

TAKE ACTION

TO END ASYLUM DESTITUTION

- 1. What is Destitution** p. 2
what is destitution and what causes it
- 2. Destitution – frequently asked questions** p. 4
your questions answered
- 3. Practical support** p. 5
how you can help individuals in need
- 4. Campaign** p. 7
how you can campaign to end destitution
- 5. Raise awareness** p. 11
what you can do to help us raise awareness
locally and through the media
- 6. Here to Help** p. 14
what the campaign supporters do for you

Initial production



Adapted by



In support of

still human still here
The campaign to end destitution of refused asylum seekers

1. What is Destitution?

Destitution (noun)

A total lack of the means of subsistence; a state of utter poverty

A destitute asylum seeker

- ⊙ is homeless and has no right to any social housing
- ⊙ is not allowed to work and risks imprisonment if they do
- ⊙ cannot claim any benefits or tax credits
- ⊙ cannot get any support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS)
- ⊙ will have been evicted from their home, with possibly only 7 days notice
- ⊙ may be pregnant, disabled or a survivor of torture

How does an asylum seeker become destitute?

- ⊙ If the decision on an asylum claim is negative, then there is usually a right of appeal, but unlike, say, a parking ticket fine, where you may get 28 days to appeal, an asylum seeker gets only 10 days to appeal.
- ⊙ If someone seeking asylum or their lawyer doesn't appeal in time, or if their appeal fails, then their NASS support will stop and they will be evicted from their accommodation.
- ⊙ People seeking asylum with dependent children are less likely to be made destitute as support from NASS should carry on while their children are of school age.
- ⊙ Other asylum seekers become destitute because of administrative delays and errors. Some refugees also experience destitution as it takes months to sort out the transition from NASS support to benefits after being granted status.

The effects of destitution

A destitute asylum seeker:

- ⊙ is likely to suffer from extreme anxiety and depression
- ⊙ is likely to be at risk of racial violence and sexual exploitation
- ⊙ feels safer starving and sleeping on our streets than returning to their home country

Asylum Seekers – explaining the system

- An asylum seeker is someone who has been forced to leave their country due to fear of persecution and has made a claim for protection, but whose claim is not yet decided; a refugee has had a positive decision on their claim and has been granted leave to remain.
- Whilst waiting for a decision on their claim, people seeking asylum are not allowed to work and cannot claim any benefits or tax credits. They are supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), part of the Home Office.
- People seeking asylum get money from NASS, paid at less than Income Support levels and are provided with basic accommodation on a no choice basis; in Scotland they are nearly always housed in hard to let high rise tower blocks.

Further information:

"The Destitution Trap" (from www.refugee-action.org.uk), "Down and Out in London" (www.amnesty.org.uk/asylum) and also www.icar.org.uk/?lid=6572.

⊙ Destitution – the lack of alternatives

The 'official' alternative to becoming destitute is to claim what is known as Section 4 Support. The Government claims that nobody needs to be destitute as they can claim Section 4 support instead.

Section 4

⊙ Accommodation provided on a no choice basis, often sharing a bedroom with someone you don't know in housing which falls below nationally agreed standards, eg sometimes even without heating. Much of the housing is what can't be legally rented out to UK citizens because it fails basic standards.

⊙ Vouchers you can only use in supermarkets and other major chain stores, worth £35 per week or just £5 per day, no money for bus fares, phone calls or essential items for nursing mothers

⊙ Usually only available if you are willing to sign to say that you agree to make a "voluntary return" to your home country and is often not available to pregnant women until 34th week of pregnancy

⊙ Routinely takes many weeks or months to process claims so destitution is inevitable
"stigmatisinginhumane and inefficient ... not adequately providing for basic living needs" House of Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights, March 2007

Many people who have been refused asylum do not want to claim Section 4, because they cannot bring themselves to sign a declaration that they are willing to voluntarily return to their country of origin. Although their asylum claim has been refused, they do not feel safe returning to their country and become destitute rather than claim Section 4.

People kept asking me to sign – but I said no I can't. To do so would be to sign my death warrant. Female asylum Seeker, affected by HIV, destitute for 30 months

⊙ Decision-making

The standard of decision making at the Home Office is very poor. Restrictions on legal aid has led to a shortage of immigration solicitors and increasing numbers of people seeking asylum are having their claims decided with little or no meaningful legal representation. The New Asylum Model, fully operational since 2007, has meant asylum claims are being decided within a few days or weeks of someone arriving in UK – raising concerns not only about the lack of time lawyers have to prepare cases, but fears that survivors of torture and sexual violence will not have the time needed to disclose their full stories before their claim is decided. Some may win their cases on appeal – others fight for years for justice and protection.

⊙ Destitution – a deliberate government policy

.. the Government is practicing a deliberate policy of destitution we believe that the deliberate use of inhumane treatment against asylum seekers is unacceptable and falls below the requirements of the common law of humanity and of international human rights law...

House of Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights, March 2007

Could you survive on £5 per day?

This is how much a single adult asylum seeker has to live on. A destitute asylum seeker has nothing

2. frequently asked questions

How many destitute asylum seekers are there?

Nobody knows the precise number. Charities across the UK are seeing ever increasing numbers, including many who are pregnant, disabled or in poor mental health. For example, the Refugee Survival Trust give out around 100 destitution grants per month to people in crisis in Scotland. In 2005 the National Audit Office estimated that there are 283,500 people refused asylum living in the UK, so the scale of the problem is huge.

Why can't destitute people refused asylum just go back to their home country?

Many people refused asylum are too afraid to go home voluntarily, not least as they are from countries - such as Iraq, Zimbabwe or Somalia - torn apart by conflict or where human rights abuses are rife. They consider starving and sleeping on the streets in Britain to be a safer option.

Mary from Uganda was destitute for three months with twins aged 3, after fleeing a dawn raid by the UK Borders Agency. Eventually she won leave to remain.

Why are people refused asylum not removed?

In many cases it is simply not possible to remove people back to their original homeland – for example there may be no safe route, no functioning airport or it is impossible to get travel documents from their country of origin. This raises the question, if it is not safe or possible to remove someone, why was their claim for protection refused?

How long are people destitute for?

Refugee Action interviewed 125 destitute people refused asylum in England. On average people had spent 21 months being destitute.

Where do most destitute asylum seekers sleep?

We've met people seeking or refused asylum who have slept in parks, phone boxes, behind bins, in doorways or just travel on night buses. Others are taken in by friends who are fellow refugees; moving from floor to floor so that they don't become too big a burden. What makes things even more difficult is that people refused asylum aren't allowed to have people staying in their NASS flats so by helping others they are running the risk of having all their own support stopped as well.

Hasn't the "New Asylum Model" fixed the system?

As the New Asylum Model (NAM) makes decisions so quickly, the people made destitute now haven't had time to build up any support networks and so are even more vulnerable. Figures from the Inter Agency Partnership figures show that many people are still ending up destitute as a result of the New Asylum Model.

During 2007 the government started a review of a backlog of cases (known as Legacy Cases). Won't this solve the problem?

The review of old cases is certainly a welcome development, but it is going to take at least five years to clear the backlog. Five years is a long time to survive with no money and nowhere to live. The review will do nothing to stop more recently arrived people seeking asylum from being made destitute.

3. Practical Support

There are many ways you can provide practical support to destitute asylum seekers. Here are some of the best ways to alleviate their suffering.

☉ Donate to organisations helping destitute asylum seekers

There are thousands of people refused asylum who have nothing. Across the country there are some amazing projects rising to the challenge of meeting people's basic needs – food, shelter, and clothes. The refugee centres below run hardship or destitution funds which are always oversubscribed. Financial support like this could make a big difference to how warm a destitute person is and whether they get to eat.

London Churches Refugee Fund	London	c/o Regent Square United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT	world.churchandsociety@urcthamesnorth.org.uk
Welsh Refugee Council Hardship Fund	Cardiff	029 2048 9800	www.welshrefugeecouncil.org
Suffolk Destitution Fund	Suffolk	01394 448576	www.ctsuffolk.org.uk/Destitution.htm
Birmingham Law Centre	Birmingham	0121 766 7466	www.birminghamlawcentre.org.uk
Nottingham & Notts Refugee Forum	Nottingham	0115 941 5599	www.nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk
Boaz Trust	Greater Manchester	0161 202 1056	www.boaztrust.org.uk
Asylum Link	Merseyside	0151 709 1713	www.asylumlink.org.uk
West End Refugee Service	Newcastle upon Tyne	0191 273 7482	www.wers.org.uk
Positive Action in Housing	Glasgow	0141 353 2220	www.paih.org
Refugee Survival Trust	Scotland	0131 554 6776	www.rst.org.uk

We know this is just a selection of the funds around. Please email livingghosts@church-poverty.org.uk to tell us about others for the next edition of this pack.

Make regular donations

Are you able to give a small but regular donation? Why not set up a standing order so that you can help people every month? As little as £5 per month, will make a real difference. Just complete the standing order mandate on page 15.

What your donation will mean

£5 food for one day, £15 one night in a hostel, £25 food for five days, £75 a week in a hostel.

☉ Raise funds

As well as making an individual donation, you could raise funds to help organisations who are supporting destitute people refused asylum. This doesn't have to be too complicated and we would be happy to discuss and help with any ideas you have.

Here are just a few possibilities:

- ✓ Organise a collection in your church, place of worship, workplace
- ✓ Get your school or university involved, eg. get students to bring in loose change and foreign currency that often lies around the house
- ✓ Get sponsorship, eg. fast for 24 hours
- ✓ Get work colleagues to donate a percentage of their day's wages
- ✓ Talk to your trade union about what they could do
- ✓ Ask your family not to buy anything for 24 hours and donate money saved
- ✓ Organise a fundraising event, eg. Friends of Ayrshire Refugees organised a music night and raised several hundred pounds

🕒 Offer somewhere to stay

Can you, or someone you know prevent a destitute person refused asylum from sleeping rough? Can you offer shelter to someone who, by sleeping rough, is at risk of racial violence or sexual exploitation? Do you have a spare room, even a spare bed - anything, so long as it's safe and warm?

Destitution projects are in urgent need of more people to join the register of housing volunteers.

Positive Action in Housing	Glasgow	0141 353 2220	www.paih.org
Open Door	Newcastle upon Tyne & Tees Valley	0191 273 7482	www.opendoor-ne.org
Green Pastures	Southport	01704 501690	www.greenpastureshousing.co.uk
Asylum Link	Merseyside	0151 709 1713	www.asylumlink.org.uk
Boaz Trust	Manchester	0161 202 1056	www.boaztrust.org.uk
BEACON	Bradford	01274 727525	www.beaconbradford.org
ASSIST	Sheffield	0114 275 4960	www.assistsheffield.org.uk
Arimathea Trust	Nottingham	0115 970 1855	
Abigail	Leeds	0113 261 8055	
Peace House	Coventry	02476 664616	www.covpeacehouse.org.uk
Spare Room	London		

Please email livingghosts@church-poverty.org.uk to tell us about others for the next edition of this pack. If there is not a hosting or voluntary housing scheme in your area the NACCOM Network can give you advice on starting one – contact the Boaz Trust on 0161 202 1056.

🕒 Offer other practical support

There are a number of churches and community organisations who give out clothes, hygiene packs or food parcels to people who are destitute. So if you cannot afford to make a monetary donation, then why not help out by donating unwanted clothes or organise a collection where you work, study or at your place of worship.

4. Campaign

The best answer to destitution is to stop it happening in the first place – by changing the Government's policies. This is not easy but, like many other campaigns, we've been chipping away at the credibility of the Government's belief in destitution as a tool of Government policy.

While it is important to respond compassionately and practically to the symptoms it is just as important to deal with the cause of destitution. All the organisations in the Still Human Still Here campaign are available to help **you** do that, and here's how ...

🕒 Write to your MP

Wherever you live in the United Kingdom you have a member of parliament (MP) who is supposed to represent the interests of people in their constituency (the area they represent). You can write to your MP at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. The support and response that MP's give to letters can vary a lot.

You'll find a template of a letter you can use on page 10 but it will make more impact if you personalise your letter.

To find out who your MP is, look at www.locata.co.uk/commons or ring 0207 219 3000.

🕒 Contact your MP in person

Personal visits can have more impact than a letter, so why not visit your MP – or if there are a couple of you from the same area, contact their constituency office to request a meeting? If there are a group of you, you can also lobby your MP whilst they are at House of Commons – you can find out more about how to lobby by going to www.parliament.uk and entering 'lobbying' in their search box.

How to find out details of your MP's constituency surgeries

Most MP's have their own website with details of their constituency surgeries. So once you know their name you can follow the links on the House of Commons website or do a quick google search to find out where their surgeries are based. If you don't have internet access, you should be able to find details of their surgeries at your local library or Citizens Advice Bureau.

How to get the most out of your meeting with your MP:

- ✓be realistic about how much you can cover in one meeting.
- ✓read this campaign pack carefully before your visit and contact us if you need more information.
- ✓pick out three main points that you want to get across.
- ✓be clear about what you want your MP to do as a result of the meeting, such as writing to the Home Office on your behalf, or asking a Parliamentary Question based on the extent and effects of destitution in their constituency.
- ✓try and predict some possible responses and rehearse your arguments.
- ✓use one of the short films that we can send you for free – let the DVD do the initial explaining.
- ✓organise a follow up visit in a few months to see what action they have taken.

What your MP can do:

▪ A **parliamentary motion** is a way for MP's to show they support change on a particular issue. If a lot of MP's sign a motion the government might be more likely to tackle the problems. One sort of a motion is an Early Day Motion. Supporters of the Still Human Still Here campaign have supported several such motions, which have had the support of hundreds MP's. It often takes just one constituent to write to their MP, for the MP to support the motion.

▪ If an MP is particularly interested in an issue they can try to have a **parliamentary debate** in the House of Commons. A relevant government minister is obliged to attend, so it is a useful way of raising issues with the Government. You can encourage your MP to hold a debate on the issues by writing and/or meeting them.

▪ Many MP's use parliamentary **written questions** to find out more and put pressure on the Government.

These three things tend to be done by back-bench MP's – those not with official Government responsibility.

🕒 Protest

You can protest in many different ways – it doesn't have to be big, it just needs to have a focus, a target audience and an impact.

Think about who you want to hear your message, and how they can bring about the changes you want. Are there other people who will be influenced by you? How can you encourage them to get involved too? A soap box, a megaphone and a busy high street may be all you need!

Types of protest include:

giving out leaflets in a prominent place

information stall with petition

candle-lit vigil

publicity stunt

or check out the list of 198 ideas at www.aeinstein.org/organizations103a.html

picketing

marches

public meeting

street theatre

🕒 Sleep Out

In the last few years there have been a series of Sleep Outs in Scotland, England and Wales. They are a great way of raising awareness with the media and politicians locally. There is an excellent Check List to ensure a safe, effective and fun Sleep Out at www.church-poverty.org.uk/campaigns/livingghosts/

🕒 Endurance Challenge

Hundreds of people have tried the Endurance Challenge of living on a small amount of money (often £5) and a food parcel for a week - the same as those provided by destitution projects across the country. This is difficult - but it will help you, your friends and anyone you tell, to know how degrading destitution is. From experience we know the Challenge:

- gives new personal realisations about the everyday hardship
- provides new and everyday opportunities to talk to friends, colleagues and family about the reality of destitution
- encourages people to campaign to end the immoral and ineffective Government policies that create the situation
- is a visible act of solidarity with those who live like this all the time
- is an excellent human-interest story for the local media
- can raise some money for destitution projects and campaigns like ours that are trying to stop destitution happening in the first place.

There is lots of advice on how to take up the Endurance Challenge at www.church-poverty.org.uk/campaigns/livingghosts/.

Template of letter to send to MP

Add MP's name
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

(don't forget to put your full address on the letter as MP's can only deal with people in their constituency)

Dear

I am writing to bring to your attention the growing number of people seeking asylum who are being left homeless and starving in *my local area/across Scotland/UK* as a result of the removal of their support when their asylum claim is refused.

(Add in paragraph to explain any personal involvement with destitute asylum seekers or a quote from within this action pack)

I believe that it is inhuman and unacceptable to use destitution as a tool of policy in an attempt to encourage refused asylum seekers to return to the countries from which they have fled. Vulnerable people including pregnant women, survivors of torture and people in poor mental health are left homeless, unable to work and unable to claim any support from the state. *(add in details of what is happening locally if you know it)*

Most of these people come from war torn countries or countries with terrible human rights records. They often feel that they have not had a fair hearing on their asylum claim and cannot access Section 4 support because they do not want to sign to say it is safe for them to return to their country of origin.

We are calling for:

1) a form of temporary status to be granted to those fleeing warfare. We call for grants of Humanitarian Protection to be made in those cases where there is a "serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict" (from article 15c of the European Union Qualification Directive). Last year, only 55 people were granted Humanitarian Protection because of the very narrow criteria applied.

2) the Government to consider a system of ongoing support and contact with refused asylum seekers which would:

- Help asylum seekers understand why their asylum claim has been refused
- Give them time to think, prepare and plan ahead
- Ensure that they have fully explored all legal and migration options
- Where no other options are available, help them to engage in humane, dignified and supported voluntary return, avoiding the need for detention or forced removal.

This would result in:

- More engagement in and understanding of the asylum process by asylum seekers
- Less refused asylum seekers becoming destitute, 'disappearing' from the returns process or engaging in illegal working
- More voluntary returns, meaning a reduction in the costs associated with detention and forced removal.

Please raise this matter with the Home Secretary and join me in campaigning for a change in the law.

Yours sincerely

NB If writing to AM also add a paragraph to explain why destitution isn't a solely reserved matter.

5. Raise Awareness

People don't know what happens to me and others in my situation, I just want to make people understand.

Blanche, destitute asylum seeker from Congo

Many destitute asylum seekers have told us that if the British people knew what they were going through, then they wouldn't let it happen. We need your help to raise awareness and here is what you can do:

🕒 **Organise your own screening**

There are some excellent short films available - *Welcome/Taking Action* and *Still Human Still Here* - that let the destitute voices of experience do the talking for you. We can guide you as to how to get the most out of your screening. Get in touch with us to find out more or preview them at www.paih.org and www.amnesty.org.uk/asylum respectively.

🕒 **Organise a performance of the Asylum Monologues or Asylum Dialogues**

These performances are a powerful way of telling the hard and heroic experience of people struggling through the asylum system. The Asylum Monologues use the actual words of people seeking and refused asylum to vividly show the impact of destitution. If you are interested in hosting a performance get in touch with the Actors For Human Rights network (www.iceandfire/afhr) who will help you find trained performers who will give their time for free. A new development is the Asylum Dialogues that retell some of the wonderful stories of how ordinary people have worked alongside refugees seeking asylum.

🕒 **Invite a speaker to talk to your group**

Nearly all of us belong to one sort of organisation or another. Do you think the other members of your organisation know what is happening to destitute asylum seekers? Do you think they would be interested to find out more or may be interested to see how they can help?

Examples of groups who may want a talk

Church, mosque, or place of worship

College or university

Community centre

Local Authority, social work etc

Neighbourhood group

Pensioners group

Women's Institute

Rotary Club

School

Social Club

Tenants association

Trade union

Workplace

Why not arrange for one of our campaigners to come out and give a talk – this could be arranged to suit the needs of your group. Contact us with the supporters registration form at the end of this pack to arrange this.

🕒 **Train to be able to give talks on destitution**

Better still, why not train to be able to give talks on destitution yourself. The more people who go out and give talks, the bigger the momentum we can build behind our campaign. It's not as hard as you think and we will support you along the way. Sign up to get more information on our next training sessions by completing the supporters registration form.

🕒 **Use the media**

One of the best ways of influencing public opinion is using the media to get your message across. Here are a few suggestions of how to do this.

Write to your local newspaper

Most local newspapers are in need of items to include and using the local letters page can be an excellent way of engaging with local people.

Tips on writing to local press

First paragraph : sum up the article and try and grab the reader's attention. If possible try and find a local angle or news story to hook your article on to.

Second and third paragraphs : go into more detail, include some background information and something to personalise the story, such as a quote from someone destitute, how it has affected you personally or what you are doing to help.

Fourth paragraph : explain why destitution matters to the local community and what you are doing to help.

Final paragraph : sum up and explain how other people can help or find out more.

Complain about national newspaper coverage

If you see an article in a newspaper that is inaccurate, misleading or encouraging racism, then make a complaint to the Press Complaints Commission (www.pcc.org.uk). Making a complaint is free, quick and effective, but you may sometimes need to complain directly to the newspaper first. You can get advice on what to do via the Press Complaints Commission's helplines:

England: 0845 600 2757 **Scotland:** 0131 220 6652 **Wales:** 029 2039 5570

Contribute to Radio Phone-Ins

Asylum seekers are often debated on radio phone-ins, both local and national. Most people who phone in don't know anything about the real situation faced by asylum seekers. For the price of a phone call, you could reach a wide audience and let them know about the suffering experienced by destitute people refused asylum.

It is not as scary as you think to take part. It is best to concentrate on getting just 2 or 3 key points across – for example, people refused asylum cannot work or claim benefits; many asylum claims are refused even when it is not safe for them to return to their country of origin, and pregnant women and survivors of torture are being made destitute as the government wants to starve them out of the country.

6. Here to help

These organisations are all supporters of the Still Human Still Here campaign and can help you in different ways.

Positive Action in Housing

Offers practical support to destitute asylum seekers in Scotland and supports grassroots campaigns.

📍 98 West George Street, Glasgow, G2 1PJ
 ☎ 0141 353 2220
 🌐 www.paih.org

Church Action on Poverty

Campaigns with churches, Christians and other supporters to end the destitution of people refused asylum.

📍 Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester, M1 1JQ
 ☎ 0161 236 9321
 🌐 www.church-poverty.org.uk

Amnesty International UK	www.amnesty.org.uk/asylum
Archbishops' Council of the Church of England	www.cofe.anglican.org/about/archbishopsCouncil
Asylum Aid	www.asylumaid.org.uk
Asylum Rights Campaign	www.asylumrights.org.uk
Asylum Support & Immigration Resource Team	www.asirt.org.uk
Asylum Support Appeals Project	www.asaproject.org.uk
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales	www.catholicchurch.org.uk
Citizens Advice	www.citizensadvice.org.uk
Immigration Law Practitioners' Association	www.ilpa.org.uk
Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees	www.icar.org.uk
Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants	www.jcwi.org.uk
Medical Foundation for the care of victims of torture	www.torturecare.org.uk
Migrants Resource Centre	www.migrantsresourcecentre.org.uk
Refugee Action	www.refugee-action.org.uk
Refugee Council	www.refugeecouncil.org.uk & www.justfair.org.uk
Refugee Legal Centre	www.refugee-legal-centre.org.uk
Scottish Refugee Council	www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk
Student Action for Refugees	www.star-network.org.uk
The Children's Society	www.childrensociety.org.uk
Welsh Refugee Council	www.welshrefugeecouncil.org

🕒 How can I keep up to date with your campaign?

To be kept in touch with what is happening with our campaign you can join our mailing list. All you need to do is complete the supporter's registration form at the end of this resource pack.

Reproducing content from this pack elsewhere

You are free to share (copy, distribute and transmit) any content under the following conditions:

- Attribution. You must indicate that the material is by Church Action on Poverty and has been reproduced from www.church-poverty.org.uk (but not in any way that suggests that CAP endorses you or your use of the material).
- Non-commercial. You may not use the material for commercial purposes.
- No derivative works. You may not alter, transform, or build upon the material.

For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to this web page.

Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from Church Action on Poverty.

Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the author's moral rights.

Your fair dealing and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

This is a human-readable summary of the Creative Commons Legal Code (www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/legalcode).