

UK Home Office Lures Undocumented Grenfell Tower Survivors into Trap

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The handling by government and their officials of the Grenfell Tower fire puts into question the UK's capability of dealing with any national disaster, let alone a single fire in a single block. However, after weeks of non-stop criticism the Home Office eventually issued an offer of 12 month's immigration amnesty for survivors which, has since been described as little more than a trap by a leading human rights group.

The amnesty programme, which came after several weeks of pressure from campaigners, allows survivors to access services without facing immediate immigration enforcement, but the catch is; they have to supply the authorities with their full biometric data.

"Theresa May promised the government wouldn't use this tragedy as a reason to carry out immigration checks," Martha Spurrier, director of [Liberty](#), said. "That's exactly what they're doing – and they're dressing it up as an act of compassion."

"This policy lures undocumented Grenfell survivors in at their most vulnerable, gets their data on file, gives them a brief reprieve, then exposes them to the same inhumane policies the Home Office inflicts on other undocumented migrants – enforced destitution, denial of basic services and the constant threat of detention and removal."

The amnesty was demanded by campaigners following fears that a number of undocumented migrants living at Grenfell Tower were not receiving the care and support required because they were frightened of coming into contact with Home Office enforcement.

Eye witnesses and residents have confirmed that there were as many as 600 people in the building. Less than 300 have been confirmed as escaped and less than 100 remains have been identified.

The Home Office gave in to [demands](#) from migrant organisations, including the Runnymede Trust and Migrants' Rights Network, a petition by the Good Law Project and support from London Mayor Sadiq Khan.

An [annotated version](#) of the Home Office guidance to staff by Liberty demonstrates that the offer effectively acts as a trap for applicants once on the authorities' databases, creating the exact dynamic protesters were concerned about in the first place – causing considerable anger.

The Home Office require all biometric information must be submitted to sign up to the programme. But now the government is already admitting after questioning that “biometrics will be retained” after the 12-month period is over.

Campaigner’s have also lodged complaints about the exclusion of asylum seekers from the scheme, which somewhat defeats the original purpose; that of allowing the identification of victims.

“The only way to ensure undocumented survivors can access the help and support they so desperately need is to grant them a permanent amnesty,” Spurrier added.

Liberty has also recommended that survivors considering signing up to the Home Office’s offer consults organisations helping undocumented survivors, such as; [Doctors of the World](#), [North Kensington Law Centre](#) and the [Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants](#).

The Home Office has since tried to calm the matter by insisting that it will not conduct immigration checks on survivors. Immigration minister Brandon Lewis said:

“The government has been clear that our priority is to ensure that victims of this tragedy get the access they need to vital services, irrespective of immigration status. This period of leave to remain for those directly affected by the fire will provide survivors with the time to deal with the extremely difficult circumstances in which they find themselves and start to rebuild their lives whilst considering their future options, as well as to assist the police and other authorities with their enquiries about the fire.”

The Government is already facing an estimated bill of more than [£600m](#) for replacing flammable cladding on housing blocks after the Grenfell Tower disaster. This does not include other government buildings such as schools and NHS buildings.

Whatever your views on the immigration status of the survivors of Grenfell Tower, be it undocumented, illegal, asylum or pending, the government is undermining its own abilities to be able to deal with matters of national emergency. In the meantime, political perceptions and confidence in government continues to dive.

After three weeks, just nine of 139 offers to rehouse survivors have been accepted. Many were offered accommodation in high-rise towers, away from schools or work, in cramped conditions or bed & breakfast. Instead of dealing with this tragic event with all the effort required, the government have stumbled from one newsworthy disaster to the next.

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