

Tips from the Frontline

Supporting Migrant Women

Our practice forums bring together those who work with women experiencing homelessness across the country. In the forums practitioners connect, share best practice, and navigate problems together. This series is informed by our most recent presentations and discussions, and provides practical guidance and recommendations for addressing these shared experiences.

This practice brief is designed to provide tips to frontline practitioners on how to remove some of the barriers to accessing services.



Why is this relevant?

Many women who experience homelessness are negatively impacted by policies that restrict certain rights and entitlements. Currently, those with insecure immigration status are prevented from working, renting, driving, accessing health services, and from claiming benefits¹. Migrant women are also affected by the threat of deportation, detention and destitution, the fear of which can hinder them from accessing services they are entitled to².

The policy environment is not the only barrier to accessing support that migrant women experience. Alongside the challenges created by having restricted eligibility due to immigration status, in a report entitled 'Dismantling Disadvantage' Black, Asian, minoritised, and migratised women in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear described the impact that language barriers, a lack of cultural understanding and experiences of racism and discrimination can have on their ability to access support³. The same report also reaffirmed the message that services that are designed "by and for" these women are valued for their understanding of the 'lived experience and social realities of the lives of those who are racially minoritised'⁴.

This practice brief summarises the presentation that was delivered by Hibiscus, a specialist organisation providing support to migrant women, and knowledge shared by frontline practitioners in the practice forum on how to support migrant women.

What does it mean to have restricted eligibility due to immigration status?

- A person has restricted eligibility when they are subject to immigration control (defined in section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999). This condition is also referred to as No Recourse to public Funds (NRPF).
- If a person is subject to immigration control, they may not be able access public funds including certain benefits.
- It is important to remember that if someone has restricted eligibility, this does not mean there is a blanket ban on accessing all forms of financial and housing assistance.
- The NRPF network provides lots of information and resources on what it means to have restricted eligibility and what support someone with restricted eligibility can access: [Rights and entitlements | NRPF \(nrpfnetwork.org.uk\)](#)

¹ [rhc-mental-health-report-document.pdf \(hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk\)](#)

² [rhc-mental-health-report-document.pdf \(hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk\)](#)

³ [TSWF Final Report \(agendaalliance.org\)](#)

⁴ [TSWF Final Report \(prismic.io\)](#)

Challenges faced by migrant women

As part of the 'Safe Housing for Migrant Women project', Hibiscus identified key challenges faced by migrant women that affect their ability to access housing, which increase the risk and impact of homelessness. They included:

- Language and cultural barriers.
- Insecure immigration status and having restricted eligibility due to immigration status which may prevent someone accessing statutory support.
- Caring responsibilities for children.
- Challenges to claiming welfare benefits, for example, errors in a claim, gaps in making a claim and problems renewing claims.
- Poverty and destitution.
- Physical health needs; generally, and resulting from disrepair in accommodation.
- Severe and/or complex mental health needs, and experience of trauma
- Lack of access to legal aid solicitors.

The initial findings of the 'safe housing for migrant women project' include that of the women with housing needs they supported:

- 49% have restricted eligibility due to immigration status.
- 45% presented with mental health needs.
- 52% are victims of trafficking/modern slavery.
- 44% have experienced domestic violence/gender-based violence.

Safe Housing for Migrant Women – Hibiscus

Hibiscus has embarked on a project to expand their work in improving housing outcomes for migrant women. Hibiscus has been funded by the Oak Foundation to work with migrant women towards creating change, improving practice of housing providers and influencing policy makers to improve housing options for migrant women. Find out more about their work on their website: [Front Page - Hibiscus Initiatives](#)

Tips on support for migrant women

Immigration advice

- If the person does not have a clear immigration status and/or restricted eligibility due to immigration status, then they should be supported to access immigration advice from regulated adviser. To be 'regulated' an immigration adviser must be registered with OISC or be a member of an approved professional body. Frontline staff who are not 'regulated' are by law not permitted to provide immigration advice.
- There is a lack of free immigration advice available. Where possible a role for immigration adviser should be funded

Immigration advice service

- Praxis: <https://www.praxis.org.uk/telephone-advice>
- JCWI: <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/our-helplines>
- Notre Dame Refugee Centre: <https://www.notredamerc.org.uk/advice-line>
- NRPF Network: <https://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/>

Challenge restricted eligibility due to immigration status

- Even when someone has restricted eligibility due to immigration status, there may still be options to secure housing and financial support for them.
- You can use the web tool developed by the NRPF network to find out what those options might be: [Web tool | NRPF Network](#)
- Read this 7 minute briefing by Homeless Link: [https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Local Authority Powers Duties to Accommodate 7 Minute Briefing.pdf](https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Local_Authority_Powers_Duties_to_Accommodate_7_Minute_Briefing.pdf)
- Support the person to access regulated immigration advice

Language support

- Provide access to language translation. Preferably by project workers who speak a range of languages, but if not possible then by providing access to a translation service.
- Be aware that if a woman is a victim/survivor of domestic abuse, trafficking, or modern slavery that she may be at risk or less able to make disclosures if the translator is from the same community.

Cultural understanding and awareness

- Seek to understand how a person's response may be culturally informed. Ask the person and respond to their needs.
- Attend or procure training for staff on cultural competency/awareness.
- Provide psychological safety by providing access to physical space to practice religion and religious items, procuring them from local religious organisation and storing them safely and respectfully.

Training - cultural understanding

Ask your local by and for organisations if they have a training offer.

Hibiscus: Report [Cultural Mediation - Hibiscus Initiatives](#)

Hibiscus: Training [Cultural Mediation Course - Hibiscus Initiatives](#)

Halo Project: [Cultural competency and religious understanding Training](#) (haloproject.org.uk)

Equity measures

- Service may often choose to empower women to complete tasks and advocate for themselves. However, it is important to recognise that migrant women may be less familiar with, and find it harder to navigate local systems, and so will need more support to do so.

Safety planning

- Recognise that human trafficking and other forms of modern slavery disproportionately impact women and girls⁵ and seek to manage the risk through effective safety planning. Attend training to increase knowledge and understanding and work closely with relevant partners. Read Homeless Link guidance for more detail: [Homeless Link Guidance on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking: Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Guidance.pdf](#) (kxcdn.com)
- Assess and provide support to manage risks faced by survivors of domestic abuse, honour-based violence and forced marriage. Attend training to increase knowledge and understanding and work closely with relevant partners. Frontline practitioners provided an example of maintaining an awareness of Facebook groups that are established to find women and put them at further risk of domestic abuse and honour-based violence.

⁵ [Taking a 'Gender Perspective' on Human Trafficking Means Investing in Women's Leadership - Human Trafficking Search](#)

Location

- Be aware of the distance of the service to amenities, which may present a challenge to meeting basic needs.
- Be aware of proximity to the woman's community, either to manage risk or to provide access to support available from the community.
- Provide a map of local services (foodbank, GP, parks, shops etc).
- Encourage and facilitate connections with the local community to reduce social isolation.

Financial support

- If developing a new service, factor in a personal budget for service users, and flexible funding for the service to respond to basic needs.
- Provide for basic needs, including furniture, toiletries, bedding and food.

Further Resources

- NHAS (for local authorities, public authorities and voluntary agencies): <https://www.nhas.org.uk/professionals/nhas-free-training>
- Civil Legal Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice>
- NRPf Network: <https://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/>
- Homeless Link Resources: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/unlocking-the-door-a-roadmap-for-supporting-non-uk-nationals-facing-homelessness-in-england/>
- Homeless Link Guidance on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking: [Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Guidance.pdf \(kxcdn.com\)](#)
- Migrant Help: [Asylum advice and guidance | Migrant Help \(migranthelpuk.org\)](#)
- Rights of Women: WOMAN – THE WOMEN'S ASYLUM AND MIGRATION NETWORK This interactive forum is a place for information sharing amongst professionals working in gender, migration and violence against women. Members regularly post information about relevant research, training courses and events. To join the network email, info@row.org.uk
- Refugee and Migrant Centre: [What we can help with - Refugee and Migrant Centre \(rmcentre.org.uk\)](#)
- East European Resource Centre eerc.org.uk/#/
- The Aire Centre (Advice on individual rights in Europe) [The AIRE Centre](#)

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Homeless Link

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Let's End Homelessness Together

