

A SLOW VIOLENCE:

How immigration
control forces
people in Greater
Manchester into
destitution

MAY 2024



Greater Manchester
IMMIGRATION AID UNIT

boaztrust

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr William Wheeler is a Policy Officer at the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU), where he has worked since 2022. He also works at Manchester Community Central as Partnership Lead for the GM Migrant Destitution Fund.

He is accredited with the OISC as a level 2 advisor in Immigration and Asylum.

ABOUT GMIAU

Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU) was set up in 1989 as a community response to racist immigration laws affecting people in our communities. We provide immigration legal advice and representation, as well as support services to people affected by immigration control across the North West.

ABOUT BOAZ

The Boaz Trust provides housing and specialist one to one support for people who have become homeless and destitute after seeking asylum. Alongside the practical work that we do, we also engage in local, regional and national advocacy, campaigning for positive reform of the asylum system.

CONTENTS

- 3** ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, GLOSSARY OF TERMS & A NOTE ON LANGUAGE
- 4** EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
- 5** RECOMMENDATIONS
- 7** INTRODUCTION: DESTITUTION AS SLOW VIOLENCE
- 10** A TIMELINE OF NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS
- 12** SECTION 1: ROUTES INTO DESTITUTION
- 18** SECTION 2: EXPERIENCES OF BEING DESTITUTE
- 26** SECTION 3: ESCAPING DESTITUTION
- 32** CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS
- 36** REFERENCES
- 37** STAY IN TOUCH

WITH THANKS TO

We are immensely grateful to the five individuals who shared their stories for this report. Some of the material discussed was difficult, but those interviewed were committed to sharing their experiences and expertise for the sake of making a difference for others – this is hugely appreciated.

Many thanks also to the frontline workers who took the time to share their insights, experience and humanity.

Thanks also to colleagues in the GMIAU policy and destitution teams, as well as partners at the Boaz Trust who have helped shape this report.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

We have chosen to publish the words of the individuals interviewed for this report without correction. The experience of destitution too often disempowers individuals, taking away their agency and voice. For this reason we have left language unchanged and unedited.

REPORT EDITING

by William Wheeler, Amy Merone & Amanda Shah

REPORT DESIGN

by Kerry Wigglesworth

PUBLISHED

May 2024

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ABEN: A Bed Every Night

EEA: European Economic Area

EEC: Equal Education Chances

EU: European Union

DWP: Department for Work and Pensions

GM: Greater Manchester

GMCA: Greater Manchester Combined Authority

GMIAU: Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit

IHS: Immigration Health Surcharge

MDF: Greater Manchester Migrant Destitution Fund

NACCOM: No Accommodation Network

NRPF: No Recourse to Public Funds

OISC: Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner

RAS Voice: Refugees and Asylum Seekers Voice

RESS: Restricted Eligibility Support Service

SPIN: Supporting People in Need

WAST: Women Asylum Seekers Together

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DESTITUTION MUST BE DESIGNED OUT OF OUR IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

Across Greater Manchester, thousands of members of our communities are being forced into destitution, often for years or even decades, solely on account of their immigration status.

- Some may be recently arrived in the UK; some have been resident for decades.
- Some are destitute because they have been refused asylum amidst the Home Office's longstanding 'culture of disbelief' – although they will later be recognised as refugees and granted protection.
- Others are European Economic Area (EEA) nationals who had lived in the UK lawfully, but fell out of status following Brexit immigration changes and requirements to apply for pre-settled or settled status.
- Others may have lost their leave to remain following a relationship breakdown, or because they couldn't afford the fees to renew their visa.
- Others may have leave to remain, but with the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition attached to their status.

Many, or most, will end up regularising their immigration status and gaining access to public funds, and may go on to become British citizens – but until then, they are denied the right to contribute and support themselves, and forbidden access to any form of social safety net.

This report shines a light on the often hidden experiences of destitution in our region. It shows destitution as a form of racialised violence embedded in immigration law that intersects in myriad ways with individual life stories. This is not spectacular violence like detention and deportation, but a slow, debilitating, often unseen violence that is insinuated into everyday life, damaging physical and mental health, and restricting people's capacity to live as members of our society.

Hostile environment policies over the last decade have intensified internal borders in our society, turning fellow residents, including head teachers, GPs and landlords, into faces of border control. This means that we are all, as Greater Manchester residents, statutory sector bodies and voluntary organisations, caught up in this violence, whether we like it or not. But we have a choice as to what to do about it – and this report highlights the series of positive statements and policy developments from local political leaders over recent years. These local developments pose a welcome contrast to the increasingly negative policy environment emanating from central government, including the Illegal Migration Act 2023, which will push thousands more in our city-region into destitution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendation from the research is for the government to **stop using destitution as a weapon of immigration control**. The ostensible justification for destitution as a policy tool is that it incentivises people to return to their country of origin. But this report, based on experiences in Greater Manchester, adds to a catalogue of previous research showing this does not work. Instead it rips years out of people's lives, punishing them for simply being here.

TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENT:

01

Repeal Section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which excludes people who are 'subject to immigration control' from the welfare system.

02

Key changes to the immigration and asylum system must be made to prevent people being unnecessarily forced into destitution:

- a)** Repeal the Illegal Migration Act 2023
- b)** Create a just and humane asylum system that is not subject to political pressures to disbelieve and discredit
- c)** Ensure visa fees are no more than the administrative cost of processing an application and are coupled with an accessible system for people to apply for a fee waiver
- d)** Abolish the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)
- e)** End the use of the NRPF condition

03

Following an asylum decision people must not experience a cliff-edge of destitution:

- a)** For people newly granted refugee status, pause evictions where local authorities and voluntary sector services are clear that there are insufficient housing options for them
- b)** Extend the eviction notice period for people given an asylum decision to 56 days in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- c)** Inform local authorities when people are being evicted from asylum accommodation, again in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- d)** Adequately resource local voluntary and statutory sector bodies that are supporting those evicted from asylum accommodation

04

Measures must be taken to make it easier for people to escape destitution:

- a)** Create a new, simplified route to regularisation based on five years residence, offering a clear route back into lawful immigration status for anyone forced out of it
- b)** Increase legal aid fees by 50%, return to hourly rates and restore legal aid for all immigration issues, not just asylum, as was the case before the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
- c)** Process applications for leave to remain within six months, rather than leaving people waiting for a year or more
- d)** Allow people claiming asylum the right to work in any job while they are waiting for a decision

TO GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY (GMCA), LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS:

As long as destitution is baked into the national immigration system, local government and voluntary and community organisations must build on the positive developments of the last few years to design destitution out of our city region.

05

Access to accommodation must be improved for Greater Manchester residents who are destitute, regardless of their immigration status:

a) Coordinate local authority homelessness strategies across GM to embed the principle that anyone presenting as homeless should be positively and proactively supported to access accommodation, regardless of immigration status

b) Voluntary and community organisations should work collaboratively with local authority homelessness teams to facilitate move-on from emergency accommodation

c) Local authority homelessness strategies must incorporate regular training to ensure that housing options services are trauma-informed, person-centred and literate in immigration law

06

We need more stable bedspaces available in Greater Manchester for those with NRPF:

a) The Greater Manchester Combined Authority should work with the GM Mayors Charity to fund an additional 60 ABEN bedspaces available for people with NRPF, doubling the current provision

b) In addition to the ABEN offer, voluntary and community organisations should seek funding to further increase the number of stable bedspaces

07

As destitution is not a fixed state, further measures should be taken by voluntary and community organisations and local government in partnership to help break down barriers to escaping destitution:

a) Local authorities should invest in long-term funding for immigration advice for people facing destitution

b) Building on the positive partnership working that has crystallised in the Restricted Eligibility Support Service (RESS), GMCA should fund this model further to increase the number of support worker roles

08

More must be done to support spaces of sanctuary and solidarity in our city-region amidst the hostile environment, embedding anti-racist practice in all statutory and voluntary sector services:

a) We need to see all local authorities join Salford and Manchester on the journey of becoming Boroughs of Sanctuary, embedding a culture of welcome and best practice across all public services

b) Voluntary sector organisations need to be given the recognition, time and resource not just to pick up the pieces, but to co-create – in dialogue with people facing destitution – spaces of welcome, offering dignity, support and solidarity

c) Local government and voluntary sector partners should ensure that hardship funds are resourced, in order to promote wellbeing, reduce dependence on others and risk of exploitation, and offer a degree of dignity

DESTITUTION AS SLOW VIOLENCE

And there were days, really you feel like giving up, you feel like, to be honest, you know... but I just had to say, know what, hang in there, hang in there, if you'll pass through this, like other, so, I just had to give myself hope, that's it. ~ Tamara

INTRODUCTION

In the late 2010s, Tamara lived in Manchester, experiencing a life of hidden violence. For more than a decade, the Home Office had refused to grant Tamara status in the UK and she was denied the right to work and the right to access benefits. Her dreams of becoming a midwife were thwarted. Tamara's immigration status had forced her into destitution. This in turn had forced her into dependency on an abusive partner.

Eventually, after drawing on the inner strength she describes above, and with the support of Manchester organisations Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) and the Boaz Trust, she escaped her abusive partner. She found safety in a shared house provided by the Boaz Trust and eventually, sixteen years after arriving in the UK, went on to secure her leave to remain. She is now training as a mental health nurse.

Political attention today is directed towards individuals newly arriving in the UK, prompted by the visibility of small boats crossing the Channel, or the hotels used to warehouse people seeking asylum. While advocacy rightly focuses on these issues, it remains crucial that we also maintain our attention on the often invisible, hidden experiences of those who, like Tamara, are forced into

destitution, often for years on end, owing to their immigration status.

As this report will demonstrate, destitution causes a myriad of harms. Unable to meet their most basic needs, individuals may face harm to their physical and mental health. Some may be street homeless; others may be cycling through insecure hosting arrangements on a sofa or a floor, continually outstaying their welcome and having to move on. Driven into dependency on family, friends and charities, people are stripped of dignity. They may feel deprived of agency, or forced into making impossible choices, which can expose them to further abuse and exploitation. Amidst loneliness and isolation, past traumas, especially among those fleeing violence and persecution, may be retriggered and amplified.

The harm spreads beyond individuals. Host families, who may themselves be living in hardship, face further strain in supporting destitute friends or family. The impacts are felt by wider society, too. The unnecessary damage to people's health, inflicted by destitution, are picked up by health and social care services. Poorly funded and overstretched voluntary sector organisations are left to plug the gaps and mitigate some of the worst harms inflicted by the immigration system.

Pathways into destitution vary widely and so too experiences of destitution. What unites these experiences are that they are inflicted on individuals who are subjected to a form of violence based on where they come from, and why and how they arrive. This is not a spectacular violence like detention and deportation, but a slow, debilitating, insidious form of hidden violence that is rooted in systems and baked into everyday life.¹ Damaging one's physical and mental health, it restricts people's capacity to live as members of our society. As years are stolen from people's lives, we all suffer: individuals, communities and wider society.

This slow violence is built into the UK immigration system. However, the violence of immigration law is not restricted to the Home Office itself. Successive governments and successive pieces of legislation, most notably Theresa May's hostile environment policies, have turned schools, GP surgeries, places of work and landlords into quasi border guards. The legislation that separates out who is and is not entitled to live in our society has created webs of violence across state and society that keep people trapped in destitution.

We are all – statutory and voluntary sector bodies, as well as wider society – caught up in these webs of violence, whether we like it or not. Yet we have a choice as to what we do about it. This report showcases some of the work currently being done in Greater Manchester to support those living in destitution and outlines what more can be done. Crucially, destitution is not a fixed state and many, with the right advice and support, can and do go on to secure their status.

A DECADE OF DESTITUTION: TIME TO MAKE A CHANGE

More than a decade ago, in 2013, the Boaz Trust and the British Red Cross published a report into destitution among people refused asylum, entitled 'A Decade of Destitution: Time to Make a Change'.² The report highlighted 'a humanitarian crisis on our doorstep that we all need to face', finding that the Home Office's culture of disbelief was pushing people into destitution as individuals were wrongly refused asylum. Almost half of those surveyed for that report had been destitute for two years, while ten per cent had faced a decade of destitution. The report stressed the limits of support that local authorities could offer.

The title of that 2013 report referred to the decade that had passed since asylum dispersal was implemented,³ dispersing people seeking asylum on a no-choice basis across the country, primarily to areas where disused housing stock was cheap. Many people found themselves sent to Greater Manchester. In response to the challenges raised by destitution, a network of support organisations had developed in the early 2000s, including the Boaz Trust, to provide accommodation and support for people seeking asylum. These organisations joined the longer-established Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, which had been set up in the 1980s as a space for legal advice and resistance against immigration controls.

A DECADE MORE OF DESTITUTION: 2013 TO NOW

More than a decade on from that 2013 report, what has changed? On a cautiously positive note, the grant rate of people seeking asylum has

risen, meaning that more people are recognised as refugees when they first apply for asylum.

Fundamentally, however, destitution remains baked into the immigration and asylum system. Many of those who were destitute in 2013, including one of the individuals interviewed for this report, may still be destitute today. The 2013 report's publication coincided with the commencement of then Home Secretary Theresa May's 'hostile environment' policies. Since then, a negative series of policy developments has ensued, as successive governments have repeatedly scapegoated people of migrant backgrounds for their own failings.

The implementation of the Brexit referendum required EEA nationals and their family members to apply for recognition via the EU Settlement Scheme. If for whatever reason they did not manage to do so, their presence became classified as unlawful, sometimes forcing individuals into destitution.

Meanwhile, the government has been weaponising its own failings in order to justify even harsher asylum policies. The Illegal Migration Act 2023, when implemented in full, will take away the right to claim asylum for anyone deemed to have entered the UK illegally. This is likely to remove any incentive for individuals to engage with the authorities, potentially driving more people underground and into destitution.

The issues facing people with insecure immigration status have been further exacerbated by the extreme difficulty in accessing immigration advice brought about by a decade of cuts to legal aid provision and local authority funding for immigration advice.

WHAT HAS CHANGED IN GREATER MANCHESTER?

In the decade since the 2013 report was published, there has been a more positive series of changes in Greater Manchester. There have been clear commitments from local leaders, including a 2014 Manchester City Council motion against destitution, a 2023 statement from the leaders of all ten GM boroughs on the harms caused by national asylum and immigration policy decisions,⁴ as well as concrete changes in local policymaking.

The scope of local government action is limited by funding and by what certain laws say people with particular immigration statuses are entitled to. Nevertheless, there are opportunities. As highlighted in a 2022 report by Homeless Link and The No Accommodation Network (NACCOM), while people with NRPF are not eligible for mainstream benefits, local authorities can offer accommodation using other funding streams that do not count as public funds.⁵ Moreover, since destitution is not a fixed state, the report highlighted the value of wraparound support and partnership working, including immigration advice.

In Greater Manchester, destitution intersects with city-region wide priorities to reduce homelessness. In 2017, 'A Bed Every Night' (ABEN) was launched to meet newly elected Mayor Andy Burnham's electoral pledge to end homelessness. Crucially, from the start it included bed spaces for people with NRPF. Sadly, the limited number of bed spaces (60 across Greater Manchester for people with NRPF) could not meet the levels of demand.

During the pandemic, the government launched the 'Everyone In' policy to house rough

sleepers. Building on the existing inclusive ABEN provision, in Greater Manchester (unlike some other parts of the country) this was extended to all, regardless of immigration status. Critically, during this period, partnership working developed to advise and support those who, previously living in the shadows, were newly accommodated. This work brought together refugee/migrant sector organisations and mainstream homelessness organisations, notably the Booth Centre.

Building on this work, in 2023 GMCA funded RESS, involving a mix of immigration advice from GMIAU and 'floating support' from the Boaz Trust and the Booth Centre. The level of demand – both for the 60 ABEN bed spaces and for the advice services – remains very high, but it represents a move in the right direction, as the final part of this report will demonstrate.

However, this work has been complicated by the recent rise in homelessness, especially among newly granted refugees. This is as a result of expedited decision making by the Home Office in 2023 (having failed to make decisions on tens of thousands of asylum claims for several years before then). While the granting of asylum to people who were previously stuck in the system was welcomed, the rushed manner in which this was done, with no coordination with local authorities, dramatically increased pressure on local authority homelessness services.⁶ While this challenge certainly needs to be addressed, it should also not detract from the equally pressing concerns around the forms of destitution discussed in this report.

TOWARDS A CITY REGION OF SANCTUARY

Today, the escalating hostility of government rhetoric and policy is spawning ever more hostile environments for people of all sorts of backgrounds. Bleak as the current moment is, there are also opportunities to join up the existing spaces of sanctuary from this hostility, and develop our city region as a space of sanctuary. After all, the open cruelty of current government policy is making explicit what had previously been implicit: the exclusionary violence that is ingrained into the foundations of immigration law. The enforced destitution of members of our communities cut off from any form of support is central to this violence.

It is time for all of us to decide what to do about it. This report points to some of the actions that we can take, both to own our place in the violence of destitution and to resist it.

STRUCTURE AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

This report is based on five in-depth case studies of people who are experiencing or have experienced destitution. These case studies will be introduced in Section One. Section Two will explore experiences of being destitute and the case studies are contextualised in interviews with six frontline workers.⁷ Section Three outlines the barriers to regularising status and the work being done to overcome those barriers.

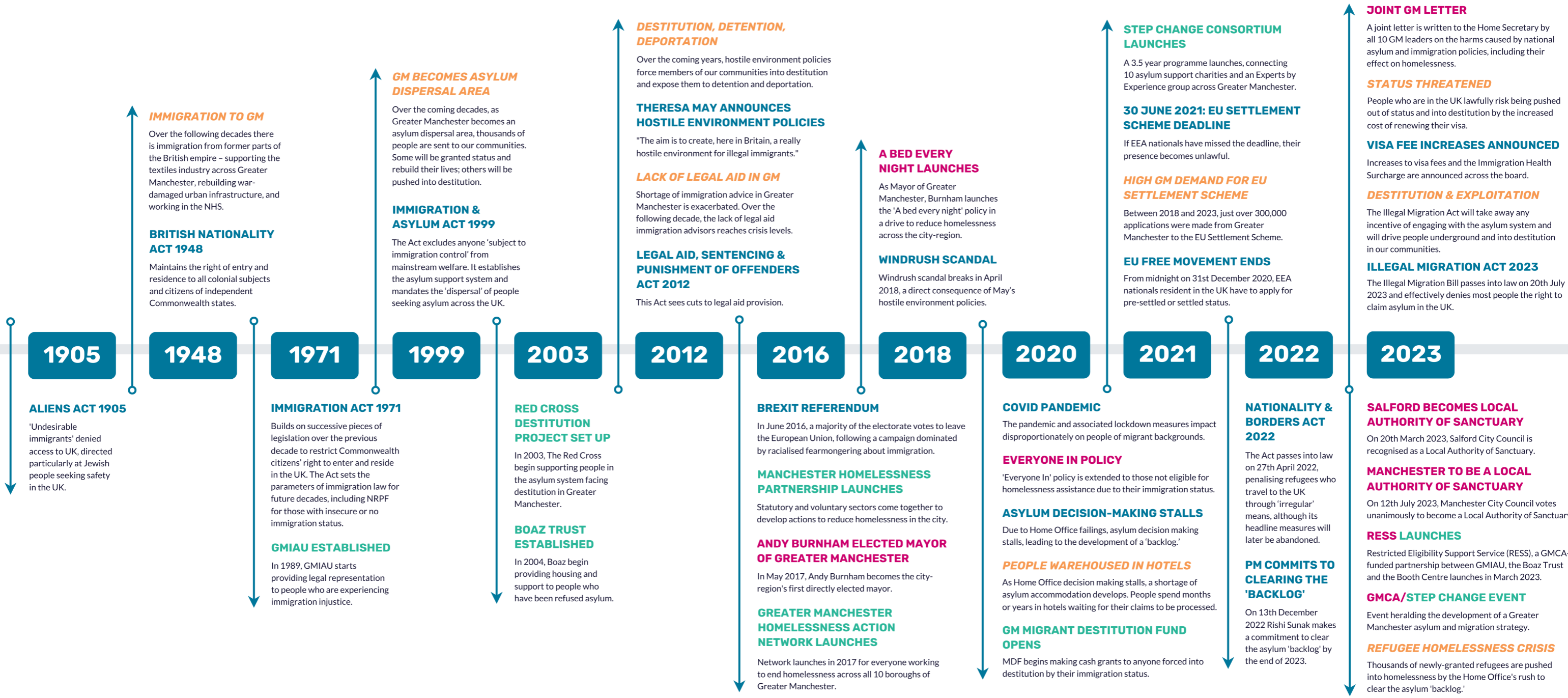
The report understands destitution in the narrow sense of having no income and no entitlement to any form of financial or practical safety net. Of those interviewed, most had experienced destitution because they had no leave to remain. One individual had the right to work, but could not claim benefits.

This report focuses on adults without children. Families with children remain on asylum support even after a negative asylum decision, until the child or children turn 18. Families who are destitute for other reasons may be eligible for support under Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989.

The report also does not consider the experiences of people who have just been granted refugee status who face 28 days to move on from their asylum accommodation (compared to 56 days for anyone else facing eviction).⁸

A TIMELINE OF NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR IMPACT

- National Policy Developments
- Impact on Greater Manchester
- Greater Manchester Statutory Response
- Voluntary & Community Sector Response



1905

ALIENS ACT 1905

'Undesirable immigrants' denied access to UK, directed particularly at Jewish people seeking safety in the UK.

1948

IMMIGRATION TO GM

Over the following decades there is immigration from former parts of the British empire – supporting the textiles industry across Greater Manchester, rebuilding war-damaged urban infrastructure, and working in the NHS.

BRITISH NATIONALITY ACT 1948

Maintains the right of entry and residence to all colonial subjects and citizens of independent Commonwealth states.

1971

IMMIGRATION ACT 1971

Builds on successive pieces of legislation over the previous decade to restrict Commonwealth citizens' right to enter and reside in the UK. The Act sets the parameters of immigration law for future decades, including NRPF for those with insecure or no immigration status.

GMAIU ESTABLISHED

In 1989, GMAIU starts providing legal representation to people who are experiencing immigration injustice.

1999

GM BECOMES ASYLUM DISPERSAL AREA

Over the coming decades, as Greater Manchester becomes an asylum dispersal area, thousands of people are sent to our communities. Some will be granted status and rebuild their lives; others will be pushed into destitution.

IMMIGRATION & ASYLUM ACT 1999

The Act excludes anyone 'subject to immigration control' from mainstream welfare. It establishes the asylum support system and mandates the 'dispersal' of people seeking asylum across the UK.

2003

RED CROSS DESTITUTION PROJECT SET UP

In 2003, The Red Cross begin supporting people in the asylum system facing destitution in Greater Manchester.

BOAZ TRUST ESTABLISHED

In 2004, Boaz begin providing housing and support to people who have been refused asylum.

2012

DESTITUTION, DETENTION, DEPORTATION

Over the coming years, hostile environment policies force members of our communities into destitution and expose them to detention and deportation.

THERESA MAY ANNOUNCES HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT POLICIES

"The aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants."

LACK OF LEGAL AID IN GM

Shortage of immigration advice in Greater Manchester is exacerbated. Over the following decade, the lack of legal aid immigration advisors reaches crisis levels.

LEGAL AID, SENTENCING & PUNISHMENT OF OFFENDERS ACT 2012

This Act sees cuts to legal aid provision.

2016

BREXIT REFERENDUM

In June 2016, a majority of the electorate votes to leave the European Union, following a campaign dominated by racialised fearmongering about immigration.

MANCHESTER HOMELESSNESS PARTNERSHIP LAUNCHES

Statutory and voluntary sectors come together to develop actions to reduce homelessness in the city.

ANDY BURNHAM ELECTED MAYOR OF GREATER MANCHESTER

In May 2017, Andy Burnham becomes the city-region's first directly elected mayor.

GREATER MANCHESTER HOMELESSNESS ACTION NETWORK LAUNCHES

Network launches in 2017 for everyone working to end homelessness across all 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester.

2018

A BED EVERY NIGHT LAUNCHES

As Mayor of Greater Manchester, Burnham launches the 'A bed every night' policy in a drive to reduce homelessness across the city-region.

WINDRUSH SCANDAL

Windrush scandal breaks in April 2018, a direct consequence of May's hostile environment policies.

2020

COVID PANDEMIC

The pandemic and associated lockdown measures impact disproportionately on people of migrant backgrounds.

EVERYONE IN POLICY

'Everyone In' policy is extended to those not eligible for homelessness assistance due to their immigration status.

ASYLUM DECISION-MAKING STALLS

Due to Home Office failings, asylum decision making stalls, leading to the development of a 'backlog.'

PEOPLE WAREHOUSED IN HOTELS

As Home Office decision making stalls, a shortage of asylum accommodation develops. People spend months or years in hotels waiting for their claims to be processed.

GM MIGRANT DESTITUTION FUND OPENS

MDF begins making cash grants to anyone forced into destitution by their immigration status.

2021

STEP CHANGE CONSORTIUM LAUNCHES

A 3.5 year programme launches, connecting 10 asylum support charities and an Experts by Experience group across Greater Manchester.

30 JUNE 2021: EU SETTLEMENT SCHEME DEADLINE

If EEA nationals have missed the deadline, their presence becomes unlawful.

HIGH GM DEMAND FOR EU SETTLEMENT SCHEME

Between 2018 and 2023, just over 300,000 applications were made from Greater Manchester to the EU Settlement Scheme.

EU FREE MOVEMENT ENDS

From midnight on 31st December 2020, EEA nationals resident in the UK have to apply for pre-settled or settled status.

2022

NATIONALITY & BORDERS ACT 2022

The Act passes into law on 27th April 2022, penalising refugees who travel to the UK through 'irregular' means, although its headline measures will later be abandoned.

PM COMMITS TO CLEARING THE 'BACKLOG'

On 13th December 2022 Rishi Sunak makes a commitment to clear the asylum 'backlog' by the end of 2023.

2023

JOINT GM LETTER

A joint letter is written to the Home Secretary by all 10 GM leaders on the harms caused by national asylum and immigration policies, including their effect on homelessness.

STATUS THREATENED

People who are in the UK lawfully risk being pushed out of status and into destitution by the increased cost of renewing their visa.

VISA FEE INCREASES ANNOUNCED

Increases to visa fees and the Immigration Health Surcharge are announced across the board.

DESTITUTION & EXPLOITATION

The Illegal Migration Act will take away any incentive of engaging with the asylum system and will drive people underground and into destitution in our communities.

ILLEGAL MIGRATION ACT 2023

The Illegal Migration Bill passes into law on 20th July 2023 and effectively denies most people the right to claim asylum in the UK.

SALFORD BECOMES LOCAL AUTHORITY OF SANCTUARY

On 20th March 2023, Salford City Council is recognised as a Local Authority of Sanctuary.

MANCHESTER TO BE A LOCAL AUTHORITY OF SANCTUARY

On 12th July 2023, Manchester City Council votes unanimously to become a Local Authority of Sanctuary.

RESS LAUNCHES

Restricted Eligibility Support Service (RESS), a GMCA-funded partnership between GMAIU, the Boaz Trust and the Booth Centre launches in March 2023.

GMCA/STEP CHANGE EVENT

Event heralding the development of a Greater Manchester asylum and migration strategy.

REFUGEE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

Thousands of newly-granted refugees are pushed into homelessness by the Home Office's rush to clear the asylum 'backlog.'

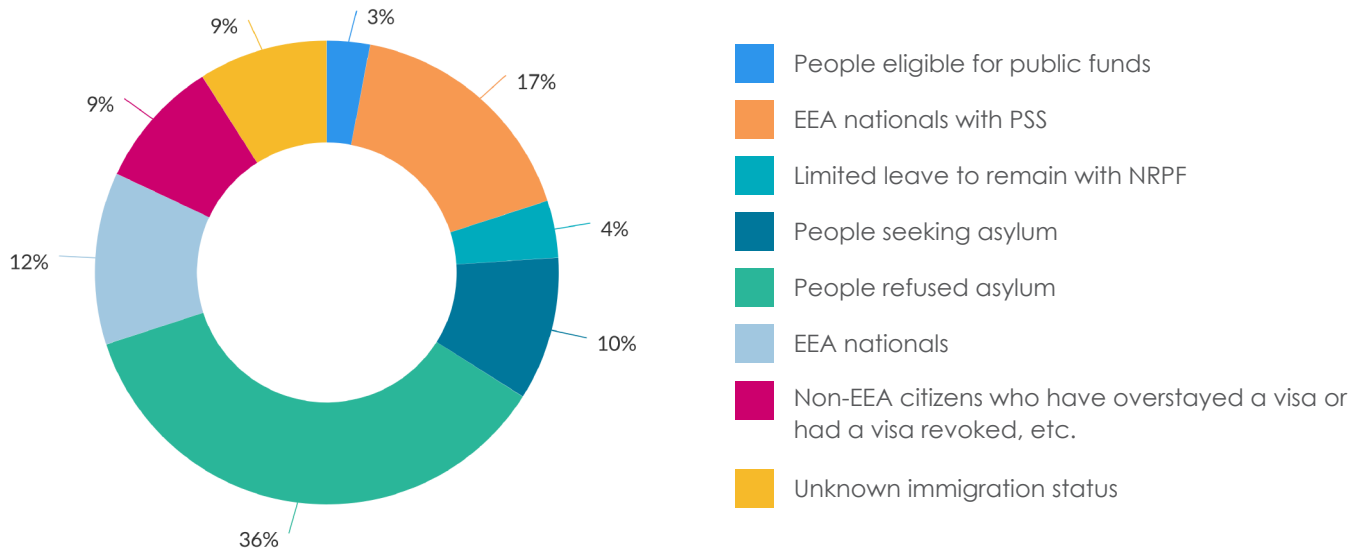
SECTION 1: ROUTES INTO DESTITUTION | FIVE CASE STUDIES

It is sometimes assumed that if people are destitute, it must somehow be their fault. What the stories in this report demonstrate is how constricted people's agency becomes within the structures of immigration law. The choices each of these people have had are very limited. That they were forced into destitution for falling foul of the complex and opaque structures of immigration law is a burning injustice.

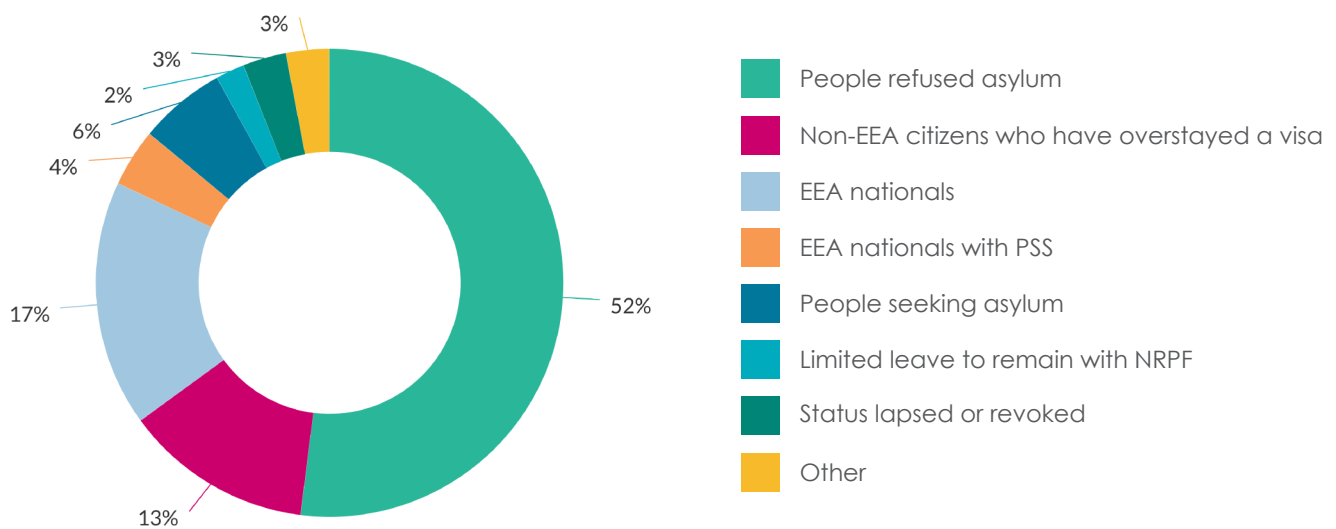
Routes into destitution include:

- **Being refused asylum** People seeking asylum are entitled to accommodation and financial support from the Home Office, but when a claim is refused, this support stops. People may be refused asylum for a variety of reasons. Someone may have fled oppression and/or violence, but if they do not meet the narrow criteria of persecution as laid out in the Refugee Convention, they will not be legally recognised as a refugee. Additionally, in the criminalised atmosphere surrounding asylum, many who do meet the criteria may have been wrongly refused owing to the culture of disbelief that exists within the Home Office.⁹
- **EEA nationals resident in the UK prior to Brexit** who have not managed to prove that they are lawfully resident, via the EU Settlement Scheme.
- **Being granted leave to remain but with NRPF** If people are unable to work e.g. for health or childcare reasons, they may be pushed into destitution.
- **Overstaying a visa, or status lapsing** This is a highly stigmatised category, but there are numerous reasons why people might be unable to renew a visa, including exorbitant visa fees and high evidential thresholds, as well as life changes like a relationship breakdown.¹⁰
- **EEA nationals granted pre-settled status** If an individual has only been able to prove less than five years' lawful residence, EEA nationals are granted pre-settled status. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has in many cases refused to recognise their entitlement to welfare benefits, although this policy has recently been ruled unlawful.
- **Windrush** Some individuals have leave to remain, or are British citizens, but the Home Office have no records. Following the implementation of hostile environment policies, people who had been living and working in the UK for decades suddenly found themselves pushed into destitution and threatened with deportation.

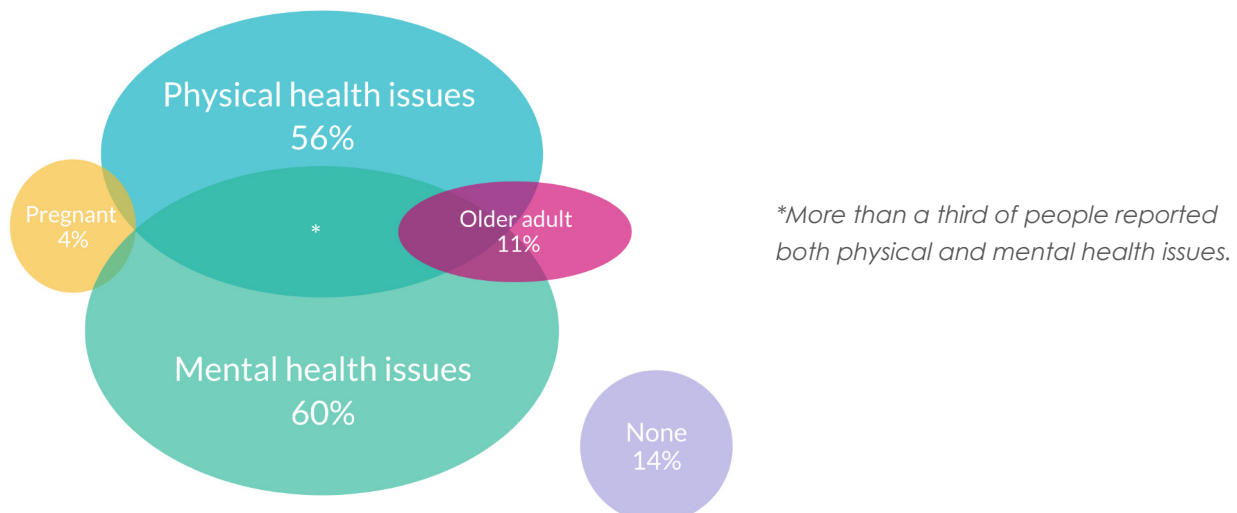
IMMIGRATION STATUS OF PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE RESTRICTED ELIGIBILITY SUPPORT SERVICE (APR-DEC 23)



IMMIGRATION STATUS OF PEOPLE ACCESSING THE GM MIGRANT DESTITUTION FUND (2021-2023)



ADDITIONAL VULNERABILITIES REPORTED BY 176 INDIVIDUALS ACCESSING MDF (2021-2023)



THE VIOLENT, RACIALISED NATURE OF IMMIGRATION LAW

Destitution is not a natural, or accidental, feature of an unequal world. Rather, it is a violent imposition designed into the racialised categories of immigration law.¹¹ This is a body of law which not only excludes certain, mostly black and brown, people from entering the UK, but also excludes certain, mostly black and brown, people living in the UK from working and accessing the most basic state safety nets. The ostensible justification for destitution as a policy tool is that it incentivises people to return to their country of origin. But it does not achieve this. Instead it rips years out of people's lives, punishing them for simply being here.

This is slow violence because immigration laws, often passed in frenzied response to the concocted moral panic of the day, have lasting effects that shape lives decades down the line. People living in destitution in 2024 will have often fallen prey to the layers of hostile legislation that have accumulated over the decades.

At the same time, destitution will be significantly exacerbated by the recent Illegal Migration Act 2023. By taking away the right to claim asylum from the vast majority of people fleeing war and persecution, this legislation, once implemented, will disincentivise people from engaging with the system. It will drive people underground where, with no legal status, they will be forced into destitution and forms of exploitation. This legislation risks leaving a toxic residue on our communities for years to come.

Sirous lost his job. He paid a private solicitor to make an application to the Home Office and was granted two and a half years leave to remain. He was on the 10-year route to settlement, meaning that he would only be able to get indefinite leave to remain again after ten years. He renewed his visa in 2018. After paying the legal and visa fees to the Home Office twice over, as well as the IHS, he had no money left.

As his sister and brother-in-law were now seriously ill, he moved in with them in order to care for them. When his leave to remain expired in 2020, and he needed to renew the visa, he had no money to do so. Nobody told him that he could apply for a fee waiver.

After a couple of years, his sister and brother-in-law moved into sheltered accommodation. Sirous came to stay near his daughter in Manchester. After a fall, he was admitted into hospital for a week. When he was discharged, he had nowhere to go. The hospital put him in a taxi, which took him to the Booth Centre.

My life, from that position of strength, working as a professional, ten years for the same company, went, to where I'm standing, to where I am now.

Though Sirous partly blames himself for not initially doing something about the loss of his passport, he attributes his predicament to the government's hostile environment policies:

This was at the time of the great Mrs May, hostile environment. It was posted over vans, and, I'm assuming someone from where I worked, I'm only assuming, you know, I'm not... I was asked to go to Liverpool, basically Borders

SIROUS: THE DEEP ROOTS OF THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

Sirous came to the UK from Iran with his mother in 1975 to study. In 1981, he was granted indefinite leave to remain, based on his marriage to a British woman and their British daughter. Completing his studies, he had a flourishing career as a building surveyor, working first for local authorities and then for a Church of England diocese. He separated from his wife after a couple of years, but his indefinite leave to remain was unaffected. He never thought to apply for British citizenship. Nor did

he worry when he lost his passport in the late 1980s.

In 2015 he received a letter from the Home Office saying that he was in the UK illegally. The Home Office, Sirous explains, had destroyed their records from the 1980s although, he noted wryly, "when they said they haven't got any records of my records, the letter, I've got the copy of the letter, the letter they sent me – it's got my picture on it, it's the same picture as in my passport, in my Iranian passport, so how the hell did they get that?"

Agency, which I went there and, taking my fingerprints, pictures and that sort of thing, and asked to attend Chester police station on a weekly basis.

His account of his early years in Britain in the 1970s and early 80s serves as a reminder of the deep roots of the hostile environment. His marriage was suspected to be a marriage of convenience, so he and his fiancée were interviewed at Manchester Airport: *“I remember the guy, he was pointing at me, I will never forget that afternoon, he said, ‘I have the power to put you on this plane, on a plane now. Back to Iran.’”* He also talked about the sense of surveillance:

Well, we had to carry this thing, it's called ‘alien registration card’. You had to carry that at all times with you, you could have been stopped on the street and if you didn't carry that, you were down to the D Division, it used to be in Albert Square, right, I think the building's been demolished now, it was the D Division that looked after ‘aliens’, as they call us. So things have not changed, but – and then the Tories came in, right, Theresa May's hostile environment, and then I got dragged into that.

DANIIL: DENIED ASYLUM

Daniil, a graphic designer, came to the UK in 2017 after being tortured in Belarus. His expectations of the UK were the opposite of his experiences in Belarus: a land of human rights, openness and transparency.

He claimed asylum on arrival. As he had a small sum of money with him, the Home Office refused to accommodate him. Having nowhere else to go, he slept in churches operating under the Boaz night shelter. After a week, he was

supported by Refugee Action to apply again for asylum support from the Home Office. He was now housed in a shared room in a hostel in Liverpool for a month, before being moved to a house in Rochdale.

For the first time since leaving Belarus, Daniil felt safe. He started volunteering at Mustard Tree and rebuilding his life. Even so, he was struggling with his mental health as he began to process everything he had been through.

As part of the asylum process, he underwent an eight-hour interview. He provided medical reports detailing his torture. After more than a year waiting, he was refused asylum. In 2019, he had an appeal hearing and the judge dismissed the appeal. He was deemed to have entered the UK for economic reasons. The judge recognised that he had been politically active, but did not believe that he had been persecuted as a result of his activism.

In May 2019, his asylum support ceased and he was evicted. He had nowhere to go and became street homeless.

YODIT: THE INCONSISTENCY OF ASYLUM DECISIONS

Yodit came to the UK in 2009 seeking safety from the dictatorship in Eritrea. Her daughter and her family were already seeking asylum in the UK and Yodit came to join them. Her other daughter had died and Yodit wanted to be with her remaining daughter. She wanted to care for her grandchildren as they grew up.

Yodit's daughter and her family were granted refugee status in 2011. But Yodit was refused. She tried to appeal, but her appeal was unsuccessful. She was told that she had only come to the UK to be with

her daughter, so could not be in danger in Eritrea.

Since that time, she has made several fresh claims for asylum, but has been refused every time. While she has been waiting for decisions on her fresh claims, she has been entitled to access support from the Home Office. But most of the time she has been destitute.

STEVE: WRONG STATUS, NO SAFETY NET

Steve came to the UK in 2016 from Romania, as a citizen of an EU country. His sense of opportunity was, he said, closed off by corruption back in Romania and he valued what he saw as the openness of the UK:

I mean for me, it's a better chance than in Romania, to do anything, going university, getting a job, applying for a house, you know, having my own things, taking care of them, that's what I'm wishing for, but who knows what future reserves?

He first worked in warehouses, then as a chef in Manchester, until he was laid off during the pandemic; the furlough scheme was not open to him. When Brexit was implemented he applied in time to the EU Settlement Scheme with the help of a friend and was granted pre-settled status, giving him five years leave to remain. He believes he could have applied for full settled status, but missed the deadline. In any case, he thought that he would be ok now that he had regularised his status.

In 2022, he returned to Romania to see family. He returned to the UK and found work as a subcontracted delivery driver for Amazon. He lodged with a landlady. Finding himself working excessive hours for very little money, he could not

make ends meet and left his job. He tried several times to claim Universal Credit, but each time was refused. Although he had legal status in the UK, the DWP did not recognise his right to claim benefits. He applied to the council for discretionary housing payment, but a few weeks later this too was refused. He went to the council to ask why he was refused. They said that he was not eligible and just gave him details of foodbanks.

I just decided to – forget about it, and try to find a different way – because they was not helpful at all.

His landlady let him stay on for some time without paying rent but in the end lost patience with him, throwing him out onto the streets in the middle of the night.

TAMARA: PUSHED OUT OF STATUS BY VISA FEES

Tamara was brought to the UK from Malawi as a child by her aunt in 2004. Her parents had died and she had no other family. Her aunt decided that she would have a better future in the UK. Tamara had no understanding of the UK's immigration system when her aunt made this decision, but was hopeful and excited about the prospect of a new life. They came on a visit visa and moved to Nottingham. Since then, she has had no ties to Malawi.

I think it was more her decision, because you know, I was young, and I didn't decide anything at that time, so I had people deciding for me what to do, what, how to live, so, I didn't decide anything.

Even so, Tamara threw herself into her education and dreamed of going to university to become a midwife. She got a student visa and

started studying in college. Upon turning 18, her aunt told her that she would now have to fend for herself. Since then, she has had no contact with her.

While studying, she was also juggling two jobs as a cleaner and as a carer. However, when it came to renewing her visa, she did not have enough money for the fees.

I couldn't do it, because it was too much for me – because I was studying now for my GCSEs and then I had to go to London for the visa, and then I had to be working on top of that, two jobs, so everything was just too much for me, and I couldn't...

She lost her leave to remain, categorised now as a 'visa overstayer'. She was forced to drop her studies. Without the right to work, she sofa surfed between friends, helping out with childcare and housework. As the years went by, she didn't apply again for a visa:

I didn't know how to go about it at that time, you know – because there was a lot going in my head, you know you're not working, you don't have a proper place to live, and all that. So the last thing I had was how to even go about the immigration side, you know.

She became seriously ill and in 2010 ended up in hospital. On the suggestion of a social worker, she claimed asylum, based on her health condition and the stigma attached to it in Malawi. While waiting for a decision, she was housed by the Home Office. After more than a year waiting, she was refused. Her solicitor said her case had no merit, so Tamara did not appeal. Owing to her ill-health, she was allowed to stay in her asylum accommodation for a while longer, but eventually she was evicted – although her health

was still bad. She became homeless again, sofa surfing between acquaintances. She sought advice several times again:

I used to try at least to get [advice], but they would say, 'Oh, the only thing you can do is, maybe try to have a baby, or, get married...' and you know, it would depress me, and they'd say, 'Otherwise, there's nothing.' Because I used to try, at least get advice from lawyers... And this would depress me, and I'm like, God... you know, but I still was hanging in there, say, ok, I would still now, I have to just stay without anything.

What needs to happen?

These years of destitution could have been avoided. Recent policy changes, such as the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and the recent hikes in visa fees and IHS, risk pushing even more people into destitution. In the long term, we want to see the government stop using destitution as a weapon of immigration control. However, in the short to medium term, as long as destitution remains baked into immigration controls, changes must be made to **prevent people being forced into destitution by laws that are not fit for purpose** (see Recommendation 2). Additionally, measures must be taken to ensure that **those receiving an asylum decision avoid a cliff-edge of destitution** (see Recommendation 3).

THE SCALE OF DESTITUTION IN GREATER MANCHESTER

Asylum destitution

From 2014 onwards, when dispersal data by local authorities began to be published, between 5,000 and 7,000 people have been living in Home Office asylum accommodation in Greater Manchester (this represents 15-18% of the national total). According to Home Office estimates, the final refusal rate (after a person is appeal rights exhausted) has ranged from 47% in 2016-17 to 29% in 2019 and 23% in 2021. Families with children have their support continued even after a refusal, but adults without children are at risk of destitution. According to Home Office figures, for most of this period, just over a third of those on asylum support have been single adults.

Hundreds of people will therefore have faced eviction into destitution each year. Based on the number of decisions made, and the grant rate, this figure could be between 800 and 900 in some years. Between 2014 and 2021, we estimate that around 4,000 people may have faced destitution following an asylum refusal.

This is a very imprecise figure. We don't know how many these people are and we don't know what has happened to them since. Very few will have left the UK. Some may have submitted fresh claims and been granted status. Others may have been refused again. Others may have stopped engaging with the Home Office and withdrawn into the shadows.

The very difficulty of generating firm figures speaks of the lack of care built into the system.

Figures on final grant rate after appeal for 2022-23 are not yet available, but with the significant increase in decisions in 2023, the numbers of refusals will also have increased.

EEA national destitution

Between 2018 and 2023, more than 300,000 applications were made from Greater Manchester to the EU Settlement Scheme. Of those, 126,680 have been granted Pre-Settled Status, and are at risk of destitution if they find themselves out of work. A further 37,950 have been refused, treated as invalid or withdrawn. We do not know how many of those have remained in the UK. Some may have applied again successfully, others may not. We also do not know how many people in our region have never applied to the EU Settlement Scheme, and who are not entitled to work or access benefits as a result.

For the other forms of migrant destitution, figures are even harder to come by, making it impossible to assess the scale of the issue.

SECTION 2: EXPERIENCES OF DESTITUTION

The experiences of destitution of those interviewed for this report varied widely, encompassing street homelessness, emergency accommodation, sofa surfing and entrapment with an abusive partner. For all, not being entitled to access any form of support or right to support themselves placed severe constraints on their agency, forcing them into situations over which they only had limited control. They found themselves wholly dependent on the goodwill of others, which for one interviewee exposed her to abuse. They all experienced a range of harms as a result: the slow violence of destitution damaged physical and mental health, blocked aspirations, and imposed a stigma that impacted people's sense of dignity.

What does destitution mean to you?

It certainly represents hostility, absolutely, I know we just said hostile environment ..., but it feels like yeah, an imposed, an imposed condition on somebody, based on hostile attitudes that are discussed and then turned into law, miles and miles away from people's actual lived experience on the ground. And I suppose more practically, it means people being essentially completely unable, through legal means, to adequately support themselves and build lives here. There are always other ways that people can manage, but there's lots of dangers and vulnerabilities that come along with that as well.

Harris, The Booth Centre

The webs of violence created by immigration law also impose constraints on services working with people who are destitute, but people working in these services also have choices. Although destitution is rooted in encounters with Home Office bureaucracy, day-to-day experiences are shaped by encounters with local government and voluntary sector services across Greater Manchester. Even within the constraints imposed by their immigration status, there were moments in the stories of those interviewed for this report when things could have gone better – where barriers they faced locally imposed further harms, or where there was an opportunity to mitigate the suffering they were going through. For all of them, too, there have been spaces where their resilience has been bolstered and where harms experienced while destitute have been mitigated.

STREET HOMELESSNESS & EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

Two of the five individuals interviewed for this research, Steve and Daniil, were forced onto the streets as a result of their destitution, while a third individual, Sirous, narrowly avoided street homelessness. Street homelessness is not an inevitable consequence of destitution. Although people who are destitute are not eligible for mainstream homelessness assistance, there are other avenues through which local authorities *can* support them, using funds that are not designated as 'public funds' for immigration purposes.¹²

However, as there is no statutory duty to support, there is a high degree of inconsistency. Indeed, frontline workers at the Boaz Trust and the Booth Centre described expending considerable

amounts of energy advocating for accommodation for people who are destitute. They highlighted multiple inconsistencies, so that people in very similar situations face strikingly different outcomes:

- **Geographical inconsistency** Different boroughs across Greater Manchester provide different levels of support.
- **Inconsistency from reliance on personal connections** Interviewees described the crucial importance of good contacts within local authorities. With the right staff member at a well-connected organisation advocating with the right person, someone might get lucky. Without that advocacy, they might get nowhere.
- **Inconsistency within local authority practice** Even services well connected to relevant contacts in local authorities reported that what was possible constantly changes in response to pressure from above.

This inconsistency is compounded by the presence of ABEN spaces. Across Greater Manchester, 60 of these are available to people with NRPF, including the 20 beds provided by one of the services interviewed for this report, Supporting People in Need (SPIN). Referrals can be made by local authorities or other voluntary sector organisations, especially where a strong working relationship already exists. Again, there is no statutory duty to provide these beds. Move-on is necessarily slow owing to the time it takes to resolve immigration issues. Spaces

are therefore not consistently available. As the move-on from emergency accommodation would usually be to ABEN beds, this creates a bottleneck. In sum, there is little sense of a cohesive system of emergency bed spaces and longer-term, stable ABEN bed spaces. Frontline worker interviewees described a sense of a lottery.

Connected to this inconsistency is a lack of transparency over what people are entitled to and a lack of a clear sense of a 'system'. Interviewees described local authority inflexibility as a short-termist approach that drives people into rough sleeping. Indeed, voluntary sector services sometimes find themselves having to advise people to sleep rough, but in the 'right' place so that they will be seen and picked up by the rough sleeper teams. This was the case with Steve, who spent a week sleeping at Manchester Airport, before the rough sleeper team signposted him to the Booth Centre, who then mobilised council accommodation for him.

If the inconsistency and lack of transparency is frustrating for support services, it is even worse for people affected to comprehend:

And how are people themselves supposed to understand what they're advocating to try and access? ... We're like, well we can try to do this referral, maybe it will lead to this, it feels like we're hiding stuff from people, but it's genuinely like we don't know, we can try it, and it is just, it feels quite inconsistent and unclear ... if that's for us, how are people trying to access it feeling?

Katie, Boaz Trust

What does destitution mean to you?

I could just see the sheer frustration, sadness, fear, just tired of fighting, and looking, and searching – and surviving, because that is all it is, it's just trying to survive, and he was, you know, 'Vron, what can you give, what can you do for me, where can I sleep tonight, where can I sleep tonight' ... and in my head, I'm thinking through a million things to try... and I think for me that just kind of sums up destitution – it's like somebody that's sitting in front of you desperately asking for you to find an answer.

Vron, Boaz Trust

The real-life impacts of these inconsistencies are demonstrated in the two contrasting case studies of Daniil and Sirous. In different ways, both found the violence of the immigration system amplified by the local government responses to their destitution.

What does destitution mean to you?

Bloody hard, I know that. Seeing their faces when they come in, to know they're not entitled to anything, and something that we take for granted like getting a new toothbrush, or going for a shower – and something they cannot do, because they can't live their life here, they've come to the UK for an easier life, or what they thought was going to be an easier life – it isn't an easier life for them, in any kind of way.

Claire, SPIN

DANIIL: RE-TRAUMATISED BY DESTITUTION

After his asylum claim was refused in summer 2019, Daniil was evicted from his asylum accommodation. With the support of a British friend, he phoned Rochdale Council for emergency accommodation. He was told that as he was in the UK unlawfully, they could not help, and he was signposted to the Boaz Trust and the British Red Cross.

With nowhere else to go, he slept in a tent in a park in Rochdale for two and half months, taking care to sleep away from other rough sleepers. He survived using foodbanks.

Daniil had already been re-traumatised by the asylum process and his refusal. The experience of homelessness exacerbated this. He did not feel safe sleeping on the street, although, he declared: "But it's, anyway it's safer than I, back to Belarus. Even in the street, even at night." He explained that when he was in Belarus, he had become used to the detentions and beatings, but as he had gradually come to feel safe during his two years in the UK, he had begun to process the enormity of what he had been through. With his mental health deteriorating, Daniil was seeing his GP weekly and had been referred for therapy. However, the instability of his accommodation was a barrier:

Because in this situation, when you living on the street, it's quite complicated to, feel yourself safe – and in my situation, when I start therapy with mental health therapist, and she said, that you must feel safe. If you will not feel safe, our therapy will [not be useful].

In October 2019, Daniil was offered a space in the Boaz night shelter,

sleeping in a different church in Manchester every night. He felt safer, but still very insecure. He was very conscious of the level of stress everyone in the night shelter was under:

In night shelter you haven't your own space, because you're living in one, you're sleeping in one room with other people, and – we know each other, but we, all of us in same situation, but anyway, we not feel safe because different situation happen even between these people – some conflict, misunderstanding, and other things.

While in the night shelter, Daniil started volunteering again at Mustard Tree.

But again, in that situation when you busy the full week, like Monday to Friday, it's once. But after that coming Saturday and Sunday. So Saturday you can go to the library, you can go. But on Sunday, in early morning you have to go to the street... And, it's also not really good time, because when you have a target to go somewhere, you're going. But when you're just walking around, without targets, without what need to do, it's complicated, and a lot of things like, exactly about yourself, come in. It's ok if for one week, ok for two weeks. But when it's going longer than a month, you're thinking changes, and you start thinking that all problem, it's because of you... I don't know how it's similar in English, but in my language we say 'you start eating yourself.'

After a few months in the night shelter, Daniil was offered a space in a Boaz house.

And when I receive a room, it was really, good time, when I

receive – it's not about, I mean about Christmas, but about my mental health condition, because at that time, it's, probably I been in situation when I was really close to – very bad situation. It could happen, and it almost happened. But some people helped me, and stopped me.

SIROUS: EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

In contrast to Daniil, Sirous avoided street homelessness. He had spent a week in hospital following a fall. When he was discharged, he had nowhere to go, so the hospital put him in a taxi to take him to the Booth Centre. The Booth Centre arranged emergency accommodation from Manchester City Council that day and he was put up in a hotel for two weeks. As it was winter, the cold weather provision meant that there was less gatekeeping around the accommodation. Even so, on several occasions he was told by the receptionist that he was being evicted that day. Each time this happened, he went to the Booth Centre, where staff members would spend time advocating with the council to get him back into a hotel. After several weeks in two different hotels, he was then moved to a different hotel for three or four weeks. He described sleeping in a room with seven or eight camp beds, with some of the other residents using drugs. Feeling uncomfortable there, he would spend his days at the Booth Centre. Having no access to any financial support, he was supported to apply to MDF for a cash grant:

I got my hair cut! ... There's a barber just round the corner – just went there, got my hair cut, got some personal stuff – and that came in handy! Couple of T-shirts

and stuff like this. It doesn't go far! It's something definitely, it's something – if you imagine even asylum seekers and refugees get some money – but I'm neither an asylum seeker nor a refugee. Like a persona non grata route! Well, it's funny and it's not funny.

Sirous's situation remained deeply precarious. He had one hostile conversation with the council about his housing and he was uncertain how long he would be allowed to stay at the hotel he was residing in. He had already been suffering panic attacks and insomnia because of his immigration status. The uncertainty of his housing further impacted his mental health: he was scared he would end up on the streets. After laughing bitterly about his situation, he said:

There's no other way – otherwise I'll go crazy. You know – when I was at [the hotel], I used to go for a walk of an evening. Just from [hotel] to the bridge there. And there was a couple of nights, I was down. And I contemplated jumping over. But when my technical background – you're not going to kill yourself by that jump, you'll just injure yourself badly. Kept walking, had a cigarette, calmed down. Second night – it happened again...

Eventually, when an ABEN bed became available at SPIN, Booth Centre staff used their strong working relationship with SPIN to advocate for Sirous to move there. He was told that he could stay as long as he needed. He declared: *"I've not had that thought again – purely because I feel safe here."*

HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

In 2021-2023, more than half of the 290 single adults who accessed MDF reported that they were sofa-surfing or staying with family or friends. Less than 10% reported being street homeless. Of the others, most were living in SPIN or other temporary accommodation.

Between April and December 2023, just under 40% of those accessing RESS (a partnership of Boaz Trust, Booth Centre and GMIAU) were street homeless, while just under a third reported sofa-surfing or staying with friends and acquaintances.

The difference between these figures partly reflects a rise in rough sleeping in late 2023. It possibly also points to RESS partners being better able to support people who are street homeless.

While street homelessness is the most visible form of migrant destitution, most will experience forms of 'hidden homelessness'. Street homelessness often attracts more political attention because of concern around the optics of rough sleeping. It is crucial also to maintain political concern for what is happening unseen, behind closed doors in our communities – but doing so is a challenge, not least because of the uncertainty around what hidden homelessness might involve. The term 'hidden homelessness' encompasses a wide range of situations. It might mean long-term stable accommodation with friends or relatives. It might mean cycling between the goodwill of different acquaintances. Chosen One from Equal Education Chances (EEC) declared:

You will not find anybody from the African background on the streets ... Because why, we always open our doors, we are very community-oriented – story always move us, and then we open our doors to people, ok sleep on the couch, maybe for two weeks you know, for three weeks, sometimes that two weeks could be extended to like six months!

Of course, the capacity of communities to go on absorbing the numbers of people in need of a roof over their heads is inevitably limited, and has become more so in recent months. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the thousands of households across Greater Manchester supporting people who are destitute, many of whom may themselves be living in poverty. In the total absence of statutory support, this unrecognised welcome and generosity is a lifeline.

At the same time, the forced dependence on others is another dimension of the violence of destitution. Hidden homelessness may involve living in uncomfortable and demeaning circumstances – for example on a kitchen floor, or a mechanics workshop. There may be household tensions. Interviewees highlighted situations where a woman

might be invited to stay by a friend whose husband made her unwelcome.

Hosting arrangements also vary widely in certainty and security. While some might have somewhere long-term to stay, others might be able to stay only for a few weeks, or move from night to night, sometimes spending nights on buses or trams. Sometimes people might have what seems somewhere secure to stay, for months or even years, but find themselves eventually overstaying their welcome and kicked out. For all the generosity and goodwill that is extended from within communities, supporting people who are destitute places a strain on household finances and can exacerbate overcrowding. It can create complications for people living in insecure tenancies. Sometimes they might be seeking asylum themselves and living in Home Office accommodation and, with very few rights, worry about breaching the terms of their occupancy agreement.

Whatever the circumstances, living in hidden homelessness is likely to impinge on wellbeing, dignity and self-worth. In these circumstances, frontline interviewees highlighted the crucial importance of the cash grants from MDF. Although everyone recognised the limits of what £80 could buy, they stressed the importance of being able to contribute to hosts' household budgets, reducing the sense of dependency.

YODIT

Yodit was refused asylum but her daughter and her family were recognised as refugees. Yodit wanted to care for her grandchildren as they grew up, and she stayed with her daughter's family. There was little space in the house and she had to sleep in a small storage room. There was no space for her limited possessions.

After a few years, she was accommodated by the Boaz Trust. Although she was offered the accommodation for more than a year, she knew there was a time limit and describes feeling stressed and depressed about what would happen next. She submitted a fresh asylum claim and moved back into Home Office accommodation. When she was refused, she submitted another asylum claim, but this too was refused. Eventually, in 2018, she was pushed back into destitution. She moved back to her daughter's.

Yodit approached WAST, who arranged for her to move into a

'pod' provided by Cornerstone. Yodit described it in Tigrinya with the English word 'container'. She spent just over a year there, in a bunk bed, sharing the pod with strangers.

After just over a year, she moved back to her daughter's. She tried calling the council, but was told that she was not eligible for support as she was not a refugee.

She describes the toll destitution has taken on her health. Because of her health, there are only certain types of food she can eat, but she has not always been able to access these. She also stressed the impact on her mental health:

It has impacted my mental health, for example, I get into a bus and halfway through I feel like I was going in the wrong direction and stopped and left, and realised that I was in the middle of nowhere.

At the time of our interview, Yodit was being hosted by an elderly lady through Refugees at Home.

What does destitution mean to you?

Destitution is – you know, people don't even want to accept that they live in destitution, because it's a big thing for where we come from ... they feel like they've been inhuman. They're not capable again, they lose confidence of themselves.

Chosen One, Equal Education Chances

She feels welcome with her host and a friendship has developed. She can now prepare *injera* for herself in the house. She has been told that she can stay as long as she needs and, as a result, says that both her physical and mental health have improved.

EXPOSURE TO ABUSE

What does destitution mean to you?

Destitution is incredibly degrading and dehumanising ... people are forced to do things, or make decisions that they would never normally choose.

Katie, Boaz Trust

Whatever form it takes, destitution places people in unsafe situations. It is a form of violence that exposes people to further violence. The imperative to meet basic everyday needs creates risks of abuse and exploitation. The forced

dependency on others means that there is no clear dividing line between what is care and support and what is exploitation and control. At one end of the spectrum, people might start out by wanting to pay back their hosts by helping out around the house, but over time this might bleed into a form of domestic servitude. Hardship funds like Red Cross support or MDF can therefore not only promote a sense of dignity, but can also make people safer if they have at least some means of contributing.

At the other end of the spectrum are forms of sexual exploitation and organised forced labour. Much will be wholly unseen by wider society, while some will be hiding in plain sight, in car washes or takeaways.

TAMARA: FROM SOFA SURFING TO ABUSE

After Tamara was unable to renew her student visa in 2006, her dreams of becoming a midwife were put on hold indefinitely. She spent the next four years sofa surfing between friends in Nottingham. She helped out with childminding and other informal labour. The help she got from her friends was limited and the experience took a toll on her health. In 2010, she was hospitalised. After claiming asylum, she was housed by the Home Office in Leeds. After her refusal, she was evicted and again had to depend on acquaintances.

It's not nice – you know, even the day you get tired at someone helping with somebody, living with somebody, so - you know, it's not...

She had to move from place to place:

Some of them were starting stories, like oh, police are here, you cannot live with me, you

know they would make up stories and it was so stressful ... They want me to move, but they cannot tell me ... and then I'd move from one person to another, just days, you know it was, that kind of life.

After several years of this, she met her then-partner. He was waiting for his asylum decision and was being supported by his family in his own flat in Manchester. Tamara moved in with him. At first she said it was nice because he was in a similar situation. However, he soon became physically and emotionally abusive. She felt trapped: *If I leave him, where am I going to go?*

Her partner used the fact that she had nowhere to go to control her:

You don't have the peace of mind because once he opens the door, you don't know what to expect that day, that's the kind of life I used to live, so you know, I really lost, now I'm slim, but I had really lost weight, you know, sometimes, it's, you sleep without eating...

Tamara spent two years living in this situation. Eventually, an acquaintance introduced her to WAST. Drawing on the support of her peers, she eventually left her partner and went to stay with another WAST member.

BLOCKED DREAMS, WASTED POTENTIAL & HOPELESSNESS

In addition to everyday harms, destitution blocks long-term aspirations, placing constraints on dreams of becoming active members of our society. Tamara had dreamt of becoming a midwife. Steve had dreamt of going to university and 'having a normal life'. The frontline workers interviewed all stressed people's eagerness to work and contribute. They talked

What does destitution mean to you?

It means an imposed state of worthlessness that isn't actually real, reflective of the individual ... it's literally barriers that are just like paperwork barriers that just make no sense at all.

Alix, Booth Centre

about the dignity, autonomy and confidence that would come with being allowed to work, as well as the waste in not allowing people who are living long-term in our communities to contribute. Katie, from Boaz, talked about her double-edged feelings when people who had been long-term destitute were finally granted status: the joy, but also the sadness: *You just think what a waste of 15 years for somebody to have not got this 15 years sooner.*

Given the combined pressures of getting by, fears of being turned away or sent back, the complexity of the legal case, and the sense of wasted potential, it is unsurprising that there were moments in the case studies above of deep despair: Sirous on the bridge; Daniil's darkest moment when he finally moved into the safety of the Boaz house; Tamara's days when she "really [felt] like giving up".

I can think of numerous examples of people ... who are at a point in their experience of trying to navigate a system, and work their way through a maze that feels completely impenetrable to them, by design, that as a result, have got really significant mental health concerns.

Harris, Booth Centre

If you're living in hell, and you're scared of being woken up with somebody kicking you and that, there is something that somebody could give you just for you to feel, not human but, get away from that situation, they're going to do it. So you can totally understand when they come in and say, yeah I've used drugs, or I've used alcohol – it's a get out of jail card, that's what it is, it's getting away from their life, and then reality hits them.

Claire, SPIN

SPACES OF WELCOME

I don't want to describe people as vulnerable, because they're vulnerable to their circumstances rather than them being vulnerable themselves ... because I think we say the people we work with are also the strongest, most resilient people you'll ever meet, but also the most at risk, vulnerable because of the systems they've been put through.

Katie, Boaz Trust

Despite everything, those interviewed for this report have found ways not only of surviving, but also of thriving and flourishing, rooted in the many spaces of welcome that exist within, and despite, the hostile environment. Indeed, the frontline services discussed in this report, like so many other spaces across Greater Manchester, go far beyond practical advice and support.

For many, these are spaces of welcome where, at best, people can find trust and nonjudgement. Even if there is no obvious accommodation option or other practical support, they can be spaces of mutual support and solidarity. Harris described a scene at the Booth Centre where a group

of people from completely different backgrounds were teaching each other to say hello in their languages:

I think there's a recognition as well, given the like horrendousness of the hostile environment from statutory angle, and from central government, I think there's, I hope, and certainly in the microcosm of here, it definitely feels like there is a – that the divide and rule isn't really working, people all recognise that for different reasons, everyone is in a different kind of shitty circumstance, that's completely beyond their control, beyond the control of the voluntary sector, and I think that's, there's almost kind of, ok, let's stick together, this is shit, rather than, you know what I mean.

Those interviewed for this report have all drawn strength from spaces of welcome like this. For all the constraints on their agency imposed by their immigration status, they have played active roles in support networks, bringing their resilience, care and hope to our communities.

Yodit is part of a gardening project for refugees and asylum seekers where she is immensely valued for the gentle kindness and hard work she brings to the garden and its community. Indeed, she described keeping busy throughout her week: attending a women's group at Revive on Mondays, the garden on Tuesdays, volunteering as a cook at Red Cross on Thursdays, WAST on Fridays. For all the pressures she has been under, Yodit has been fulfilling her dream of caring for her grandchildren and maintains a very good relationship with them.

Daniil kept on volunteering at RAS Voice throughout his period of homelessness, and as well at Mustard Tree. When a new charity was set up

offering accommodation to refused asylum seekers, although it was too late to support him, Daniil drew on his skills as a graphic designer to create a logo for them.

Sirous, appreciating the sense of community at the Booth Centre, has become a long-term and valued volunteer. Serving food and translating for Farsi-speaking clients, he adopts the ethos, 'Behind every face, there's a story'. He is also part of the Booth Centre's advisory group, where he is bringing his expertise as a buildings surveyor to advise on their environmental policy. When he gets his status back, he says he would like to work in the homelessness sector. Although deeply frustrated at still being unable to work, he is pleased to be volunteering:

The issue is, I'm still capable of giving something – and that's been taken away from me by the laws concerning immigration ... I can be helpful!

What needs to happen?

If Sirous had had certainty throughout the months he spent in insecure emergency accommodation, perhaps he would have avoided those suicidal thoughts on the bridge.

If Daniil had not simply been turned away as not entitled when he first approached homelessness services, perhaps he could have avoided the mental health crisis that followed.

Access to accommodation must be improved for Greater Manchester residents who are destitute, regardless of their immigration status. We need to see greater consistency across the city region, founded on the principle that anyone presenting as homeless should be accommodated, regardless of their immigration status (see Recommendations 5, 6).

More consistency is an answer ... broadly speaking, if I was to sum it up in one sentence, rather than saying What are the reasons why we can't help this person? - What are the reasons why we can accept this referral and how can we make sure that we get this person accommodated and supported? - would be really, really positive.

Harris, Booth Centre

More must be done to support spaces of sanctuary and solidarity in our city-region amidst the hostile environment, embedding anti-racist practice in all statutory and voluntary sector services. Against the odds, people are finding and co-creating spaces of welcome, spaces where friendships, care, and hope can flow across racialised boundaries that divide us into those with and without status. Building on this work, we want to see all local authorities across the city-region joining Manchester and Salford on the journey to becoming a Borough of Sanctuary (see Recommendation 8).

SECTION 3: ESCAPING DESTITUTION | HOW GM ORGANISATIONS ARE BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Part of the violence of destitution lies in the barriers that are placed in the way of escaping it.¹³ Policymakers justify destitution on the basis that it incentivises people to return to their country of origin. This was not an option for any of the people interviewed for this report. Indeed, all have either regularised their status, or are in the process of doing so. Destitution is not a fixed state. With the right advice, and support to act on that advice, many of those currently facing destitution could regularise their status. Even if there is no chance now of regularising status, this can always change.

For people who have been refused asylum because they did not meet the narrow criteria of refugee, changes in the situation in their country of origin, or in the case law about a particular country, might make them one day eligible for refugee status. They can make further submissions to the Home Office and, while these are being considered, they can access Home Office support again. Additionally, changes in people's lives in the UK, especially in family relations, might make them eligible for leave to remain on human rights grounds. Eventually, after 20 years living in the UK, with or without status, people can apply to regularise their status on private life grounds.

Yet, owing to the barriers outlined below, many can find themselves trapped in destitution for years or even decades, even when according to the letter of the law their right to remain should be recognised. However, organisations across our region are finding ways to break down these barriers and support people to regularise their status despite the overwhelming hostility of the policy environment. This work points the way to how our region can become a space of sanctuary from the violence of the hostile environment.

In 2022, 16 years after she first arrived in the UK, Tamara was granted leave to remain. Daniil was granted refugee status the same year.

At the time of the interview, Sirous was waiting for a decision on his long residence application. Nine months later he is still waiting.

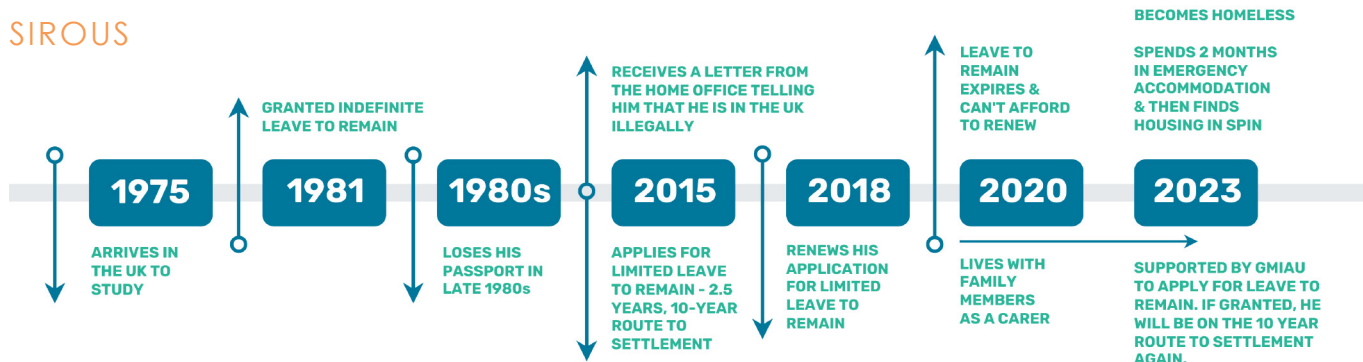
Steve has been supported by GMIAU to submit an application for settled status. The early intervention from the Booth Centre and the joined up partnership working between GMIAU, the Booth Centre and SPIN, stopped a week on the streets turning into months or years.

Since our interview, Yodit has found a solicitor for further submissions.

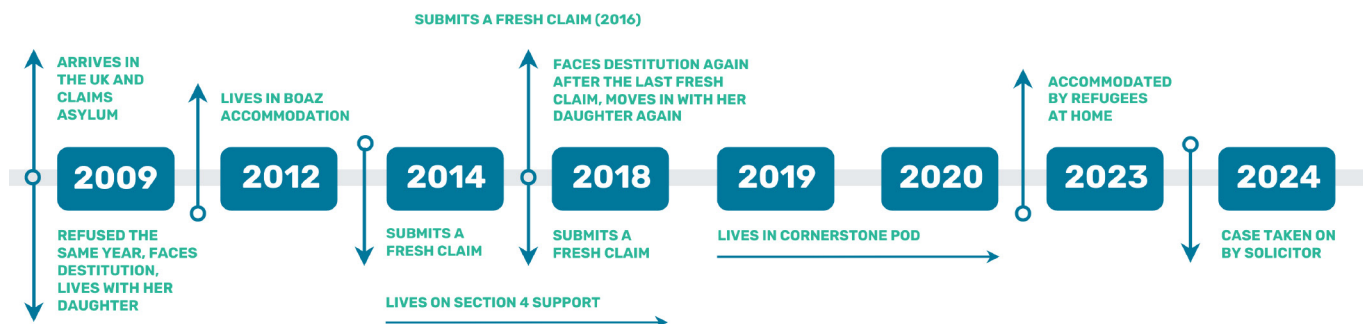
THE RESTRICTED ELIGIBILITY SUPPORT SERVICE (RESS)

In April to December 2024, of the 361 people receiving an immigration assessment from GMIAU as part of RESS, more than a quarter were supported to make an immigration application to the Home Office, while 14% escaped destitution by gaining access to public funds. A further 8% were granted asylum support.

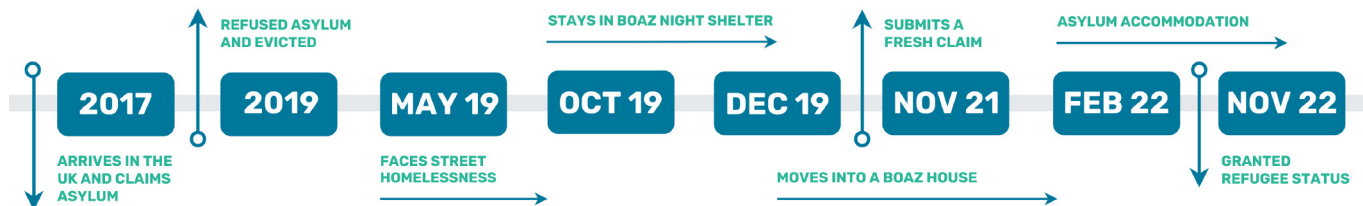
SIROUS



YODIT



DANIIL

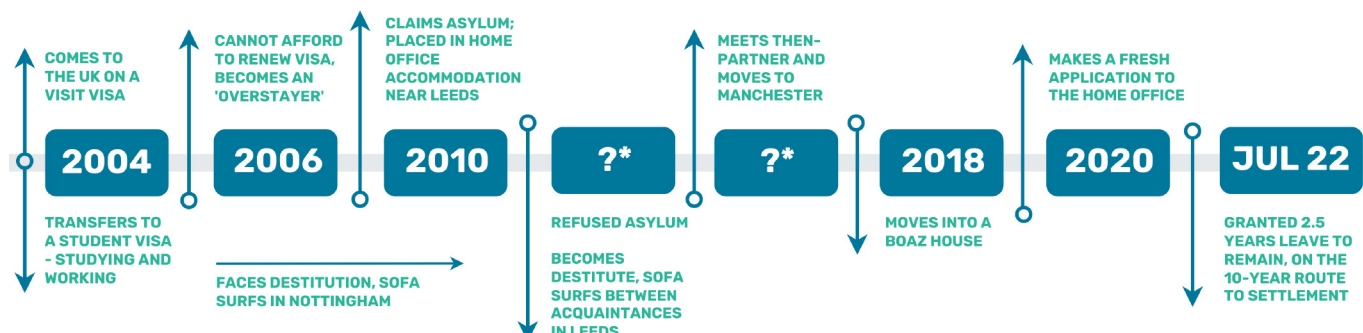


STEVE



TAMARA

**Exact dates during this period are a blur for Tamara*



BARRIERS TO REGULARISING STATUS

■ Difficulties finding a legal advisor

There is a drastic shortage of accredited immigration advisors, owing to austerity-related cuts to legal aid and to local authority-funded immigration advice. In the North West, in 2022 the deficit was estimated to be 6,470.¹⁴ For people living in destitution, it can be even harder to find an advisor owing to legal aid not being available for most immigration cases and the difficulty in finding a legal aid lawyer willing to do further submissions for asylum claims because of the assumed complexity of those cases.

Unsurprisingly many individuals therefore turn to non-legal aid lawyers, borrowing money or raising money from the community to fund the legal advice. This can expose people to another form of exploitation, where they risk paying substantial sums of money for little work.

I've been from one quack lawyer to another one to another one. It's so, so difficult to get the real one who know what they're doing. So some lawyers out there, they're not updated about the new rule, new application form, so they just give out the old form. People pay to take that in, they send it to the Home Office, and it bounce back, and money don't come back from the Home Office, you know that.

Chosen One, Equal Education Chances

■ Visa fees and the IHS

Human rights applications, for people applying on family or private life grounds, carry large fees and the IHS on top of that. If people are put on the 10-year route to settlement, they are expected to renew their visa every two and a half years – paying fees and the IHS each time. This creates the risk that people will be pushed out of status again.¹⁵ While it is possible to apply for a fee waiver, people may not be aware of this. This was the case with Sirous. He had paid a considerable sum to regularise his status the first time, and was put on the 10-year route. When he came to renew it for the second time, he could not afford the fee and was unaware that he could apply for a fee waiver.

■ High evidential threshold and challenges of gathering evidence

In any immigration application, the burden of proof lies on the applicant, meaning that they must evidence how they meet the criteria of the route they are applying under. Even with high-quality advice, it can be a challenge to gather all the paperwork for the application, especially when people are living in destitution. For example, people who have been refused asylum might be advised that they need documentation from their country of origin to corroborate their story, such as an arrest warrant and they will also need to demonstrate that this documentation is genuine.

And it's like I need find some proof, and more proof, more and more and more and more, every time. Of course, it somehow destroyed me mentally. ... When you every time in negative situation, in negative sphere even, it destroy you, mentally. You, you feel, you, you don't see anything positive. And you, expecting only negative. And if you every time living in negative, you will be negative.

Daniil

Applications under family or private life routes require extensive documentation of the relevant relationships, which can feel very intrusive. People also often find themselves relying on friends or acquaintances for supporting evidence, which can be a challenge when they have been dependent on them and potentially overstayed their welcome.

You have to like, evidence where you've been living for so long, the children, if they've got children, they've got to bring letter from school, from college, stuff like that, you need to bring utility bills. So imagine if somebody has been living on somebody's sofa, they don't have any, there's no proof that they're living there ... They wouldn't [write letters of support], because most time, the person they're living with too, has got no immigration status. So, you understand me now? They're like hiding, please, don't bring any government issue to my door.

Chosen One, Equal Education Chances

Applications under the long residence route, such as Sirous's, need to provide evidence of every year that people have been living in the UK to prove that they have never left the country. This is a major challenge for people who have been living on the margins, not in touch with services.

Similarly, applicants to the EU Settlement Scheme need to document proof of residence, which may not be straightforward for people who have been facing homelessness and/or in precarious employment. Recent changes to Home Office policy have meant that further evidence is required to justify the late application to the EUSS.

■ Home Office delays in making decisions

Even very straightforward applications, like Sirous's, which relies on decades of His Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC) and healthcare records, can take a year or more to resolve. While waiting for most applications, people are still not allowed to work or access benefits.¹⁶

Destitution exacerbates these challenges in a number of ways. People may have lost key paperwork over the years (especially if having moved multiple times). For many, the pressures to meet urgent everyday needs can distract from the slow and difficult process of evidence gathering, which may also be frustrated by mental or physical health issues (exacerbated by the experience of destitution).

All these barriers mean that people will remain unnecessarily trapped in destitution, often feeling frustrated and even blaming themselves for their inability to move on. However, these barriers are not always insurmountable, as the stories of those interviewed for this report demonstrate.

WHAT WORKS: THE BENEFITS OF STABLE ACCOMMODATION

All the individuals interviewed for this report had moved into more stable accommodation: a long-term hostel placement in a single room in SPIN (Sirous, Steve); a space in a shared house provided by Boaz (Tamara, Daniil); hosting via Refugees at Home (Yodit). After the precarious

conditions on the street had compounded the harms brought about by their insecure immigration status, all reported that stable accommodation brought significant improvements in their wellbeing. It was far more than just a roof over their heads.

We are a dysfunctional family, that's what we are! We do not judge you when you walk through the door, we really don't, you're family when you walk through the doors, and I'd say that the hardest thing out of everything is ... it's sad to see them go, and the majority of them don't want to go, it is sad to see them go!

Claire, SPIN

After Daniil moved into a Boaz house he shared that his mental health began to improve: *I start feeling myself bit better, probably because I've got like hope, hope, I get hope.* After his street homelessness had re-traumatised him, for the first time, he felt safe again:

So some people, home it's like a place where they're sleeping, but for me home it's not only place where I sleep, because for me home it's like a place where every time I'm safe.

Related to these benefits, stable, long-term accommodation also offers people a secure base from which to pursue their immigration case. Given the time taken to resolve immigration issues, long-term stability is key.

For Sirous, whose insecurity being moved between emergency hotels had driven him to contemplate jumping off a bridge, being moved into SPIN accommodation offered significant respite. He was told when he arrived that there was no time limit: he could stay as long as he needed to. He felt welcome and made friends with staff and other residents. He had already had advice from GMIAU before he moved to SPIN, but having stable accommodation proved key to getting his application together:

I needed that – basically, the peace of mind that you're not going to be on the streets – and the Booth Centre provided that, on their advice I came here.

Tamara, after escaping her abusive partner, found herself staying on a friend's sofa, but the friend was herself being accommodated by social services and risked getting into trouble having her stay. Via WAST, she was referred to Boaz and prioritised for a space in a house. Having been violently controlled by her partner, she could now reassert a sense of agency:

You are just somewhere where you know you can now try to control your life, or you can try to mould your life. It became easier, I felt at ease, ok, at least some part of my life is being – you know, so it changed a lot, even with my health, and everything about me changed.

Like Sirous, this regained sense of agency had knock-on benefits in being able to engage with immigration advice. Boaz connected Tamara with a solicitor who advised her that she could apply for leave to remain on private life grounds. When asked if she could have acted on that advice without the accommodation, she replied:

Oh, no, I wouldn't, because at least in Boaz I had now, I was in a place to say ok this is my home, so I was, I was stable in myself a bit, so at least I could organise, go here, go there, but if I'm living with friends, I have to think, ok, she's not happy, or this, you know, there'd be a lot of things going on in my head, I'm not going to be stable to say, ok I'm trying to sort this paperwork, or do that, but at least at Boaz, I was a bit settled, and that now, I could manage to say ok, I have this appointment, ok I'm going to print out this, I'm doing that, so at least, the other part of my condition was sorted, so it gave me an ease as well.

WHAT WORKS: PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND WRAPAROUND SUPPORT

Even with expert advice and stable accommodation, it can still be hard for people to act on the advice. The organisations interviewed played a crucial role in working in partnership with immigration advisors to deliver support to amplify the value of immigration advice. This might be built into the accommodation offer, as is the case with SPIN and Boaz. For people not in accommodation, it is also offered through the RESS floating support provided by the Booth Centre and Boaz, both of which emphasised the benefits of being flexible to accommodate people's difficulties in attending fixed appointment times. Benefits include:

■ Building trust

For people fearful of being reported to the Home Office and who may feel stigmatised and let down by multiple services, building trust is key. As Claire said of SPIN residents:

So we found when people come in, they're not really good pool players, but by the time they're leaving – playing a game of pool with somebody, you can ask questions, and have a conversation, break down the barriers, and they seem to be more opening, with giving information, and they trust you a little bit more, it's just gaining that little bit of bond.

For people refused asylum who have been re-traumatised by Home Office disbelief, the interviewees from Boaz found that non-judgemental listening affords validation and helps rebuild trust.

Equal Education Chances (EEC) registered as a referrer into MDF during the pandemic in 2020, a crucial boost to the many destitute people EEC was supporting. They had accessed no immigration advice and many were scared even to approach an immigration solicitor. As EEC was not tapped into wider support networks, MDF introduced them and two other organisations to GMIAU, which offered a series of outreach sessions. Several of those who had been accessing MDF as the only form of support went on to get advice and representation from GMIAU and ultimately win their status. EEC played a key role in facilitating trust. Chosen One found that by sharing some of her own story she could persuade people to approach GMIAU and access the advice that would ultimately result in winning their leave to remain.

■ Gaining clarity in opaque situations

If people have lost key paperwork, it can be wholly unclear where their immigration case is up to, making it impossible to advise. Here, services like floating support can help people gather their paperwork together as a first step to getting advice.

■ Support to act on advice and gather evidence

While immigration advisors may be able to commission forms of expert evidence, most of the evidence gathering is the responsibility of the applicant, which people often do not fully understand, meaning that they might think that a lawyer is taking care of their case, when in fact they need to be gathering evidence. Through the partnership working in the RESS model, Booth Centre or Boaz support workers can liaise with GMIAU advisors, to offer support such as talking through and reinforcing the advice that people have received, discussing how they might obtain various sorts of evidence.

In our key worker sessions, when we sit down with them, I focus on one thing – for example this week you need this bit of evidence for right to remain, so on Friday when we sit back down together, you let me know what evidence you've got, and I'll let you know what I've got, and we'll work together as a team, I will send the emails, I will do the chasing up, you give me a bit of info, and I'll run with it, I'll get as much info as I can – so it is wraparound support from the minute you walk in through the door, to the minute you leave, and even when you leave you've still got that support.

Claire, SPIN

■ Providing practical support in gathering evidence

For example, Sirous had to provide medical records, which he had to collect from a former GP outside of Manchester. The Booth Centre provided the bus fare to facilitate this.

■ Helping chase up letters of support, medical records etc.

Harris gave the example of someone who needed to provide bank statements for their application. They could not remember their address, so the bank repeatedly refused to help, even with a letter from the Booth Centre saying what they needed. It all changed when a RESS worker, wearing a lanyard, went with him:

Once it was picked up by the RESS service, on the next day, straight to the bank, bit of a conversation with somebody who is smart, speaks really good English, understands somebody's rights perhaps a bit better than they do, and the bank manager at this place went Oh yeah of course we can do that ... And that literally would have stopped that gent from, you know, you think about the outcome of him not being able to get hold of that, and make an application that was likely to be successful.

Harris, Booth Centre

Those interviewed stressed the sense of dignity and respect that came with this support. As Tamara said:

My support worker would try her best, anything, if I need something, she will print it off, photocopy, or even if there's a letter they need – cos you know the Home Office, they ask for a lot of evidence, so they were very helpful ... so I think I had, I still have a very supportive system around me, you know, even now – if there's anything I need, there's Boaz still there, you know.

What needs to happen?

The barriers identified above do not have to be there: that they persist is a policy choice. There are urgent steps that can and must be taken by national government to **make it easier for people who have been pushed out of status to regularise their status and escape destitution** (see Recommendation 4).

In the meantime, voluntary and community organisations and local government, working in partnership, should build on the work highlighted in this section to further **break down barriers to escaping destitution**.

This means that we need further stable bedspaces for people with NRPF, recognising the benefits these bring not only to wellbeing but also to people's ability to engage in the difficult processes of escaping destitution (see Recommendation 6). It also means local authorities investing in immigration advice to help mitigate the legal aid crisis, and further development of partnership working between voluntary bodies to amplify the benefits of expert advice (see Recommendation 7).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: ABOLISHING DESTITUTION AS A WEAPON OF IMMIGRATION CONTROL

The 2013 Boaz Trust and Red Cross report called for change and, in contrast to the very negative changes at a national level, the last decade has seen positive commitments within our city region.

What will the next decade hold? Recent national policy changes – from the punitive visa fees hikes to the performative cruelty of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 – threaten to push yet more people into destitution. If enforced destitution is a form of slow violence, we are all – statutory and voluntary sector bodies, as well as wider society – going to continue to be entangled in these webs of violence for the foreseeable future, whether we like it or not.

And yet we have a choice as to what we do about it. We can close our eyes to what is happening and say there is nothing we can do, or we can own our place in these violent systems and carve out spaces of sanctuary within them. Even within these webs of intentional slow violence, where agency is constrained or channelled into impossible choices, individuals, organisations and

statutory bodies can co-create agency to do things differently in our region. Our local leaders in particular have opportunities and responsibilities to turn Greater Manchester into a region of sanctuary and solidarity, where destitution is – as far as possible – designed out, as highlighted in the recommendations below.

More than mitigating the next decade of destitution, however, we also want to build towards a future where no one is forced into destitution because of where they come from. The central recommendation from the research is **for the government to stop using destitution as a weapon of immigration control**. Everyone living in our communities should have the resources and opportunities to live with dignity and to thrive as members of our society. The ostensible justification for destitution as a policy tool is that it incentivises people to return to their country of origin. But this report adds to a catalogue of previous research showing this does not work. Instead it rips years out of people's lives, punishing them for simply being here in our city region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

01

Repeal Section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

This legislation bakes destitution into the immigration and asylum system by excluding people who are 'subject to immigration control' from the welfare system. People 'subject to immigration control' include people without leave to remain, as well as those with leave to remain with an NRPF condition attached to their visa.

02

Key changes to the immigration and asylum system must be made to prevent people being unnecessarily forced into destitution:

- a)** Repeal the Illegal Migration Act 2023. When implemented in full, the Act will take away any incentive for people seeking sanctuary to engage with authorities, pushing thousands more in our region into destitution and exploitation.
- b)** Create a just and humane asylum system. This means a system that is not subject to political pressures to disbelieve and discredit. People who have fled war and persecution should not be retraumatised by a hostile culture of disbelief. Asylum applications must be processed in a timely fashion to give people the chance to rebuild their lives.
- c)** Reduce visa fees to no more than the administrative cost of processing an application. They should be coupled with an accessible system for people to apply for a fee waiver. People should not be forced out of status just because they are unable to afford the visa fees.
- d)** Abolish the IHS. If people are in work, they will be funding the NHS through their taxes. If they are out of work, they will not be able to afford the IHS, so having to apply for a fee waiver simply imposes an unnecessary administrative barrier.
- e)** End the use of the NRPF condition. The application of this condition to certain types of visa forces people into destitution by taking away any safety net if people are unable to work, for example for health or childcare reasons. While it is possible to apply for a change of conditions to lift the NRPF condition, this is an onerous process and people may not be aware of this or may be unable to access legal advice to do so.

03

Those facing destitution following an asylum decision must avoid a cliff-edge of destitution:

- a)** For people newly granted refugee status, pause evictions where local authorities and voluntary sector services are clear that there are insufficient housing options for them.
- b)** Extend the eviction notice period for people given an asylum decision to 56 days in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. At present, people granted asylum have just 28 days' notice, and people refused have only 21 days.
- c)** Oblige the Home Office to inform local authorities when people are being evicted from asylum accommodation, again in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This will make it possible for local statutory services to plan and better support those being evicted into destitution.
- d)** Adequately resource local voluntary and statutory sector bodies that are supporting those evicted from asylum accommodation.

04

Measures must be taken to make it easier for people to escape destitution:

- a) Create a new, simplified route to regularisation based on 5 years' residence, offering a clear route back into lawful immigration status for anyone forced out of it. The simplicity of this approach would reduce high evidential barriers that block people from regaining status.
- b) Expand the reach of legal aid provision by:
 - 1. Increasing fees by 50% and linking them to the rate of inflation. Fees have not increased in nearly 30 years, and a 50% increase would restore fees to the 1996 level.
 - 2. Abolish fixed fees and return to hourly rates for the actual work carried out.
 - 3. Restore access to legal aid for all immigration issues, as was the case before the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.
- c) Process applications for leave to remain within six months, rather than leaving people waiting for a year or more.
- d) Allow people claiming asylum the right to work in any job while they are waiting for a decision. This would replace the highly restrictive present situation whereby people who have been waiting for an asylum decision for more than a year can apply to work in a job on the Shortage Occupations List.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO GMCA, LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS:

05

Access to accommodation must be improved for Greater Manchester residents who are destitute, regardless of their immigration status

- a) Coordinate local authority homelessness strategies across GM to embed the principle that anyone presenting as homeless should be positively and proactively supported to access accommodation, regardless of immigration status.
 - Strategies must oblige housing options teams to explore all possible avenues to accommodate people with NRPF, within the parameters of the law.
 - Strategies should clarify an expanded definition of homelessness, going beyond rough sleeping to encompass insecure and/or unsafe sofa surfing arrangements.
 - They should oblige housing options teams to take a flexible approach to verifying people as homeless, for example through trusted partner verification rather than being seen by rough sleepers teams.
 - Referral pathways for emergency accommodation for people with restricted eligibility must be transparent and easily accessible without advocacy from a voluntary sector organisation.
- b) Voluntary and community organisations should work collaboratively with local authority homelessness teams to facilitate move-on from emergency accommodation.
- c) Local authority homelessness strategies must incorporate regular training to ensure that housing options services are trauma-informed, person-centred and literate in immigration law. This is necessary to embed the principle that statuses like NRPF are not used for gatekeeping, but are instead seen as a support need in themselves.

06

We need **more stable bedspaces available in Greater Manchester for those with NRPF**. Therefore:

- a) The Greater Manchester Combined Authority should work with the GM Mayors Charity to fund an additional 60 ABEN bedspaces available for people with NRPF, doubling the current provision. Stable accommodation can, in addition to promoting wellbeing, help people engage in the difficult process of escaping destitution and gaining access to public funds. This investment will therefore bring long-term cost savings for local statutory services. Further bedspaces should remain tied to holistic immigration advice and support offers.
- b) Voluntary and community organisations should work in partnership with GMCA and local authorities to further increase access to stable bedspaces – recognising that even 120 ABEN bed-spaces is unlikely to meet demand, and not all ABEN placements will be suitable for particular individuals. Therefore:
 - 1. Voluntary sector accommodation providers should seek funding to increase the number of bed-spaces available for people with NRPF.
 - 2. GMCA should map these accommodation options, including referral processes, so that local authority and voluntary sector partners are fully aware of all possible move on options.

07

As destitution is not a fixed state, further measures should be taken by voluntary and community organisations and local government in partnership to help **break down barriers to escaping destitution**:

- a) Local authorities should invest in long-term funding for immigration advice for people facing destitution. This will bring cost savings in the long run as people will be less in need of emergency local authority support if they are able to access public funds.¹⁷
- b) Building on the positive partnership working that has crystallised in RESS work, GMCA should fund this model further to increase the number of support worker roles. These support roles can substantially amplify the benefits of expert advice, through supporting people to act on advice, helping with evidence gathering, etc.

08

More must be done to support spaces of sanctuary and solidarity in our city-region amidst the hostile environment, embedding anti-racist practice in all statutory and voluntary sector services. Against the odds, people are finding and co-creating spaces of welcome, spaces where friendships, care, and hope can flow across racialised boundaries that divide us into those with and without status. Building on this work:

- a) We need to see all local authorities join Salford and Manchester on the journey of becoming Boroughs of Sanctuary, embedding a culture of welcome and best practice across all public services.
- b) Voluntary sector organisations need to be given the recognition, time and resource not just to pick up the pieces, but to co-create – in dialogue with people facing destitution – spaces of welcome, offering dignity, support and solidarity.
- c) Local government and voluntary sector partners should ensure that hardship funds such as the Red Cross Destitution Project and MDF are sufficiently resourced. Access to cash funds for people who are destitute can promote wellbeing, reduce dependence on others and risk of exploitation, and offer a degree of dignity.

REFERENCES

- 1 The use of the term 'slow violence' is inspired by recent academic work, which has used the concept to analyse everyday life in the UK asylum system. See Jonathan Darling, *Systems of Suffering: Dispersal and the Denial of Asylum*, Pluto Press, 2022; Lucy Mayblin, *Impoverishment and Asylum: Social Policy as Slow Violence*, Routledge, 2020.
- 2 'A decade of destitution: Time to make a change', Boaz Trust/British Red Cross, 2013, <https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/refugee-support/greater-manchester-destitution-report.pdf>
- 3 The policy of dispersal was introduced by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
- 4 <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/letter-from-greater-manchester-leaders-on-asylum-immigration-and-homelessness/>
- 5 Jennie Corbett, 'Unlocking the door: A roadmap for supporting non-UK nationals facing homelessness in England', Homeless Link/NACCOM, 2022, https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Unlocking_the_door_-_Roadmap_Report_2022_final.pdf
- 6 'Briefing: Refugee homelessness in Greater Manchester', GMIAU, 2024, <https://gmiau.org/refugee-homelessness-briefing/>
- 7 The interviews consist of two members of the support team at the Boaz Trust; two members of the support team at the Booth Centre; one support worker from Supporting People in Need (SPIN), an ABEN hostel for single men with NRPF; and a support worker from Equal Education Chances.
- 8 Lucy Smith, 'Mind the gap: Homelessness amongst newly recognised refugees', NACCOM, 2018, https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NACCOM-Homelessness-Report_2018-05-20_EMAIL.pdf; 'Still an ordeal: The move-on period for new refugees', British Red Cross, 2018, <https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/about-us/research-publications/refugee-support/still-an-ordeal-move-on-period-report.pdf>
- 9 On experiences of those refused asylum, see 'Refused? Experiences following a negative asylum decision', NACCOM, 2023, <https://naccom.org.uk/new-report-refused-experiences-following-a-negative-asylum-decision/>
- 10 On some of the reasons for becoming undocumented, see Zoe Gardner and Chai Patel, 'We are here: Routes to regularisation for the UK's undocumented population', JCWI, 2021, <https://jcw.org.uk/we-are-here-routes-to-regularisation-for-the-uks-undocumented-population> (not currently available at this link)
- 11 See the legal scholar Nadine El-Enany on the violence of immigration law: Nadine El-Enany, *Bordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire*, Manchester University Press, 2020.
- 12 'Unlocking the Door: A roadmap for supporting non-UK nationals facing homelessness in England', Homeless Link/NACCOM, 2022, https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Unlocking_the_door_-_Roadmap_Report_2022_final.pdf
- 13 See also Zoe Gardner and Chai Patel, 'We are here: Routes to regularisation for the UK's undocumented population', JCWI, 2021
- 14 Jo Wilding, 'No access to justice: How legal advice deserts fail refugees, migrants and our communities', Refugee Action, 2022, <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/no-access-to-justice-how-legal-advice-deserts-fail-refugees-migrants-and-our-communities/>, p.17.
- 15 See Lucy Mort et al., "'A punishing process": Experiences of people on the 10-year route to settlement', IPPR/GMIAU/Praxis, 2023, <https://www.ippr.org/articles/a-punishing-process>.
- 16 People waiting for a decision on an asylum application for more than one year can apply for the right to work, but only for jobs on the Shortage Occupation List. People waiting for decisions on EUSS applications are technically allowed to work but struggle to find employers willing to take them on without a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP).
- 17 Jo Wilding, "'It's a no-brainer": Local authority funding for immigration legal advice in the UK', Justice Together, 2023, <https://justice-together.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/JT-Local-authority-funding-for-immigration-v3.pdf>.

Stay in touch

The Boaz Trust

Kath Locke Centre
123 Moss Lane East
Manchester
M15 5DD

T 0161 202 1056
E info@boaztrust.org.uk

  @boaztrust  @boaz-trust
 @theboaztrust  @BoazMcr

boaztrust.org.uk

Registered charity in England and Wales no. 1110344

Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit

1 Delaunays Road
Crumpsall Green
Manchester
M8 4QS

T: 0161 740 7722
F: 0161 740 5172
E: info@gmiau.org

  @immigrationaidunit
 @GMIAU  @gmiau

gmiau.org

Registered charity in England and Wales no. 1123908