

# 'Welfare cuts mean charities struggle to meet migrants' needs'

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Small charities and faith organisations are increasingly stepping in to fill a gap in basic support for destitute children as a result of welfare restrictions designed to deter migrants from coming to the UK, a new report published today by Oxford University's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) has shown.

The research, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, shows that small charities and faith organisations are critical service providers for this vulnerable group, which includes a significant proportion of British [children](#). The study examines the strategic challenges facing voluntary sector organisations in developing and delivering destitution services to migrant children and their families. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with representatives of 51 voluntary sector and faith-based organisations and funding bodies.

Some larger third sector organisations voiced concerns about reputational consequences for helping this unpopular group of people – which they fear may jeopardise their relationship with government – whose welfare policies are designed to create a 'hostile environment' for irregular migrants in the UK. Meanwhile, smaller charities and faith-based organisations are struggling to cope with the increased scale of demand due to their fragile funding base, caused partly by cuts to local authority budgets affecting the funding of voluntary groups. Further restrictions to welfare support for migrant children and families under the Immigration Act 2016, which are due to be implemented next year, are likely to increase demand for voluntary sector support even further.

Report author Jonathan Price said: 'Small charities and faith groups are stepping in to provide vital support to destitute children and families such as housing, food and clothing as well as help accessing services. Often they are having to provide this help with little or no financial assistance from the state, whilst negotiating complex and frequently changing legal contexts, and situations where children and adults are at risk.'

Certain groups of destitute children are affected more than others by the poor provision of support. These include children whose parents have temporary leave to remain and are EU citizens or whose status is irregular. Children in the asylum system are relatively better served by charities because funders tend to prioritise the needs of this group over other migrants.

Mr Price added: 'Charities are worried that migration is not a popular issue, and that sections of the public, media and funders have little sympathy, particularly for people who are perceived to have chosen to migrate to the UK and who aren't seeking asylum. This results in the needs of some destitute children, whose parents are perceived as less deserving, being deprioritised.'

The report finds that organisations from across the voluntary sector could explore new ways of working in partnership on this issue. Building expertise on migrant destitution within larger, and a more diverse range of organisations would also help to increase capacity within the sector to respond to migrant destitution and facilitate a more sustainable response. It says better referral systems and sharing of expertise across organisations are needed and a stronger evidence base, with authoritative research on the extent of destitution among migrant children, could improve in targeting support more effectively.

The research, *Meeting the challenge: voluntary sector services for*

destitute migrant children and families, is available [here](#).

Provided by University of Oxford

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