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MIGRATION

POLICY & PRACTICE

MIGRANT SUPPORT:

CHALLENGES AND THE ROAD AHEAD

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FINDINGS AND THEMES

BUILDING TRUST

“I worry that my information is being shared with the Home Office, and I feel like they are monitoring me constantly.”

During the project period, it was noted that most of the asylum seekers are living with a fear of being monitored and that their activity is under strict observation, and they fear that their data is being shared with the Home Office and any other agencies. It took over three months to build trust with asylum seekers, enabling them to share their experiences without fear.

There was a clear need to provide seamless services in the hotels where immigrants were temporarily accommodated, allowing them to openly discuss their struggles or challenges without worrying that their information would be shared with the Home Office or any other government authorities.

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“With the help of those charities, we are getting basic information for everything.”

Many asylum seekers are reluctant to express their feelings because they fear their data might be disclosed to the Home Office. This lack of trust increases their vulnerability to mental health issues.

Regular meetings with partner organisations helped clarify each group's role, streamline referrals, and improve overall service coordination. This fear was found to be the main reason for mental health problems among asylum seekers living in the hotel. During the project period, it tried to bring awareness about these services among asylum seekers to bring that trust of support and help in them.

Most of the participants shared that charity organisations are helping them the most, and they trust their workers and share their feelings with them openly.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND SUPPORT

“Learning about mental health and its impact on me has been crucial in managing my stress and anger issues. I believe everyone should be aware of mental health issues and how to address them”

Many asylum seekers are often unaware of their mental health conditions and the impact these issues have on their overall well-being. It has become clear that there is a need to organise regular mental health awareness sessions for asylum seekers. Due to cultural definitions of mental health, many individuals do not understand the term or recognize which conditions fall under the umbrella of mental health. It took time to explain what the term means and that it is normal to discuss these issues with a professional.

Many asylum seekers mistakenly believe that mental health refers solely to mental instability associated with mental illness. There is a common myth among them that sharing any concerns about mental health could negatively affect their asylum application or be recorded in a way that would harm their future job opportunities.

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This persistent anxiety is significantly impacting my sleep. The prolonged asylum process requires a great deal of patience, which can be very frustrating at times.

Many asylum seekers are reluctant to discuss their mental health issues. As a result of stress, numerous asylum seekers experience sleeplessness and poor appetite. They often prefer to isolate themselves, remaining in their rooms and avoiding participation in activities

Cultural beliefs also play a role, as many men feel that discussing their stress and anxiety makes them seem weak. They believe that, as the heads of their families, they should bear all burdens without showing how it adversely affects their health.

A few asylum seekers mentioned that they consult their GPs and are taking medications for their issues, but they feel that these are not helping and consider them an unhealthy way to manage stress.

To address these challenges, it is suggested that awareness sessions about mental health be organised for asylum seekers. Introducing stress management and time management workshops in multiple languages could also be beneficial. Sessions aimed at raising awareness and providing guidance on managing stress, anxiety, and trauma have been initiated.

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Additionally, pregnant women and those experiencing domestic violence are found to be at a higher risk of mental distress, making urgent referrals and specialised support necessary. Language barriers and a lack of understanding regarding the asylum process were identified as significant challenges for these individuals.

The controlling behaviour of some staff members at various hotels has contributed to mental health issues, particularly among single males. The rude and uncooperative attitude of some staff has increased the stress and trauma experienced by asylum seekers, leaving them feeling hopeless while residing in hotels.

CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

“I need help dealing with my stress, but I worry that no one will understand my feelings or might misinterpret them, potentially leading to my children being taken away.”

Women with children often hesitate to discuss their mental health concerns due to the fear of losing custody of their children, stemming from the perception that they might be seen as unstable parents.

Children, especially those adjusting to living in hotels, often show signs of trauma, such as withdrawal and refusal to eat, which require specialised interventions. Families referred to charities offering mental health support have reported greater success in building healthy relationships with their children while living in temporary accommodations with limited resources.

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“*My daughter sometimes asks for different foods, but I can't afford anything right now. It's tough to help her understand our current situation.*”

There is a growing need to arrange special mental health sessions for both parents and children. Many parents feel guilty about putting their children in difficult situations, and this guilt can strain family relationships. Activities that promote family bonding and stress management, such as games and storytelling techniques, could be particularly effective for immigrants living in temporary accommodations with fewer resources.

Support from various charity organisations has proven helpful, and parents have expressed relief in securing school admissions for their children.

Many parents struggle with food-related issues, as their children find the unfamiliar tastes and menu options in hotels unappetizing. The strict meal timings often lead children to refuse the food served, and parents cannot afford to buy extra items. This situation has also contributed to feelings of depression among many parents.

MENTAL HEALTH DURING PREGNANCY

“*I am 8 months pregnant, and things are difficult for me here in the hotel. My bed is not comfortable; it gives me backache*”

Pregnant women and those who have experienced miscarriages face additional hardships, highlighting the need for more appropriate accommodations. The lack of basic facilities during pregnancy can lead to further mental health issues.

Pregnant women often require extra meals or healthy food options, but living in a hotel with strict mealtimes limits their ability to do so. They are also not allowed to take food to their rooms. The pressure of asylum decisions and limited resources can cause anxiety among many pregnant women, leading some to experience tragic outcomes, including abortions.

It was noted that women who gave birth while living in temporary accommodations often suffered from serious postpartum depression.

There is a pressing need to provide special care to those living in temporary accommodations. When possible, they should be offered additional healthy meal options to support their well-being.

AWARENESS OF ASYLUM PROCESSES

“*I don't know when I will receive asylum. It's been 8 months, and I am waiting for a decision on my application. This waiting is very stressful, and I have trouble sleeping because of it*”

Many asylum seekers lack awareness of UK immigration policies, asylum procedures, and timelines. One asylum refusal in a hotel caused significant anxiety among other residents, underscoring the need for improved communication and psychological support.

Additionally, many asylum seekers do not know how to respond to inquiries from the Home Office about their appeals or applications. Access to free legal services could alleviate stress for many, especially since financial constraints often prevent them from hiring solicitors.

Many asylum seekers experience considerable stress before their interviews and while awaiting responses from the Home Office. They require mental health support and legal assistance during this challenging time.

EXPERIENCES FROM DIFFERENT ROUTES

“*Throughout my travels, I have suffered multiple injuries, and the stress and trauma sometimes lead me to experience panic attacks*”

Individuals arriving via small boats often endure significant physical and psychological trauma, which necessitates counselling and specialised interventions. They face multiple challenges while residing in temporary accommodations. Many are traumatised or require special medical support due to their harrowing journeys and experiences crossing the UK border. As a result, they need dedicated trauma recovery sessions.

Survivors of domestic violence also require targeted healing sessions to recover from their trauma and related mental health concerns. Many in this group take anxiety medications and express dissatisfaction with the medical treatment they are receiving from the NHS. They often feel guilty, believing they are the cause of their family's disrespect, and some believe this marks the end of their life.

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The lingering fear of detention persists within me, leading to feelings of anxiety that disrupt my ability to sleep and eat

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Some individuals are from detention centres and live in fear of deportation, leading them to isolate themselves from others due to the fear of being judged and the shame they feel. They rarely share their feelings with anyone and need mental health support

IMPACT LINKED TO EDUCATION

“*I am a software engineer, and it is depressing to wait for my asylum application while doing nothing. I want to join any course or volunteer work related to my field.*”

Highly skilled asylum seekers face significant challenges due to prolonged inactivity while staying in hotels, which negatively affects their mental health. Many experience intense stress and depression, leading to a lack of motivation in their lives. There is a recognised need to arrange career guidance sessions and introduce the benefits of volunteering in the UK to help alleviate their mental stress.

In response to this situation, many asylum seekers have been directed toward skill training programs and volunteer opportunities to help them manage their stress. These initiatives have proven effective in promoting their integration and well-being, providing a constructive way to return to normal living while awaiting the outcome of their asylum applications.

LIFE IN THE UK

“Everything feels foreign to me—food, environment, people, places, and even the rules and regulations. Crossing the road and understanding the bus system were all challenges for me”

Many new arrivals find it challenging to become familiar with their new environment and life in the UK. Often, they feel a sense of shame that prevents them from asking questions or seeking help, leading them to isolate themselves in their rooms. This isolation can cause stress and anxiety.

The language barrier and cultural differences make it difficult for them to handle even basic tasks, putting additional pressure on them and negatively affecting their mental health and well-being.

Organising informal awareness sessions is essential to assist these new arrivals. These sessions can help them integrate into society without fear or shame.

In the Rowton Hotel, St. Chads Sanctuary organises city tours for asylum seekers and holds informal sessions for new arrivals, which have proven effective.

LEGAL SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

“*I don't have enough money to hire a personal solicitor. I don't know how I will protect my family from all the stress and trauma*”

Many individuals are suffering due to the lack of legal support available to them. Financial constraints mean they cannot afford to hire a personal solicitor. Single women often struggle to understand how to proceed with their asylum applications and how to appeal if rejected.

This creates significant fear regarding how to respond in their asylum interviews and what to do if their applications are refused. This is a major concern for most asylum seekers living in hotels.

Brushstrokes provided valuable assistance, helping residents of Rowton and Collection Hotels with interview preparation and guidance regarding asylum appeals. Many asylum seekers were referred to Brushstrokes and RMC for this support. .”

Legal support and guidance on the asylum process, including the timeline for each step, is crucial for individuals living in these temporary accommodations.

ADDRESSING ISOLATION

“I am alone; no one is from my country. The people around me have different habits and routines, and sometimes, I feel I don't belong here. This is bringing me down”

Participants from countries without compatriots often felt isolated and faced various fears. Coupled with language barriers, this isolation led to experiences of depression and mental health issues due to their inability to communicate and connect with others from different cultures.

Whilst individuals from the same country and background tend to support each other while living in the hotel, those from countries with no one else present often feel very alone and experience heightened stress and anxiety.

Due to cultural differences and language barriers, many struggle to make friends. Many avoid participating in activities for fear of being judged by others and often choose to remain in their rooms.

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

“*This affects me deeply, I don't want to live in a hotel.*”

Several participants shared their experiences of domestic violence, both before and during their asylum journey. These individuals emphasised the urgent need for specialised psychological support to help them address their trauma and support their mental health recovery.

Many women live in fear of being harmed or killed by their husbands or partners. They reported experiencing threats and abuse through phone calls and messages. Unfortunately, they often do not know how to navigate their situation or where to seek help. Most are enduring significant stress and trauma, which affects their mental health and, in some cases, the well-being of their children as well.

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It was observed that women were generally more comfortable discussing their situations compared to men. Some men living in hotels also experienced domestic violence but were reluctant to share their reasons for stress due to fear of shame.

Cultural practices lead many individuals to feel ashamed of disclosing their experiences of domestic violence. They fear that by sharing their situation, their husbands' families may retaliate and harm their own families back home.

There is a clear need for specialised awareness and counselling sessions to educate individuals about UK laws regarding domestic violence and the protections available to them.

DIGNITY THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

“*I want to do a job now—anything that makes me feel like I am not a useless being. I want to prove myself and live a dignified life again*”

Several participants expressed a strong desire to work and contribute to society. They emphasised that employment would help restore their sense of dignity and self-worth, allowing them to regain control over their lives. Although they understood that they were not allowed to work during the asylum application process, many found this restriction to be quite depressing.

They felt fully dependent on the benefits and support they received, which were often insufficient to meet their basic needs, especially for families with children and individuals with medical requirements.

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To support these individuals, it would be beneficial to offer various skills training and sessions to help them develop their CVs and prepare for job interviews. Many would greatly benefit from career guidance on how to explore different opportunities while waiting for their regularised status.

Currently, there are very few activities available to keep them occupied throughout the day. They want to use their time constructively.

ELDERLY ASYLUM SEEKERS

“*At this age, it is very hard to live like this. My bed is not comfortable for me. I can't use the stairs due to arthritis*”

Older participants reported various difficulties related to their age, including discomfort with hotel beds, mobility issues due to arthritis, and the lack of lifts in buildings. They shared feelings of helplessness and increased physical strain, which compounded their mental health challenges.

Elderly asylum seekers are often overlooked and feel especially vulnerable and are struggling with mental health issues. Many spend their time in their rooms, feeling isolated and distressed. They face multiple challenges, including language barriers, fear of getting lost if they go outside, and difficulties digesting the food provided at the hotel.

It could be beneficial to provide them with ground-level accommodations or rooms equipped with lift access. Introducing specific activities for this demographic or connecting them with charities that offer social care for older adults might help them feel more integrated and supported among peers their age.

QUANTITY OF FOOD

“We have the same food every day, which is full of oil and salt, and it’s not good.”

Many asylum seekers have expressed concerns about the food provided in hotels. They report that the meals are unfamiliar to them, which is significantly affecting their well-being.

Some asylum seekers are facing health issues that make it difficult for them to eat the daily meals served. This includes elderly individuals, pregnant women with high blood pressure and diabetes, and those who have recently undergone surgery.

In male accommodations, there were complaints about the portion sizes being too small. Those who ask for more food report being treated poorly and sometimes abused. This has led to feelings of shame and low self-esteem, as many feel hesitant to request additional food.

It is suggested that the food portions be revisited and increased to ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

“*Volunteering has not only occupied my time but has also allowed me to learn about the official setup in the UK. It has been a rewarding experience*”

Many asylum seekers experience significant stress while waiting for decisions regarding their applications. In some cases, it can take a considerable amount of time to receive a response from the Home Office. Those who engage in volunteer work tend to be more active and lead healthier lives compared to those who are passively waiting for their asylum decisions.

Many asylum seekers have expressed a desire for awareness sessions about job opportunities in the UK. They seek guidance on how to prepare for job interviews and to write CVs.

Several individuals feel challenged in securing employment in the UK, despite their professional backgrounds, as they are unfamiliar with the UK CV format and interview preparation processes. They want to utilize the waiting period during which they are allowed to work constructively by learning how to apply for jobs.

KEY SUMMARY

- **TRUST BUILDING:** FEAR OF SURVEILLANCE DISCOURAGES ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM SEEKING SUPPORT. CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS PLAY A KEY ROLE IN FOSTERING TRUST.
- **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS:** MANY ASYLUM SEEKERS LACK KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH, AND CULTURAL BARRIERS PREVENT THEM FROM SEEKING HELP. AWARENESS SESSIONS AND SUPPORT SERVICES ARE ESSENTIAL.
- **FAMILIES AND CHILDREN:** PARENTS HESITATE TO SHARE THEIR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES DUE TO FEARS OF LOSING CUSTODY, WHILE CHILDREN FACE TRAUMA IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATIONS. THERE IS A NEED FOR FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND FLEXIBLE MEAL OPTIONS.
- **PREGNANT WOMEN:** POOR LIVING CONDITIONS EXACERBATE STRESS AND LEAD TO NEGATIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES. SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS AND NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT ARE REQUIRED.
- **LEGAL AWARENESS:** MANY ASYLUM SEEKERS STRUGGLE WITH ASYLUM PROCEDURES, LEADING TO ANXIETY. FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE CAN HELP ALLEVIATE THEIR CONCERNS.

KEY SUMMARY

- **TRAUMA FROM JOURNEY AND VIOLENCE:** ASYLUM SEEKERS ARRIVING THROUGH DANGEROUS ROUTES OR FLEEING VIOLENCE REQUIRE TRAUMA RECOVERY SERVICES.
- **SKILLED ASYLUM SEEKERS:** PROLONGED INACTIVITY CAN LEAD TO MENTAL DISTRESS. CAREER GUIDANCE AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS CAN HELP ALLEVIATE THIS ISSUE.
- **INTEGRATION INTO THE UK:** CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS OFTEN CONTRIBUTE TO ISOLATION. INFORMAL SESSIONS AND CITY TOURS CAN ASSIST NEWCOMERS IN ADJUSTING TO LIFE IN THE UK.
- **EXPANDING CAREER GUIDANCE:** IMPROVING ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT PREPARATION AND PROVIDING CAREER GUIDANCE AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES FOR SKILLED ASYLUM SEEKERS CAN SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE, MENTAL HEALTH, AND WELL-BEING.
- **SOCIAL INTEGRATION:** ORGANISING INFORMAL AWARENESS SESSIONS IS CRUCIAL TO SUPPORT SOCIAL INTEGRATION, ESPECIALLY FOR INDIVIDUALS FROM COUNTRIES WHERE THEY MAY NOT HAVE COMPATRIOTS. A SENSE OF ISOLATION CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH.

KEY SUMMARY

- **SUPPORT FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS:** IT IS ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDE TAILORED SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.
- **SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY:** ENHANCING ACCOMMODATIONS AND SUPPORT FOR ELDERLY ASYLUM SEEKERS IS NECESSARY FOR THEIR WELL-BEING.
- **CULTURALLY SENSITIVE NEEDS:** OFFERING CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SERVICES IS IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS VARIOUS RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL NEEDS.
- **FOOD-RELATED ISSUES:** MANY ASYLUM SEEKERS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERNS REGARDING FOOD QUALITY, VARIETY, AND PORTION SIZES. IMPROVING THESE ASPECTS COULD GREATLY BENEFIT THEIR OVERALL EXPERIENCE.

FURTHER INFORMATION

WEBSITE:

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