

#EndDestitution: Briefing for Greater Manchester MPs

What do we mean by migrant destitution?

We use 'destitution' to mean having no income to support oneself and no access to mainstream welfare through the "no recourse to public funds" (NRPF) condition. Pathways into destitution include:

- **Being refused asylum:** amidst the legal aid crisis, many fail to find adequate legal representation to support them through the highly complex asylum process. If a claim is refused and appeal rights are exhausted, people are not allowed to work or access any kind of support, and therefore face destitution.¹
- **Falling out of lawful status:** people may be pushed out of lawful status and lose the right to work, by exorbitant visa fees, high evidential thresholds, or a change in life circumstances like a relationship breakdown.
 - This also includes EEA nationals who were residing in the UK before Brexit, but who have been unable to prove their lawful residence under the EU Settlement Scheme.
- **Being granted leave to remain with the 'no recourse to public funds' condition:** if people are unable to work e.g. for health reasons or caring responsibilities, they are cut off from any safety net and pushed into destitution.
 - This includes many EEA nationals and family members granted Pre-Settled Status.²
 - In recent years, it has also included thousands who have come in good faith to work as care workers, but have not been offered the work they were promised by their visa sponsor.³

Destitution in Greater Manchester

Because people are forced to live in the shadows, the scale and nature of destitution, both nationally and in Greater Manchester, is unknown. A 2023 [Joseph Rowntree Foundation report](#) estimated that 1.3 million people in the UK of migrant background were living in destitution. Within Greater Manchester, levels of destitution may be particularly high because of the presence of longstanding migrant communities within the city-region, and the large amount of asylum accommodation.

Some of those facing destitution in our city-region are forced into sleeping

1 At present, this does not apply to families with under-18 children, whose support continues after a refusal. However, this is under threat with the government's latest plans threatening to force families refused asylum into destitution.

2 This is because the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) requires them to pass the 'habitual residence test' in order to be able to access benefits.

3 As people's visas are tied to a specific employer, they are only allowed to work up to 20 hours per week for other employers.

rough, while others are 'hidden homeless', staying with friends, relatives or acquaintances, in varying degrees of precarity and (in)dignity.

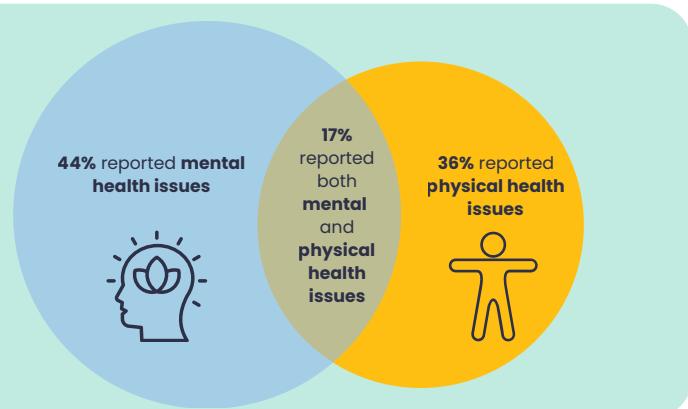
While destitution is driven by Home Office policy, local government still has a positive role to play. Crucially, the 'no recourse to public funds' condition does not exclude people from access to all government services. While they are excluded from certain benefits, homelessness assistance and social housing, other forms of local government assistance are available. As destitution intersects with regional priorities to tackle homelessness, [long-term cost savings](#) for local government have been achieved by partnership working to support people at threat of homelessness facing immigration-related barriers. Building on this work, more needs to be done to ensure that people facing destitution are supported to reclaim dignity, and wherever possible move on from destitution.

Of those accessing the GM Migrant Destitution Fund in 2024-5:

- 18% were facing **street homelessness**
- 7% were **older adults**
- 14% had **children**

On average, people accessing the fund report being destitute for **3 years**

- 19% reported **5+ years** of destitution
- 9% reported **10+ years** of destitution



What are the new government changes and what do they mean for destitution in your constituency?

On 17th November, the government announced changes to the asylum system in a paper called ["Restoring Order and Control"](#). Then on 20th November, they released a [statement and consultation](#) on their planned changes to migrants' rights to settle in the UK. The Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU) has put out explainers [here](#) and [here](#) about what these plans mean for our communities. The Greater Manchester Migrant Destitution Fund (MDF) has [also explained](#) how these plans will dramatically increase destitution in our communities.

If implemented, these plans will:

- Cause harm and suffering for your constituents;
- Increase pressure on Local Authority homelessness services;
- Create new pressures for Local Authorities to support families with children, especially if Home Office support is removed from families who have been refused asylum;
- Undermine community cohesion as people are denied the right to contribute and are pushed into exploitative situations.

What you can do

Stand up to **oppose the latest government plans** by:

- Tabling a supportive Early Day Motion
- Working with other elected representatives in your area to publicly oppose the asylum and returns plans, and the earned settlement proposals, by highlighting their likely impact on communities in your constituency;
- Signing the [Fight for Asylum Rights pledge](#), which has been signed by many MPs across the UK.

Offer **solidarity and support** to those already facing destitution in your constituency by:

- Working with local government colleagues to advocate for **better access to accommodation** for people with 'no recourse to public funds':
 - Homelessness strategies should embed principle that everyone presenting as homeless should be proactively supported into accommodation, with NRPF seen as a support need rather than a barrier;
 - Local authority homelessness strategies should incorporate regular training to ensure that housing options services are trauma-informed, person-centred and literate in immigration law;
 - 'A Bed for Every Night' provision for people with NRPF should be protected and further bedspaces made available.
- Advocating for **increased funding for immigration advice**:
 - The Ministry of Justice [should take action](#) to address the severe deficit of immigration advice, by overhauling the legal aid system to ensure providers are properly paid for their work, with a short-term injection of funding to make high-quality work financially viable.
 - Local authorities [should invest](#) in long-term funding for immigration advice for people facing destitution;
 - Building on the positive partnership working that has crystallised in the Restricted Eligibility Support Service (RESS), this model should be further expanded to increase its reach.
- Working with local government colleagues to ensure that a **culture of welcome and solidarity** is embedded across all statutory services – from homelessness to social care to education:
 - Training should be provided for local authority employees about the immigration system, so that they are empowered to support people facing immigration-related harms and to combat misinformation and divisive narratives;
 - For a comprehensive set of practical steps to implement good practice within your local area, see the [Checklist](#) produced by the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS).
- **Speaking out publicly in solidarity** with our friends and neighbours facing destitution, and promote cohesive communities by resisting harmful and divisive rhetoric.