

Speeding up immigration claims urgently needed to help migrants experiencing homelessness

February 13 2023



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Unique research carried out during the COVID pandemic has highlighted major problems with the Home Office application process

for immigration claims.

The research was undertaken by the University of Portsmouth during the Everyone In initiative—a £3.2million [emergency fund](#) that required [local authorities](#) in England to house all [homeless individuals](#) in their area, regardless of their [immigration status](#). The initiative was designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Everyone In gave researchers from the University of Portsmouth a rare opportunity to talk to people that are usually unreachable. Migrants experiencing homelessness were placed in hotel rooms during the pandemic, and for the first time their stories could be shared.

The report describes findings from an 18-month study, facilitated by the leading homeless charity St Mungo's. It highlights the significant crisis of the hidden homeless: the number of people accommodated during Everyone In was six times higher than the number of people recorded sleeping rough before the pandemic.

Researchers are calling for some radical changes to the immigration system. Lead researcher Dr. Simon Stewart says, "The current immigration system is destructive for those that are trying to work and continue with their lives. On the basis of their previous experiences, people with an unresolved immigration status tend to avoid contact with authorities. Instead, they develop a habitual practice that we call cultivated invisibility, which means they find ways to go unnoticed and stay on the move and blend into the crowd, for example resting on public transport.

"If their right to work is restricted, their source of income is often derived from working in the informal economy, which makes them potentially deportable. With limited or no access to [public funds](#), they become trapped in a downward spiral—they end up sleeping rough and

becoming ill. In attempting to adapt they become more illegalised, and so it continues."

The report delivers key recommendations. Dr. Stewart says, "We recommend the continued suspension of the eligibility criteria that made Everyone In such a positive initiative for migrants experiencing homelessness and those working in the homelessness sector. There needs to be better communication between the Home Office and embassies so that issues such as lost ID and paperwork can be resolved quickly thus speeding up immigration status claims."

The research highlights the benefits of the Everyone In initiative for migrants experiencing homelessness. On the basis of interviews with staff working in the sector, the research found the suspension in [eligibility criteria](#) for migrants coupled with a huge increase in emergency accommodation ensured that many migrants received homelessness assistance for the first time.

Researchers found that in many ways Everyone In was a great success. The benefits included access to food, shelter, clothing, healthcare and legal advice. It gave some individuals a chance to improve their mental health and access support services such as those relating to alcohol or drug use.

The situation meant those working in the homelessness sector were able to access their clients in hotel rooms, rather than having to search for them on the streets. They were able to speak to them "in person" rather than on the phone. For many homeless organizations this was the first encounter with migrants who had long been among the ranks of the hidden homeless, a group made invisible through rough sleeping, sofa-surfing or sleeping on public transport.

The report shows that many migrants experiencing homelessness

previously unfamiliar with their rights were able to receive advice that enabled them to make progress with their immigration paperwork or their search for longer-term accommodation. There were also increased levels of cooperation between various institutions in the homelessness sector, including third-sector organizations and local authorities. This happened as rapid solutions had to be found when Everyone In was announced. Charities perceived to be pitted against each other in competition for funding were able to work together more effectively to help their clients.

Researchers also noted negative aspects of Everyone In. Confined to their rooms during the various lockdowns, some individuals experienced a lack of autonomy and an increasing sense that their lives were under surveillance. For some housed in the emergency accommodation this presented difficulties. For example, staff in the sector regularly carried out welfare checks. These checks were carried out in a uniform way but were disproportionately experienced as negative by those with conditions such as PTSD. Many of those interviewed described their traumas, which included conflict-related and sexual assault-related traumas, as well as trauma deriving from interrogation.

Dr. Stewart says, "Our findings showed that some individuals were particularly affected by welfare check-related door knocking in the emergency accommodation. Some forms of assessment were also anxiety-inducing and gave people the perception that they were being watched. These experiences produced a sense of hypervisibilization. With this in mind, we recommend a more personalized, trauma-informed approach to welfare checks and assessments in the homelessness sector."

Petra Salva OBE, St Mungo's Director of Rough Sleepers and Migrants said, "We welcome this research and the valuable contribution it makes in telling the stories of the homeless migrant population, who are often

difficult to reach. The research highlights the importance of access to independent immigration services, allowing people's immigration statuses to be progressed and resolved rapidly. At St Mungo's we have seen first-hand the transformative difference that can make to people's lives. We'll be working together with our partners to take forward the learnings within this report, so that together we can end rough sleeping for everyone."

More information: Simon Stewart et al, Everyone In and migrants' experiences of homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic, *University of Portsmouth* (2023). [DOI: 10.17029/2cd8-z592](https://doi.org/10.17029/2cd8-z592)

Provided by University of Portsmouth

Citation: Speeding up immigration claims urgently needed to help migrants experiencing homelessness (2023, February 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-02-immigration-urgently-migrants-experiencing-homelessness.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.