

The Crisis logo consists of a red square with the word "Crisis" in white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

Crisis

Together
we will end
homelessness

A HOME FOR ALL: UNDERSTANDING MIGRANT HOMELESSNESS IN GREAT BRITAIN

November 2019

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About us

Crisis is the national charity for homeless people. We are committed to ending homelessness. Every day we see the devastating impact homelessness has on people's lives. Every year we work side by side with thousands of homeless people, to help them rebuild their lives and leave homelessness behind for good. Through our pioneering research into the causes and consequences of homelessness and the solutions to it, we know what it will take to end it. Together with others who share our resolve, we bring our knowledge, experience and determination to campaign for the changes that will solve the homelessness crisis once and for all. We bring together a unique volunteer effort each Christmas, to bring warmth, companionship and vital services to people at one of the hardest times of the year, and offer a starting point out of homelessness. We know that homelessness is not inevitable. We know that together we can end it.

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Foreword

We all need a home to build a life and to thrive, but for many people living in this country their immigration status traps them in a situation which makes it almost impossible for them to move out of homelessness.

This report presents the findings of Crisis' scoping research that sought to understand what is currently known about migrant homelessness and identify gaps in evidence.

There are more than 170,000 families and individuals across Great Britain experiencing the worst forms of homelessness. A significant proportion of these people are originally from outside the UK but substantial gaps in the data that is collected and published means we do not know exactly how many of the people who are homeless in Britain today are migrants. Nearly seven out of 10 survey respondents said that the scale of migrant homelessness in the areas that they worked in had increased in the last 12 months, and over a third have had to expand their service to meet current need.

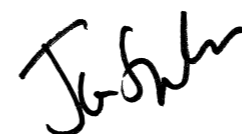
On a daily basis, we know that migrants experiencing homelessness can experience suspicion about their motives, being excluded from much of the available support, and experiencing threats of removal from the country.

People in this situation are extremely vulnerable to the changing political environment leaving them more at risk of homelessness. This includes changes to entitlements which may affect ability to access Housing Benefit and support, other forms of welfare and access to support and services.

Homelessness has a devastating impact on people and on our communities. Being able to secure a stable home gives people the best chance of moving on from homelessness or preventing it from happening in the first place.

We must see the policy changes needed to ensure that everyone living in Britain can access help to prevent or resolve their homelessness, regardless of where they are from. As a service provider, Crisis does not deny elements of our help to people experiencing homelessness based on their nationality or their immigration status. We believe everyone should have a safe and stable home. Government policies that leave some people locked out of anywhere safe to live because of their immigration status must be changed.

No one should be homeless because of their immigration status. Ultimately the immigration system should work together with housing and welfare policies designed around a shared goal of ending homelessness. This would ensure that homelessness could be ended for good.



Jon Sparkes
Chief Executive, Crisis

Executive summary

There are more than 170,000 families and individuals across Great Britain experiencing the worst forms of homelessness.¹ A significant proportion of these people are originally from outside the UK but substantial gaps in the data that is collected and published means we do not know exactly how many of the people who are homeless in Britain today are migrants.

As a society, we must make sure that everyone can access help to prevent or resolve their homelessness, regardless of where they are from. Currently this is not the case for far too many migrants living in the UK.

We all need a home to build a life and to thrive, but for many people living in this country their immigration status traps them in a situation which makes it almost impossible for them to move out of homelessness. Homelessness has a devastating impact on people and on our communities. Being able to secure a stable home gives people the best chance of moving on from homelessness or preventing it from happening in the first place. No one should be homeless because of their immigration status. Ultimately the immigration system should work together with housing and welfare policies designed around a shared goal of ending homelessness. This would

ensure that homelessness could be ended for good.

The migrant population in Great Britain are affected by the same socio-economic context as the general population. This includes problems related to low wage labour² and a lack of affordable housing. However, this is exacerbated by the conditions created by the immigration system. People who are homeless face the challenges of navigating multiple systems, including housing, welfare and the labour market. People experiencing homelessness who are not originally from the UK face many of the same challenges, but these can be compounded by their specific experiences, immigration status and associated entitlements. This can include being locked out of the support services that help people to navigate these systems and provide help with other issues they may be

facing, including complex trauma, mental health and substance misuse.³

This report presents the findings of Crisis, scoping research that sought to understand what is currently known about migrant homelessness and identify any gaps in evidence. This involved an online survey across organisations working in the immigration and homelessness sectors (N=83), key informant interviews (N=14), and three focus groups with frontline workers at Crisis. The research looked at the scale of homelessness among non-UK nationals, the different experiences of homelessness that migrants face across Britain and how services are responding to this.

The scale of migrant homelessness

- The scale of migrant homelessness has increased. Nearly seven out of 10 (67%) survey respondents said that the scale of migrant homelessness in the areas that they worked in had increased in the last 12 months. Just under a fifth (17%) state that it has increased a lot.
- When focusing on specific migrant groups, one in four (24%) respondents said homelessness had increased a lot in the last 12 months for people with no recourse to public funds or irregular status. This is compared to 14 per cent for both EEA nationals and asylum seekers and refugees.
- The increased level of homelessness amongst migrant groups is having an impact on service provision. Over a third of survey respondents reported that they had expanded their services to meet the demands on their organisation across each of the different groups, whilst only two per cent said they had decreased provision.

Brexit and EEA national discrimination

- Brexit and the implications on EEA nationals was one of the biggest concerns of those organisations we spoke to, 62 per cent of survey respondents identified this as their biggest concern for future impact on migrant homelessness.
 - EEA nationals living in the UK have now begun to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme that will allow them to continue living and working in the UK after Brexit. Although this is a relatively simple process in comparison to most immigration applications, people experiencing homelessness still face multiple barriers to successfully applying. Loss of passports, the lack of identification documents, and the difficulty in replacing ID was highlighted as a common problem that can prevent applying to the scheme.
 - For those who do not successfully apply by the deadline the consequences are likely to be severe. EEA nationals who have made their home in the UK are expected to lose their right to live and work here, leaving them facing homelessness, destitution and potentially deportation.
- ## Systemic barriers
- Restrictions on benefit entitlements make it harder to both prevent and end people's homelessness. Among survey respondents the two most reported barriers impacting on people experiencing homelessness who are not originally from the UK related to lack of income (93%) and lack of access to financial support (89%).
 - Lack of understanding of entitlements for different groups among Jobcentre Plus staff was

1 Albanese, F. (2018) Crisis blog: 'What is the scale of homelessness on any given night?' <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/the-crisis-blog/what-is-the-scale-of-homelessness-on-any-given-night/>

2 Cominetti, N., Henehan, K., & Clarke, S. (2019) *Low Pay Britain 2019*. London: Resolution Foundation

3 Serpa, R. (2018) *Choice, Constraint and Negotiating Housing Systems: Understanding Migrant Homelessness in the US and UK*. Unpublished PhD thesis Edinburgh: Heriot Watt.; Stephens, M., & Fitzpatrick, S. (2007). *Welfare regimes, housing systems and homelessness: how are they linked*. *European Journal of Homelessness*, 1(1), 201-211.

noted as potentially leading to those who have rights to benefits being excluded from the system. It is taking significant time and effort from frontline services to overturn or support individuals to appeal decisions.

- Being unable to access benefits leads to a desperation for employment, and alongside the precarious nature of housing, this creates situations where people are extremely vulnerable to exploitation.
- Access to housing was one of the largest barriers - 84 per cent of survey respondents reported that the people they work with experience access to housing as a barrier to support, and 82 per cent reported that the people they work with generally lack entitlement to Housing Benefit. It's clear that access to housing is at the heart of the barriers facing the migrant homeless population.
- Legal advice for migrants experiencing homelessness is paramount but has been severely affected by cuts to legal aid. Over 50 per cent of survey respondents said they provided legal support or advice. In addition, 67 per cent of survey respondents stated that legal aid cuts have had an impact on migrant homelessness.
- A variety of reasons were given for an inability to access legal advice: legal aid cuts reducing the number of available lawyers; lack of capacity amongst services with legal advisors; and an under resourced system not able to cope with the level of need.
- There were a number of concerns related to Home Office practice in general that tie directly to hostile environment policies. Repealing the overarching hostile environment structure came through strongly amongst survey respondents as the most common answer to being

asked what single change could make the most difference to ending migrant homelessness.

- Home Office processes and the length of time taken to make decisions were highlighted as being significant contributory factors that were leaving asylum seekers trapped in destitution and unable to move on into safe and stable housing.

Support needs

- The majority of survey respondents reported that support needs had increased across all migrant groups. Many of the issues raised were things that are common challenges within homelessness services, such as mental health or substance misuse, but for the migrant population these can be exacerbated by their immigration status.
- For asylum seekers and refugees presenting with support needs around complex trauma and poor mental health this may be related to both the reason why they had to leave their country and the potential trauma of the journey itself. This can then be compounded by the impact that homelessness has on any person's wellbeing and mental health.
- Substance misuse and alcohol misuse were highlighted as particular concerns and the lack of accessible services and support, coupled with an inability for many to access a stable home has the potential to exacerbate existing addiction problems.
- There was a lack of specialist support available in frontline homelessness services for people with mental health and substance and alcohol misuse needs. Homelessness services were unable to fill the gap left by mainstream provision to address the support needs of people they were dealing with.

Next steps

The purpose of undertaking this scoping research was to inform a wider strand of work looking at supporting and better understanding the experience of different migrant groups experiencing homelessness. This will inform Crisis' own service delivery and inform our policy work and campaigning activity.

Based on the findings of the research Crisis' next steps are to:

- Commission in-depth research to estimate the overall number of EEA nationals experiencing different forms of homelessness, including hidden homelessness, and to better understand the characteristics and support needs specific to this population. The research will also profile the experiences of EEA nationals to better understand and evidence the causes of homelessness amongst this group.
- Based on this new research, Crisis will develop national policy and practice solutions to address the issue of EEA migrant homelessness across Great Britain

Chapter 1:

Introduction

There are more than 170,000 families and individuals across Great Britain experiencing the worst forms of homelessness.⁴ This includes people sleeping rough, in cars, tents, and on public transport, or staying for extended periods of time in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

A significant proportion of these people are originally from outside the UK. However, substantial gaps in the data that is collected and published means we do not know exactly how many of the people who are homeless in Britain today are migrants.

There are many reasons why people from outside the UK can be more vulnerable to homelessness, and why they may find it harder to access the safe and stable home we all need. As a society, we must make sure that everyone can access help to prevent or resolve their homelessness, regardless of where they are from. Currently this is not the case for far too many migrants living in the UK.

Many people find that when they are pushed to the brink of homelessness they are unable to access vital support services because of their immigration status. This can include being locked out of statutory homelessness services

and critical financial support to help cover essentials like food and rent.

Crisis research shows that if there is no significant change to current homelessness, housing and welfare policy the number of families and individuals experiencing the worst forms of homelessness will more than double to 392,000 by 2041.⁵ But homelessness is not inevitable. With the right policies in place, we can reverse this trend and ultimately end homelessness in Great Britain altogether.

This must include policy change to ensure that everyone living in Britain can access help to prevent or resolve their homelessness, regardless of where they are from. As a service provider, Crisis does not deny elements of our help to people experiencing homelessness based on their nationality or their immigration status. We believe everyone should

have a safe and stable home. Government policies that leave some people locked out of anywhere safe to live because of their immigration status must be changed.

1.1 Understanding the links between the immigration system and homelessness

There is a general acknowledgement that understanding the causes of homelessness means exploring the interconnection of individual and structural factors.⁶ Whilst structural causes such as lack of affordable housing, or shortfall between local rents and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates create the conditions that make homelessness possible, specific individual risk factors like poor mental health increase someone's likelihood of experiencing homelessness.⁷ The risk of homelessness is not randomly distributed across the population but structured around a set of identifiable individual, social and structural factors.⁸ It is in this context that we can look to understand the links between the immigration system and homelessness.

Structural factors

The migrant population in Great Britain is subject to the same conditions that contribute to homelessness as the general population, including low wage labour and a lack of affordable housing. However, this is exacerbated by conditions created by the immigration system. There are

two substantive structural factors that compound the conditions for migrant populations increasing their likelihood of experiencing homelessness.

Firstly, the welfare system which, for those with entitlements, breaks the link between employment and accessing the housing market.⁹ Access to benefit entitlements gives people who are unemployed or in low paid work a security that should prevent these from being precursors to homelessness. There are of course wider concerns that reforms to welfare policy are making this security weaker, however for some groups of migrants this support can be almost none existent. This restriction to welfare benefits creates a disconnect between income and the cost of housing meaning people are more vulnerable to homelessness.

Related to the eligibility and access to benefits is a person's legal status. Depending on their status there may be restrictions on access to the labour market (in some case an inability to work), housing, and the welfare system. Lacking full citizenship and equal entitlements, which mean people cannot afford housing is arguably the primary determinant of homelessness amongst migrants.¹⁰

Individual risk factors

Individual factors contributing to homelessness can be split up into three categories: those that are the same as the general homelessness population, those that are compounded by immigration status,

4 Albanese, F. (2018) *Crisis blog: 'What is the scale of homelessness on any given night?'* <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/the-crisis-blog/what-is-the-scale-of-homelessness-on-any-given-night/>

5 Bramley, G. (2017) *Homelessness Projections: Core homelessness in Great Britain summary report*. London: Crisis.

6 Christian, J. (2003). *Homelessness: Integrating international perspectives*. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 13(2), 85-90; Fitzpatrick, S. (2005). *Explaining homelessness: a critical realist perspective*. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 22(1), 1-17.; Benjaminsen, L. (2016). *The variation in family background amongst young homeless shelter users in Denmark*. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(1), 55-73;

7 Fitzpatrick, S., & Christian, J. (2006). *Comparing homelessness research in the US and Britain*. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 6(3), 313-333.; Bramley, G., & Fitzpatrick, S. (2018). *Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?* *Housing Studies*, 33(1), 96-116.

8 Bramley, G., & Fitzpatrick, S. (2018). *Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?* *Housing Studies*, 33(1), 96-116.

9 Fitzpatrick, S., & Stephens, M. (2014). *Welfare regimes, social values and homelessness: Comparing responses to marginalised groups in six European countries*. *Housing Studies*, 29(2), 215-234.

10 Serpa, R. (2018) *Choice, Constraint and Negotiating Housing Systems: Understanding Migrant Homelessness in the US and UK*. Unpublished PhD thesis Edinburgh: Heriot Watt.

and those that are unique to migrant populations.

- **Universal risk factors:** these are factors that mirror those in the wider homelessness population. Universal risk factors include mental ill health, substance misuse and alcohol misuse, relationship breakdown, domestic abuse and loss of employment. It should be acknowledged that depending on immigration status these too can be compounded by an inability to access appropriate support to deal with these needs.
- **Compounded risk factors:** these are factors that have some commonality to wider known causes of homelessness but have unique elements caused by the immigration system. For example, these may include domestic abuse where relationship status is tied to a visa, debts that have been incurred through either the cost of migration or exploitative employment, and lack of any social or support networks.
- **Factors unique to the migrant homeless population:** These can cause specific challenges for someone who is trying to establish a settled life in the UK. These include language barriers which can be prohibitive in finding and sustaining employment, loss and theft of documentation which mean an inability to prove immigration status potentially leading to loss of employment or housing, and a lack of knowledge of the welfare and statutory support system leading to an inability to seek out support and advice if needed.

People who are homeless face the challenges of navigating multiple systems, including housing, welfare and the labour market. People

experiencing homelessness who are not originally from the UK face many of the same challenges, but these can be compounded by their specific experiences, immigration status and associated entitlements. This can include being locked out of the support services that help people to navigate these systems and provide help with other issues they may be facing, including complex trauma, mental health and substance misuse.¹¹

1.2 The research

This report presents the findings of Crisis' scoping research that sought to understand what is currently known about migrant homelessness and identify any gaps in evidence. This included looking at the scale of homelessness among non-UK nationals, the different experiences of homelessness that migrants face across Britain, and how services are responding to this. There is very little research that is focused specifically on non-UK nationals' experience of homelessness and the barriers that make it harder to prevent and end homelessness for people in this group.

In addition to carrying out a review of the existing literature and data for this report, we conducted primary research consisting of three different approaches covering homelessness and migrant organisations across Great Britain.

An online survey was sent out to both immigration and homelessness sector organisations. This was sent out to a targeted sample with a further snowballing of respondents. Respondents comprised of a mix of frontline services, network organisations, policy and campaigning organisations, and local authorities across both homelessness and migrant

services. In total there were 83 respondents to the survey.

Fourteen key informant interviews were then conducted with identified stakeholders representing a range of service types and covering both operational and strategic practice. These were semi-structured interviews which were transcribed and analysed thematically.

Alongside these, focus groups were conducted with frontline workers in three Crisis Skylight services: Edinburgh, Merseyside and London. These were also transcribed and analysed thematically.

1.3 The report

The report starts by setting out the current policy context that impacts on migrant homelessness. It then looks at the scale of migrant homelessness, looking at existing available data and perceptions of scale in services. It then considers the support needs specific to the migrant homeless population highlighted in the research, before finally examining the systemic barriers that affect the ability to prevent or relieve homelessness.

¹¹ Serpa, R. (2018) *Choice, Constraint and Negotiating Housing Systems: Understanding Migrant Homelessness in the US and UK*. Unpublished PhD thesis Edinburgh: Heriot Watt.; Stephens, M., & Fitzpatrick, S. (2007). *Welfare regimes, housing systems and homelessness: how are they linked*. *European Journal of Homelessness*, 1(1), 201-211.

Chapter 2: Policy context

Homelessness policy is the responsibility of national governments in England, Scotland and Wales, but the Westminster Government has responsibility for immigration policy across Britain. This means that decisions made in Westminster about immigration affect people in all three nations. Because homelessness policy is devolved there are still some differences in the support that people not originally from the UK can access in each nation.

In recent years the primary aim of the Government's immigration policy has been to reduce net migration to sustainable levels to address concerns about the pressures on housing, public services and wages.¹²

2.1. The 'hostile environment'

A key part of the Government's strategy for achieving this has involved creating a 'hostile environment' for migrants who they believe are not here legally. The policy was first mentioned by Theresa May, then Home Secretary, in 2012 when she stated: "The aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration."¹³ This involved making it more difficult for irregular migrants to get work, housing and financial services –

measures introduced through the Immigration Act (2014) and the Immigration Act (2016).

A central part of the hostile environment is an increase in secondary immigration control. This makes private citizens and public bodies – including banks, landlords and the NHS – responsible for immigration enforcement. The Right to Rent scheme is a key example of this. The scheme requires private landlords and letting agents in England to check that tenants have a right to rent. If they rent their property to someone who does not have the right to rent, they will face criminal charges and may get an unlimited fine or a prison sentence.

Many landlords are already reluctant to let to people experiencing

homelessness¹⁴ and the Right to Rent scheme introduces additional barriers that make it even harder for people in this situation to find somewhere to live in the private rented sector. This can affect anyone who does not have readily available ID but is a particular problem for people who are not British citizens. Research carried out by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants found that 42 per cent of landlords surveyed were less likely to rent to people who do not have a British passport because they feared criminal sanctions if they made a mistake under the legislation.¹⁵

The Windrush scandal, which saw thousands of people who had been living in the UK legally for decades wrongly classified as not having a right to live in the UK, highlighted the human impact of this approach. Since the scandal gained national attention in early 2018, the Government have stopped using the term 'hostile environment' and now refer to this set of policies as the 'compliant environment'.¹⁶ However, although some policies have been paused or ended following Windrush, overall there does not appear to have been a substantial shift in policy direction. This is evident in the Government's response to the High Court judgment on the Right to Rent scheme in March 2019, which found that the scheme is causing discrimination and is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. The Government made a public statement disputing the findings and stating their intention to continue with the scheme, emphasising that they are committed to an immigration system that ensures

"illegal migrants, with no right to be in the UK, are not able to access work, benefits and public services".¹⁷

This approach to immigration reform and tackling irregular immigration can be both a cause of homelessness and make it harder to end homelessness for people who are not originally from the UK. While the hostile environment is aimed at people without valid leave to be in the UK, there are regular reports of people with a lawful right to be here being caught up in the system.¹⁸ The Windrush scandal is a prime example of this, but people from outside this group are also being affected, including UK and EU nationals.

The hostile environment is also making some migrants who are experiencing homelessness more reluctant to approach homelessness services for support. Crisis services report that some of the people they work with are fearful of engaging with statutory organisations. This is supported by the findings of a recent consultation exercise by the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution, which found that some people who are originally from outside the UK are avoiding organisations and authorities they fear might report them to the Home Office.¹⁹

2.2. Access to support

The immigration system is complex, expensive and difficult to navigate without specialist legal support. Changes introduced in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of

14 Gousy, H. (2016) *Home: No less will do*. London: Crisis.

15 Patel, C. and Peel, C. (2017) *Passport Please: The impact of the Right to Rent checks on migrants and ethnic minorities in England*. London: Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants.

16 House of Commons (2018) *20 April 2018 debate Volume 640, col 44*. Retrieved from <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-04-30/debates/E7547DA9-5D22-4EC0-BAB4-8FC71BD2E1F9/Windrush#contribution-F4C953D1-BC64-49AF-9288-9D1A29ED4243>

17 Right to Rent Scheme: Written statement - HCWS1379, Caroline Nokes, 5 March 2019.

18 House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2018) *Immigration policy: basis for building consensus. Second Report of Session 2017-19*. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/>

19 Malfait, R., Cottrell, S. and Fylnn, N. S. (2017) *Migrant destitution: survey and consultation, commissioned by the Strategic Alliance on Migrant Destitution*. <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/siteattachments/SAMD%20Destitution%20Survey%20Summary%20Report%20June%202017.pdf>

12 Amber Rudd MP, Speech to Conservative Party Conference 2016. <http://press.conservatives.com/post/151334637685/rudd-speech-to-conservative-party-conference-2016>

13 Kirkup, J. and Winnett, R. (2012) *Theresa May interview: 'We're going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception'*, The Telegraph, 25th May. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/9291483/Theresa-May-interview-Were-going-to-give-illegal-migrants-a-really-hostile-reception.html>

Offenders Act (2012) significantly reduced the types of immigration cases eligible for legal aid, meaning that legal aid is no longer available for most immigration status problems. Even where people can access specialist advice and legal support, it will still be extremely difficult for people to successfully navigate the lengthy application process without stable accommodation and funds to meet basic needs, such as food, clothing and travel to appointments.²⁰

Many people who live in the UK but are originally from somewhere else have limited access to benefits and other essential services that help to prevent and relieve homelessness. People who have moved to the UK from outside the European Economic Area (EEA)²¹ are increasingly being granted discretionary leave to remain with a condition of no recourse to public funds. This means that they are not entitled to most benefits or to local authority homelessness services. This leaves people vulnerable to homelessness if their circumstances change and they are no longer able to support themselves.

People with an unresolved immigration status, which includes those who had leave to remain but have not managed to extend it, do not have access to benefits and are not allowed to work. This means they are at an even higher risk of homelessness. Asylum seekers are also unable to work and access mainstream welfare benefits, but where people would otherwise be destitute they are entitled to accommodation and limited financial support from the Home Office.

20 Petch, H., Perry, J. and Lakes, S. (2015) *How to improve support and services for destitute migrants*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

21 The European Economic Area (EEA) includes all EU countries and Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

22 Butler, P. and Rankin, J. (2019) Surge in EU citizens unfairly refused access to universal credit, *The Guardian*, 5th August. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/aug/05/surge-in-eu-citizens-unfairly-refused-access-to-universal-credit>; Sandbach, J. (2012) *Out of scope, out of mind: Who really loses out from legal aid reform*. London: Citizens Advice Bureau.

23 If the UK leaves the EU without a deal, then the deadline will be 31 December 2020.

24 Weaver, M. and Gentleman, A. (2019) EU nationals lacking settled status could be deported, minister says, *The Guardian*, 10th October. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/oct/10/eu-nationals-lacking-settled-status-could-be-deported-minister-says>

Entitlements to benefits and homelessness services for EEA nationals and their family members is different because their right to live and work in the UK is based on EU freedom of movement rights. The rules governing EEA nationals' entitlement to benefits and statutory homelessness services are complex and the support that someone is entitled to will vary depending on the basis on which they have a right to reside in the UK. One of the main ways that EEA nationals become eligible for benefits and statutory homelessness support is through working in the UK. However, the complexity of the rules that determine eligibility can lead to individuals being wrongly denied benefits they are entitled to.²²

People's entitlements will also be affected by the UK leaving the EU. EEA nationals and their family members will need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme if they want to remain living in the country after the UK leaves the EU. Those who successfully apply to the scheme will either receive settled or pre-settled status, depending on how long they have been living in the UK. EEA nationals who get settled status will be entitled to benefits and statutory homelessness assistance on the same basis as British nationals. Eligibility for those who get pre-settled status will not change. The deadline for applications is currently 30 June 2021²³ and the Government have confirmed that those who have not successfully applied for status by the deadline could be subject to deportation.²⁴

2.3. Government actions to address migrant homelessness

National governments in England, Scotland and Wales have begun to consider solutions to migrant homelessness, primarily as part of wider strategies to reduce and end rough sleeping. Although immigration is a reserved policy area, responsibility for homelessness is devolved to the Scottish and Welsh governments so they have some capacity to address migrant homelessness despite not having power over immigration policy.

The Rough Sleeping Strategy for England, which was published in August 2018, includes £5 million of new funding to support non-UK nationals who sleep rough, and the £45 million Rough Sleeping Initiative also funds some projects that are specifically working with non-UK nationals.²⁵ Additional funding to support rough sleepers has been made available in some local areas for winter 2019/20 through the Cold Weather Fund with specific extension of local authority powers to support EEA nationals, including the provision of emergency accommodation and employment support. However the strategy does not consider wider homelessness or the changes needed to prevent people who are not originally from the UK from becoming homeless in the first place.

The Scottish Government published *Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan* in November 2018. The action plan includes a commitment to continue pressing the Westminster Government to address issues relating to migrant homelessness to ensure that no one sleeps rough or becomes homeless due to their migration or social

security status. The plan also sets out the Scottish Government's intention to continue exploring what measures they can put in place to prevent rough sleeping and homelessness for those without recourse to public funds.²⁶ The Scottish Government are also currently developing an anti-destitution strategy that will focus on people with no recourse to public funds.

The Welsh Government published a two-year action plan to reduce rough sleeping in February 2018, however this did not include any mention of solutions to support non-UK nationals.²⁷ In June 2019 the Welsh Government put together a Homelessness Action Group to consider the actions and solutions required to achieve the goal of ending homelessness. The group is due to report on its recommendations in spring 2020.

As part of their commitment to be a Nation of Sanctuary for asylum seekers and refugees, the Welsh Government are also currently looking at ways to improve the accommodation options for destitute refused asylum seekers. They have commissioned research to scope out these options with a view to potentially funding some accommodation provision for this group in future.

Although it is positive to see governments in each nation start to consider how they can support migrants who are experiencing homelessness, this has not yet extended to considering the impact of current immigration policy on homelessness. Following the December 2019 General Election, the new government will be considering what the immigration system should look like after the UK leaves the EU.

25 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) *Rough Sleeping Strategy*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy>

26 Scottish Government (2018) *Ending homelessness and rough sleeping: action plan*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-homelessness-together-high-level-action-plan/pages/9/>

27 Welsh Government (2018) *Rough sleeping action plan*. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/rough-sleeping-action-plan.pdf>

It is crucial that this process includes consideration of the impact of any proposed changes on homelessness, both for people already living in the UK and those who will move here in future. This is essential to ensure that homelessness is ended for everyone living in the UK, whatever their nationality or immigration status.

Chapter 3: The scale of migrant homelessness

3.1. Assessing scale

Challenges in understanding the true scale of homelessness across Great Britain are not unique to the migrant population. However, there are additional factors that increase the difficulties in estimating the number of non-UK nationals experiencing all forms of homelessness. These include lack of eligibility for statutory services due to immigration status and lack of engagement with both statutory and non-statutory services due to fears of the 'hostile environment'. Migrants clearly make up a significant proportion of the rough sleeping and wider homeless population across Britain, but there are significant gaps in data that are collected or published. *Everybody In: How to End Homelessness in Great Britain*²⁸ explores the current available data across different migrant groups in full finding patchy and inconsistent data across the three nations.

For those with entitlements and who are accessing local authority support, the statutory data in England

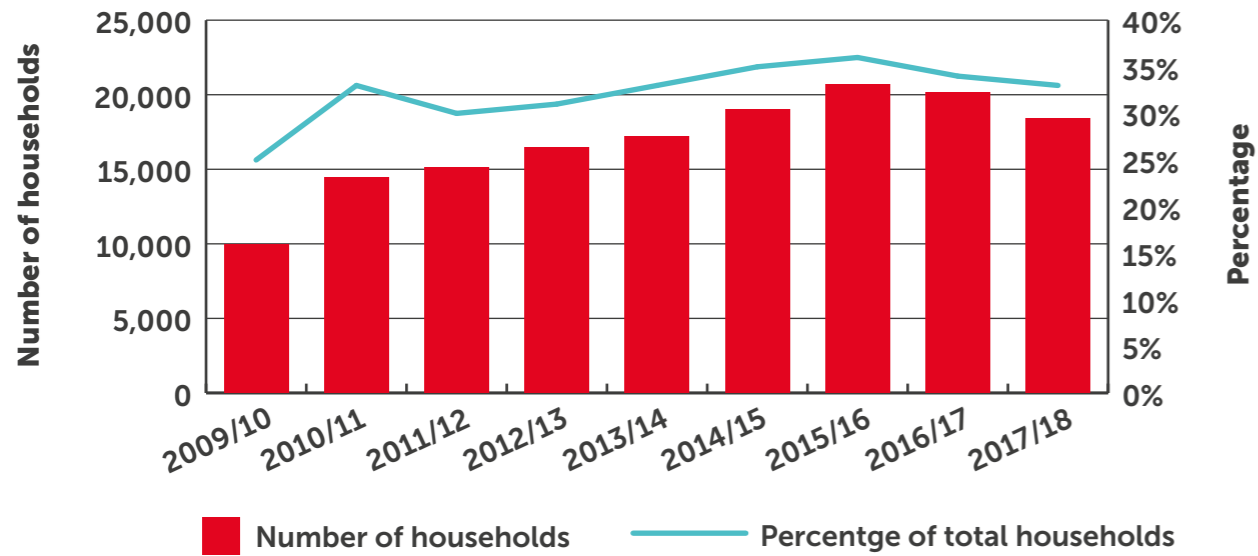
does show the number of non-UK households accessing support as comparable to UK nationals. Until the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) in April 2018 non-UK households remained a substantial proportion of all households accepted as homeless by local authorities in England. The proportion reached a high of 36 per cent (20,700 households) in 2015/16 before falling slightly to 33 per cent (18,420 households) in 2017/18. This is significantly higher than the overall percentage of non-UK nationals in the UK which was just shy of ten per cent for the years 2016–2018.²⁹

The introduction of the HRA increased the level of data available on non-UK nationals accessing local authority housing support. The overwhelming majority of households accepted as either at risk of, or homeless, by the local authority were either British or Irish citizens (225,080 households). However, 33,610 households were non-UK nationals, of which 46 per cent were EEA nationals. Figure 3.2. shows the immigration status of the

²⁸ Downie, M., Gousy, H., Basran, J., Jacob, R., Rowe, S., Hancock, C., Albanese, F., Pritchard, R., Nightingale, K. and Davies, T. (2018) *Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain*. London: Crisis.

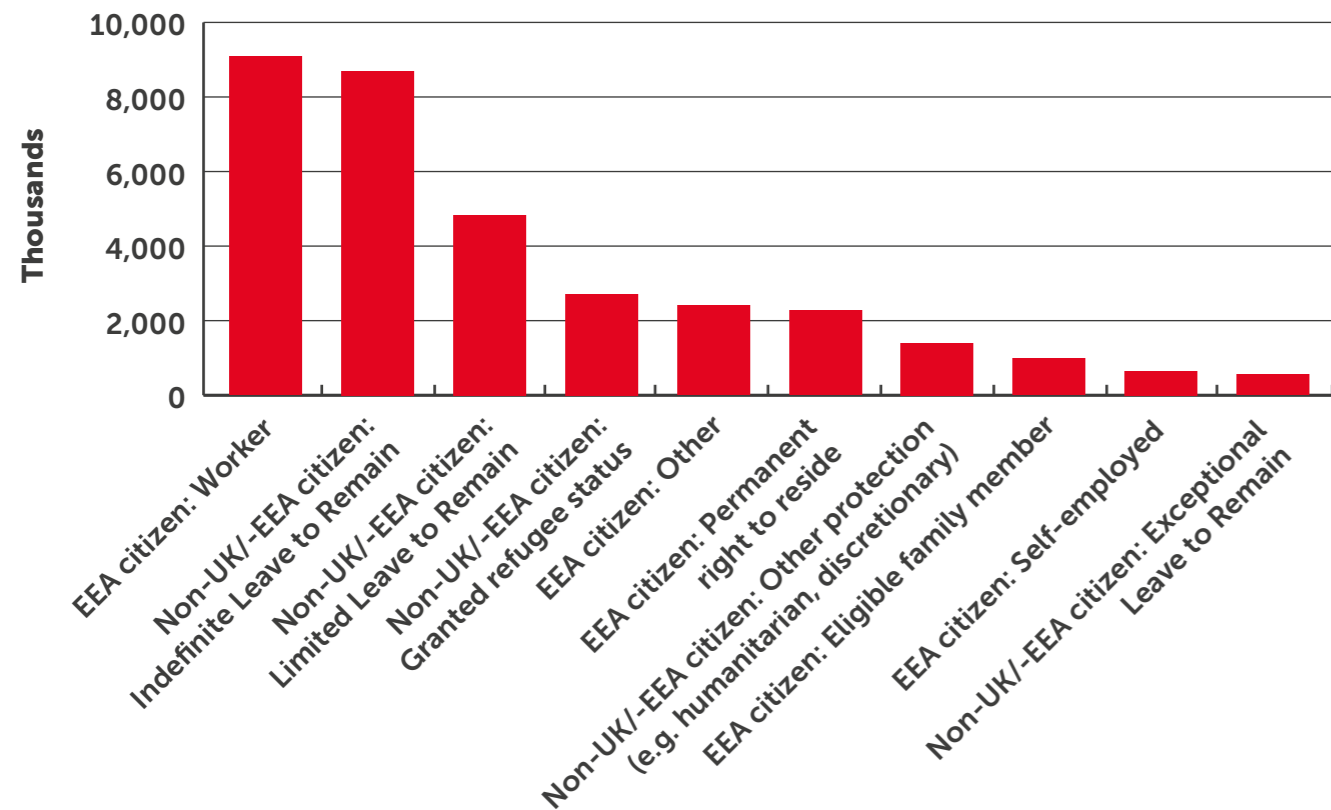
²⁹ Varags-Silva, C. & Rienzo C. (2019) *Migrants in the UK: An Overview* Oxford: The Migration Observatory

Figure 3.1. Number of non-UK households accepted as homeless in England between 2009/10 and 2017/18 and the percentage of non-UK households of total households accepted.



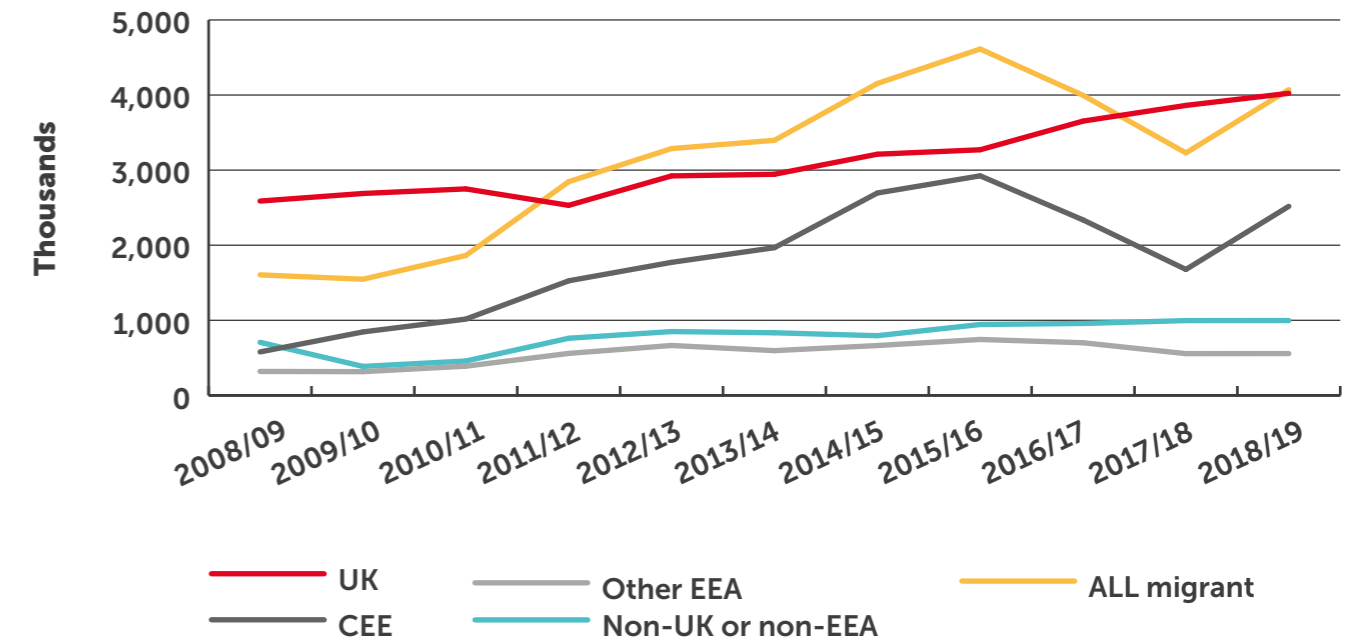
Source: MHCLG statutory homelessness statistics (pre-HRA)

Figure 3.2. Breakdown of households accepted under the Homelessness Reduction Act (2018) by immigration status 2018/19



Source: MHCLG statutory homelessness statistics

Figure 3.3. Number of rough sleepers in London by nationality, 2008/9 to 2018/19



Source: Greater London Authority (GLA) CHAIN reports (<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>)

remaining households over the first year of the HRA.

The local authority statutory data shows a steady increase in the number of non-UK nationals being accepted as homeless by their local authority. This has remained a relatively constant proportion of the overall number of households accessing statutory support. However, this data is limited because it only shows households who are eligible for support, excluding those not entitled because of their immigration status from the statistics. In Scotland and Wales comparable data are not collected.

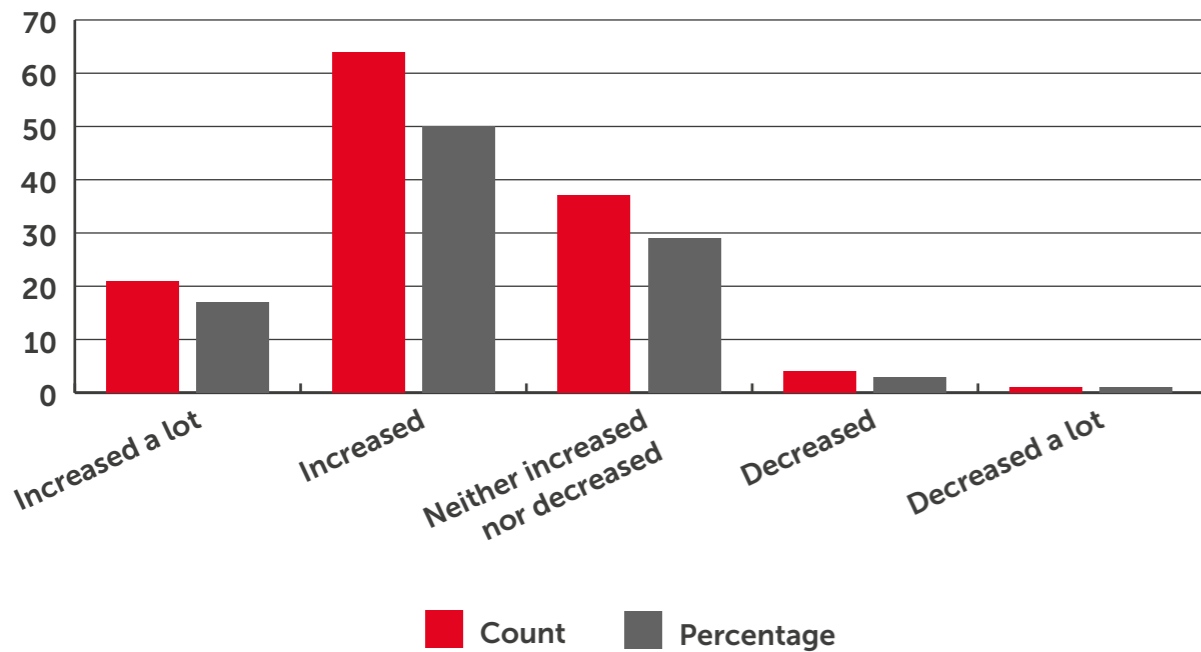
The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) gives a more detailed view of the number of people rough sleeping in London who are not originally from the UK and includes all people encountered

by outreach workers regardless of immigration status. Figure 3.3. shows the number of people seen sleeping rough over the course of a year broken down by nationalities. It shows that while rough sleeping amongst UK nationals has seen a steady and sustained increase over the last ten years, migrant rough sleeping has shown more fluctuation reaching a peak in 2016/17 before dropping and starting to climb again in 2018/19.³⁰ Since 2009/10 over 50 per cent of the non-UK nationals found to be rough sleeping through CHAIN have been people from Central and Eastern European countries.

Current statutory data collection on homelessness across Great Britain is inconsistent and does not join up across different sources. Inconsistencies may also be due to exclusions based on eligibility and

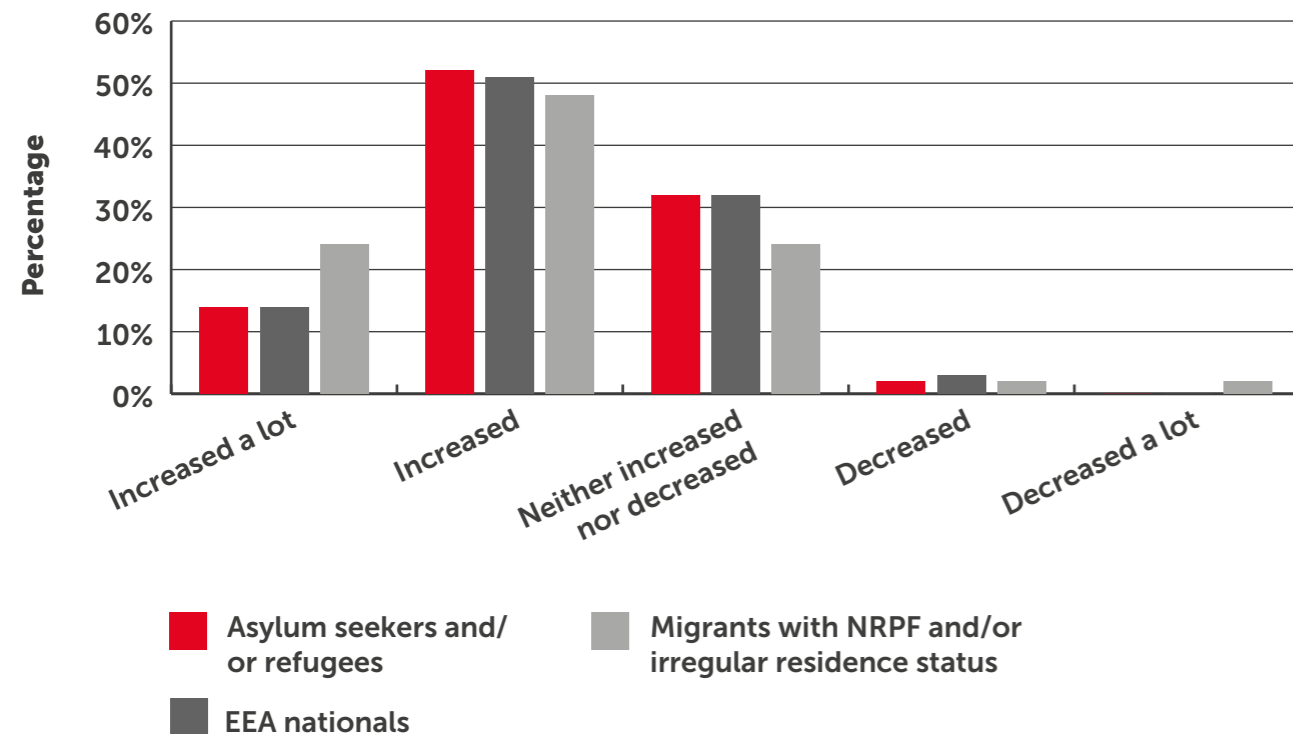
³⁰ Greater London Authority (2019) CHAIN annual report: Greater London 2018/19. Greater London Authority.

Figure 3.4. Over the last 12 months what has happened to the scale of migrant homelessness in the area(s) that you work?



Source: Sector survey. N=83

Figure 3.5. Over the last 12 months what has happened to the scale of migrant homelessness in the area(s) that you work (by migrant group)



Source: Sector survey. N=83

people avoiding state services due to concerns around the 'hostile environment'. With this in mind, one of the core questions we asked organisations in this survey related to the change in the numbers of migrant homeless people accessing their support. Responses highlighted a perception from both homelessness and migrant services that there are increasing numbers of people from outside the UK experiencing homelessness that are not reflected in the statutory data.

Nearly seven out of 10 (67%) survey respondents said that the scale of migrant homelessness in the areas that they worked in had increased in the last 12 months. Just under a fifth (17%) state that it has increased a lot. Only four per cent of respondents said that it had decreased.

When focusing on specific migrant groups, one in four (24%) respondents said homelessness had increased a lot in the last 12 months for people with no recourse to public funds or irregular status. This is compared to 14 per cent for both EEA nationals and asylum seekers and refugees. However, overall there were significant observed increases for all three groups: no recourse to public funds (71%), EEA nationals (65%) and asylum seekers and refugees (66%).

This observed increase in migrants who are experiencing homelessness and accessing services was echoed by the focus groups with observed changes across all the different migrant groups:

"Just a big yes [observed increase]. I think when I first started, the client group was predominantly white British. Then, over time I've worked with quite a few people from the Polish community as well. That's been difficult because

I do something that's more therapeutic and you need language to emotionally connect to people. Our asylum seeker community as well, because we have a dispersal area, so we find people that have come from London but moved to Liverpool."
Focus Group

"I've been in London about 4 years and I would say the last 2 or 3 there has been a big increase in the number of refugees coming to access our services."
Focus Group

However, some participants did contradict this by saying they did not think there had been a noticeable change in scale recently, and that they felt after a rise around 2016-17 there had been a reduction or slowing down. This was particularly true of EEA nationals and perhaps supports the trends seen in the CHAIN data.

"It certainly has with European, certainly new migration, yeah, with European migrants, I think has slowed."
Focus Group

"I don't think I've noticed a change. I don't think. I've worked there for two years. I don't think there is suddenly more migrant, homeless migrants."
Focus Group

One of the key challenges related to migrant homelessness is understanding the true scale and the research confirmed that there could

be a significant amount of hidden homelessness amongst this group. In particular, this was highlighted as being prevalent amongst refused asylum seekers or those seeking appeal as opposed to refugees or EEA nationals.

"I would say EU nationals that come are often homeless, street homeless, so they'll be rough sleeping or they'll be living in a squat or something, whereas often people who have no status who are from other countries, might stay with family or friends, sofa surfing, so it's a different kind of homelessness in my experience."

Focus Group

Despite this it was clear from the key informant interviews that it is very difficult to estimate the true scale of migrant homelessness, and as a consequence be able to state whether there has been a change in numbers.

"Very hard to quantify. Because there are no official records we can only estimate, we're working with a figure of 1000 destitute people in Scotland because there are people outside of Glasgow, but most destitute people will be living in Glasgow. It's very difficult to say. I don't think we are meeting the need, but it's a little bit like how long is a piece of string. The more capacity you offer, the more clients we end up getting."

KI Interview

"It is very difficult to estimate the number of people in that position because like, the clinicians and the pathway team, they have no skills or knowledge in trying to ascertain what is the issues. How many people have no recourse, how many people are simply undocumented, have not got the evidence?"

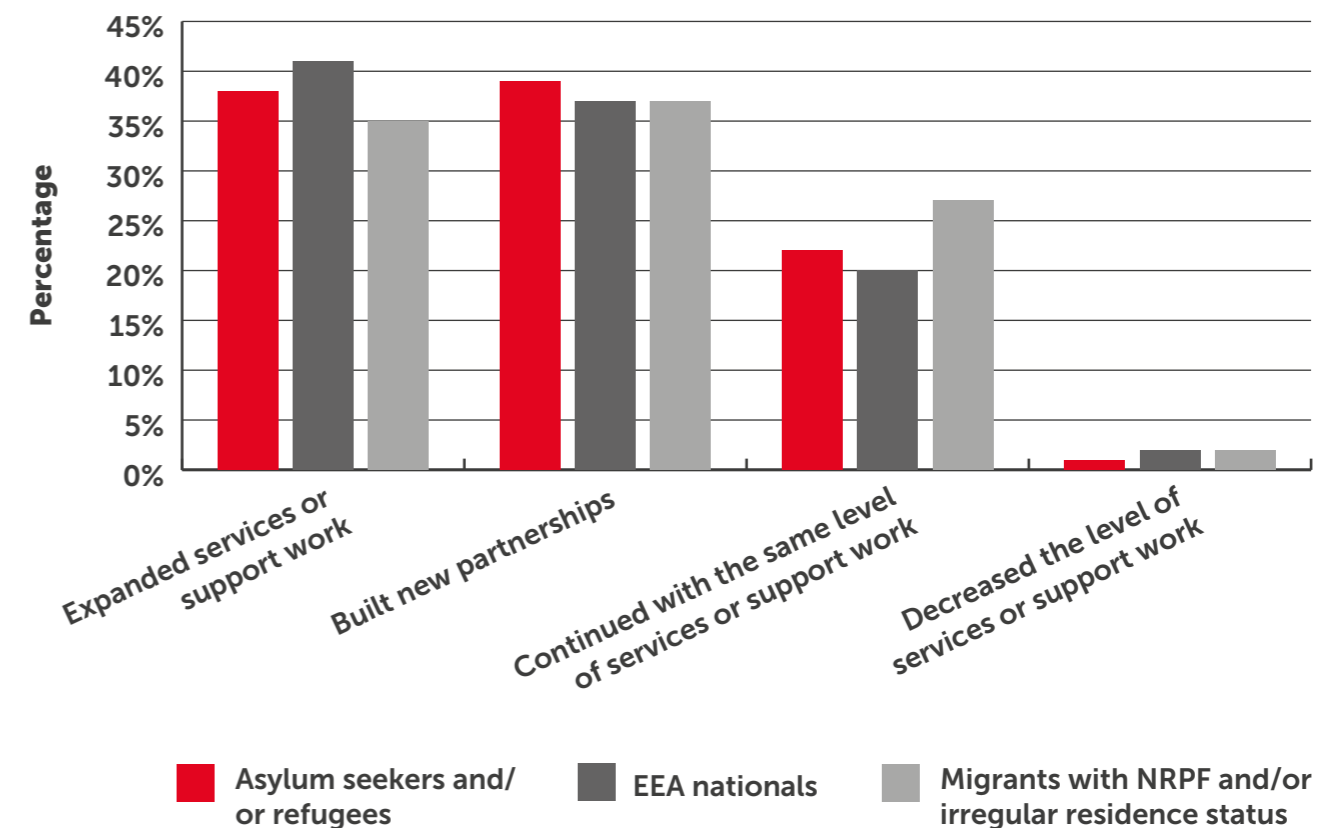
KI Interview

"I guess you can only say something's worse if you know exactly what it is in the first place. I think as well. I think what we never got our heads round was we'd never been able to get a really good grasp on numbers or...that always makes it really difficult to do any kind of comparison with before."

KI interview

Informants could not give definitive reasons for the change in scale of migrant homelessness and in part this reflects the ambiguous nature of data that there is for this group. Not being able to track trends and understand the particular issues that different migrant groups face is an issue for the sector. Despite this uncertainty about the change in scale of migrant homelessness it is interesting to note that over a third of survey respondents reported that they had expanded their services to meet the demands on their organization across each of the different groups, whilst only two per cent said they had decreased provision.

Figure 3.6. Has your organisation changed its approach to respond to current need?



Source: Sector survey. N=64

3.2. Data collection

As set out above when exploring existing statutory data, for many people one of the biggest challenges with estimated scale lay with the paucity of consistent data collection. Further, where data is collected there were concerns with its quality, particularly data collected by the Home Office. A recent examination of current immigration measures by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration found that out of a sample of 169 cases on the database, ten per cent should never have been listed as 'disqualified persons' i.e. people considered to have no right to remain in the UK. This is because they had leave to remain or an outstanding application or appeal.³¹

"One of the issues as well is the Home Office, loads of the data they are holding is inaccurate. Its incorrect and this is just a fact. We know that today there was like some report released from the government about Windrush and that's one of the things they found that the government, the Home Office, is acting on information, on data that is incorrect."

KI Interviews

It was also acknowledged that third sector organisations are not necessarily capturing the information needed to better understand the scale

³¹ Bolt, D. (2016) *An inspection of the 'hostile environment' measures relating to driving licences and bank accounts: January to July 2016*. London: Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration.

and support needs of the migrant homeless population.

So, getting an understanding of migrant homelessness that's not as well known, because it's people that try to avoid bigger services. A lot of the smaller services are not great at recording the information, so they are not really able to tell you who they are seeing, in that sense."

KI Interviews

This was reflected in the investigation done into data collected as part of this research. This found a lack of consistency in collected data, and recognition that many of the smaller organisations were not equipped to be able to collect information in a sustained and robust manner. This is particularly challenging when thinking about estimating the scale of migrant homelessness for people with no recourse to public funds, or those who may want to be hidden not just from statutory services but also larger voluntary organisations, and who may only be accessing support from smaller services or faith based or community services.

"I think if there is a community there that speaks your language and connections that you can make in the mosque or wherever...I think there obviously is an informal network of support. We know that the mosques provide food, we know that the mosques let people sleep overnight in their buildings, although usually they don't and they don't want to be seen as an official provider of services. But we

do know, unofficially, that they do that. There will be support out there for those groups but there will be a concern about potential danger as well and are they potentially being exploited."

KI Interview

This suggests that, in addition to wider concerns about the amount of hidden homelessness among people originally from outside the UK, there are certain groups that are even less likely to be captured within existing data. A particular concern raised in the key informant interviews was around the lack of understanding specifically of the scale of homelessness amongst migrant women. Key informants were concerned that the number of women they saw was not a real reflection of the extent of homelessness among women who are not originally from the UK. While domestic abuse services will work with more migrant women, and an increase in women fleeing domestic abuse was reported in the survey, other services aimed at people sleeping rough and those experiencing destitution see less.

"One thing we have observed through our work on migrant destitution is that we don't see that many women."

KI Interviews

There were also specific concerns raised by a small number of organisations in the survey concerning the complications of spousal visas and the implications of these on those fleeing domestic abuse. Organisations expressed worry that fear surrounding uncertain immigration status prevented these women from accessing support.

As with other forms of homelessness, it is well known that women are less likely to sleep rough and may adopt

risky patterns of behaviour to avoid being on the street. This pattern was also reported by informants who said that they had observed homeless migrant women staying in precarious circumstances to stay off the street.

"Women tend to avoid sleeping rough and I'm sure that this is happening not just for people with no records but it's very much what happens. ... they are staying in very precarious circumstances because of the people that they are posing a risk to them. We see lots of cases... we do see cases of people that are sexual servants who have done things like that".

KI Interviews

This acknowledgement that it is likely that there are more women who are experiencing more hidden homelessness and are at risk of serious exploitation, again speaks to the need to better understand the true scale of migrant homelessness.

Chapter 4: Brexit and EEA national discrimination

62 per cent of survey respondents identified Brexit and the implications on EEA nationals as their biggest concern for future impact on migrant homelessness.

The potential implications of Brexit are significant but despite this it did not feature as a particularly common issue to come up through the key informant interviews. Perhaps this was because there remains so much uncertainty around what the impact of Brexit will be. When we carried out the interviews for this research the EU Settlement Scheme had not yet opened to the public, and the implications for EEA nationals were less clear. Where people did specifically address Brexit, their main concerns focused on the discrimination that EEA nationals may begin to experience as landlords and employers decide to avoid the perceived risk of renting to them or employing them.

“I think with Brexit this is going to be a huge issue for EEA nationals. So it has already started a while ago. That EEA nationals.... Just some specific

cases like I’ve had people telling me, yeah I was about to sign a contract and then they asked me, oh so you’re British right? And it’s like no I’m from, whatever your country is. It’s like no because I don’t know what’s going to happen with Brexit so I’m sorry I prefer to hire a British national. And that’s going to be a huge issue.”
KI Interviews

The people we interviewed also feared that the wide-reaching consequences of Brexit could further compound the already precarious circumstances EEA nationals often find themselves in.

“The scary thing for EEA nationals because there’s nothing around the protection of discrimination because

clearly Brexit creates a lot of legal uncertainty for a lot of people and a lot of misunderstanding and it can really have consequences on people also being exploited.”
KI Interviews

EEA nationals living in the UK have now begun to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to get pre-settled or settled status that will allow them to continue living and working in the UK after Brexit. However, while this is a relatively simple process in comparison to most immigration applications, people experiencing homelessness still face multiple barriers to successfully applying.

Crisis services have been working with partner organisations to support people with experience of homelessness to apply to the Settlement Scheme since it opened in April 2019. Many of the clients we have worked with have very little knowledge of the scheme, and those that were aware often assumed that they wouldn’t be eligible because of their homelessness, poor health or unemployment. Even with the additional support currently being offered as a result of Home Office funding to help vulnerable people apply to the scheme, there are still likely to be a significant number of people who do not successfully apply for status by the deadline. People in this situation will be left without status, unable to work or access vital services, leaving them trapped in poverty and vulnerable to exploitation.

Proof of identify and residence in the UK are the key things that applicants must provide evidence of when applying to the Scheme, and this is particularly difficult for many people experiencing homelessness. Lack of ID and the loss of passports were highlighted as common problems throughout the research. While this

issue is not unique to the migrant homeless population, people originally from outside the UK face additional challenges when trying to replace lost documentation. The variation in both speed and ease in which passports can be replaced by different embassies was commented on as being a barrier to effectively supporting individuals.

“We get different responses from within the same embassy and different responses from all the embassies at different times. I think whilst some embassy staff have been really helpful when we’ve been trying to sort those issues out for people, I don’t think there’s a strong link between us and some of the embassies. I think having that could maybe make getting ID faster for people because people are facing eight month processes sometimes to get a passport, and they literally can’t do anything to move on without that photo ID.”

Focus Group

Supporting someone to find the evidence they need to make a successful application can take months, and during this time people may stop engaging with support and end up not completing an application.

Even where people do have the evidence they need to make an application, some people remain reluctant to apply because they are fearful of engaging with the Home Office. This is a particular issue for people who have ID cards rather than passports because they are unable to complete their application without sending their ID card to the Home Office. Many are reluctant to do this for fear that their ID will be lost or that

Luis' story

Luis is an EU national and he has been homeless in the UK for over five years. He has spent some of this time sofa surfing and a lot of this time sleeping rough. As he has been living in the UK for more than five years he will be eligible for settled status. This would make him eligible for Housing Benefit and other services that could help him move on from homelessness and find a stable home.

However, Luis does not have any ID because it was stolen while he was sleeping rough. He cannot make an application to the Settlement Scheme until he has got new ID. Crisis have supported Luis to work with the embassy to get a new ID. This isn't a quick process as there is

a one month wait for the embassy appointment and then a further six week wait before Luis will receive his ID.

During this time Luis still cannot access benefits and housing so he remains homeless. He has experienced significant hardship while he has been homeless in the UK because he hasn't been entitled to this essential support. It is really challenging for Crisis to provide effective support for people in this situation, and people like Luis often struggle to engage with services because of language barriers, health problems and a lack of hope that they will ever be able to move on from homelessness.

Artem's story

Artem is an Eastern European man in his sixties who has lung cancer. He has been living in the basement below his place of employment where he works cash in hand. He was hospitalised because he needed an operation for his lung cancer however it could not go ahead because he didn't have anywhere to stay where he could rest and recover afterwards.

A local authority housing officer who Artem was working with referred him to Glass Door so that they could help him apply to

the EU Settlement Scheme. They supported him with the application and four days later he received a decision to say that he had been granted settled status. This meant that he was now eligible for benefits and so could get help to pay his rent.

The local authority provided accommodation for Artem the next day and he had the operation the following week. He is now recovering at home and waiting for follow up treatment.

there will be a long delay before it is returned to them.

There is also a risk that people will not get the status they are entitled to because they are unable to provide sufficient evidence of their time living in the UK. EEA nationals who have lived in the UK for five years should be eligible for settled status, and if successful they will then also be eligible for benefits and statutory homelessness services on the same basis as British nationals. People who get pre-settled status will continue to face restrictions on the benefits and homelessness assistance they are eligible for, making it much harder for them to move on from homelessness.

For those people who are granted settled status the scheme may offer access to a route out of homelessness. Supporting someone who is experiencing homelessness to successfully apply for settled status can provide an opportunity to help people access other essential services that they had previously been locked out of, including benefits, accommodation and healthcare. However, it can still be challenging for people to actually access these entitlements, and some people with settled status are finding that their Universal Credit applications are being wrongly denied. This can leave people without any income for months while the decision is challenged.

However, for people who do not successfully apply by the deadline – whether because they are unaware of the need to or lack the necessary documents – the consequences are likely to be severe. EEA nationals who have made their home in the UK are expected to lose their right to live and work here overnight, leaving them facing homelessness, destitution and potentially deportation.

Chapter 5: Systemic barriers

Alongside both the individual support needs of the migrant homeless population, and the barriers that are ubiquitous across the homelessness system, there are specific systemic barriers that are unique to this population. A number of these issues are highlighted in section 1.1 of this report, which looks at the causal links between homelessness and the immigration system. This section highlights these and expands on the impact they have on people's lives based on the responses of those who participated in the research, while also identifying specific barriers to support that are evident through frontline practice.

5.1. DWP, Jobcentre Plus and benefit entitlements

The two most reported barriers impacting on people experiencing homelessness who are not originally from the UK related to lack of income and lack of access to financial support.

The research found that within the Jobcentre Plus there can be a lack of understanding of what the benefit entitlements are for different immigration statuses potentially leading to people being excluded despite having rights to benefits. This can then take significant time and effort from frontline workers to support individuals in overturning or appealing decisions. There was also

a concern that the complexity of the system meant that in many cases neither the Jobcentre Plus staff nor the supporting organisations were able to be fully confident as to whether a decision was correct or not and are therefore not able to challenge.

"The DWP are making mistakes and a lot of charities are just not aware of them or it's too difficult because it's complex for anybody. If you already have to know this breadth of information around mental health, physical health, housing law, benefit law, and then you have to know this

extra thing it's just like, it's not really reasonable so they made it very complicated and then there is again no legal aid for that and not really that much advice out there for those types of cases."

KI interviews

"We had a refugee who was being told they needed to provide proof of passing the HRT (habitual residence test) to get benefits, and, it's, like, 'They are a refugee.' Like, 'They are not an EU national. I think you're getting your wires crossed.' Eventually, it got sorted out, but yeah. There are so many complexities and statuses and... Yeah. It could all be made simpler and fairer."

Focus Group

This was not a blanket experience across all staff within Jobcentres but a recognition of the inconsistency of support provided and the direct impact on individual decisions. Having supportive DWP staff can make a significant difference.

"My experience working with the DWP, is that, individual characters can be amazing, but you don't know that it's blanket, it doesn't feel like everyone's been taught to work this way. 'I hope they get so-and-so in', I find myself saying, 'Why do I hope they get H* in [Scottish town]?' because I know she's going to do a really good job."

Focus Group

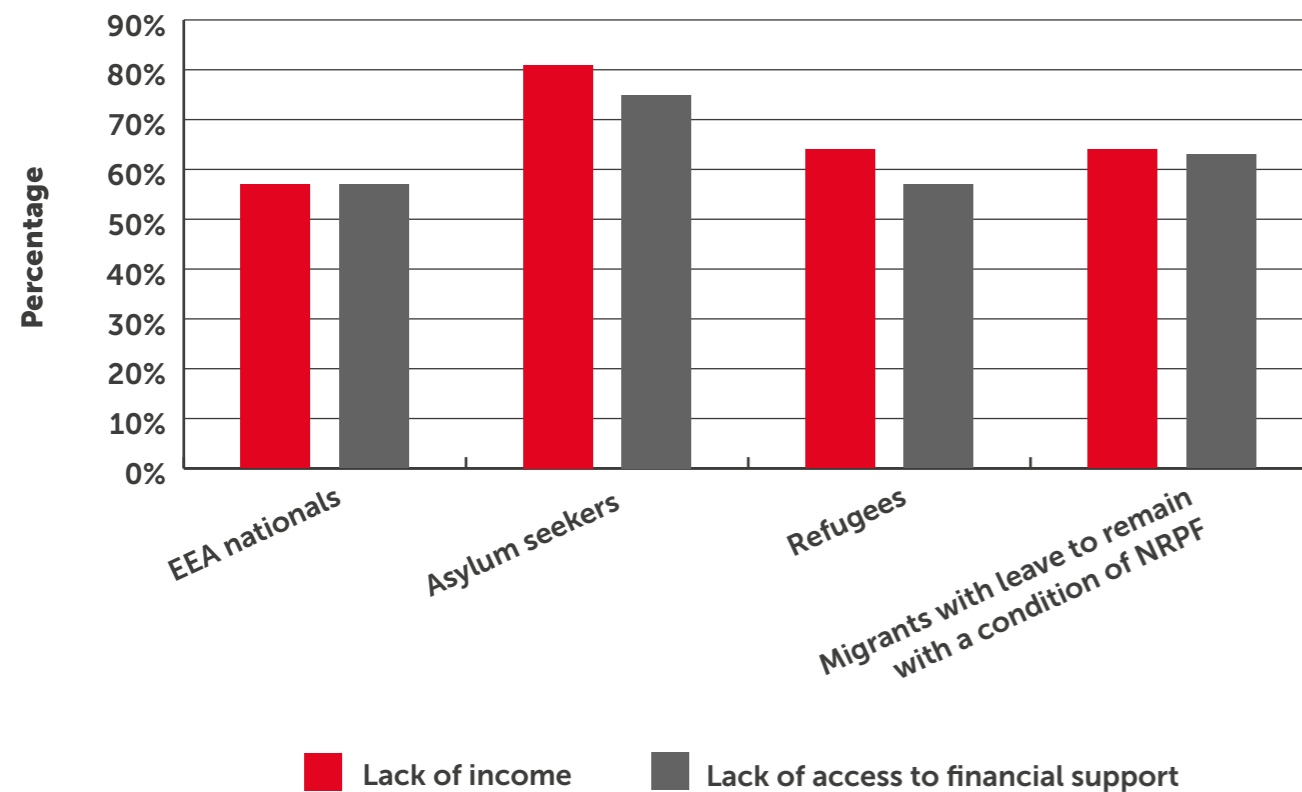
It was clear from the focus groups that frontline homelessness staff are developing a substantial amount of knowledge about the complexities of the interaction between benefit entitlements and immigration status. However, this is dependent on the individual worker and their own experiences and is not a sustainable long-term solution.

Restrictions on benefit entitlements clearly have an impact on both prohibiting homelessness prevention and making it harder to end people's homelessness. Amongst survey respondents the two most reported barriers impacting on people experiencing homelessness who are not originally from the UK related to lack of income (93%) and lack of access to financial support (89%). As Figure 4.6 below shows this is particularly a concern for the asylum seeker group but is universally a substantial barrier to effective support for all groups. The below sections on exploitation and accessing accommodation explore the impact of this in further detail but the findings highlight the challenges of being able to effectively support an individual out of homelessness when they are not entitled to financial support.

All respondents reported that recent changes to eligibility for benefits in relation to EEA nationals were impacting on this group. Concerns were also raised about the additional restrictions on entitlements that have been implemented as part of the Universal Credit roll-out.

"And since Universal Credit came out [sic], I don't think we've had a successful EEA claim, they're not even getting the 91 days anymore. There seems to be a barrier there, and we've not been able to see anybody come through."

Focus Group

Figure 5.1. Financial barriers to accessing support

Source: Sector survey. N=58

EEA nationals who have a right to reside as a jobseeker are not entitled to Universal Credit. Whereas previously they would have been eligible to claim Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) for a limited period (usually up to three months) this is no longer the case under Universal Credit. Crisis frontline staff reported how they had previously been able to use this period when a client was receiving JSA to intensively support members.

“Okay, here’s your options, we understand what you are, what we’ll do is we’ll put in the benefit claim...then you’ve got those 91 days to try and get a job and keep learning with ESOL, work and learn, we can do it that way.’ And now that

seems to have gone, we can’t even seem to guarantee that 91 days anymore, we can’t seem to be able to get money to them at all.”

Focus Group

This makes it even more challenging to provide effective support for EEA nationals who are looking for work because their entitlements to benefits are so limited.

However, even when EEA nationals do have entitlements to benefits – for example because they are working or have settled status – they still face challenges to making a successful claim. The complexity of the rules governing EEA nationals’ entitlements to benefits leads to individuals being wrongly denied benefits they are entitled to. Concerns about how the

Matteo’s story

Matteo is an Italian man in his mid-twenties. He moved to the UK to find work about three years ago but didn’t manage to find stable employment. Unable to access benefits he ended up rough sleeping for a long time. He has struggled with his mental health and cannabis use, making it even harder for him to find and sustain employment.

During the times when he was working he was able to get Universal Credit, which meant he had more options to find housing. He lived in a shared house for a while and stayed at various hostels. He left the last hostel he was staying at because he was bullied by other residents. Following this he has struggled to find anywhere else to live.

Matteo isn’t working at the moment, so he isn’t eligible for benefits. He has struggled to find work because he has minimal work experience and limited English. Crisis have supported him to find

accommodation in a shared house with a young person’s housing association. During this time Crisis have supported Matteo to improve his English, complete a volunteering placement, get a CSCS card so he can work on a construction site and begin searching for work.

However, even with this support he struggled to find employment and had to leave the accommodation after four months. It was only available for a limited time because it was being jointly funded by the housing association and Crisis with the aim that Matteo would be able to start working during this time, which would allow him to start paying the rent. Since leaving the shared house Matteo has been doing some cash in hand car wash work and has been sofa surfing when he can and paying to stay some nights in a backpacker’s hostel when he can afford it. Crisis continues to support Matteo to find more stable employment that will allow him to access benefits.

habitual residence test is being applied to EEA nationals were frequently raised by front line workers participating in the research.

“I’ve experienced it more with EEA nationals having habitual residence tests which are refused.”

Focus Group

“They’ve really tightened up the habitual residence test. It’s just the whole idea of having an actual connection to your city used to be, join the library, register for the GP, it’s now,

they ideally actually want you to be in work to actually get the benefits. And it takes people a long time to actually get the work in the first place. They’ve made it so strict now, and I think it’s going to get stricter as well.”

Focus Group

This also affects people who have settled status, who are entitled to benefits on the same basis as British nationals. On multiple occasions clients that Crisis has been working with who have been granted settled status have had their Universal Credit application denied on the basis that

Stefan story

Stefan got settled status in July 2019. Crisis supported him to make an application for Universal Credit on the 9 July. He attended an initial appointment at the Jobcentre the following week and provided evidence that he had been granted settled status and a supporting letter from Crisis.

A couple of weeks later his Universal Credit account was updated to say that he would find out how much he would be paid on the 9 August and would receive his first payment on the 16 August. When this didn't happen, Crisis supported Stefan to

phone the Universal Credit helpline and explained that he had settled status and therefore has a right to reside. They said that his case was with a decision maker and they couldn't say how long it would take for a decision to be made. This continued for several weeks.

Stefan is currently staying in accommodation funded by the local authority because of his care needs. Aside from this he has no income and this accommodation may not continue if he does not start receiving benefits soon.

they do not pass the habitual residence test. This is despite the fact that they shouldn't have any problems passing the habitual residence test because they must have been resident in the UK for at least five years to get settled status.

Where people are wrongly denied benefits, it is critical that they have access to advice and support to enable them to successfully challenge the decision so that it is reversed as quickly as possible. Without this people will be left without access to essential financial support which increases their risk of homelessness.

5.2. Accessing the labour market and exploitation

Given the restrictions on benefit entitlements, and in particular to Housing Benefit, the importance of employment and being able to generate income in order to be able to access housing is vital. Across all the focus groups there was recognition that this need had created a reverse pathway in the support that they

were offering to migrant homeless members, in that they had to prioritise employment outcomes before they could look to support people with any wider needs they may have, including housing support.

"I think we're missing steps 1, 2 and 3 and then jumping to 4, 5 and 6 before we actually help someone, you know, there's desperation to get them to work but we're not dealing with social needs, their dependencies, anything like that. How can you expect someone to go through rough sleeping and alcoholism and drug dependency that's been created by trauma or a kind of psychological damage and then go into employment, it must be so hard, so difficult, you know?"

Focus Group

"If they're absolutely determined to stay in this country, their only route off the streets is to get a job and get into the private rented sector. Getting a job, yeah they could just about do that, but in a very precarious way. But would they go into accommodation? Highly unlikely."

KI Interview

Where people are able to sustain employment there is still no guarantee that they will be able to access the private rented market. The reliance on low paid work, or zero-hour contracts means some landlords are unwilling to accept people as tenants due to the instability of their income.

"Then, zero-hour contracts, I think, also affect a lot of EU nationals, and then finding accommodation with a zero-hour contract is extremely difficult. We even have a hostel that is for workers, but they don't accept people with a zero-hour contract, which is crazy because that's the whole point. Because they're like, 'Well, we're not sure that they will earn that money. They might go into rent arrears, so it's worse for them'. It's like, yes, but, you know, so many people are getting zero-hour contracts. So, when you think someone had a successful outcome, it's not, necessarily. It's not going to mean that they're just out of the streets and that's it."

KI interview

The desperation for employment and the precarious nature of housing circumstances are creating situations where people are becoming extremely vulnerable to exploitation. A range of different examples of this were highlighted across the key informant interviews and focus groups. But there were notable concerns that people were being exploited within their own community that they had sought out when they first arrived in the country.

"Falling into a trap and people saying, 'we can house you and you just have to help us with something.' And then in the end, it's indentured to them and they've got to work it off to pay off or be there for a certain amount of time or whatever it is. The lack of a structure for the state or a clear agency that you direct people to means that people fall through and then you don't really know what's happening with them, which makes them actually more vulnerable in a way."

Focus Group

Informants and focus groups also highlighted challenges with the labour black market with people working but outside of the legal employment structure. This means they may be not accessing their employment rights, but it also raises concerns for being able to evidence their habitual residency as they will not have a clear record of employment and tax contributions via HMRC. For EEA nationals this may create barriers when applying for pre-settled or settled status.

"If you've just always worked on the black market, and then you lose your job, the easiest thing for you to do is just to get another illegal job. So, you're

in no... You're never improving your situation."

Focus Group

The ban on working for asylum seekers, both for those awaiting a decision or appealing a decision, means they are extremely limited in their income options. This means they are even more vulnerable to exploitation. Perhaps unsurprisingly 91 per cent of survey respondents reported that the work ban was impacting on homelessness among asylum seekers. As highlighted through the key informant interviews this ban on working is not consistent with other European countries.³² It was emphasised that lifting the ban would make a significant difference to the outcomes for homeless and destitute asylum seekers.

"And most of the European countries do allow asylum seekers to work while they're seeking asylum... So, I think that's something that would really help".

KI Interview

5.3. Affordable housing and accessing accommodation

"I mean it does come back to accommodation, I think that's so fundamental, because without that people just can't move on, they really, really can't."

KI Interview

The heart of the barriers facing the migrant homeless population is the lack of access to housing. 84 per cent of survey respondents reported that

the people they work with experience access to housing as a barrier to support, and 82 per cent reported that the people they work with generally lack entitlements to housing. As set out in section 1.1 there are a number of contributing factors to this, including not being entitled to housing benefit, and being reliant on creating their own income to access the private housing market either through legal or illegal employment.

However, there are also exacerbating barriers within the system that further contribute to an inability to find secure accommodation. The most obvious of these is the Right to Rent scheme in England in which landlords have to check the immigration status of prospective tenants. A recent High Court judgment which found that the scheme was incompatible with human rights means the policy will not be rolled out across Scotland and Wales, but the Government's announcement that they will appeal the ruling means that it will continue to be implemented in England.

"We saw some changes around Right to Rent and we saw that landlords are less keen to rent to someone who is not white-British basically in a nut shell and if someone has precarious immigration status then they would think twice before renting."

KI Interview

It is notable that not all services had directly observed any particular issues with the Right to Rent scheme. However, some people did reflect that because they have built relationships with certain landlords, they are potentially acting as a buffer between their clients and the policy in practice.

Aimee's story

Aimee was born in Jamaica and moved to the UK when she was nine years old. She has two grown up children. She was living in a private rented property and was reliant on Housing Benefit to cover the rent.

She started working with Crisis when her landlord tried to evict her. With Crisis' support she was able to successfully challenge the eviction, but several months later there was a fire in her home and she was forced to find new accommodation. When looking for a new place in the private rented sector she struggled to find any landlords who would accept her as a tenant because she didn't have a British passport.

Aimee had her naturalisation document, which proved that she had a right to live in the UK, but

she had never used this to obtain British citizenship. She was staying in a temporary accommodation hostel and was advised that her naturalisation document wasn't legible, and it would therefore be assumed that she didn't have right to rent or wouldn't be eligible for benefits.

Crisis worked with Aimee to help her collect any evidence that could support her case. Her coach at Crisis supported her to attend Windrush clinics, to contact her MP about her situation and to seek support to help cover the cost of her citizenship application.

The Home Office initially said they had no record of Aimee, but after 4-5 months and a letter from her MP they confirmed that they did have a record of her.

"If you're working with a certain landlord who you know, they are expecting you to refer people that are going to be suitable, whether that's support need, or because they have the right to rent anyway."

Focus Group

The lack of suitable accommodation options was highlighted across all focus groups and key informant interviews. It was highlighted in particular that this contributed to a deterioration in mental health and preventing any sustainable ending of someone's homelessness.

"If people don't have a safe place to stay, if they don't feel safe, there's so many things that will come out of that in terms of their ability to actually

do anything about their situation. It will affect their mental health, their physical health, all those sort of things, and that will just put a huge barrier up for them to do what they need to do to resolve their legal situation, which is ultimately the only root that's going to enable them to change their life. So I think accommodation is a big one."

KI Interview

Also emphasised was the scarcity of available accommodation, with service providers talking about the limited stock that they have available and their awareness that they cannot meet the levels of need.

³² Refugee Action (2018) *Lift The Ban: Why people seeking asylum should have the right to work*. London: Refugee Action

“Accommodation is a big issue and it’s something that we, unfortunately, really can’t offer a solution to at the moment because our accommodation provision is tiny. We can only monitor that and try and get people into a hosting scheme if possible or some other informal hosting. The accommodation options are very limited. That hasn’t changed an awful lot over the years I’m afraid.”

KI Interview

Alongside those who are not able to access any accommodation are those people who are living in poor quality housing, often being over-charged on rent and without appropriate tenancy agreements and rights being enacted.

“There are homeless migrants who might be working but end up living in atrocious accommodation...just take real advantage of their lack of knowledge and their lack of rights. And what is and isn’t a reasonable amount of rent to pay.”

KI Interview

“He was renting half a room, because it was two to a room. So, he was basically in the Polish community. One Polish person rented a house, and then he rented the rooms to two people each and was charging them £600 each, I saw him on last week, actually, he was also HIV positive. His roommate saw the medication, googled it, and realised what it

was, and because of the stigma with it, told the landlord. The landlord kicked him out. He didn’t have a contract.”

Focus Group

Participants raised concerns that this kind of precarious housing, and desperation to find somewhere to live left people open to exploitation.

For those that were working and had access to temporary accommodation there were also barriers created by the rules of the accommodation provider. This was particularly something observed across frontline homelessness services.

“However, because they [temporary accommodation provider] close their doors at eight-pm, they open their doors at, I think, four-thirty or five-thirty, and then they close the doors at eight-o’clock, people who might work in the catering industry or work in warehouse on the night shifts, or work unsociable hours, which actually is what is available quite a lot of the time to all migrant communities, it’s the only type of jobs that they can actually access, means that the doors will be closed for them to stay in that accommodation for that night.”

Focus Group

“So people are working, refugees are often in temporary accommodation, they are working as kitchen porters and things at night, they can’t meet the temporary accommodation curfews and

things like that, so then they go and sofa surf and they stay with their friends and so they’re not in this temporary accommodation, they’re really just staying on the floor with 10 other people”

Focus Group

5.4. Legal aid and immigration advice

The importance of legal advice to this population is clearly paramount, with over 50 per cent of survey respondents saying they provided legal support or advice. In addition, 67 per cent of survey respondents stated that legal aid cuts have had an impact on migrant homelessness. Unsurprisingly this was specifically identified in relation to asylum seekers and refugees (83%), or those without leave to remain (78%). However, this was still raised as an issue for EEA nationals and concerns about their future needs following Brexit were also identified.

An inability to access legal advice was repeatedly highlighted as one of the most significant barriers in both the focus groups and key informant interviews. A variety of reasons were given for this as a particular barrier: legal aid cuts reducing the number of available lawyers; lack of capacity amongst services with legal advisors; and an overwhelmed system not able to cope with the level of need.

“Legal aid is a big issue. There’s the whole thing about not having enough immigration advice for people. It’s about having enough immigration advisors. It’s legal aid but it’s also funding for charity to have embedded immigration advisors. Because the way the

legal aid works at the moment is that it’s all very difficult to get a contract. The lawyer usually wants to make sure that there is a really good case and they’re going to have a higher percentage of success. So, having funding for immigration advisors to give initial advice, but then being able to also take the case, because it’s very sad when you can see someone actually has a case, and then it takes you months to find someone, including a legal aid lawyer that’s willing to take it.”

KI Interviews

“I wanted to get someone to get assistance for that [legal advice] and they were like “no, we’re not taking any referrals for that” or “they don’t meet that criteria, we’re only working with this specific group,” and then it’s like well who else is going to do it, you know? Are you expecting someone who hasn’t got any clue how to do it? And then what happens if the answer is no? We don’t have any fall back.”

Focus Groups

“Access to legal aid being curtailed and people often are dispersed to the places where there is hardly any legal advice. It’s really difficult for them to maintain their immigration case and, you know, to present their case in the best possible way.”

KI interviews

Frontline services emphasised the amount of time that staff are spending trying to help their clients get legal advice to support their immigration case.

“Oh yeah, [I rang] about thirty [solicitors]. And two out of thirty... one was actually very helpful so I did have success in the end, but not that they could do anything, but they at least tried. So yeah, it’s not easy to get legal advice, there is some there but it’s not easy.”
Focus Groups

5.5. Home Office decision making and process

There were a number of concerns related to Home Office practice in general that tie directly to hostile environment policies. The need to repeal the overarching hostile environment structure came through strongly amongst survey respondents with it being the most common answer to being asked what single change could make the most difference to ending migrant homelessness.

More specifically Home Office processes and the timescales for making decisions were highlighted as being significant contributory factors that are leaving asylum seekers trapped in destitution and unable to move on from temporary and often unsuitable housing to find a safe and secure home.

“I had a call the other day from [immigration support organisation], I referred a case almost four years, and he called to say he’d just got

his status. This is the first decision. This is not even like he appealed, or anything. We referred him four years ago, he made the claim, and four years later ... he got NASS, but he’s been living with 30-something pounds a week, in a room, for four years. It’s crazy. This person could be actually contributing in society, and then integrate very easily without getting any benefits, if you actually gave them the right to work. So that, I think, is a big preventative issue.”
KI Interview

“Home Office takes so long to make decisions...one guy that I’m working with, has got a solicitor but the solicitor is like okay but I’ve got to do all of these things and it might take up to a year and in a year’s time the guys got nothing, no access to anything, so how are you expected to survive? I mean it seems to me very unfair that they can take that long to give you a decision. It’s crazy.”
Focus Group

There were incidents highlighted where individuals who wanted to return home on the voluntary reconnection scheme still encountered poor process that delayed their return and extended their homelessness. Alongside this is the potentially traumatising nature of being trapped in the limbo and uncertainty of the decision-making process, in some cases for a matter of years. Considering this in the context of people who are homeless, without support networks, and who may be

suffering from complex trauma and ill mental health, emphasises the need to explore alternative housing options for this most marginalised group.

“Essentially there’s people in purgatory, you have to... you’re liable to be detained, you’re never going to be detained for the majority of those, it’s just kind of left in the street, without access to any services, but still having to report once a week or once a fortnight. So that fear is still there that you’re going to be detained, but very rarely that it is, from people I’ve worked with in different organisations.”
Focus Group

“There was a lady like that who had been detained in like 2012 or something, and they booked her the plane ticket and they cancelled the plane, and she just has to go and sign in at the Home Office, so she’s still here. Which is good in a way, she’s still here, great, but I mean I can’t imagine living like that really.”
Focus Group

Whilst reconnection will always be one of the options available to migrants who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness this should be done in a supported way and as part of a range of options including access to immigration advice so that they can make an informed decision. A level of support should also be provided by the connecting authority and be available in the recipient country. Collaboration with services in the country of origin, to which someone wishes to return, is important to help a connecting authority understand the support and accommodation options available and ensure someone will not be at risk of homelessness when they return.

Chapter 6: Support needs

As set out in section 1.1 exploring the causal links between homelessness and the immigration system, the common support needs of the wider homelessness population are not exclusive to those of the migrant homeless population. This section explores support needs highlighted through the research that are unique to the migrant homelessness cohort, or that are exacerbated by the immigration system.

When asked whether support needs generally had increased across different migrant groups the majority of survey respondents reported that support needs had increased across all groups. There was some variation within this with undocumented migrants, and those with no recourse to public funds viewed to have seen the highest increase of supporting needs. Conversely, and perhaps rather surprisingly, asylum seekers were most likely to have seen their support needs decrease.

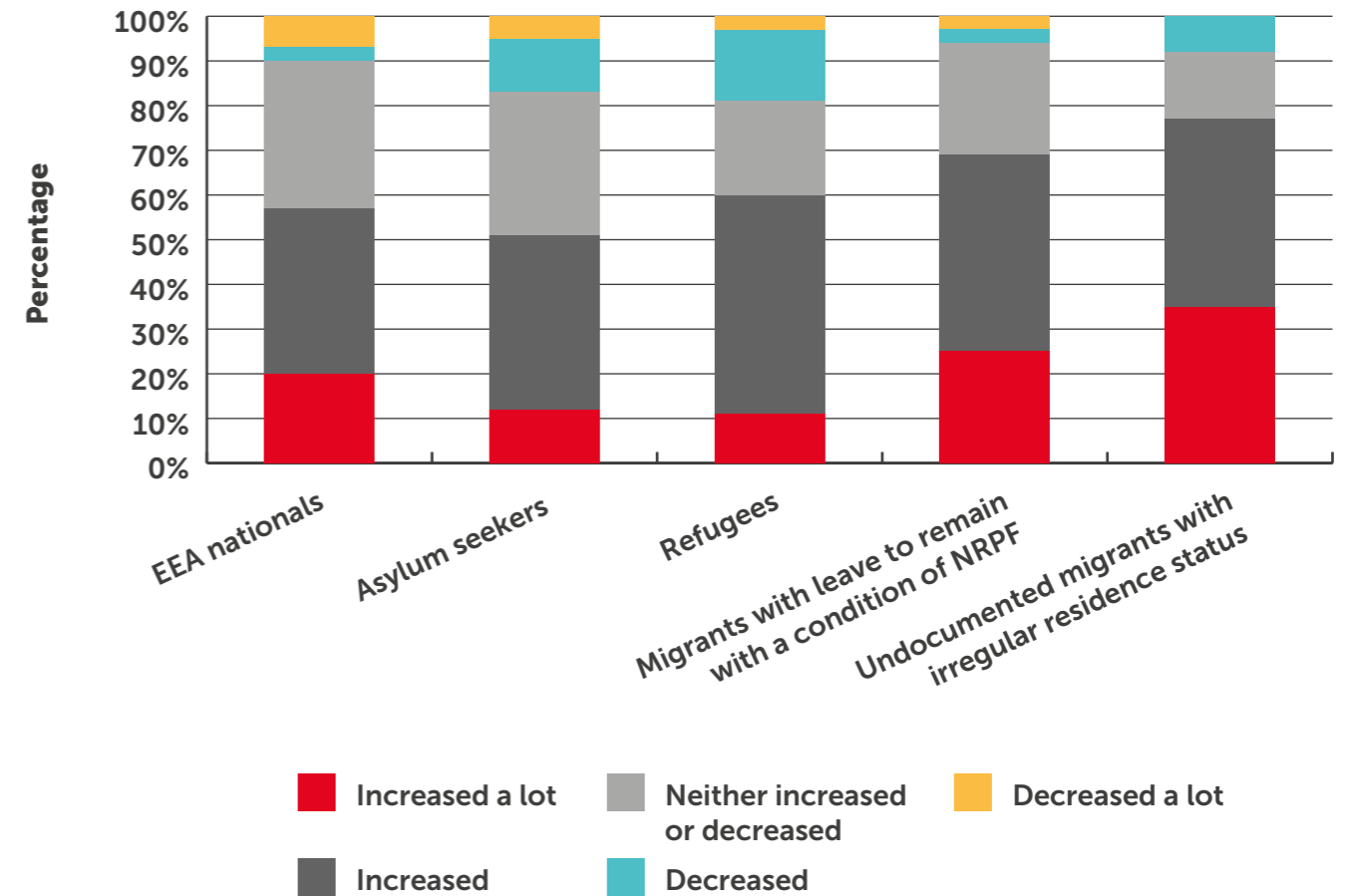
The key informant interviews and focus groups explored in more detail the specifics of the support needs that people presented with. They highlighted the challenges faced when people are caught between the immigration support system, which is less equipped to manage needs related to homelessness, and the homelessness system, which is less able to manage the specific needs that migrants may have.

6.1. Complex trauma and mental health

Complex trauma and poor mental health are certainly not unique to the migrant homeless³³ population but, especially for asylum seekers and refugees, there is a particular trauma related to both the cause of their need to leave their country and the potential trauma of the journey itself, as well as trauma caused by the immigration system itself. This can then be compounded by the impact that homelessness has on any person's wellbeing and mental health. These issues can result in complex mental health needs that frontline homelessness services are not equipped to manage. Where people do not have recourse to public funds this can mean that there is limited support available.

³³ Bramley G, Fitzpatrick S, Edwards J, Ford D, Johnsen S, Sosenko F and Watkins D, (2015) *Hard Edges: mapping severe and multiple disadvantage*. London: Lankelly Chase Foundation; Homeless Link (2014) *The Unhealthy State of Homelessness – Health Audit Results 2014*. London: Homeless Link.

Figure 6.1 Change in support needs



Source: Sector survey. N=62

“I mean, they have other abuse issues, like they have other trauma but may not be through childhood sexual abuse, but they might have – asylum seekers or migrants might have other abuse issues, such as trauma from torture or post-traumatic stress disorders amongst other things.”
KI interview

“People that come to the service are more distressed, we have more incidents of having to call the police because people are just flipping out

and they’re desperate and distressed. We’re seeing people coming to us with more severe mental health issues than when we started and more of them as well. That’s challenging for us because none of the organisations in the partnership are health practitioners. We do get training, trauma awareness training and ASIST training, but it’s still very difficult for them to manage case after case of very distressed people”.
KI interview

In addition, the interviews and focus groups described the exacerbating impacts of the immigration system increasing trauma. In particular, Home Office interviews, slow decision making, and then the impact of a rejected asylum claim were highlighted as being very problematic.

“So people get traumatized by the whole system. Even the way some interviews are done. Just question everything and they’re very aggressive people, [they] just get traumatized by the way it works.”

KI interview

“For some guy that I’ve been working with, for a long time, he’s been reporting since June and occasionally he goes and gets taken into a room, he’s essentially terrified, grilled a little bit, and then they let him go again. And I’ve been with him a few times because he got told he was going to get taken into a room again the following week, so I went with him and he’s terrified to even go through their doors. And it’s like ‘oh no, we don’t need to speak to you’. And another time I go in and they just ask him some completely irrelevant questions, note it down, and then he’s told to go again, and it means that weekly process of going to the Home Office, becomes quite terrifying for him.”

Focus Group

The knock-on effect of these interactions with the Home Office was highlighted across services

who highlighted concerns that the information that they collect for their support work and case management may be triggering of people’s mental health due to the associations they have with sharing personal information both with the Home Office as well as officials in their home country.

“Because they’ve often either handled that with the Home Office, or they might have had it in the countries they’ve fled. So, then sitting down with someone and doing all this stuff, for some people, is actually a really negative [experience]. Because it’s always been a negative experience for them in the past. Why is it going to be different for them at that point?”

Focus Group

There were also cultural barriers in accessing appropriate healthcare, which were identified both from a practitioner perspective and from those needing to access support.

“I think there’s a lack of guidance for health practitioners who sometimes don’t know whether or not it’s okay for them to work with somebody. They’re not sure. They don’t want to make a mistake, they don’t want to break the law, because there’s always this fear of breaking the law, so the easiest thing to say is no and say they can’t work with you.”

KI Interview

“We have a PTSD clinic in Edinburgh, but there’s a stigma around that. Refugees from Syria don’t want to necessarily

Alex’s story

Alex is an EU national who has lived in the UK since 2004. He has worked a lot in the past but because he isn’t currently working he isn’t entitled to any benefits. This has meant he has been forced to spend time rough sleeping, sofa surfing and staying in night shelters. He has type 2 diabetes and has suffered diabetic seizures and been forced to stay for long periods in hospital because it is impossible for him to effectively manage his condition while he is rough sleeping.

Crisis are supporting Alex to apply for settled status and are currently working with him to collate evidence to show that he has lived in the UK for more than five years.

Alex has had alcohol problems on and off for a number of years. About two years ago he completed a rehab programme and after this he was able to secure employment and accommodation.

However, following the death of a close friend, he started to drink again and ended up losing his job and his flat. Since then he has either been sleeping rough or staying in a night shelter. Because he has no recourse to public funds, he is unable to access another rehab programme. His health has deteriorated as a result of his drinking and he has struggled to engage consistently with Crisis and other support services.

Alex wants to work but so far any work he has found is temporary and has not lasted more than a few days. He says he would not need to drink if he had somewhere to stay, but he cannot secure more stable employment and find accommodation while he is drinking. Access to detox services would massively improve his chances of securing more steady employment and therefore being able to sustain accommodation.

access that because they don’t understand what it’s about and you know, plenty of people would benefit from that service but they’re not choosing to access it.”

Focus Group

There is clearly need for more informed services and support to make sure people can access the specialist services they need. The impact of hostile environment policies is perhaps evident in the caution some organisations have around offering support. However, it is also clear that there is a need to support people who have moved to the UK more recently

to understand how to navigate the new system they are now living within.

6.2. Substance and alcohol misuse

High levels of substance and alcohol misuse amongst this population were commented on widely. Issues relating to substance and alcohol misuse are prevalent across the general homelessness population. A 2015 report in England, *Hard Edges: mapping severe and multiple disadvantage*, found that 49 per cent of people experiencing homelessness also had substance misuse and/or alcohol addictions.³⁴ Similarly, the 2019 report in Scotland,

³⁴ Bramley G, Fitzpatrick S, Edwards J, Ford D, Johnsen S, Sosenko F and Watkins D, (2015) *Hard Edges: mapping severe and multiple disadvantage*. London: Lankelly Chase Foundation.

Hard Edges Scotland, found a 20 per cent crossover between homelessness and substance and alcohol misuse.³⁵ However, the lack of accessible services and support, coupled with an inability for many to access sustainable housing outcomes, has the potential to exacerbate existing substance misuse and alcohol problems.

“I think by and large there aren’t traditionally high levels of addiction for lots of different reasons, but we are seeing people that are drinking and taking drugs to numb the pain.”
KI Interview

“I think we’re definitely seeing an increase in alcoholism and drug use amongst the service users.”
Focus Group

Alongside this the challenge of accessing addiction services where someone has no recourse to public funds was highlighted. In particular, the high cost of rehab and detox services if accessed privately was a significant barrier and focus group participants emphasised the potential impact of not being able to access necessary support.

“I think there’s something around the alcohol provision as well because some of the local detox programmes require huge amounts of funding that’s sometimes really impossible for migrants to get access to.”
Focus Group

“In absolute desperation, people are starting to turn to alcoholic gel soaps and hand soaps, and they’ve been going into hospitals and that’s...the end part that we can see with that and it’s been highlighted by some of the health services, is that that leads to significant brain impairment very quickly and it can lead to significant mood swings, it can lead to heightened aggression, so there is that, there’s a bit of a public health concern there.”
Focus Group³⁶

For people that are able to access substance misuse support there is a disconnect between being able to access addiction services and having access to accommodation. One of the focus group participants noted that people will get discharged from rehab and detox services with no fixed abode.

“There are people going into the [rehab] unit for two-weeks and then leaving to go back onto the streets.”
Focus Group

This lack of available support options, both for sustainable housing and addiction services, then has a knock-on effect on frontline homelessness services who are left needing to support people with high levels of complex needs that they are not trained or equipped to support effectively. This was highlighted by frontline staff:

“I don’t think we have the skills in the [service] to address somebody’s alcohol fully. We can have some conversation but we’re not alcohol councillors or alcohol workers. People may need some ongoing support and treatment around that that we can’t offer.”
Focus Group

6.3. Language

Poor English language skills represent both a barrier to accessing and benefiting from support, but also as something that can dictate the priority of support offered.

In terms of accessing support, this generally highlighted a need to focus on supporting people to access language classes where they are able.

“But certainly, the ability to speak English is the main one. And access to ESOL provision.”
KI interview

Within frontline homelessness services a lack of translated materials was highlighted as prohibitive. It was acknowledged that there had been steps taken to address this through translating initial contact materials, but it was clear that more could be done.

“Language is an enormous thing, I find, with our services. Like, we have the first contact form in a number of languages, and I think there’s more plans to translate stuff, but, you know...We don’t have a lot of our service information, and it’s just, you know, that then slows down the work or

prevents work in a lot of areas, and it feels like we could... We could overcome a lot of those barriers quite simply just by getting some stuff translated and providing it.”
Focus Group

English language barriers also meant that people struggled to receive the right support. The language barrier meant there were challenges in communicating complex information, impacting the efficacy of the support provided.

“You sometimes feel like you might be bombarding someone with information, and you’re doing all of that through a translator, and you’re thinking, ‘Is this translator...?’ You know, do they truly understand? I’m trying to say it as simply as I possibly can, but is that getting across? There are so many obstacles in the way of you getting the correct information to that person, and then knowing whether they truly understand.”
Focus Group

“Like, often, people speak a bit of English, enough to get by, so they won’t get a translator, and then a lot of information is just lost or not understood, or people pretend they understand. You know, nod and everything, but actually, they don’t know what’s being said to them, so then what’s required of them, they don’t know.”
Focus Group

³⁵ Bramley G, Fitzpatrick S, Wood J, Sosenko F, Blenkinsopp J, Littlewood M, Frew C, Bashar T, McIntyre J and Johnsen S (2019) *Hard Edges Scotland*. London Lankelly Chase Foundation

³⁶ Gormley NJ, Bronstein AC, Rasimas JJ, et al. *The rising incidence of intentional ingestion of ethanol-containing hand sanitizers*. *Crit Care Med*. 2012;40(1):290–294. doi:10.1097/CCM.0b013e31822f09c0

Another challenge presented by the language barrier is that it has the potential to mask other support needs. In particular, this was mentioned in the context of mental health or learning difficulties where an assumption is made that it is language that is the problematic barrier rather than any other support needs.

“You assume that somebody doesn’t understand because they don’t speak English well enough, but it might also be because they’ve got learning difficulties or mental health issues.”

Focus Group

The converse was also highlighted as a problem whereby people were identified with having a mental health problem when it was their language barrier that was the need that required addressing.

“Their advisor, rather than saying ‘language barrier’, they put that that person has mental health issues. So, it’s easy to mark they have mental health issues, and when I approached the community people, and found that person in the community, they say, ‘No. That person is alright. He doesn’t have any mental health problems.’ They have language problems.”

Focus Group

Without access to information and support in their own language as well as English language classes, many people are left not knowing what support is available to them, or how to access it.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

We all need a home to build a life and to thrive, but for many people living in this country their immigration status traps them in a situation which makes it almost impossible for them to move out of homelessness. Homelessness has a devastating impact on individuals and communities. Being able to find a stable home gives people the best chance of moving on from homelessness or preventing it altogether. No one should become homeless because of their immigration status and having an immigration system that works together with housing and welfare policies designed around a shared goal of ending homelessness is the most effective way of ending homelessness for good.

A key finding of this report is that a lack of accurate data makes it very difficult to estimate the true scale of homelessness among non-UK nationals. Despite this there was a strong sense that more and more migrants are facing homelessness, with more than half of organisations surveyed reporting that they had expanded their services to meet demand. Better data is critical if we are to understand the scale of migrant homelessness and the reasons why people are becoming homeless or experiencing destitution. This is a significant evidence gap that must be addressed to enable us to understand the particular issues experienced by different groups that are both causing homelessness and making it harder to resolve. This would ensure that

appropriate services are available to protect people from homelessness or destitution and that support is available quickly if someone does become homeless.

People experiencing homelessness who are not originally from the UK are faced with many of the same support needs as the general homelessness population, but these can be compounded by the additional challenges caused by their specific experiences, immigration status and associated entitlements. For those without recourse to public funds or not entitled to full support across health and social care, they are locked out of systems that can assist with complex trauma, mental health and substance misuse. Frontline

homelessness services are feeling the pressure of supporting individuals who are not able to access specialist support, and for some suffering from PTSD caused by the trauma of their experiences in their home country.

The research also helped to identify some of the specific structural barriers that non-UK nationals face. These barriers make it harder for people to access essential support to help prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place and to resolve it quickly when it does happen. Increasing challenges in accessing legal and immigration advice were highlighted as a significant barrier to supporting the migrant homeless population. Access to benefits that provide critical help to cover housing costs when people need it was found to be a significant barrier, affecting both those who lack entitlements as well as people who are excluded by mistake when incorrect decisions are made. Restrictions that prevent people from getting welfare benefits creates a disconnect between income and the cost of housing meaning people are more vulnerable to homelessness and less likely to be able to move into stable housing. This creates a situation where homelessness services are having to prioritise supporting individuals into employment before addressing wider support needs they may have that would help them to sustain both employment and a tenancy. The desperation for employment and the precarious nature of housing situations makes people extremely vulnerable to exploitation.

These structural barriers are all underpinned by a lack of accommodation options caused by lack of access to housing benefits, government policy such as the Right to Rent scheme and a general lack of affordable housing across the private rented sector.

No strategy to end homelessness can be credible or valid unless it includes solutions to address the specific barriers that affect people who are not originally from the UK. In our society what affects one of us affects all of us. Support to help prevent and end homelessness must be provided on the basis of need, and not on the basis of where someone was born. The Government must act to address the problems identified here and make sure that no one in Great Britain is at greater risk of becoming homeless because of their immigration status.

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**Together
we will end
homelessness**