A DECADE OF DESTITUTION: TIME TO MAKE A CHANGE

Working in partnership to assist asylum seekers in Greater Manchester

British Red Cross

boaztrust
serving destitute asylum seekers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the asylum seekers and refugees who took part in the research; for their willingness to give their time and share their experiences. We are very grateful to all the staff and volunteers at the agencies who participated in the survey.

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Images

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FOREWORD

In March 2003, the British Red Cross and partner agency Mustard Tree started working with destitute asylum seekers in Greater Manchester. The project was the first of its kind in the UK. The team helped 15 destitute asylum seekers in its first week and by August that year 85 people were attending.

Unfortunately, what was intended to be a temporary solution to a temporary problem turned out to be the start of a long journey. That journey has seen many agencies work together, in challenging circumstances and with very limited finances, to support some of the most vulnerable people in our community. Ten years since the project started we are in the unenviable position of marking a decade of destitution among asylum seekers in Greater Manchester. Indeed, this month we expect to see the 3,000th destitute person ask us for help.

This report is the first attempt to map destitution among asylum seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester. It makes depressing reading, revealing that one in ten people using the service has been destitute for more than ten years, and almost half have been destitute for at least two years.

This bleak picture is repeated in towns and cities up and down the UK. As a result, this report is relevant not just to people and organisations in and around Greater Manchester but across the whole country. Despite the best efforts of agencies such as ours, and the commitment of our dedicated staff and volunteers there is a humanitarian crisis on our doorstep that we all need to face.

However, identifying problems is always the first step to solving them. In fact, many of the problems described here could be tackled relatively easily. At the end of the report we propose recommendations that could help prevent destitution – tackling the causes rather than the symptoms. These include changes at a local and national level.

I hope you agree with me that after a decade of destitution in Greater Manchester we need to work together to bring about much-needed change.

Nick Scott-Flynn

Head of refugee support
British Red Cross

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For ten years the British Red Cross, Boaz Trust and other agencies have supported destitute refugees and asylum seekers in Greater Manchester through a unique partnership. This report was written after surveying 150 of those people about their day-to-day lives and the reasons for their destitution.

The survey's key findings include:

> Most destitute asylum seekers are at the end of the asylum process, and a significant amount are waiting for emergency support to begin.

> Almost half of those waiting for emergency support in Greater Manchester have been destitute for at least two years, and one in ten people have been destitute for more than a decade.

> Service users are prepared to move if destitution occurs. This often causes migration to more densely populated areas.

> 40 per cent of service users who participated were thought to be at moderate or high risk, with high levels of physical and mental health problems.

Our recommendations

We ask local authorities and agencies to take the following action:

> All Greater Manchester councils should sign a motion in support of destitute asylum seekers and refugees.

> The North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP) should convene a voluntary sector forum.

> The Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) should have a lead on refugee issues who can liaise with voluntary sector partners to coordinate region-wide responses to destitution.

> All adult safeguarding boards should review their procedures and duties in relation to destitute asylum seekers.

> Councils should follow best practice guidance from the NRPF Network on assessing and supporting people who have no recourse to public funds.

We urge the government to:

> Fix administrative delays relating to all asylum benefits.

> Give people seeking sanctuary in the UK end-to-end support.

> Introduce a simplified asylum support system.

> Uphold decision-making quality and efficiency, especially on fresh submissions from end-of-process asylum seekers.

> Ensure the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions prioritise solving the structural problems involved in the 'move-on' period and transition to the mainstream benefit system.

BACKGROUND – DESTITUTION AND THE GREATER MANCHESTER RESPONSE

Social and policy context

Over the last ten years, successive British governments have passed a range of legislation[1] about asylum and immigration. This has caused:

- charges for some refused asylum seekers accessing secondary healthcare
- the withdrawal of permission to work from people who have been waiting for more than six months for a decision about their claim[2].

The legislation has created an asylum support system that is complicated, reliant on large amounts of difficult paperwork and in many ways inefficient, leaving asylum seekers vulnerable to destitution at many points throughout the process[3].

Poor decision making by the authorities and asylum seekers' limited access to good legal advice means many reach the end of the process without their protection needs being recognised. During the last three years more than 25 per cent of initial decisions to refuse asylum in the UK have been overturned on appeal, pointing to alarming inconsistencies in the quality of decision making[4].

1 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act 2004, Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006, UK Borders Act 2007, Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009

2 At the End of the Line: Restoring the Integrity of the UK Asylum System, Still Human Still Here 2010

3 This is powerfully proven by the recent 'Parliamentary Inquiry into Asylum Support for Children and Young People,' January 2013

4 'A Question of Credibility: Why so many initial asylum decisions are overturned on appeal in the UK,' Amnesty International and Still Human Still Here, April 2013

Why do people face destitution?

An asylum seeker's financial support and/or housing entitlement ends 28 days after their claim is refused and any appeal rejected. At this point they have no recourse to public funds (NRPF), including welfare benefits or, in most cases[5], public housing. This includes temporary accommodation such as homeless shelters.

An asylum seeker whose claims for asylum have been refused is expected to return voluntarily to their country of origin. An asylum claimant who is unable to return immediately is entitled to a limited form of support known as 'section 4'[6].

To be eligible for this support, the person must be destitute and:

- taking steps to leave the UK, or
- unable to leave due to a physical impediment to travel or for medical reasons, or
- have, in the secretary of state's opinion, no viable route of return currently available, or
- have an outstanding judicial review or other outstanding representations, or
- be in need of support to prevent a breach of their rights, within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998.

Section 4 support entitles someone to accommodation and a card loaded with £35 a week that can only be spent in certain shops. Despite this, many people who lose asylum support do not submit an application for section 4 support because they are fearful of what will happen to them if they return home.

As a result, they fall into destitution. Many find themselves street homeless or sofa surfing, relying on family, friends and community members for basic support such as food and shelter. Many, though certainly not all, find their way to a voluntary sector agency or faith group to ask for help.

It is not only refused asylum seekers who face destitution. People who are granted leave to remain can also find themselves without accommodation or any financial support despite having the same rights and entitlements as British citizens. People granted status are given a 28 day 'grace' period before their asylum support ends and by the end of this four week period are expected to find alternative housing, and be accessing mainstream benefits.

Many refugees find themselves having to rely on families, friends, voluntary sector agencies and faith groups for help as they face delays of weeks and sometimes months for benefits to start. Cutting off support to asylum seekers leaves them destitute and has social and economic costs for local communities. These include costs met by charities and faith groups who support asylum seekers and increased pressure on the NHS, as destitute people are more likely to experience physical and mental health problems. Destitution can force asylum seekers to use survival strategies such as rough sleeping, begging, illegal working and prostitution, all of which carry indirect costs for communities.

The role of local authorities

Local authorities' ability to help destitute asylum seekers is impeded by national policies and immigration law. However, in some circumstances local authorities have a statutory duty to support people who are destitute and have no recourse to public funds. This is a source of tension between local and national government.

The National NRPF Network argues 'the financial burden of providing support to [destitute asylum seekers] lies disproportionately with local authorities, who have little control over [the asylum] decision making process.' The NRPF suggests local authority services are effectively 'a safety net for those in limbo[7].' This tension is illustrated by the wave of motions against destitution passed by local councils in recent months, which advocate an end to a national policy that forces asylum seekers into destitution.

The circumstances in which a local authority has a statutory duty to support asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds are narrowly defined, and may be disputed by local authorities. Councils are increasingly unlikely to use their budgets to support vulnerable asylum seekers.

Legislation underpinning the support that may be available to destitute asylum seekers locally includes the National Assistance Act, 1948. The act means a refused asylum seeker with a serious health problem, disability or community care

5 Exceptions are families with children and a limited number of asylum seekers who qualify for some support by meeting narrow criteria which shows that they are temporarily unable to go home through no fault of their own.

6 The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

7 'Social Services Support to People with No Recourse to Public Funds: A National Picture,' NRPF Network, March 2011

need (within very clearly defined parameters) may apply to the local authority for accommodation and financial support. People with mental and physical health problems, disabilities, older people, pregnant and nursing mothers, and those suffering domestic violence may also be entitled to local authority services under other legislation[8].

A local authority can also support families under the Children Act 1989, if the family includes a former 'looked after child' or one who is found to be a 'child in need'[9]. In some circumstances, women with children fleeing domestic violence who are waiting for a decision from the Home Office on an application for leave to remain under the domestic violence rule are also eligible for support.

Some local authorities have used their discretion to interpret this guidance more liberally, making support and housing more readily available to destitute asylum seekers. However, the recent transfer of north west England's asylum accommodation contract to a new provider means that there is now less flexibility or willingness to offer accommodation to asylum seekers on a temporary basis following an eviction notice.

The transfer of the accommodation contract has had various knock-on effects in Greater Manchester. Many of the asylum teams within local councils have been reduced or disbanded[10]. While their main function was to oversee the accommodation and welfare needs of asylum seekers, they also played a key role in coordinating support and ensuring statutory service providers were working together to protect the most vulnerable.

8 Such as the National Health Services Act 1977, Mental Health Act 1983 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990

9 As above

10 Manchester City Council continues to take a lead in co-ordinating the NRPF network, and the wider North West Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP)

Such coordinated support is vital to ensure those who are most acutely at risk do not slip through the net, but the statutory support available locally is limited at best. National policy change and reform of the whole asylum system is the fundamental answer.

The destitution response in Greater Manchester

The British Red Cross and Manchester homelessness charity the Mustard Tree launched the destitution partnership in 2003, after implementation of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. The act had restricted asylum seekers' access to support if their claim for asylum was not made as 'soon as reasonably practicable' after arriving in the UK.

The two organisations were concerned about a potential rise in the number of asylum seekers without accommodation and financial support. This would leave more people sleeping rough, lacking of basic necessities such as food, and asking for help from voluntary sector agencies and faith groups.

The partnership was the first of its kind in the UK. It later grew to help two other groups of destitute asylum seekers – those whose claims had been refused but were unable to leave or had not been removed from the UK, and those eligible for support but denied it by administration errors. In the last couple of years, the organisations have also begun to encounter and help refugees entitled to benefits but facing the administration delays described earlier.

> "What we thought might be an immediate solution to a temporary problem had turned into a long-term project."
>
> Dave Smith, former manager of the Mustard Tree and now director of the Boaz Trust

> "The furthest that I recall was a young man who had walked from Wigan – 18 miles."
>
> Dave Smith, Boaz Trust

The partnership currently covers Manchester, Oldham, Bolton, Salford and Trafford. Its members are Rainbow Haven, Oldham Unity, BRASS, Salford Life Centre and St Brides. We estimate 3,000 destitute asylum seekers and refugees have been helped by the partnership over the last ten years. It has provided food parcels, supermarket vouchers, hygiene packs, travel grants, clothing and emergency temporary accommodation. Casework support has included assessments of need, information, signposting and advocacy.

In addition to this partnership, many other voluntary sector agencies and faith groups give financial and casework support to destitute asylum seekers across Greater Manchester. Estimates by these agencies suggest 300 to 400 destitute asylum seekers and refugees are helped each week across Greater Manchester. The extent of destitution among asylum seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester is not collected in government statistics.

CASE STUDIES

GEORGE'S STORY*

Few people can imagine living without any legal means of supporting yourself, day in, day out, for even a few weeks. However, such destitution has characterised George's life for more than four years. He is not alone facing such extreme destitution, which can be found by those who care to look in the refugee population of many of Britain's cities. His case is nonetheless instructive.

A young man now in his 20s, George arrived in Britain from his West African country of origin in 2006. Once he had made his claim for asylum in Liverpool, he was allocated national asylum support service (NASS) housing in Manchester. When his initial claim for asylum was refused, several months after he first applied for asylum, his legal-aid solicitor quickly lodged an appeal against the refusal. As a result, George was able to stay in the same NASS accommodation and his subsistence support continued. However, the appeal was rejected, his support was terminated and he was quickly made to leave that accommodation. He was homeless and, for more than two years, entirely dependent upon the willingness of friends to let him stay and to help him out with basic necessities.

With donations from these friends, George eventually managed to scrape together £500 to pay privately for a new solicitor, who lodged a fresh claim for asylum on his behalf. At this point his solicitor also successfully reapplied for accommodation and support for George, relieving him of his destitution. Although he couldn't know it at the time, this was the last concrete help that he was to receive from the solicitor, who phoned the day before his court hearing to tell George that he would not be attending the hearing, leaving George to represent himself at court. While his English had improved greatly since his arrival in Britain, George struggled to convey his case to the judge. As he himself pointed out, "if you make a mistake…they will use it against you and at that moment you're under a lot of pressure because this is like most of the technical terms you've not used." Unsurprisingly, this claim for asylum was also refused, and George was again required to leave his NASS accommodation, becoming homeless and wholly dependent on friends once more. A subsequent submission made by George himself was also refused.

In order to keep himself occupied George had enrolled at college when he first arrived in Manchester, but when his NASS support was stopped he could no longer pay the bus fare to travel there. After this, he used to try to fill his time by going to the library. For some time now, however, he has kept himself busy by volunteering at a Manchester homelessness charity which he first became aware of when he was directed there to collect the food parcels which keep him going. He also volunteers with a second charity, one supporting refugees and asylum seekers. George stresses that he needs to do this voluntary work "just to forget about my worries somehow" but it is evident that he takes his commitment to each organisation very seriously.

"If you make a mistake... they will use it against you."

George

George emphasises that he isn't an economic migrant, and that his reason for coming to Britain was for protection. Determined to have the merits of his case finally recognised, George made another submission to the Home Office in June 2011. The Home Office wrote to him acknowledging receipt of that submission, but since then he has heard nothing from them. Despite – or perhaps because of – the precariousness of his own situation, he feels that the government should either give people permission to stay and to work quickly or it should remove them. Above all, people should not be left in the kind of limbo which he is experiencing. In this situation, he says, "you're not living; you're just surviving." How does he manage to keep going through such prolonged stress? "I just take every day as it comes, but it's not easy" he explains.

> "You're not living; you're just surviving."
> George

During the periods when he lived in NASS accommodation George was always fearful of coming home, in case he should find a letter from the Home Office asking him to leave the house, or bringing negative news about his application for asylum, waiting for him. Nonetheless, George acknowledges the difficulties of having to depend on the willingness of friends to accommodate and support him. He is forced to accept treatment from them that he wouldn't otherwise tolerate. At the moment, he explains, "I'm trying my best to put up with the person that I'm living with" although this involves having to "put yourself down below your pride, because you're vulnerable."

Why, then does George persist here, instead of giving up and going back to his country of origin, as the authorities so clearly wish him to do? He acknowledges that he can't explain where his strength and perseverance come from, despite the obvious hardship that he is experiencing. Moreover, he refuses to sign for the section 4 support which the Home Office reserves for destitute refused asylum seekers, and he is afraid of the fate that would await him at home. "I came here to be safe, so why would I sign my own death back?" He adds that while he may be constantly worrying about money in his current situation in Britain, "over there you're worrying about your life, like if you're going to see the next day, because it's really, really, really terrible."

LINDA'S STORY*

Destitution is not only an issue for 'refused' asylum seekers. On the contrary, it may be experienced by people at all stages of the asylum process. This is as true for those who have emerged from the system having been given permission to stay in the country, as it is for those whose application has been fully rejected.

The second case study provides a good illustration of the kind of problems which can arise at the end of an application for permission to stay (leave to remain), when it is not uncommon for individuals and families to fall through the cracks between mainstream benefits and the segregated asylum support system.

Linda's account illustrates how this happens. She arrived in Britain in 2009 with her baby daughter, having fled a violent and abusive husband in her country of origin. Her original claim for asylum was refused, as was her appeal against its

rejection. She was then asked to attend a Home Office meeting at which she was asked to sign some forms, which later transpired to have been forms which gave her consent to comply with efforts to remove her from the country. As Linda recalled, "they said, 'sign these forms because we are dealing with your case', which I know that they are busy with my case and then I couldn't say no. I signed the document, not knowing that that is a document that they are preparing for me and my kids, my baby … to go back home."

On the advice of a friend, she submitted a fresh claim for asylum. Although this was very swiftly refused, Linda then began to look for a solicitor who could help her to stop the removal process. The solicitor demanded a payment of £800, which she was able to get together with help from friends and acquaintances, who contributed what they could afford towards the solicitor's fee. Throughout this period of uncertainty and refusal, however, Linda and her child continued to be eligible for housing and subsistence support from the government, which contrasts starkly with the experience of George, described above. Linda acknowledges that while the state usually continues to support families of refused asylum seekers which include children up to the age of eighteen, right up to the time when they leave the UK, this is not the case for childless individuals or couples, for whom the legal safeguarding obligations do not apply.

Four years after making her first claim for asylum, Linda was finally granted limited leave to remain in Britain. At this point she had to promptly leave the NASS accommodation where she had been staying, and her NASS subsistence support was terminated. Unfortunately, however, the time delay between applying for benefits on receipt of leave to remain and being issued with those benefits was two months in her case. Linda was lucky in that she was given some support by her British partner, with whom she now has a second daughter, but since he himself was unemployed and therefore on a restricted income, he was unable to meet all the needs of both Linda and the two children.

For many people who find themselves destitute at the end of the asylum process with either a positive or a negative decision, the network of people on whom they rely for support is extremely fragile, and the supporters themselves struggle financially. Linda explains that although she was given temporary housing following her grant of leave to remain, the benefits "took time to come" and while she was waiting for them she was fortunate to be able to access assistance from the British Red Cross to buy milk for her baby, who was still too young for cow's milk. "Luckily I went there and then they helped me, they were giving me £20 each week which [made] a very big difference to me." Though she has at last been given access to benefits and no longer requires the organisation's help, she is grateful for what they did for her. In Linda's words, "at the time I needed help they were there for me, they did really good for me which I do appreciate and I'm happy with it, and I hope they will continue helping people because it's not easy, especially when you've got kids."

"I hope they will continue helping people because it's not easy, especially when you've got kids."
Linda

*Names have been changed.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Aims

This study attempts to map the extent and nature of destitution among asylum seekers across Greater Manchester. It has been estimated the area may support more than 2,000 destitute asylum seekers.

The research aims to find out which services destitute asylum seekers use and investigate why individuals do or do not access support. We hope it will help voluntary sector agencies and faith groups raise awareness of the issue and assist even more destitute asylum seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester.

Background

There have been a number of national reports published over the last few years, including *Coping with destitution: survival and livelihood strategies of refused asylum seekers living in the UK*, Oxfam (2011)[10] and *Not gone, but forgotten*, British Red Cross (2010)[11]. Reports about destitution in individual cities have also been written in Birmingham[12], Leeds[13], and Bradford[14].

In 2011, the North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership published a study on migrant destitution in north-west England[15] as an initial attempt to map the wider group of migrants who have come to the area in the last ten years. It found the majority of destitute migrants were failed asylum seekers but did not give a full picture of the extent of destitution.

This report is therefore the first attempt to map destitution among asylum seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester. In early 2012, the Boaz Trust started to explore the possibility of conducting a Greater Manchester area wide destitution survey based on the survey in Leeds in 2009. Significant preparation work took place but due to staff changes and other pressures, the project did not move to the implementation stage. In May 2013, the British Red Cross agreed to take the survey to the next stage.

Methodology

We defined destitute refugees and asylum seekers as anyone who has claimed or is in the process of claiming asylum, and is without any form of statutory support.

The study included anyone who has recently arrived in the UK to claim asylum and those who have refugee status but are destitute because of delays in receiving benefits or problems finding work. Research was carried out from 29 July to 23 August 2013. A simple questionnaire survey was conducted in person with as many destitute asylum seekers as possible who access support from frontline agencies across Greater Manchester. Responses were filled in by either the service user or the support worker. The study also gave some people the chance to tell their story more fully through one-to-one interviews. It aimed to cover the ten boroughs in the Manchester conurbation.

Agencies involved

We identified 24 third-sector, frontline agencies likely to come into contact with destitute asylum seekers. This included refugee support organisations, homelessness charities, legal services, health agencies and faith groups. They were all contacted and ten returned completed surveys. The ten agencies were:

- ASHA (Manchester)
- Boaz Trust (Manchester)
- BRASS (Bolton)
- British Red Cross (Manchester)
- Cornerstone (Manchester)
- George House Trust (Manchester)
- Oldham Unity (Oldham)
- Rainbow Haven (Manchester)
- Salford Life Centre (Salford)
- St Brides (Trafford).

Although most are based in Manchester, they all work with people from across Greater Manchester. Despite being supportive of the survey, Refugee Action were unable to participate.

10 http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/coping-with-destitution-survival-and-livelihood-strategies-of-refused-asylum-se-121667

11 http://stillhumanstillhere.files.wordpress.com/2009/01/not-gone-but-forgotten-june-2010.pdf

12 http://www.restore-uk.org/downs/finaldestitutionreportmay05.pdf

13 http://www.jrct.org.uk/text.asp?section=0001000200030006

14 http://stillhumanstillhere.files.wordpress.com/2009/01/no-return-no-asylum.pdf

15 http://www.northwestrsmp.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=594:rsmp-publishes-migrant-destitution-report&catid=45:latest-documents1&Itemid=63

FINDINGS

Profile of respondents

> 150 participants completed the survey.

> They were aged between 18 and 64 years of age. 34 per cent were below the age of 30.

> 80 per cent were male. The vast majority (86 per cent) did not have any dependents in the UK, either adults or children.

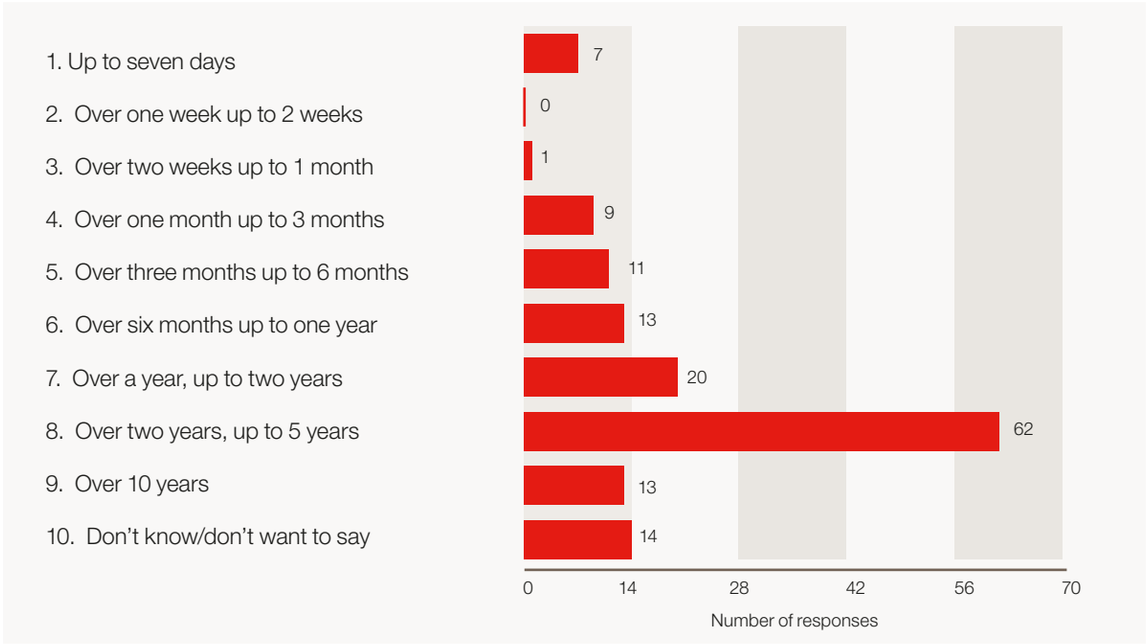
> They came from 29 different countries. The top five were Iran (29 per cent), Iraq (17 per cent), Zimbabwe (11 per cent), Eritrea (6 per cent) and Afghanistan (5 per cent).

Period of destitution

Almost half of those surveyed had been destitute for at least two years. The most common length of period of destitution was between two and five years (41 per cent).

Within this group, 95 per cent are men and over half (53 per cent) are waiting for section 4 support to begin.

Figure one: the period of destitution



Reason for destitution

We asked people the reason for their destitution[16].

The majority of those who knew the reason for their destitution were at the end of the asylum process, and made up 87 per cent of respondents. The most common reason for destitution was being at the end of the asylum process and waiting for section 4 support to begin (46 per cent).

A quarter of participants said they were at the end of the asylum process and had not applied for section 4 support. 13 per cent stated they were being refused section 4 support and only four per cent of individuals were at the start of the asylum process.

16 The total number of answers across both parts of this question was 152, meaning that in two questionnaires, a response was recorded in both parts.

If the reason for destitution was not known by the service user or the support worker, we asked where they were in the asylum process. Most were at the end.

The vast majority of service users who took part in this study were at end of the asylum process. This is perhaps unsurprising as this is usually when support and accommodation has been reduced or removed. Most of those who knew their reason for destitution (46 per cent) had applied for section 4 support and were waiting for a decision. Almost half the people waiting for emergency section 4 support had been destitute for between two and five years.

A small number of people fell into destitution at earlier stages of the asylum process. Of the 150 respondents across the questionnaire, 15 were destitute despite receiving government support during a claim for asylum.

Figure two: answers to "If the reason for destitution is not known by either the service user or the support worker, please record whether the service user is…"

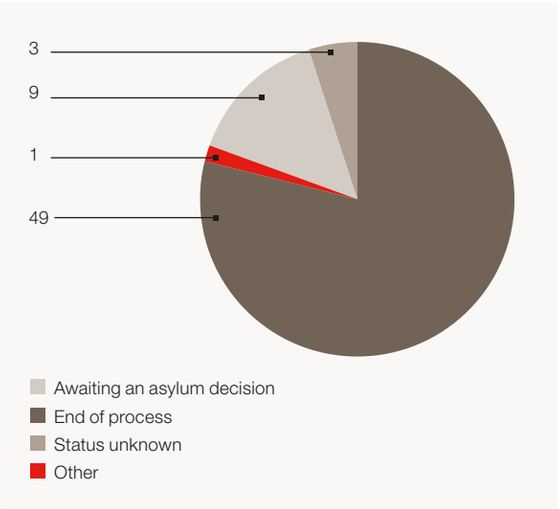
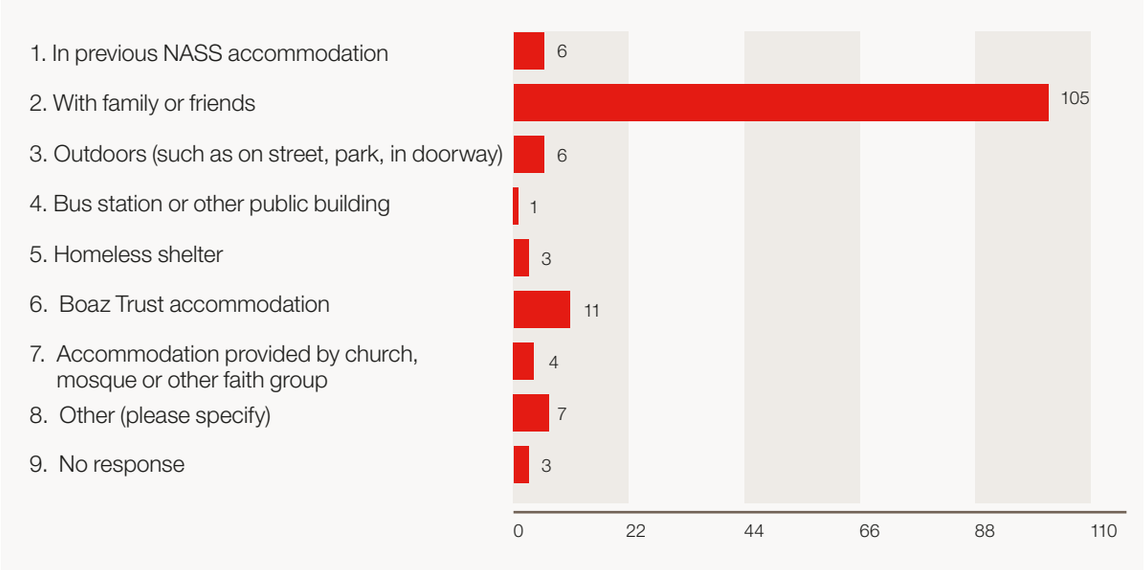


Figure three: where each service user slept the night before their interview before



Where did the service user sleep last night?

Most service users (70 per cent) were able to stay with friends or family, but more than a quarter spent the night in places such as homeless shelters, charity accommodation, bus stations or other public buildings. Almost one in 20 slept outdoors on streets, in parks or in doorways.

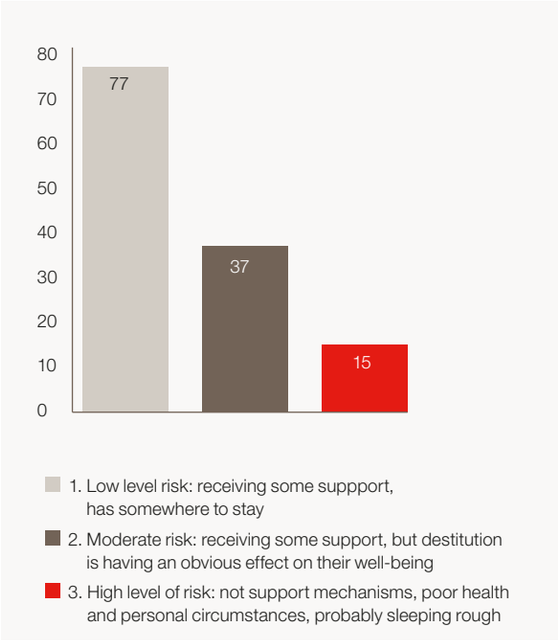
Locations before and after destitution

Non-destitute users of British Red Cross refugee services are spread reasonably evenly across Greater Manchester, with the largest proportion (29 per cent) living in the city itself. But the survey suggests destitution prompts migration towards Manchester, as 48 per cent of destitute service users said they spent the previous night there.

Almost one in five spent time outside Greater Manchester before their current period of destitution. They arrived from major cities such as London, Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham and Cardiff, and also smaller towns and cities such as Blackburn, Stoke-on-Trent, Halifax, Hull, and Newport. Most who arrived in the area when they became destitute went to the city of Manchester.

Of the 44 people who lived in Greater Manchester before becoming destitute, only six moved somewhere else in the area when they became destitute. Salford was the second most popular place to live before destitution occurred (17 per cent) and half of those who lived there moved to Manchester when they became destitute.

Figure four: risk level of service users before their interview



Support received

Organisations such as ASHA, the British Red Cross, the Boaz Trust, Refugee Action, Salford Food Parcels, Oldham Unity, St Brides, Rainbow Haven, BRASS and the George House Trust have helped destitute refugees and asylum seekers with accommodation, food parcels, advice, section 4 applications, and solicitor referrals.

Risk assessment

Support workers were encouraged to assess the risk facing each service user they interviewed. This section was completed on 129 out of 150 questionnaires.

Just over 40 per cent were thought to be at either a moderate or high risk, and over ten percent at high risk. This group had high levels of physical and mental health problems.

Comments

30 service users gave extra comments or details about their case. Some of these are below.

"I am too tired with no hope. It's not my fault. Please help me."

"I am waiting too long and I have suffered for about five years. I need help and more support."

"I would like the opportunity to work."

"I was exposed to various types of abuse as a woman."

"I have problems with accommodation. Currently living with a friend but things are rough. I fail to attend many appointments due to financial problems."

"I feel solidarity with people in her situation, and feel very sad about my life."

"We as a family get really tired so we need more help and normal life like everybody else."

"There is need for the immigration system to house asylum seekers whether seeking or failed, for it is inhumane and against human rights to throw them on the streets."

"I am really struggling; I have a disability and somebody now to look after."

"It's really difficult, I have nowhere to live. You have to keep asking for food and accommodation every day."

"I'm suicidal."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the survey are bleak, and many of the people we interviewed were in a desperate situation. However there are easy changes which we believe could help solve the problem of destitution among asylum seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester.

Some of these changes can be made at a local level, and others by central government. Every one would improve the lives of hugely vulnerable people, many of whom live in hardship simply because of administrative failings. Without action, hundreds of people in Greater Manchester – and many more elsewhere in the UK – will continue to face destitution and danger.

After a decade of destitution we need to tackle the causes, not the symptoms, of destitution. We believe Greater Manchester should lead the way in tackling this problem.

THE RED CROSS, TOGETHER WITH OUR PARTNERS INCLUDING THE BOAZ TRUST, PARTICULARLY RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING:

Recommendations for local agencies

All Greater Manchester councils should sign a motion in support of destitute asylum seekers and refugees.

> It should include a commitment to write to the Minister to highlight the damage done to individuals when they are destitute in the asylum system, and a request for the Home Office to continue giving financial support and accommodation to everyone who seeks asylum. It should also ask the Home Office to fix administrative failings in the asylum system and allow local authorities to help refused asylum seekers at risk of destitution.

The North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP) should convene a voluntary sector forum.

> This could be a contact group to update the voluntary sector, as key stakeholders, on the RSMP's activities and business plans. It would enable dialogue between the Greater Manchester boroughs and the voluntary sector about the issue and local authorities' statutory obligations to destitute refugees and asylum seekers in Manchester.

Councils should follow the NRPF Network's best practice guidance on assessing and supporting people with no recourse to public funds.

> This should include, at a minimum, respecting human rights and following guidance on needs assessments under Section 21 of the National Assistance Act, Section 47 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act (NHSCCA) 1990.

All adult safeguarding boards should review their procedures and duties in relation to destitute asylum seekers.

> This is especially relevant where, as in Manchester City Council's safeguarding policy, abuse is defined as a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons. This may be pertinent in the context of asylum seekers who have been destitute for a number of years, who may be in receipt of some local authority services and who may also have health and housing needs.

The Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) should have a lead on refugee issues who can liaise with voluntary sector partners to coordinate region-wide responses to destitution.

> AGMA should also set up a refugee destitution fund to assist those in greatest need and work closely to address this issue. It is unacceptable that almost half of those waiting for emergency support in Greater Manchester have been destitute for at least two years, and that one in ten have been destitute for over a decade. In light of this fact, all agencies should look to provide even a basic support system for those people in this position.

Recommendations for central government

Fix administrative delays relating to all asylum benefits.

> Our survey found the largest group of destitute refugees and asylum seekers (among those who know the reason for their situation) were those waiting for section 4 support to begin. These service users have been destitute an extremely long time for this support. These systemic delays are unacceptable and must be addressed as a priority.

Give people seeking sanctuary in the UK end-to-end support

> The stark scale of destitution in Greater Manchester shows the need for an end-to-end support system that helps people until they leave the country or are granted some form of status.

Introduce a simplified asylum support system.

> Section 4 should be abolished and all asylum seekers bought on to cash support through Section 95.

> Asylum support should be increased annually at the same rate as other benefits.

Uphold decision-making quality and efficiency, especially on fresh submissions from end-of-process asylum seekers.

> The Home Office must ensure all fresh submissions are examined rapidly and any Section 4 Claim awarded within the relevant five or two day timeframe set out in operational policy guidance. Five days should be an absolute maximum for an assessment according to the test for fresh submissions. Where representations meet the test for fresh submissions, the Home Office must make high-quality decisions about the individual application despite the existence of a live section 4 support claim.

Ensure the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions prioritise solving the structural problems involved in the 'move on period' and transition to the mainstream benefit system.

> 10 per cent of people surveyed were destitute despite getting government support during their asylum claim. It is striking how many people were recognised as refugees but did not have support because of administration problems.

> Service users losing support they are legally entitled to is a clear injustice. The move between asylum support and mainstream benefits often causes homelessness, and the move from Home Office housing providers to new accommodation is particularly problematic. It is a fundamental responsibility of government to improve this transition and extend the 28 day 'grace' period, ensuring no-one with status is left destitute.

APPENDIX ONE: SURVEY

SURVEY TO DETERMINE THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF DESTITUTION AMONGST ASYLUM SEEKERS IN GREATER MANCHESTER.

The British Red Cross, Boaz Trust and other refugee partner organisations across Greater Manchester will be conducting a survey of service users who use our destitution services from 29 July – 23 August 2013. This will help us get a clearer picture of the extent of the problem across the ten boroughs, the reasons why people become destitute and will importantly also help us to advocate for change. The findings of this survey will be released as part of a partnership event raising awareness of this issue which is scheduled to take place in Greater Manchester on 18 October 2013.

Completed surveys are to be returned by 27 August 2013 to:

FAO: Joe Parkinson
British Red Cross,
10 Brindley Road,
City Park, Cornbrook,
Manchester, M16 9HQ

joeparkinson@redcross.org.uk

Name of agency completing survey:

Name of person (staff/volunteer) completing survey:

Please ask the service user questions 1 – 11 only. Question 12 is for the person completing the survey, based on the information you know about the service user.

Working in partnership to assist asylum seekers in Greater Manchester

British Red Cross

boaztrust
serving destitute asylum seekers

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. First time surveyed?

Using the repeat visit symbol ask the client if this is the first time that they have taken part in the survey. If 'no' please go to question 1a.

- ☐ 1. Yes
- ☐ 2. No
- ☐ 3. Don't know/not sure

1a. Where surveyed before

2. Date of birth

Please enter the client's date of birth. dd/mm/yy

2a. Name or initials

Please write the client's name (if willing to share) or his/her initials

3. Country

Please write in the client's country of origin.

4. Gender

Please indicate the client's gender:

- ☐ 1. Female
- ☐ 2. Male

5. Dependents

Is the client responsible for any people other than themselves (in the UK)? Please indicate number of:

Number of adults responsible for:

Number of children responsible for:

6. Reason for destitution

Why is the client destitute?

Choose (tick) from the following:

- ☐ 1. Start of process – not yet applied for Section 95 (NASS)
- ☐ 2. Start of process – applied and waiting for Section 95 to begin
- ☐ 3. Denied support under Section 55
- ☐ 4. NASS administrative error – support stopped during asylum process
- ☐ 5. Lost NASS support due to breach of conditions (e.g. absence, working illegally, alternative income)
- ☐ 6. End of process – not applied for Section 4 (unwilling; don't meet criteria; if age disputed please note this)
- ☐ 7. End of process – waiting for Section 4 support to begin
- ☐ 8. End of process – refused Section 4
- ☐ 9. End of process – previously supported by Social Services as UASC
- ☐ 10. Positive decision (without housing)
- ☐ 11. Social Services – applied and waiting for social services support
- ☐ 12. Adult social care – social services support removed

If the reason for destitution is not known by either the client or support worker, please record whether the client is:

- ☐ 13. Awaiting an asylum decision
- ☐ 14. End of process
- ☐ 15. Status unknown

7. Length of period of destitution

How long is it since the client stop receiving support? (What is their present period of destitution) Answer one only (tick):

- ☐ 1. Up to seven days
- ☐ 2. Over one week up to 2 weeks
- ☐ 3. Over two weeks up to 1 month
- ☐ 4. Over one month up to 3 months
- ☐ 5. Over three months up to 6 months
- ☐ 6. Over six months up to one year
- ☐ 7. Over a year, up to two years
- ☐ 8. Over two years, up to 5 years
- ☐ 9. Over 10 years
- ☐ 10. Don't know/don't want to say

8. Where did the client sleep last night?

If the client is willing to give this information, please note where they slept last night (Answer (tick) one only):

- ☐ 1. In previous NASS accommodation
- ☐ 2. With family or friends
- ☐ 3. Outdoors (e.g. on street, park, in doorway)
- ☐ 4. Bus station or other public building
- ☐ 5. Homeless shelter
- ☐ 6. Boaz Trust accommodation
- ☐ 7. Accommodation provided by church, mosque or other faith group
- ☐ 8. Other (please specify)
- ☐ 9. No response

8a. Borough in which client spent last night

Please enter the borough (or area) where the client spent last night

- ☐ 1. Manchester
- ☐ 2. Salford
- ☐ 3. Trafford
- ☐ 4. Stockport
- ☐ 5. Tameside
- ☐ 6. Oldham
- ☐ 7. Bury
- ☐ 8. Bolton
- ☐ 9. Rochdale
- ☐ 10. Wigan
- ☐ 11. Outside Greater Manchester (please specify)

_____

- ☐ 12. Don't know/don't want to say

9. Borough of residence prior to destitution

Please enter the borough (or area) where the client stayed before this period of destitution.

- ☐ 1. Manchester
- ☐ 2. Salford
- ☐ 3. Trafford
- ☐ 4. Stockport
- ☐ 5. Tameside
- ☐ 6. Oldham
- ☐ 7. Bury
- ☐ 8. Bolton
- ☐ 9. Rochdale
- ☐ 10. Wigan
- ☐ 11. Outside Greater Manchester (please specify)

_____

- ☐ 12. Don't know/don't want to say

10. Other support received in last month

Please ask the client to say what support they have received in the past month and where from (can be more than one answer):

- ☐ British Red Cross
- ☐ Boaz Trust
- ☐ Oldham Unity
- ☐ Rainbow Haven
- ☐ Refugee Action
- ☐ ASHA
- ☐ Salford Food Parcels
- ☐ St Brides
- ☐ BRASS
- ☐ Other charity or community organisation (please specify):

_____

- ☐ Faith group (please specify):

_____

What type of support have they received:

_____

_____

_____

11. Other comments/ details

Has the client anything else they want to say about their current situation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK THE SERVICE USER FOR THEIR TIME.

12. Risk assessment

(This question is to be completed by the volunteer/caseworker based on the answers given by the client.)

Based on your contact with the client during this visit, please assess the level of 'risk' caused by their destitution (Tick one only):

- ☐ 1. Low level of risk: receiving some support, has somewhere to stay
- ☐ 2. Moderate risk: receiving some support, but destitution is having an obvious effect on their well-being
- ☐ 3. High level of risk: no support mechanisms, poor health and personal circumstances, probably sleeping rough

Additional vulnerability, if applicable/known:

- ☐ a. Detention release
- ☐ b. Prison release
- ☐ c. Hospital discharge
- ☐ d. Pregnant woman
- ☐ e. Physical health problem
- ☐ f. Mental health need

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redcross.org.uk

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