

# HOMELESSNESS AMONG MIGRANT GROUPS

**A SURVEY OF HOMELESSNESS AND REFUGEE AGENCIES  
ACROSS ENGLAND**



**MARCH 2010**

[WWW.HOMELESS.ORG.UK/MIGRATION-PROJECT](http://WWW.HOMELESS.ORG.UK/MIGRATION-PROJECT)

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**Cover photos**

*Left - top and bottom:* King George's hostel in Westminster; *Right:* Clients from St George's Crypt Faith Lodge at the Eden Project, Cornwall. Photos © Robert Davidson

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homeless Link is the national membership organisation for agencies working with people who are homeless.

In recent years, our members have reported an increase in demand on their services from Eastern European clients and other migrant groups, many of whom have limited or no access to welfare support and as a result find themselves homeless and without basic resources. While previous Homeless Link research has focused on Eastern European migrants, limited information has been collected on the needs of wider migrant groups.

This report explores the experiences of 160 organisations across England that provide support to migrants from Eastern Europe, asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants. The findings help provide a national picture of these client groups' needs and the issues faced by agencies in trying to meet them.

The survey found evidence of rough sleeping by EU migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants across the nine English regions. Agencies are also working with migrants living in squats, nightshelters and various forms of other temporary and insecure accommodation.

Factors leading to homelessness included people having no accommodation on arrival in the UK, the loss of private rented sector or accommodation tied to employment, immigration status issues and relationship breakdown. Two thirds of the agencies surveyed said they saw migrants who are unable to work, while agencies also reported that they see migrants who are working in a precarious situation – working cash in hand, on a short term basis and sometimes illegally.

Migrants who are accessing services are presenting with a number of pressing support needs: employment and benefits issues are encountered by a large number of clients, but many agencies are also seeing a smaller number of individuals affected by poor physical and mental health, sex abuse, sex working, trafficking and torture.

Many of the agencies who took part in our survey are responding to the changing demands on their services by adapting their existing provision, piloting new projects and recruiting specialist workers. Many shared examples of these, which include reconnection services, ESOL classes, and befriending schemes.

However, only 1 in 5 of the respondents felt able to meet 'all or most' of the needs clients present with. Agencies face a number of challenges: language barriers, feeling unable to operate within tight funding frameworks, and not being equipped to advise on immigration-related issues were some of the difficulties shared.

Following the survey, Homeless Link held a consultation event in February 2010 with practitioners from both homelessness and migrant organisations. Their feedback, along with the findings, have helped to identify some of the future priorities which need to be tackled in order to address homelessness among this group.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND TO REPORT

Homeless Link is the national membership organisation for agencies working with people who are homeless. The services provided by our members range from local authority housing services, housing associations, day centres, outreach services, residential care homes, hostels, supported housing, floating support through to employment, training and education services.

Agencies in the homelessness sector work with a diverse range of individuals, at various stages of their journey from homelessness to more settled accommodation. In recent years, our members have reported increased change in the demands on their services following the expansion of the European Union and changing migration patterns to the UK.

Expansion of the European Union in 2004 and 2007 led to an increase in migration from Central and Eastern Europe to Britain. The majority of individuals from these A8 and A2<sup>1</sup> countries successfully obtain employment and accommodation in the UK. However, for those who find themselves homeless, options can be limited due to the restrictions placed on access to social provision and benefits<sup>2</sup>.

In 2006, research conducted by Homeless Link<sup>3</sup>, indicated that 15% of all the clients who used day centres, outreach services, night shelters and other homelessness provision in London were from A8 countries. In 2007, a Baseline Report into Rough Sleeping in London found that 18% of rough sleepers were from A8 and A2 (A10) countries. When this research was repeated in November 2008, rough sleepers from A10 countries had reached 25% of the total<sup>4</sup>.

However, in addition Central and Eastern Europeans, there are other migrant groups who are particularly at risk of homelessness as a result of their migration status. A brief overview of these groups and why they are at risk is provided below:

- **Asylum seekers.** An asylum seeker is a person exercising their right to seek asylum, and awaiting a decision by the host nation on their entitlement to protection. Asylum seekers have a no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition attached to their immigration status in the UK. At no point in the process before a positive asylum decision are asylum seekers able to work. However, some asylum seekers are entitled to apply for support through the UKBA. This support can cover accommodation, education fees and other principal benefits<sup>5</sup>. Accommodation, however, is in most cases only available in 'dispersal locations' – so some asylum seekers do end up as sofa surfers and sometimes destitute if they have refused to take up this accommodation. At the end of the asylum process, claims are either accepted – at which point the person becomes a refugee – or rejected.
- **Refugees.** A refugee is an individual who has had a positive decision on their claim for asylum under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention). Many refugees flee their country of origin due to fear of

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<sup>1</sup> 'A8' countries refers to those countries which joined the EU in 2004: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. 'A2' countries refers to Bulgaria and Romania who joined in 2007. This group is collectively referred to as A10.

<sup>2</sup> Clients from A8 countries are not entitled to benefits unless they have completed 12 months continuous employment under the Workers Registration Scheme. A2 nationals have further restrictions placed on them and are only able to work in certain industries – please see <http://www.homeless.org.uk/central-eastern-europeans> for more details

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.homeless.org.uk/cee-research>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/repeat\\_survey.pdf](http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/repeat_survey.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> For more about the conditions attached to this support, see <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/support/>

persecution because of their civil, political or social status. To receive refugee status, an individual must prove that their own government does not want to (or is failing to) protect them from harm. Once refugee status has been granted, refugees should receive entitlement to benefits and housing. However, delays in administering their claims and accessing welfare support may result in homelessness.

- **Irregular migrants.** Irregular migrants include people whose claims for asylum have been refused, those who have overstayed a visa or permission to remain and other illegal entrants. It can also include people who have arrived on the basis of marriage but who can no longer stay with their partner (e.g. due to domestic violence). This group of people often lack the appropriate documentation making it difficult or impossible to work legally. They also have limited or no access to welfare support and housing<sup>6</sup>, so are at greater risk of becoming destitute.

Many migrants who fall outside of the protection of the welfare state face similar problems: complexity of rules around claiming public funds, limited access to services and public funds, and, for some, the risk of periods of destitution and homelessness. 'Traditional' solutions to homelessness don't work, as these are typically structured and funded around the needs of the population that are entitled to claim benefits and housing support.

In its strategy 'No One Left Out – Communities ending rough sleeping' the government commits to ending rough sleeping by 2012<sup>7</sup>. To reach this aim, homelessness among migrant groups needs to be addressed. A number of initiatives have been developed to respond to these challenges including:

**Thamesreach Reconnection Team** – a London based service working towards reconnecting EU migrants to support in their home countries.

**National Reconnection Service** – Government Relocation Pilots run in Peterborough and Boston by Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI).

**Barka UK** - established in London in June 2007 and now operates across a number of London Boroughs, supporting people to return to services in their home countries.

**Accommodation and employment projects** set up to support migrants back into employment, then housing, or support them with reconnection where appropriate.

In addition, many other homelessness and migrant agencies have been responding the various needs of this group. However, there has been a gap of knowledge around the extent of the support offered and developed. The Refugee Council has undertaken some research looking at the extent and nature of destitution among refugees and asylum seekers presenting to their advice services. Their research found evidence of long term and enduring destitution among refugees and asylum seekers<sup>8</sup>.

This survey builds on this work to find out more from both the homelessness and migrants sectors to help frame future work, particularly the work of the Migrant Rough Sleeper group established by the CLG and chaired by Lord Roberts of Llandudno. The Migrant Rough Sleeper group is co-ordinated by Homeless Link and is attended by the GLA, UKBA, CLG, Homeless Link and other partner agencies.

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6 People who have been refused asylum and whose appeal rights have been exhausted can receive support if they satisfy one or more criteria outlined under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. This includes for example if they are unable to leave the UK because in the opinion of the Secretary of State there is currently no viable route of return available. See <http://www.homeless.org.uk/migrants-asylum-seekers-refugees> for more details on this.

<sup>7</sup> No-one Left Out: Communities ending Rough Sleeping - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/roughsleepingstrategy>

<sup>8</sup> Refugee Council 2nd Destitution Tally – <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/responses/2009/destitution.htm>

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEY**

To gain a better picture about the needs of different migrant groups, particularly outside of London which has been the focus of previous research, we developed a survey to better understand:

- the patterns of homelessness amongst different migrant groups across England
- their support needs
- how agencies are able to address these needs and some of the challenges they face
- use the findings to inform future recommendations for developing good practice and policy work around this issue.

## **METHOD**

We used data from the Homeless UK website and UK Advice Finder to identify over 1100 agencies in England that offer a range of services to homeless people, refugees, asylum seekers and other migrant groups. Hostels and accommodation projects were not routinely included in the survey as most do not provide accommodation to this client group due to funding restrictions.

These agencies were invited to take part in an on-line survey in October 2009. The survey questionnaire was developed in consultation with the Refugee Council and piloted with a small number of agencies. The survey asked respondents to provide information based on their experiences of contact with migrant groups over the past month. This included providing case studies where appropriate.

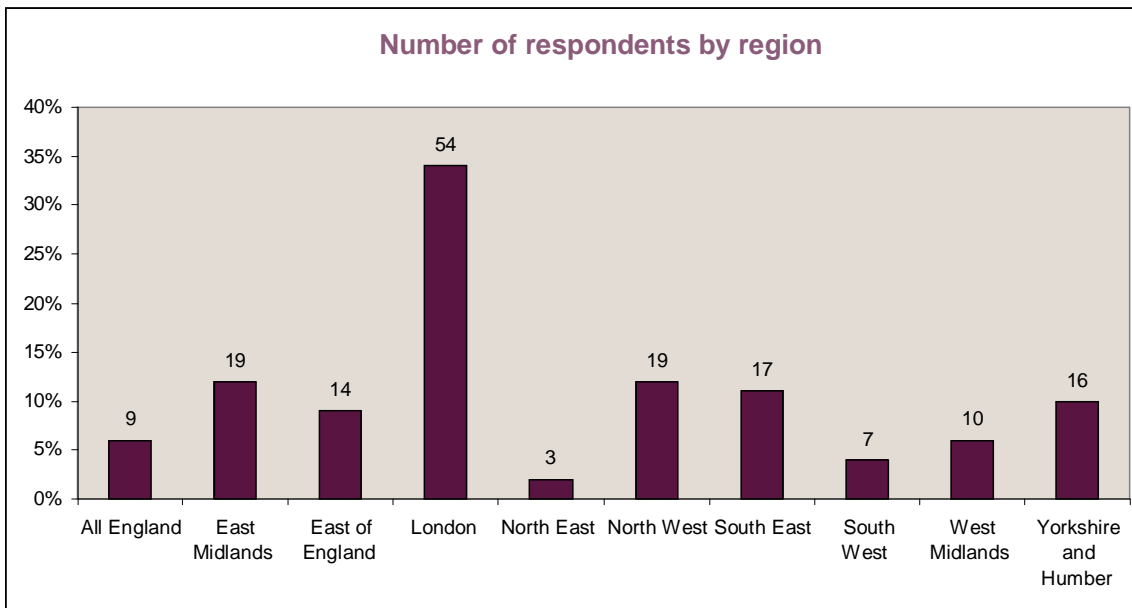
The survey was open access – agencies were free to circulate it to other agencies that may be interested in responding. We asked agencies to identify themselves so that we could control duplicate entries. However, responses are anonymous and agencies have taken part on the understanding that they will not be identified without their consent.

## **HOW REPRESENTATIVE IS THE SURVEY?**

160 organisations responded who said they provide help to migrant groups. Of these, 65% (104) were from agencies aimed primarily at homeless people and 30% (49) from agencies for refugees and migrants and 2 services were aimed at both these groups. The remaining five respondents were services for the general public.

The types of services provided by respondents were predominantly day centres; services offering practical support, such as soup kitchens, food projects, and furniture projects; and night shelters. As the chart below shows, all of the English regions are represented in the survey:

- a third of agencies are London based
- the South East, East Midlands, North West and Yorkshire each make up about 10% of the total
- the East of England, West Midlands and national agencies each make up 5-9% of the total
- the South West and North East each make up less than 5% of the total.



N=160

**Figure 1: Number of respondents by region**

The analysis of survey data in this report refers to the 160 agencies that responded saying they provide help to migrants. All percentage figures given relate to the base of 160 respondents, unless otherwise stated.

Because the survey seeks the views of organisations that assist migrant groups, it does not capture the experiences of migrants in areas where such agencies do not exist or did not respond, or of agencies that do not assist migrant groups. The survey focused on non-residential projects, so the results do not provide a full picture of refugees who can be housed in hostels.

### WHAT THE SURVEY CAN TELL US

This survey examines the experiences of agencies. All statistics given in this report relate to the numbers of agencies reporting concerns relating to the migrant groups they see. The figures given do not tell us about the numbers of individual migrants affected – an agency may see one Polish migrant in a month or 100, but what will register in the statistics is that the agency has Polish migrants amongst its client group. However, the results can give an indication of the challenges affecting agencies as well as illustrating the issues affecting their migrant clients.

With the exception of questions where agencies were asked to categorise the migrant groups they see, responses to survey questions relate to all migrant groups.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IN THIS REPORT

In January 2010, we held a Consultation Event to discuss agencies' experiences of rough sleeping among migrants to help inform the national Strategic Migrant Rough Sleepers group. The meeting was attended by 25 people from a range of agencies who had expressed an interest in following up on issues raised by the survey. The event focussed on identifying the issues faced as well as examples of positive practice from across the country. Some of the experiences and issues raised at the event have been included in this report.

## 2. KEY FINDINGS: CLIENTS – A PROFILE

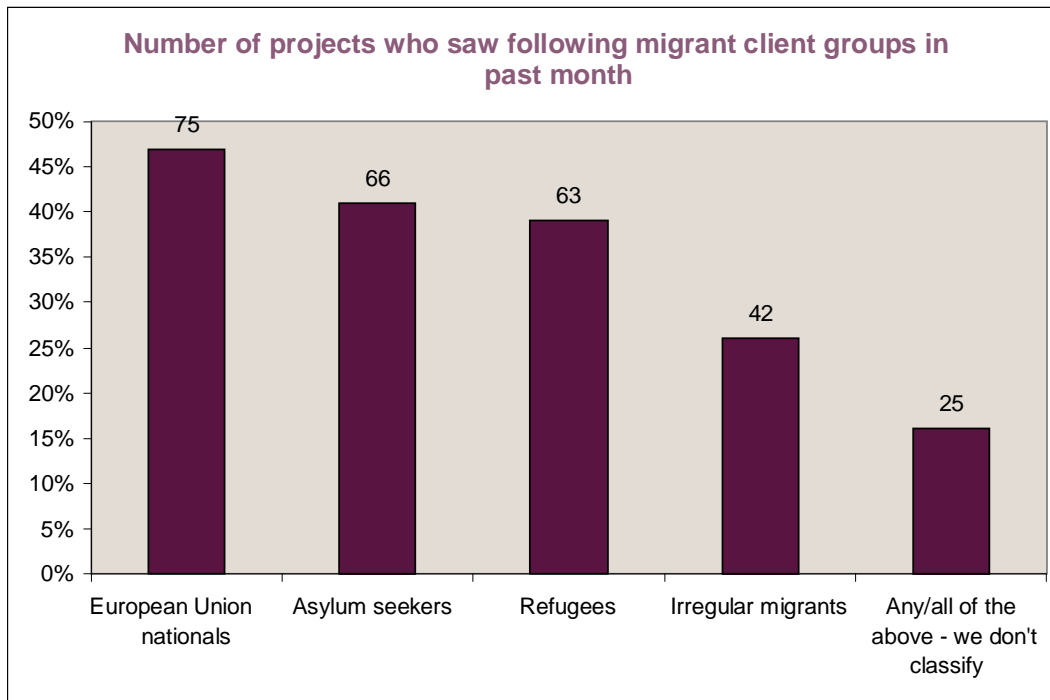
### HEADLINE FIGURES

In the survey we asked agencies a number of questions about the clients who access their services to better understand how many are from the migrant groups described on page 4.

Agencies were asked how many migrants they had seen in the past month. Almost all agencies responding were able to say if the people they see fall into the categories of European migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants. The agencies that were unable to state a breakdown included some of the day centres, winter shelters, furniture projects and agencies providing practical help such as food.

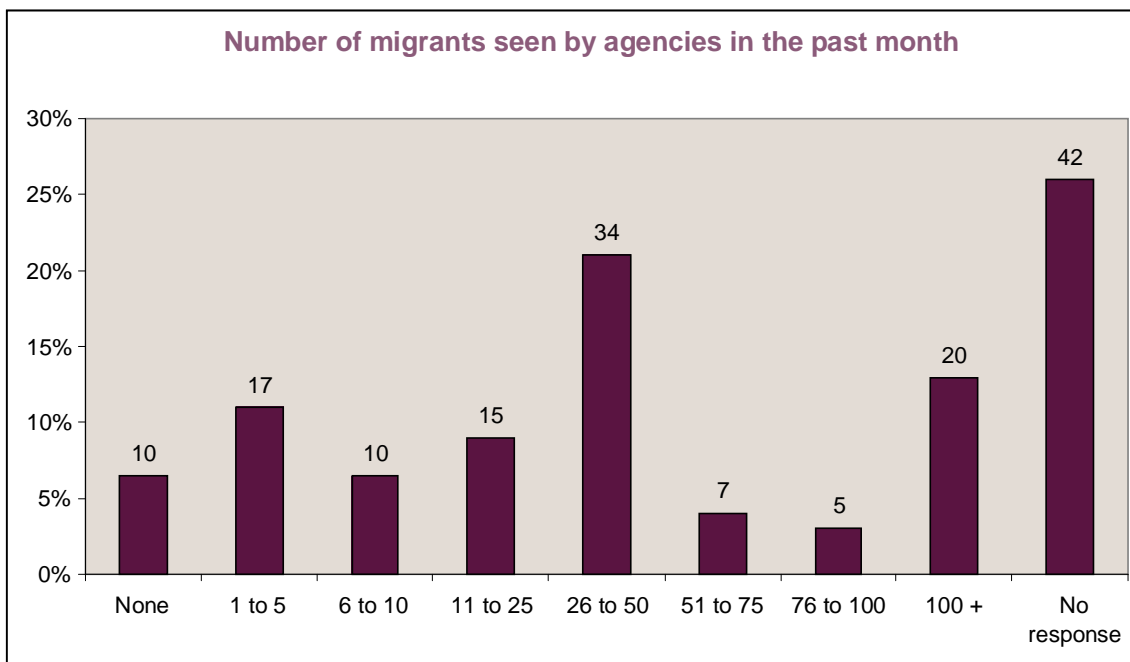
The chart below shows the number of agencies that said they saw clients in the categories above in the past month. These results do not give an indication of the numbers of individuals in each category seen by agencies.

- 47% respondents (75) agencies saw EU migrants
- 41% (66) saw asylum seekers
- 40% (63) saw refugees
- 26% (42) saw irregular migrants



N=160 Note that some projects see more than one migrant group, so numbers may add up to more than 100%/160  
**Figure 2: Number of projects who saw following migrant client groups in past month**

The chart below provides details of the number of individual migrant clients seen by agencies in the month of the survey. 118 agencies provided details of the number of migrants they see. Note that 10 agencies saw no migrants in the month of the survey.



N=160

Figure 3: Number of migrants seen by agencies in the past month

### EUROPEAN MIGRANTS

Of the 160 survey respondents, 47% of agencies see migrants from Europe. Of the 104 homelessness agencies that responded, 49% reported this.

A greater number of agencies said they saw clients from Eastern Europe (44%) compared to Western Europe (19%). These figures do not provide an indication of the numbers of individuals in each group.

#### Eastern European migrants:

Nearly 40% of responding agencies saw people from Poland and a quarter of agencies saw people from Latvia and Lithuania.

Nationality	% of agencies seeing clients from these countries
Poland	39% (63)
Latvia	25% (40)
Lithuania	25% (41)
Romania	23% (37)
Czech Republic	20% (32)
Slovakia	15% (24)
Bulgaria	14% (22)
Hungary	9% (14)
Estonia	8% (12)
Slovenia	8% (11)

Figure 4: Nationality of Eastern European clients seen

### Western European migrants:

12% of responding agencies saw people from Portugal and 9% people from France and Spain respectively. Agencies that see nationals from other Western European Countries made up less than 10% of the total. Countries making up 3% of the total or less have been excluded from these results.

Nationality	% of agencies seeing clients from these countries
Portugal	12% (19)
France	9% (14)
Spain	9% (14)
Ireland	7% (11)
Italy	7% (11)
Germany	6% (9)
Netherlands	6% (10)
Sweden	5% (8)
Belgium	3% (4)

Figure 5: Nationality of Western European clients seen

### ASYLUM SEEKERS

41% (66) of the 160 responding agencies see asylum seekers. Of the 104 homelessness agencies, 31% (32) see asylum seekers. Note that these figures do not give an indication of the numbers of individuals seen by each agency.

Asylum seekers may be entitled to Asylum Support help with living expenses and housing while they await a Home Office decision on their claim for asylum. Support may be continued while an appeal is outstanding. Asylum seekers whose claims for refugee status are turned down are entitled to support only in limited circumstances under Section 4 of the Immigration Act. Those that fall outside of this protection do not claim or whose claims are delayed risk falling into destitution.

#### **Case study: A man from DRC was refused asylum. His NASS support and accommodation was withdrawn and he was left destitute.**

This man has been helped by a Birmingham based advice and support agency. He has been staying with friends when he can and is required to sign weekly at the regional Enforcement Unit. This is about 10 miles away from where he normally stays. He has no funds to pay for a bus ticket to get there yet faces consequences if he does not attend each week.

The agency has funded bus passes for him when they can, but as a small charity they cannot sustain this. They are wary of setting a precedent as there are others in a similar position. He asked them to help find a solicitor for him who could take on his case and submit a fresh claim. They contacted several solicitors but none were able to take on new cases.

### REFUGEES

Over a third of the 160 responding agencies (40% or 63) see refugees. Of 104 homelessness agencies, 23% (24) see refugees. Note that these figures do not give an indication of the numbers of individuals seen by each agency.

Asylum seekers who are granted refugee status often lose their Asylum Support accommodation. Once refugee status has been granted, entitlement to benefits and housing may commence. However, delays in accessing welfare benefits and housing support, and delays in administering their claims, may result in homelessness.

79% (50) of agencies that see refugees answered questions about the benefits and housing status of the refugees they saw.

Of these:

- 86% (43) saw refugees who were trying to access benefits, but had not yet received any payment
- 74% (37) saw refugees who had not accessed benefits or housing support
- 74% (37) saw refugees who had accessed some benefits or housing support.

### ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES: NATIONALITY

Agencies were asked to specify refugee and asylum seeker's country of origin, where this was known. The results suggest that refugee and asylum seeker clients are predominantly from areas of international conflict. They broadly reflect the top 20 countries of origin most frequently seen in the Refugee Council's report: 2nd Destitution Tally<sup>9</sup>.

Nationality	% of agencies seeing clients from these countries
Somalia	27% (43)
Iraq	25% (39)
Eritrea	24% (38)
Iran	23% (37)
Democratic Republic of Congo	21% (34)
Zimbabwe	21% (33)
Afghanistan	19% (32)
Nigeria	19% (31)
Ethiopia	19% (29)
China	15% (24)
Sudan	13% (21)
Pakistan	13% (21)
Angola	13% (20)
Sri Lanka	18% (18)
Ivory Coast	10% (16)
Congo-Brazzaville	9% (14)
India	7% (13)
Vietnam	7% (11)
Palestine	5% (11)
Lebanon	5% (7)
Other non-European countries	14% (29)

Figure 6: Nationality of Asylum seekers and refugees

<sup>9</sup> Refugee Council 2<sup>nd</sup> Destitution Tally –see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/responses/2009/destitution.htm>

## IRREGULAR MIGRANTS

26% (42) of respondents see irregular migrants. Irregular migrants include refused asylum seekers, visa overstayers and those who enter the UK without permission. Agencies were asked to list the ten most frequently seen nationalities of irregular migrants. The results show irregular migrants from a range of New Commonwealth countries (Canada, South Africa), old Commonwealth Countries (Bangladesh, India, Jamaica, Pakistan), the USA and countries featuring in the Refugee Council top 20 countries of origin for refugees and Asylum Seekers (Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Zimbabwe).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ALL MIGRANT GROUPS

Agencies were asked about the demography of the clients they see. To make it easier for agencies to respond to this question, their responses refer to all migrant groups.

116 agencies provided information about the gender balance of the migrants they see. Of these, 66% (77) see all or mostly men, 16% (19) see an equal balance, 17% (20) see all or mostly women.

122 agencies provided information about the age of the migrants they see. The responses suggest that agencies are predominantly seeing people of working age. However a smaller but still significant number of agencies are also seeing young people aged under 18 and people over 65.

Age range of migrants seen	% of agencies seeing these clients
Under 18	21% (33)
18 - 25	50% (80)
26 - 40	66% (105)
41 - 55	53% (85)
56 - 65	27% (43)
65+	16% (26)
No response	24% (38)

Figure 7: Age range of migrants seen

### 3. KEY FINDINGS: CLIENT SUPPORT NEEDS

There has been a concern that some migrant groups may have support needs arising from their particular circumstances and the lack of a welfare safety net to provide support in times of need. As some migrants are excluded from benefits support for basic living or accommodation expenses, they may be completely without resources when presenting at homelessness agencies.

Our previous report on CEE rough sleepers<sup>10</sup> suggested growing prevalence of alcohol problems and poor mental among these clients. In this current survey we wanted to explore the extent of these and other support needs amongst all migrant clients.

The following section looks at:

- housing status
- factors leading to homelessness
- work status
- client support needs
- additional challenges faced by migrants.

#### HOUSING STATUS

Over half the 160 responding agencies see migrants who are sleeping rough. A significant number of agencies also work with clients who are squatting and sleeping in cars:

- 56% (90) agencies see migrants who are sleeping rough
- 32% (52) agencies see migrants who are squatting
- 14% (22) agencies see migrants who sleep in cars.

The graph below shows a regional picture of the agencies who reported that the clients who access their services are sleeping rough. This suggests that rough sleeping among migrant groups is an issue in all regions across England. When this figure is compared to the overall number of respondents in some regions, the findings suggest this problem is widespread in several regions. For example, around 8 out of 10 respondents in both the East and West Midlands reported rough sleeping among migrant groups. Around 6 out of 10 respondents reported this in London and the South East.

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/repeat\\_survey.pdf](http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/repeat_survey.pdf)

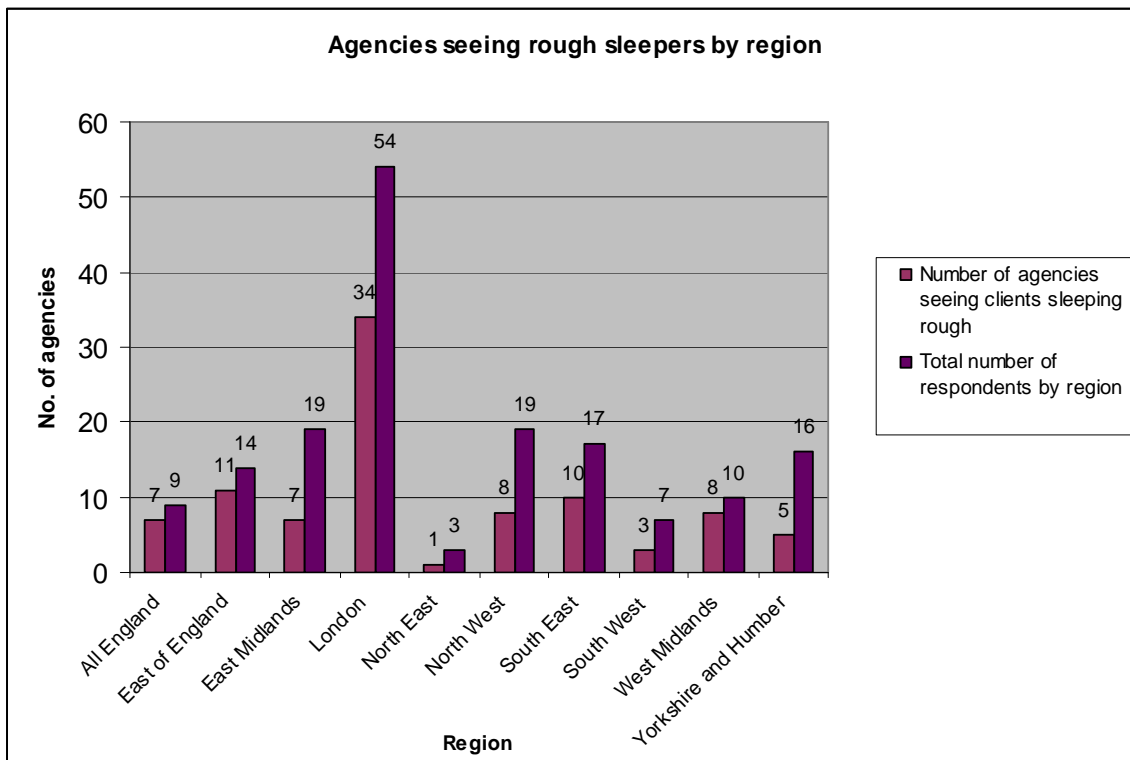


Figure 8: Regional breakdown of migrant rough sleepers

The closure of squats was identified in the Consultation Event as a cause of rough sleeping among Eastern European Migrants. An example was given of between 30-35 Eastern Europeans rough sleeping in a coastal town in the South East as a result of squat closures. Eviction from rented accommodation as a result of multiple occupancy and overcrowding was identified as another factor leading to rough sleeping.

Participants also raised the high cost of accommodation for migrant workers compared with their earnings from insecure and low paid work and the lack of available shared accommodation.

In addition, many agencies see migrants living in temporary and insecure accommodation:

- 53% (84) agencies see migrants who stay with friends
- 28% (45) agencies see migrants who are housed by church or other support group volunteers
- 18% (28) agencies see migrants who are accessing a night shelter

A small number of agencies told us about projects set up to help refused asylum seekers. These include shelters for destitute asylum seekers and host family projects. One charity pays rent to house vulnerable women seeking asylum.

Of the agencies that reported seeing migrants in temporary and insecure housing, 53 were organisations supporting homeless people and 31 were organisations supporting migrants.

**“We run our own housing project, providing temporary accommodation to refused asylum seekers and new refugees.”**

*“We are a housing charity - we house homeless/refused asylum seekers. Individuals generally have been street homeless or sofa surfing before being referred to us.”*

## FACTORS LEADING TO HOMELESSNESS

Agencies were asked what led to the homelessness of the migrants they saw. Issues relating to immigration status, loss of accommodation and relationship breakdown were the main issues cited.

### Case study: Torture victim at a Birmingham based agency

“Our hardship fund allowed us to provide very temporary accommodation and transport to a vulnerable male client who had medical evidence to suggest he was a victim of torture.”

“Whilst temporarily accommodated, volunteers were able to explore more long term options for him as well as look at additional support needs – the result of this was that detailed referrals were made to a medical charity and to a national fund supporting victims of torture. If we did not have limited provision to support clients in this way, then we would be unable to support some at risk clients who may be street homeless and without any form of financial support.”

Factors leading to homelessness	% of agencies reporting this factor
Asylum Support (previously NASS) accommodation ended	41% (65)
Loss of rented accommodation	36% (58)
Never had any accommodation	34% (55)
Relationship breakdown	26% (41)
Loss of accommodation tied to a job	24% (38)
Domestic violence	21% (34)
Release from prison	18% (28)
Hospital discharge	16% (26)
Other	6% (10)
Loss of owner occupied accommodation	3% (5)

**Figure 9: Factors leading to homelessness**

Immigration issues: Asylum seekers refused refugee status who are no longer entitled to accommodation or financial support may become homeless: 41% (65) agencies said they saw asylum seekers who were homeless because Asylum Support (formerly NASS) accommodation had ended<sup>11</sup>.

Some homelessness may be attributable to new arrivals in the country having nowhere to stay: 34% (55) agencies saw migrants who had never had any accommodation.

Consultation Event participants identified a delay in obtaining housing for refugees as a cause of homelessness among this group. They also reported the difficulty of trying to support some refused asylum seekers who are unable to return to their home countries because the government has deemed return to be unsafe, or there is no safe route – e.g. Zimbabwe. They are not allowed to work to support themselves, and if unable to access financial or housing support may become homeless.

<sup>11</sup> Asylum seekers with no means of supporting themselves are supported and housed by Asylum Support, formerly known as the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

Loss of accommodation and employment issues: Many agencies were working with migrants whose lack of income and work had contributed to their homelessness. Some agencies attributed this to the impact of the economic downturn.

- 36% (58) of agencies saw migrants who had lost accommodation in the private rented sector
- 24% (38) of agencies saw migrants homeless after losing accommodation linked to a job.

Consultation event participants also identified the loss of tied accommodation eg to jobs in hotels and car washes as a cause of homelessness among Eastern European and undocumented migrant groups.

They felt the actions of rogue employers also contributed to this problem. Some agencies had seen migrants who had worked for 'false' employment agencies that had confiscated documents, and paid below the minimum wage or not at all.

**Case study: A Yorkshire and Humber hosting project**

A 26 year Latvian client lost his job and became homeless. He stayed with a hosting project for 1 month, but they could not help him with move-on accommodation as he could not access any hostels in the area. He lost his passport which made it more difficult for him to get a job. He was sleeping on the streets and in squats and developed alcohol and drink problems. He stole to feed himself and his habits and got into trouble with the police as a result.

“A year and a half later he is still living in a squat and drinking regularly. He keeps having to move squats as they get closed up, or landlords force the squatters out. He is currently living in a squat with no running water, gas or electric. We (the agency) have helped him by paying for him to get a new passport. His only hope (to be able to access housing) is to be able to secure work, although this is unlikely as he is still drinking on a daily basis”.

Domestic violence and relationship breakdown: 26% (41) of agencies saw migrants homeless due to relationship breakdown and 21% (34) due to domestic violence.

Release from institutions: One in six agencies reported that they saw migrants who were homeless as a result from being released from prison (18%) or hospital (16%). Agencies at our consultation event felt more could be done to work with migrants who are in prison, to help avoid homelessness on release.

**WORK STATUS**

56% (89) of agencies responding see migrants who are working. The results suggest that much of the work being done by migrant clients is of a casual or insecure nature. Almost a third of agencies said they see clients who are engaged in illegal work.

Work status of clients	% of agencies reporting this
Working 'cash in hand'/casual	42% (67)
Working legally	36% (58)
Working illegally	36% (58)
Working on a short term/seasonal basis	25% (40)
Working unpaid in return for board/lodging	14% (22)

N=160 Note that some projects see more than one migrant group, so numbers add up to more than 100%/160

**Figure 10: Work status of clients**

In addition, 18% of agencies said they saw migrants involved in begging and a small number reported that they were working with clients who were involved in sex working (9%).

Two thirds (68% or 108) agencies said they see migrants who are unable to work. Immigration restrictions were reported as the main reason for this. In addition, the respondents suggested that a significant proportion of clients are unable to work due to drug, alcohol or mental health problems. 23 agencies said that they see women who are unable to enter employment due to pregnancy. This is also a wider concern in the sense that these women vulnerable and at risk of homelessness.

Why are migrant clients unable to work?	% of agencies reporting this
Unable to work due to immigration restrictions	53% (84)
Unable to work due to sickness/disability	30% (48)
Unable to work due to alcohol/drug problems	29% (46)
Unable to work due to mental health problems	24% (39)
Unable to work due to pregnancy	9% (14)

N=160 Note that some projects see more than one migrant group, so numbers add up to more than 100%/160

**Figure 10: Reasons clients are unable to work**

Agencies we consulted at our event reported a similar range of experiences among their client groups. They also reported a number of additional factors as barriers to work:

- the cost of the Worker's Registration scheme
- a lack of work experience in people's home countries
- lack of documentation. Undocumented migrants are at a particular disadvantage when made unemployed, sometimes as a result of immigration raids on their former employers.
- regularisation of immigration. Agencies reported that migrants who had submitted applications to regularise their immigration status were unwilling to jeopardise the outcome by continuing to work or seek work, but the resulting lack of funds contributed to their destitution.

## CLIENT SUPPORT NEEDS

Clients are presenting at agencies with high levels of immediate need:

- Over half the agencies reported that 'all or most' of the migrants they see are in immediate need of housing (55% or 88)
- 44% (71) agencies said 'all or most' were in immediate need of food
- A third of agencies (33% or 52) said 'all or most' need clothing.

In addition to clients' immediate needs, issues surrounding housing, employment, language, benefits and immigration are the problems clients most commonly experience (please see graph overleaf).

Over half the agencies say that all or most of the migrants they see have problems with housing and employment. Over a third say that they have problems with lack of knowledge of the UK system, language difficulties, benefits problems and destitution.

Agencies are also coming into contact with smaller numbers of migrants who are in need of help with issues relating to health, physical abuse, mental health, torture, sexual abuse, sex working and trafficking.

- over half the agencies say 'some or a few' need help with physical health problems
- a third say 'some or a few' need help with issues related to torture
- over 20% say 'some or a few' need help with issues related to trafficking and sex working.

The chart below shows the number of agencies saying that 'all or most', or 'some or few' of the migrants they see have support needs in a range of categories.

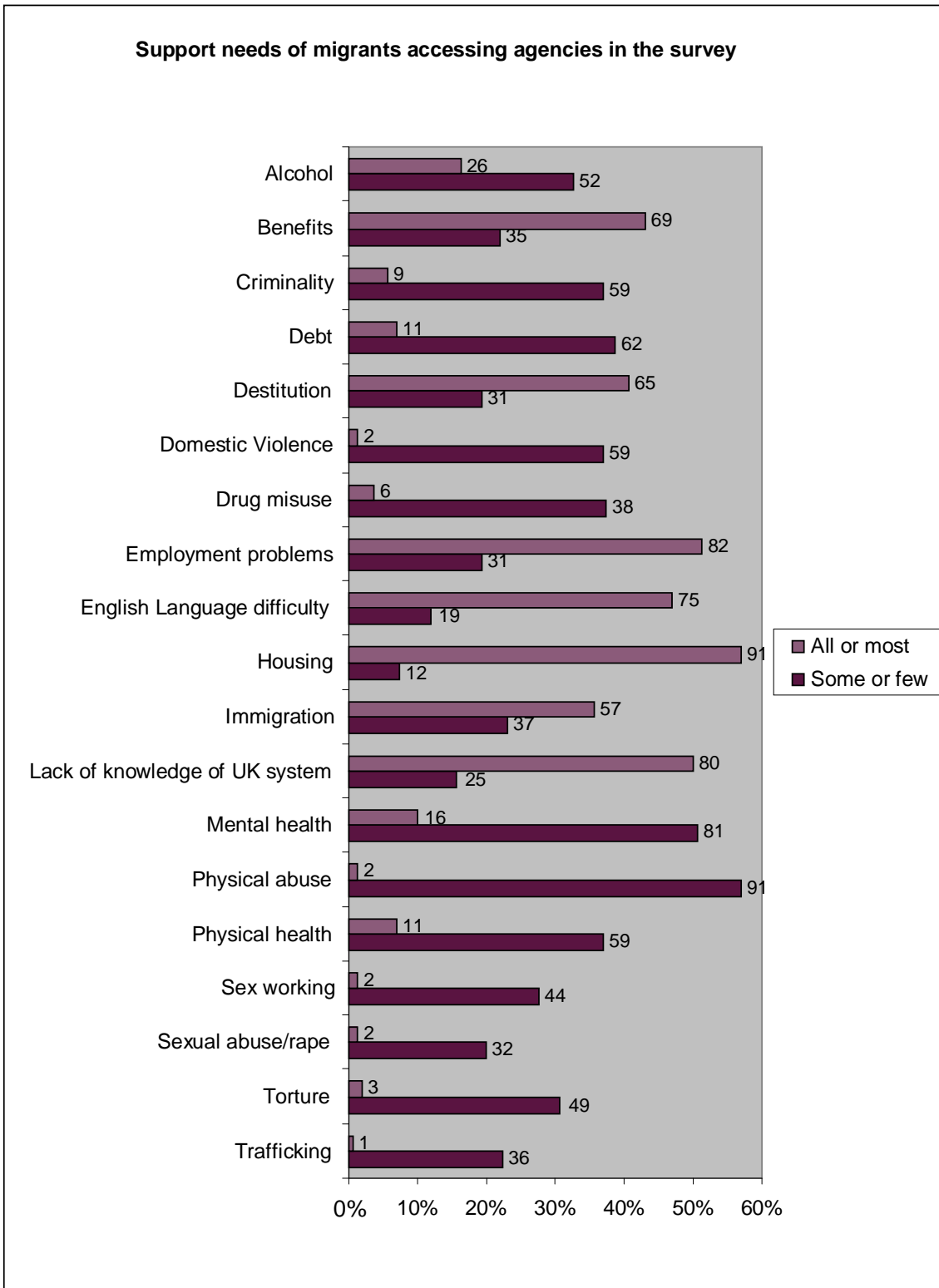


Figure 11: No. of agencies reporting clients have the following support needs

## **ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY MIGRANT CLIENTS**

85 agencies provided information in their own words about the problems or issues their clients experience when accessing their own and other mainstream services. The findings suggest that language issues and lack of entitlement present key barriers.

Language: Over half said clients' had needs relating to language. One agency noted that the drop-in service model doesn't fit the needs of clients who need interpreters.

*“Services often do not have ready access to interpreters, so clients who do not have good English cannot really make use of drop-ins as interpreters need to be booked on an appointment basis.”*

Lack of access to public funds: 15 agencies mentioned lack of public funds and no recourse to public funds as a theme.

Hostility of other service users: Some agencies talked about the fear experienced by some migrants and hostility expressed towards them by others:

*“They can encounter negative comments from other people around public perception problems”*

*“Those who have been in a hostel tend not to stay as they feel intimidated by other service users”*

Fear of authority: Some agencies noted that some had a fear and mistrust of authority and institutions, sometimes related to experiences in their home country. A few agencies also cited fear surrounding immigration status as a barrier to people accessing services.

*”scared of being sent home”*

*“concern about immigration status leads to a reluctance /suspicion of accessing support”*

Lack of personal responsibility: Some of the agencies felt that some are not helping themselves, presenting the barriers faced in terms of the responsibility of the individual:

*“Willingness to engage. Alcohol problems. Unwillingness to work or get to grips with their problems....”*

### **Reconnection for Central and Eastern European Migrants**

Return home was a theme for discussion at the Consultation Event. Many CEE migrants are successful in their efforts to find and retain employment and housing in the UK. However, for those that do not, some may wish to return home and lack the resources to do so.

Participants identified some new services as a model for good practice, such as those that provide accommodation and help with finding work, with assisted reconnection if this is not successful within an agreed timeframe; and services assisting with document renewal.

For some migrants, return home is the only alternative to a position of continued destitution in the UK. However, some in this position do not wish to return, prompting agencies to explore factors which are a barrier to return. Some agencies have developed services which work with foreign governments to resolve issues of outstanding convictions. Some agencies have developed services that support people in dealing with substance abuse, enabling a return with organised treatment in the home country. Consultation event participants suggested work could be done with migrants who are imprisoned to link them up with reconnection services prior to their release.

## 4. SERVICES

The agencies surveyed for this report play a key role in addressing the needs of these client groups. The findings suggest that agencies are providing a broad range of services, both as an extension of their existing provision and through developing specific services in response to the needs of migrant clients.

### WHAT SERVICES ARE PROVIDED?

Agencies are providing advice, practical help and some assistance with housing:

- Over half the respondents provide advice on benefits, housing and employment issues (90, 88 and 72 agencies respectively)
- About half the agencies provide help with food, clothing and bedding
- 45 agencies provide some accommodation, and 18 provide some funding for accommodation
- About a quarter of agencies provide help with showers and laundry (39).

Other services provided include counselling, emotional support, befriending, use of the internet and money for passports and a flight home.

Although agencies are providing advice on benefits, employment and housing issues, the lack of entitlement means that financial support and housing are not realistic outcomes from the advice given. Therefore, agencies reported a reliance on sourcing charitable help or support from agencies who are not restricting access to their services for this group.

### CHALLENGES IN SERVICE DELIVERY

We asked agencies what challenges they face in delivering services to this client group, particularly in relation to language issues and their ability to advise on public funds issues, as these issues have both been raised by our members in the past.

#### Language issues

As above, language issues were highlighted as a major challenge for clients and agencies.

Some agencies have structures in place to address clients' language needs. Provision appears to be limited and patchy – over half the agencies surveyed said that language issues were a barrier to people accessing services.

- 42% (67) have volunteers who speak relevant community languages
- 29% (47) agencies use interpreters and 20% (32) use a telephone language interpreting service
- 26% (41) agencies employ staff who speak relevant community languages.

Asked about how well they think their service meets the language needs of this client group, only 12 agencies felt they meet all their needs, 30 meet most needs and 71 met only some, few or none of their needs.

#### Lack of access to public funds

9% (15) agencies mentioned clients' lack of entitlement to services as a key barrier:

A day centre in the South East said: "Having no recourse to public funds is the first and greatest obstacle. Most housing options available to our other homeless clients are not open to them"

### Advice on recourse to public funds

Advice on entitlement to public funds is a complex issue and affects asylum seekers, EU migrants and some groups subject to immigration control. This issue is closely related to immigration status and issues around the transitional arrangements introduced to manage the impact of EU accession, which were renewed in 2009<sup>12</sup>.

Asked how well they think their service can meet the needs for advice on this area, 26% (41) agencies could meet most all or most needs and 40% (64) could meet some or few needs. 6 agencies said they couldn't meet any of the needs of this group.

Some agencies have clearly developed expertise in this area, leaving scope for continued work to further develop and share good practice resources.

### Overall needs

Few agencies feel they are able to meet all the needs of this client group.

- 20% (32) can meet most needs
- 32% (51) agencies say they are able to meet some needs
- 7% (11) few needs.

### RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES

The results from our survey show how services are being developed in response to changing need

57 agencies told us about services they have developed in response to the needs of this client group. These agencies have taken a number of approaches. They have adapted their existing services, set up new services, recruited specialist workers, enabled access to their service by improving communication through the recruitment of staff and volunteers speaking community languages and developed new information resources.

The table below provides a brief summary of initiatives.

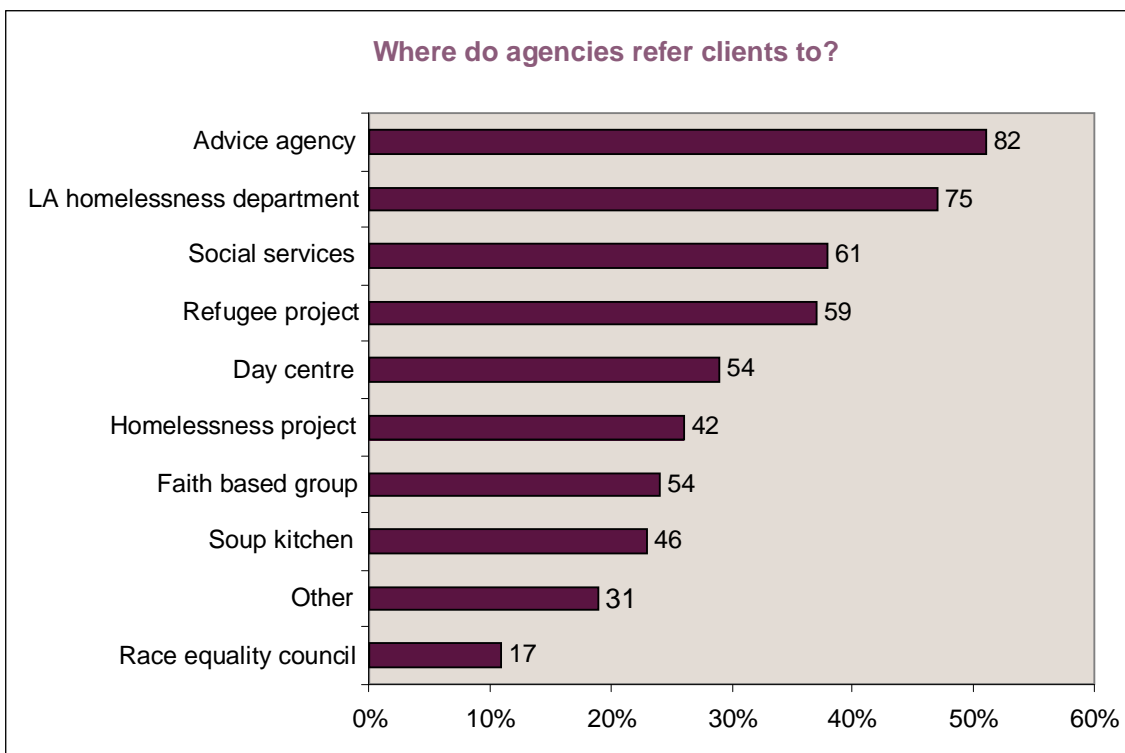
<b>Languages</b>	Recruited volunteers who speak relevant languages Interpreters recruited Interpreting service developed
<b>Service changes to meet new demands</b>	Advice service developed Outreach work developed ESOL services developed Mental health service developed Support group set up for people working with this group. Training for staff Passport replacement service
<b>Specialist worker recruitment</b>	Full time worker to work with people with no recourse to public funds
<b>New services started</b>	Practical help service – food, clothing, furniture Fire safety service – a service giving fire prevention advice to people in temporary accommodation who at increased risk of fire. Befriending service Reconnection service for people wanting to return to their country of origin Alcohol service Mental health service for people with no recourse to public funds
<b>Information</b>	Translated materials made Information on referral agencies developed – housing, sources of food and support
<b>Safe storage facilities</b>	Facility to store passports safely Facility to store suitcases safely

<sup>12</sup> Information about the Worker's Registration Scheme can be found on the Homeless Link website:  
<http://www.homeless.org.uk/cee-employment>

## REFERRAL ROUTES

Agencies actively make referrals to other organisations. 68% (109) of agencies that provide support to migrants make referrals to at least one type of organisation.

When asked which other organisations they refer this group to, the highest number of agencies said they make referrals to advice agencies, local authority housing departments and social services. Smaller numbers of agencies make referrals to church or other faith based groups, day centres for homeless people, refugee projects and soup kitchens.



N=160 Note that some projects see more than one migrant group, so numbers add up to more than 100%/160

**Figure 12: Referrals made by agencies**

Faith-based organisations were highlighted as a key source of assistance for this client group. A number of respondents said they referred people to churches, mosques, and Sikh and Hindu temples who provide help including food and temporary shelter, sleeping bags, clothing, toiletries, befriending, and advice. Some faith groups make their premises available for volunteer groups supporting asylum seekers.

One agency said:

*“Occasionally we make general appeals to faith networks for some things, for example the burial costs for the stillborn child of an undocumented migrant”*

## 5. CASE STUDIES

A number of agencies provided case studies about the clients who have accessed their services.

Many conveyed the needs of migrants from Eastern Europe. They also illustrate the complex personal, social, legal and financial situations encountered by asylum seekers, refugees and people with irregular immigration status. Some examples describe successful outcomes for individuals who have been able to access housing, legal and financial support, but others simply described how destitution has arisen, and were not able to offer a solution.

The following case studies raise issues which were typical to many of the experiences shared.

### **Latvian client: Day Centre in the North West**

A 45 year old client from Latvia came to Britain to find work. He worked for 18 months for various agencies and is registered with the Workers Registration Scheme, but has not got 12 months continuous employment so is not entitled to benefits. Since February 2009 he has been unable to find work. After losing his private rented accommodation he is now sleeping rough. He had his passport stolen, so is unable to apply for legal work. He tries every week to get cash in hand work, but none is available. Now he survives by shop lifting and every day he drinks during the day with groups of other Eastern Europeans. This makes it less likely that he will be able to find work.

He comes to our centre for sandwiches, to use the internet, goes to the gym where he can get a swim and shower. Our centre has registered him with a doctor and helped him complete a few courses like Food Hygiene and First Aid. However, he has not had the motivation to improve his English. He has arranged an interview at the Latvian embassy in London to get a replacement passport, but the earliest interview is in 6 weeks time. Our centre will have to pay for the passport, the photos, the coach fare to London. He will have to sleep out for at least 1 night in London as the appointment is first thing in the morning. It will be at least 6 weeks after the interview before the passport arrives.

At the moment he says he does not want to go home, as things are worse there. He hopes to eventually find work and will get a private rented room, in the meantime he will continue to sleep rough, shop lift, drink on the street. Our centre will continue to offer to get him a flight home, however, this is not an option for at least 3 months until he gets his passport.

### **Refused asylum seeker in the Midlands**

Leah\* is 22 years old. She suffers from a genetic disorder which leaves her with back pain and brittle bones. When her asylum claim was turned down she was made homeless. She has attempted suicide on two occasions and considers suicide as a solution should she be forced back to her home country.

Leah avoided rough sleeping by accepting invitations from men from her home country for short term places to stay. She travelled across the Midlands to stay in their homes. They were supportive, yet strangers and she found it increasingly uncomfortable having to live with single men. As a refused asylum seeker there were no other housing options available to her - she was homeless, without the right to work or claim benefits. However, she was still expected to make a 30 mile+ round trip to a small East Midlands town every month.

Leah came to stay with a Nottingham based charitable project in May. They supported her with health matters (including accessing a counsellor and getting a bus pass), asylum issues (numerous letters written on her behalf, liaison with a refugee network, solicitors etc) and provided her with a volunteer mentor to help her practice her English.

She now regularly attends college. Leah is a bright and eloquent woman, destitute in this country through no fault of her own, who wishes one day to become a doctor. However, her life has not only stalled since she has been in the UK but her physical and mental health have deteriorated through lack of opportunity, complete uncertainty over her future, lack of access to medical care and enforced destitution.

\*not the clients real name

### **Asylum seeker in the North West**

Our organisation supported an asylum seeker from Darfur. Back home he had been arrested and beaten by the Sudanese authorities who wrongly thought he was a political activist. Six months later, his family were all killed in a militia attack on his village. He fled to Port Sudan where he paid an agent to take him somewhere safe. He spent four weeks in a shipping container on a boat bound for Liverpool. He claimed asylum and was given a place to stay and a solicitor who he only met once.

His claim was refused and he was forced onto the streets. He was suffering from severe back problems due to his beatings in Darfur and the long journey to the UK, and was physically carried out onto the streets and left with only his bag of medication and a little food beside him. He spoke little English and couldn't even access a hostel without a national insurance number.

After a few days a kind stranger directed him to the Red Cross who referred him on to a Manchester based service that assists homeless migrants. They were able to provide him with accommodation, first with a host family and then in one of its houses. The man received a food parcel each week. The service also helped him to access medical care and to find a new solicitor. We provided clothing and other essentials.

Two years later he is now in good health and has moved on with his asylum case. Since his solicitor submitted fresh evidence, he has been supported by the Home Office. He hopes to receive leave to remain in the UK soon. He is learning English at college and is a dedicated volunteer at a destitution project.

# CONCLUSION

The findings have shown that migrant groups across the country are experiencing homelessness with many falling into destitution.

Over half the agencies in our survey are supporting refugees, asylum seekers and EU migrants who are sleeping rough or who are otherwise insecurely housed. A similar number said they worked with migrants with immediate needs for basic services such as food and clothing. Along with the wider range of support needs faced by these groups– many of which are likely to require specialist interventions – the picture presented by this survey is an alarming one.

Many voluntary sector agencies step in to fill the gaps: advice services, local charities and faith or other support groups provide services and support to these clients. The survey shows how agencies have adapted and developed specific services in response to their needs and demonstrates that solutions can be found to the problems encountered by some migrants.

However, only 1 in 5 agencies felt they were able to meet all the needs of migrants seeking their help. The support and assistance required to achieve positive outcomes for these clients are placing demands on agencies which can be difficult to meet within their existing resources, capacity and knowledge of the complex legal framework around entitlements and immigration.

Homeless Link believes that more action needs to be taken address the range of issues that lead to the short and long term destitution of migrants from the EU, asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants.

In our 2010 manifesto, 'Ending Homelessness together'<sup>13</sup>, we called on the next government to commit to the following actions to ensure that no one is left destitute and excluded from basic supporting in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain:

- Take immediate action steps to end exclusions from support linked to the Worker's Registration Scheme
- Amend and strengthen the National Assistance Act so there are no excluded groups
- Work with local government to ensure all homeless and destitute people from Central and eastern Europe receive short term support to enable them to find work or to make a dignified return home connected to appropriate services
- Establish "destitution proofing" for new Government proposals which could inadvertently result in destitution, particularly around withdrawal or exclusion from safety net benefits.

The findings of this report reinforce the pressing need for such action to be taken. As part of our ongoing work with the Migrant Rough Sleepers Group, we will be working with the CLG, UKBA and other government departments to seek to address the issues raised in this report. The following issues were identified as priorities by the agencies in this report and these are ones which we believe can be tackled in the short term:

## **EMPLOYMENT:**

- tackling administrative processes for NI numbers and ID
- provision of appropriate advice for migrant job seekers via Job Centre Plus network
- taking a pro-active role in tackling rogue employers.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.homeless.org.uk/manifesto>

## **FINANCIAL AND HOUSING ISSUES**

- clear guidance for statutory sector staff so that they can advise migrants correctly and avoid them being denied access to those services which are unaffected by restrictions
- minimise administrative delays for clients whose refugee status has been granted
- wider access to legal advice for individuals and voluntary sector agencies.

## **RECONNECTION**

- extension of reconnection services, and some of the current barriers to reconnection tackled
- advice and information offered to those considering reconnection.

We would like to extend our thanks to all the organisations who shared their views and experiences for this report. To keep updated on our work on this area, please visit our website [www.homeless.org.uk/migration-project](http://www.homeless.org.uk/migration-project) .