



ENDING DESTITUTION TOGETHER

Participatory Action Research Project

**Addressing the Impact of Destitution among People with No
Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) in Scotland**

July 2023 - March 2025

This report examines the challenges faced by individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) in Scotland. It highlights key factors contributing to destitution, barriers to accessing basic needs, and the mental and social implications of NRPF.

The findings are based on discussions and peer research conducted by the EDT PAR group. The report also provides recommendations for policy changes and support strategies to mitigate the impact of NRPF and promote social inclusion.



CONTENTS

SECTION	DETAILS	PAGE(S)
1	BACKGROUND	3 & 4
2	TOPICS RESEARCHED	5 – 7
3	KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	8 – 10
4	CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PLANS	11

1. Background

The Ending Destitution Together (EDT) strategy was established as a collaborative initiative between the Scottish Government and COSLA to address the pressing issues faced by individuals experiencing destitution and No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

The primary objective of the strategy is to ensure that “No one in Scotland is forced into destitution and everyone has their human rights protected, regardless of their immigration status.” The EDT strategy is designed to mitigate the impact of NRPF conditions through a cross-sector approach that includes enhancing support systems, promoting advocacy, providing access to essential services, and developing sustainable solutions to prevent destitution.

The strategy acknowledges that NRPF conditions disproportionately affect individuals who cannot access social welfare and housing support due to their immigration status. This lack of access to fundamental resources increases vulnerability to exploitation, homelessness, poverty, and other related harms.

The EDT project aligns with these objectives by involving individuals with lived experience to gather qualitative data, identify systemic barriers, and provide recommendations aimed at enhancing policy implementation and improving support services.

The EDT Project meets *Action Point 13* of the strategy – working with people with lived experience of destitution and NRPF to continue to inform and shape the strategy during implementation. The project was structured to gather qualitative data through interviews, questionnaires, and group discussions, with a particular focus on participants' experiences in navigating systemic barriers. The inclusion of individuals with lived experience ensured that findings and recommendations were rooted in practical realities rather than theoretical assumptions. The project also aimed to raise awareness about the limitations of existing support systems and propose meaningful solutions for improvement.

The EDT PAR group consists of eight individuals who have been together since the start of the group's establishment (August 2023). They are from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences: three women and five men with lived experience of NRPF and/or destitution. Amongst the group members, three were subjected to NRPF (including 1 EEA national), three were destitute asylum seekers and two are in an “appeal rights exhausted” (ARE) condition. All are based in Glasgow apart from one member who is based in Aberdeen.

The project involved consistent engagement with the group through fortnightly meetings, alternating between face-to-face and online, with interpretation services for 1 member who needed it. Participants adhered to a collaboratively developed agreement that encouraged voluntary sharing of personal experiences.

Over the course of the project, the group have faced a range of challenges, both directly linked to their research and wider political and societal changes, which often had a direct personal impact on group members.

The group's challenges were addressed through the following efforts:

- Alternating meeting days/times so that the most participants could attend due to external commitments such as childcare and one of the group members traveling from Aberdeen to Glasgow every month.
- Provision of digital support, travel expenses (including individual transport for those members with mobility needs), and food vouchers to reduce barriers to participation.
- Development of support networks through community-based organisations.
- Engagement with local authorities and advocacy groups, including attending advocacy events, to promote awareness of the complexities faced by marginalized individuals For example, group members attended 4 workshops organised by Tripod, a grassroots development collaborative.
- Meeting with Kaukab Stewart, Minister for Equalities, to discuss the EDT Strategy
- Certified training workshops on advocacy, public speaking, presentation skills and report writing to support participants to communicate their findings and experiences
- Wellbeing support through mental health workshops.
- Encouraging peer support and solidarity to help overcome isolation and build resilience.



2. Topics of Research

(Quotes are from individual responses)

Essential needs:

The group's findings reveal that meeting essential needs such as accommodation, financial support, food and healthcare is fundamental to combating destitution.

Safe Accommodation:

The lack of suitable housing and privacy is a major concern. Collaboration between councils and advocacy organisations is vital to provide dignified accommodation.

"There is no maximum privacy, you remember some past trauma of people coming into your house, and it doesn't make me feel safe or my kids."

Financial Support:

Financial instability and restricted work rights exacerbate destitution. The inability to access sufficient funds impacts all aspects of life, from food security to health care and travel. The cancellation of the free bus pass for asylum seekers scheme by the SG was really sad news for all of us. It means discriminating and dehumanising those who were hoping their future to be brighter by accessing the free bus pass to reduce social isolation and loneliness. Scrapping the free bus pass plan also led to severe mental and physical health conditions.

"The biggest barrier is finances you can't get anywhere without transport and all needs to be paid."

Healthy Food:

Access to culturally appropriate food remains extremely limited. Food insecurity continues to be a challenge due to inadequate resources and restrictions.

"Our food barrier is halal food not easily available near home, along with other Asian food ingredients."

Health and Social Isolation

The mental health impact of destitution is profound. Lack of appropriate support and stigmatization worsens mental health issues

"The trauma which you have fled from is constantly part of your life."

Advice & Advocacy

Access to legal advice, understanding rights and navigating complex systems are critical components of effective advocacy.

Support to navigate the system:

Many individuals struggle to access essential services due to complexity and lack of guidance. Creating dedicated case management systems can help address these issues.

"Lack of support and access to services including help to navigate the system and to understand my rights."

Legal Advice:

The shortage of legal aid and long waiting times for processing immigration-related matters are significant issues. Enhanced legal services are essential.

"I've heard from many people who have struggled to get legal aid, especially with immigration cases, which are facing processing delays that can last up to five years."

Information on Rights and Entitlements:

Improving awareness about available resources and rights is necessary to empower those in need.

"Educate people about their needs and benefits, most asylum seekers don't know the relevant government institutions where they can get support."

Inclusion

Ensuring inclusivity through participation, skill development, and anti-racism is critical to the strategy's success.

Zero-Tolerance to Racism:

Marginalized groups often face discrimination that limits their access to essential resources and opportunities. Policies must be designed to be inclusive and equitable.

"Discrimination, racism and exploitation is seen everywhere and the government can play a part in stopping this by using the media platform."

Education and Skills:

The lack of training programs and language support creates barriers to inclusion. Removing these barriers is essential to help people reach their potential.

"Equal education for all will make Scotland so much better."

Meaningful Employment:

Providing asylum seekers with the right to work can significantly reduce poverty and enhance social integration. While the right to work is a reserved issue, the Scottish Government can still challenge the Home Office for policy change. Until then, the SG can act on other areas, such as significantly expanding access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs, particularly vocational ESOL tailored to specific job opportunities and sectors facing workforce shortages.

"Give asylum seekers the right to work so they can be part of contributing society."

Community services and support:

Building community networks and partnerships between local authorities and organisations is essential to provide support where it is most needed.

"Improve access to support and services provided by the voluntary and community sector."

Participation in Service Design:

Engaging those with lived experience in the design of services ensures that solutions are realistic and effective.

"The vulnerable people, refugees, and asylum seekers need to be part of the lifelong involvement in projects ending destitution."

Meeting People and Being Involved in the Community:

Creating opportunities for social interaction is vital for reducing isolation and promoting inclusion. Scottish government-led awareness-raising campaigns and educational initiatives specifically addressing racism and targeting misinformation about the migrant community are needed to improve community cohesion and promote positive integration narratives.

"Collaboration among communities, local organisations, and the government can ensure that the assistance they provide meets the needs of the individual."

Key Findings and Recommendations

Community Support:

Effective support systems are built around community-based organisations with established networks. These entities are instrumental in providing peer support, logistical assistance, and outreach to marginalized populations.

Participants emphasized the importance of cultural and religious organisations, as well as LGBTQ groups, in offering safe spaces where individuals feel supported and heard. Collaboration between local authorities and grassroots organisations is essential for building robust support networks.

Recommendation:

Enhance funding for community-led organisations to improve outreach and provide direct assistance to marginalized populations. Strengthen partnerships between advocacy organisations, local authorities, and grassroots groups to enhance policy implementation.

Systemic Challenges:

Participants reported issues such as prolonged processing times for immigration-related matters, lack of suitable accommodation, homelessness, and restricted access to mental health services. Barriers related to financial instability, food insecurity, and social isolation were also highlighted. Housing insecurity and limited privacy were recurring concerns, especially for individuals dealing with past trauma.

Recommendation:

Enhance collaboration between councils and organisations to provide suitable, dignified accommodation with appropriate privacy considerations. Implement systems to track progress, assess policy effectiveness, and refine strategies accordingly.

Financial Barriers:

The withdrawal of hardship funds and limited access to essential resources have significantly impacted participants. Many reported prioritizing food over transportation, which further restricted their ability to access available support services. The withdrawal of the publicly stated budget allocation for bus passes for asylum seekers was especially problematic for those without sufficient financial means.

Recommendation:

Ensure consistent and adequate funding for transportation, essential resources, and culturally appropriate food.

Employment Barriers:

Restricted rights to work, limited employability support, and a lack of recognition for previous qualifications were identified as major obstacles. Language barriers also hindered individuals from accessing available training programs and employment opportunities.

Recommendation:

Provide employability training and skill development for individuals with the right to work. Address language barriers and improve access to training programs.

Policy Awareness and Advocacy:

Limited knowledge of available resources and support mechanisms was a recurring theme. Participants stressed the importance of having dedicated caseworkers to guide them through the complex systems of support available. Enhanced advocacy efforts are needed to provide clearer pathways for those seeking assistance.

Recommendation:

Implement dedicated case management systems to streamline support access and improve the coordination of services.

Educational Barriers:

Limited access to skill-building programs and English language support has further restricted opportunities for integration and economic independence. Long waiting lists for English language classes and restricted access to employability training remain persistent issues.

Recommendation:

Continue expanding efforts to bridge gaps between available resources and those who need them most.

Mental Health and Social Isolation:

The continuous threat of poverty, inadequate housing, societal stigma, and lack of proper healthcare access contribute to deteriorating mental health among participants. Issues such as depression, stress, and anxiety were frequently reported, especially when individuals faced prolonged uncertainty regarding their legal status and ability to support their families.

Recommendation:

Address the long waiting times for healthcare services and ensure that service providers are trained to understand the unique challenges faced by marginalised individuals.

Inequality and Discrimination:

Participants also described how social, economic, and political factors such as discrimination, inaccessible healthcare, and inadequate housing contributed to destitution. Many felt that systems were designed to exclude them rather than offer meaningful support.

Recommendation:

Encourage the provision of culturally appropriate food options and healthcare services that respect individuals' backgrounds and experiences.

Advice and Advocacy:

The lack of accessible legal advice and advocacy remains a critical issue. A “one size fits all” approach does not work. Many participants reported difficulties in accessing legal aid, as well as delays of up to five years or more in some cases in processing immigration cases. Waiting times for access to advice and advocacy increases the length of time of people are experiencing destitution. Geographic location, language barriers, and a lack of trained social workers were identified as significant challenges in accessing legal assistance.

Recommendation:

Enhance collaboration between councils and organisations to provide suitable, dignified accommodation with appropriate privacy considerations. Trust in advice and advocacy support is essential. Information on how to access advice and advocacy should be available at a grassroots level through charities as well as public agencies and there should be a wide enough range of support available to enable individuals to choose who to engage with. Information needs to be available in translated formats and the onus should be on organisations to make sure this is available in relevant community languages to ensure equity for all.

Inclusion:

Participants noted that the involvement of individuals with lived experiences in policymaking is limited outside of specific programs. While grassroots organisations attempt to address this gap, there is a need for broader inclusion of affected individuals in decision-making processes.

Recommendation:

Strengthen partnerships between advocacy organisations, local authorities, and grassroots groups to enhance policy implementation.

Conclusion and Future Plans

The EDT PAR group's findings clearly demonstrate the need for a coordinated and inclusive approach to tackle destitution among individuals with NRPF. Addressing essential needs, improving advocacy, and promoting inclusion are critical steps towards achieving the objectives of the EDT strategy. Continued collaboration and targeted interventions are necessary to drive meaningful, long-term change, and these must be adequately resources to meet the actual level of need.

Future Plans

The group are very pleased that the project is being supported to continue to work with the Scottish Government and other strategic partners.

The group's future plan is to expand the geographical scope of the research, ensuring there's wider representation and inclusivity by capturing experiences from individuals beyond Glasgow and learning more about additional/difference barriers faced by the NRPF community in less urban locations.

We will also look to include members of different communities, for example the Hong Kong community to enhance the comprehensiveness of the research.

The group would also be keen to hear from statutory partners what areas of discussion would be most helpful to gain lived experience input to inform and influence policy change.