

**Crisis**

Together  
we will end  
homelessness

# **A HOME FOR ALL: UNDERSTANDING MIGRANT HOMELESSNESS IN GREAT BRITAIN**

**Executive Summary**

November 2019

Sophie Boobis, Ruth Jacob and Ben Sanders

## About us

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

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the key informants and Crisis Skylight staff who took their time to share and talk openly about their experiences with migrant homelessness, and to everyone across the statutory and voluntary sectors who took the time to complete the survey. Thanks also to Crisis colleagues for their help in developing this report, in particular Matt Downie, Francesca Albanese, Hannah Gousy, Jasmine Basran and Leah Miller.

### **Crisis head office**

66 Commercial Street  
London E1 6LT  
Tel: 0300 636 1967  
Fax: 0300 636 2012  
[www.crisis.org.uk](http://www.crisis.org.uk)  
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# Foreword

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

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

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

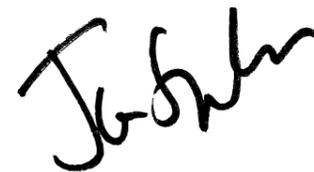
On a daily basis, we know that migrants experiencing homelessness can experience suspicion about their motives, being excluded from much of the available support, and experiencing threats of removal from the country.

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

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

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

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



Jon Sparkes  
**Chief Executive, Crisis**

# Executive summary

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

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

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

ensure that homelessness could be ended for good.

The migrant population in Great Britain are affected by the same socio-economic context as the general population. This includes problems related to low wage labour<sup>2</sup> and a lack of affordable housing. However, this is exacerbated by the conditions created by the immigration system. People who are homeless face the challenges of navigating multiple systems, including housing, welfare and the labour market. People experiencing homelessness who are not originally from the UK face many of the same challenges, but these can be compounded by their specific experiences, immigration status and associated entitlements. This can include being locked out of the support services that help people to navigate these systems and provide help with other issues they may be

facing, including complex trauma, mental health and substance misuse.<sup>3</sup>

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

## The scale of migrant homelessness

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

## Brexit and EEA national discrimination

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Support needs

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

### Next steps

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

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

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



**Crisis head office**

66 Commercial Street  
London E1 6LT

Tel: 0300 636 1967

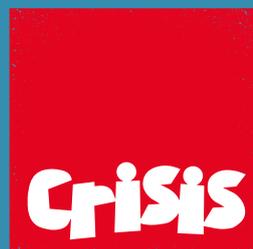
Fax: 0300 636 2012

[www.crisis.org.uk](http://www.crisis.org.uk)

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