

IMPACT REPORT 2025



Greater Manchester
IMMIGRATION AID UNIT

“A reason to smile is what GMIAU is. Amidst the dark. There are hundreds, if not thousands of us, who are safe at home now, due to GMIAU.”

An opening message from our outgoing Chief Executive, Denise, and our new Chief Executive, Neil



Denise McDowell,
outgoing CEO

This is the last time that I will write the introduction to GMIAU’s impact report. After 17 years in post, I retire as CEO at the end of this year.

I am very proud to present the report that you are about to read. You’ll see what we’ve achieved through our free, specialist, legal immigration advice and representation, and you’ll hear from people who have used our services about the difference it has made to their lives.

Never take this for granted. Access to legal aid and a lawyer is more difficult now than at any time in the years I’ve been at GMIAU.

Campaigning with and on behalf of people who are at the harshest end of the immigration system is why GMIAU exists. We don’t take anything for granted, and we have seen massive shifts in the politics of immigration over the years, none in a positive direction. But throughout, we have always relied on our allies and supporters to help us to get through the challenges and threats we have faced.

This report outlines not just all that we have achieved over the last year, though the achievements are considerable, but it represents a testimony to the strength and courage of an organisation that has never forgotten why it exists and why **‘no-one is illegal’**.



Neil Frackelton,
CEO

As the newly arrived CEO, this report clearly demonstrates the multiple positive, and lasting, impacts GMIAU delivers, to the huge credit of Denise and her staff team, and supported by a rich and diverse mix of funders, supporters and partners. GMIAU continues to work within a social justice context, almost constantly unsettled by government agendas and the chasing of short term populism policies.

This comprehensive and accessible report is an invaluable reminder of the importance of a clear focus on the needs of human beings subject to immigration control in the North West, many of whom face multiple challenges and significant trauma within their daily lived experience.

An opening message from our Chair of the Board of Trustees



Judith Nyanjowa,
Chair

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, it is with immense pride that I present the GMIAU 2025 Impact Report. This document is not merely an account of services delivered; it is a profound affirmation of the resilience and purpose that define our organisation.

The results showcase the organisation securing permanent status for hundreds and rescuing families from destitution as a direct result of GMIAU’s foundational values, expertise, tenacity, and deep-seated empathy. We are proud to be the only not-for-profit provider of specialist legal immigration advice of this scale in the North West.

As we enter a new era with new leadership, we are confident in the future under Neil’s leadership, who steps into the CEO role as we transition from Denise’s outstanding 17-year tenure.

The Board is committed to ensuring the organisation remains financially stable and strategically focused to meet the ever-growing demand for our services.

We see evidence every day that our model works: combining crucial legal casework with targeted policy and campaigns work, which is why we continue to challenge the systemic injustices that fuel the “hostile environment.” Our investment in the Children’s Asylum Project is a testament to the effective, community-rooted solutions that define our impact.

The Board extends its deepest gratitude to our staff, volunteers, funders, and partners. Your solidarity is the foundation of our success. We will continue to hold fast to our vision of a society built on equality and justice for everyone, without exception.



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WHO WE ARE

Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU) has been standing up for people navigating the UK's hostile immigration system for **over 35 years**. Based in Manchester and Liverpool and working across the North West, we provide expert immigration legal advice, representation and support to people seeking asylum, refugees, children, and vulnerable adults.

Our mission is simple but vital: to provide expert legal representation, support, and hope. Our vision is of a society built on equality, compassion and justice for everyone, regardless of their immigration status.

Alongside our legal casework, we research, campaign, and work with communities to challenge systemic injustice and drive change. People with lived experience of immigration injustice are at the heart of everything we do - shaping our advocacy and guiding the direction of our organisation. Our Board is advised by a Consultation Group with lived experience of the immigration system.

Our dedicated team of **11** solicitors and **15** Immigration Advice Authority-accredited caseworkers support people facing homelessness and destitution, survivors of domestic abuse and unaccompanied children seeking asylum and care leavers. We also deliver training to improve understanding of the immigration system and strengthen practice amongst voluntary and statutory sector partners.

Without the hard work and unwavering commitment from all our staff members and volunteers, our work would not be possible.

OUR VALUES

WE SPEAK UP

We know what's right and what's fair.

We are not silent when we see injustice.

WE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

We use all the knowledge, expertise, and skill we possess in order to succeed.

WE SEE THE WHOLE PERSON

We recognise the talents, humanity and potential of those who turn to us for help.

WE ACT WITH EMPATHY

We treat people how we'd want to be treated; with kindness, dignity, and respect.

WE ARE TENACIOUS

We take on difficult cases. And we don't give up easily.

WE FIGHT FOR CHANGE

We campaign with others for improvements in immigration law and policy.



THE CONTEXT OF OUR WORK

We are proud to be rooted in Greater Manchester and the North West, part of strong communities and networks that show every day what solidarity looks like. But the context we are working in is one of intensifying hostility. Every day at GMIAU we witness the human cost of the UK's hostile immigration policies, where government language and a culture of disbelief make life extremely difficult for the people we support. Refugee family reunion has been suspended, detentions and deportations ramped up, and routes to settlement and citizenship are under attack from both ruling and opposition parties. These choices are not about evidence or compassion. They are political decisions designed to look "tough", appeal to short-term populism, and to echo the rhetoric of the far right. The result is more families torn apart, and communities left less safe.

This is a frightening time for people in our community. In 2024, far-right disinformation fuelled racist riots, and a year later intimidation outside asylum accommodation has become routine. Government hostility towards people seeking safety feeds this violence and legitimises those who spread hate. These attacks target people in the asylum system, but in truth they are an attack on Black and Brown communities as a whole, particularly Muslim communities, and they make all of us less safe.

We're also working as the only not-for-profit provider of specialist legal immigration advice in the North West of England, in the context of a growing crisis in legal aid provision. There are far more people who need immigration advice than advisers who are able to support them. The law, which is meant to protect people's rights, has become increasingly less accessible to the very people whose rights are under attack.

This is the backdrop to GMIAU's work. The pace and scale of change has left us defending the very basics: asylum, human rights and justice. **And yet, more than 35 years on, GMIAU is stronger than ever.** Every campaign, every coalition, every voice raised and every case won matters more at this moment. Throughout this report you will read about people for whom GMIAU has been a lifeline: who without our support would be without legal representation, separated from family, or without a roof over their heads. Together with our communities, we keep showing that another future is possible.

POLICY AND CAMPAIGNS

Our Policy and Campaigns Team exists to challenge this hostility, expose injustice, and influence decision-makers for a fairer, more compassionate society. We amplify the voices of people with lived experience of immigration injustice and engage with politicians and government officials. We also carry out meaningful, evidence-based research and work with the media to show the impact of the hostile policies and laws directed at the people we support.

Against an unprecedented backdrop of relentless change and escalating hostility, our work has focused on building a more hopeful narrative on immigration and strengthening community resilience.

Our policy and campaigns work is in constant dialogue with our legal and support work, shaped by the reality our caseworkers see as well as by the lived experience groups who we support to stand up for their rights.

In the last year, we've ramped up our communications capacity, an agreed organisational priority. With our first dedicated Communications Officer, Annie, we're able to more quickly respond to the fast-changing landscape - keeping our communities informed of changes that impact them, and ensuring their voices are heard.



Annie,
Communications
Officer

Throughout this report you will see the **impact** of our interconnected strands of work over the past 18 months, and of the partnerships and coalitions that make us stronger.





OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE

JULY 2024 - JUNE 2025

2,760

people got legal advice from us



1,190

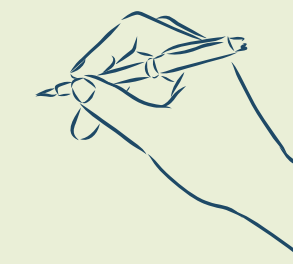
people were given legal advice even though we could not take on their case



we received

3,900

referral forms asking for our help



we handled

1,284

advice phone calls



594
Legal cases taken on

168 asylum applications and appeals for adults

85 asylum applications and appeals for unaccompanied children

83 leave to remain applications based on human rights

81 leave to remain applications for people suffering from domestic abuse

671

Legal cases closed

130 grants of indefinite leave to remain

75 grants of limited leave to remain

236 grants of refugee status or humanitarian protection



Our Legal Team provides expert immigration and public law advice to people across the **North West**, guiding them through some of the most complex and life-changing legal processes. At a time of fast-changing policy, the team is able to meet the unpredictable and unexpected with flexibility, ensuring we are at the cutting edge of immigration law and always securing the best outcomes for the people we support.

Between July 2024 and June 2025, we took on **594** legal cases for people from **58** nationalities, spanning **23 of the 24** local authority areas in the North West. Based in Crumpsall and Liverpool, our lawyers take on cases involving asylum and trafficking, family and private life applications, deportation and detention challenges, domestic abuse, and citizenship for children in care.

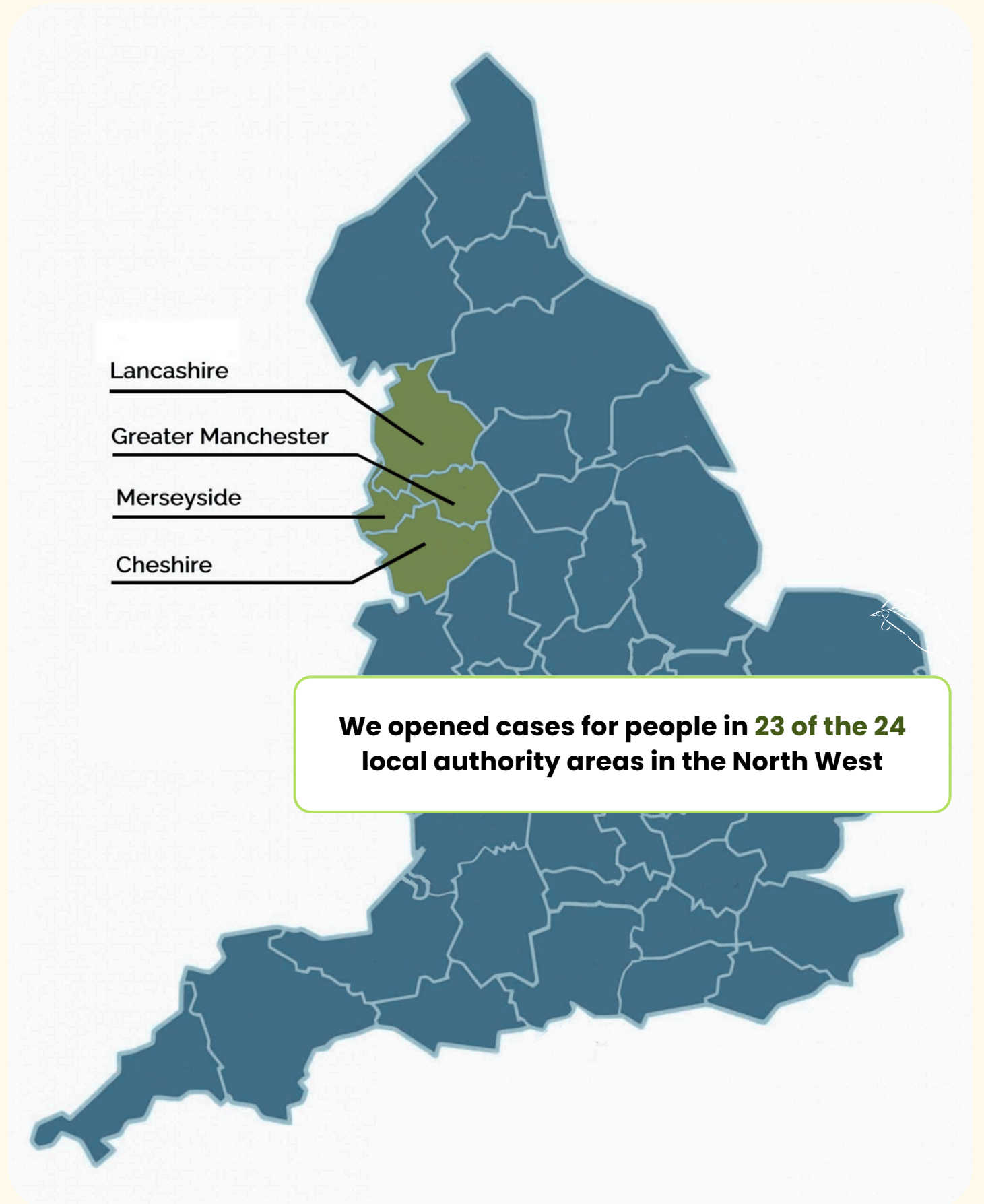
From July 2024 to June 2025:

- We took on **168** asylum applications and appeals for adults and families who have fled their countries to seek safety in the UK.
- We made **85** asylum applications for unaccompanied children, who have arrived in the UK on their own to claim asylum. Usually in the care of local authorities, we also provide additional support for these children, including through the All4One group.
- We made **83** applications for leave to remain for people in the immigration system based on their human rights. This might be based on their private life or family life.
- We made **81** applications for leave to remain for people who were suffering domestic abuse and their families. To ensure they are able to be safe from harm, survivors of domestic abuse can apply for leave to remain on this basis.

During the same period, we closed **671** cases, securing:

- **130** grants of indefinite leave to remain
- **75** grants of limited leave to remain
- **236** grants of refugee status or humanitarian protection

Whether someone is seeking safety, reuniting with loved ones, or fighting to stay in the place they call home, we ensure they are treated fairly, their rights are upheld, and they are never left to face a hostile system alone.



OUR LEGAL WORK



Shakhura,
Senior Caseworker



Our lawyers represent clients at **every level** of the legal system, from the First-tier and Upper Tribunals to the Court of Appeal and, when necessary, the Supreme Court. When there is no right of appeal, they use judicial review to challenge unlawful decisions and hold the Home Office to account.

Our Public Law team also plays a crucial role in preventing homelessness and destitution. Building on the work of our Destitution Team, they challenge delays, refusals, and inadequate support to ensure people can access housing, financial help, and stability, allowing them to rebuild their lives with dignity and security.

“The outcome has brought unending joy, peace and compensation for my months of tears and sadness.”

“I was dead before and this help brought me back to life. I got the status. I feel safe now.”

“I feel relieved and not anxious anymore because of the uncertainty about my future, as going back to my country was not an option for me.”

“All the anxiousness and anxiety went away. I was able to work again and provide for my family which made our living better.”

“Now I am able to move forward and focus on building a brighter future.”

“Everything changed for the positive. I felt like being born again.”

Because our team can only legally represent a small proportion of the people who need our help, we often think creatively about how our team’s expertise can have the biggest impact.

We provide legal information, training and drop-in advice sessions to ensure as many people are getting our advice as possible, even if we can’t always represent them. Our caseworkers run regular legal advice sessions in partnership with Women Asylum Seekers Together and in asylum hotels. These sessions focus on equipping people with the legal knowledge to navigate the overwhelming asylum system.

“We will be grateful to GMIAU until the last day of our lives”

MEET HASSOUN, OUR TEAM ASSISTANT



The story of one family who secured refugee status in the UK with GMIAU’s help.

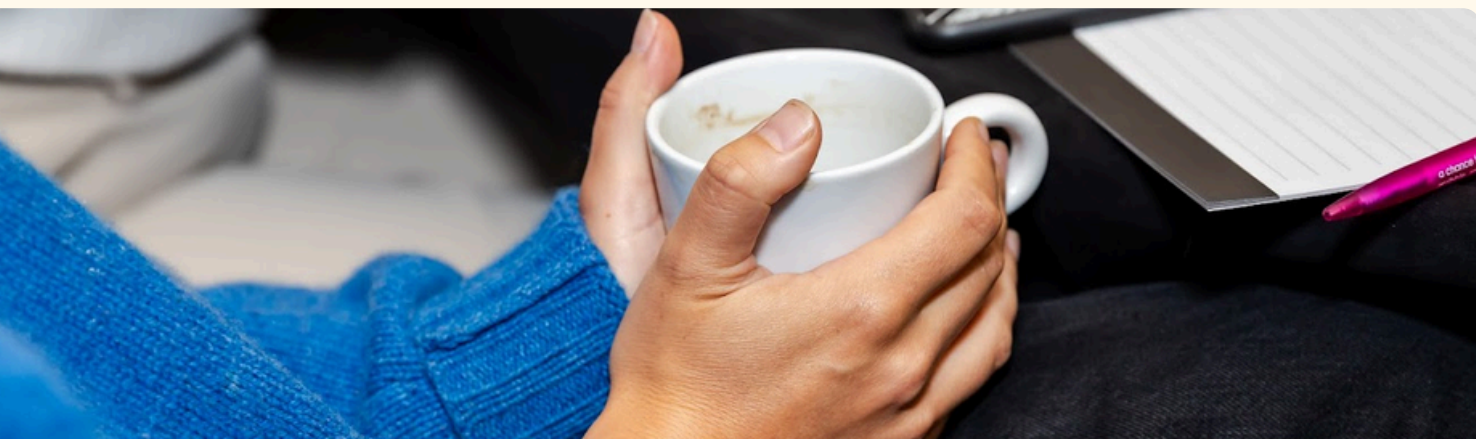
“We had to leave our country, El Salvador, due to the gangs. Gangsters came one night to our house to threaten us and our children. Our daughter and son were between teens and adults, so they were at the right age for the gangs. Boys are taken to be part of the gangs even if they don’t want to, and for girls, they are taken to be sexual slaves. We didn’t want that for our children. That’s how we decided to run away from our country.

It was really a hard decision to make. We didn’t have time to discuss it. We started trying to get passports, selling our vehicle to get the flights straight away. On the flight, we were really nervous. We didn’t know what we were going to do, we didn’t know anybody. No house, no work, nothing. But at least we felt that we would have an opportunity to live, to be free from the gangs.”

After arriving in the UK, the family faced a long and difficult asylum process. They were let down and even scammed by several lawyers, and at one point, their children were detained in London. For five years, they struggled to navigate the complex system, finding some comfort through their church and the community they built through volunteering. Eventually, they found GMIAU, and everything changed.

“After the storm, the calm comes. We found Max. GMIAU is the only firm that really cares about the person, not as a client – as a human being. We really felt their concerns about our situation. They were not only kind, but comprehensive. Supportive. Empathic. It was like working with family. They didn’t care if we had money or not, they explained from the beginning that they are a charity, and the most important thing is the client.

After one year, we were finally granted refugee status. We will be grateful to GMIAU until the last day of our lives. They have given us the life we have now. My husband and son have permanent jobs in a warehouse. Our daughter has just started university. I’m working in the pharmacy in a hospital. We’re renting our house. They are amazing people. We owe them our lives.”



Hassoun has been GMIAU’s Team Assistant since August 2024.

As well as working at GMIAU, he is studying for an Access to Business university course.

“I’m the first face people see when they come into our reception. I also make sure that all the caseworkers here get the help that they need. People who come into our office are in a range of difficult situations. They might have an appointment with their GMIAU caseworker or need to pick up their documents. But often, people who don’t have a legal representative come to ask for our help: appealing an asylum decision, bringing family members to the UK, or finding a place to stay.

When people come here, they are often very, very worried. We do our best to reassure them.

A difficult thing recently has been telling people that the refugee family reunion route has been suspended. It’s very sad. And people are upset when I tell them we have no capacity. Hearing people’s stories, I know they have good reason to be distressed. Often it helps just to have someone listen to them.

I try to bring the positive energy. I speak Arabic, Chadian, English and French, and I learned basic greetings in other languages, like Farsi, Dari, Kurdish and Urdu. I learned that if you start the conversation with someone who looks very nervous or anxious, and you just start by saying hi in their language, then they will automatically relax. In this job I’m professional, but I’m not too formal. I ask people questions to make them feel comfortable, to break that barrier. I know how hard things can be for the people coming to see us and I’m doing my best to listen and help.

I want to study international relations in the future, and working here has helped me a lot to understand what the law looks like. I get to educate myself a lot, I read a lot. I always wanted to help people. “



DESTITUTION AND HOMELESSNESS

OUTREACH WORK

Our work preventing and ending destitution works because it is rooted in communities. Our team delivers regular outreach sessions in nine organisations across six boroughs and additional one-off advice sessions. We're able to support people in the areas where they live and settings they're comfortable in, while building up important relationships with community organisations.

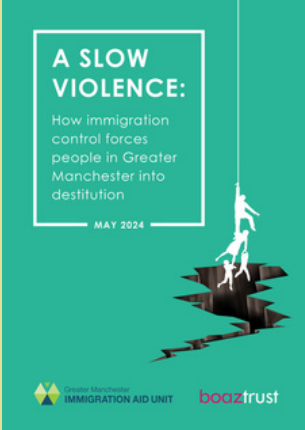
Support & Action for Women's Network, a charity based in Oldham supporting Black African women and their families, said:

"This opportunity and working closely with GMIAU has benefited the women we serve in their local community where they are confident, feel safe to seek help and talk openly and honestly about the challenges they face...The knowledge and expertise provided by GMIAU to women was extensive in all areas and provided with honesty, empathy with reference to the law where required.... This has enabled women to access support through timely referral to appropriate statutory agencies particularly Adult Social Care resulting in families not being separated.... Women tell us they have been listened to without judgement and what this means in reality to them. They felt seen, heard and believed."

While our team works to help people in crisis, we're determined to tackle the systemic failings that have led them to that point. We have delivered training to over **1,000** frontline workers, on issues including homelessness, asylum support, and domestic abuse.

POLICY & CAMPAIGNS

In May 2024, we released a research report, [Slow Violence](#) with the Boaz Trust, a report revealing how immigration policy traps people in destitution for years and framing it as a form of racialised violence. Our October 2025 [refugee homelessness briefing](#) showed how national asylum policy collides with a broken housing system, pushing newly recognised refugees into homelessness, and set out practical solutions to rebuild trust and create safe homes for all.



OUR IMPACT

Between July 2024 and June 2025, our team supported **1,047** people in crisis. More than **300** were homeless or sofa surfing, including **151** sleeping on the streets. In a climate of rising racism and normalised hostility, people of colour experiencing street homelessness face particularly high risks of harassment, abuse, and violence. Growing media attention, especially from right-wing outlets, has turned encampments into targets of public scrutiny, increasing people's vulnerability.

In a context of shrinking Legal Aid and limited housing options, we are pleased that **61%** of people supported secured more stable accommodation, **171** people regained access to welfare or essential support, and **55** people had immigration applications submitted to help secure their futures.

RESS



We work in partnership with the Boaz Trust and the Booth Centre through The Restricted Eligibility Support Service (RESS), commissioned in 2023 by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). RESS combines floating support with legal advice for Greater Manchester residents facing immigration-related barriers to housing, helping them to navigate complex systems in order to move on from homelessness, live well and thrive. The service's vision is that no one should ever be forced into homelessness due to their immigration status.

In the year 2024/25, **444** people received immigration advice through RESS, and **264** people were supported with accommodation, employment, and other needs. Through the RESS contract, we also took on new work in 2025 supporting **93** people with Health and Care Worker Visas who had been exploited or left without housing while seeking new sponsors.

A priority in our work is securing immigration status for children. This takes the form of representing children in the asylum system to get refugee status, or through immigration routes to settlement for other children who are not British. We don't want to see any children turning 18 without status, unable to pursue their work or study dreams or access the social safety net if things go wrong. And we want to see children secure and safe to stay here, with the same rights as their friends. Though it is important for young people to stay connected to their heritage, British citizenship is often the most secure option for them, and so that's what we pursue for many of the children we work with.

SEPARATED CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM

In the year to June 2025, at least **3,553** children arrived in the UK on their own to seek asylum. They have left behind their families and everything they know and often undergone unimaginably difficult journeys to get here. Now in the UK they are asked to relive their most traumatising experiences in order to prove their asylum claim and get the security they need. The first hurdle is finding legal representation. Too often, unaccompanied children are left waiting months or even years for legal help, with their asylum claims delayed or decided without proper representation. In the North West, a local project was set up as a response to the national failings of the legal aid system.

CHILDREN'S ASYLUM PROJECT

Since July 2023, local authorities across the North West have funded GMIAU caseworkers to tackle the severe shortage of legal representation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in care. This allowed us to expand our capacity.

Over the past year, the project has supported more than **150** children, guiding them through every stage of their asylum claims. We help them understand the process, gather strong evidence, prepare for interviews, and challenge decisions where needed. Our caseworkers have achieved new accreditations, expanding the scope of work they can do. Of the 150 cases taken on, more than half have already received a decision: **62** young people were granted leave to remain, seven were refused but supported with appeals, and around **90%** of the remaining **70** cases are expected to be successful. Delays in accessing GMIAU's help have reduced by **78%**, meaning most children are represented before they turn 18 and can move forward with their lives.

The work has not been without challenges. In 2025, the Home Office changed its approach to Afghan asylum claims, moving from a high grant rate to refusing more than half of cases and removing Afghanistan from its "high grant" list. Our team adapted quickly, strengthening case preparation, training staff to identify all risk factors, and ensuring appeals were handled by experienced lawyers.



One case shows the difference this makes.

Ali (name changed), a 17-year-old Afghan boy, had been waiting 18 months for a lawyer when our caseworker took on his case. He had fled Afghanistan after the Taliban abducted his father, threatened his family, and forced him onto a dangerous journey alone to the UK. Traumatized and deeply anxious, he feared being sent back. His caseworker guided him through the process, secured medical and expert evidence, and applied for him to be excused from further interviews due to his mental health. When the Home Office refused his asylum claim, she submitted further legal arguments and evidence and eventually succeeded. Ali was granted refugee status with five years' leave to remain.

For Ali, and for many other young people, this project has been **life-changing**, turning long waits, uncertainty and fear into safety, stability and the chance to build a future.

SEPARATED CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM

THE ALL4ONE YOUTH GROUP

Our weekly youth group, All4One, is a safe and welcoming space for unaccompanied children and young people seeking asylum, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. It's a place for connection and learning, where young people come together to build their futures with support and community around them.

Each week they play games, practise English, take part in workshops and share a meal. Run by staff and a brilliant team of volunteers, the group helps reduce isolation, build friendships, and increase confidence and understanding of rights. It also strengthens young people's sense of belonging and integration into their new communities.

Between May 2024 and July 2025, we welcomed **174** young people to the group, with many attending weekly and describing All4One as their **"family."**



"This group is amazing. It introduces you to friends and doesn't make you feel alone. It teaches you British laws. No one here makes me feel safer than this group. You are the comfort, the laughter and the support I need every week."

"The All4One group is very important to me because it helps me feel included and supported. It gives us a safe space to meet new people, share experiences, and learn from each other. Kathleen is also a big part of why the group is special. She is kind, patient, and always makes sure everyone feels welcome. This group truly makes a difference in our lives."

"I see it as very important for those who do not have a family."

"I first heard about it from a friend who told me how supportive and welcoming it is, so I decided to give it a try. From my very first visit, Kathleen and Maria greeted me with kindness and made me feel at home. Being part of the All4One group makes me happy. I've met amazing people, made new friends, and always leave with a smile."

A young person who we represent and support shares his experience

"I first got to know GMIAU through the All4One group. I joined All4One when I was 15 years old. Since then, and for over a year and three months, I have never missed a single meeting. Every Wednesday, I go there with excitement, because I feel at home.

Before joining All4One, my life was very difficult. I was a stranger in a new country, without friends, family, and I did not speak English. Everything was challenging and confusing.

All4One changed all that. It taught me how to depend on myself, face my problems courageously, and express myself confidently. I now feel completely different from the person I was before. I am very proud to be part of the All4One family.

Kathleen is very kind, always makes me laugh, asks about me, and helps me feel comfortable. Maria is very patient, and helps me with every legal matter, documents, and appointments.

When I started coming to All4One, I had a lawyer, but he did not provide translators I could understand, so I struggled to communicate with him. I reached a crisis when he closed my case, but Kathleen and Maria started looking for a new lawyer.

After six months, Kathleen informed me that Ryan, a GMIAU lawyer, would represent me. I was able to meet him in a friendly setting at the All4One group before our first official meeting. After I met him **I could sleep peacefully for the first time in a long while.**

GMIAU treat me with respect and humanity. They listen carefully and understand that we are not just files or cases, but human beings with feelings and experiences. They never made me feel ashamed of my problems.

After everything I experienced before **GMIAU restored my confidence and gave me hope."**

“With this group we have confidence to speak to people. This group is very powerful, we believe in this group.”

OUR WORK WITH CHILDREN



SEPARATED CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM

YOUNG LEADERS

The All4One group is a place where young people’s leadership skills can thrive, and some of the young people formed the Young Leaders group, drawing on their experiences in the UK to campaign for change.

This year they have developed the **‘No Borders In Education’** campaign.

For all of the young leaders, education is of utmost importance to them, but they found that the education system didn’t always support them to reach their goals. Based on their experiences in the UK, their campaign demands are:

- 1 Immediate access to full-time education for all, no matter when they arrive in the school year.**
- 2 Full-time education with access to a range of subjects so we can follow our passions.**
- 3 Understand that we need support to reach our full potential and make decisions about our future.**
- 4 Understand that we are all different, and arrive with our own skills, talents and qualifications.**

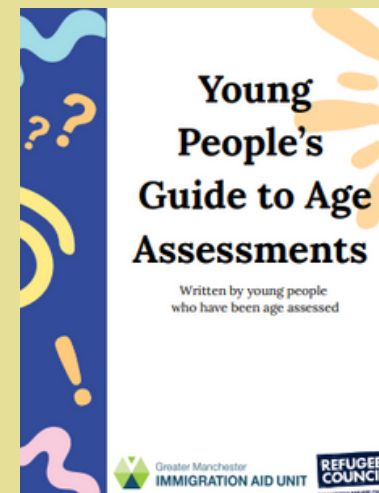
They have taken this campaign to decision-makers in Greater Manchester and beyond. They met with staff from their college to speak about their demands. In January 2025, young leaders shared their insights at the Northern Race Equality Conference in Bradford. They have influenced local decision-makers, including Manchester City Council and the Commission on the Integration of Refugees, and their experiences helped to shape Manchester’s journey to becoming a Local Authority of Sanctuary. They speak not only for themselves but as representatives of the whole of the All4One group.

AGE DISPUTED CHILDREN

In the All4One group and in our one-to-one support and legal casework, we support children whose age is being disputed and who are being treated as adults by the Home Office. Far too often, children who arrive in the UK have their age disbelieved by officials at the border who are not trained or specialised in working with children. They are routed into the adult asylum system and sent to adult accommodation, often hotels. In the North West, between January 2024 and February 2025, at least **296** children were wrongly sent to adult asylum accommodation. In these settings children are isolated, at heightened risk of exploitation, and report deteriorating mental health. Often, children who have been placed in adult hotels in Greater Manchester find the All4One group, and it is a lifeline for them – the only place they are accepted and welcomed as the children they are.

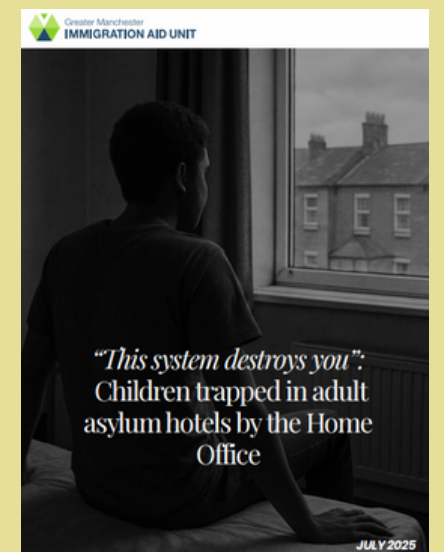
Children who have been age disputed have been working together with GMIAU to try to improve things for the young people who come after them.

POLICY & CAMPAIGNS



Five young people travelled to London to work with the Refugee Council to update our 2019 Young People’s [Guide to Age Assessments](#)— a resource made by young people, for young people going through the same process. The new version is translated into eight languages and includes guidance for social workers supporting young people.

Ten young people also worked with us to share their stories, which became a research [report](#) on their experiences of being wrongly treated as adults and trapped in hotels by the Home Office. In the report, we called on the Home Office to admit the harm their processes at the border are causing, and to act now to stop this harm. The young people also wrote a letter to the Home Secretary.



This [work](#) is also helping inform local authorities across the North West on how to better support children whose ages are disputed. We are grateful to the brave young people who said: **“We don’t want the young people who come after us to go through what we have gone through.”**

SECURING CITIZENSHIP FOR CHILDREN

Many children, even those who were born in the UK or grew up here, can reach 18 without realising that they are not British and that their immigration status has never been resolved. We work to stop that happening, both through representing individual children, and on a system level, supporting local authorities to improve their practice in resolving status for children in their care.

CHILDREN IN CARE

In 2019, Manchester City Council took a bold step by adopting a pledge to identify all children in their care with immigration issues, ensure they receive legal advice, and support them on a pathway to secure status and, where possible, citizenship. Our goal is for every local authority in Greater Manchester to sign up to this pledge.

To help councils turn this commitment into practice, we meet regularly with service leads and support social workers to help staff identify children who may not be British and understand what action is needed.

Since June 2024, we've provided immigration consultations on 116 children's cases in Manchester and taken on 16 of those for legal representation. We've started consultation sessions with two more local authorities and delivered specialist training to four others. We've also published **two guides** to help professionals understand citizenship and other immigration applications.

We're determined to see a future where no child is left without status or security.

POLICY & CAMPAIGNS



KIND UK PROJECT



GMIAU is one of five partner organisations delivering the [Kids in Need of Defense \(KIND\)](#) project in the UK since 2019. Together with Central England Law Centre, Coram Children's Legal Centre, JustRight Scotland, and the Migrant and Refugee Children's Legal Unit at Islington Law Centre, and pro bono partners Clyde & Co, DLA Piper and Sidley Austin, we help children and young people in families and in care secure the British citizenship they are entitled to and the stability that comes with it.

Camille, Solicitor at GMIAU who works on this project, said:

"One of the highlights of our work is being able to tell children and young people that their case has been successful, and they finally have the status they are entitled to under the law. I get an adrenaline rush every time. It's a great feeling. It means all the hard work has paid off. I find it puts all of life's problems into perspective."

Since May 2024, through the KIND project we've secured British citizenship for **30** children with a **100%** success rate.

In one success story, GMIAU was able to support a whole family to get their status: mum and dad, twin brothers, and their sister. Through our regular casework, GMIAU supported the parents and sister with leave to remain applications, while through KIND we submitted citizenship applications for the twins.

Born in the UK and about to start secondary school, the boys were eager to have proof of the citizenship they already felt was theirs. Their successful applications not only gave them the confidence and opportunities of British nationality, such as joining school trips abroad with their peers, but also strengthened the immigration position of the whole family. With their status secure, the parents could continue working and providing for their children, while the mother, a part-qualified accountant, was finally able to focus on completing her exams.

The family described the impact as life-changing:

"It is good to have citizenship because it helps with future applications for the family. It has helped with mental stress. We are now able to enjoy life to the full, it's like freedom for us. There were so many barriers before and now we are authorised to study and work. The children are very happy as they already thought they were British."

MEET SUZIE, GMIAU SOLICITOR



Suzie joined us in 2021 as a Trainee Solicitor as part of the Justice First Fellowship, GMIAU's fourth Justice First Fellow. She has been a qualified Solicitor since 2023 and specialises in children's rights and applications for British citizenship and leave to remain for children in care.

"Since I started working at GMIAU, my focus has been securing the status of children in care and care leavers. If your immigration status hasn't been sorted by the time you turn 18, you hit a brick wall. You don't have any rights and you're subjected to the Hostile Environment. No child should be put in that position, especially not children in the care of British local authorities who have a duty to secure status for them.

We've worked with local authorities and developed a consultation process to identify the children who need that support. Often social workers don't know when those applications need to be made, or assume a child is British if they were born in the UK. I think without our help there would be a lot more young people who didn't get that status before the age of 18. But this work needs to be widespread and national. That's why we've created new guides to empower local authority social workers to help the children they're supporting get on track for British citizenship.

Our work has become more difficult recently. People we're working with often ask about things they've seen on the news that they think is going to impact them – they're scared. Legally, they have rights, but politically, they're made to feel other.

For the first time ever, I've had refusals of British citizenship applications for children in care. It seems to be a change of approach from the Home Office. Previously, these were always positive cases. You're talking to the children about their future ambitions and why they feel British already. I was able to give a lot of hope to children who have faced real difficulty in their life. Now I'm bearing bad news. At that moment they feel unwanted, that they're not accepted here. We'll challenge these refusals, and we hope we'll be successful in the end, but it takes a long time and that doesn't help the child in the moment, when they want to go to uni and get on with their lives.

But that's part of GMIAU's ethos: we have tenacity and we keep fighting. I feel very motivated by that. **Being part of the team at GMIAU gives me hope.** I'm hopeful that these children I'm representing will get their rights secured in the UK."



GMIAU has a long-standing history of supporting survivors of domestic abuse and helping them reach a place of safety and security with a resolved immigration status.

[Research shows](#) that people, and particularly women, who are subject to immigration control, are at heightened risk of domestic abuse. Visas may be dependent on abusive spouses, and we know that immigration status can be used as a tool of abuse. Real and perceived risks of being penalised by the Home Office can make people scared to come forward about what they are experiencing, while some routes to support are denied to people with No Recourse to Public Funds.

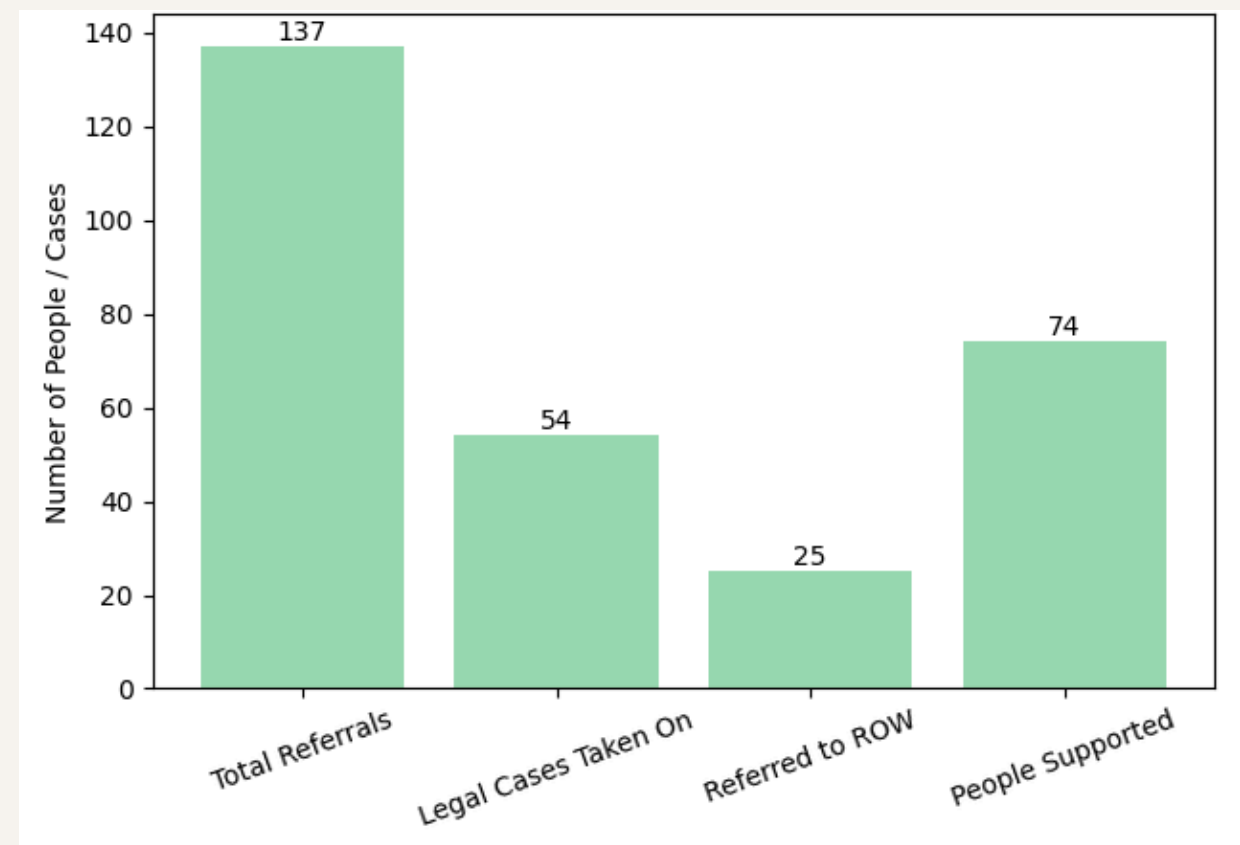
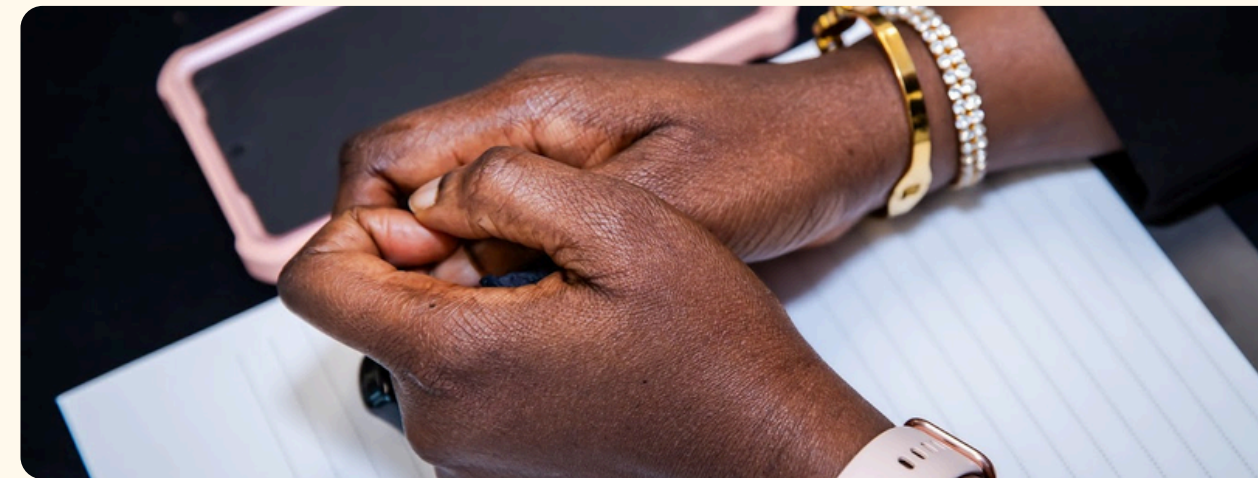
Between July 2024-June 2025 we successfully completed **81** applications for leave to remain based on domestic abuse. That means **81** people living with the deep trauma of domestic abuse were given a second chance at life.

GMCA DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROJECT

Since February 2025, GMIAU has been delivering the GMCA Domestic Violence Project in partnership with Rights of Women (ROW). The project supports people across Greater Manchester who are experiencing domestic abuse, including honour-based abuse, and have no access to public funds. Many are dependent on their abusers for their immigration status, facing threats of deportation or withdrawal of sponsorship alongside physical, emotional and financial abuse. Without immigration protections, survivors are often trapped in unsafe situations and at risk of homelessness. Our work gives survivors the chance to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity

Between February 2025 - June 2025, the project received **137** referrals, the vast majority from across Greater Manchester. We took on **54** legal cases directly and referred a further **25** to ROW. Together, we supported **74** people, most of them women and their children. Through this work, we've helped survivors secure emergency support through the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC), apply for settlement as survivors of domestic abuse, and, in some cases, secure permanent status. Already, 11 people have successfully accessed public funds through MVDAC, unlocking life-changing housing and welfare support so they can leave abusive homes and begin to rebuild their lives. Many more cases are ongoing, and we remain committed to walking alongside survivors every step of the way.

The project's early impact shows how vital specialist legal advice is. People need immigration support before changing their status to avoid unintended consequences, and quick access to public funds can be the difference between remaining in abuse or finding safety. Working with ROW has allowed us to extend our reach and ensure that no one facing abuse and insecure status is left without expert help.



£1.4 million

and more secured in compensation

Since 2022, GMIAU has been providing pro bono legal support to people navigating the Windrush Compensation Scheme through the Windrush Legal Initiative, a partnership with eight leading law firms: Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, Charles Russell Speechlys, Debevoise & Plimpton, Dechert LLP, Latham & Watkins, Linklaters, Taylor Wessing and White & Case. The Initiative was created to fill a critical gap in the scheme, which provides no funded legal assistance despite its complexity.

The Compensation Scheme was created to recognise and redress the devastating impact of the government's failure to acknowledge the lawful status of the Windrush generation – a failure that caused job losses, homelessness, loss of benefits, and, in some cases, detention and deportation.

Without proper legal support, many people face overwhelming challenges in making claims or risk receiving far less than they deserve. Through our work, we've helped ensure fairer outcomes – including one case where our client's final award of **£130,644** was **more than three times** the Home Office's original offer.

To date, the Initiative has secured **28** compensation offers, totalling **over £1.4 million**, and **321** lawyers have dedicated **18,583** pro bono hours across **68** cases. The Initiative was also **highly commended** for its impact at the Law Works Pro Bono Awards 2025.

Supporting people long term is a key aspect of the work, so we also work with teams of pro bono accountants and psychologists to ensure that our clients are awarded the maximum amount of compensation and are supported through the process – helping survivors make informed decisions so their compensation supports long-term security.

SUPPORT FOR WINDRUSH SURVIVORS



“I wanted to express my heartfelt gratitude for your exceptional support and guidance throughout my Windrush compensation case. Your dedication and faithfulness have meant the world to me, especially during a time when I've faced significant emotional challenges.

Your team's expertise and empathy have been invaluable, and I'm grateful for the trust you've built with me. Winning compensation is not just about financial recognition; it's about acknowledging the injustices I've faced, and your role in this process has been instrumental.

Thank you for believing in my case and fighting tirelessly on my behalf. Your support has made a profound difference, and I'm deeply appreciative of your hard work and commitment.”
- Windrush survivor supported by us

Nicola, GMIAU Solicitor, said:

“The Initiative provides vital access to justice for those who have experienced decades of disbelief. An inability to prove lawful status denies a person their rights and prevents access to key services we take for granted. The human impact of this is immeasurable. Working with our teams of lawyers they at last feel supported and listened to.

Helping to establish the Initiative, build and nurture partnerships across the collaboration, and secure life-changing sums of money for Windrush survivors harmed by the State **will always remain one of the proudest moments of my career.** Our clients show immense courage in taking on the Home Office, the very body responsible for their suffering. Their cases often take years and require persistent challenges before justice is achieved. **GMIAU is proud to stand alongside them.**”



POLICY & CAMPAIGNS

As well as fighting for the best compensation outcomes for our clients, we're campaigning with Windrush survivors for far better support, particularly for funded legal representation.

Too often, the original injustice suffered is being compounded by the demanding and distressing process of applying for compensation. We have supported people to [speak to the media](#) about what they have gone through, and contributed our experiences to academic and policy research, including the [JUSTICE report](#), and parliamentary advocacy - ensuring survivors' voices are represented at the highest levels.

'I can't believe I had to prove I'm British'



Christina, 27, had to battle for years to prove her citizenship

The 10-year route to settlement is an immigration route, where people have limited leave to remain based on their human rights to family and private life. Leave to remain is granted in periods of 2.5 years, and eye-watering fees are attached to each visa application, with No Recourse to Public Funds often a condition of stay. The cost and complexity of the route mean status is precarious, with a high risk of falling off the route, and it leaves many families in debt and financial hardship. Many of the people we represent in our legal work are on this punishing route.

Nationally, the group is calling for all routes to settlement to be capped at 5 years. They have challenged visa fees with public statements, reminding the state that [“We are not your cash machine.”](#) Their reflections on the 2024 racist riots highlighted the insecurities and the racism of the route: “it feels like we’re the first ones to be attacked”. Alongside five other lived experience campaign groups, VOICE members wrote to the Minister for Migration and Citizenship in September 2025 to share their concerns and call for a meeting to discuss the real-life impact of government policies.

A group member spoke to MPs at a Parliamentary Roundtable event about the impact of the 10-year route. Drawing on their own experiences, they’ve shaped government consultations and strategic legal challenges on issues including fee waivers, visa costs, and indefinite leave to remain.

Locally, the group has worked to improve the understanding of local authorities and politicians, including MPs, so that people in Greater Manchester on the route can be better supported. They ran training for local authority staff, sharing their experiences and practical tools to encourage a more compassionate approach.

Through this work, VOICE members have helped shape policy, build community strength, and inspired other activists.

How getting indefinite leave to remain changed Natasha’s life

Natasha (name changed) came to the UK when she was 12 years old. She first came to GMIAU when, aged 18, her application for leave to remain was refused. Her status had never been regularised. We supported her to appeal this refusal, but in the meantime she had no status at all.

It was a really difficult time. I wasn’t able to go to uni because I couldn’t get a student loan. I was just at home. You don’t realise what you need until you don’t have it, and I didn’t realise I needed to get my status resolved until my friends were talking about going abroad – that’s when it clicked.

When I met my GMIAU lawyer, he was so so nice, he was so kind. I was going through a tough time, but he really listened to me.

After two years, Natasha’s refusal was overturned, but she was put on the 10-year route to settlement.

You can work, but you still don’t have access to benefits or things like student loans. I did eventually go to uni, but I was considered an international student, so the fees were £15,000. I was working two jobs to pay the fees, as well as my placement hours as a nursing student. It was really, really tough. I had to leave uni in my second year because I couldn’t keep up with the fees.



Recently, GMIAU supported Natasha to get indefinite leave to remain, after 5 rather than 10 years.

I was so relieved. When I got that news, I almost screamed. It’s the relief of not having to pay visa fees, not having to worry about your visa expiring, not having the anxiety of having to wait for that Home Office decision or worry about that £3,000. I was filled with so much joy and relief. It truly feels like I can finally start living my life freely.

In the next year, I’m going to finish uni, and do my masters, and travel. I haven’t been back to Nigeria, where I’m from, for thirteen years, so I’m going to go back to visit.

All the support, guidance, and kindness GMIAU has shown me over the past five years really means the world to me. You’ve helped change my life, and I’ll never forget that.

GMIAU’s Community Organiser supports The VOICE, an action group made up of women navigating the 10-year route. The group has turned their lived experience into powerful advocacy on both a national and local level, as part of our partnership work with Praxis and the Institute for Public Policy Research.

Their work is more important than ever as 2025 draws to a close, with the government planning to expand the 10-year route to more visa routes, and to make settlement harder to achieve.

THE 10 YEAR ROUTE NELSON'S VICTORY



“When you hear birds chirping in trees or flying overhead, believe me – that is me and my children thanking you from the bottom of our hearts.”

In July 2024, we celebrated a major legal and campaign victory against the 10-year route. Nelson has lived in the UK since 1977, raising a family and becoming a pillar of his Wallasey community. But in 2019, he discovered he had no legal status. By his mid-70s, a simple mistake made without legal advice left him back at square one, and he was told he must spend another decade on the 10-year route to settlement.

GMIAU Solicitor Nicola took on his [case](#), arguing that forcing Nelson through another decade of insecurity was irrational and unjust. With GMIAU's legal challenge, and the family's powerful [campaigning](#), his story reached [national headlines](#) and struck a chord with [thousands](#).

Under growing pressure, the Home Office finally backed down. Nelson was granted indefinite leave to remain, giving him the certainty and security he deserves in retirement. The family's crowdfunding campaign raised more than £47,000, which Nelson chose to [donate](#) to three North West charities.

This victory was life-changing for Nelson and his family and also highlighted the injustice of the 10-year route, fuelling GMIAU's wider campaign for change.



Nelson said:

“When I heard the news that I would be granted Indefinite Leave to Remain here, I was overwhelmed, and very very very happy, and relieved. All along I had tried to bottle every feeling in me so that my children wouldn't be worrying about me. I was so relieved that in the end, we won the battle. Now we hope to win the war: for the authorities to agree that the 10-year route is inhuman and abolish it or shorten it.

I would like to thank everybody who believed in us and supported us in words and donations. **That makes me really really happy. When you hear birds chirping in trees or flying overhead, believe me – that is me and my children thanking you from the bottom of our hearts.”**

In December 2024, the UK Government moved to a digital-only immigration system. We knew that this shift would disproportionately affect vulnerable communities, particularly refugees, due to language barriers, digital exclusion, and lack of access to information, risking loss of employment, housing, benefits, and essential services.

To respond, we launched a pro bono initiative in partnership with Dechert LLP, Linklaters, Clyde & Co, and Squire Patton Boggs. We produced **multilingual written** and **video guides** to explain the eVisa process and we ran weekly hands-on **support sessions**, helping individuals to set up accounts, resolve technical issues, and apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR).



Volunteers provided individual guidance under our supervision and training, and urgent cases were escalated directly to the Home Office, with advocacy support from MPs when needed. The project, initially scheduled to end in May 2025, was extended due to high demand, with additional support sessions in July and September.

“Being able to speak to someone about my specific issue made the greatest difference.”

“Your generosity and commitment make a difference, and we are truly grateful.”

Through these sessions, we supported **286** people who had previously struggled to navigate the system alone. We were also awarded **‘Frontline Agency of the Year’** at the Greater Manchester Pro Bono Awards 2025, and **‘Best New Pro Bono Activity’** at the Law Works Pro Bono Awards 2025 in recognition of this work.



GMIAU Solicitors Nicola, Suzie, Maxwell and Camille collecting our ‘Frontline Agency of the Year’ award

Without our support, many faced loss of employment, frozen benefits, and imminent risk of homelessness. Beyond the practical assistance, having someone to listen, guide, and help people through a confusing and distressing process provided reassurance, dignity, and confidence.

EXPECTATIONS: INFLUENCING OUR LOCAL MPs

POLICY & CAMPAIGNS

In the run up to the General Election in 2024, we published our **Expectations for Greater Manchester Politicians**. It asks our local politicians to use both practical action and political voice to ensure welcome, safety, justice, home and support for everyone in our city-region. Since its publication, the Expectations have become a collective document, with over **50** organisations across all **10** boroughs putting their names to it, including grassroots campaigning and community organisations, charities supporting homeless people and national organisations with branches in Greater Manchester. The rainbow of logos that now make up the signatories is a representation of the network of organisations, small and large, dedicated to making these expectations a reality.

We used this network and document to start conversations with MPs in Greater Manchester, and support people with lived experience of different parts of the immigration system to meet with their MPs. We have had **13** collaborative meetings with individual MP offices; and we have held an online casework session for MP's casework staff which was attended by staff from **14** MPs' offices.

Together we are making more visible to MPs the issues and the work that are often invisible in their communities.



ASYLUM ACCOMODATION

POLICY & CAMPAIGNS

When adults and families are in the asylum system waiting for their claims to be decided, with no right to work or rent, they are accommodated by the Home Office. The presence of asylum accommodation in communities has been in the **headlines** on a weekly basis in recent months. The widespread use of asylum hotels, a result of the asylum backlog that formed due to the Covid pandemic and the last government shutting down asylum decision-making, has been a flashpoint of hostility and scapegoating. Media and far right influencers paint life in hotel as a luxury, while in reality people are struggling in accommodation that feels more like a prison than a home. Too often, the voices of people living in those hotels are silenced.

We've built alliances to challenge that hostility and change the narrative. Through [open letters](#) and [joint statements](#) signed by over **100** organisations, we've stood with people in asylum hotels, pushing for a new human-centred and place-based model of asylum accommodation.

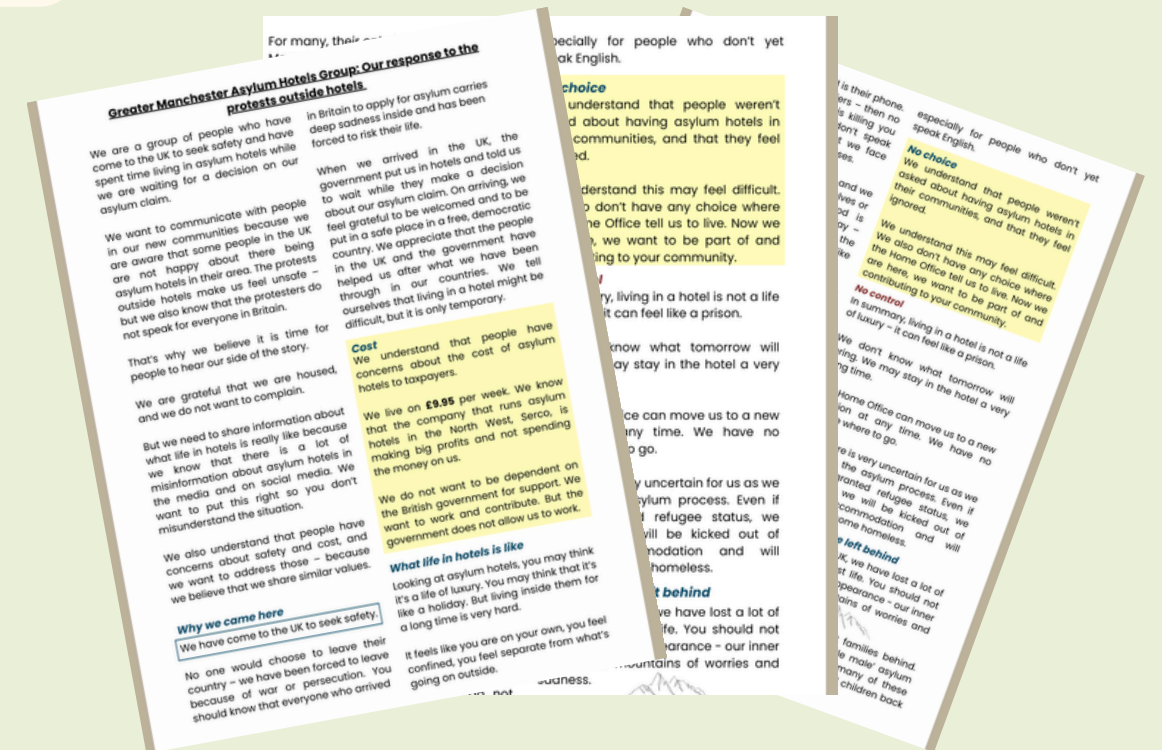
Working with Caritas Shrewsbury and Asylum Matters, we have supported the Greater Manchester Asylum Hotels Group: a group of residents from six asylum hotels across Greater Manchester. Their insights have shaped campaigning for a fairer and more humane accommodation system. The group is made up of 20 people representing 10 nationalities, and they have built solidarity and confidence through regular sessions, with one member describing the group as "like a family." Their evidence was submitted to a parliamentary enquiry into asylum accommodation, the only lived experience group to do so, and shared with policymakers locally, regionally, and nationally.

In October 2025, in response to protests and misunderstanding around asylum accommodation, members of the group came together to write a [public statement](#): a message of openness, understanding, and hope that focused on addressing the concerns they had heard in their communities.

They said:

"We are hopeful that we will be able to rebuild our lives and give back to the communities that have welcomed us – and we hope to be part of a UK that will continue to be a place of fairness, tolerance and openness. We are not here to take – we are here to share. Our dreams of a better tomorrow may be similar to yours. We hope you will see us not as strangers, but as new neighbours who want to live in peace and grow together with you."

The response to the statement was huge. People were moved and motivated to hear from people in asylum hotels; many got in touch to say they would be sharing the message in their own communities, whether through sending it onward, starting conversation, or even printing and flying copies. It was a huge win for the group, who had successfully taken back control of the narrative and had their voices heard.



A message to people living in asylum hotels in Greater Manchester

We are voluntary and community organisations based in Greater Manchester. We are writing to say that you are **WELCOME** here in our communities. We understand that you may not have chosen to come to Greater Manchester, but we hope that you will be able to feel safe and secure, and that this can feel like home. Across Greater Manchester, there are organisations and groups who will stand alongside you with care, solidarity and hope.

- We know that living in a hotel for a long time can be a difficult and sometimes hostile experience. We understand that it may not feel like a home.
- We know that, unfortunately, there are some people who don't like refugees who spread misinformation about asylum hotels. We understand that this can make you feel unsafe.
- We know that the asylum process can be scary. We understand that the way the Home Office communicates with you can feel hostile. We also understand how hard it is to find a solicitor to support you through the process.

We want you to know that we stand in solidarity with you during what can be a difficult and uncertain time.

We also want you to know that the people who show hostility are a minority – they do not speak for our communities.

YOU ARE WELCOME HERE AS MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITIES.

NEED HELP?

Find Local Services – Kompassi:
<https://www.kompassi.org/>

Find information about the asylum process – Right to Remain Toolkit:
<https://righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/>

Find information about keeping yourself safe – Hope not Hate:
<https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/NEW-FINAL-staying-safe-amidst-far-right-activity.pdf>

Want to be a volunteer?:
<https://manchestercommunitycentral.org/volunteer-centre-manchester>

See the names of organisations who stand in solidarity with you: <https://gmiau.org/solidarity-statement-asylum-hotels>

MOVING FORWARD

The work we do can often feel heavy.

The people we work with and their rights are under constant attack, from government policy, hostile media and a surge of street-level racism. Systems collide to leave people behind and to silence their voices.

In conversation with colleagues in our sector across the North West, we often hear of exhaustion and despondency.

But despite crisis after crisis, and setback after setback, **we keep finding reasons for hope**. Whether it's the voices of the people we work with making themselves heard above the din, or the successes of our caseworkers who quietly change lives, we find joy in our work and our connections with others. People who wrote to us after reading the Asylum Hotels Group's statement told us it made them feel energised, ready to continue the fight.

Much of our hope lies in the fact that we are a place-based organisation, embedded in community. We draw strength from generations who have gone before, particularly in our two city bases, Manchester and Liverpool, places with proud radical histories.

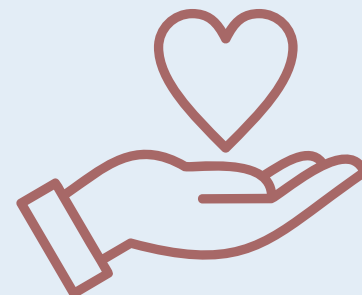
Looking back at the anti-racism and anti-deportation campaigns of decades past, we are reminded that while things are hard now, they have been hard before, and we've never given up.

The stories in this report point to the far-reaching impacts of our work. When someone gets secure status in the UK, or is able to reunite with family members, it has a knock-on effect: on their mental health, their family life, the opportunities available to them, and to the togetherness and the safety of their whole community.

The years ahead will undoubtedly bring new challenges, **but we will keep moving forward, staying radical in our approach and unwavering in our commitment to the people who need us the most**. Our ability to challenge the system comes from our combination of legal expertise, frontline support work, and our campaigning work alongside people with lived experience. Our strength comes from our network of supporters, colleagues, funders, and board members who work and stand with us. We're deeply grateful for continued belief in our work – we can only do what we do with the support of others around us.

If you're able to support us financially, every donation will make a difference. You can donate to GMIAU as a one-off or regularly through [JustGiving](#).

You can also support us by supporting our campaigns. To find out how, you can visit our [website](#), sign up to our monthly [newsletter](#), and follow us on social media: [Bluesky](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).



THANK YOU

Although some of our team have been named in relation to stories in this report, the majority of GMIAU's wonderful staff have not.

Thank you to David, Ryan, Hannah, James, Laura, Isobel, Camille, Angela, Nadia, Maxwell, Kate, Nicola, Shakhura, Decla, Sukhdeep, Melissa, Suzie, Alex, Rory and Cecilia in our Legal Team, Maria, Asli, Michelle, Joe, Niloufar, Yamusu, and Editte in our Destitution team, Amanda, Kathleen, Will, Fatou, Tania, Annie and Rivka in our Policy and Campaigns Team, and to Mona, James, Hassoun, Lana, Husna, Abbas, Emillienne, Neil, and Denise.

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