Routes into London’s homelessness services: The experiences of A8 nationals

October 2007
About Broadway

Broadway is one of London’s leading homelessness charities, working to ensure that every single person finds and keeps a home. We recognise people’s individuality and address their all-round mental, physical and social needs. We provide services to over 3,000 single adults every year who are at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness.

We work in 12 of London’s boroughs providing services that cater for people at each stage of homelessness. We work in partnership with over 125 agencies to build capacity to meet the needs of homeless people and push forward the boundaries of good practice.

Broadway’s Research Team

Broadway's research projects focus on improving and developing services for homeless and vulnerably housed people. They are aimed at practitioners and policy makers with a view to developing effective, quality services and promoting best practice. The team uses a range of methodologies including workshops, focus groups, interviews and surveys.

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1 Summary

This report identifies common themes in experiences of A8 nationals accessing homelessness services in London. Thirty-two people were interviewed across five homelessness agencies. Interviews focused on experiences of finding work, accommodation and support in the UK.

Headlines

- A8 nationals face a cycle of interrelated barriers when trying to access accommodation, work and support, i.e. the need to know about the process of getting work in the UK to secure employment, the need for a job to afford accommodation, and the need for an address to get a bank account.¹

- Lack of English language ability was seen as the principal barrier for integrating into life in the UK as it prevents people from accessing work, accommodation and support.

- A lack of clear, official advice on where to go for support and information was a key theme in responses.

- Not all participants understood the long-term implications of failing to register on the Workers Registration Scheme and of working illegally, i.e. problems accessing employment rights and entitlement to benefits.

- All participants were currently living in squats or sleeping rough and many were moving between the two.

- The majority of participants were ready as well as willing to work. Many were skilled and had qualifications to work in a variety of industries. However, several needed to translate documents for employers or found that their qualifications were not equivalent to similar qualifications in the UK. The majority of participants had worked illegally in the UK at some point.

- The majority of those interviewed planned to stay in the UK for the next few years - with some intending to settle more permanently and others planning to move to another country or return home in the future.

- Homelessness agencies were the main source of support for all participants.

- Participants reported that overall, experience of living in the UK is difficult, however many said the quality of life was still better than in their home country.

¹ At the time of publication it was possible to open a bank account without an address and Lloyds TSB has an account which can be opened without a passport or national ID card.
Respondent profile

Twenty-seven men and five women took part in the study. The majority of participants were aged between twenty-six and forty-five. Seven of the A8 countries were represented in the research. Twelve participants had been in the UK less than one year and twenty had been in the UK over one year at the time of the study.

Moving to the UK

Reasons for moving - The main factors driving people to move to the UK were to look for work and to earn more money, and for a higher standard of living than in their own country.

Prior knowledge about the UK - The majority of participants did not try to find out about life in the UK before moving. Of those that did, the main source of information was family or friends who had previously lived or were currently living in the UK.

Expectations of work - The majority of those that had not secured work before arriving said they planned on looking for work. They expected to find work quickly and easily, and there to be more work opportunities than in their country.

Expectations of accommodation - The majority planned to stay with family or friends or in private rented accommodation on arrival. Those that had not arranged accommodation tied to work planned to stay with family or friends temporarily until they found work and could afford their own place. Those with no plans had either spontaneously decided to go to the UK or said they knew it would be difficult and were expecting ‘the worst’ and staying on the streets was an accepted consequence of migration.

Living in the UK

Accommodation

Arrival in the UK - The majority of participants either stayed with friends and family or slept rough when they first arrived in the UK.

Housing - All participants are currently living in squats or sleeping rough with the majority moving between the two. Most of the participants have moved between several different forms of housing since arriving in the UK.

Overcrowding - Twelve participants reported that they had stayed in overcrowded conditions in the UK. Sharing rooms was commonly reported by people living in accommodation attached to work, and those in squats and private rented accommodation.

Tied accommodation - Six participants secured accommodation tied to work, through an agency before moving to the UK. Three arrived to find they had been conned and as a result they lost the money paid to the agency; two found the work was illegal and conditions for both work and accommodation were poor; and only one found official work tied to satisfactory accommodation on arrival. Those in accommodation tied to illegal work were those who felt least secure as they found it difficult to demand rights from their employer and landlord.
**Moves** - The vast majority of the moves between accommodation the participants made were due to necessity rather than choice, e.g. moving as a result of losing income from employment or losing tied accommodation.

**The reality of accommodation in the UK** - The majority of participants did not find the accommodation in the UK as they expected. Many said it was more expensive than they had anticipated and they thought the conditions would have been better.

**Work and skills**

**Work** - Twenty-nine of the thirty-two participants had worked since being in the UK. The majority had experienced irregular and insecure working conditions. Most had not registered on the WRS and were therefore not progressing towards full benefit entitlements and rights to homelessness assistance.

**Legal status** - Twenty-two interviewees had worked illegally, four had worked legally but it was not possible to ascertain the working status of three participants. Of the four participants who had worked legally three had also worked illegally. So three quarters of participants confirmed that they had, at some point, worked illegally in the UK.

**Sources of referral** - The main method participants used to find out about work available was word of mouth, particularly through friends, other people from their home country, other people living in squats or on the street, and people in and around Victoria coach station.

**Skills** - Thirteen participants had a professional qualification. Many reported qualifications gained in their home country were not transferable to the UK or that they still needed to translate documentary evidence of qualifications for them to be recognised in the UK. The majority of participants who had training and qualifications in a specific industry would like to work in that area while in the UK.

**Barriers** - The main barrier to finding and securing work was language - the majority of participants reported their English to be poor. The next most commonly reported barrier was lack of information. Areas where information was not easily available were:

- where to access help and information about the process of working in the UK
- what documents are required for work
- where to get required documents
- where to find work

A lack of clear, official advice on where to go for support and information is a theme running throughout this study.

**The reality of work in the UK** - Interviewees acknowledged there are more work opportunities in the UK than in their home country, however the barriers faced prevented many participants from finding work quickly and easily. Many reported incidents of employers taking advantage of staff - particularly if the work was illegal. The majority of participants did not like the type of work they were doing but needed to work to survive, and were willing to take any work available. Participants regularly found themselves in situations where they could not negotiate legal status, pay or conditions for fear of losing their job.
Support and information

Sources of support – Participants’ main support networks were staff from homeless agencies, people from their home country (the majority being homeless) and other homeless people (many from other A8 countries).

Support needs - Participants required support in:

- finding work
- accessing accommodation
- English language
- understanding processes relating to working in the UK

A number of participants said that not being able to speak, read or write in English was the main barrier in accessing work, accommodation, advice and guidance, and health support and therefore was their greatest support need.

Loss of identification – Losing passports or personal identification had a negative impact on participants’ search for accommodation and work. Replacing identification is time consuming and expensive. The lack of identification affected several participants’ ability to complete the documents required for work, access work and complete other administrative activities such as opening a bank account. Consequently some interviewees found they were unable to work legally and were forced into illegal work to raise the money to replace lost or stolen passports, or to sustain living in the UK without identification.

Integrating and settling into life in the UK

Experience in the UK

Expectations – Participants reported that overall their experiences of living in the UK were difficult due to the barriers faced in finding work, accommodation and accessing support. Although the UK was not all that some participants expected, many said the quality of life was still better than in their home country and the support received from the homelessness agencies made their experience of the UK more positive than it would have been without this support.

Drugs and alcohol - Three participants said they had long term alcohol problems prior to arriving in the UK and two had started drinking heavily due to the circumstances they found themselves in since being in the UK. Drink and drugs were seen to be an important factor in preventing A8 nationals living successfully in the UK and escaping unemployment and homelessness.

Links with home - A number of participants had or planned to support their families back in their home country financially while living in the UK.

Several participants reported feeling ashamed of the situation they found themselves in while being in the UK and consequently some were no longer in touch with family or had not told them of their situation in the UK.

Interviewees frequently reported links with their home country through socialising and receiving support from other people living in the UK from their home country.
Future plans

Interviewees’ future plans included:

- settling in the UK long term
- staying in the UK to save money then returning to their home country
- staying in the UK for a couple of years and to then move to another country
- getting work and accommodation in the UK and ‘waiting and seeing’ if their situation improved.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the British Government:

1. Review the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) and take steps to ensure that this, and any future systems for registration, are as clear, transparent and accessible as possible for migrant workers.

2. Provide A8 nationals with clear advice and support on arrival in the UK to aid initial orientation. Information is needed on finding work, the housing market and other areas including access to health care. Orientation packs in community languages could provide this information. These should be distributed as close to arrival points as possible and would be a useful resource for homelessness agencies. A community language information and advice line for those who need further assistance could be provided and publicised in any orientation / signposted to by agencies working with A8 nationals.

3. Work with the European Union and the new EU members to raise awareness of the realities and risks people might face when moving to a new country, ensuring that people have access to information on which to base a decision about migrating and where appropriate to prepare for a successful move.

4. Ensure that research and policy work regarding hidden homelessness and overcrowding considers A8 nationals, as they are a key group experiencing these conditions.

Recommendations for the European Union:

5. Develop a campaign to raise awareness of the realities and risks of migration from A8 countries to other parts of Europe. Information about what factors lead to successful or unsuccessful migration should be included in campaign materials. Case studies from research could be included to illustrate problems faced by a small but significant proportion of migrant workers.

Recommendations for the Embassies of the A8 countries:

6. Support nationals without the means to support themselves in the UK by assisting with return to their home country where appropriate.

7. Consider helping nationals who fall on difficult times by providing access to hardship funds and temporary respite accommodation.
8. Recognise the contributions A8 nationals have previously contributed through taxes in their home country when supporting them though embassies in the UK.

9. Regulate employment agencies where possible to ensure that they meet basic standards, and create recognised standards/branded codes of practice to enable agencies to publicise their adherence to government backed schemes. Provide potential migrant workers with a list of legal and reputable employment agencies and means to report poor practice.

Recommendations for **Homelessness agencies**:

10. Collate monitoring data relating to A8 nationals to demonstrate the need for services amongst this group.

11. Be clear on the role of homelessness agencies and take steps to manage expectations of A8 nationals, ensuring people understand what services they can and cannot receive and why this is.

12. Provide access to training and information for staff working with A8 nationals in the following areas:

   a. Awareness of workers’ rights, exploitation and what A8 clients should expect from employers in the UK. An example is Homeless Link’s ‘Working with clients from the new EU member states’ training.

   b. Awareness of the cultural needs of A8 nationals and how these may differ from other clients staff are working with.

13. Provide a crisis intervention service to assist A8 nationals in dealing with problems such as loss of passports and other documents, which can be resolved quickly and can make a huge difference to an individual’s chances of successfully securing legal employment and avoiding homelessness.

14. Recognise there is a lack of knowledge and experience of working with people from A8 countries within the homelessness sector. Develop partnerships with organisations from A8 countries such as the BARKA Foundation and interpreting services.
2 Introduction

In May 2004 the European Union expanded to include ten new countries. Limitations were placed on entitlement to public funds for citizens of eight of the ten accession states (known as A8 nationals) – Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The vast majority of those who have come to the UK have found work, accommodation and a place in the community. However, “a small but significant number of A8 nationals are turning to homelessness services for help” (Homeless Link: 2006), indicating that some are finding it difficult to successfully settle.

In response to anecdotal reports from member agencies, Homeless Link conducted a survey of the extent to which A8 nationals were using homelessness services in London. This was published in September 2006. Of the 43 services who responded 15% of client contacts were with A8 nationals. Homeless Link has followed up recommendations from the survey at a meeting with government and consulate officials.

In September 2006 a seminar was held in London to discuss the policy response of homelessness agencies working with A8 nationals. This was funded by the Ashden Trust and facilitated by Lemos and Crane. The seminar highlighted key issues and challenges for homelessness agencies in working with this client group, and that this is not only an issue for London but also one for other areas of the UK. Following the seminar, Lemos and Crane have produced guidance for homelessness agencies in working with A8 nationals. This has been published on the SupportActionNet website.

To further understand why A8 nationals are presenting at homelessness services, and progress work towards responding to this issue most effectively, the Ashden Trust funded Broadway to conduct a short research project. The focus of this study was to be qualitative research with A8 nationals to establish the story of their route into these services. The study was designed to link to and follow on from the Homeless Link survey and other research to date, with the aim of generating new information based on the views and experiences of A8 nationals.
3 Aims and objectives

Aim

The aim of the research is to determine why A8 nationals are accessing homelessness services. The project will identify the experiences that are leading some A8 nationals to turn to these services for assistance. It aims to provide further evidence and understanding of both client groups that are identified in the Homeless Link survey as accessing homelessness services:

- A8 nationals who require homelessness services due to support needs
- A8 nationals with low or no support needs who access homelessness services.

Achieving this aim will provide greater understanding of the needs of A8 nationals and how these can best be met. The focus will be on the former group whose support needs mean that they require a homelessness service. In addition, the experiences and needs of those with low or no support needs will also be covered. This information can be used to inform discussions on what action should be taken by whom to better support A8 nationals for the benefit of all.

Objectives

To achieve this aim the research will:

- Conduct qualitative research with A8 nationals.

Outcomes

The research results will:

- Provide clarity on the extent of current knowledge about A8 nationals accessing homelessness services by reviewing secondary data
- Inform approaches to managing EU expansion so that the positives are maximised – by providing new information on the needs of A8 nationals and how these can be met
- Promote good practice in effective working with A8 nationals via recommendations for next steps in improving service provision, including joint working
- Highlight the need for agencies to collate data relating to A8 nationals to enable effective monitoring and help demonstrate the need and demand for support services
4 Research design

The 32 interviews for the research were conducted over two weeks in March 2007.

Methodology

The study takes a qualitative approach to explore the routes of participants from A8 countries into homelessness services and their experiences of living in the UK.

Interviewers encouraged participants to relay all relevant details of their experience of migrating to the UK. When helpful, during interviews a calendar was used as a tool to aid participants in accurately recalling their experiences since arriving in the UK. Interviews included structured questions to ensure that basic factual information was collected, as well as open questions to enable individuals to tell their story of life in the UK. At the end of the interview participants had the opportunity to add final comments or views on their experiences.

The main themes covered by the interviews in the study were:

- reasons for migrating to the UK
- prior knowledge about the UK
- expectations on arrival
- accommodation in the UK
- work in the UK
- support needs
- sources of support
- help received
- barriers to getting help
- links with home country
- integration
- future plans

Agroni, an independent research company with extensive specialist knowledge of and experience in working with ethnic minorities was commissioned to assist Broadway with the research. All Agroni interviewers were from one of the A8 countries and therefore it was possible to conduct the interviews in people’s own language.

Sample

Thirty-two A8 nationals were interviewed across London in day centres run by five different homelessness agencies across three London Boroughs. To ensure that the sample was balanced the following criteria were applied to the sample:

- conduct a minimum of thirty qualitative interviews
- include a minimum of three different homelessness organisations
- include homelessness organisations in different areas of London
- include representatives from a minimum of four of the A8 countries
- include a maximum of 5 females
- to ensure that half the sample to have been in the UK less than a year and half over a year
• to ensure that 65% are aged between 25 and 45 years of age
• to ensure a mixture of:
  o vulnerable people with support needs who are part of homelessness agencies usual client group
  o people with low/no support needs who are not part of homelessness agencies usual client group but are accessing their services

The above sampling criteria were developed from the profile of A8 nationals accessing homelessness organisation in London as identified in the Homeless Link 2006 survey.

Table one provides a summary of the services interviewees were accessing, the boroughs the services were based in and the country and gender of interviewees.

**Table 1: Sample group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homeless project</th>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>A8 countries represented</th>
<th>Number of clients interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Centre, Broadway</td>
<td>Hammersmith and Fulham</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>4 male, 2 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Vincent's Centre, The Passage</td>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>Estonia, Latvia, Poland</td>
<td>5 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dellow Centre, Providence Row</td>
<td>Tower Hamlets</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>3 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester Row, Salvation Army</td>
<td>Westminster</td>
<td>Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Czech Republic</td>
<td>13 male, 1 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Upper Room</td>
<td>Hammersmith and Fulham</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>2 male, 2 female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Background – a review of existing information

European Expansion

In May 2004 the European Union expanded to include ten new countries. Limitations were placed on entitlement to public funds for citizens of eight of the ten accession states – migrants from these countries are known as A8 nationals. The eight countries are

- Czech Republic
- Estonia
- Hungary
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Poland
- Slovakia
- Slovenia

The UK, Ireland and Sweden were the only European countries to allow A8 nationals free access to their job markets. Other European countries applied work permit systems under transitional arrangements. The European Union allowed transitional measures for an initial period of 2 years after which member states had to inform the European Commission of whether they intended to continue or amend their regulations regarding free movement.

The initial 2 year period ended in April 2006 and additional countries decided to lift restrictions. These include Greece, Finland, Portugal and Spain. France intends to lift restrictions gradually.

UK context

The UK government limited A8 nationals entitlements to social provisions such as social housing and benefits. At the same time it also introduced the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) for A8 nationals employed in the UK.

Workers from the A8 countries in the UK must apply to the Workers Registration Scheme within a month of commencing employment. There are some exceptions to this rule such as self-employed people and those who were already working legally in the UK prior to 2004. To obtain the right of residence in the UK and entitlement to income related benefits, such as job seekers allowance, they must remain in registered employment for a continuous 12 months. Anyone who loses or leaves their job has 30 days to find alternative employment and re-register for the employment to be seen as continuous.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of A8 nationals in the UK using WRS statistics because not everyone registers on it. This was illustrated in a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which found that 64% of 217 A8 national respondents had not registered.²

Destitution

A small but significant proportion of migrants from A8 countries are ending up homeless and destitute in London\(^3\). This is where the greatest impact has been felt however research in Norwich and Great Yarmouth\(^4\), Slough and Peterborough\(^5\), and Edinburgh\(^6\) show this is something not confined to London. Individuals in this group can drift into squatting, rough sleeping and street drinking\(^7\). Many A8 nationals have limited entitlement to public funds and those who fail to find accommodation or work are not entitled to housing benefit. Because hostels generally depend on Housing Benefit, they are often unable to accept such people. Voluntary day centres and night shelters can provide support as they are not as dependent on public funds.

Accessing services for homeless people

In the first week of March 2006, Homeless Link conducted a snapshot survey\(^8\) to identify the prevalence of A8 nationals in London’s homelessness services and explore agencies’ experiences of working with them.

The survey obtained information from 43 front line services with a response rate of 64%. Of a total of 4,365 client contacts 638 (15%) were A8 nationals. Over 89% of these were attending day centres. In some agencies this accounted for less than 5% of clients, but in some it was over half. They found that A8 clients were male and older than the average A8 migrant (compared to those registered on the WRS) and that 40% had spent over a year in the UK and almost two-thirds were unemployed. Where their accommodation status was recorded, the majority of clients were sleeping rough (53%) or living in squats (27%). Between 40 and 45% were assessed as needing emotional support or having alcohol or mental health issues and 28% were recorded as misusing drugs. Almost a quarter of respondents also highlighted concerns around exploitation in employment.

Support needs

The Homeless Link survey also asked agency respondents an open question about other issues for concern specifically related to A8 clients. The question was not able to uncover the prevalence of particular issues but highlighted areas of concern, these were:

- Exploitation in employment
- Poor living conditions
- Lack of services that can be accessed for those with ‘no resource to public funds’
- Incidents of violence or crime

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\(^3\) Homeless Link (2006) A8 nationals in London homelessness services.

\(^4\) Saint Martins Housing Trust (November 2006) Research into the housing and welfare needs of European workers in Norfolk.


\(^6\) Scottish Executive (February 2007) A community profile of EU8 Migrants in Edinburgh. An evaluation of their access to key services.

\(^7\) Audit Commission (January 2007) Crossing borders. Responding to the local challenges of migrant workers.

\(^8\) Homeless Link (2006) A8 nationals in London homelessness services.
• Inadequate food
• Insecure employment
• Lack of recognition of qualifications gained in the home country
• Difficulties in accessing bank accounts
• Prejudice against A8 nationals
• Lack of ID and official records e.g. lost or stolen
• Language – lack of English classes and impact of language barriers on the ability of services to assess support.

It was not in the scope of research to interview individual A8 nationals to gain a greater understanding of their needs and subsequently one of the recommendations of the report was to undertake further research as a matter of urgency to identify the needs of homeless A8 nationals in London and elsewhere.

Research with migrant workers from A8 countries

To date little qualitative research has been done on the experiences and perceptions of migrants from Eastern Europe working in the UK\textsuperscript{9}. Neither has there been much focus on people from the countries who recently joined the EU. One piece of work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation\textsuperscript{10} which looked at the experiences of Central and Eastern Europeans in the UK found that migrants’ experiences at work, including low pay and long working hours, had a significant impact on their lives beyond the workplace. It also found a lack of practical information on arrival left many migrants ignorant of the conditions attached to their immigration status, how to access health care, where to obtain advice and their rights at work. English language proficiency was a key factor in whether migrants had received the information they needed and the extent of their social contact with British people.

Another report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation focusing on East European immigration and community cohesion found that generally the immigrants interviewed were in the UK to work and had been very successful in finding employment, but in low-paid work with limited occupational mobility. When asked about ‘sense of belonging’, only a minority of immigrants felt they belonged to their neighbourhood and that the sense of belonging was positively affected by better housing status, length of time in the UK, plans to stay in the UK and having children living with them.

Little is known about the experiences of migrants from the Accession countries who are accessing homelessness services. There is work that has included experiences of homeless A8 nationals such as that by the Audit Commission\textsuperscript{11} and the Von Hugel Institute\textsuperscript{12} however, this group has not been the focus.

Research has been undertaken about the experiences and needs of A8 nationals using homeless services in Edinburgh\textsuperscript{13} and in the Great Norwich Region and Great

\textsuperscript{9} COMPAS (May 2006) Fair Enough? Central and East European migrants in low-wage employment in the UK.
\textsuperscript{10} Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007) Migrants’ lives beyond the workplace: the experiences of Central and East Europeans in the UK.
\textsuperscript{11} Audit Commission (January 2007) Crossing Borders: responding to the local challenges of migrant workers.
\textsuperscript{12} Von Hugel Institute, St Edmunds College, Cambridge (2007) The Ground of Justice. The report of a pastoral enquiry into the needs of migrants in London’s Catholic Community.
\textsuperscript{13} Scottish Executive (February 2007) A community profile of EU8 Migrants in Edinburgh. An evaluation of their access to key services.
Yarmouth\textsuperscript{14}. Both explored reasons for moving, future intentions, types of employment and access routes into accommodation. The main finding of the Scottish Executive research was that the difference between those that successfully integrated and those that had not was their employment and accommodation experiences. In particular it found that those that had not integrated successfully and that were found in homelessness services had:

- greater difficulty speaking English
- lack or preparation and knowledge about living in UK
- insufficient funds on arrival
- lower level of education attainment
- lack of information on housing, employment and living conditions in Edinburgh

\textbf{Bulgaria and Romania}

On 1 January 2007 the European Union expanded by two more members when Romania and Bulgaria joined - this added almost 30 million people to the EU population\textsuperscript{15}. On this day the first Romanians and Bulgarians flew into UK airports exercising their right of free movement within the EU. Unlike the 2004 expansion of the EU, Romanian and Bulgarian citizens are prevented from working in the UK unless in seasonal agricultural employment, a small number of skilled jobs or if they are self-employed\textsuperscript{16}.

The current situation of A8 nationals accessing homelessness services in the UK is placing limited resources under strain and risks creating an increase in rough sleeping. Homeless Link are lobbying the Government to recognise and take urgent action as they believe these problems will become more widespread and more difficult to tackle with the further expansion of the EU. Indeed anecdotal discussions with homelessness services shows that nationals from Bulgaria and Romania are presenting at homelessness services and some are appearing on CHAIN\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{14} Saint Martins Housing Trust (November 2006) Research into the housing and welfare needs of European workers in Norfolk.
\textsuperscript{15} Homeless Link (January 2007) Romanian and Bulgarian nationals rights in the UK Homeless Link briefing.
\textsuperscript{16} Homeless Link (January 2007) Romanian and Bulgarian nationals rights in the UK Homeless Link briefing.
\textsuperscript{17} CHAIN is a database containing details of individuals, assessments of their needs, contacts and interventions. It is compiled by agencies in London that work with those rough sleeping or engaging in other street activities, managed by Broadway and funded by the CLG.
6 Profile of participants

Gender and age

Twenty-seven men and five women took part in the interviews. This reflects the profile of those identified in the Homeless Link survey which showed the majority of A8 clients accessing homelessness services being male, with one in ten being female.

The average age of participants was 37, with the youngest being 25 and the oldest being 57 years of age. The majority of A8 clients identified as accessing homelessness services in the Homeless Link survey were aged between 25 and 45 years of age and this corresponds to the age profile of participants in this research as shown in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Age groups of participants

![Age groups of participants chart](chart.jpg)

Country of origin

Seven of the eight accession countries were represented in the research with the majority being from Poland as shown in figure 2. This is similar to the profile of A8 nationals accessing homelessness services identified by the Homeless Link survey which showed a slightly higher proportion of Poles accessing homelessness services than other A8 nationals when compared to the country profile of those registered on the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS).
Figure 2: Country of origin of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slovak</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Lithuania</td>
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<td>Latvia</td>
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<td>Hungary</td>
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<td>Estonia</td>
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<td>Czech Republic</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time in the UK

Participants’ length of time in the UK ranged from 3 weeks to 22 years with the majority having been in the UK for over one year at the time of the study (see figure 3 below).

Figure 3: Time in the UK of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Time</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 month</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 6 months</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 12 months</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 months to 2 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 2 years</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the Homeless Link survey, if they had been employed and registered on the WRS many would now be qualified for benefits when out of work. However as will be shown later, the majority have had irregular and insecure working conditions, and have not registered on the WRS to allow them to build up towards full benefit entitlements and rights to homelessness assistance.
7  Moving to the UK

*Reasons for moving to the UK*

The main factor driving people to move to the UK, as reported by fourteen participants, was to look for work and to earn more money than they had in the country they arrived from. Nine people said they wanted a higher standard of living than in their home country; six were unable to find work in the country they came from; five were encouraged by friends and from hearing stories of people’s experiences in the UK; and five had no family in their home country to keep them there. In summary the reasons participants gave for moving to the UK were:

- to look for work and to earn more money
- for a higher standard of living / in search of a better life
- unable to find work in the country arrived from
- encouraged by friends / hearing stories of people’s experiences in the UK
- no family ties in home country

Five participants reported that they had previously lived abroad and visited a number of countries on their way to the UK and intended to stay for a couple of years in the UK and then to visit other countries in the future.

Financial reasons and a lack of jobs at home were some of the most cited reasons for moving to the UK. In addition a number of people referred indirectly to money-orientated motivations such as “higher standard of living” and “professional development”. Other reasons for migration included:

- Personal problems (such as family conflict)
- Curiosity
- Easy to get to / no work permits required.

Four participants said they had not planned to move to the UK but that it was a spontaneous decision; one had been drinking heavily when they bought their ticket.
Reasons for moving to the UK

"I have nothing back home, no house, not even a fence."

"One day I woke up and decided to leave. I couldn't stand my wife's mother complaining all the time any longer."

"I left Poland in 1982. Before that I lived in several different countries like Thailand, Netherlands, Turkey … This is my 22nd country that I am visiting."

"I have heard a lot about England and wanted to see it with my own eyes."

"I couldn't find work as a nurse in the town I was in because there was only one hospital. As I had to move somewhere I decided that I would move abroad again."

Prior knowledge about the UK

The majority of participants did not try to find out about life in the UK before moving. Of the twenty-eight participants who responded eleven sought information prior to moving to the UK whereas seventeen did not.

Of those that had tried to find out about life in the UK (such as work, accommodation, cost of living and the culture) the main source of information was family or friends who had previously lived or were currently living in the UK.

Those that did not try to find out information about life in the UK before moving generally reported one or more of the following:

- that they were relying on general information picked up through television, radio, newspapers, and history or geography lessons from school
- that they felt secure because accommodation and work was organised in the UK
- that they had previous experience in the UK (through work or holidays)
- that they didn’t have time to find out more because it was a spontaneous decision to move

Those that had secured work and accommodation showed that they had prepared somewhat to move to the UK however, of the six that had organised work (either through friends or an agency) only one tried to find further information about life in the UK.

Four participants said that in preparation for moving to the UK they had collected all their financial resources from their home country before moving.
Prior knowledge about the UK

“I didn’t know anything and didn’t try to find anything out. But, I am very brave and I wasn’t afraid of obstacles or any problems I might encounter.”

“I couldn’t speak English but didn’t think this lack of knowledge could create such problems.”

“My friend said I could live on £30 a week, which was untrue, and work for £50 a day, which was true. I didn’t know much, but it was enough, I was very desperate.”

“I knew one must speak English and have a work number.”

“I had no knowledge of the UK whatsoever but felt secure coming to the country as acquaintances promised work.”

“I tried to find out some information but there was little time as my decision was spontaneous.”

“I tried to find out as much as I could, the most important thing is language but I spoke English already.”

Expectations on arrival

Participants were asked about their plans and what they expected to happen on arrival in the UK. Participants’ expectations included:

- earning a better living
- settling down in the UK (for a minority only)
- learning English
- meeting new people
- seeing new places

Work

All participants had either secured work or intended to obtain work once in the UK. Of those that were planning on looking for work once they arrived all expected:

- more work opportunities than in the country they arrived from
- to find work easily
- to find work quickly

Four participants expected recruitment agencies or job centres in the UK to help with their search for work. Two Polish participants said they expected there to be Polish recruitment agencies in the UK to assist them.
Expectations on arrival: work

"I thought there were a lot of possibilities of work and choice of work offers here. I expected to find job a within two weeks."

"I expected to find work quickly and to stay in hotels or motels until I found work."

"I expected UK conditions to be better than in Lithuania. I hoped to make a living without having to struggle to make ends met."

"I hoped to go to a Polish agency and find a job with accommodation. I was ready to take any job."

Accommodation

The points below summarise interviewees' plans for accommodation on arrival:

- seven were to stay with family or friends
- six were to live in accommodation supplied with work
- six planned to stay in private rented accommodation
- three planned to stay in hotels
- three planned to sleep rough
- one planned to live in a squat
- six had no plans

Those that had no plans for accommodation had either spontaneously decided to go to the UK or said they knew it would be difficult and were expecting ‘the worst’ and felt that staying on the streets was an accepted consequence.

Expectations on arrival: accommodation

“I planned to live in accommodation provided by the nursing home and work as a carer. Then I planned to find my own accommodation.”

“II planned to live on the street and work as a carpenter.”

“Planned to look for a job and live in a squat.”

“Thought I would be able to cope on my own, to rent a room and look for a job.”

Participants' expectations of their arrival in the UK came from word of mouth, specifically from:

- friends and family who had previously or currently lived in the UK
- people going back to their home country telling stories of their experiences
Where expectations came from

“I thought it would be relatively easy to find job, that's what my friends in Poland told me.”

“The expectations came from other Romany people who came back and said there was plenty of well paid work.”

“My expectations came from friends who were leaving the UK who said 'be prepared for the worst'.”
Living in the UK

Accommodation

Arrival in the UK

The majority of participants either stayed with friends and family or slept rough when they first arrived in the UK. Eight participants stayed the first night in the UK with friends or family. Of these, seven had prearranged to stay with friends or family before arriving to the UK and one arranged it on arrival as the accommodation tied to work promised through an agency in their home country was a scam.

Eight participants slept rough on their first night in the UK. Of these, three participants had planned to stay on the streets; three were supposed to be met by someone from an agency with whom they had prearranged work and accommodation but no one turned up; and two had no plans on arrival for somewhere to stay.

Four stayed in a hotel on their first night in the UK. Of these, three participants had planned to stay in a hotel and one had no plans on arrival.

Four stayed in accommodation provided through work on their first night in the UK. Of these, three participants had prearranged this through an agency in their home country and one had no plans on arrival and met people on the coach on the way to the UK who were going to work on a farm with accommodation provided. The participant who had no plans decided to accompany them to see if there was work, and he found that there was.

One participant was arrested when he first arrived in the UK and consequently stayed his first night in police custody.

It was not clear where six of the participants stayed on their first night in the UK.

Accommodation on arrival in the UK

"The money that I brought from Poland was enough only for 7 days in the cheapest of the hotels in central London."
Housing

Most of the participants have moved between several different forms of housing since arriving in the UK. All participants had stayed in a combination of one or more of the following:

- accommodation provided through work
- with friends or family
- hospital
- hotels
- night shelters
- police custody
- private rented
- sleeping rough
- squats

At the time of the interviewers all participants were living in squats or sleeping rough with the majority moving between the two. Since being in the UK, fifteen participants had stayed in private rented accommodation; twelve in accommodation provided through work; eight with friends or family; and five in hotels. In addition to this, three participants have stayed in hospital and two have spent time in police custody. Many participants have moved between the different types of housing on multiple occasions.

Overcrowding

Twelve participants reported that they had stayed in overcrowded conditions while in their accommodation. Four participants gave examples of conditions:

- twenty people in a three-bedroom flat
- twelve people in a four-bed flat
- nine people in a four-bedroom flat
- five people in a one-bedroom flat

These conditions were experienced in both squats and private rented accommodation. It was also commonly reported that people living in accommodation attached to work shared rooms.

Accommodation tied to employment

Six of the thirty-two participants interviewed had secured work before moving to the UK with an agency. The majority paid between £250 and £300 to an agency which promised to find work and accommodation in the UK. Three of the six arrived in the UK to find there was no accommodation or work and when they tried to contact the agency it appeared not to exist. As a result they lost their money. Two of the six arrived in the UK and there was work and accommodation organised but the work was illegal and the conditions for both work and accommodation were bad. Only one of the six arrived in the UK to find official work and accommodation on arrival. The
agency scams were not limited to one country as people from both Poland and Latvia reported it.

**Employment agency scams**

"An agency in Poland promised to find me a job and accommodation, and meet me on arrival. It cost 1800PLN but they didn't show up. The Head Office in Poland looked credible."

**Sources of referral**

The main methods participants used to find out about accommodation were through:

- friends
- homeless people met on the street or in homelessness services
- other people from their home country (generally also homeless)
- Police Officers
- people in and around Victoria coach station
- though information about accommodation tied to work when seeking jobs
- newspapers.

"It was something natural to go to the police officers to ask the information regarding the possibility of places to eat or stay for free."

**Moves**

Most of the A8 nationals in the study have moved between several different forms of housing since arriving in the UK. The vast majority of the moves participants made were due to necessity, rather than choice.

The reasons participants moved from family or friend’s accommodation was because they felt they had outstayed their welcome or circumstances obligated them to move. However there were a number of occasions where participants found work and were able to move into their own accommodation.

The main reason participants left private rented accommodation was because they had no money and therefore could not afford the rent. This was either because they were out of work or the work they did have did not pay enough. Again there were occasions where participants found work and were required to relocate to another city or because accommodation was supplied with work. The reasons participants left hostel accommodation were similar to those for people leaving private rented accommodation.
"From time to time I would get some work, mainly in construction. And thanks to this money, I could pay the hotel for a few days where I could rest and relax a bit. But after the short time of this better living I would run out of money and go back to live on the street."

Two left the accommodation that was tied to their employment because conditions were overcrowded or bad; and one was asked to leave because the landlord found people who were willing to pay more than she could afford. In addition to this several participants had to leave their accommodation because of their work situation. Because the accommodation was tied to the work they were obliged to leave the accommodation when their work contract ended, they were laid off or in one case they had an accident and so could not work. Tied accommodation was viewed as insecure and participants found it difficult to demand their rights and a decent standard of accommodation especially where work tied to the accommodation was illegal.

"It was a job with accommodation so once I lost the job I had to move out. When I lost this job I lived for some time on a street in London."

The main reasons participants left squats was because they were moved on or they were living in bad conditions and commonly reported experiencing violence, theft, abuse, and a high level of drug and alcohol misuse in squats.

"The people in squats often drink without doing anything else. And once I lost some of my belongings in a squat."

"Time to time I lived in squats but not always safe as there were people drinking and partying there."

The majority of participants moved back and forth between different forms of accommodation on several occasions and intermittently slept rough. This was mainly influenced by whether participants were in work and earning money or not.
**Moves: sleeping rough**

"I'd never considered living on the streets but I was completely alone and it's a new country for me. So I had to arrange for myself to survive."

"I brought a sleeping bag which is the only good thing I brought from Poland."

"Where I start to drink is the same place where I fall asleep. But I have many friends in London so it happens that they take me to their flat or to a squat. I'm not worried about a place to sleep."

"Life at Victoria is not safe but I don't know any other place where it would be possible to stay."

"The main risk of living on streets is alcohol. The people who are staying in Victoria are drinking and wasting their time and money. People who are living in Victoria seem to be stuck in this place with no way out of it and their bad situation. Often people in Victoria lose their documents, they are drunk, start to argue and fight with each other, all because of alcohol."

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**Expectations of accommodation**

The majority of participants did not find the accommodation in the UK as they expected. Many said it was more expensive than they had anticipated and they thought the conditions would have been better.

**Accommodation expectations**

"The realities of accommodation in the UK proved much more difficult than I ever expected. The prices of accommodation are very high, and my experience with life in a squat was very bad."

"I was expecting conditions which would be more comparable to Poland."

"My overall experience with accommodation in the UK is much worse that I expected. The correlation between the price and quality is really bad."

"When it comes to the quality of accommodation I was expecting something significantly better."
Work and skills

Work

Of the thirty-two participants interviewed, three had not worked since arriving in the UK. Of these:

- one had only been in the UK three weeks and was looking for work
- one had been in the country three months and was looking for work but specified that he did not want to work illegally
- one had been in the UK one year and five months - this participant had not planned on moving to the UK he was just driving a friend over to the UK but was arrested on arrival and put in police custody for one month. Consequently he was required to stay in the UK for a further month after his release. Since being in the UK he has been looking for work but found it difficult without a bank account and National Insurance number.

Of the twenty-nine participants who had worked since being in the UK, twenty-two had worked illegally, four had worked legally and it was not possible to ascertain the working history of three participants. Of the four participants that had worked legally three had also worked illegally. So in total three-quarters of respondents confirmed that they had worked illegally.

The majority of participants had worked in manual labour work. The most common types of work participants had done were:

- construction work
- decorating (including painting, flooring and carpentry)
- restaurant work
- hotel work

Other types of work participants had done since being in the UK include:

- leafleting
- car washing
- driving
- couriering
- ship building
- nursing
- farm work

The majority of male participants had worked in construction and decorating. All five female participants had worked in nursing homes and / or hospitality, specifically hotels and restaurants.

Most of the A8 nationals in the study had worked in several different jobs in different industries since arriving in the UK. For the vast majority of people leaving employment or changing jobs was due to necessity, rather than choice. Twenty-two of the twenty-nine participants who had worked said work was irregular which forced them to consistently look for work and change jobs.
Sources of referral

The main method participants used to find out about work available was word of mouth particularly through friends, other people from their home country, other people living in squats or on the street, and people in and around Victoria coach station. The next most common methods for finding work were the “Wailing Wall” in Hammersmith (unofficial meeting place for employers and workers), free newspapers in their own language and recruitment agencies. Other ways included the Internet and walking from door to door.

Sources of referral

"Many people were coming to Victoria asking for workers."

"We used to wake up early in the morning around six AM and then we went around and asked for any job."

"The only place I knew from television was Victoria station. I went directly there to meet Polish people who told me it would be possible to find a job around the station."

Skills

Participants were asked if they had any employment training or qualifications. Thirteen of the thirty-two participants interviewed were trained and had qualifications. These were in:

- hairdressing
- teaching
- electrical engineering
- nursing
- desk top publishing
- carpentry
- construction
- bakery
- blacksmithing
- catering
- hospitality

Of the thirteen participants who had a professional qualification three had worked in that industry since being in the UK. Two of these had also worked in unrelated industries both before and after that particular job. Many reported that qualifications gained in their home country were not transferable to the UK or that for qualifications to be recognised documents needed to be translated into English. The majority of participants who had training and qualifications in a specific industry stated that they would like to work in that area while in the UK.
Skills

“I hated these jobs, it’s something I despise but I had to do it to survive. But I’m working part time repairing electronics at the moment. I love this job, this is something I really would like to do, it’s my passion.”

Barriers to finding work

Participants were asked if there were any barriers to finding work. The main barriers were seen to be language, lack of information and lack of understanding about the process of working in the UK. Other barriers identified included problems getting a bank account, problems related to not having an address, competition for jobs and alcohol problems affecting motivation and ability to work.

Barriers

“I didn’t go to work because I was weak because of drinking.”

“There are many Polish people here who are ready to take any job, and work even for as little as £30 for all day. Because of that it’s more difficult to find a good job now.”

“I want to stay here for a long-term and don’t want to do anything illegal.”

The main barrier to finding and securing work as reported by sixteen participants was language. In addition to this participants were also asked about their confidence in speaking English. The majority who answered the question reported their English to be poor. One participant was fluent, two said ‘good’, eight said it was ‘satisfactory’, ten said it was ‘poor’ and three said it was ‘very poor’. It was not possible to ascertain the confidence level in English for nine participants.

Barriers to finding work: language

“The most significant problem in my life in the UK is the fact that I don’t speak English. If I spoke English at least well enough to be able to fully communicate I would be able to find a job.”
The next most commonly reported barrier was lack of information and related support, specifically:

- where to access help and information about the process of working in the UK
- what documents are required for work
- where to get required documents
- where to find work

Participants said they required support in transferring qualifications from their home country to the UK and preparing and completing forms such as the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS), National Insurance, Construction Skills and Certificate Scheme (CSCS) and the Construction Industry Scheme (CIS).

Some participants reported they were not aware they needed any documentation to work in the UK and some seemed not to understand the implications for not having the documents in the long-term, such as for employment rights and entitlements to benefits. A lack of clear, official advice on where to go for support and information is a theme running throughout this study.

The majority of interviewees had irregular and insecure working conditions, and have not registered on the WRS to allow them to build up towards full benefit entitlements and rights to homelessness assistance.

**Barriers to work: lack of information**

"The bureaucracy in the UK is worse than in Poland. It would be very useful to have an institution guide to explain where to go to get the necessary assistance to settle in the UK."

"The documents were useless. Because of them I need to pay more taxes if I knew that before probably wouldn’t have prepared them."

**Multiple barriers**

Many of the barriers discussed above affected participants’ ability to build a life in the UK from working, to securing accommodation. Many were interrelated, for example a migrant:

Needs an address to get a bank account → needs a job to get accommodation → needs to be registered on WRS and a National Insurance number to get a legal job → needs to know the process to access work to get registered.

The majority of participants said they could not get accommodation until they found work but because many were unsure of the process some participants would take illegal work to earn enough money to survive in the UK. Some did this while going through the process of getting registered to work legally where others did not want to work illegally and so were not earning any money.
Multiple barriers

“The most serious obstacles in getting help is the fact that I practically do not speak English. It makes it so difficult to find work and until I have work I will not be able to afford to rent any accommodation.”

Expectations of work

The majority of participants did not find work in the UK as they expected. While the UK presents work opportunities the barriers faced prevented many participants to quickly and easily finding work.

Many participants reported incidents of employers taking advantage of them particularly if the work was illegal. The majority of participants did not like the type of work they were doing however they needed to work to survive and they were willing on many occasions to take any work available. Participants regularly found themselves in situations where they could not negotiate legal working status and decent pay and conditions.

Expectations for work in the UK

"My original plan was to stay with family in the UK then move to my own apartment. I didn’t expect finding work would take so long."

"My overall experience of the job market in the UK is not so great. I was expecting that it will be more honest. On several occasions I wasn’t paid all the money due to me, sometimes as little as fifty per cent what I should have received."

"I found this job [cleaner] through friends but I didn’t like it because I felt I was being used. I was supposed to work as a cleaner but my employers asked me also to baby-sit, do shopping etc. After some time I decided to quit this job."

"I didn’t like these jobs. Sometimes my colleagues were treating me badly but I know how to take care of myself and always managed to cope somehow. Still I worked in these jobs just because I had to."

"I didn’t like my jobs but work is work and I was glad to have anything."
Support and information

Sources of support

At the time of being interviewed, participants’ main sources of support were:

- homeless agencies
- people from their home country
- homeless people often from interviewees home countries
- friends living in the UK from interviewees home countries
- Accident and Emergency and NHS walk in centres

Sources of support

"Now I come as a volunteer [to homeless agency] and I try to help others. However it is important for me that I have a place where I can come and have a chat, see other people, so I don’t feel so lonely."

"The staff [at the homeless agency] treat me nicely and they’re always ready to help."

"The best support has been other homeless Lithuanians I’ve met on the street. They’ve been my main source of support and information."

Sources of referral

The main way participants found out about support available was word of mouth particularly through people from their home country (the majority also homeless in the UK), friends and other homeless people. Other ways for finding out about support available included free newspapers and websites dedicated to life in the UK in their own language, and the police.

Help received

Participants were asked what help they had received since being in the UK. The most common support people received was:

- food
- showers
- laundry / new clothes
- advice on accessing accommodation
- advice on finding work
- guidance and support with completing documents for work
- English courses
- shelter and opportunities to meet people
- medical assistance
Help received

"Thanks to the help I received I have an appointment for a National Insurance number. Through the Upper Room I met many people and now I meet them on the street and they say hello. I feel better because of that."

"I plan my day between different charity organisations to get food and I like atmosphere."

"The emergency services helped me after I had a car crash. I was very impressed with their help."

"Thanks to help I received I already registered with CIS and already have appointments for National Insurance number and CSCS. Also it is important that I can come here and have a conversation with someone - otherwise I would be very lonely here."

The reaction of non A8 homeless people

In general non A8 homeless people were reported as being supportive and friendly. However, a few participants reported discrimination from other homeless people both on the street and in homelessness agencies. In all cases this was related to a perception that the support A8 migrants were receiving was reducing support available to other homeless people.

Reactions

"I feel discriminated by British homeless people who keep saying that I should go back to Poland, that I don’t deserve all this support I am getting here."

"Great deal of help I received so far in London from other homeless people since I came here."

Support needs

Participants were asked about their support needs and what would help them have a more positive experience in the UK. The majority of participants required support in:

- finding a work
- accessing accommodation
- improving their English
- accessing advice and guidance on the process of working in the UK

In regard to advice and guidance on the process of working in the UK, support was specifically required in understanding the process - knowing what documents were
required, preparing and completing certificates and forms for employment, and writing CVs and application forms.

In addition to these, six participants reported that they required health support. These included treatment for the flu and dermatological problems, as well as assistance for one participant’s partner who was homeless and pregnant. Three participants also reported they required help for their long-term alcohol problems and one participant required help with a gambling problem.

A number of participants said that not being able to speak, read or write in English was the main barrier in accessing work, accommodation, advice and guidance, and health support and therefore was their greatest support need.

Other support needs reported by participants included somewhere to meet people so not to be lonely, shelter, food, clothing and showers.

Support needs

“I realise that to improve my situation I have to give up drinking and I’ll try and get back on the English course and attend the classes.”

“Medical help is most important to me as I need medication and facilities to shower and wash for my dermatological problems.”

“The only help I need is finding a job, I have all necessary documents and my English is good.”

“It would be great to get some more medical help especially that [partners name] is expecting a baby. Also I have a problem with gambling and I could use help in this area.”

“It is very important that I come here and meet people I can speak to, that I am not completely alone.”

“I must improve my English in order to improve my life in England. I am already studying English and being able to learn it for free is crucial to me.”

“I don’t have time to deal with documents to work because I’m drinking constantly. I’ve had alcohol problems for years.”

Drink and drugs

Three participants said they had long term alcohol problems prior to arriving in the UK and two others talked of instances of drinking heavily due to the circumstances they found themselves in since being in the UK. Many participants said they were aware of the dangers of drink and drugs and the detrimental affect they could have on their situation. Drink and drugs were seen to be an important factor in preventing A8 nationals living successfully in the UK and getting out of the situation they found themselves in, that of being out of work or with no accommodation.
Drink and drugs

“It's important not to find myself in bad company. By my own experience of bad company and living in the streets, it is very easy to hit the ground.”

"Important thing is to focus on your own target and to avoid getting lost in alcohol and drug problems."

"It's easy to find a job in London. The necessary thing is English and not to get into bad drinking company like it is in Victoria Station."

Theft

Of the thirty-two participants interviewed thirteen reported to having been a victim of theft. This included theft of identify documents such as national identity cards and passports, or of general personal belongings for example a mobile phone.

Of the thirteen participants who had been a victim of theft:

- six reported to having had their passport stolen
- five reported to having been drinking heavily at the time
- three were in Victoria coach station

Losing identification

Participants who lost passports or personal identification found that this had a negative impact on their search for accommodation and work and consequently in settling in the UK. Participants reported it took time to get a replacement from their Embassy and it cost a lot of money to replace it. For some this made obtaining a new passport impossible without first accessing illegal employment.

The lack of a passport affected participants completing documents required for work, getting work and other administrative activities such as a bank account.

"My advice to new arrivals in UK is that it's necessary to look after the personal documents. I know exactly how difficult it is living and getting a job without any valid identification."

“It is very difficult to call my Embassy. And besides that it is necessary to pay £120 for the new passport. I have only the copy of the passport. I will wait until I have some money and then I will try to have one.”
Hospital

Five participants reported to having been beaten up when they were robbed and two were required to spend time in hospital resulting from injuries sustained. In addition to this two participants reported to having spent time in hospital while staying in the UK. Reasons for participants spending time in hospital included:

- a car accident while being drunk
- becoming ill due to being on the street
- being beaten up while living on the street
9 Integrating - settling into life in the UK

Experience in the UK

Overall participants reported that the experience of living in the UK has been difficult due to the barriers faced while attempting to find work. These were seen as fundamental in preventing integration into the UK or achieving what they wanted to in the UK i.e. to look for work and to earn more money and to secure a higher standard of living.

"Without any knowledge of English and in my case without any documents, bank account, NI number, I cannot aspire for any better position here."

"I found it difficult to understand the situation in the UK and the rules to settle here, where to go, who to ask for help and where to get info."

For the majority of participants life in the UK has not been what they expected. The work participants experienced was not what they expected as many were taken advantage of and could not negotiate legal status, pay or conditions as earning money was imperative for their survival in the UK. Accommodation has been more expensive than anticipated and the types of housing participants have had to use, out of necessity rather than choice, has been in poor conditions. These have included being overcrowded and having to live in squats or sleep rough.

Despite this many participants reported that their quality of life was still better than in their home country. Participants also reported that the support received from the homelessness agencies has made their experiences of the UK more positive.

Expectations

"So far my life in the UK has been rather difficult. I thought that the cost of living here is lower and that finding work will be much easier. Still even though the life here has not been very easy for us, the overall experience and quality of life in England is better than in Poland."

"So far my experiences in the UK were quite good. On the one hand I did not expect that there will be so many formalities which need to be done before one can start legal work. I thought that it will take me less to find legal work. But on the other there is extensive support provided and soon I will have all the necessary documents."

"I can't say that I manage. I do need to find permanent job, accommodation, learn English etc. So far life in UK has been much worse than expected. I had many bad experiences with finding work; when I had it, I wasn't paid, also I was a victim of theft. But there are positive aspects. There are places like the Upper Room, police are friendly, the society is very tolerant and I also like the culture."
“I am very disappointed with the results of my immigration to Great Britain. I became here a victim of theft. But there were also nice things like for example small gifts received from other people when I lived on a street.”

“Until now my life in the UK was much worse than I expected. I had my passport stolen; I couldn’t find a job and consequently cannot afford accommodation. Still I try not to lose hope, and maybe everything is going to be OK.”

Links with home

A number of participants financially supported family back in their home country since moving to the UK. Seven participants said they regularly sent money home and three used to send money but could not afford to at the moment. In addition to these, three other participants said they had not sent money home since being in the UK but intended to in the future.

Six participants said that they felt ashamed of the situation they found themselves in while being in the UK. Two of these participants said they were not in touch with anyone in their home country because of the shame and three participants were in contact with people at home but had not told them of their situation in the UK.

Five participants had returned to visit their home country since moving to the UK and three planned to in the future.

Participants also reported to having links with their home country through socialising and receiving support from other people living in the UK from their home country as covered previously.
### Links with home

"I called my mother on Monday. They know that I live on the street… I called my mother one week after I've been robbed. My mother was crying."

"I used to send money home and phone. But I missed my son's communion and as I had just been robbed I couldn't phone or send a gift. I feel ashamed as a husband and father. I know that homeless people who are ashamed and don't contact home can be called a missing person."

"I haven't been back due to lack of money but also because of shame."

"I don't have anyone there I would like to visit. I know many Polish people in London and we stay in touch and help each other."

"Sometimes if I can, I try to help them financially."

"I can't provide them with support but would like to in the future."

"I'm ashamed to go back for being unsuccessful in UK, living in bad conditions and being homeless."

"My mother doesn't know that I am living on the street. I keep telling her that I have a job and flat here."

### Future plans

Of the thirty-two participants interviewed twenty-eight gave their plans for the future. Future plans included:

- settling in the UK
- staying in the UK to save money and return to their home country
- staying in the UK for a couple of years and to then move to another country
- getting work and accommodation in the UK and 'waiting to see' if their situation improved

Eleven planned to settle in the UK, with three of these wanting to bring family over in the future, including specifically spouses and / or children. Of the rest of respondents:

- six planned to stay in the UK to save money and return to their home country
- five wanted to get work and accommodation in the UK and 'wait and see' if their situation improved as to whether they were to stay in the UK or return home
- five planned to stay in the UK for a couple of years and to then move to another country, and of these four did not want to go back to their home country
- one was unsure whether to stay or go to another country but did not want to return home.

The interviewees were split between those who plan on staying in the UK and those who planned on going to another country or returning to their home country. This

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may be tied into the notion of where migrant perceive themselves as ‘expatriates’ or ‘immigrant’, immigrants often commit themselves to becoming a part of their country of residence, whereas expatriates are usually only temporarily placed in the host country and most of the time plan on returning to their home country, so may never fully adopt the culture in the host country.

The majority of participants had friends and contacts within the UK who were from their home country. These were often met through work or at homelessness agencies.

**Future plans**

"*Poland is a beautiful country and I cannot imagine living for the rest of life in different country.*"

"*I want to improve my English, find a job and once we both, me and my husband, have salaries we will move to better accommodation. Maybe in a few years, once my brother graduates he can come to England as well.*"

"*I believe that the most difficult time is already behind me, I want to stay in the UK, live and work here.*"

"*I would like to have a normal job and start to live in UK. I would like to work here and visit Poland to see if they are ok, if they are still alive.*"

"*I would like to work in what I’m trained in. I know about a school where I could learn English for free so maybe I could go there. Right now I want to wait another three months and see what will happen. Then if nothing changes I will go back to Poland or move somewhere else.*"

"*I would like to realize my plans here, do something to be able to help my children. I have two hands and I would really like to work.*"

"*I want to stay in the UK and become part of British society*"

"*In the future I would like to rent together with someone else a very cheap room, have a regular job from Monday to Friday. I could work also on Saturdays.*"

"*I would like to find a steady job and once I have it I would like to bring my wife here. Maybe rent a one bed flat so we could live more comfortably and save some money.*"
Every single person finds and keeps a home
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