

Summary Report

Migrant destitution: Survey and consultation

Commissioned by the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution

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Strategic Alliance
on Migrant Destitution

1) Introduction and acknowledgements

This report summarises the findings and recommendations emerging from a targeted survey of the scale and nature of non-EEA¹ migrant destitution in three UK regions; London, Greater Manchester and the North East.

The full report is available on request from the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution (<http://www.homeless.org.uk>).

The survey and consultation was commissioned on behalf of the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution (SAMD), by Patrick Duce, Innovation and Good Practice Manager at Homeless Link and coordinator of SAMD. It was conducted from January to March 2017.

Organisations (hereafter referred to as stakeholders) working with destitute non-EEA migrants were invited to share their experience and views on destitution amongst this cohort. The aim of the survey is to inform the development of the work of the SAMD.

The survey findings and recommendations draw primarily upon feedback and views gathered from the stakeholders in each region. Additionally, the perspectives of 35 non-EEA migrants (hereafter referred to as service users) who were currently or had previously been destitute and with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) were included. These people were either interviewed directly by the survey team or by volunteer interviewers based in regional support projects.

The survey and consultation would not have been possible without the input and co-operation of all the contributing stakeholders and we are grateful to everyone who gave their time and shared their views in the consultation process. We are especially grateful to those contributors who are enduring or who have previously endured destitution in the UK. We hope that this report helps to give voice to their experiences and views, raises awareness of their needs and the impact of government policy on these, often vulnerable, individuals.

We are also especially grateful for the help of staff and volunteers at the Boaz Trust, Praxis, the Refugee Council, Connections at St Martins, Street Legal, Justice First and the Mary Thompson Fund for their help in either facilitating or completing consultations with destitute service users.

Terms and definitions

The focus of the survey was destitute non-EEA migrants with NRPF.

- NRPF abbreviates 'No Recourse to Public Funds' and refers to individuals who are subject to immigration control and have no entitlement to welfare benefits or public housing.
- 'Destitute' for the purposes of the survey refers to individuals without their own primary place of residence and without the necessary funds to afford food and/or shelter.
- Most of the cohort were people who had at one point been in the asylum system. Many had their asylum claims refused and are referred to as 'asylum rights exhausted' (ARE).

¹ European Economic Area

2) Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution (SAMD) - an overview

The Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution (SAMD) is a network of organisations from the homelessness, refugee and migrant sectors who have come together to ensure that they work more effectively to tackle homelessness and destitution amongst migrant communities. The Alliance was set up in 2014 and operates across England. It aims to increase the number of bed spaces available to destitute non-EEA migrants with NRPF as well as providing routes out of destitution, including immigration advice and representation.

Members of the Alliance are national bodies including: Homeless Link (which hosts the Alliance); British Red Cross; Housing Justice; Migrant Rights Network; NACCOM (the No Accommodation Network); Refugee Action; Refugee Council; Praxis Community Projects.

The key aims of the Alliance are to:

- Increase supply of accommodation for people with NRPF
- Support front-line agencies and local partnerships
- Develop integrated pathways out of destitution
- Gather, share and use evidence of what works to inform service providers, funders, commissioners and policy makers

The Alliance has three key pilot areas (London, Greater Manchester and the North East) where it is focusing its work to develop pathways out of destitution for destitute migrants. Understanding the scale of migrant destitution and mapping existing services in these pilot areas is a key objective to support cross sector working.

3) Executive summary

Destitution amongst non-EEA migrants has been a prominent feature of the asylum system in the UK for the last fifteen years. Policy changes from 2002 onwards have resulted in destitution for thousands of non-EEA migrants. Most of these people had made a claim for asylum and typically became destitute because of their claim being rejected - with the consequent cessation of any government support. The voluntary sector has witnessed the impact on the lives of these people and has sought to address the needs.

Some organisations have developed to work solely with destitute clients, while other organisations have incorporated specific destitution services within their overall work with refugees, asylum seekers and other clients. The voluntary sector response to destitution involves a mixture of material help (food, clothing, money, Etc.), access to advice and in limited circumstances access to accommodation. It also includes research into the issue and advocacy for policy and practice changes - which is where this survey fits.

The survey has taken a snap shot of destitution amongst non-EEA migrants in the three areas of London, Greater Manchester and the North East. This has involved exploring the extent and nature of destitution, including the impact on people who are destitute. It has also identified some of the support that is available to destitute non-EEA migrants. Dishearteningly, the survey findings echo much of the research that has gone before, with examples of needless want and suffering amongst a vulnerable client group whose lives are in limbo. It also highlights a dedicated but under-resourced

voluntary sector trying to respond in an increasingly hostile environment for non-EEA migrants. The key findings are as follows:

The scale and nature of destitution

- There has been an increase in the numbers of destitute non-EEA migrants, although not experienced by every organisation working in the three areas.
- There has been an increase in the complexity of the casework involved in addressing ways to find routes out of destitution for non-EEA migrants.
- A disturbing number of destitute non-EEA migrants have been destitute for a considerable length of time, in some cases several years. The average time amongst individuals consulted for the survey was over two years.
- Non-EEA migrants are experiencing destitution at every stage of the asylum process (pre-asylum claim, during the consideration period and in the post-asylum claim period).
- Many non-EEA migrants experience periods of destitution between periods of having support.
- Destitution is leaving individuals open to both labour and sexual exploitation.
- The physical and mental health of the non-EEA migrants experiencing destitution is being adversely affected.
- Some destitute non-EEA migrants have challenges with drug or alcohol addiction.
- There is a cohort of long-term destitute non-EEA migrants who display significant mental health problems, one aspect of which is anti-social behaviour. In this context, there are few statutory or voluntary sector organisations able or willing to respond to their specific needs.
- Many destitute non-EEA migrants move around to access support from a variety of sources at different times, often returning to organisations for repeat support after a gap of several months. In some instances, there may be a duplication of support provided.

Support available

Most of the voluntary sector organisations supporting destitute non-EEA migrants have a huge amount of experience in doing so. This experience is coupled with considerable skill and dedication and often the services of these organisations are delivered by volunteers. Mostly, organisations offer a specific service for the client group (for example, food or hosting) and work in a complementary way with other destitution organisations in their area. There are however some significant challenges:

- The organisations lack capacity to respond to the volume and complexity of the need (for example, casework takes time and resources to follow-up).
- Organisations can see the value of sharing data about destitute non-EEA migrants in the area, but they lack the capacity or mechanism to do so in a coherent way (apart from in London where there is a database capturing some of the data²).
- Organisations have different criteria for who they will support, or different definitions of destitution. For example, some organisations provide the same material support to non-EEA migrants who are receiving Asylum Support as they do to those whose support has ended.

² The CHAIN data (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) is a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider population in London commissioned by GLA and managed by St Mungo's.

Others have much tighter criteria and will only work with people with no access to any other resource. These variations militate against closer working across the sector.

- Many people believe that the core of the problem of destitution stems from the lack of access that asylum seekers have to good quality legal immigration advice. Cuts to legal aid provision enacted three years ago have exacerbated the problem and other research has highlighted the increasing challenges that asylum seekers face in this context. The voluntary sector is making efforts to address this gap but can only do so in a very partial way due to lack of resources.
- There is a cohort of refused asylum seekers who are unable or unwilling to return to their original country. This group makes up a significant proportion of long-term destitute non-EEA migrants. Several of the voluntary sector organisations working with this group struggle to engage with the concept or practicalities of a person returning to their country or a third country. The ending in 2015 of the Choices voluntary return scheme left a significant gap in services designed to inform people in this group.
- The two most recent Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016 have explicitly sought to create a difficult environment for people that the government deems have no legal right to be in the UK. This includes people who have overstayed their visas and the measures introduced in these Acts have had an adverse impact on many destitute non-EEA migrants. For example, the so called 'right to rent' provisions that prohibit landlords from renting to certain categories of people are curtailing some options for destitute non-EEA migrants. Other sanctions from the 2016 Act are being introduced over the next two years, such as charges for health services and it is envisaged that these exacerbate the problems faced by destitute non-EEA migrants. One consequence of this is that it will continue to drive people further into the margins of society where they will be more vulnerable to exploitation and a deterioration in their health.
- Most provision for mainstream homeless and destitute people (who are not non-EEA migrants) is not designed for or accessible by non-EEA migrants. This includes much accommodation and housing provision, a key need amongst the destitute non-EEA migrant cohort.

Conclusion

The impact of destitution amongst non-EEA migrants continues increasing in scale and in the toll of human suffering. There is an overwhelming image of people whose lives are being wasted in a limbo of destitution and uncertainty. The consequences of this benefit no one, certainly not the individuals affected or the communities in which they find themselves living. Some of the ways to alleviate the problem seem obvious, such as providing access to good advice, or granting people permission to work so that they get on with their lives and contribute more fully to the community. Other aspects are more nuanced, such as how to work with people who have no ostensible protection needs and could consider return, or people who have mental health and social problems.

The challenge for the members of SAMD is how best to use the collective efforts of the members of the alliance and the multitude of dedicated organisations on the ground to direct future research, advocacy and the promotion of good practice. The following recommendations suggest possible ways forward.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations identify a number of needs, issues and potential areas for collaboration that we feel could usefully be considered and taken forward by SAMD and stakeholder organisations in the regions. They draw upon findings, stakeholder feedback and key messages that were often similar or consistent across the three survey regions, though we appreciate that there will be some degree of variability both in relevance and feasibility across areas and networks.

1. Explore the feasibility of establishing more coherent and coordinated monitoring tools and practices in Greater Manchester and the North East. Possible options could include:
 - review and harmonisation of existing processes used by local projects and regional organisations;
 - development of a database similar to CHAIN (the Combined Homelessness and Information Network) that exists in London in other regions to establish the extent of destitution within this cohort;
 - undertaking a 'snap shot' survey such as that used by several members of the Leicester Voluntary Sector Forum in the past (this involved coordinated, targeted data collection for one month each year).
2. Support the development of stronger coordination amongst front line organisations for the purposes of lobbying and influencing government and local authority policy (and practice). This should be on a regional and national basis. Priority areas suggested by stakeholders and service users included:
 - Challenge Home Office policy and raise awareness of its impact.
 - Build on links with the Home Office with the aim of positively influencing policy development and impact (for example in the Asylum Support processes). As an alliance SAMD is well placed to do this with and on behalf of local projects with little time and few resources.
 - Grant temporary permission to work and access to support for refused asylum seekers - no one should be made destitute.
 - Increase access to safe and appropriate accommodation for non-EEA migrants with NRPF.
 - Avoid delays in access to Asylum Support for new applicants (leading to destitution) by improving the processes for contacting the Home Office when resolving problems with support claims.
3. Promote and lobby for increased cooperation and engagement between local authorities, statutory and voluntary sector agencies and housing providers in order to ensure access to essential accommodation and beds for those suffering destitution.
4. Lobby for and improve access to good quality legal advice and general advice at all stages of the asylum process, especially for non-EEA migrants who are destitute. For many people whose asylum rights are exhausted, there is the possibility of making a fresh asylum claim and re-entering the asylum system and support mechanisms. Such claims are not straightforward and benefit from good legal advice. Other advice provision should include the capacity to undertake the casework and follow-up necessary to achieve successful outcomes for clients. It may also entail effective referral to other appropriate legal specialists.

5. Aim to provide or improve access to impartial, confidential, non-directive (trusted) advice and information on voluntary return to destitute non-EEA migrants who have exhausted other possibilities and may wish to consider returning to their original country (or a third country).
6. Explore and support ways of building and sharing knowledge in key areas of immigration policy amongst workers in front line organisations and in communities. This will reduce the risk and extent of avoidable destitution amongst non-EEA migrants. Models can be drawn from the current work of Refugee Action's Frontline Immigration Advice Project in promoting good practice in this area of work.
7. Establish or build upon existing regional networks and forums that focus on destitution to enable better sharing of information, key data and good practice. One of the barriers to this happening is a lack of resources amongst stakeholders to perform this role. As a national project, SAMD might consider supporting organisations in accessing funds to help resource capacity to enable this to happen. This could include the development of web based tools for ease of participation.
8. Advocate for the better sharing of information between accommodation providers, Migrant Help, the Home Office and front-line organisations on new arrivals to the region through the asylum dispersal system. This will help support organisations to ensure service users receive good and timely advice about entitlements and militate against people becoming destitute.
9. Similarly, advocate for and support better coordination between local authorities, accommodation providers, the Home Office and support organisations at the time a person in asylum dispersal accommodation receives an asylum decision. At this point service users are especially vulnerable to becoming destitute and timely interventions can help prevent this.
10. Develop or strengthen national and regional links with Registered Social Landlords (RSL), housing associations and homelessness organisations to raise awareness of destitution amongst this cohort and to promote ways in which the aforementioned can provide practical support, for example, by freeing up more bed spaces for destitute clients.
11. Explore needs and ways for targeted work with destitute people who suffer from mental health or behavioural problems, such as addiction to alcohol or drugs. This could involve exploring preventative actions and cost-effective measures that would benefit the individuals and the communities in which they find themselves. Within the destitute cohort there are a proportion (approximately 10%) of people who can be described as having mental health problems. This group of people are more vulnerable and more likely to fall through gaps in state and voluntary sector provision. When they come into contact with the statutory services, such as health, social services and the police, it is often at a crisis point.
12. Consider collectively resourcing and supporting commissioned research into the financial costs and impact of destitution amongst non-EEA migrants to inform advocacy (possibly through SAMD). Most stakeholders are of a view that the long-term costs are far higher than the costs of measures that would see people avoid destitution.
13. Identify and share models of effective and innovative practice (and learning) within and across support organisations, housing providers, voluntary and statutory organisations in the three regions. There are several models of good practice aimed at tackling destitution that are being employed by support organisations in both the voluntary and statutory sector, for example access

to emergency accommodation, mental health support and legal support. SAMD is well placed to promote and facilitate this approach.

4) Survey purpose, scope and methodology

This was a targeted survey and consultation process undertaken throughout January and March 2017. The budget available for the work allowed a total input of 16 consultancy days. The survey focus, scope and core questions were specified by SAMD and the completion methodology was jointly designed by the SAMD Coordinator with the consultancy team. The overall purpose in commissioning the survey was to help SAMD investigate the scale and nature of non-EEA migrant destitution, and to gather information and build understanding of the nature and causes of migrant destitution in London, Greater Manchester and the North East.

The findings and recommendations will be shared with SAMD partners, funders and local stakeholder organisations to help inform and strengthen future support for destitute non-EEA migrants. The terms of reference for the survey set out the following core questions to be addressed in each of the three regions:

- What is the scale of non-EEA migrant destitution?
- What is the average length of destitution and reasons for being destitute in the first place?
- Where are destitute migrants sleeping?
- What access to a) accommodation and b) immigration advice is currently available to destitute migrants? What are the reasons individuals access this support?
- How do destitute migrants experience homelessness and/or migrant services?
- How could services better meet the needs of these clients to prevent further destitution?
- How have the changes to legislation brought in by the Immigration Act effected services delivering accommodation and immigration advice to non-EEA destitute migrants?

In total 68 individual stakeholders fed into the survey including 35 people from non-EEA backgrounds who are or have been destitute in the past (see table below).

The majority of organisation based stakeholders were initially proposed by SAMD and were either:

- individuals and organisations with direct front line service experience of contact and support provision to destitute non-EEA migrants, or:
- individuals with relevant experience and insight through policy or similar roles.

Additional stakeholder organisations and individuals were added by the survey team as consultations progressed and suggestions for other contacts were received.

SAMD and the survey team were keen to invite and hear the experience and views of destitute people in each of the survey areas. We liaised with and were extremely grateful for the help of front line stakeholder organisations in each area, who either arranged and completed volunteer led interviews with current and former service users, or supported survey team members in completing interviews. In total 35 destitute, non-EEA migrants with NRPF or people who had previously experienced destitution contributed to the survey and consultations.

Participation of all stakeholders was voluntary and individuals were told that their feedback and contributions would be made anonymous and not specifically attributed to individuals either in discussion with SAMD or in the survey report.

A summary of stakeholder group participation is shown in the following table:

Region	Stakeholder organisations	Service users
North East	11	6
Greater Manchester	9	15
London	12	14
Organisation or name not stated (online survey)	1	0
Total	33	35

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Appendix: Contributing stakeholder organisations

Contributor	Role	Organisation
Alex Fraser	Head of Refugee Services	British Red Cross
Julian Prior	CEO	Action Foundation
Hilary Hodgson	Area Manager	British Red Cross
Amer Ratkusic	Integrated Advice Team Manager	North of England Refugee Service (NERS)
Paul Catterall	CEO	Open Door (North East)
Lindsay Cross	Manager	West End Refugee Service (WERS)
Kester Young	Manager	Night Stop North East (Depaul UK)
Pete Widlinski	Manager	Justice First
Bini Araia	Coordinator	Based at the John Paul Centre, Middlesbrough
John Dowling	Project Manager	Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle Refugee Project
Mike Dolan	Preventing Asylum Homelessness Project Coordinator	Refugee Action
Helen Bourne	Housing Advice Co-coordinator	The Passage
Andrew Jordan	Senior Immigration Advisor	Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network
Timothy Lawrence	Solicitor / Head of Immigration Department	Southwark Law Centre
Ros Holland	CEO	Boaz Trust
Shaheda Magerah	Caseworker	Bolton Destitution Project
Romy Muller	CEO	Booth Centre
Eleanor Watts	Area Manager	Riverside
Maria Houlahan	Manager	ASHA
Nizam Zanganah	Destitution Coordinator	British Red Cross
Aidan Hallett	Ops Manager	Refugee Action
Lidia Estevez Picon	Migration Lead	Connection at St Martins
Alison Gelder	CEO	Housing Justice
Sally Daghlian	CEO	Praxis Community Projects
Hugo Tristam	London Ops Manager (refugees)	British Red Cross
Kellie Higgins	Destitution Coordinator	Refugee Council
Dan Olney	Deputy Director	St Mungos
Carolina Albuerne	Good Practice and Partnerships Manager	Refugee Action
Addison Barnett	Project Manager	Street Legal
Sofia Roupakia	London Projects Manager	Migrant Rights Network

An additional four stakeholders also opted to not share their names and organisational details.