

Unlocking the door

A roadmap for supporting
non-UK nationals facing
homelessness in England



Appendix 1

Case studies of non-UK nationals with lived
experience of homelessness and restricted eligibility

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The case studies and testimonies below are shared thanks to the generosity of ten individuals who faced homelessness and restricted eligibility to public funds during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their stories are shared to provide detailed insights into the complex and varied routes into homelessness experienced by non-UK nationals, their experiences of support, personal hopes and progress made.

Case studies 1-6 were collected by NACCOM with the support of their Community Researcher team in Autumn and Winter 2021. Case studies 7-10 were collected by Homeless Link, either as part of this project (7) or separate research conducted for Islington Council in November-December 2021 (8-10). Alex, Ivan and Elias were all being accommodated by Islington in their Everyone In accommodation at the time of interview.

1. Aleksy's story

Themes: failure to prevent; employment; long-term homelessness; physical health; EUSS; recovery

Aleksy, 47, is originally from Poland and has lived in the UK for 12 years. He has been homeless on and off for the last five years, after facing cancer and losing his job.

“Because of the cancer I couldn't work. I had problem with getting benefits. In this situation I asked my family to help and they sold my flat in Poland and sent it here. I was living with this money for five years. It was hard for me to get work. When the money finished I was confused because I got some help from the council but it was only 3 months. After I was sick from cancer I couldn't work as well. I was like half of a man ... I had hope it would be better – but it just got worse and worse.”

In that time, he has moved between his own accommodation, squatting, hostel accommodation and living on the street and had difficulty accessing other support other than for basic survival.

“The outreach workers would come to my tent to check on me and helped with sleeping bags or clothes but this was it. It was like ‘help for now’ but not proper help so 2 years I was just living in the bushes. 3 years ago was the worst time and I did not expect this support. I slept in a tent. I didn't believe that there was someone who could help me. I stopped asking, stopped trying, I gave up. I just thought what will be will be. I didn't care.”

During his time rough sleeping, Aleksy began to misuse alcohol and drugs and his mental health declined significantly.

“I have had some mental health problems. Which bothers me still. Not so much as before. On the street I used to do many things, sometimes stupid things. But I was concentrating on staying alive. Everything I did on the street, I don't want to judge myself, but it was things that weren't good. I started taking drugs. I thought it would make things better but it made things worse.”

As part of 'Everyone In' Aleksy was moved into hotel accommodation. While staying in the hotel, he was supported by a key worker to get settled status. This was a complicated, lengthy process because he was missing documentation needed. He was then moved into a shared house by a local charity working with the council. He is happy with his current accommodation and feels safe living there. Since moving into

accommodation, he has been supported around his physical and mental health and to access benefits.

“Since COVID has happened there have been many changes for me. Before I signed the contract with [charity] I had many problems. Problems with applying many times for JSA while I was homeless and couldn't get it. Usually when I applied myself it was cancelled... So they have helped me a lot with all paperwork. It is a big change for me because [...] I am trying to get a job so I can be responsible for myself.”

Aleksy feels that access to support has changed significantly since the COVID pandemic began and is more readily available to people who are non-UK nationals. He is currently working with his key worker to plan his move-on from the shared house. He is very grateful for the support he has received recently but also feels that if support is available sooner it can prevent people from suffering the ill effects of homelessness.

“Since COVID has happened there have been many changes for me... I had help with my mental health. It is one battle with myself that I won. It was much more last year than now. I don't have problems with drugs and alcohol anymore. It is not easy. I had some friends on the street but I am trying to make changes in my life and I want to move away from them. I am now struggling with loneliness and I am trying to find new friends and stay away from drugs and alcohol. More than a year I am clear.”

2. Matis' story

Themes: precarious work; EUSS paperwork and delays

Matis is 19 and is originally from Lithuania. He has lived in the UK for four years but for the last year has been homeless, having lost his job and then his accommodation during the pandemic. As it was cash in hand work, he did not have a National Insurance (NI) number.

“Before Corona I was working and renting a room in a house. I was working in a car wash. It was cash in hand work. In a week I would earn around £120. From that I could pay £90 for my accommodation. I had £30 a week to live on. Of course that was not enough. I had to hustle to look for ways to get food and clothes. You live day-to-day.”

Once he lost his job, he could not access any support and turned to crime to survive. He was arrested and sent to prison. Upon release, the probation service quickly arranged for him to move into COVID-19 hotel accommodation.

He no longer has any identification and is attempting to get this from the Lithuanian embassy. At the time of interview, he was being supported to get settled status and a NI number.

“I should find a new place to live [but...] I don't have any benefits. At the moment I can't get this [benefits] because I have to get my papers right... I had to go in person to London. I went alone, [charity] helped me to pay for the trains. I was not able to get my ID because the government think I am a deserter because I left when I was 16 and at 18 years old you have national service. At the moment I could not go back to Lithuania.... We hope we will get through this. We are stuck at the moment because I can't get my ID.”

He is still not registered with a GP, but has taken advantage of the GP visits to the hotel to get some support with his mental health for the first time, including a prescription for anti-depressants. Matis is hoping to

move into independent accommodation after leaving the hotel. He is not sure what options are available to him but is flexible as long as it is safe and secure.

“At the moment I am just waiting. Once I get this sorted I want to get a room somewhere. I need the insurance number to get the job. I don’t know what is available for accommodation. I would like to do some cooking work. I would clean dishes or anything. I have been practicing cooking by myself.”

3. Jan’s story

Themes: precarious work; repeat homelessness; physical health; EUSS

Jan, 39, is from Poland and has been in the UK for six years. Jan became homeless in winter 2019, when missing wages meant that he was forced out of his home. Jan slept rough for two weeks, during which time he received very little care or assistance and developed frostbite.

“I did not get paid from my work. I got kicked out from my house just before Christmas two years ago. I lost all hope and landed on the street...There was no real support when on streets. There was morning tea at the day centre but nothing special.”

He eventually moved into a shared house via a local charity, Jan was able to settle and find a new job.

“It has helped me to look to the future and feel safe. I can go through and do anything when I have a place to live in. I feel safe. I was able to start working every day. When you are on the street it is impossible to go to work every day”.

However, after five months Jan suffered another setback when he was the victim of a random assault at work. This event, which occurred just before the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions in March 2020, left Jan with a broken spine and in need of immediate treatment. After eventually getting medical support and returning to work, he lost his job and due to enduring injuries, has been forced to retrain in a different field.

Jan received settled status while staying with the charity. He is currently receiving Universal Credit and is waiting on a Personal Independence Payment. He hopes to move on to his own accommodation, once he is able to receive mental health treatment for PTSD, for which he has been waiting nearly a year. “I want to wait for that before I can think about what is next.” he said.

4. Adiah’s story

Themes: pre-settled status; rough sleeping verification

Adiah is 22, originally from Zimbabwe but with Portuguese citizenship, and has lived in the UK for three years. Adiah has pre-settled status until 2025, but faced difficulties claiming Universal Credit. She has been unstably housed since losing her job during COVID-19 and falling into arrears. Since then, she has been forced to ‘sofa surf’ with family and friends.

Adiah initially moved in with her uncle, and when their relationship broke down, she relocated to her current town to stay with a friend. However, eventually she was also asked to leave there. Adiah contacted various authorities requesting emergency assistance but was told that she would not be eligible for support unless

she could verify that she was street homeless. As a result, she and her boyfriend were forced to sleep rough, until Adiah was moved into hotel accommodation the following day.

“She [friend’s mother] got the police involved and they said there was nothing they could do about it. I tried calling the council and they weren’t very helpful. They told us we had to be rough sleeping in order for them to help. My boyfriend at the time stayed with me... It would be great if people did not have to sleep out in the cold in order to get supported. The police had to come pick us up. They took us to a café so they could call the council.”

She is frustrated at her treatment in the hotel, is confused about her rights and entitlements and reports that she only eats one meal a day.

“I have been here about a month and a half. It’s not too bad. There are a lot of feelings of not really getting enough help. They told me my rights and there are things I should have help with, but the case workers are telling me different... They are telling me not to use the lift, but I have to use the lift as I have problems with my knees. It feels like we are treated like second class citizens. We can’t go near the hotel desk.”

Caseworkers helped Adiah to successfully reapply for UC, which she was waiting on at the time of interview. She worries that her current immigration status will affect her housing options, and is frustrated by her limited agency in the situation, particularly as it remains unclear what type of accommodation she will be eligible for and where this may be:

“When it comes to things like local connection I keep being told about that. My local connection is in Nottingham so I don’t know how they are going to help me. Just to get help I feel I would need to go back to the start. I’m concerned about what type of place I might move into and who I will be forced to live with.”

In the meantime, Adiah is keen to use the support network available through the charity and at the hotel and evaluate her options until she can eventually access a one bed flat or studio for herself.

5. Ashu’s story

Themes: complex immigration issues; physical health

Ashu is in his mid-30s and has been in the UK for over 20 years. In that time, he has faced challenges with regularising his immigration status and with homelessness. He initially had indefinite leave to remain, but this was then revoked leaving him with no recourse to public funds. He was not allowed to work and had little access to support. In 2018, he became homeless and was forced to live on the streets for two years.

“My health wasn’t great as I have underlying health conditions. I was drinking alcohol to help me to get through the night. I was struggling for food. I wasn’t able to find a solicitor to help me with my immigration case. I had nowhere to go and didn’t know what move I could make.”

When COVID hit, Ashu was concerned about his inability to isolate, given his health conditions, and sought support from charities to find accommodation.

“When COVID came I was panicking... I was referred to the council. The government had already announced Everybody In, but because I had no recourse to public funds the council still refused.

I went to another local council and they refused as well.”

After a month, and with help from charities, he was finally given a bed by the council. With it, came comfort, security, food and contact with a solicitor to help his immigration case.

“I was warm, I didn’t have to drink to get to sleep. I could wash every day. It meant I felt safe and could protect my health. Mentally it made a huge difference... It was a big change not to worry about eating. After that the council linked me with a solicitor to help me with my immigration case. I am still working through my immigration case. While it is not a problem solved it is going in the right direction. Personally, I also met my girlfriend and we have had a child together.”

Even though he knows his support could end at any time, Ashu is clear that Everyone In provided the opportunity he had needed for so long to progress with his life.

“If it wasn’t for ‘everyone in’ I would still be homeless and my health would have been getting worse. ‘Everyone In’ gave me options and hope.”

“I hope that COVID is near to an end. But with it also brings uncertainty for me and I hope that others in similar situations will be given the same level of support and opportunities.”

6. Jane’s story

Themes: domestic violence; asylum system; fear and racism

Jane came to the UK in 2002 after leaving her country for political reasons. She hoped to study in the UK until the danger had passed in her home country, so after arriving as a visitor she applied for a student visa. Even though she had preferred not to go the asylum route, when the student visa was refused she claimed asylum.

Soon after, she met her husband who was given discretionary leave to remain following his own asylum claim. The local authority accommodated them in a two-bedroom flat, but because her status was not settled, her husband had control of all of the paperwork. Unfortunately, he husband soon became abusive towards her. After looking for help from the police, she found that there were few options: because her name was not on the lease, she had to choose between staying or facing homelessness.

“[The police] told me that I needed to leave the flat. They made me dress quickly as I was wearing my nightgown. They took me to central station and left me there. I was so afraid and cold. I didn’t know what to do. I only had one bar of battery on my phone and there was no-one I could call. I had to call my husband again. I returned to our flat.”

Jane expressed distrust and frustration at the treatment she received whenever she sought help from the police and other statutory services during this period. She felt that her race was a factor in how she was perceived by the authorities.

“It is frightening and demeaning to be in the hands of the police and be left less safe than you were before contacting them. They could have taken me to a safe place or helped me get support – but they never did. They had left me on the street so I could not go back to them for help.

“When I have tried to get help through any statutory services it feels that if they do not know that someone has your back, you can be mistreated. As a woman of colour, it feels I am judged and not believed.”

She remained with her husband in the flat for a long time, enduring his abuse and sleeping on the floor behind the door in a separate room. Eventually, after telling her story to a charity support group, a support worker arranged for her to move into a hotel for four days – enough space to be able to consider her options.

Jane was then able to move in with a friend for a year, and is now staying in accommodation provided by a charity again. She described how vulnerable not having documents can make you as a woman of colour and the stress she felt trying to navigate the system:

“I had the vulnerability of not having my documents and I am defenceless because of this. Men can put you in situations where you are subjected to sexual assault and abuse.”

“When I have been to the local authority they have asked me to provide information, they say, ‘Can we have this?’, ‘Can we have that?’ Straight away they want your National Insurance number, which I do not have. Then in the end, they say they cannot help you. When you ask for support you feel judged and you do not want to return.”

7. Anna’s story

Themes: long-term rough sleeping; domestic violence; substance misuse; EUSS

Having run her own cleaning business previously, Anna became homeless in 2015 and spent a number of years rough sleeping in a large town in the East of England. Anna was an EU national and due to the lack of provision for individuals with restricted eligibility, Anna was unable to be housed. For a few years, there was no outreach support readily available to her.

Anna was particularly vulnerable, living in an encampment with a partner who was abusive, and others who were mutually unhelpful towards one another, regularly spending any money they obtained on alcohol and expecting Anna to spend any of her finances to share amongst each other. This combination of heavy alcohol use and regular abuse meant that Anna was regularly in need of medical help, and police interventions were common too.

While interventions and respite housing helped, accommodation was time-limited, and Anna returned to her encampment after a brief stay at a local hostel. Alternative ‘No Recourse’ accommodation was not suitable at the time either, due to ongoing domestic abuse issues.

Finally, the dual opportunities of a path to regularisation and stable accommodation helped Anna to turn things around. Anna was supported by local agencies to apply for the EUSS, and while waiting for the outcome, she was able to be safely housed under the ‘Everyone In’ initiative away from her abusive partner. Anna took the chance to separate herself from destructive relationships, instead building up a positive support network around her. She stopped drinking alcohol, and was able to start caring for herself with access to necessary facilities, going from being dangerously underweight and unable to care for herself, to being healthy and able to have pride in herself again, with returned dignity and being able to live again as she once did.

Anna is still in the process of obtaining permanent accommodation. Practically, Anna now has housing and financial security from which she is keen to progress back into work, and personally, she is safe, happy and looking ahead with optimism.

8. Alex's story

Themes: complex immigration issues; trauma; person-centred support.

Alex has been in the UK for 22 years. He has ongoing immigration issues and has been in immigration detention twice, most recently for 18 months in 2012-2013. He describes this experience as extremely traumatic, with £5 a week to live on. His father died during this period of detention and he describes watching the phone ring at 2am and not answering, knowing it could only be bad news. His mother died just two years later.

When he was released, rather than being returned to London, he was moved to the North of England, away from all the places and people he knew. He became depressed and after two years decided to come back to London, despite having no accommodation there and no access to funds. Before the pandemic hit, Alex had been sleeping on the streets since 2015. He suffers with extremely poor mental health and has had no access to support or any options to end his destitution.

For the first time in five years, Everyone In meant that he had access to a stable home and much-needed immigration support. He describes being given access to immigration advice and lawyers immediately after being brought into accommodation; this has given him hope after so many years of insecurity. He has been in his most recent accommodation for four months and this is the third accommodation he has been in, but he describes them all as "excellent" and explains the importance to him of having a roof and people who care:

"They want to help"; "they're human"; "they're always here".

His future is still uncertain, but Alex is confident that the team supporting him are doing what they can and says that he must be appreciative of what he has, rather than wishing for things that are unrealistic. He explains the importance to him of receiving advice and support after so long: knowing that staff care and are trying, regardless of the outcome of immigration issues, "that is enough".

9. Ivan's story

Themes: person-centred support; EUSS

Ivan was sleeping on the streets when he was approached by an outreach worker from St. Mungo's. He had been sleeping rough since before the pandemic in a range of locations, including Haringey, Central London and Islington.

In Haringey, he was approached by outreach a number of times, but these conversations did not result in any support because without recourse to public funds, there were limited options available for him. After Everyone In was announced, contact with an Islington outreach worker led to him being taken to Everyone In accommodation. He describes a light touch initial assessment focussed on outlining rules and expected behaviours, which he was happy to sign up to. Ivan has been working on getting settled status with his support worker since he moved in.

He describes being happy with the support he has received and moreover being grateful to have somewhere to stay: a roof and a room, and that food has often also been available:

“I’m very happy with the support. We have so much, actually. ... I’m happy with that”

He works in construction and has worked in London previously. He has had some challenges with alcohol in the past, and this had led to him losing work. On his way into the interview, Ivan was given the good news that he has been granted Settled Status. Now that he has his status, his main aim is to find employment and a place to live, with a kitchen so that he can cook for himself.

10. Elias’ story

Themes: trauma; mental health; person-centred support.

Elias has been in the UK for several years. He was living with his partner and working as a patisserie chef but lost his accommodation after his relationship broke down. He stayed with a family member for a while but, before the pandemic began, this situation became untenable.

After attempting to take his own life, Elias was put in hospital and was referred to Everyone In accommodation after he was discharged. He was impressed at the speed with which he was put in touch with a support worker once he had discussed his situation with the doctor.

Elias’ visa lapsed when he was living on the streets, and his support worker has helped him to regain his status. He is unreservedly positive about the support he has received. Over the course of a year, his visa has been restored and he has now moved into his own flat. He explained:

“I’m very happy with the service and I couldn’t ask for more. I couldn’t ask for more. Got my place and I’m talking with my big daughter”.

He describes experiencing trauma in his home country, including the loss of both of his parents when he was young. He has depression and other mental health issues as a result of this and in an effort to cope, he has preferred to keep to himself for many years. Through the support he received during Everyone In, he is now accessing mental health support for the first time; and is also determined to stop smoking.

“By myself, I can’t do it myself, I need someone, ... like [my support worker]. He motivates me a lot and I feel motivated for a lot of stuff now. Before I wasn’t, but now I’m very motivated”.

He has also made contact with his daughter and she has been helping him to settle into his new home. He is visibly proud of himself and positive about the future. He plans now to go back to work and is looking forward to proving to his uncle that he now makes the more refined patisserie!



Homeless Link



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About Us

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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