatives from seven organisations participated in either a focus group or an interview. We ran two focus groups, one with three and one with two participants. We also ran individual interviews with two services. One interview was held with one 'by and for'<sup>4</sup> service who runs a refuge for Black and minoritised survivors and the other was held with a London-based refuge working within the conditions of the housing crisis in London.

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<sup>3</sup> Routes to Support is the UK violence against women and girls directory of services and refuge vacancies, which we run in partnership with the other Women's Aid Federations in the UK. The resource enables domestic abuse professionals to identify the most suitable services for the women, children, and men they are supporting. It is used by all domestic abuse services, not just Women's Aid's member services so the resource provides us with a comprehensive picture of the scope and nature of domestic abuse service provision over time.

<sup>4</sup> Specialist 'by and for' services are run by and for the communities they serve, such as for Black and minoritised women, D/deaf and disabled women and LGBT+ survivors. In doing so they offer a uniquely empowering experience to the communities they support, as the client group is reflected in staffing, management, and governance structures of these organisations.

Questions were open-ended and groups discussions were encouraged during the focus groups. We performed a thematic analysis of the data gathered from the focus groups and interviews, identifying the key themes from each section of the discussion.

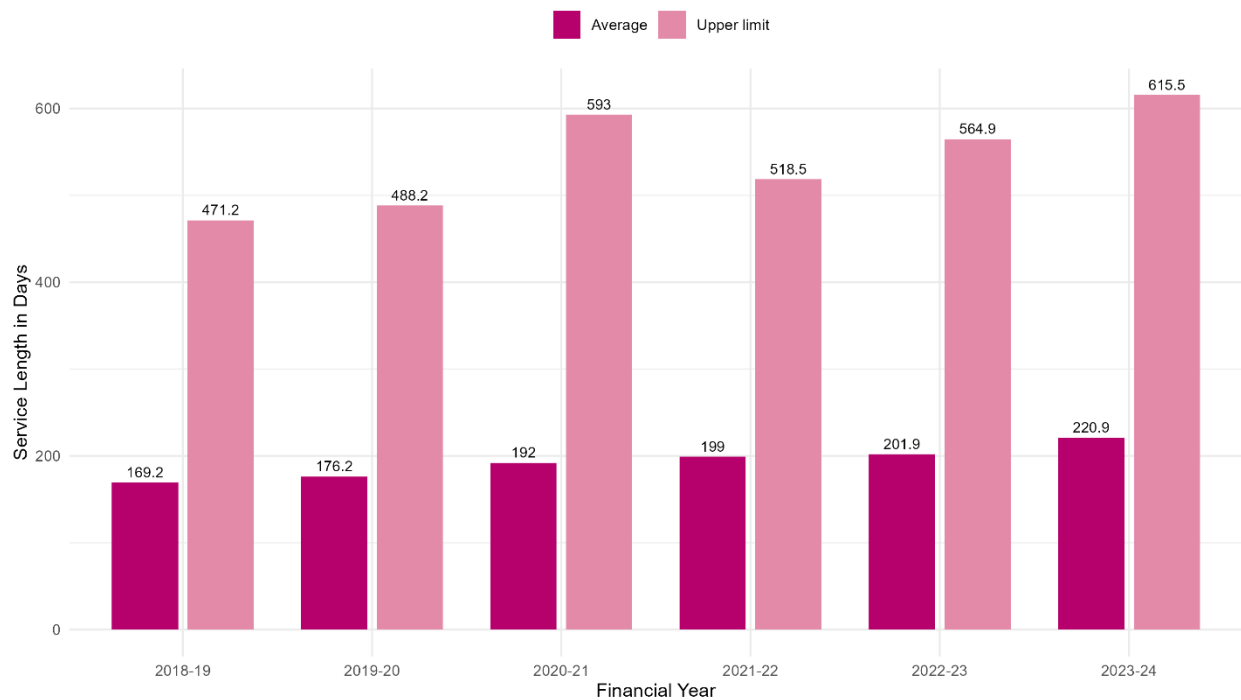
## 1. Changes in length of stay

Using data from On Track, we can see how the length of time survivors spend in refuge has changed in each financial year between 2018-19 and 2023-24. The average length of stay for residents who ended their stay in refuge in 2018-19 was 169.2 days or 5.7 months. In 2023-24, the average length of stay was 220.9 days or 7.3 months. This is an increase of 51.7 days or around 1.7 months. The increase in the average reflects a wider shift in the length of time survivors spend in refuge. In 2018-19 most residents stayed less than 469 days (1.3 years), but by 2023-24, this had increased to 616 days (1.7 years)<sup>5</sup>. This rise of 4.8 months suggests that longer stays in refuge have become more common over time.

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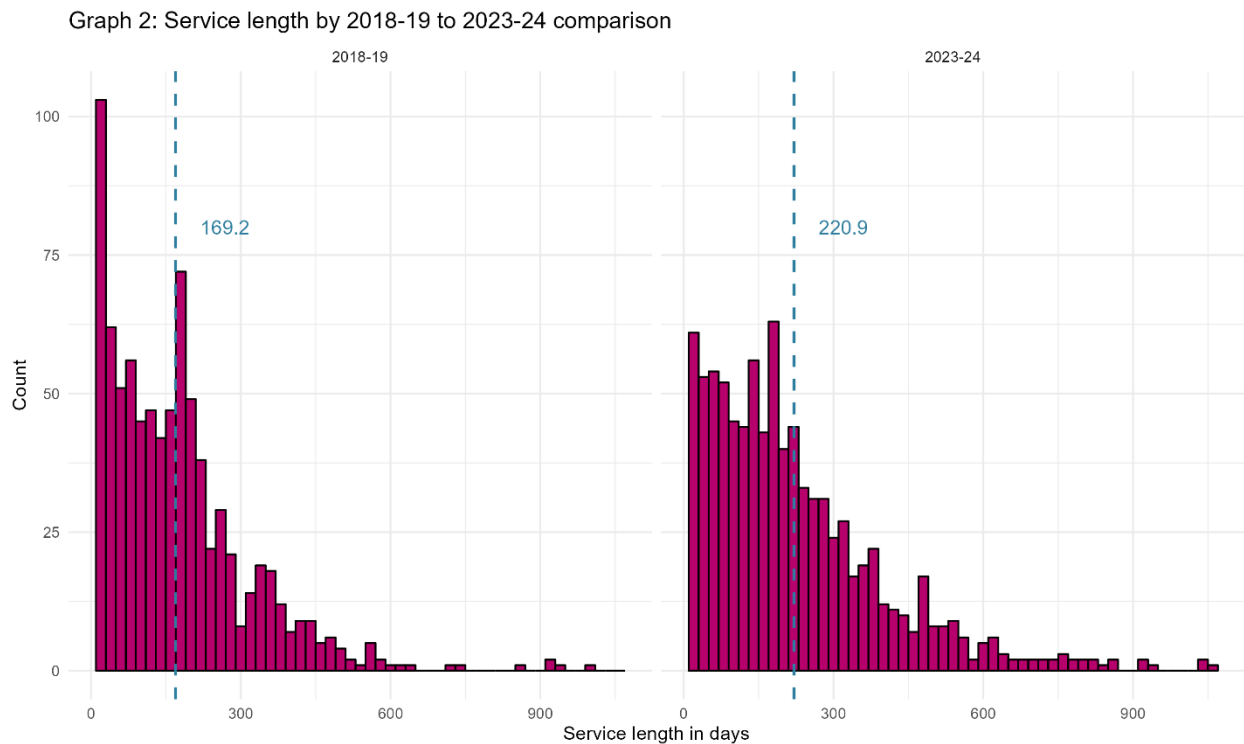
<sup>5</sup> This was calculated from the upper fence of a boxplot modelling the length of stay data for each financial year. The 'upper fence' refers to the upper limit of 95.0% of the sample in each financial year, representing the 'typical range' of the length of stay data. In each financial year, around 5.0% of the sample was above this range and classified as outliers so by examining changes in the upper fence over time, we can see how length of stay has shifted for 95.0% of the sample. The typical range/upper fence is calculated by taking 1.5 times the interquartile range (IQR) and adding it to the upper quartile (Q3).

Graph 1: Average and Upper Limit of Length of Stay by Financial Year



The average length of stay increased year on year with the largest increase being between the financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24. Graph 2 presents the change in more detail by comparing the distribution of length of stay between the financial years 2018-19 and 2023-24. We can see there has been a decrease in the numbers of residents leaving refuge in a few weeks and an increase in those staying in refuge for 500+ days. Throughout the remainder of the report, length of stay is primarily discussed by comparing averages, but as Graph 2 shows, it is important to consider the distribution when interpreting the findings. Whilst these changes are often only increases of a few months, the impacts of these increases on services with limited bedspaces and survivors who are trying to seek refuge will be felt considerably.





## 2. Barriers to sourcing appropriate move-on accommodation

The overall increase in length of stay in refuge is caused by three main barriers to sourcing move-on accommodation for refuge residents. These barriers are the national housing crisis and the availability of appropriate social housing; the inconsistent implementation of the statutory duty and local authorities' lack of understanding of domestic abuse; and the lack of suitable move-on accommodation to meet the support needs of survivors.

*"Up until 2008, it was literally, you were cleaning rooms every week because people were moving on very quickly, [...] in 2014, its ground to a halt, so it's been 10 years and it's probably longer than that."*

*"It's just been a steady incline that that's made it more difficult and made the wait times longer."*

## 2.1 The national housing crisis and availability of appropriate social housing

The national housing crisis has resulted in an increase in the number of people – notably children – living in temporary accommodation, and unprecedented waiting times for social housing (Hart & Pennington, 2024; Women's Aid, 2020). These conditions contribute to longer stays in refuge and have changed the types of move-on accommodation refuge residents are able to access.

<b>Table 1: Types of move-on accommodation</b>							
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Insecure housing</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Owner occupier</i>	<i>Private sector</i>	<i>Social housing</i>	<i>Temporary accommodation</i>	<i>Women's refuge</i>
2018-19	8.6%	5.6%	0.8%	13.3%	39.0%	12.0%	8.5%
2019-20	8.7%	3.4%	0.5%	15.6%	38.7%	14.2%	9.0%
2020-21	7.8%	3.8%	0.7%	15.0%	37.1%	14.0%	7.2%
2021-22	6.2%	5.3%	0.1%	10.6%	44.3%	17.0%	7.3%
2022-23	7.8%	6.2%	0.3%	9.2%	43.9%	18.6%	7.1%
2023-24	6.1%	5.6%	0.1%	5.6%	49.1%	19.6%	6.7%

<b>Table 2: Average length of stay by type of move-on accommodation</b>			
<i>Type of housing</i>	<i>2018-19</i>	<i>2023-24</i>	<i>Change over time</i>
<i>Social housing</i>	209.6 days (6.9 months)	268.6 days (8.8 months)	+59 days (1.9 months)
<i>Social housing – outside of refuge LA</i>	235.4 days (7.7 months)	266.9 days (8.8 months)	+31.5 days (1.1 months)
<i>Social housing – same LA as refuge</i>	194.4 days (6.4 months)	303.8 days (10 months)	+109.4 days (3.6 months)
<i>Private rental</i>	184.6 days (6.1 months)	174.9 days (5.6 months)	-9.7 days (0.5 months)

<i>Temporary accommodation</i>	203.3 days (6.7 months)	213.7 days (7.0 months)	+10.4 days (0.3 months)
<i>London-based services</i>	217.9 days (7.2 months)	263.2 days (8.7 months)	+45.3 days (1.5 months)
<i>Services outside of London</i>	155.1 days (5.1 months)	207.4 days (6.8 months)	+52.3 days (1.7 months)

Between 2018-19 and 2023-24, there was an increase in the proportion of residents moving into social housing of 10.1%. As more residents moving out of refuge access social housing, the impact of local authority housing shortages has also increased.

*"I think the main cause of it actually is not enough properties in the country. That's definitely one and we're quite experiencing a lot of housing department staff shortages so they're not working through applications."*

In 2023-24 residents moving into social housing in the same local authority had a longer length of stay (303.8 days or 10 months) than those moving to another local authority (266.9 days or 8.8 months). Interestingly, in 2018-19, the reverse was true and over time the rate of increase was considerably higher for residents moving into the same local authority.

Access to social housing differs regionally, with London refugees having longer average stays, though the rate of increase between 2018-19 and 2023-24 was slightly higher for services outside of London.

In 2023-24, 34.3% of residents in London moved into social housing and 38.6% moved into temporary housing. Outside of London, 59.0% of residents accessed social housing and only 15.2% moved into temporary accommodation. The average length of stay in London-based services for those moving into social housing was 317.1 days (10.4 months) compared to those outside of which was 259.3 days (8.5 months).

Residents leaving refuge are also impacted by the unaffordable private rental sector. Between 2018-19 and 2023-24, the proportion of residents accessing the private rental sector halved. Domestic abuse puts survivors at an economic disadvantage and the psychological and economic impacts of domestic abuse often

mean survivors are not in employment and rely on the welfare security system (Women's Aid, 2024b). It is important to note that for survivors who have no recourse to public funds, their access to financial security is even further limited. Low rates of the welfare security system payments and the high cost of living further limit refuge residents' ability to secure financial independence. The private rental sector requires considerable upfront payment and/or a guarantor, often making it inaccessible for residents in this situation.

*"I have never given out so many food vouchers like food bank vouchers in my whole entire career than I have in the last year. This year alone, it's and they're coming into refuge and then they're still not with what benefits they're getting like on Universal Credit, it's not helping them. So they can't, they're not even saving in refuge to even buy goods. So when they're moving into properties, they've got nothing."*

*"Obviously through debt that the perpetrator has caused, they can't get a guarantor."*

*"I think probably five years ago [...] you would have a few women going into [...] the private rented scheme with you know, the council, where they'd get support around that. But you know, God the way rent prices are. [...] I haven't known anyone in years going to private rented."*

*"Finances. Big, big, big, big, big problem because it's OK being told to go private rent. But how do they source that money?"*

## 2.2 Inconsistent implementation of statutory guidance and local authority understanding of domestic abuse

The housing rights of survivors have been strengthened by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the consequent amendment to the priority need for accommodation

under the Housing Act 1996<sup>6</sup>. Local authorities must now consider survivors made homeless due to domestic abuse an automatic priority when they submit a homelessness application. Under these laws, refuge residents are considered to be unintentionally homeless, priority need and therefore not applicable for local connection residency tests. The most recent statutory guidance to improve access to social housing for survivors in refuge outlines that local authorities must ensure survivors leaving refuge have appropriate priority under the local authority's allocation scheme, and those who have fled to a refuge in another local authority area are not disadvantaged by any residency or local connection requirements<sup>7</sup>. Further, in September 2024, the Government announced plans to ensure that survivors of domestic abuse would no longer be subject to the local connection test, meaning they would no longer be required to prove a local connection to the area where they apply for social housing.

The housing rights of residents leaving refuge are often undermined by how the law is applied by local authority housing teams and often, survivors' access to social housing is determined by individual housing officers' knowledge of the relevant legislation. Where knowledge is limited, survivors are prevented from making valid homelessness applications and refused access to safe accommodation (Home Office, 2023; Women's Aid, 2024a). This was echoed in the focus groups where all participants gave examples where the local authority housing teams they work with had been unaware of the statutory guidance and inconsistently applied it to residents. This included inappropriately applying local residency tests and refusing to take duty of residents approaching them for social housing from out of area.

*"The issues we're finding with the local connection is that if a lady's fled quite a large county, they will say that they need to go back to their fled county because its big enough for them to safely live in a different area [...] but as we all know, that's not always the case."*

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<sup>6</sup> Housing Act 1996, S. 189. Available online: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/189](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/section/189)

<sup>7</sup> Statutory guidance: Improving access to social housing for victims of domestic abuse. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-access-to-social-housing-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse/improving-access-to-social-housing-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse#:~:text=Move%2Don%20accommodation%20gives%20those,support%2C%20depending%20on%20their%20needs>

*"[Local authority out of area] dug their heels in because she's a lone single woman and didn't have any local connection and because she was accommodated with us they said they couldn't put her in priority banding because she's already in safe accommodation. [...] So they've come to us, because they are in a safe house, they're still safe, but they're not safe to actually be rehoused in the [current local area] and set down their roots there [...] if we rehouse her in the [current local area] she's a sitting duck again."*

*"You know, as we see the DA Act come in, [...] underneath the DA Act, they can apply to any local authority, that should be a given. They should be having that as part of their protocol and process of when we're dealing with a victim, but it's not."*

*"But every other local authority doesn't really like starting the application until we've issued the 28 day notice<sup>8</sup> and they don't look at someone in a refuge as homeless, although that's the law, it's not their home, they're homeless. And we have to challenge that quite often."*

*"Domestic abuse victims should be able to flee anywhere [and] kind of get, you know, high priority. But it doesn't happen."*

*"So one wanted to move to [out of area] and the issue that we've hit there of the barrier was that they needed to have two years local connection within that area. OK. So even though we were like she's in a refuge, she's fleeing DV [domestic violence], they kind of think she's not fleeing anymore because she's in safe accommodation in a refuge. So that kind of hinders her being able to move really to somewhere that's safe for her."*

Focus group participants' experiences of working with local authorities was also shaped by housing teams' lack of understanding of domestic abuse or the role of refuge services, and their attitude towards people who are homeless. Some of the issues raised included housing teams' inconsideration of refuge residents as victims and the attitude and culture of the local authorities they approached.

*"But they're kind of just told everywhere you go, well, [...] we don't have a duty to house you. [...] It's pretty much unless you flee to the exact area that you think you want to live in, you can't really then get accommodation anywhere else. But of course, when you're fleeing domestic violence, you go to the first place that takes you, don't you? Because*

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<sup>8</sup> This referred to the 28-day notice, also known as a "notice seeking possession" used to begin the process of ending tenancies.

*you're so unsafe. You're not really thinking well in six months down the line I don't want to live in [local authority where refuge is located]. So yeah, that is difficult."*

*"Like people forget they don't want to be in refuge, they don't want to be rehoused, they want to be back in their home. You know, they actually [...] want to be with that person and not experience domestic abuse. You know, they want that perpetrator to be the person they hope they'd be. You know they're broken hearted, they're traumatised and then they're kind of being challenged and judged about wanting social housing. It's just not acceptable. Like the attitude and the culture have just got to change."*

*"The attitudes of local authorities are kind of if you're homeless, you should accept what you're offered. And I think as a victim, as a survivor [...] especially with somebody with children as well, or maybe somebody that doesn't speak English, they've already fled one place, you know, fled their home, they're in refuge, they're kind of building that support networks up in that borough. [...] And it's just they're just expected to just go to this property because you're homeless."*

*"But having to kind of explain well, you know you've turned that [house] down and it's like they're just punishing, punishing her. You've turned that down, these were your reasons. We [refuge] found that they were good enough reasons, but the local authority doesn't because the way they see it is well, she was going to be homeless so should just take it."*

The focus groups participants told us the most common contributing factor to positive move-on experiences was an effective working relationship with local authority housing teams, particularly when the teams had a specialist domestic abuse worker in them or specialist domestic abuse training.

*"We do a duty to refer into [local authority] and then it usually gets allocated to, but if she's got capacity, especially our high risk kind of MARAC cases, get referred into [...] the domestic abuse housing worker and from there she kind of helps to speed up the process. [...] we're very lucky she's she's a really lovely domestic abuse housing worker. So she kind of makes sure that everything's in place. [...] she helps to kind of streamline the process and make sure that the cases that are in refuge [...] are dealt with like as a priority"*

*"So it is really helpful that that worker [in the domestic abuse housing team at the local authority who] is kind of like allocated to support us and can just kind of override the system essentially and just go in quicker and [...] put everyone on band one."*

*"Some of our local authorities have DA specialists, and it does make it easier."*

*"So we've been doing a lot of training with them [local authority housing team] and I have seen like an improvement in the attitude towards DA."*

## 2.3 Understanding the support needs of survivors

The national housing crisis and local authority housing teams' lack of understanding of the statutory duty, and domestic abuse more generally, creates structural barriers for residents with certain support needs when accessing move-on accommodation. The focus group participants explored four areas of support.

### 2.3.1 Family size

The focus groups discussed family size as a factor impacting residents' access to move-on accommodation. The discussion also highlighted the impact of the inconsistent application of the statutory duty.

One service who runs a refuge for single women described their challenging experiences with sourcing social housing for their residents because they do not have children.

*"Even when a service user are in a higher band when they're bidding for properties, they're still like number like eight or seven on the list. So the chance of them even getting a viewing is very, very slim. Families are also included in band 2 now, so it's a little more, I would say, competitive. The chance of our service users getting priority over a family that's in need that's quite low as well."*

In comparison, a refuge located in a different region explained that their residents are given automatic priority banding by the local authority, even if they do not have any dependents. For this service, they face more barriers when finding appropriate social housing for families with multiple children.

*"I would say like our single women, average length of stay might be between like four and six months. But women that have several children, it becomes a lot harder."*



Another service reported that the local authority housing stock was not appropriate for families.

*"Because of the lack of social housing, they're given anywhere and high-rise flats for children, etcetera, that may not be ideal. But if they turn it down then make themselves intentionally homeless. The Council win."*

### 2.3.2 Disability

Participants spoke about the barriers faced by their residents with a physical disability to find suitable social housing to meet their needs.

*"We do struggle with people [with] specific support needs around like disability and physical health and things like that. A lot of the social housing in [local authority], especially for single women is high rise flats. So, for a woman that needs ground floor access it's very difficult. [...] So that is really difficult and definitely adds on to time people spend in refuge compared to, you know, an able-bodied person that can go in a high rise."*

### 2.3.3 Support networks

Survivors have different needs when leaving refuge and for some, being rehoused close to their existing support networks is essential for their recovery. Focus group participants noted how this can be a barrier to finding suitable move-on accommodation because it can be difficult to find social housing in an appropriate area.

*"And their family networks as well, you know [...] people don't want to move from their family. They may have been isolated from their family for so long, rebuilding those relationships and then I've got to go again."*

### 2.3.4 Non-British nationals

Non-British nationals on average, have longer stays in refuge. This can be for multiple reasons around support needs but barriers to accessing move-on accommodation are also a factor. In 2023-24, residents who were non-British nationals had an average length of stay in refuge 2.3 months longer than residents who were British nationals. In the focus groups, immigration support needs, such as applying for indefinite leave to remain through the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) were described as contributing factors to increasing the

length of stay in refuge for non-British nationals. Whilst these additional support needs are being addressed, residents who are non-British nationals cannot gain access to any other types of housing. Non-British nationals who accessed social housing in 2023-24 had an average length of stay of 339.1 days (11.1 months) due to the compounding delays of accessing immigration support and move-on accommodation. Local authority housing teams often overly rely on refuge services to house survivors who are non-British nationals with unresolved housing or immigration needs, even when their immediate domestic abuse support needs have been met and they no longer need to be in refuge.

*"But we had we've had clients previously waiting 6 to 9 months just for that leave to remain to come through [...] You can't even get on the housing register when you don't have that leave to remain, so it's a bit like they spend kind of six to nine months within refuge and then we start the process from the beginning."*

*"When someone hasn't been granted ILR, [the local authority] will not even look at their application, although they may have [...] recourse [to public funds] could really get emergency accommodation or temporary accommodation, they're putting pressure on us to kind of hold them until they've got their ILR."*

<b>Table 3: Average length of stay comparisons by citizenship</b>			
<i>Citizenship</i>	<i>2018-19</i>	<i>2023-24</i>	<i>Change over time</i>
<i>British nationals</i>	149.5 days (4.9 months)	196.8 days (6.5 months)	+47.3 days (1.6 months)
<i>Non-British nationals</i>	227.8 days (7.5 months)	268.1 days (8.8 months)	+40.3 days (1.3 months)
<i>Non-British nationals accessing social housing</i>	288.0 days (9.5 months)	339.1 days (11.1 months)	+51.1 days (1.7 months)

Finding suitable move-on accommodation which was in an appropriate location was also reportedly a challenge for residents who are non-British nationals.

*"A lot of them are new to the UK so they've probably been in the UK between 6 and 12 months before they've experienced violence [...] So their experience at home is that*

*they're coercively controlled, they're not able to go out and do anything. When they come to us we try and build them up to be as independent as we can but to put a woman or service user in an area that's not suitable. [...] So it's looking at the local area, the demographic make-up of the local area. So, we have to be really, really careful."*

The national housing crisis has resulted in a shortage of affordable housing options for survivors leaving refuge. Social housing has become the only affordable and accessible option for most residents and delayed access to this type of housing directly causes length of stay to increase for a significant proportion of residents. Refuge services are beholden to local authority housing teams to move their residents on from their service and this working relationship is characterised by local authorities' inconsistent application of the housing rights of survivors and housing teams' lack of understanding of domestic abuse and the role of refuges. Refuge services must continually advocate for the legal rights of their residents despite the positive steps taken to improve survivors' access to social housing. The national housing shortage also means that local authority housing teams often rely on refuges to house survivors with additional support needs for extended periods of time whilst they source move-on accommodation suitable for their circumstances. When local authority housing teams have specialist training or have a specialist domestic abuse worker in the housing team, both the move-on process and attitudes towards victim-survivors of domestic abuse are improved.

### 3. Impacts on services

Our research shows that increased length of stay in refuge is having significant impacts on refuge services. Four main impacts were identified through On Track data and the focus groups. These are reduced capacity for support, frontline workers ability to deliver specialist domestic abuse work, management of the refuge and staff wellbeing.

#### 3.1 Reduced capacity for support

The refuge sector is already inadequately funded and does not have the capacity to meet the demand for their services. In 2023-24 there was a 20.3% shortfall in the number of refuge bedspaces in England compared to the Council of Europe's

recommendation<sup>9</sup> and 27.5% of all referrals into refuge were rejected because the service did not have the space to accept the survivor into service (Women's Aid, 2025). The lack of access to move-on accommodation is impacting refuges' capacity to meet the demand for their service even further because as the length of time residents spend in refuge increases, bedspaces become available less frequently and fewer survivors can access them.

Using data from RtS and OT, we looked at how the number of survivors who successfully accessed refuge changed compared to how many bedspaces they have. Over the past five years we saw that there has been an overall increase of 88 bedspaces in the sample. Between 2018-19 and 2021-22, this had a positive effect, and more survivors were able to access refuge. However, by 2023-24 this trend had reversed. The number of bedspaces continued to increase but in 2023-24, 128 fewer survivors accessed refuge compared to 2021-22. Between 2022-23 and 2023-24, the average length of time residents stayed in refuge increased by the largest amount in the past five years (by 19 days), and this corresponded with the largest decrease in the number of survivors who access refuge (114 fewer survivors), despite an additional two bedspaces.

This worrying trend shows that capacity is not just about bedspaces, but also how accessible move-on accommodation is for those who are ready to leave refuge.

*"I think last month alone we had 48 referrals and [...] I think we accommodated one. And that's because we were fully occupied, we only had one bedspace and as soon as a service user leaves that bed space is filled practically the same day. We turn it round really really quickly. We did start operating a waiting list, but we found that that didn't really work because its [...] crisis support. So we signpost as much as we can to other services but its the same there, a lot are fully occupied because we're unable to move women on who are ready to go. [...] Cause we do have service users that are ready to go, but because we can't find them anywhere else or because the housing stocks are too low, even moving them out of area is difficult."*

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<sup>9</sup> Council of Europe (2008): "...safe accommodation in specialised women's shelters, available in every region, with one family place per 10,000 head of population." (p. 51). Based on the ONS mid-year population estimate for 2022: 57,106,398

### 3.2 Ability to deliver specialist domestic abuse work

Participants reported that delays in sourcing move-on accommodation meant their residents are spending longer in refuge when their immediate domestic abuse support needs have been met. As a result, refuge workers reported that they felt they are required to provide support to residents on different needs, outside of their specialisms or job role.

*"You start doing a lot of things that aren't specifically within your role as a DA workers. [...] I think the longer people stay in their needs become different in a sense."*

Participants noted this was particularly the case for residents with multiple support needs. Where there is no or delayed access to appropriate move-on housing which can accommodate residents with additional support needs, refuge services provide support that they are not funded to do. This includes support around mental health and drug and alcohol use.

*"We have to invest so much more time in training around mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues to try and manage best we can within refuge."*

*"Our specialty is domestic abuse, but we're finding ourselves that we're having to be trained in a lot more stuff. And even us, as qualified IDVAs, we're still not getting recognised for the job that we do, and we're doing other people's jobs and we ask for mental health support, we're just getting battered backwards and forwards. And we are relying on each other."*

Participants noted that this creates a situation where they are unable to provide crisis domestic abuse support for all survivors requiring access to their service.

*"We're blocking people fleeing domestic abuse because we've done the work around DA with the people that have been in our refuges so they're sitting with us like maybe six months up to a year with no DA needs cause we've done the bulk of that work."*

*"You start to be like I just need this person to move and its [...] not nice to feel like, is it? [...] I just know there's another family that need to get in here."*

### 3.3 Management of the refuge

Increased lengths of stay also impact on the management of refuge services. When entering a refuge service, residents will be asked to sign a license agreement which

outlines the conditions or 'rules' for staying. These are necessarily restrictive to maintain the safety of residents and staff. However, participants reported that the longer residents stay in refuge, the more difficult it becomes to manage these restrictions as residents' support needs change from immediate need to longer term recovery and independence.

*"The longer they are in refuge, the more likely the rules are to be breached, even if its by accident."*

Due to delayed access to other forms of temporary safe accommodation or supported housing, participants reported some residents have to stay in refuge for extended periods, even when the conditions of refuge are not suitable for their needs.

*"Because of the lack of joined up working with the local authority we can't enforce our house rules as much as perhaps we used to be able to when they would help us if we had a tricky family. They'd recognise they were still fleeing DA, but they weren't right for refuge."*

Participants noted the additional pressure this places on refuge staff who have to balance the negative consequences of evicting a resident for a breach of license agreement, and the impact this will have on their housing application, with the safety of other residents.

*"And the other thing was with the length of stay increasing, we seem to have more kind of breaches on license agreements. [...] But when you've got children thrown in as well that have potentially got additional needs and don't understand safety risks, things like that. We had a family whose child kept unlocking our front door and putting it on the latch. [...] refuge wasn't the right place for them. We weren't able to house them anywhere else but the council was saying to us if we evicted them, they had purposefully made themselves homeless and they wouldn't take duty of them. And there was no consideration actually for refuge just not being suitable for that family's needs."*

### 3.4 Staff wellbeing

Participants reported that the conditions created in refuge by the lack of move-on accommodation have a direct negative impact on staff wellbeing. Focus group participants reported feeling frustrated and demotivated due to the move-on

process, something that is likely contributing to staff burnout which is seen across the sector and leads to high levels of staff turnover (Women's Aid, 2024c).

*"The survivor will have that expectation that the support officer should be doing XY and Z when actually managing that expectation is we don't have the influence over housing, we can't give you the answers you want. It's really frustrating really, demotivating."*

*"Think there's frustration isn't there because there's only so much we can do and then we become frustrated because we can't do enough."*

Participants reported that this impacts staff retention, increases staff absences and sickness leave, and creates mental and physical health concerns amongst staff.

*"I think they're really, it's really impacting [refuge support workers]. I have seen an increase in sickness. Especially on the day that women are due to leave because it's such a stressful, stressful process."*

*"When you've got a difficult family in the refuge and you know they're going to be there for a long time, that can really impact on staff morale and increase like sickness, absences from work. [...] Especially if you've got, you know, a few families that are just not getting along [...] that can really have an impact on the staff."*

#### 4. Impacts on survivors

For survivors who have successfully accessed refuge and completed a programme of support within the service, moving on from temporary accommodation into permanent and stable housing is imperative for recovery from abuse (Kelly et al., 2014; ONS, 2024). It is also particularly important for survivors to access move-on accommodation at the appropriate time during their recovery. Through the focus groups, we identified three themes on the impacts of increased length of stay in refuge on adult survivors. These were the residents' safety, wellbeing and dependence on refuge. We identified two themes on the impacts on child survivors: wellbeing and experiences at school.

*"and I think the biggest point that everybody's missing is that the perpetrator is now sitting comfortable [...] in that home."*

## 4.1 Safety

Participants report that long wait times for move-on accommodation contribute to residents disengaging from their stay in refuge to return to their previous accommodation, which could be living with a perpetrator or at an address known to a perpetrator. Without access to stable housing, residents' access to safety is compromised.

*"They've been dictated to for so long in that relationship to feel controlled and dictated to when they've come to us. [...] Then some very much feel like, well, I might as well go back to the perp because at least I had a house, you know."*

*"If housing takes a really long time, we've had women that are like, do you know what? I've been in refuge for five months, I'm no further for housing, I'm going back to my house [...] then that potentially increases the risk because they're going back to an address that is, they're not necessarily reconciling with the perpetrator, but they're going back to their address."*

## 4.2 Wellbeing

Domestic abuse is a driver of survivors' mental ill health, and many survivors access mental health support services during their recovery (Women's Aid, 2021). Focus group participants noted that their residents could not access mental health support services due to being in temporary accommodation. As length of stay is increasing, so do the wait times for mental health support, prolonging their residents' recovery.

*"What we get is that we try and refer someone onto a mental health service but they go, oh really? You're not in the right place for mental health service because you're in temporary accommodation so re refer yourself when you're rehoused. And that works for the children's mental health services as well. They won't touch anybody in temporary accommodation even though it's very settled temporary accommodation and likely to be for over 12 months."*



*"Yeah [residents' mental health] definitely has got worse and I think that's because of how quickly you could access those services. I mean, there's always been, you know, waiting lists. But now the waiting lists are so much longer you can't access that service."*

Participants noted that long stays in refuge impact residents' wellbeing by creating conditions where their residents cannot move forward from the abuse, regain their independence and build a stable future.

*"Or we're retraumatising them because [...] we're bringing in new clients and they're having to listen to all this again. I know it's easier said than done, you can switch off, you've got your own space, but it doesn't work that way."*

*"Like we just had a lady move out this week and she's been with us for 2.5 years and that woman didn't need support for the last year I would say, like she'd done everything. But actually [...] she was deteriorating again because she just sat there and she feels like she'd lost everything and that you know, the housing might listen to her and actually it took the council 19 months to sort out her home."*

*"but it's so difficult for people that don't have recourse to kind of like, regain independence because they are just kind of stuck in refuge for so long."*

Across all focus groups, participants explained how the process of relying on local authority housing teams for extended periods of time mirrors the dependence and controlling relationship residents were previously in.

*"And again, it comes back to why am I the one being punished? Why has this happened to me and my children?"*

*"And yes, I'm safe but now it's it the idea of starting from scratch, and why should it be the victim that has to do that."*

*"The perpetrator won't be prosecuted, he's out living his best life, carrying on in the same home, in the same job. And the children have been, you know, completely uprooted everything around them just disappeared."*

The process of fleeing abuse can be precarious and there are many elements to recovery. Access to the appropriate support services at the right time ensures survivors can continue to live free from abuse. Previous Women's Aid research shows that when specialist domestic abuse services are properly funded to provide

mental health and trauma support for survivors, they are successful (Women's Aid, 2021). However, mental health support within the sector remains chronically underfunded. In May 2024, Routes to Support showed only 11.8% (33 out of 280) of refuge services in England had specialist mental health workers (Women's Aid, 2025). This was 15 fewer refuge services, compared to May 2023. In these conditions, refuge services continue to work hard to mitigate the negative impacts on residents' wellbeing in a trauma-informed way.

*"We do training, educational courses, activities, things like that, just to keep that momentum of positivity going."*

*"I think people are kind of in the headspace of, you know, I need to train or use this time, whilst I'm not being forced by the job center to look for, you know, work, use the time to train. So we kind of always encourage that to fill their days as well. Give them a bit of purpose."*

### 4.3 Dependence on refuge

Longer stays in refuge impact residents by creating dependence on the support and safety measures in the refuge. Focus group participants reported that the eventual step of moving out of refuge becomes more daunting due to the extended stays in refuge, impeding residents' ability to gain independence.

*"But then when they move, they're absolutely terrified because they're so used to being in refuge."*

*"A wobble or a dip or like lots of worries that come out just before people move out of refuge because they're going, oh I've been safe, and I know I've been safe for so long."*

*"I've got women under resettlement for months because they're still scared of the real world [...] it's not appropriate for most women to be in refuge for more than six months, I would say, to be honest, a year tops. But you know, we are seeing longer and longer stays in refuge. Unfortunately, they're not seen as a priority."*

This was noted as a particular risk for residents who have additional support needs and have an increased risk of becoming reliant on the intense support of a refuge.

*"They don't want to because they're getting all the help they need and their fear will be if I move on, what support am I going to get? I'm going to go backwards and I'll end up back in the same situation."*

#### 4.4 Wellbeing of child survivors

Focus group participants noted that extended periods of stay in refuge also impacted children and young people's wellbeing by creating dependence on the support and safety measures of the refuge.

*"Literally just they leave everything behind, you know, all the family members, friends, and then to think that they make that all again and then they move again and it's starting from scratch. It's so difficult. And even just like the refuge they get used to the refuge, they make friends in the refuge and the longer that they are somewhere, it's you know, they start to think of it as home don't they? I've seen children crying when they leave the refuge cause they just didn't want to go. [...] I think it's one of the cruelest parts of it all that out of no fault of their own, they just become so unsettled for such a long time."*

*"Actually, a little boy was terrified of leaving here and he was very worried about not having the gates, and you know, the cameras and stuff like that. [...] because he's been here 2.5 years. He's like 7, so he's grown up his formative years, you know, have been spent here and you know it's not real life. So, it does impact on them a lot of ways."*

Children and young people's wellbeing was also impacted as staying too long in refuge impeded their ability to sustain friendships and contributed to behavioral issues.

*"And I think you know when you're a teenager as well, more so you want that time away [...] from your family, but also you want your friends to be able to come over."*

*"The longer they're with us, like, especially the older they are, it becomes a very difficult conversation when they make friends in the new school [...] The longer they're here for, the more friendships they make or it becomes apparent where they are. And it puts them in a really difficult position."*

*"[Staying] in the same room as your mum for six months or two years is damning. And I think that that's causing a lot of behavioral issues to children."*

## 4.5 Experiences of school for child survivors

Children and young people's access to and experiences at school are also significantly disrupted by extended and unpredictable stays in refuge. Participants reported on the continual disruption for children and young people caused by the difficulty with finding school places and changing schools multiple times.

*"You really struggle with school places, sometimes it can be like oh they finally have a space and now they are moving"*

*"I mean it's like we were saying, you know, they move, they go to a different school, get used to that school, make friends. So, you know, if [...] the children are in refuge for a year, say, it's you know, that's a whole school year, isn't it? You experience so much there. And then, all of a sudden, you move again. [...] Say we knew the length of stay was gonna be two months depending on the age of the children, maybe you could say, [...] give them work to do at home and then you [...] start afresh, so you're not doing it again and again."*

*"The kids love the school they go to locally in refuge but the council disregard any need to stay in the same school when they're considering areas to offer them housing in. Although I'm trying to argue at the moment that children are now recognised as victims in their own right and therefore their support needs should be addressed so that one's kind of working."*

## Conclusion

This report has assessed the availability of move-on accommodation for survivors leaving refuge by analysing how the length of stay in changed between the financial years 2018-19 to 2023-24. These findings were developed with data from focus groups and interviews with refuge keyworkers on their experiences of finding move-on accommodation for their residents.

We have shown that the current conditions of the move-on process prevent refuge services from being able to operate as emergency and temporary accommodation for survivors fleeing domestic abuse. Refuge workers continue to provide lifesaving support in these difficult circumstances. Measures are needed to ensure that refuge workers can continue this work by drastically improving residents' access to move-on accommodation, including enforcing the statutory guidance, providing

specialist training for housing teams in local authorities and fully funding the refuge sector.

## What needs to change?

Below we have outlined national and local level recommendations to improve access to move-on accommodation based on the findings explored in this report and existing solutions from previous research.

### Local level

**Provide local authority housing teams with regular training in domestic abuse from a specialist domestic abuse organisation and foster positive collaboration and protocols between domestic abuse providers and local authority housing teams.** This report has shown that access to move-on accommodation is significantly limited by local authority housing officers' inconsistent application of the statutory duty and lack of understanding of the role of refuges and domestic abuse. This has led to survivors being denied their housing rights, undue pressures put on refuges to explain the law and statutory guidance to housing teams and survivors being unable to move on from refuge at the appropriate time during their recovery. Training should include education around domestic abuse, the statutory guidance and awareness on how and when to refer to local domestic abuse support services.

**Improve refuge residents' access to all forms of accessible, affordable and secure housing.** In this report, we have shown that survivors leaving refuge have limited financial options to explore types of move-on accommodation other than social housing. New measures are needed to adopt a Whole Housing Approach to housing, including improving access to the private rental sector and the welfare security system. Where it is safe to do so, survivors should also be supported to stay in their own homes and remove perpetrators from private or social joint tenancies (DAHA, 2020). Fully funding resettlement support for refuge residents such as resettlement workers and grants for purchasing furniture and white goods,

is also essential to improve survivors' financial position to regain independence when leaving refuge.

#### National level

**Embed a cross-country approach to move-on accommodation.** This report has shown that the recent changes to remove local connection residents for all survivors have not improved access to social housing and local authority boundaries still continue to contribute to delayed access to move-on accommodation. To counteract inconsistent local arrangements and the barriers survivors face when accessing move-on accommodation, a national 'link up' mechanism between refuges housing associations with 'direct let' vacancies will ensure the process is swift and simple (Women's Aid & DAHA, 2022).

**Invest in refuge services in England at a minimum of £222m on a multi-year basis across the country to ensure there are enough bedspaces to support all survivors fleeing abuse.** The limited availability of move-on accommodation is further reducing the capacity of refuge services. Women's Aid's *Investing to Save* report estimates that domestic abuse costs £77,963,000,000 per year in England (Women's Aid, 2023). Women's Aid has recently updated our funding proposal, our total funding settlement for the specialist domestic abuse sector is now £502m, including a minimum funding settlement for the 'by and for' sector of £150m. This is divided into a funding settlement of £222m for refuge services (previously £228m) and £280m for community-based services (previously £288m). Therefore, our estimate for the total shortfall from current government spending is £307m. This includes a shortfall of £62m for refuge services<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-updates-proposed-funding-settlement-for-domestic-abuse-services/>

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## Appendix

Table A1: Reason for case closure by financial year						
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Disengaged from refuge stay</i>	<i>Evicted/asked to leave</i>	<i>Internal move</i>	<i>Moved out of area</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Planned exit from refuge</i>
2018-19	13.5%	10.4%	4.0%	5.7%	10.2%	56.2%
2019-20	12.6%	9.1%	4.3%	5.7%	11.4%	56.9%
2020-21	9.5%	8.1%	4.5%	6.8%	12.0%	59.0%
2021-22	10.9%	8.3%	4.4%	6.2%	11.8%	58.4%
2022-23	10.6%	9.3%	4.4%	5.6%	13.9%	56.2%
2023-24	10.8%	7.7%	7.2%	6.3%	10.6%	57.4%

Table A2: Type of social housing			
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Different local authority</i>	<i>Same local authority</i>	<i>Old address</i>
2018-19	45.0%	46.3%	8.8%
2019-20	47.1%	48.2%	0.5%
2020-21	39.7%	54.5%	5.7%
2021-22	47.1%	49.8%	3.1%
2022-23	49.0%	44.7%	6.1%
2023-24	43.6%	53.4%	3.0%

Table A3: Citizenship sample			
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>British national</i>	<i>Non-British nationals</i>	<i>Missing data</i>
2018-19	73.8%	25.1%	1.1%
2019-20	70.9%	27.8%	1.3%
2020-21	63.9%	35.4%	0.7%
2021-22	65.3%	33.7%	1.0%
2022-23	65.7%	33.7%	0.6%
2023-24	64.9%	33.3%	1.8%

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