No Return, No Asylum

Destitution as a way of life?

The extent and impact of destitution amongst asylum seekers in Bradford

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www.jblresearch.org

Commissioned by Destitution Concern Bradford

www.destitutionconcernbradford.org

This report can be downloaded from the above websites

Destitution Concern Bradford

Destitution Concern Bradford was established out of concern for the plight of asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants suffering destitution in the district. The DCB group is comprised of those affected by and those working with these groups, who are united in their concern for those who have no choice but destitution, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, ill-health, malnutrition, poor living conditions, and street homelessness.

Destitution

A person who may have no recourse to public funds, who is unable to access legal employment and/or lacking the means to provide for themselves and who is either street homeless or staying with friends only temporarily.

Asylum seeker

Someone who leaves their own country for their safety, often for political reasons or because of war, and who travels to another country hoping that the government will protect them and allow them to live there (Cambridge Online Dictionary). An asylum seeker is someone who has lodged an application for protection on the basis of the Refugee Convention or Article 3 of the ECHR (European Convention on Human Rights).

Refugee

A refugee is a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.' (Definition quoted from the 1951 Refugee Convention)

Refugee status

Refugee status is awarded to someone the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) recognises as a refugee as described in the Refugee Convention.

Refused Asylum seeker

Someone whose application to a government for asylum has been refused.

Members of Destitution Concern Bradford

- British Red Cross (www.redcross.org.uk/Where-we-work/In-the-UK/Northern-England/Yorkshire)
- Hope Housing (www.hopehousing.org.uk)
- BEACON (www.beaconbradford.org)
- Inn Churches: (www.innchurches.co.uk)
- Bradford Action for Refugees (http://bafr.org.uk)
- Bradford Refugee Forum (www.bradfordrefugeeforum.org.uk)
- Horton Housing (www.hortonhousing.co.uk)
- Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council (www.bradford.gov.uk)

The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and may not reflect those of the individuals and organisations associated with Destitution Concern Bradford.

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Foreword

The experience of destitution among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK continues to present a worrying humanitarian crisis.

This is the first report focussing on this issue in Bradford. It is hoped that the findings presented here will contribute to the growing body of research evidencing the extent and impact of destitution linked to the asylum process. There remains a need to highlight the plight of those affected by destitution, in many cases for prolonged periods of time, who are often hidden from view and dependent on charities and friends to meet their basic needs in order to survive from one day to the next.

In late 2009, individuals and organisations concerned with the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers experiencing destitution and the limited support services available in Bradford came together to form Destitution Concern Bradford (DCB). The group aims to advocate on behalf of those experiencing destitution in order to raise awareness, improve support services and ultimately create change to address the causes of destitution linked to the asylum process.

This report would not have been possible without the contributions of group members, who have worked hard to bring about and support this research.

It is often traumatic events that drive refugees into exile such as experiences of war, persecution, torture or the loss of loved ones. Those seeking protection should be treated with dignity throughout the asylum determination process and their time in the UK in order that they have the opportunity to re-build their lives and contribute to society.

The findings in this report build on the conclusions and recommendations of previous studies and further emphasise the urgent need for a more humane asylum system where refugees and asylum seekers are not exposed to destitution.

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Summary

This report contributes to a growing body of research on destitution in the asylum system across the UK by examining the extent and impact of destitution amongst asylum seekers in Bradford.

Research findings:

- 66 people destitute – including 10 children
- Prolonged periods of destitution – up to and over 10 years
- 50% from countries where human rights abuses, war and violence are endemic
- Refused and destitute asylum seekers from 21 countries
- At least 78% of respondents were at the end of the asylum process
- High levels of homelessness – around 44% staying with family and friends
- It is difficult to secure legal provision in order to make a fresh claim due to government restrictions in funding for legal aid
- Funding cuts are impacting on already stretched front line support services
- Front line staff are frustrated by the limited options available to find routes out of destitution
- Increasing demand is making voluntary provision unsustainable
- Refused asylum seekers are increasingly frustrated by the lack of statutory measures in place to prevent destitution

Recommendations

- Destitution should not be used as a policy tool to force refused asylum seekers to leave the UK
- The Government must change its policy to allow local authorities to help asylum seekers facing destitution
- Section 95 cash-based support and accommodation should be provided until safe return is negotiated, an individual leaves the UK or leave to remain is granted
- UKBA should provide travel costs for all refused asylum seekers required to travel to report
- Quality legal advice should be made available to all asylum seekers at all stages of the asylum process to enable better decision making
- Permission to work should be granted if case not resolved within six months/ case refused and asylum seekers temporarily unable to return to country-of-origin
- Practical support and funding for organisations working on the ground with refused asylum seekers should be provided

This research was commissioned by Destitution Concern Bradford to address the worries of agencies working on the ground in Bradford that significant numbers of refused asylum seekers are destitute. A survey recorded the visits of destitute asylum seekers to seven agencies in Bradford over a five-week period in June and July 2012. The results of the survey were augmented by interviews with agency staff and destitute asylum seekers during July and August.

The views expressed in this report may not reflect those of all organisations associated with Destitution Concern Bradford.

1. Introduction

Over recent years considerable evidence has emerged from agencies working on the ground in Bradford that significant numbers of refused asylum seekers are destitute. Commissioned by Destitution Concern Bradford, the research on which this report is based was conducted to examine this situation in more detail.

1.1 Research aims

The primary aim of the research was to examine the extent and impact of destitution in the asylum system in Bradford. The research had three specific aims:

- To generate data on refused asylum seekers experiencing destitution
- To examine the reasons *for* and consequences *of* destitution
- To assess the impact of destitution on statutory and voluntary sector service providers, and to explore how service provision could be improved

1.2 Methods

A survey of refused asylum seekers visiting seven participating agencies[1] was conducted between the 11th June and 13th July 2012.[2] Interviews with refused asylum seekers and front line agency workers were conducted during July and August to examine the issues raised by the survey in more detail.[3]

1.3 Destitution in the asylum system in the UK

Estimates of the number of refused asylum seekers present in the UK vary considerably. According to sources cited by the British Red Cross (2010) this number may range from 155,000 to 500,000. In a majority of cases, initial claims for asylum are refused. In the year ending June 2012, for example, there were 19,959 asylum applications; 5807 (35%) were granted asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave; 10,922 (65%) were refused. This resulted in 8,713 appeals, 2,410 (27%) of which were allowed (Home Office 2012).

Where a claim for asylum has been refused and an appeal is either not made or unsuccessful, asylum support is usually withdrawn within 21 days; asylum seekers in this situation are then expected to return voluntarily to their country of origin or be forcibly removed from the UK.

The asylum system has become increasingly restrictive about the welfare support asylum seekers are entitled to while their applications are being processed – and also if they are refused (Oxfam 2011). It has been argued that destitution has been institutionalised within the asylum system and that it is now used as a policy tool to force refused asylum claims seekers to leave the country (PAFRAS 2009).

There is now an extensive body of research on the rise of destitution amongst asylum seekers in a number of UK cities. Research in Leeds (Lewis 2007; Brown 2008; Lewis 2009) found that many asylum seekers are now destitute for prolonged periods, and that the long-term social and health consequences of destitution and the impact on local voluntary and statutory agencies is becoming unsustainable. Studies in Birmingham (Malfait and Scott-Flynn 2005) and Leicester (LRAS 2009) paint a similar picture. The plight of failed asylum seekers is chronic, as PAFRAS recently stated:

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[1] See Appendix 1 Participating Agencies
[2] See Appendix 1: Methodology
[3] Further details about the survey are available in Appendices 3 (Survey Sheet) and 4 (Survey Explanation Notes)

> *Below an underclass, destitute asylum seekers exist not even on the periphery of society; denied access to the world around them and forced into a life of penury. To be a destitute asylum seeker is to live a life of indefinite limbo that is largely invisible, and often ignored. It is also a life of fear; fear of detention, exploitation, and deportation* (2009, 2).

Many refused asylum seekers remain destitute because they fear that looking for help will result in deportation to their country of origin and many thus lead a day-by-day existence (Oxfam 2011). Once their support is removed, many asylum seekers are reduced to a life of 'street homelessness' (Citizens For Sanctuary 2012) or 'sofa surfing' with anyone that will help (Inside Housing 2012). Over the last couple of years research has highlighted the continuing plight of refused asylum seekers in the UK and the pressures faced by those working with them. Research by the Refugee Survival Trust (2010) highlighted the financial strain the asylum system places on charitable organisations and local authorities attempting to prevent street homelessness. Research by Citizens For Sanctuary (2012) – which found 70 refused asylum seekers, including three families with children, destitute in Nottingham – argued that refused asylum seekers are being pushed into 'mass destitution'. Research by the Children's Society (2012) painted a similar picture, arguing that in many cases UK Government policy is making many children and young people destitute. On June 28th 2012, following lobbying by the Scottish Refugee Council, Glasgow City Council passed a motion condemning UKBA policy for making refused asylum seekers destitute. The council urged the UK Government to change its policy and allow local authorities to help asylum seekers facing destitution.

The impact of this situation is profound and it has been argued that the UK is *'in danger of creating a society where destitution becomes an acceptable way of life'* (LRAS 2010, 5). This report contributes to these debates by exploring concerns about the rise of destitution as a way of life amongst asylum seekers in Bradford.

2. The survey

Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMDC) keeps a rolling total of asylum applications and asylum seekers who are in receipt of Home Office funded housing and financial support. A freedom of information request in July 2012 obtained the following information from BMDC on the number of asylum seekers in Bradford over the last 3 years: [4]

- July 2010 = 533
- July 2011 = 312
- July 2012 = 307

It is important to note that this figure relates to those whose asylum applications are still being considered and who are in receipt of housing and support; it therefore excludes the individuals, families and children surveyed for this report.

2.1 A 'definite minimum'

The survey recorded 66 people as destitute; 55 individuals completed the survey and there were 10 dependent children and 1 dependent adult; over 40% were female.

A number of those surveyed reported that they were aware of significant numbers of other destitute asylum seekers in Bradford who, for a variety of reasons (often linked to fear of being identified and deported), do not regularly access the seven support agencies. The actual number of refused asylum seekers experiencing destitution in Bradford will therefore be significantly higher than recorded by the survey, as recognized by the methodology that sets out to record a 'definite minimum' (Lewis 2009).[5]

2.2 Survey procedure

It was initially envisaged that the survey would be conducted over a 4-week period, in keeping with research conducted in Leeds (Lewis, 2007, Brown 2008, Lewis 2009). However, 18-24th June 2012 was Refugee Week and an extra week was added to the survey period to cover the pressures agencies were under; the survey took place between the 11th June and 13th July 2012. Every effort was made to survey all clients presenting themselves as destitute during this period, though it is recognized that service provision pressures mean that this may not have been the case.

Number of surveys conducted at each agency

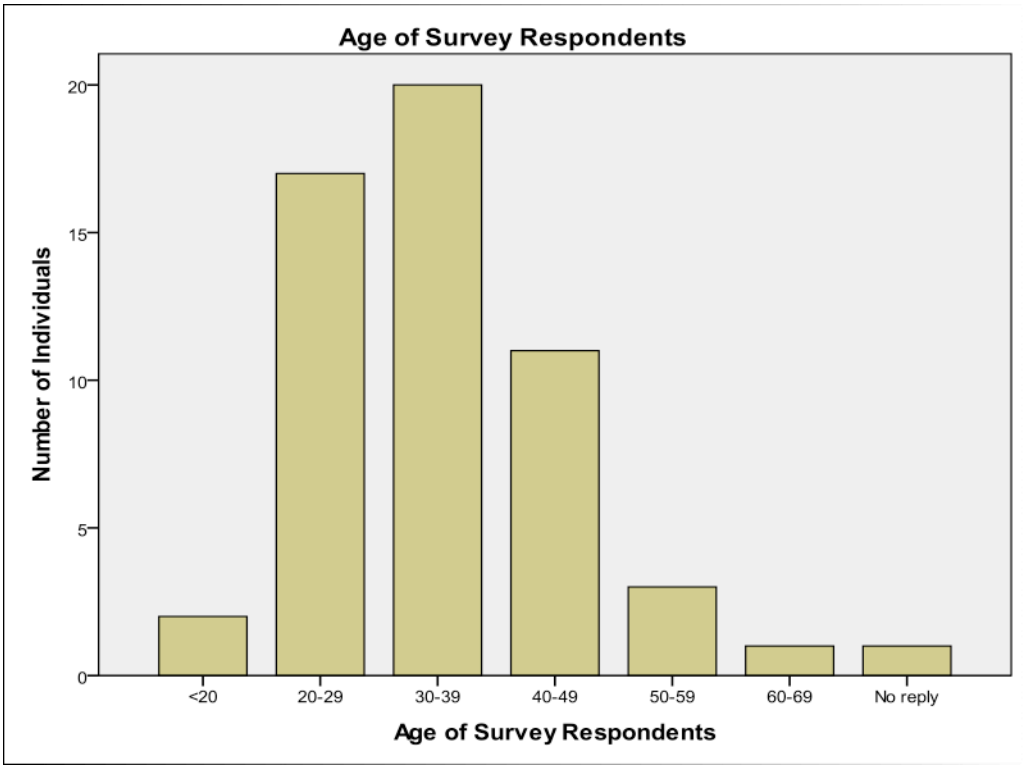
Agency	Surveys
Abigail	9
BAFR	10
Beacon	3
Bevan House	2
BIASAN	2
Biasan Women's Club	2
British Red Cross	27
Total	55

[4] See www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/asylum_seekers_9#incoming-301074
[5] See Appendix 1: Methodology

The survey counted *only* the first visit of each individual attending participating services. However, it should also be noted that due the workload and pressures faced by some agencies, a number of clients were advised to go to the British Red Cross drop-in on Tuesday to complete the survey, hence the particularly high number of surveys completed by the British Red Cross.[6]

2.3 Age of those surveyed

Around 67% of those surveyed were between the ages of 20 and 40; two respondents were less than 20 and one was between 60 and 70.



[6] See Appendix 2 Methodology for more details.

3. Destitution in the asylum system in Bradford

The extent of destitution among refugees and asylum seekers in Bradford falls outside of the remit of official statistics. Destitution can occur at various stages of the asylum process. The reasons for this can include administrative errors or procedural delays, ineligibility for support or where a positive or negative decision on an asylum claim results in a change in circumstances.

3.1 Section 95

Section 95 (S95) support is available for single asylum seekers with ongoing claims who meet set criteria; support continues throughout the appeal process providing clients submit their claim within the time frame stipulated by the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA). Once they are at the end of the appeal process and their appeal rights are exhausted, asylum seekers are no longer eligible for S95. Section 95 is also available for families with dependent children under the age of 18 throughout the asylum process until they leave the country, are removed, or no longer meet the criteria. Support consists of accommodation and cash support collected weekly via a Post Office.

Those at the beginning of the asylum process may find themselves destitute while waiting for applications for S95 to be processed. In Bradford, 4 people were at the start of the asylum process; 1 individual had not yet applied for S95 and a woman with 2 children was waiting for it to begin. Similarly in Leeds, 6% and 5% of destitute asylum seekers surveyed in 2008 and 2009 were at the start of the asylum process (Brown 2008; Lewis 2009).

3.2 Section 4

If they meet set criteria some destitute asylum seekers and families can access short-term support for adults under Section 4 (S4) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The criteria are:

- Taking reasonable steps to leave the UK
- There is no viable route of return
- Medical grounds/ physical impediment
- A case is subject to an ongoing judicial review
- Accommodation is necessary to protect a human rights breach

Support is provided via a payment card, which gives access to a small amount of money – equivalent to less than half the value of income support – that must be spent in selected supermarkets on a weekly basis. This means that refused asylum seekers have to travel to access support and report at the UKBA offices in Leeds without access to cash; it also means that they cannot shop at charity shops and ethnic stores for clothes and food that may not be available in these supermarkets.

Around 27% of those surveyed indicated that they are destitute because they had not applied for S4; another 11% had been refused S4, all of which suggests that the application criteria are becoming more stringent and that some refused asylum seekers no longer apply.

Lewis (2009) found that in Leeds the length of time refused asylum seekers are waiting for S4 support to begin is increasing; in 2008 27% of those surveyed indicated that 'Waiting for 4 Support to Begin' was the reason for their destitution (Brown 2008); in 2009 the figure was 33%. Research in Leeds also found that the criteria for obtaining S4 support are becoming more stringent and subject to review. As taking reasonable steps to leave the UK is the only way most refused asylum seekers can access S4 support, it has been suggested that many are deterred from applying (Lewis, 2007; The Children's Society 2012).

3.3 Legacy Cases and the New Asylum Model (NAM)

In March 2007 the Home Office introduced the New Asylum Model (NAM) to process cases through a 'case owner' system. At the time, there was a huge backlog of unresolved asylum cases and the government set up the Case Resolution Directorate (CRD) to review outstanding cases; residual claims made before March 2007 are now dealt with by the Case Assurance and Audit Unit (CAAU).

Front line staff suggested that many people obtained leave to remain through the case resolution process in Bradford in the initial period. Of those surveyed, all those that applied for case resolution – 9 individuals with 4 dependent children – had been refused.

Around 73% of those surveyed in Bradford were processed through NAM. This included:

- 13 individuals who had not applied for Section 4
- 3 individuals who been refused Section 4, and
- 14 individuals who indicated that they were at the end of the asylum process

Despite the intention for NAM to improve the asylum system, these figures confirm that significant numbers of refused asylum seekers processed through NAM are made destitute throughout the asylum process (Brown, 2008). Furthermore, the new system fails to alleviate destitution at the end of the asylum process (Lewis, 2009). Of those processed through NAM in Bradford, around 75% were at the end of the asylum process.

Status	Reason for Destitution	No.	%
Asylum Seeker	Start of process - not yet applied for Section 95 (NASS)	1	1.8
	Start of process - applied and waiting for Section 95 to begin	1	1.8
	Start of process – and has been refused Section 95	1	1.8
	NASS administrative error - support stopped during asylum process	0	0
	Lost NASS support due to breach of conditions	0	0
Refused Asylum Seeker	End of process - not applied for Section 4 (unwilling; don't meet criteria; age disputed)	15	27.3
	End of process - waiting for Section 4 support to begin	1	1.8
	End of process - refused Section 4	5	9.1
Refugee	Positive decision, but benefits/ housing delayed	1	1.8
Refused Asylum Seeker	Social Services - applied and waiting for social services support	1	1.8
	Social Services - removed from social services support	0	0
Asylum Seeker	Waiting on an asylum decision	1	1.8
Refused Asylum Seeker	End of process	21	38.2
	Status unknown	7	12.7
Total		55	

3.4 Destitute families and children

The survey recorded 1 dependent adult and 10 dependent children as destitute. This included:

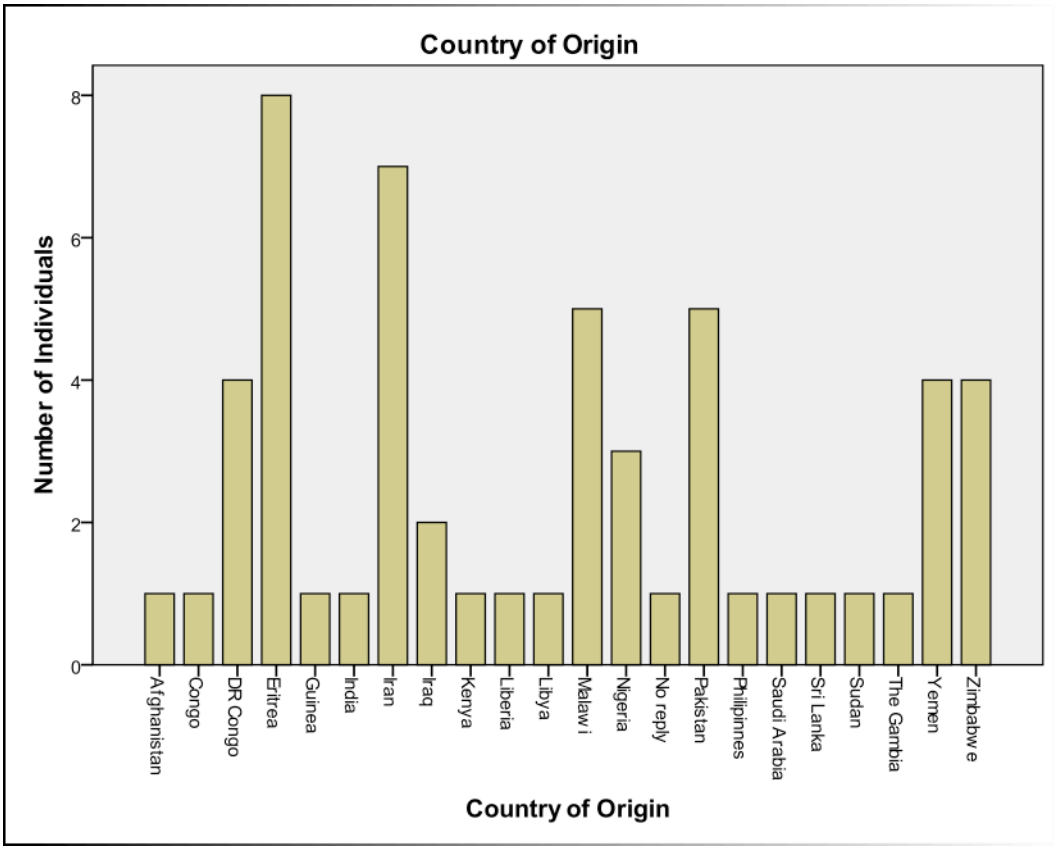
- 1 family – 1 women with 1 dependent adult and 3 dependent children
- One woman with 3 dependent children
- 1 woman with 2 dependent children; and
- 2 women with 1 dependent child each

It should be noted that the survey methodology did not allow the issue of destitute children and families to be investigated in more detail, hence it is not entirely clear how many of these children were born after their parents claimed asylum. What is clear, however, is that long term refused asylum seekers with dependent children are presenting for help at agencies across Bradford.

This reinforces findings from existing research that UK Government policy is making children and young people destitute (The Children's Society, 2012). Concern was expressed about this situation during interviews with front line staff. One interviewee argued that as the system becomes more difficult *'children are going missing with parents, and workers are getting worried by this.'*

4. Country of origin

The survey identified refused asylum seekers from 21 countries.



4.1 No return, no asylum

Of those surveyed around 50% came from Eritrea, Iran, Malawi, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo, reflecting national trends which demonstrate that individuals are being refused asylum from countries with ongoing conflict, violence and human rights abuses. Still Human Still Here (2009), for example, estimated in 2007 that 50% of those refused asylum in the UK came from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia and Zimbabwe. A subsequent survey found that 50% of those visiting refugee agencies across the UK during a 1-month period came from only four countries – Iraq, Iran, Eritrea and Zimbabwe (Smart 2009).

The failure to support people from these countries is indicative of a growing humanitarian crisis in the UK, which adds to the number of people experiencing destitution as a way of life. This is recognised not just by refugee agencies, but also highlighted by the JCHR (2007) who have suggested that an intentional policy of destitution is now widely practiced.

The British Red Cross report 'Not Gone but Forgotten' (2010) highlights a number or reasons why refused asylum seekers may stay in the UK. These include:

- There is no viable route of return
- Their government will not provide travel documents
- They are ill and cannot travel
- They have developed strong personal ties with the UK (e.g. entering relationships and having children).
- They fear death or persecution if they return to their country-of-origin

4.2 Assisted Voluntary Return

The UK Government has offered refused asylum seekers the chance to return home over a number of years. UKBA currently offers refused asylum seekers the chance of Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) through a partnership with Refugee Action. There are three different programmes and people can apply for AVR once; they will sometimes get another chance if the reason for declining the first offer is seen to be legitimate. However, interviewees in Bradford argued that this process is also becoming more stringent and that second opportunities are less frequent than they once were.

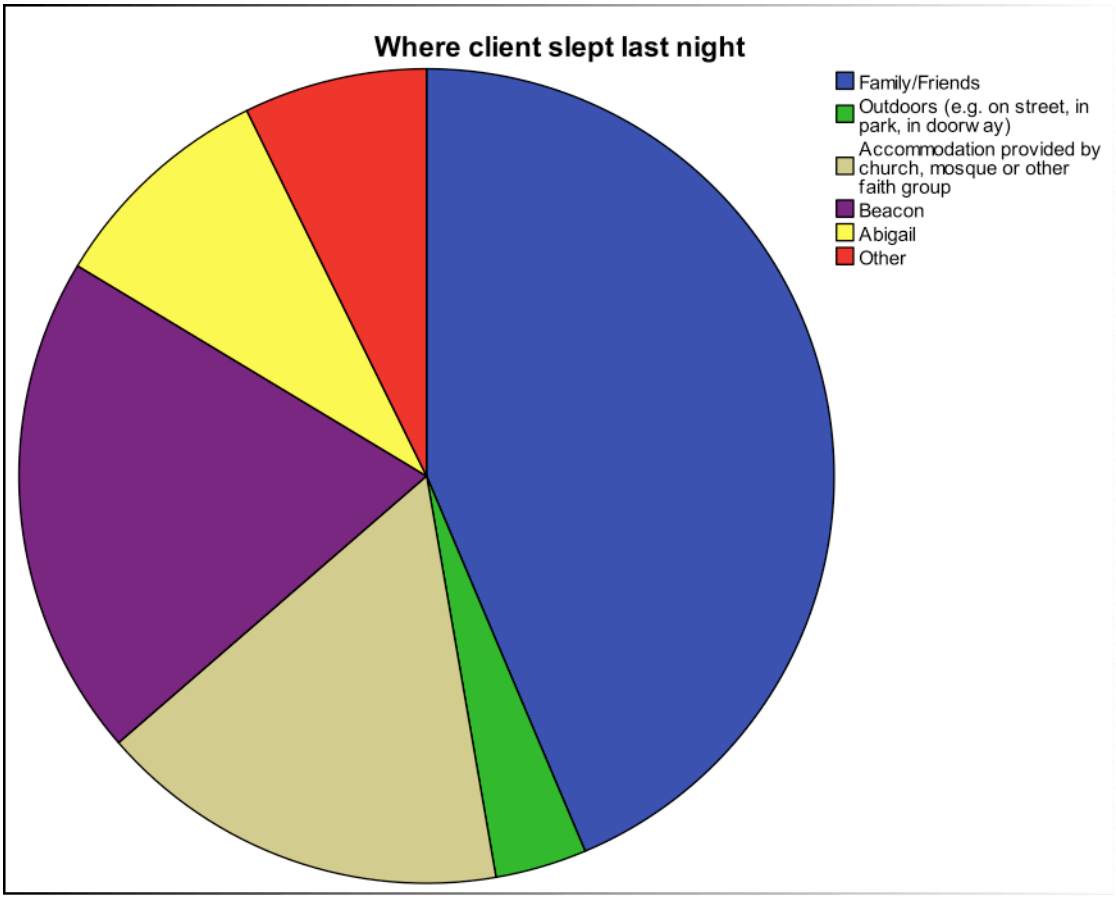
AVR remains an option, but as the British Red Cross (2010) note, many people now prefer to be destitute in the UK rather than return home. As an interviewee confirmed: '*Despite having been refused protection, many asylum seekers still fear returning to their country to such an extent that they prefer to stay in the UK and face destitution.*'

5. Accommodation and shelter

Only 2 people out of the 55 surveyed had slept outdoors on the night prior to completing the survey. Almost 44% – 24 people – had stayed with family and friends. Another 9 people had stayed in accommodation provided by a Church, Mosque or other faith group; a further 11 people had slept in the homes of Beacon volunteer hosts, and another 5 in supported accommodation provided by Abigail Housing.

When clients were asked to indicate where they had stayed longest since arriving in Bradford, friends and family, along with Abigail Housing and Beacon, again scored highly.[7] However, the difficulties of providing accommodation for destitute asylum seekers in Bradford were widely noted during interviews. As one front line worker stated:

'It is always a struggle to find accommodation for destitute asylum seekers in Bradford, particularly for those with mental health needs. There are long waiting lists and very few longer-term options. Staying with friends or acquaintances is often the only option and I always worry about how vulnerable people are in this position.'



5.1 Homelessness

Homelessness is not having a home. This means that many people who are not necessarily sleeping rough on the streets, but are without their own accommodation, are homeless. Even with a roof over their head a person may still be considered homeless (Shelter 2012).

Once their claims are refused, many asylum seekers in Bradford end up homeless, 'sofa surfing' with family and friends from one short-term stay to the next. Some stay in accommodation

[7] See Appendix 1 for more details of the types of support provided by these organisations.

provided by a Church or Mosque, while many more stay in supported accommodation provided by voluntary organisations and volunteer hosts. Some people stay in supported accommodation for many months, while those staying with friends and family appear to move around more frequently.

Interviews with refused asylum seekers confirmed the strength and willingness of the refugees and asylum community to afford help and support across Bradford. However, there was also plenty of anecdotal evidence about the increasing difficulties of acquiring this type of support as the number of refused asylum claims increase, and about overcrowding and poor quality housing. Front line workers also noted the emotional and financial impact of this situation on the already marginalized refugee and asylum community.

5.2 Bradford as a hub and a safe haven

Previous research in West Yorkshire has consistently shown that Leeds is a hub for refused asylum seekers (Lewis 2006; Brown 2008; Lewis 2009), with 33%, 35% and 37% of those surveyed previously living outside Leeds. To a lesser extent, the same can be said of Bradford, with around 20% of those surveyed coming into the city from London and other towns and cities in the region, including Huddersfield and Sheffield.

On 18th November 2010 Bradford was officially recognized as the third UK 'City of Sanctuary' by the City by Sanctuary movement.[8] There was some indication during interviews with front line staff and refused asylum seekers that Bradford is seen as a safe and welcoming destination by asylum seekers. To some extent, the lack of rough sleeping in Bradford was seen to be a consequence of a large and supportive community of fellow refugees and asylum seekers. Bradford also has a strong and close-knit asylum and refugee sector that responds quickly to new and emergent issues. As a front line worker stated when asked about the low numbers of people sleeping rough on the streets: *'Maybe it's because there's that combination of places [in Bradford] where people can bring other people for help.'* A long-term refused asylum seeker – who had previously lived in London – agreed with these sentiments, stating that: '*I like it here, it's small, I know my way around and the people are nice'.*

When they have no access to support it appears that some people travel to places where they can to access the support of friends and family. However, while some refused asylum seekers choose Bradford as their destination, it should be noted that many more are dispersed to Bradford by UKBA. It should also be recognised that although the refugee and asylum community in Bradford actively supports refused asylum seekers, this in no way constitutes an effective solution; there is no dignity living a hand-to-mouth existence on charitable handouts.

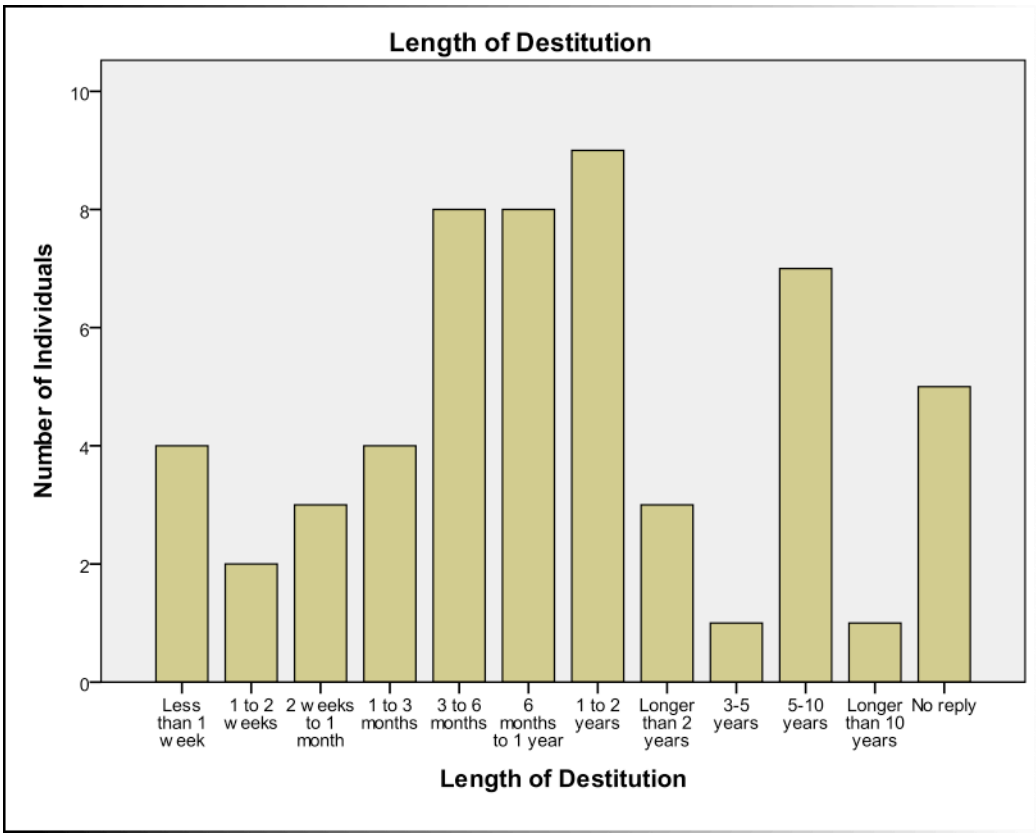
[8] www.cityofsanctuary.org/bradford

6. Length of destitution

The survey recorded 21 individuals who had been destitute for a year or more. Significantly 7 of these people had been destitute for between 5 and 10 years, 1 for more than 10 years. This included:

- 1 family – 1 woman with 1 dependent adult and 3 dependent children that had been destitute for almost 10 years
- One woman with 1 dependent child who had been destitute for over 8 years

While previous research has tended to record destitution up to 5 years or more, this survey was altered specifically to capture the length of time that some people are living in destitution. This powerfully supports the suggestion that for some people destitution is becoming a way of life.



6.1 Prolonged destitution

During interviews with front-line staff, the increasing length of destitution amongst refused asylum seekers was seen to be a consequence of a number of factors. The primary issue to emerge was the impact of the recession and cuts to front-line services and reductions in legal aid leading to the closure of two key immigration legal firms.

Budget cuts in 2011 had a severe impact on frontline services, with the Refugee Council's One-Stop service in Leeds and Horton Housing's Refugee Development Service in Bradford both closing. The closure of these services has made it more difficult for refused asylum seekers and those newly awarded refugee status to find appropriate sources of legal advice and practical assistance. In July 2011 the Immigration Advisory Service, a national charity providing legal advice and representation to asylum seekers across the UK, closed. Prior to this, another key legal firm, Refugee and Migrant Justice charity closed as a result of late payment of legal aid by the Legal Services Commission.

Large groups of refused asylum seekers were left in limbo by these closures, their cases archived, until new companies went through the process of deciding on the merit of individual cases; many cases were subsequently dropped. All such developments have made it harder for clients to find good quality legal representation, significantly increasing the risk of destitution. All legal aid providers across the UK are now required to take a 'merits test' for representation of appeals and they cannot take on new cases unless they have a 50% or more chance of success.

A freedom of information request made by Inside Housing (2012) to the Home Office reveals that between the start of 2009 and June 2012 just over 57,000 further submissions were made, 93% of which were either rejected (49%) or are still awaiting a decision (51%). Of the 23,350 applications refused, 96% were refused without the right to appeal, which means that they had no entitlement to Section 4 support unless they could prove that they were making plans to return home.

The significance of accessing quality legal advice and representation has been widely debated. An independent evaluation involving UKBA and the Legal Services Commission (Aspden 2008) found that access to good quality legal advice facilitates better outcomes for asylum seekers. As a report by Oxfam (2011) confirms, many refused asylum seekers now prefer to stay destitute because they fear that looking for help will result in their deportation to where they fear persecution.

7. Challenges for Services

As the asylum system becomes stricter, the behaviour of those refused asylum is changing. A front-line worker argued that as *'more and more people… are detained'* asylum seekers are becoming more frustrated by the asylum process; this is having a detrimental impact on their physical and mental health and also on the emotional pressures faced by front line staff. The absolute reliance of refused asylum seekers on charitable groups, food parcels and irregular handouts, combined with legislation that prevents them from working to earn a living, means that they cannot contribute to society. As one interviewee pointed out: *'They are increasingly desperate, we get clients pulling their hair out and threatening to kill themselves.'*

Lack of cash is also problematic for refused asylum seekers and many lack the funds they need to access support. Although Bradford has a very close-knit refugee and asylum community, the impact of the recession and changes to the asylum system are making it increasingly difficult for agencies within this network to provide services and maintain a good level of support. It is now also more difficult for refused asylum seekers to find good quality legal assistance and representation. This was evident in discussions with individuals providing voluntary legal assistance as McKenzie Friends,[9] some of whom stressed the increasing pressures they are under to take on more clients and hence to take a break from their work as McKenzie Friends.

For many local agencies, the provision of support is fast becoming unsustainable. The British Red Cross has introduced a maximum of 6 x £10 food vouchers per client per year, and only in exceptional circumstances do they provide bus tickets for clients to attend their weekly drop-in sessions. Destitute asylum seekers without any access to support are often expected to report weekly, sometimes monthly, to UKBA in Leeds, yet the UKBA does not cover their travel expenses. Because they cannot cover the costs of all refused asylum seekers reporting in Leeds, such are the numbers involved, the British Red Cross does not now pay the fares of any. Smaller organisations in Bradford are also struggling to maintain the level of support they provide. As an interviewee from Biasan Women's Club pointed out: *'Being connected to other people is important, and we provide bus tickets to allow people to come to the club regularly, but we are now really struggling to even pay bus fares for the women.'*

When clients were asked what other support they had accessed in Bradford over 60% of those surveyed indicated that they had sought and received advice from at least two or more of the three options listed – medical services, places of worship, and refugee agencies. However, the current situation can be extremely frustrating for staff at these organisations, as a GP at Bevan House stated: '*Staff are frustrated and in despair. There's nowhere to go… and it's easy to get overwhelmed. It's a Government decision and there's absolutely nothing you can do to help these people'.* Some interviewees also expressed the view that many UKBA staff do not have the experience to deal effectively with the complexity of the issues that asylum seekers present. Others argued that there is a 'culture of disbelief' at UKBA – exacerbated by a lack of quality interpreters – which often leads to cases being refused before they have been properly considered.

Given the pressures that local agencies and support groups are under a number of interviewees were reluctant to discuss how services could be improved in Bradford. A number of the answers provided were contextualized by references to the current fiscal climate in the following way: *'Having more people with the right level of training would be a big help, but it isn't going to happen is it?'* Of those that did respond to this line of questioning, the need for better coordination was stressed, primarily because the asylum system changes so regularly that there is a need to keep on top of current developments. As one interviewee stated, *'we need more places where we can talk things over and liaise better… improvement has been made but the system constantly changes.'*

[9] http://mckenziefriendlegalsupport.co.uk

8. Conclusions

The findings presented in this report confirm the concerns of agencies working on the ground with refused asylum seekers in Bradford that the asylum system causes destitution. Although the true number of destitute asylum seekers will be much higher, the survey recorded 66 destitute people in Bradford, including 10 dependent children.

The results of the survey demonstrate that asylum seekers are made destitute throughout the asylum process, and further that NAM fails to alleviate destitution at the end of the asylum process. Of those surveyed in Bradford, 7 individuals had been destitute for between 5 and 10 years, 1 for over 10 years. This included 1 family with 3 dependent children, who had been destitute for almost 10 years, and a woman with 1 dependent child who had been destitute for over 8 years. Around 50% percent of those completing the survey were from countries where human rights abuses, war and violence are endemic.

Combined these findings add evidence to and substantiate findings from other studies. Indeed there is a great deal of symmetry between the findings from the Bradford survey and a number of recent studies in nearby Leeds. However, the report also provides important new evidence about the extended periods over which individuals, families and children are experiencing destitution.

Recommendations

- Destitution should not be used as a policy tool to force refused asylum seekers to leave the UK
- The Government must change its policy to allow local authorities to help asylum seekers facing destitution
- Section 95 cash-based support and accommodation should be provided until safe return is negotiated, an individual leaves the UK or leave to remain is granted
- UKBA should provide travel costs for all refused asylum seekers required to travel to report
- Quality legal advice should be made available to all asylum seekers at all stages of the asylum process to enable better decision making
- Permission to work should be granted if case not resolved within six months/ case refused and asylum seekers temporarily unable to return to country-of-origin
- Practical support and funding for organisations working on the ground with refused asylum seekers should be provided

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Appendix 1 Participating Agencies

Abigail Housing provides supported accommodation for refused asylum seekers, and also for those newly awarded leave to remain in the UK (www.abigailhousing.org.uk).

BAFR (Bradford Action for Refugees) provides an advice service and a children and families project for asylum seekers and refugees; they also provide training for volunteers and workers in the sector (www.bafr.org).

Beacon (Bradford Ecumenical Asylum Concern) provides:

- Supported accommodation for refused asylum seekers in the homes of volunteer hosts;
- Trained volunteers who provide moral support and informed help for those, without access to legal representation, appealing against asylum decisions or wishing to make fresh asylum claims;
- A hospitality service at the local Asylum and Immigration Hearings Centre (www.beaconbradford.org).

Homeless and New Arrivals Health Team (Bradford District Care Trust) is a multi disciplinary health team working with asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants new to Bradford and Airedale. The team also works with homeless clients, supporting them in accessing health care, and offering initial health and TB screening, advice and/or facilitating access into treatment (www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/?page=directoryview&itemid=1307).

Bevan House Primary Care Centre is an NHS General Practice that provides services designed to meet the needs of people who are homeless; in unstable accommodation; who have come to Bradford as refugees or to seek asylum; and others who find it hard to access health care. (www.bevanhealthcare.nhs.uk).

BIASAN (Bradford Immigration and Asylum Seekers Support and Advice Network) runs a weekly drop-in, Women's Club and English classes for asylum seekers and refugees. (www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/?page=directoryview&itemid=1114).

British Red Cross runs a weekly Destitution Drop-in and provides access to legal advice, emotional support and emergency food and toiletries, as well as advocacy and signposting to other sources of help (www.redcross.org.uk/Where-we-work/In-the-UK/Northern-England/Yorkshire).

Hope Housing provides emergency accommodation in the homes of volunteers across Bradford for people who have nowhere to stay on a given night. Hope Housing works in partnership with several other housing providers, including local churches, to house homeless people and support them in their own homes (http://www.hopehousing.org.uk).

Appendix 2 Methodology

The problem of obtaining reliable data on the number of refused asylum seekers was addressed by collecting information though a survey with individuals visiting refugee support agencies in Bradford. The survey methodology was developed from previous work on asylum seekers, refuges and destitution in West Yorkshire (Lewis 2007; Brown 2008; Lewis 2009).

A survey was conducted with refused asylum seekers at seven participating agencies between 11th June and 13th July 2012. While the survey attempted to record all refused asylum seekers visiting the agencies during the survey period, it is recognised that this may not be the case. Although this approach does not provide an exact figure for the number of refused asylum seekers experiencing destitution, it does give a 'definite minimum'. Double counting was avoided through the use of a symbol card, which was used to assess whether clients have previously completed the survey (Lewis 2009). A number of new categories were added to the Bradford survey, including new measures to examine the length of destitution; some were also omitted. Only the first visit by each individual to an agency was counted. Because of workload pressures, some agencies also directed clients to the British Red Cross drop-in on Tuesday to complete the survey.

If the reason for destitution was not known by either the client or the support worker conducting the survey, question 7 recorded the clients situation as either: 1) Awaiting an asylum decision; 2) End of process; or 3) Status unknown. This resulted in 21 individuals being recorded as at the end of process; 14 of these people gave a date for their first asylum claim and were therefore counted as processed through NAM; the rest provided no date for their first claim. This could either be the result of the way the question was asked; because the client was unsure of their overall situation; or because of they feared the consequences of providing such information. Seven more respondents were recoded as 'status unknown' for similar reasons, although 6 of these provided a date for their first asylum claim. It should also be noted that question 9a did not record consistent data.

During July and August, ten interviews were conducted with staff at front-line agencies to assess the implications and findings of the survey. Five in-depth interviews were carried out with refused asylum seekers to examine their situation in more detail; these interviews were carried out face-to-face to gain informed consent; a female researcher conducted all interviews with female clients.

Appendix 3 Survey Sheet

Agency Name:		
1. Date of visit	dd/mm	
2. First time surveyed	1. Yes 2. No (If no ask 2a)	
2a. Where surveyed previously	See coding list	
3. DoB	dd/mm/yy	
4. Country-of-origin	Write in	
5. Gender	1. Male 2. Female	
6. Number of Dependents	Adults	
	Children	
7. Reason for destitution	See coding list	
8. Length of period of destitution	See coding list	
9. Where client slept last night	See coding list	
9a. Longest stay	Write in	
10. Other help	See coding list:	
11. NAM	When did you first claim asylum?	
	Have you been refused by case resolution/ legacy process? 1. Yes 2. No	
12. Outside Bradford	1. No 2. Yes	

Appendix 4 Survey Explanation Notes

1.Date of visit	Write the date of the client visit to your agency with a destitution problem. dd/mm/yy
2. First time surveyed	Is this is the first time you have taken part in the survey? • 1. Yes • 2. No If 'no' please answer question 2a.
2a. Where surveyed before	Where have you completed this survey previously? (code as many as needed) • Otherwise answer as many as appropriate: • 1. BAFR, • 2. Red Cross, • 3. Bevan House • 4. Beacon • 5. Abigail • 6. BIASAN Women's Group • 7. BIASAN Drop-in • 8. Other (please specify)
3. DoB	What is your date of birth? dd/mm/yy
4. Country	What is your country of origin?
5. Gender	Please indicate the client's gender: • 1. Male • 2. Female
6. Number of Dependents	Do you have a caring responsibility for any other person in the UK? Please indicate number of adults or children:
7. Reason for destitution	Why are you destitute? 1. Start of process - not yet applied for Section 95 (NASS) 2. Start of process - applied and waiting for Section 95 to begin 3. Start of process – and has been refused Section 95 4. NASS administrative error - support stopped during asylum process 5. Lost NASS support due to breach of conditions (e.g. absence, working illegally, alternative income) 6. End of process - not applied for Section 4 (unwilling; don't meet criteria; if age disputed please note this) 7. End of process - waiting for Section 4 support to begin 8. End of process - refused Section 4 9. Positive decision, but benefits/ housing delayed 10. Social Services - applied and waiting for social services support 11. Social Services - removed from social services support If the reason for destitution is not known by either the client or support worker, please record whether the client is: 12. Awaiting an asylum decision 13. End of process 14. Status unknown
8. Length of period of destitution	How long is it since you stopped receiving support? (What is their present period of destitution) Answer one only: 1. Less than 1 week 2. 1 to 2 weeks 3. 2 weeks to 1 month 4. 1 to 3 months 5. 3 to 6 months 6. 6 months to one year 7. 1 to 2 years

	8. Longer than 2 years 9. 3-5 Years 10. 5-10 Years
9. Where client slept last night	Are you willing to say where you slept last night? (Answer one only): 1. In own NASS accommodation 2. With family or friends 3. Outdoors (e.g. on street, park, in doorway) 4. Bus station or other public building 5. Homeless shelter 6. Accommodation provided by church, mosque or other faith group 7. Beacon, 8. Night Stop 9. Abigail 10. Hope Housing 11. LASSN Short Stop 12. Other 13. No response
9a. Longest Stay	Where have you stayed longest since becoming destitute - and for how long approximately?
10. Other help	Have you used any of the following during the survey period (11th June-13th July)? 1. Medical services: Doctor or Nurse 2. Places of worship: Church, Mosque etc. 3. Refugee agencies: BIASAN, Bradford Action for Refugees, Red Cross etc. (Code as many as needed)
11. NAM	When did you first claim asylum? Have you been refused by case resolution/ legacy process? 1. Yes 2. No
12. Outside Bradford	Have you previously or do you usually stay outside Bradford? 1. No 2. Yes


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