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RELEASING RESILIENCE AND BUILDING NETWORKS OF RESILIENCE:

LEARNING FROM THE SURVEY, INTERVIEWS, AND EVALUATION

● Prepared by RAPAR (Gráinne McMahon, Rhetta Moran and Sunitha Dwarakanath),
May 2021, contact: g.mcmahon@hud.ac.uk

Releasing resilience and building networks of resilience: learning from the survey, interviews, and evaluation

Prepared by RAPAR (Gráinne McMahon[1], Rhetta Moran and Sunitha Dwarakanath), with Migrant Voice and Kanlungan Filipino Consortium, May 2021

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Finally, and most importantly, thank you to all the participants in the project. Thank you for sharing your time, your expertise, and your stories. None of the project could have happened without you and we are so grateful for your dedication to the work. We hope that this report, and the project overall, helps to bring about the change that we all so desperately want and need.

In solidarity.

Gráinne McMahon
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Executive summary

The Building Resilience project aimed to learn about the impacts of COVID-19 and the lockdowns in marginalised communities, and to organise, empower and build networks of resilience with some of the migrant communities most marginalised by COVID-19 – those who are without status, including those with no recourse to public funds and those who are in the asylum process or who have been refused asylum.

Migrants without recourse to public funds and with limited immigration status, who work in exploitative conditions, and/ or face sustained social and economic exclusion, need to be able to speak about their experiences of the pandemic, and to work together for change. The Building Resilience project aimed to work alongside migrant communities to understand and hear experiences of the pandemic, to explore how resilience may be released and built, and to develop the process of building community networks of resilience.

Aims of the project

The six-month project had six aims:

1. To create spaces that enable migrants to form networks within and between marginalised communities to discuss and articulate their shared experiences with state/ other institutions throughout the pandemic.
2. To record these experiences in ways that can be communicated to raise awareness and to inform media/ public debate.
3. To create communities that can sustain and support each other in the future and can be more readily reached by support services.
4. To provide direct aid which can both meet urgent needs and facilitate the above (vouchers for food and data).
5. To benefit the members of our communities who have been most severely affected by COVID-19 in terms of lived experience and public health.
6. To intervene with the impacts of Covid-19 by creating networks, sharing experiences, and providing help, and in the longer-term by raising awareness, informing debate, and working towards change.

Stages of the project

The project took place in three stages:

i. Sharing experiences through an online survey and one to one interviews and hosting a series of co-learning workshops with participants in the community.
ii. Building networks on community planning, development, and collective support, leading to informal support networks to develop and share expertise and build collective resilience that continues beyond the project.
iii. Making change through the newly created networks of resilience.

The current report speaks specifically to learning from stages i and ii and the potential from stage iii, by setting out the learning from a survey, interviews, and the evaluation of the process of building networks of resilience.

Key learning from the project

The learning from the project indicated that the capacity of people to keep themselves safe from contracting and transmitting COVID-19 was significantly impacted by financial limitations and overcrowded accommodation. The participants in the project reported many concerns about their physical health and access to healthcare, and the impact of the pandemic on their mental health because of their isolation, fear of catching the virus, existing mental health issues, and financial concerns. Participants struggled to buy food and other necessities during the pandemic, and were severely disenfranchised because of a lack of access to public funds.

Networks of support and resilience were crucial to the participants. The project revealed several individual, group, community and political level process and impact outcomes from involvement with networks in the project. The participants particularly valued awareness-raising, working with others, and personal and political learning, and the findings from the project illustrate the potential for groups and communities to work together, and in collaboration, to release and build resilience.

However, the UK's hostile environment continued to negatively affect the participants in the study because of a lack of status, money, safety, and security. These impacts affected the process of releasing and building resilience because of the ongoing precariousness of participants. Communities and networks of resilience have the potential to achieve much, individually, and collectively, but only if individuals can feel safe.

1.   Introduction to report

The Building Resilience project set out to explore the impacts of COVID-19 and the lockdowns on marginalised communities, and to begin a process of organising, empowering and building networks of resilience with some of the migrant communities most marginalised by COVID-19 – those who are without status, including those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and those who are in the asylum process or who have been refused asylum[2].

Migrants who are categorised as NRPF and who have limited immigration status, and those who work in exploitative conditions, and/ or face sustained social and economic exclusion, need to be able to speak about their experiences of the pandemic, individually and collectively, and to work together for change. The Building Resilience project aimed to work alongside migrant communities to understand and hear experiences of the pandemic, and to explore how resilience may be released and built through community networks of support and resilience.

Aims of the project

The six-month project had six aims in all:

1. To create spaces that enable migrants to form networks within and between marginalised communities to discuss and articulate their shared experiences with state/ other institutions throughout the pandemic.
2. To record these experiences in ways that can be communicated to raise awareness and to inform media/ public debate.
3. To create communities that can sustain and support each other in the future and can be more readily reached by support services.
4. To provide direct aid which can both meet urgent needs and facilitate the above (vouchers for food and data).
5. To benefit the members of our communities who have been most severely affected by COVID-19 in terms of lived experience and public health.

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[2] The Building Resiliences project received full ethical approval from the School Research Ethics and Integrity Committee, School of Human and Health Sciences, at the University of Huddersfield. Ethical approval was sought by the report's first author, Dr Gráinne McMahon, who is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Huddersfield.

6. To intervene with the impacts of Covid-19 by creating networks, sharing experiences, and providing help, and in the longer-term by raising awareness, informing debate, and working towards change.

Stages of the project

The project unfolded place in three stages:

i. Sharing experiences through an online survey and one to one interviews and hosting a series of co-learning workshops with participants in the community.
ii. Building networks on community planning, development, and collective support, leading to informal support networks to develop and share expertise and build collective resilience that continues beyond the project.
iii. Making change through the newly created networks of resilience.

The current report sets out the learning from stages i and ii and the potential from stage iii, by exploring the learning from the survey, interviews, and the evaluation of the process of building networks of resilience.

Data in the report

The Building Resilience project survey collected data from 198 respondents during December 2020 and January 2021. The survey included questions about personal circumstances during the pandemic and lockdowns, including accommodation and family, finances, the means to buy food and other necessities, physical and mental health needs, personal safety, support and networks, strategies of coping and resilience, and hopes for the future.

The project conducted interviews and focus groups with 25 people who had taken part in the survey (20 individual interviews and two focus groups with five people) in February and March 2021. The interview questions were about life circumstances during COVID-19, changes to circumstances, physical and mental health concerns, financial and housing concerns, networks and social support, and visions and needs for the future.

The project also integrated an evaluation of both its processes – releasing resilience and building networks of resilience - and outcomes - changes that demonstrated the releasing and building of resilience - at the individual, group, community, and political level. The evaluation focused, in the main, on learning from a series of community events with up to 300 participants. The evaluation also explored how releasing and building resilience was inhibited

because of simultaneous developments taking place within the external world (e.g., policy change) and living in the UK's hostile environment.

In all, the report explores how, and how much, a project involving up to 300 marginalised migrants, many of whom were already excluded by NRPF and further left behind by the Government's COVID-19 response, became able to release individual resilience and to build networks of resilience during the project. This is not to say that the participants did not have resilience when the project began; indeed, the resilience of migrant communities is well documented[3]. The Building Resilience project started from the premise that migrants have myriad strategies for coping and a great deal of resilience because of, rather than despite, the UK's hostile environment. The project did not, therefore, assume a deficit model but, rather, set out to explore how resilience could be released and maintained, individually and collectively.

Format of the report

The report has five more sections:
- Section 2 sets out a brief socio-political context in which the project took place.
- Section 3 explores participants' perspectives on their lives during COVID-19.
- Section 4 evaluates how the project, and the networks which grew during the project, released and built resilience with migrant communities.
- Section 5 explores systemic barriers to resilience.
- Section 6 draws the report to a set of conclusions and recommendations.

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[3] Simich, L. & Andermann, L. (2014). *Refuge and Resilience: Promoting Resilience and Mental Health among Resettled Refugees and Forced Migrants*, Springer Netherlands, Dordrecht.
Roberto, S. & Moleiro, C. (2016). "Looking (also) at the Other Side of the Story. Resilience Processes in Migrants", *Journal of international migration and integration*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 929-946.
Ejorh, T. 2015, "The Challenge of Resilience: Migrant-Led Organisations and the Recession in Ireland", *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 679-699.
Rydzik, A. & Anitha, S. (2020;2019). "Conceptualising the Agency of Migrant Women Workers: Resilience, Reworking and Resistance*", Work, Employment and Society*, vol. 34, no. 5, pp. 883-899.

2. Socio-political context

No project activity takes place in a vacuum. In this case, outside of the project itself, but coincident with its proposal development and delivery timeframe, socioeconomic, cultural, political, and legal reactions to the emergence of COVID-19 related directly to the project's participants: marginalised migrant communities already excluded by NRPF and further left behind by the Government's COVID-19 response.

Intrinsically, these reactions tended to impact either positively or negatively upon the participants' abilities to acquire and/ or retain resilience. They have also impacted directly on the workers inside of the project, several of whom are migrants themselves and some of whom have lived experience of being without status in the UK. Consideration of an illustrative sample of socioeconomic, cultural, political, and legal developments that punctuated our project's timeframe offers a more complete understanding of the nature of the environments out of which 'resiliences' have or have not emerged, and a deeper appreciation of the achievements themselves.

In the period leading up to our project's beginning, far-right groups were reported targeting hotels housing asylum seekers[4] and, within a few weeks, the Home Affairs Committee published its report on Home Office preparedness for COVID-19[5]. This report highlighted many issues of concern relating to displaced people: the quality or levels of accommodation, personal allowances, safeguarding and risk assessments, impacts on mental health, lack of provision of internet to enable people to access information, access to GPs, and lack of provision of sanitising and other products or an increase in allowance to enable people to buy them themselves. It was during this period also that Boris Johnson intervened[6] in the case of Mercy Baguma[7], who had lost her Leave to Remain status (visa) and job which, according to the

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[4] Dearden, L. (2020). *Far-right groups targeting hotels housing asylum seekers during coronavirus pandemic*. [online] Available at: https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/far-right-groups-targeting-hotels-housing-asylum-seekers-during-coronavirus-pandemic/ar-BB18ma79

[5] Parliament.uk. (2020). *Home Office preparedness for COVID-19 (Coronavirus): institutional accommodation - Home Affairs Committee* - House of Commons. [online] Available at: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmhaff/562/56202.htm

[6] Parliament.uk. (2020). *Engagements - Wednesday 9 September 2020 - Hansard - UK Parliament*. [online] Available at: https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-09-09/debates/4EF94DF5-3079-4DEE-85A7-6F7B96F60BE2/Engagements#contribution-2E967502-7399-4809-A9E3-2E4435523117

[7] Brooks, L. (2020). *"She was a rainbow": Friends paint fuller picture of Mercy Baguma.* [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/aug/28/friends-paint-fuller-picture-of-mercy-baguma-she-was-a-rainbow

government's NRPF policy, left her with no support, who was found dead in a flat in Glasgow next to her distressed one-year-old son. In that case, which was very widely reported, the asylum application had been pending for the child's father who, following the mother's death, was now the boy's sole carer. A week later, the Public Accounts Committee[8] condemned Home Office 'work' that resulted in humanity-denying actions in the lives of hundreds of thousands of displaced people, including children in families. The Public Accounts Committee also raised several questions over a multitude of migration-related Home Office decisions.

During the month that we finalised our proposal for the current project, partner organisations became involved in actions against the UK's hostile environment[9] policies. These actions included vigils[10] commemorating lives lost due to the UK's immigration policies prior to and during the hostile environment. It was also during this period that the government mooted the idea of putting floating barriers in the English Channel[11] to stop asylum seekers crossing to the UK, and using nets to stop dinghies[12]. Widely reported, these announcements induced panic, fear, and profound concern throughout our migrant populations in the UK and their allies, stimulating extensive discussions about the impact of such announcements on the mental health and well-being of our most vulnerable population members. Furthermore, reports of a Home Office intention to hire a private risk management company to provide a rapid review of initial accommodation for single adult asylum seekers[13], thereby effectively outsourcing the monitoring of compliance with public health guidelines to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 for people housed in the asylum system, appeared to legitimise exempting asylum seekers from the public health standards that applied to everyone else.

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[8] Ein.org.uk. (2020). *Public Accounts Committee raises serious concerns over the work of the Home Office Immigration Enforcement directorate* [online] Available at: https://www.ein.org.uk/news/public-accounts-committee-raises-serious-concerns-over-work-home-office-immigration

[9] McMahon, G., & Moran, R. (2021). *Young people seeking asylum: voice and activism in a 'hostile environment'*. In M. Bruselius-Jensen, I. Pitti, & K. Tisdall (Eds.), Young people's participation: Revisiting youth and inequalities in Europe Policy Press.
Webber, F. 2019, "On the creation of the UK's 'hostile environment", *Race & class*, vol. 60, no. 4, pp. 76-87.

[10] McGuirk, S. (2020). *10 years since Jimmy Mubenga died and we're still dangerously privatising immigration.* [online] Available at: https://inews.co.uk/opinion/10-years-jimmy-mubenga-died-learnt-lessons-privatising-immigration-712280?ITO=newsnow

[11] Parkinson, J. (2020). *Asylum seekers: UK considered floating barriers in Channel*. [online] BBC News. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-54384858

[12] BBC News (2020). *Migrant crisis: Dinghies to UK could be "disabled using nets."* [online] BBC News. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-54499958.

[13] Patel, P. (2021) *Letter to Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee (18th March).* [online] Available at https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5348/documents/53233/default/

As our project went live in November 2020, organisations were speaking out directly[14] against the government intention to allow their private contractor, SERCO, to resume evictions into destitution during lockdown. At this time, a report exposing Home Office failures to comply with equality law[15] concluded that public bodies and government departments need to be more consistent in the way that they implement their duty, and to take meaningful action by setting specific objectives and action plans to tackle the biggest barriers faced by people already experiencing disadvantage in Britain today. At the same time, evidence was emerging of the alarming rise in backlog of asylum cases[16], even though the numbers of applications had been falling, and it became known that people were now waiting for over six months for an initial response to their applications to become regularised through the asylum system.

As we moved into the second live month of the project (December), the national media began to become dominated by the question of the imminent availability, via the NHS, of vaccines against COVID-19. However, for people without status, the multiplicity of barriers[17] to their access to vaccines remained, and continue to remain at the time of writing, unaddressed. Almost immediately, people without status were picking up intelligence about countless people being turned away from GP surgeries when they tried to register, being told they needed proof of ID, of status, of address, or that people from their country of origin cannot register with a GP because *'we don't deal with illegal immigrants'*[18].

December's second week brought the announcement of rule changes targeting rough sleeping migrants[19]. These rule changes were met with immediate opposition from the Greater London Authority that prohibited any organisations trusted with CHAIN data[20] - a multi-agency database added to by outreach teams, accommodation providers and other homelessness

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[14] Status Now 4 All. (2020). *SERCO attempting to evict Refugee People during Lockdown* [online] Available at: https://statusnow4all.org/serco-attempting-to-evict-refugee-people-during-lockdown/

[15] Equalityhumanrights.com. (2020*). Home Office failed to comply with equality law when implementing "hostile environment" measures* [online] Available at: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/news/home-office-failed-comply-equality-law-when-implementing-%E2%80%98hostile-environment%E2%80%99

[16] Irfan (2020). *Alarming Rise in Asylum Backlog Despite Fall in Applications*. [online] World News TV. Available at: https://www.wntv.uk/world-news-united-kingdom-399/

[17] Status Now 4 All. (2020). *Barriers to Accessing Vaccination* [online] Available at: https://statusnow4all.org/barriers-to-accessing-vaccination/.

[18] Migrant Voice (2019). *Editorial: Denied access to healthcare.* [online] Available at: https://www.migrantvoice.org/home/editorials/editorial-denied-access-to-healthcare-120419112255

[19] Free Movement. (2020). *"Compassionate" Home Office targets rough sleepers, again* [online] Available at: https://www.freemovement.org.uk/home-office-targets-rough-sleepers-again/

[20] St Mungo's. (2020). *CHAIN - St Mungo's.* [online] Available at: https://www.mungos.org/work-with-us/chain/

organisations in London - from communicating it to the Home Office. That refusal was soon joined by others in the Midlands and across Greater Manchester[21].

During the heart of the Christmas period, eyewitness accounts amplified the conditions within which single men newly arrived in the UK were being held[22]. By mid-January, their collective organising and actions resulted in camp residents self-defining, '*We are victims, not criminals*'[23] and ultimately commanding the attention of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration[24].

In early February, Privacy International's new report[25] revealed the 'Status Checking' Project which could result in any person on British soil being able to be assessed for their migration status. This stimulated the creation of an historic Early Day Motion #1442[26] through which, for the first time in British history and in direct response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, British Members of Parliament formalised a call for Indefinite Leave to Remain for all those without status and in the legal process.

Later, in the penultimate month of this project, the intention to remove Osime Brown, a profoundly autistic man aged 22[27] who is also living with learning disabilities and a PTSD diagnosis, to Jamaica, was followed closely by the revelation that a new network of immigration detention centres for women[28] is being quietly planned.

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[21] Status Now 4 All. (2020). *Greater Manchester leaders "will not be complicit" in asylum seeker evictions* [online] Available at: https://statusnow4all.org/greater-manchester-leaders-will-not-be-complicit-in-asylum-seeker-evictions/

[22] Status Now 4 All. (2020). *Napier camp* [online] Available at: https://statusnow4all.org/?s=Napier+camp

[23] Status Now 4 All. (2021). "*We are victims, not criminals*": Asylum seekers protest conditions in military camp [online] Available at: https://statusnow4all.org/we-are-victims-not-criminals-asylum-seekers-protest-conditions-in-military-camp/

[24] Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (2021). *An inspection of the use of contingency asylum accommodation – key findings from site visits to Penally Camp and Napier Barracks.* [online] GOV.UK. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/an-inspection-of-the-use-of-contingency-asylum-accommodation-key-findings-from-site-visits-to-penally-camp-and-napier-barracks

[25] Privacy International. (2021). *The UK's Privatised Migration Surveillance Regime: A Rough Guide for Civil Society.* [online] Available at: https://www.privacyinternational.org/report/4408/uks-privatised-migration-surveillance-regime-rough-guide-civil-society

[26] Parliament.uk. (2021). *Undocumented migrants and covid-19 vaccination - Early Day Motions - UK Parliament.* [online] Available at: https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/58054

[27] Barrigan, H. (2021). *The Story of Osime Brown.* [online] Available at: https://immigrationnews.co.uk/osime-brown-deportation/

[28] Townsend, M. (2021). *Revealed: Priti Patel U-turn on end to detention for refugee women*. [online] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/27/revealed-priti-patel-u-turn-on-end-to-detention-for-refugee-women

Finally, as the last month of our project closed, 't*he biggest overhaul of the UK's asylum system in decades*'[29] was announced and a leading migrant organisation and project partner observed that it is '*based on false premises - particularly the actual availability of legal routes – and tears apart the principle of the right to claim asylum*'[30].

The political decisions and changes set out in the current section took place in the UK's long-standing hostile environment[31] that has brought about sustained and myriad impacts upon marginalised groups and that form the backdrop of the 'Building Resilience' project and the lived experience of people in Britain who are without status, in the legal process of seeking asylum (or refused asylum), and without recourse to public funds. The learning presented in the project's report is contextualised within this setting.

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[29] Saffron Otter (2021). *Priti Patel to announce "biggest overhaul of asylum system in decades."* [online] Available at: https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/uk-news/priti-patel-announce-biggest-overhaul-20242709

[30] Migrant Voice (2021). *Protecting protection.* [online] Available at:
https://www.migrantvoice.org/home/editorials/protecting-protection-240321180250

[31] McMahon, G., & Moran, R. (2021). Young people seeking asylum: voice and activism in a 'hostile environment'. In M. Bruselius-Jensen, I. Pitti, & K. Tisdall (Eds.), *Young people's participation: Revisiting youth and inequalities in Europe Policy Press.*
Webber, F. 2019, "On the creation of the UK's 'hostile environment", *Race & class*, vol. 60, no. 4, pp. 76-87.

3. Life during COVID-19

Section 3 of the report begins to chart the learning from the Building Resiliences project and draws, in the main, on findings from the survey with 198 participants and the interviews and focus groups with 25 participants. The section explores the demographics of the survey and interview/ focus group participants, their health, financial and housing concerns during the pandemic, and their perspectives on the importance of networks and support.

Building Resilience survey

The Building Resilience project survey collected data from 198 respondents during December 2020 and January 2021. The survey asked participants to respond to questions about their circumstances during the pandemic and lockdowns, including accommodation and family, personal finances, the means to buy food and other necessities, physical and mental health needs, personal safety, support and networks, and strategies of coping and resilience, and hopes for the future. We conducted the survey online and sent the invitation to take part in the survey by email to the partner organisations' networks. We asked recipients of the emails to distribute the invitation around further networks, as appropriate. To ensure that recruitment was confined to those people who were without status, in the asylum process or refused asylum, stateless, and those with NRPF or only limited leave to remain, the survey included a filtering question at the beginning that excluded all British/ EU citizens, and those with indefinite leave to remain, from completing the survey.

The 198 survey respondents were from the three focus locations of England, in the main (the Midlands, the North, and Greater London/ South East) (figure 1):

- 26.3% (n=52) were from the Midlands
- 40.4% (n=80) were from Greater London and South East
- 21.2% (n=42) were from the North
- 8.6% (n=17) did not provide a location and 3.5% (n=7) were outside of the three main regions
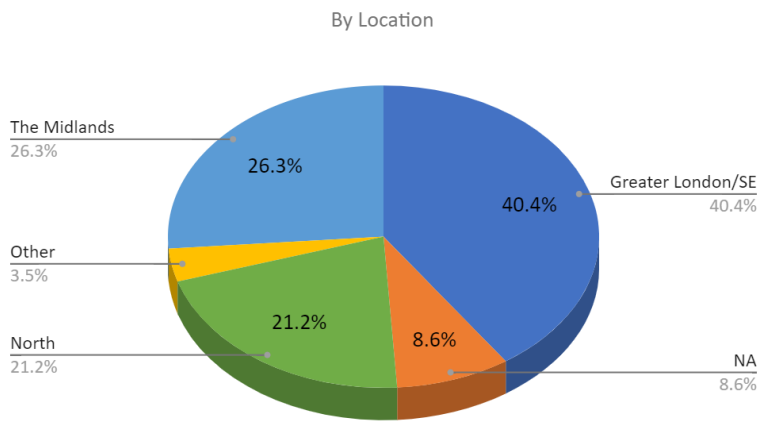
By Location

Figure 1. Location of survey respondents

In terms of gender (figure 2), the 198 participants were predominantly female:

- Female - 65.2% (n=129)
- Male - 29.3% (n=58)
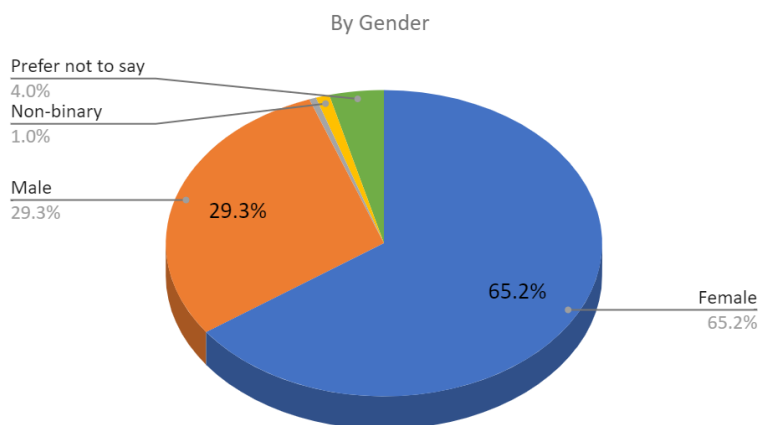- Non-binary - 1% (=2) and prefer not to say - 4% (n=8)

By Gender

Figure 2. Gender of survey respondents

The age range of respondents (figure 3) varied from 18 to 77, with 30- to 49-year-olds being the dominant group: 30–34-year-olds (17.7%) 40-44-year-olds (16.7%), 35-39-year-olds (12.1%) and 45-49-year-olds (11.1%).
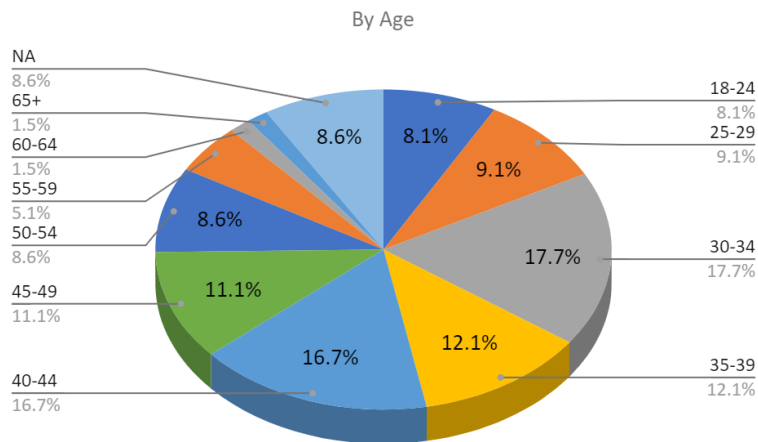
By Age

Figure 3. Ages of survey respondents

The ethnicity of the respondents (figure 4) also varied, with people of African background (36.9%) representing the dominant group in the data. This group was closely followed by those from any other background (35.4%), which was made up mostly of any other Asian background (80%) with smaller amounts from any other White, any other Black/African/Caribbean, any other mixed, and any other ethnic group. The remainder of the participants were South East/ East Asian (11.6%), from the Middle East (9.1%) or South Asia (4.5%), or not specified (2.5%).
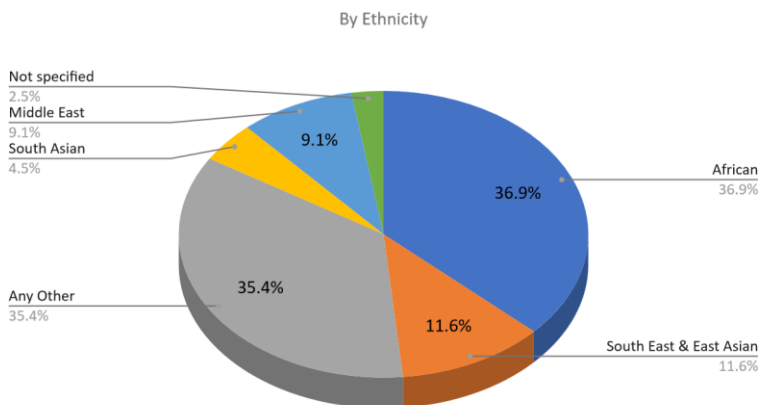
By Ethnicity

Figure 4. Ethnicity of survey respondents

Finally, the survey asked participants to select multiple options from a list of immigration statuses:

1. Undocumented
2. Refused asylum seeker
3. In asylum process (all)
4. Stateless
5. Limited leave to remain (all)
6. No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

It was necessary to include the option of 'undocumented' in the survey question because this terminology is often utilised by people without status who are categorised as NPRF to describe themselves. We included NRPF as a specific category of immigration status because it is an exclusion that can be attached to various types of visas and leave to remain statuses, including limited leave to remain. People who are categorised as NRPF cannot access public funds such as Universal Credit and housing benefits, and services such as those that may be available to people experiencing homelessness (e.g., shelters and financial support from certain charities). In practice, most people who are living without status are categorised as NRPF, apart from those who are in the asylum process. The collation of the data collapsed the categories of 'undocumented' and 'NRPF' together, and separated that category from those who were in the asylum process, those who have been refused asylum, and those who were stateless[32].

The breakdown of immigration status in the sample was as follows (figure 5):

- NRPF - 28.8% (n=57)
- Refused asylum seeker - 12.6% (n=25)
- In asylum process - 40.4% (n=80)
- Stateless - 1.5% (n=3)
- Limited leave to remain (all) - 16.7% (n=33)

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[32] The exploration of the interview data below includes the ways in which participants described themselves (e.g., undocumented, in the asylum process).

By immigration status

- Stateless 1.5%
- Refused Asylum Seeker 12.6%
- 12.6%
- No Recourse to Public... 28.8%
- 28.8%
- 40.4%
- In Asylum Process 40.4%
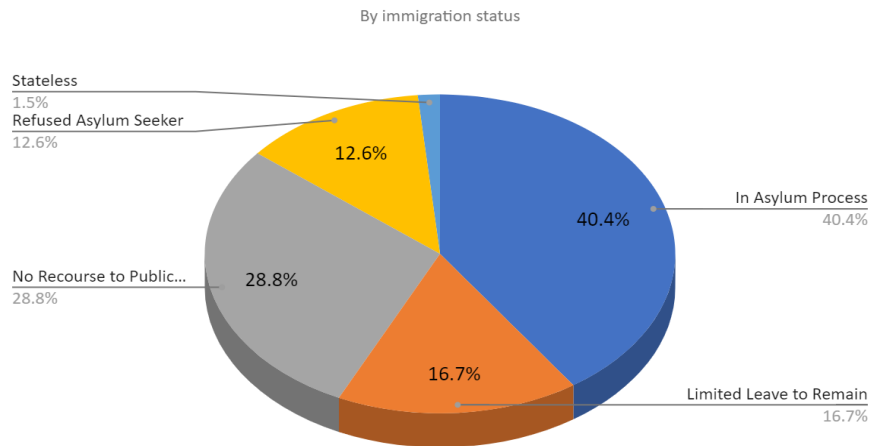- 16.7%
- Limited Leave to Remain 16.7%

Figure 5. Immigration status of survey respondents

In all, the survey captured data from across a range of participants from a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences. Ensuring that we did so was a key aim of the survey respondents: to enhance learning about COVID-19 experiences within and between several groups.

Building Resilience interviews

When the survey was completed, we sampled several of the survey participants who had opted to be interviewed (by answering a question at the end of the survey). We selected interview participants according to location, gender, and immigration status, to try to interview a range of respondents across the three locations of the project, and women and men, and to focus on participants who were NRPF, and/ or in the asylum process or refused asylum. Where possible, we then sampled according to ethnicity and age. Initially, we contacted 40 participants who had opted to be interviewed, but responses to our emails were very often delayed. As time went on, we contacted further survey participants to invite them to be interviewed. The Community Interviewers who were supported by the Community Enablers in contacting potential interviewees and setting up interviews managed to arrange interviews with 20 of the survey respondents. By this time, the project was nearing completion, so we decided to run focus groups, where possible, to maximise the number of interviewees within a short timeframe. Five respondents agreed to be part of the focus groups. For ease, the report refers to the interviews and focus groups as 'interviews' only.

In all, 25 people were part of the interview stage of the project:

- 14 were from Greater London/ South East, 5 were from the North, and 6 were from the Midlands
- 17 were women, 7 were men, and 1 interviewee was non-binary
- 16 were NRPF, 7 were in the asylum process or had been refused asylum, and 2 had limited leave to remain
- 9 of the interviewees were from South East/ East Asia, 5 were from Africa, 3 were from South Asia, 1 was from the Middle East, and 4 were from another Asian background
- The interviewees were aged 18 to 65+ and aged 30 to 50 in the main.

The interview questions were about life circumstances during COVID-19, changes to circumstances, physical and mental health concerns, financial and housing concerns, networks and social support, and visions and needs for the future.

The survey and interview learning is set out below in three sub-sections: physical and mental health concerns, financial and housing concerns, networks and social support. Later sections explore the participants' visions and needs for the future.

3a. Physical and mental health concerns during pandemic

A large proportion (80%) of survey participants were concerned about their physical health during the pandemic, while 45% had preexisting non-communicable conditions (including asthma, high blood pressure, diabetes) and HIV, all of which make them clinically vulnerable to serious illness from COVID-19[33]. Over half of the participants felt that they could not access healthcare easily (including registering with a GP), including 20% who could not access healthcare at all.

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[33] Bmj.com. (2021). *Migration and health | The BMJ*. [online] Available at: https://www.bmj.com/migrant-health Refugee and Migrant Health. (2020). *World Health Organization*. [online] Available at: https://www.who.int/migrants/en/
Abubakar, I., Aldridge, R.W., Devakumar, D., Orcutt, M., Burns, R., Barreto, M.L., Dhavan, P., Fouad, F.M., Groce, N., Guo, Y., Hargreaves, S., Knipper, M., Miranda, J.J., Madise, N., Kumar, B., Mosca, D., McGovern, T., Rubenstein, L., Sammonds, P. and Sawyer, S.M. (2018). "The UCL–Lancet Commission on Migration and Health: the health of a world on the move", *The Lancet (British edition),* vol. 392, no. 10164, pp. 2606-2654.
Burnett, A. (2001) "Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Britain: Health Needs Of Asylum Seekers And Refugees", *BMJ: British Medical Journal,* vol. 322, no. 7285, pp. 544-547.

The survey also asked respondents to indicate if they could access information about keeping safe during the pandemic. Encouragingly, over 75% of participants had access to information on how to keep safe during COVID-19, which suggests the various methods of communication utilised by the government, the NHS and third sector community-based organisations were being used and were accessible. Unfortunately, around 15% were able to access that information only sometimes, and around 5% did not have access to that information at all. This finding indicates that there were still gaps in the national health information campaign that were likely because information was, in the main, available online and a proportion of the survey's participants had limited or no internet access.

The survey also included questions to explore concerns around safety in general, and if respondents needed to travel during the pandemic. Eighty-four percent of respondents were concerned about their personal safety, in respect of keeping themselves safe from COVID-19 and feeling safe in general. Approximately 80% of respondents wanted or needed to travel during the pandemic (for shopping, for work, to see children, to have support from family/ friends). Of those who needed or wanted to travel (n=155), only 23% felt that they were safe doing so, and almost half of the respondents were travelling by public transport as their only mode of transport. The reasons why people felt unsafe included being afraid of contracting COVID-19, being around too many people on public transport, and noticing people not following the rules, such as social distancing or wearing face covers. Of the respondents who went to work (n=61), around 40% felt that they were not safe and worries relating to this included lack of access to Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), and worries about contracting COVID-19. Around 25% of survey respondents were provided with PPE by their employers either sometimes or not at all.

In terms of broader safety concerns, 80% had not experienced violence from a partner or someone they lived with during COVID-19 pandemic; however, 11% had and 9% preferred not to say. Breaking this down by gender, it equated to around 75% and 25% for females and males, respectively.

Only 10% of respondents felt that COVID-19 had not affected their mental health at all; 40% reported that their mental health had been greatly affected, and the remainder reported that it had affected them in some way. The reasons given for poor mental health included anxiety, depression, loneliness/ isolation, worries about the unknown, fears of getting sick, and fears relating to work and stress. Only one-quarter of the participants felt that they could access emotional or psychological support when it was needed, while 40% had no access to such support and 30% had access only sometimes.

The interviews similarly suggested that the participants were concerned about their physical health during the pandemic. The concerns in this regard were about accessing medical care.

Two undocumented[34] women said:

> *Trying to register with a GP was hellish for me. There are people that came after me who managed to register easily and I was like, 'What's happening'? When they now told me this person just came and just like that they registered with a GP'*
> *And: 'It's very hard having a situation like me, we don't know how to register with GP'.*

Learning from the workshops (see Section 4. Building networks of resilience, below, of the current report) indicated that many of the survey participants did not know that they were entitled to primary care services or that they could register for a GP without disclosing their address or other personal details. This learning emerged during the workshops when participants reported that they were frightened of registering for a GP in case they had to disclose personal details that might be shared with the Home Office.

Pregnant women reported additional concerns. One undocumented woman who was pregnant during the pandemic said:

> *I started engaging to my prenatal checkup because I got worried about the situation with my baby. I experienced difficulty breathing and I got admitted in the Royal Free Hospital then after that, I received an email from the hospital about the bill. I really got worried because of my situation, because I am undocumented and I have no recourse to public funds and I don't know where will I get money to pay for the NHS and everything regarding my situation because I am pregnant. I really got depressed because of that.*

The workshops also explored the rights of women with NRPF status who are pregnant. The key speakers at the workshops advised women that maternity care, including antenatal appointments, will always be treated as 'immediately necessary' and then charged later by the NHS. The experiences on the women in the project reflect those conditions.

While the interviewees were concerned about their physical health during the pandemic, they were more concerned about their mental health, in the main, and the strain of the restrictions

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[34] The terminology of 'undocumented' is utilised to introduce participants' data if it is how the participants self-describe.

and the pandemic. These concerns are summed up by one man who was undocumented at the time of his interview, when he said:

> *This pandemic, the stress, I could not sleep at the end of the day to be honest. I was happier during the day than during the night. During the night, I'm in bed and can't sleep. I can stay all the night and cannot sleep, maybe 6 o'clock in the morning I can try to sleep.*

Another man who had been refused asylum reported:

> *During the pandemic, this experience I'd have, my experience is so bad… everything is so bad for me because I have had a lot of mental stress... sitting in one position.*

Another man with NRPF said:

> *Before I came here, I never knew what depression was all about, or [what] being traumatised was all about. But staying in your room, like one week straight, seeing nobody, can't contact anybody, don't know anybody, just on your own, just really depressing.*

The impacts of the pandemic and the restrictions manifested in a variety of ways - poor sleep, mental stress, and depression. The interviewees' mental health concerns were both personal and social and they were worried about the number of deaths being reported. One undocumented man said:

> *During this COVID-19, everything that you understand is the number of deaths, the anxiety, you cannot sleep.*

Similarly, another undocumented man said:

> *It was too scary, you cannot listen to the news, 300 deaths, 600 people are dying, it was scary. I was lying in bed, thinking if I'm going to be the next person to catch this virus.*

In addition, two of the interviewees reported that the pandemic had triggered their existing trauma and PTSD.

A woman who was in the legal process said:

> It just amplified my PTSD, my depression, my anxiety, I was just in a very bad place and this continued until December. In December, I went to the GP [and said] 'I don't want to live anymore, I can't go on like this.'

A man, also in the legal process, said:

> The fear as I am 100% worried even with my medication and I have nightmares sometimes I can't sleep properly because I flashback to the time of torture. I feel that more people will end up committing suicide or self harm when you were living on your own with no visits is very hard.

The risk of suicide was mentioned several times during the interviews and during the workshops. Indeed, as the project went on and, nationally, we entered the third lockdown, the evaluation team noted a palpable, qualitative difference between the findings of the survey (conducted in December and January) and the interviews (conducted in February and March). While the survey respondents reported that they were hopeful for the future and for social change, the interviewees were notably more despondent about the future. This change in 'mood' seemed to be attributable to a feeling of endlessness about the pandemic. This despondency was summed up by a man who was in the legal process:

> It's like the world around you is crumbling down, you kind of feel vulnerable, feel alone, kind of feel scared, could I be the next in this situation? Is it going to be my end to die here alone in this house? I don't know anyone, I don't have family or friends. So you kind of get scared and your mental health can take a toll.

Another man, who had been refused asylum, said: *'No, it's getting worse. Nothing, things just getting worse.'*

3b. Money, finances, and housing concerns

The survey asked several questions about money and finances, and housing and accommodation. In all, 80% of respondents were worried about their financial situation during the pandemic, and about being able to afford food and other items that they might need; of these 80%, almost half did not have enough money to meet their needs, and 35% could meet

their needs only sometimes[35]. The reasons that people gave included their income not being sufficient, not being allowed to work and losing their jobs.

Of these 80%, almost 60% needed to access financial support, another 20% needed to access financial support sometimes, and only 20% said they did not need to access financial support at all. Of those that needed access to financial support, including those that sometimes needed support (64%), more than half were unable to access support. Two of the common reasons why people were unable to access this support was because they did not have the information or did not qualify due to their irregularised status, including those who were NRPF. Respondents could select multiple sources of income on the survey question, so it is difficult to ascertain their main sources of income, but they included ASPEN cards[36], money from family or friends, being in part-time, informal or full-time employment, or having no current income. Only seven respondents received income via Universal Credit, which further highlights the lack of financial safety nets for those with certain immigration statuses.

Where participants specified the items that they struggled to buy during the pandemic, they included fresh fruit and vegetables, baby essentials, toilet roll, warm clothes, vitamins, internet, and bed linen. When specifically asked about being able to cover the cost of food, only around 25% were able to cover food costs for themselves and their family, while around 75% struggled with this cost (approx. 30% were unable to cover this cost at all, and approx. 45% reported that they could sometimes cover this cost). Of those who had to pay for their accommodation (42% of the sample), approximately 65% struggled to cover accommodation costs (40% sometimes and 25% always). Of those who needed to buy sanitary products (58%), approximately 60% struggled (33% could buy these products sometimes and 25% could not at all). Only half of the whole sample was able to afford hand sanitiser and face masks, and 50% were able to afford soap and cleaning projects; the remainder of respondents could not afford such products.

Survey participants were also concerned about their ability to socially distance and self-isolate in their accommodation (approximately 50% could distance only sometimes or not at all, and approximately 40% could self-isolate only sometimes or not at all)[37]. In addition, of those who

[35] Eugster, B. (2018). "Immigrants and poverty, and conditionality of immigrants' social rights", *Journal of European Social Policy,* vol. 28, no. 5, pp. 452-470.
Mayblin, L. & James, P. (2019). "Asylum and refugee support in the UK: civil society filling the gaps?", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 375-394.
[36] Government Digital Service (2012). *Asylum support*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get.
[37] Phillips, D. (2006)., "Moving Towards Integration: The Housing of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Britain", *Housing Studies,* vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 539-553.

had communal areas (almost half of all survey respondents), approximately 53% said they were cleaned regularly, approximately 35%, sometimes, and approximately 10% said that they were not cleaned regularly. This finding corresponds to how safe people generally felt, with those feeling unsafe being less likely to be able to socially distance (70% were unable to socially distance compared to 9% who could and who also felt safe), self-isolate (70% were unable to self-isolate while 15% could and also felt safe), or have clean communal areas.

Just under one-third of respondents did not have internet access all the time. Some of the reasons that they could not access the internet all the time included not being able to afford it, having no Wi-Fi in their accommodation, and having limits on their data.

The interviews also explored concerns about money and surviving on limited means. Several interviewees had lost paid work during the pandemic (e.g., domestic work or caring) and had access to money only if they had an active application for asylum.

One undocumented woman said: *'[It's very] hard for us that you can't access into any benefits, any help because of the situation. All the help is very limited for people like us.'*

Another undocumented woman said:

> *I have no recourse to public funds. So nothing, literally nothing. … I don't even have child support at the moment as well. They're supposed to help us buy some stuff for the baby. I can do nothing about it. Yeah, still, we're still hoping that they give me the child benefit. But until now, nothing. Nothing's happening.*

Even those who had been kept on in paid work were struggling financially to a much greater extent than before the pandemic. Sharing her experiences, an undocumented woman reported:

> *You are in a hard situation in UK but most of the time, I have my work, I can only get few hours in my full-time job. I get there every day and they give me only 3 hours a day and how can we survive that to support our needs, especially we need to pay our rent in our house and then after that, I need to buy some meal and some diaper for my son also and for our food? When my partner lost his job, I just have few pounds in my pocket, it's*

McClenaghan, M. (2017). *Syrian asylum seekers in UK forced into poverty*. [online] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/26/destitute-syrian-asylum-seekers-fear-deportation
Kissoon, P. (2015) *Intersections of displacement: refugees' experiences of home and homelessness,* Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, England.

> *difficult how you manage that… I need to save money for my children, I need to buy things, I need to pay bills and I need to support our food also.*

The respondents who had financial worries were concerned not only about buying food and other necessities, but they also struggled significantly with paying rent. Many of the respondents had fallen into rent arrears and were not sure how to recover:

> *I had COVID and I cannot go to work and… my partner… We don't have any penny in our pocket, actually we don't pay our rent for the month of January because of this COVID-19 (undocumented woman)*

Similarly, a man who was undocumented said that, before he got a job, he was very concerned about rent:

> *The first challenge [was] in [the] beginning as couldn't pay rent for the few months, my landlord doesn't really know my situation, [it was a] constant headache and anxiety about how I will pay my bills and everything without my landlord and flat mates would know. I was able to get a job. Landlord doesn't care, just wants you to pay the money.*

Concerningly, some of the interviewees were evicted from their accommodation because they could not maintain rent payments. An undocumented woman reported:

> *[D]uring the big changes in the circumstances, I cannot work because of the restrictions, which means I will not have income because of my status. If I don't work, no pay, no food, I cannot pay my bills and rent so my situation becomes very difficult. Since I'm not able to work, I don't have enough money, I don't have money to pay rent so my landlady kicked me out.*

Another woman who was also undocumented, said:

> *[After the period of self-isolation, did you go back to the place where your husband is living?] No. That time, I have no job. No more income, no food, I can't pay my rent so there comes anxiety, worried and how to get help and where.*

3c. Importance of networks and support

The survey also revealed that half of the respondents were not involved with community organisations or groups for support at all. Those who were attended workshops/ activities, helped or volunteered with charities, talked on Zoom, or attended church.

In addition, 30% of respondents felt they had no social support of any form during the pandemic, 37% had social support only sometimes, and 33% had such support quite regularly. Those who had social support, including those who had it sometimes, had friends and/ or family, and had links to organisations. For those who had support only sometimes, one of the reasons that was highlighted was that organisations closed due to restrictions during the pandemic. Those who had no social support described finding it difficult and also noted that they struggled with having no friends or not being able to see people.

Most survey respondents (80%) needed support of some sort during the pandemic. The examples that people gave for needing this support predominantly included financial, mental health and help with food.

The interviews explored the importance of support networks in some detail. The interviews asked about engagement with social and support networks before and during the pandemic, the sort of support that was needed and valued, and the impact of limited support.

Some of the interviewees were not involved with any support networks at all: A man with NRPF said in his interview: *'I'm on my own, I don't have anybody here so I'm all alone.'*

Other interviewees had engaged with support groups, or met with networks, only recently. One man in the legal process said: '*I have no family and limited connections but I was lucky to be put in contact with an LGBT group where I met some people.'*

Others again had lost access to their support networks because of the pandemic. One man who had been refused asylum said:

> *I used to have this organisation before the pandemic, before COVID-19, the Red Cross. They used to assist us asylum seekers in one way or another but during this pandemic, they stopped everything. The Red Cross office closed, it's really bad.*

Where support was absent, the interviewees reported that they needed help with money and help with their asylum case. For example, a man who had been refused asylum said:

> *I need [a] network like back before COVID-19, I used to have Red Cross to help Home Office work on my case so that I can know my position in the country. So I needed a network that will help me to facilitate things and help me financially also in this pandemic period also because due to the pandemic, what I have, what the Home Office is really providing for me, a week is kind of like small. I really need a network that can facilitate my case and help me during this pandemic financially.*

There was a lot of learning from the interviews about the importance of networks, and how they help in a variety of ways[38]. Of course, respondents valued organisations helping to support them financially. One woman who was undocumented noted, however, that the other forms of support by an organisation outweighed financial help:

> *[The financial support is] a big help for us. [But] it's not about the amount that we're having because of the organisation, but you know the feeling of being not alone because of the support you're having from them.*

Indeed, several respondents explored why support networks are so important in terms of belonging, being heard and cared for, and feeling part of something, particularly in circumstances where they might otherwise be alone. For example, one undocumented woman said:

> *I think throughout all of our struggles because of Kanlungan, the organisation, volunteers will assist you anytime. [...] Because of the pandemic, we lost the confidence that we had. Because of Kanlungan, they help us to build and realise that we are not alone, that we have somebody, which is very important in our daily life here in England having no family.*

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[38] Liamputtong, P. & Kurban, H. (2018) "Health, social integration and social support: The lived experiences of young Middle-Eastern refugees living in Melbourne, Australia", *Children and Youth Services Review,* vol. 85, no. Jan 2018, pp. 99-106.
Sales, R. (2002) "The deserving and the undeserving? Refugees, asylum seekers and welfare in Britain", *Critical Social Policy,* vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 456-478.
Glorius, B., Doomernik, J. and Darling, J. (2016). "Asylum in austere times: Instability, privatization and experimentation within the UK Asylum Dispersal System", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(4): 483-505.

Another undocumented woman said:

> And all the members of the Kanlungan organisation were very helpful, they embraced us sincerely. They call us from time to time, how are you, which I think is the most important thing in coping. They also keep on following up, how is our situation which I think helped us recover from the COVID symptoms. … Because of Kanlungan, they help us to build and realise that we are not alone.

In terms of specific needs-based support, one undocumented woman, for example, shared how her network had helped her to navigate life in the UK as an mother without status:

> The organisation that really helped me is really Kanlungan honestly, I did become a part of the mumshie group. The mumshie group is a group of mothers or mother to be, we shared our own experiences, all topics that could help us being, how to become a mother and how we could handle as a mother here in the UK especially and have the same situation like me as undocumented.

Emotional and psychological support from organisations was also valued, particularly when the support was about mental health and wellbeing. Three women, all of whom were undocumented, said of this kind of support:

> During the pandemic, I already become depressed, feeling so sad. Kanlungan helped me with my wellbeing, I attended group therapy sessions and workshops for mental health.

> During the pandemic, with the help of Kanlungan and FDWA, I was able to recover and I received assistance from them, for my mental health and I felt a lot better when I joined to the group therapy sessions.

> I was able to cope by attending these seminars, workshops in mental health and wellbeing, art therapy sessions, group therapy sessions, organised by Kanlungan. I felt better and felt more at peace.

The value of support networks is perhaps best summed up by the following quote from an undocumented woman:

> I think the most important one is that they're very passionate, things to help you that could uplift your spirit, your soul, your physical stuff, especially the confidence.

The interviews also explored how networks, and particularly those networks developed during the Building Resilience project, enabled, empowered, and supported people in a variety of ways. We will return to this learning in Section 4 of the report.

3d. Summary of life during COVID-19

Overall, both survey and interview data indicated that people's finances were significantly impacted by the pandemic. The survey respondents and interviewees noted that it affected their ability to buy food for themselves and their families, and to cover the cost of their accommodation.

The broader questions posed by the survey about items that people could afford indicated that people were struggling to buy essential items such as food, warm clothes, and bed linen. Unlike British citizens who benefited from the furlough schemes and increases to their benefits, in both the surveys and interviews, participants identified themselves as unable to qualify for financial support, in part due to the NRPF regulations that affect people across different statuses. In the interviews, one instance of eviction highlighted the precarious nature of those without access to the welfare system. The survey indicated that around half of respondents had difficulties being able to afford additional items such as hand sanitiser and face masks as well as soap and cleaning products to ensure that occupants were safe in their own homes and to reduce the risk of transmission.

Similarly, although aware of the need to physically distance within their homes and self-isolate in any situation where someone in the home had symptoms or a positive COVID-19 test result, half of survey respondents had difficulties in physically distancing and almost half struggled to self-isolate in their homes. Furthermore, the survey revealed that it was those who felt unsafe who were also more likely to be unable to socially distance, self-isolate, or have their communal areas cleaned regularly.

In terms of travel, many respondents felt unsafe with almost half of those who needed to travel having to use public transport where they expressed concerns about people not following the government guidelines on maintaining social distance and wearing face coverings. Over half of the respondents who went to work disclosed that they experienced difficulties accessing PPE and that they worried about acquiring COVID-19. Overall, then, our survey respondents were disadvantaged in their abilities to protect themselves and to take actions to minimise COVID-19

transmission risk both within their households and when travelling, including to their workplaces.

Although questions about physical safety from COVID-19 formed a central part of the survey, at the time of interviewing, participants focused more on the longer-term impacts such as enduring financial hardships and challenges to their mental health. A significant proportion of the respondents to the survey indicated that their mental health was impacted by COVID-19. This finding was reflected in the interviews where participants reported that many aspects of the pandemic had affected their mental health. Some participants noted that preexisting mental health illnesses were exacerbated to the extent, in certain instances, and people referred to having thoughts of suicide.

The significance of having access to organisations and networks was a central theme in both the surveys and interviews. While the main concerns revealed through the survey were people's need for access to food, and for support financially, the interviews captured the extent to which people recognised the benefit of having access to mental health support in particular, because it provided a way for people to increase their confidence and to empower themselves. The significance of the survey finding that just under one-third of respondents had no social support at all was amplified during interviews where people explained how the absence of social support left them feeling very alone and isolated.

Over half of the survey respondents said they could not access healthcare easily. This concern was echoed in the interviews with a particular focus on the difficulties people experienced registering with a GP even though, theoretically, this right extends to everyone residing in the UK, irrespective of their status.

Overall, during COVID-19, on both a material and an emotional level, the quality of life for this project's participants has been deeply and negatively impacted.

4. Building networks of resilience

From the outset and for its duration, the project integrated an evaluation of both its processes – releasing resilience and building networks of resilience – and outcomes – changes that demonstrated the releasing and building of resilience – at both the individual, group and, to a limited extent, the community and political level. The evaluation also explored inhibitors to releasing and building resilience: it incorporated the understanding that simultaneous developments within the external world (e.g., policy change) may affect that process, and explored the impact of external factors on the capacities of the project's participants to release and build resilience. Nonetheless, we point out before the exploration of learning from the evaluation begins that, while the evaluation was robust, the project was limited in its scope and timeframe and we can speak only to the learning that was available in the timeframe of the project. In addition, we cannot make claims to outcomes that demonstrate a direct correlation between participants' resilience levels and external events.

Section 4 has five main sub-sections: the methodology of the project and learning; the evaluation framework for the project; setting out two crucial aspects of the project; learning from the evaluation; and a summary of evaluation outcomes.

4a. Methodology of the project and learning

The lockdown brought about a necessity for remote communications that from the outset excluded people from the project who did not have the material resources available to connect online. The people invited to take part in the project exist in profound poverty (see Section 3a for findings on the participants' financial concerns) and could participate only if they had an internet-enabled device and internet data. It is not possible to estimate how many people were unable to take part in the project at all because of a lack of technology or data but it is likely to be sizable.

Citing a longstanding precedent[39], where displaced people in a community development process were provided expenses associated with offering up some of their time, the pre-project negotiation involved partners sharing their preference for cash to recompense the expenses

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[39] Temple B. and Moran R. (2005) *Learning to live together. Developing communities where there are dispersed refugee people seeking asylum*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

and time involved for all participants who would take part in the project (survey, interviews, and workshops). Ultimately however, the project offered £25 vouchers to spend at one of a small selection of supermarkets. All participants received a voucher for each activity in which they were involved. Providing gift vouchers that participants could use to offset the cost of data that was necessary to be involved in the project was intended to mitigate against barriers to participation because of a lack of data. However, in order to take part at all, people needed data to access the first stage, the survey[40].

In a number of cases, while participants were able to complete the survey, they did not have their own email address, which is quite common, particularly in undocumented groups. It was necessary for the project team to ask everyone to have (or to set up) an email address in order to receive the voucher, but it was often the case that participants were unfamiliar with using email. In all, further on in the project, it was difficult to keep in touch with people to invite them to further stages of the project if they did not have access to the internet or if they did not utilise a personal email address. Again, we were concerned as a project team that we were having to exclude people because they did not have an email address or were not able to engage with us because they did not have access to the internet.

When participants did join the project for the interviews and the conversation/ training workshops, every participant and Community Enabler who was involved in the workshops had to learn how to communicate with each other exclusively online. This meant establishing clear

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[40] In addition, all the participants who completed the survey needed access to an email address to receive the gift voucher. We found in several cases that survey respondents 'borrowed' a friend's email address to receive the voucher, and in some cases, the same email address was used several times. This meant that the project team had to contact each person without an email address, through their friend's email address, to ask for exclusive email addresses for vouchers to be processed. While this was a cumbersome process, it was possible (though see note below). In addition, and unfortunately, there were also difficulties with people advising that they had completed the survey when they had only partially completed the survey and had not left any contact details. These people had expected a voucher and were upset not to receive one. The Community Enablers highlighted that some people were unfamiliar with the technology and needed additional support, which was a challenge to provide in further stages of the project due to the lockdown restrictions and the lack of face-to-face contact.

Despite the additional administration resource that accompanied the voucher payment, we underestimated how much administration the vouchers would require, and the cumbersome and often unmanageable nature of the process of distributing vouchers to participants. The combination of the project's timeframe, the challenges of accessing the internet or being unfamiliar with email technology and thereby accessing accurate email addresses for all participants (bearing in mind that, according to our survey, 40% of participants had poor social networks prior to this project) so that they could be sent links to vouchers, and voucher links disappearing into email spams, threatened to undermine trust levels between participants and the project. However, fortunately, the grounded knowledge and high respect levels enjoyed by some activity deliverers and early participants who had snowballed from their own groups and organisations to locate more people for involvement ensured that, ultimately, the difficulties were overcome, and the trust remained intact.

communication processes with others who were, overwhelmingly, strangers to them prior to the project's start, without being able to meet them in person, without necessarily having a private space within which to participate, and using zoom which was, initially at least, an unfamiliar platform. For those who had no prior experience following zoom procedures, the technical requirements of this project meant that some people who expressed interest during the recruitment stages for the interviews and workshops also became excluded before the interviews and workshops began, and others needed additional support from project enablers each time they wanted to participate during individual sessions.

Therefore, while the intention was to maximise consistency of involvement throughout the project's duration, so that individuals who completed the surveys and opted to be interviewed one on one and participate in the activities were included, it proved impossible to achieve within the timeframe of the project. This was because insufficient time and resources made it impossible to keep trying to maintain contact with everyone who was interested. If individuals did not respond to emails or confirm attendance at project activities, the project enablers had to move on to the next person on the list. The lack of capacity to try to 'stay' with all participants who wanted to be part of the work was disappointing but unavoidable. The project enablers were also cognisant that many potential participants were unable to engage with the project in ways that they wanted not only because of access to the internet but because of other issues and concerns in their lives.

Key learning from the methodology was concerned, in the main, with communication. Due to the nature of the project, there were sometimes several communication layers between the main core team of the project and the participants. For example, the lack of clarity on the voucher process (e.g., timescales for sending vouchers) led to confusion and frustration for the participants. These issues were sometimes compounded by the lack of trust amongst groups that participated in this project, especially those with irregularised status who often have mistrust in the political systems that control their status.

As the project continued, there was more direct communication between the core project team and the Community Enablers, and we paid more attention to setting expectations and timescales, which helped with all aspects of the project and particularly with communicating with participants and ensuring that they were kept up to date. In future, also, we learned that existing and strong existing communication pathways between individuals and groups may be harnessed to feed into a project at all stages and, in this way, it will be possible for us to focus on maximising consistency of involvement throughout the project's duration, with all the associated benefits that such consistency offers.

4b. Evaluation framework for project

Early reflections about how to maximise evaluation processes and intra- and inter-individual impacts as the project unfolded became systematised through RAPAR's non-participant observation and data collection from 21 virtual events or meetings carried out on Zoom. The purpose of these activities in the project ranged from community conversations, a writing and creative workshop, leadership training, media training, MP-writing letter training, and a meeting with an MP and advisors.

The data from the activities above were complemented by two further activities. First, ongoing commentary from the Community Enablers who facilitated the project's activities. In addition, activity enablers (Community Enablers, Volunteers, and Community Interviewers) wrote reflections about the project, which included the aspects of their work that they thought were enjoyable, successful and those that they thought were less so. The learning also draws upon a final evaluation session involving a representation of all partners who had engaged in some form of activity delivery.

The evaluation utilised an established framework for assessing 'outcomes' in terms of what took place during the project (process outcomes) and the kinds of changes that came about because of the project (impact outcomes). The evaluation framework examined process and impact outcomes at the individual, group, community, and political level. We argue that the outcomes indicated by the learning may be attributed, to some degree, to the project's activities but the activities should not be understood as causative. The learning from the evaluation is presented with this caveat.

At the individual level, during the virtual activities and within the reflection documents, we looked for processes that released confidence and capacities, and built knowledge and learning about rights. We also explored individual level impacts that were facilitated by the project's activities, such as evidence of feeling supported, heard, and valued, developing awareness about their rights, increasing their sense of belonging, of recognition, and acceptance as part of a group or process, reducing loneliness, and increasing feelings of coping and resilience.

Similarly, in terms of group outcomes, the evaluation framework enabled a capturing of group processes such as sharing experiences and talking together, developing group ideas and wishes, moving towards calling for change, and working with other groups and networks, including sharing examples of how groups develop and are organised. Possibly, at this level, the impacts

that have been brought about by the activities included feelings of belonging, recognition, and acceptance (as being part of a community group or process), sharing stories and building commonality, creating a shared language for understanding ('language creation from below'[41]), understanding the process of creating resilience networks, creating actions for change, working towards group longevity and development and working with other groups and networks on outcomes, and also developing understanding about how groups are created and organised.

At the community level, we examined process outcomes that demonstrated the start of community conversations, developing actions in and working within communities, and developing actions with other groups in communities: the processes of reaching out, raising voice, and beginning conversations. The community level impacts that we examined that may be attributed, to some degree, to project activities included participants' feeling that they were part of collaborative communities and could act within them to speak up for rights, experiencing a level of success with communities' actions, recognising how networks are part of communities and contribute to communities' lives, and wanting to working towards group longevity and development in communities by developing process, voice, and conversations within their own and with other communities.

Finally, at the political level, we explored process outcomes that were concerned with developing political awareness ('political learning'), having political conversations, and working in groups and communities on political issues. Political level impact outcomes were about engaging with issues on a p/Political level, speaking up for rights in communities, interacting with community and policy makers politically, feeling like change is possible in a real sense, and feeling like participants are making a change.

Disaggregating between the levels of outcome (individual, group, community and political), and process and impact outcomes, is complicated. Some of the learning below could arguably fit into one more of the outcome categories. The framing of the learning is based upon the analysis of the data and 'best fit' for understanding the workings of the project, where participants emphasised their perspectives in terms of individual, group, community, and political thinking.

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[41] Voloshinov, V. N. (1929/ 1986). *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Harvard: Harvard University Press.

4c. Two crucial aspects of the project

Before the section explores learning from the evaluation utilising the framework above, it is worth setting out the ways in which the project enabled a 'safe space' for participants to come together in the conversation and training workshops that were explicitly centered around rights-based and rights-seeking work. These spaces were crucial to the beginning of building networks of resilience.

Facilitating 'safe spaces'

The project's Community Enablers were instrumental in securing participants for the group activities and the project greatly benefitted from their very selfless preparedness to open out their group and social networks to the project, and particularly the care and attention that they paid to ensuring that the more deeply isolated members of their networks were able to become involved. Issues with access to data and internet-enabled devices were explored above. In cases where potential participants were unable to be part of the project, they became unfortunately but inevitably excluded over time. Nonetheless, the Community Enablers invested time and energies in ensuring that they included as many of those invited to the activities as possible.

Information centrally held by the project team (e.g., participants' names, email addresses, telephone numbers, and so forth) was treated in the strictest confidence. Information-sharing is always a concern for migrant communities whose precarious status, and the risk of detention and deportation, are daily, live issues. The Community Enablers ensured that they built and/or maintained high trust relationships with all the participants with whom they were individually communicating. In all, the participants expressed deep appreciation of the confidentiality and care that underpinned the project's processes and its *'encouragement for compassion about each other's circumstances'* (quote from a workshop).

One of the unique aspects of this project was its bringing together of migrants who were differently placed in respect of their regularisation, ranging from those currently living outside of all legal processes, through to people who were waiting for responses to visa and asylum applications. The project also included a small number of people with limited leave to remain. This variation in participants' statuses necessitated Community Enablers' consistent use of inclusive language, and their ensuring that every different kind of 'irregular person' was acknowledged so that no one felt 'othered', unwelcome, or further displaced.

Crucially, also, the Community Enablers were present at all the training and conversation workshops and held each virtual space for everyone who was there. They were responsible for organising the events, including the technology, welcoming participants, inviting them to introduce themselves to each other, explaining the structure of each event, exercising their judgement about the optimal combinations of participants for break out rooms, putting everyone at ease during each activity, and comfortably drawing each activity to a close. These numerous tasks were vital to not only the smooth running of events but also to ensuring that participants felt that they were in a 'safe space', where they would be safe *from* oppression, harassment, and fear, and safe *to* engage in dialogue and debate, to disagree, challenge, learn, express, emote, and develop one's consciousness[42] where they could speak freely and in confidence. Each event opened with a Community Enabler or Volunteer reassuring all participants that they were in a 'safe space' and that anything that they said would be held in confidence. Holding the virtual space meant also holding all the participants there in ways that maintained safety and comfort. These features of the workshops are explored below again as part of the learning about process and impact outcomes.

Focusing on rights-based work

All the project's workshops were focused on rights-based information-sharing and learning, disseminating learning about rights, engaging with the media, MPs, and policy makers about rights, and becoming leaders in the community. To begin the process of awareness-raising and establishing a solidarity around rights and needs[43], the project utilized a rights-based approach and ran several workshops.

Community conversations (nine in all): The three community conversations (three held in each of the three regions separately) were explicitly focused on sharing rights-based information with participants. Each event had three expert speakers from various organisations (e.g., Migrants at Work, Migrants Organise, RAPAR, Scoma) to talk about health rights, housing rights, and employment rights, for 15 minutes each. The presentations included legal issues, COVID-19 related changes and policies, and information on 'grey areas' or areas that are often unclear (e.g., payments for healthcare). The community conversations developed on these three areas

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[42] Lewis, R., Sharp, E., Remnant, J. & Redpath, R. 2015, "'Safe spaces': Experiences of feminist women-only space", *Sociological Research Online,* vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 1-14

[43] Morris, L. (2021). "Moral economy from above and below: contesting contraction of migrant rights in austerity Britain", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* vol. 47, no. 7, pp. 1686-1703.
Webber, F. & Peirce, G. (2012; 2015). *Borderline justice: the fight for refugee and migrant rights,* Pluto Press, London.

of concern in the breakout rooms when smaller numbers of participants came together to explore their own experiences around health, housing, and work, or other issues that were emerging for them. The information disseminated in the presentations was accurate and up to date at the point of presentation, and relevant to migrants who are undocumented, in process, and/ or who have NRPF. The short duration of the workshops meant that some of the issues could be explored only briefly; nonetheless, the speakers tried to ensure that they covered rights for groups with different statuses. As they evolved, some of the community conversations reduced from three to two speakers and this created more time for questions and for people to interact. Furthermore, as the community conversations became more polished, preparatory dialogue between the Community Enablers and presenters helped to adjust the presentations as they went along, improving their accessibility and the associated time management.

The rights-based community conversations were the lynchpin to the project and to the beginning of the process of releasing resilience and building networks of resilience. Ninety-four participants attended the first community conversation (across the three areas), and 121 participants attended the second and third conversations. Holding them simultaneously in the three regions of England where the project was based brought about a sense of collectivism to the project. Participants in the London conversations were aware that people in the Midlands and the North were also exploring their rights, and having conversations, at the same time. This intrinsic sense of solidarity-building fed throughout the process as the speakers (all of whom went to all three simultaneous conversations to deliver their presentations) talked about being in the other conversations and there was a palpable sense of collective action in the different regions.

All workshop presenters demonstrated tremendous commitment, being prepared to share their skills and knowledge through structured presentations. Like the Community Enablers and participants, many of the presenters came from migrant backgrounds. This fact was important for developing a sense of peer involvement. As one of the presenters explained for context at the beginning of every session that he delivered, *'I have been through many of the experiences that you have been through.'*

Creative writing workshop (one): The creative writing workshop (attended by 60 people) was designed to bring people together for something fun, different, and engaging. The aim of the event was to explore how we document the migrant experience through creative expression. Participants learned how to write poems and how to 'tell your story'. With a very enthusiastic and engaging enabler, the writing workshop offered simple slides that were easy to read and

understand and the break-out rooms encouraged people to fill out their stories, and to articulate wider and stranger questions about what has happened in their stories. There was a great deal of laughter in the breakout rooms as participants tried to write poetry (one participant in one breakout room declined to take part, laughing, and saying, *'I don't understand poetry*!'). This session was not only useful in terms of thinking of new ways of telling our stories but throughout, there was a happy, positive, and upbeat energy.

MP-writing and media training workshops (five in all): The MP-writing and media-training workshops were also focused on pursuing rights through direct communication with MPs and interacting with the media. These workshops were based on developing skills in communicating with MPs (e.g., specific advice on what to include in a letter to an MP) and preparing media videos (e.g., how to capture an audience's attention in a short space of time). At the beginning of the first of the three media-training workshops, the presenter fruitfully stimulated participants' ideas for producing their own one-minute videos with three direct questions: What is the biggest impact COVID-19 is having on you? What do you want people to know and what do you want them to do with the information? What would help towards solving your problems? The second and third media-training sessions then enabled participants to prepare attention-grabbing and impactful videos. The MP-writing workshops explored the best way to write to an MP with the crucial information about individual needs that an MP would need to know and about which an MP could respond and act. These sessions were, by necessity, less open-ended in their conversation and exploration and were focused on skills development and producing a letter or media clip.

Community leadership training sessions (two): The community leadership training sessions were aimed at providing basic skills training for 12 selected members of the community, nominated by the Community Enablers. The sessions covered leadership skills, community organising, and community action. The content of the leadership activities energised people who were invited to respond to the following questions: Why am I here? What values motivate me? Why do I feel I have to act? The leadership workshop presenters paced their speaking presentations very well and offered strong visuals which included diverse examples of leadership, such as the civil rights movement in the USA and the independence movement in India.

Learning launch workshop (one): One of the final events of the project was a launch workshop, to which survey and interview participants were invited to hear about the preliminary learning from the survey and interviews, to reflect upon the findings and what they mean to them, and to consider four questions that started to bring different elements of the project together. As the launch workshop was one of the final events, we wanted to ensure that we provided a

space for participants to share some last thoughts on key questions. The facilitators posed four questions to the participants: (1) Can you talk about any of the things that you have learned from working together as a group or community during this project? (2) How would you like to develop working together to challenge the hostile environment going forward? What do you think needs to be done? (3) How can we build networks that truly last and empower people? (4) Can you say what you have learnt about how we need to make change happen? Approximately 40 people came to the launch workshop.

Community networking events (two): Two community networking events closed the events for the project. Representatives of support and campaign groups from around England, including the three partner organisations in the project, presented about their activities during the first of these sessions, and the second facilitated discussion among 90 participants about how to continue building communities of resilience beyond this project. The Community Enablers invited participants to discuss several questions in the breakout rooms:

(1) Do you want to continue the regular community conversations? How? And would you like them to be regional, city-based, or national?
(2) What is the best platform for communication amongst members of the community? How are we going to meet? Zoom? Face-to-face?
(3) How would you like to get involved with the different campaigns?
(4) How should we raise awareness of issues using different media and strategies so we can reach out to other members of the community and inform the British public?
(5) Are there any other practices in our community that we could share to the other communities to help them cope with the lockdown, and the hostile environment?
(6) Are there any 'soft skills' that the community needs i.e., English language classes?

This exercise resulted in seven suggestions for what could be the next community steps to take (explored below).

Meeting with an MP and advisors (one): Finally, during the project, a group of participants met with an MP (Stephen Timms, Labour MP for East Ham). RAPAR introduced early learning from the survey and interviews to the MP and his advisors, and the participants (approximately 50) had the opportunity to tell their stories and ask questions of the MP and his advisors.

In all, the project ran 21 events with hundreds of participants, all of whom were given a supermarket voucher to enable their participation in the activities. All the activities would have benefitted from more time over a longer period so that group dynamics evolved that fully

incorporated everyone to the point where sustained creative collaboration became possible. Nonetheless, the learning from the events was illuminating in terms of how we start to release resilience and build communities of resilience. This section will now move on to discuss the process and impact outcomes from the project.

4d. Learning from the evaluation

The current section sets out the project's process and impact outcomes at the individual, group, community, and political level. As above, disaggregating between the levels of outcome (individual, group, community, and political), and process and impact outcomes, is not an easy task. Some of the learning presented below could arguably fit into one more of the outcome categories, and could, plausibly, be about process or impact or both. The framing of the learning is based upon the analysis of the data and 'best fit' for understanding the workings of the project, where participants emphasised their perspectives in terms of individual, group, community, and political learning.

Process and impact outcomes: individual level - 'I got empowered'

The individual level process outcomes are summarised as developing communication skills and technical competencies through the need to work online (capacity-releasing and confidence-building/ releasing), and, crucially, awareness-raising about rights at the individual level.

A previous section of the report (4a. Methodology of the project and learning) explored issues with access to data and an email address and trying to maintain the participation of individuals throughout the project. Where the project enablers were unable to do so, they invited new members of our communities. This meant, however, that whenever anyone participated in an activity (an interview or workshop), people who were unknown to each other were coming together. Indeed, such was the nature of the project (located in three disparate regions), and the numbers of people involved (198 in the survey, 25 of whom were involved in the interviews, and approximately 300 people in the workshops, some of whom were involved in interviews and/ or more than one workshop and some not), that anyone who took part in an interview or workshop was likely to meet one or several there who were unfamiliar to them. The first individual level process outcome of the project, then, is about developing communication skills to allow for conversation in unfamiliar spaces with unfamiliar people.

A great deal of the work that takes place between networks and members of communities takes place in high trust, familiar surroundings (e.g., organisation offices) so it was inevitable

that individuals would feel constrained about the extent to which they felt they could speak freely, and make personal disclosures about their lives and experiences, in unfamiliar online spaces with unfamiliar people. All the people involved in the activities had to reach a level of comfort in those spaces to speak and share, and doing so was clearly easier for some of the participants than others. The efforts of the Community Enablers to ensure a 'safe space' (see above) was crucial to bringing about this level of comfort. In addition, some of the participants who were less confident speaking in English shared with their mother tongue and were translated. Communicating online, and in a way that was accessible and comfortable to all, was challenging in general terms and even more so as the average of between 30-60 participants who were involved in all workshop sessions at any one time, and presenters, had to speak and communicate in ways that were comfortable and safe for them.

Within different project activities, participants learned, therefore, both communication skills and technical competencies. One participant said in a workshop: '*I personally learnt a lot about communication and… the technical thing was how to use Zoom itself and how to use Google Drive.'* The process of sharing and co-creating content within groups via Zoom was challenging, not least getting everyone to mute and unmute themselves at the appropriate time. On occasion, participants had to be introduced to the camera function, and the chat function, and guided in their use. It was an interesting endeavour, however, because it provided opportunities to test out how to use technology to release resilience and build communities of support and resilience. It is difficult to overstate, though, the combination of sensitivity and interpersonal complexity that was associated with setting up and delivering each of the group activities. Some group members were almost completely socially disconnected prior to the project while every group member, in every group, faced the challenge of overcoming barriers - emotional as well as material - to functioning within the groups. While the groups were set up as 'safe spaces', it was not possible to assume, for example, that everyone had a space in their homes or workplaces where they could speak freely, or a space where they could guarantee not being interrupted. In one instance, a woman with a young baby joined an activity while she was travelling on public transport, saying*, 'Sorry I can't speak. I'm on my way home with the baby. He's not stable at the moment'.* In another, a Volunteer who was asked to add a comment had to write in the chat function*, 'I am listening from my employer's house and I cannot speak'*. While technology provided an invaluable opportunity to come together during COVID-19, it was also limited in the extent to which people could engage as freely, and safely, as they would have offline and in the same room.

Despite the challenges of meeting together, the welcome variation in the composition of participants across events from different communities, as well as the Community Enablers'

attention to the details and 'nuts and bolts' of the events, ensured that the workshops were vibrant, engaging, and valuable to the participants. The community conversation events were explicitly rights-based and began with experts presenting information on health, housing, and employment rights, and offering brief opportunities to ask questions and seek individual advice. While engaging in detailed discussions about individual needs and concerns was not possible inside of the large events, all the speakers made themselves available outside of the workshops to offer individual level advice, supported by the Community Enablers.

Some of the participants made good use of the Zoom chat facility to share and capture thoughts and ideas as they arose, to ask questions, and to make general comments. Utilising this form of communication not only allowed a 'sideways' conversation to take place during the workshops but also enabled the participants to learn together in a casual and ad hoc manner and to help raise each other's awareness. Here is an example of such a conversation from the MP-letter writing training workshop:

> *From M: Does it carry any weight when an MP knows that people seeking asylum are not allowed to vote, I feel they may be reluctant to respond?*
> *From L: My local MP, refused to help and no longer response to my emails.*
> *From T: What's the success rate in an immigration case with an MP recommendation/ intervention?*
> *From LM: some MPs are helpless. they just say "vote labour if u want things to change"*
> *from A: Can the MP make some special permissions? for example permission for asylum seeker to work?*
> *From P: What does it mean to be a constitute [constituent]? Is that based on a status or anyone who is living in UK?*
> *[…] From S: [When writing to MPs] Include your name address postcode HO reference no. issue, any evidence (medical, missed info), what you want*
> *From C: Its best to start your contact with an MP sooner rather than later! If you can build a relationship with them they are more likely to put a lot more effort into help you! a year or 6 months in advance would be great!*
> *From S: make it simple, chronology helps ie date/event*

These conversations evolved as participants continued to chat, ask questions, and answer questions. Participants received answers to questions from the experts who were present, and a greater understanding of issues about which they were unclear, by communicating in this way.

Overall, the awareness-raising of issues facing migrants, and possible recourses, was a crucial individual level outcome; indeed, feedback from the participants suggested that learning about issues relevant to their lives (during Covid-19 and otherwise) was the most valuable part of the community conversations. For example, a woman who was undocumented said in one breakout room during a community conversation that she '*did not know that she could register with a GP*'. This participant believed that she did not have any access to healthcare at all because of her status. Another participant who sought advice about a housing issue after the presentation about housing rights learned that he could challenge a landlord's eviction notice. This participant had not been aware that that was possible and that he had those rights.

The media, MP-writing and leadership training events were particularly useful to participants in terms of gaining the skills, knowledge and confidence that are needed to begin to speak up for rights. For example, one participant said in the chat for the MP-writing workshop:

> *This training session definitely helped me to know what MP can & cannot do, how to lobby an MP, building bridges/relationships with them to get what you want at the end. Thanks for organising this.*

Another participant remarked:

> *I would like to thank Migrant Voice team for this awesome training/presentation. I have been wondering how to contact my MP, and even just find out who it is and your timing could not be any better. Cameron was awesome and answered my question and I feel more confident on the steps to take next in my case. Thanks again for your amazing work.*

Similarly, the media training workshops enabled participants to consider the best ways to tell their stories and to capture an audience's attention. The participants received specific instruction and advice on preparing media videos and then had the opportunity to prepare a video and to receive feedback from media experts. The sessions involved not only learning about the technicalities of making videos (pitch, lighting, location, and so forth) but also how to craft a story and message. These ideas were picked up again in the creative writing session (below).

The individual impacts of being part of the project were concerned, then, with developing and releasing skills, and the understanding and knowledge that came with learning about rights. In

this sense, the participants not only gained understanding but also gained a sense of empowerment to speak up for rights through knowledge.

One undocumented woman said:

> *Yes, I learnt a lot about many things. I learnt about my rights, I got empowered by joining activities on social organisations [organised] by Kanlungan.*

It is notable that this participant explicitly mentioned the idea of empowerment and what she had gained from the sessions. The idea of empowerment - where individuals gain more control over their own life or the situation they are in - is crucial not only in releasing and building resilience but also in developing a sense of rights-based awareness and rights-based action. One can learn about rights and what they are and mean, but one arguably needs to be empowered to speak up and act for those rights.

In terms of knowledge and empowerment, one participant said: '*Knowledge is power, legal power, how you can do some things.*' while another astutely remarked that the workshops were '*How to show someone to sew, rather than just sewing for you*'.

In addition, data from the interviews with people who had also participated in the community workshops suggest that the participants gained a great deal in terms of individual learning and understanding. These findings are presented as 'impact outcomes' as they are concerned with the individual outcomes of the group activities reported by participants. For example, one woman who was undocumented said in her interviews that she had learned about her rights:

> *Because of the webinar, I gained a lot of knowledge, how I could protect myself, as well as my partner and also my baby as well for our own safety. We did find out our own rights, that even though we are undocumented, we have some human rights and it's a very big help for us in coping our depression and faster recovery despite of our bad experiences in the past.*

The impact of awareness-raising and empowerment through sharing and learning ran through the participants' learning. The sessions also brought about an individual sense of belonging, being heard by others, and gaining perspective on one's own issues. Being heard was also an important individual-level impact outcome. The data from the workshops and the interviewees reported a sense of greater belonging through the building resilience network. Some of the participants expressed feelings of being supported, heard, and valued: *'[I] feel free, feel that*

you are comfortable to continue, to explain to each other if you have a problem, otherwise I feel shy.'

Participants also reported a sense of perspective from attending the sessions, in terms of understanding their own issues and the lives of others. One participant said that he enjoyed the community conversations:

> *To learn more and explore and really appreciate those… A lot of things I learnt, the sympathy and the struggle that people have and appreciate the life that I have now.*

Another participant said*: 'Being on the training, I heard other people's journeys and struggles. Gave [me] a sense of perspective.'*

Process and impact outcomes: group level - 'know about the problems we are facing'

Separating individual process outcomes from group level process outcomes is complicated. In many respects, the groups did not spend enough time with each other, or with the same people in groups, to evaluate group outcomes in detail. Nonetheless, it is possible to consider what was important to the participants in terms of group formation and processes, learning about rights together, sharing experiences, and developing outcomes and wishes (process outcomes) and how groups may have started to experience impacts (feeling belonging, building commonality, understanding how to release and build resilience, creating opportunities for raising awareness) working towards group longevity, working with other networks.

In all the group settings, participants appreciated the consistent and fundamental respect for one another that imbued the sessions: respect for diversity in culture, religion, and status. This respect combined with the desire to cooperate and to actively enable dialogue to foster stronger communicative processes. Participants observed, for example, that the way someone talked in sessions, and how other group members responded to contributions, using questions or statements, demonstrated mutual respect. Giving each other time and advice, and sometimes even challenging what people said within groups that maintained mutually respectful environments meant that, in turn, the conversational looms of the groups enabled people to feel in control of themselves and to work towards solutions.

Participants also identified an intrinsic benefit in the process of groups listening to each other's stories about how they have passed through this time, and of the opportunity, because they are

in a group, to demonstrate supportiveness towards each other and to express optimism about having the chance to sit together at some future time. Sharing experiences and identifying commonality were important group level processes and groups began to build their resilience and sense of solidarity together. A conversation in one breakout room (all women) during the community conversations was concerned with women's health rights. While much of the conversation took place in Filipino, the facilitator translated and it emerged that the women had talked about their concerns with pregnancy, babies, and their health rights and noted together they all had had similar experiences. The women in the same group also talked about their similar experiences with employers who had been abusive towards them and exploitative of them. Sharing this commonality was reassuring and galvanising as the women talked also about how they wanted to push for their rights and fight their exploitation. While participants as individuals gained from being part of the sessions, there was also a sense of groups being happy to be together, in the 'safe space' and to know that there is a shared experience with others.

Participants also explored learning at a group level about concerns and problems. One participant said: *'This project has helped us to know about the problems we are facing and the importance of communication.'*

In a similar way, the Community Enabler who ran the writing workshop said at the start of the session:

> *Trying to tell your story [to others] sharpens the mind, it enriches imagination, and it is necessary for us as Undocumented and in legal process people to learn the skill of storytelling, because if the stories aren't told they doesn't exist. But writing is an acquired skill that needs practice, it's a craft, it has rules, and we need to know the basic rules. The myth is that you just write. The reality is that 90% or 95% of writing is revisions, 5% is writing. It was very good to get some benefit from listening to the stories of each other, how they have passed through this time, to be supportive to each other, to see optimism and to get the chance to sit together. Acknowledging differences and also something in common, working with different people in different times, with more expectations.*

This quote reflects the importance of coming together as a group to share, explore, and understand, and to craft our stories of experiences together. The grounding of raising awareness about rights of group issues, and then exploring that understanding together, is crucial to the ways in which we then move forward with our stories and our actions.

However, participants also identified that the UK's hostile environment has affected all groups' abilities to function well (see also Section 5. Systemic barriers to resilience, below). One of the Community Enablers noted:

> *Also, how to manage it when people running events are also subject to the hostile environment but there is an expectation and a demand to maintain a safe space, and that a project of this nature can be problematic when it comes to recompensing people for their involvement.*

This perspective encompasses two important issues. First, the profound need for migrants to have a 'safe space' in which to learn and explore, and second, ensuring that participation in such spaces is not taken for granted and unrewarded. This issue relates to the problem of providing gift vouchers for participants in the project. While the gift vouchers were valuable to and welcomed by the participants, there was also a sense that they are a substitute for money (which is allowed to 'legal' citizens only) and a reminder of their status and position. This dilemma is perhaps best summed up in the question that was raised during the final evaluation session: *'How can an approach be utilised that does not involve some level of exploitation of migrants?'*

The evaluation of the project cannot answer this question, but it is an important question for consideration in future work and in ensuring the longevity of networks of resilience.
This issue also leads well to the final section of the evaluation learning. The duration of the current project was short, and the capacities within the project were limited, so the potential for moving towards community and political level outcomes was also limited. While there was some evidence of community-level outcomes (for example, working with other groups and learning to raise one's voice), and some evidence of aspirations to become involved at a political level, it is difficult to speak clearly to community and political level outcomes or to easily disaggregate between the two. For this reason, community and political level outcomes are presented together in the next section. Furthermore, some of the learning set out in the next section was initially explored as part of group outcomes. However, because of the explicitly political nature of the participants' engagement, and their framing of their activities as political, the learning is explored as part of community and political level outcomes.

Process and impact outcomes: community and political level - 'I'm not scared to speak up'

The most important community and political level outcome is concerned with the ways in which the project helped individuals to themselves cope and to feel sufficiently resilient to engage in understanding how best they could help others. This is a community and political level process outcome where participants were present and wanted to begin to support others in the community.

One participant said in the leadership workshops: *'How do I lift them up from that? I want to bring back human value back into the system.'* Another said, *'I think something is right and good, how do I get people to realise that they have that potential?'*

These perspectives demonstrate the ways in which the project galvanised people to start working with others at a group and community level.

The event participants also explored how they wanted to amplify their own voices, and work with others to help them to amplify theirs, about political issues. This finding is central to the idea of releasing and building resilience and solidarity in groups and in communities. All the events had, in some way, a political focus: rights-based discussions, creative storytelling, becoming leaders, interacting with media and MPs to communicate circumstances and needs, and community networking planning. Through these sessions, the 'personal' became 'political' and the 'political' became 'personal'[44]. Again, we are not arguing that the project's activities brought about particular outcomes, per se. Individuals who do not have status live at the intersection between the personal and the political every day as their personal experiences, oppressions and exploitations are enabled by the political climate and as they react to that political climate, e.g., the very recent events in Glasgow[45]; nonetheless, it is important for the project to discuss how the participants explored their own learning from the project in terms of personal and political learning, voice and action.

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[44] Hanisch, C. (1999). "*A Women's Liberation Tribute to William Hinton and the Women of Long Bow*" by Carol Hanisch. Available at: http://www.carolhanisch.org/Speeches/HintonSpeech/HintonTribSpeech.html
Hanisch, C. (1970). *The Personal Is Political (in Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists),* Radical Feminism; First Edition edition.

[45] Brooks, L. (2021). *Glasgow protesters rejoice as men freed after immigration van standoff*. [online] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/13/glasgow-residents-surround-and-block-immigration-van-from-leaving-street

Personal and political learning

First, the data indicate significant political learning from the project's events (these data were explored above in the section on awareness-raising and learning about rights). The project's activities did not, of course, happen in isolation, and many of the participants were involved in other groups and community networks. Their experiences in, and learning from, those networks intersected with their learning on the current project, and each informed the other. (The names of other organisations and networks, apart from the three partner organisations in the current project, are redacted for anonymity.) For example, one woman who was undocumented remarked in her interview:

> *From Kanlungan and building resilience and [redacted], it's really helpful to face the situation, it really helps me to be positive in everything to cope up the situation, to build resiliency and of course, to give a purpose in my life and connecting in the group also, it's really nice. I discovered good perspective, I'm accepting whatever is the challenges ahead and the process I need to go in the process, and I need to give myself care for myself especially during the pandemic.*

The participant above had experienced several individual level outcomes (positive thinking, coping, resilience, purpose, perspective, and care). The idea of perspective emerged several times in the participants' account of their personal and political learning, including perspective on their own lives and issues and the lives of others.

Another woman who was undocumented said in an interview:

> *I felt empowered and I know the rights 'cause of this organisation [redacted] and I'm not scared to speak up and my self-position and self esteem is uplifted not like before, I'm scared and now I have all the access [to information], to feel safe of this hostile environment.*

On an individual level, the participant above had developed greater self-esteem through her work with organisations and, on a political level, had developed the courage (and released the resilience) to speak up for her rights.

Another undocumented woman also explored her personal and political learning and development in her interview:

> I had really bad experiences with my peers, had a lot of friends before. When my situation is not just this low. I lost most of my friends because of what I've gone through so when I knew Kanlungan, it's really hard to trust people, first because of my status, and then I'm very hesitant to contact Kanlungan because I don't have any trust. When I started talking to people involved in Kanlungan, slowly, slowly I started trusting people and I realised, it's good that you trust those people who are genuine. They're true, they're willing to help, always willing to listen no matter what time it is. Also, the positive thing that given me being involved in these organisations is I met people whom I can easily talk to. There are days when I'm having depression and anxiety and having these triggers, I'm feeling very low or I'm feeling really frustrated. There are people who I can contact straight away who are willing to listen who give me some advice.

This participant clearly valued the support, being heard, and being part of a high trust environment. In terms of political learning, she identified the project's conversations and workshops that had helped her in her everyday life:

> Another thing is that someone really believed in me. … I've learned, also with the webinars we've had in the past, you know they're fairly full of information that I applied on my daily living and it helped me a lot to build a good relationship with my son nowadays. So, everything I learnt from those sessions and the projects, I've applied it in our daily living.

Through the 'safe spaces' of the groups, and the rights- and change-focused activities, the participants in the project were also galvanised to build upon the learning and solidarity developed through the project to speak up for change. The participants and Community Enablers explored ideas for building upon the project's work in the final workshops (community networking). The community networking sessions focused on what 'we might do next'. Participants contributed to the discussions, facilitated by the Community Enablers, and came up with several ideas about how to maintain the fledgling networks established during the project. Examples of these ideas are:

> When the lockdown eases make a group, WhatsApp and Facebook is a really good medium it's easy to connect.

> *To come together again in large numbers, here the common denominator is the same faces.*
> *Communicate with each other, keep on communicating, tell people to tell each other about this project.*
> *Develop an activity to make our issues visible to build solidarity - need to work together and publish stories and let our neighbours know.*
> *Visibility is essential.*

All these ideas are concerned with staying together, working together, involving others in the communities (community level outcomes) and continuing to make migrant issues visible (political level outcomes). Several of the discussions about what to do next were about continuing to build communities of solidarity to speak up for rights. Some of the participants said:

> *Be certain of what you're fighting for and what you want to do, otherwise it's in vain.*
> *Solidarity: we need to connect with one voice.*
> *We are at an advantage, we have already built relationship, we should build on this and continue working - we already are here and people are hungry to learn and do more.*
> *Personal stuff that brings us together, every movement has to be based around people, it's my fight and your fight.*

The importance of this work was underscored by two comments from the participants in the events, when they said: *'Definitely way forward and right people to hear us and for solutions to be found. Feels like it was really important.'* and *'People in this situation find out how to be a part of the group, helps them give power.'*

The final events also invited participants to think of methods by which the network could stay together to continue to build resilient communities beyond the project. In the first of the community networking events, the participants proposed seven ways to maintain the network and the work, which were then explored:

(1) a 'Big Event': a forum that everybody could attend, done via zoom - a 'catch-up session', a hangout, and by invitation
(2) access to organisations and services (how can they access the community organisation directly) and a contact list of all organisations and their work for collaboration between organisations

(3) a WhatsApp Group/ social media group for two-way communication so that members of the communities can received direct information

(4) a mailing list that updates participants regularly on events and campaigns

(5) a regular 'Townhall' type meeting, face-to-face in the three locations, after the lockdown

(6) a Refugee Week celebration to bring everyone together

(7) a platform for potential collaborations among community organisations

The final community networking session involved a ranking activity where participants in breakout rooms could select their top three preferences for methods to keep working together.

The collective agreement, decided by an online poll, was that:

- 86% wanted to set up WhatsApp Group for all members of updates and communication
- 72% wanted a 'Big Event' where everyone will gather again
- 68% agreed to have a list of all organisations and their respective contact details to be distributed and are accessible to the community

The Community Enablers, volunteers and project team are very keen to move these ideas forward.

The learning within the project, alongside other work on rights and voice, was, therefore, not just informative on an individual level but empowering at a group and political level. Indeed, the political act of telling your story is itself empowering: the place of storytelling within the asylum process is necessary to make a case for asylum. At the same time, however, the asylum process is such that it removes people's stories from them, as stories become 'evidence' for cases. In this way, people detach from storytelling as it becomes a necessarily functional process where stories need to be linear and factual rather than in a 'normal' narrative and storied form[46].

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[46] Maynes, M.J., Pierce, J.L. & Laslett, B. (2011). *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History*, Cornell University Press.
Woodiwiss, J., Smith, K. & Lockwood, K. (2017). *Feminist Narrative Research: Opportunities and Challenges*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, London.

Returning to the creative writing training, the Community Enabler leading the session said:

> *At the individual level trying to tell your story sharpens the mind, it enriches imagination, and it is necessary for us as Undocumented and legal process people to learn the skill of storytelling, because if the stories aren't told they doesn't exist.*

This reflection captures the idea that we are our stories, however much they are removed from us to use as evidence. UK culture, traditionally boundaried by writing and textually dominant, makes the detachment of stories - a de-skilling process - extremely dangerous for people seeking asylum, so taking back those stories is itself an act of empowerment and political voice.

4e. Summary of evaluation outcomes

All activities would have benefited from more time over a longer period, to create sustained and consistent creative collaboration. However, notwithstanding this project's very short timeframe, its evaluation became an exploration of the extent to which its people - living in extreme poverty, mostly strangers to one another at its outset, and completely dependent on their abilities to access the internet to be involved - demonstrated their creation of processes and outcomes that released and/ or built their resilience. In addition, disaggregating these outcomes at the individual, group, community, and political level was complicated and aspects of learning at all levels indicate that while outcomes may to some degree be attributable to project activities, they cannot be asserted as causative.

As they led the utilisation of a rights-based approach, the project's Community Enablers were instrumental in facilitating 'safe spaces' and constructing high trust environments where participants believed that their confidentiality was being respected. This was the case in all the rights-based community conversations that became the project's heart.

At the individual level, the development of communication skills allowed for conversations in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people. As participants learned technical competencies that facilitated their communication, it became evident that while the technology provided an invaluable opportunity to come together, it was also limited. People did not necessarily feel as free to self-express or to engage as safely as they may have done had they been active in the same rooms at the same time. However, through their learning about their rights and possible recourses, participants acquired empowerment, sensing that they were being heard and

recognising that, within and through the project, they were developing and adopting new perspectives.

The mutual respect that imbued interactions at the group level was deeply appreciated for enabling experience sharing and identifying commonality. In turn, helping people to understand the importance of effective communication for becoming able to know about each other's problems, fed into the fledgling building and releasing of resistance in solidarity that the project exemplified.

At the community and political outcome level, participants understood how to help others and wanted to amplify voice, to work with others about political issues. As exemplified by participants' ideas around next steps, there seems to have been significant political learning through the project events, with people developing the courage to speak up for their rights, to learn how to make their issues visible, and to take back their stories as an intrinsic act of empowerment.

Despite all the hardships they were enduring, people did not feel alone. They came and came back, to explicitly raise their awareness on issues that are complex and changeable, and they started coming together outside of the project groups through Facebook groups and other external platforms that were stimulated by project events.

In any future projects, some form of payment that helps people to be involved – so that they can buy some food and contribute towards the data costs associated with involvement – means that if the environment persists where some individuals are still living with NRPF, and are deeply disadvantaged because of it, they will be able to overcome the challenge of securing involvement. However, while the vouchers were welcomed by the participants, there was also a sense that they are only a substitute for money – a luxury afforded to 'citizens' only.

Open, timely, and clear communication is also vital because migrants may come to a project such as this mistrusting formal institutions and many organisations, including third sector organisations. The current project was inhibited at the beginning by lines of communication that were delayed and unclear. As time went on, communication improved greatly, particularly between the project team and the Community Enablers. Establishing communications and clear expectations is key learning for future work.

The final substantive section of the project explores systemic barriers to resilience that exist because of the UK's growing hostile environment. While the project illustrated significant

evidence of resilience and learning, it can be understood only in the context of the participants' wider experiences.

5.   Systemic barriers to resilience

The open-ended questions in the survey revealed further concerns during the pandemic, including not being able to work (because of the pandemic or in general), being unable to send money home, and being confined indoors. The interviews also explored other issues that were concerning to participants, while the workshop participants also talked in detail about their worries. It is not within the scope of the current report to include all the learning of further concerns, but it is possible to set out an understanding of the interaction between concerns and the capacity to release/build resilience individually and as a group and community.

The survey, interviews, and workshop discussions also captured the ways in which people coped during COVID-19 and their methods for releasing and building resilience. The survey respondents mentioned maintaining contact with friends and families, cooking, reading, watching films, resting, being patient, keeping busy, and praying. They valued connecting with people and networks over Zoom, and the emotional support in their existing networks and organisations. The participants also reported that they did all that they could to adhere to government safety advice, maintain cleanliness, and ensure social distancing, where possible. The interviewees reported similar strategies and mentioned how support from networks helped them to cope during the lockdowns, particularly when organisations provided mental health and therapy sessions.

Importantly, several of the interviewees also noted how engagement with networks helped them to cope and gave them hope for change. Some of this learning was explored above. In terms of releasing and building resilience and finding hope, this work with others was important. One undocumented woman said in an interview:

> *I attended a meeting last week where people were discussing why it's important to grant everybody that needs to be regularised status, whether they are undocumented or in the system. But it's not a definite. So, it's just about trying to fight and spread awareness. I have high hopes and dreams.*

Similarly, a participant in a workshop said:

> *The good part is being able to join voice of immigrants group and connect with other people. Before, I thought I was all alone in this country as most of my friends have their*

> *documentation as don't want to be talking the same thing all the time. Been nice to join the Zoom calls by Migrant Voice and RAPAR.*

One woman who was in the legal process had even started her own group to focus on the needs of women, and particularly women who had experienced violence. She said in her interview:

> *I'm also happy that I had the courage to start my own group, I'm going to provide, your staple of your food, of your housing, there's more that we need. We need emotional support, we need social support and that is what I want to give them. I want to provide some kind of a service where a woman who is alone here, comes into this country and she finds it easy to navigate the system, she gets a skill that she can actually use when she has the papers. More often, when they get the papers, then they start going to college, then they start thinking about what to do. I'm trying to show, why don't you do it by the time that you are in the process, help them to see and get that information that they can get, put them in groups, so that they can see what others are doing, help them to expand their minds. This is the big plan, but I don't know how much I will succeed. If you get it or not, if it's a skill you have, it will stay with you. If you have information, you will be able to fight your case better, you will be able to tell your solicitor what to look at, what issues to think about and not the other way around.*

These actions and involvements all contribute to releasing and building resilience individually and collectively. However, the data also indicated substantial impediments to wellbeing and to the process of releasing and building resilience. The open-ended questions in the survey revealed further concerns during the pandemic, including not being able to work (because of the pandemic and in general), being unable to send money home, and being confined indoors.

The interviews also explored other issues that were concerning to participants, while the workshop participants talked in detail about their worries. These further concerns impede the capacity to release and build resiliences individually and as a group and community. The remainder of the analysis in the current section focuses on systemic barriers to releasing and building resilience because, by and large, the concerns reported by the participants were related to structural impediments to safety, wellbeing, and resilience - in short, lack of status, money, safety, and security made the process of releasing and building resilience even more precarious for the participants in the project.

'At the mercy of the system'

Section 2 above set out the learning about survey participants' financial concerns. In the open-ended questions, the participants included responses such as, 'always hungry', 'hungry', 'difficulty in getting food', 'no food', and 'losing my job with a child to maintain, nothing to pay rent'. These comments illustrate the levels of poverty facing people without status and without recourse to public funds.

The interview data demonstrated similar findings about poverty, housing insecurity, and vulnerability in housing. Issues around poverty, paying rent, and fear of eviction were explored above, but concerns about housing extended beyond the material too. For example, one undocumented woman said in her interview:

> *We did a home test kit and then they all tested positive together with my partner. The only negative test result is me and together with my baby. The agony in there, my baby, my partner and I, we just stayed in a small room. We don't have any choice to isolate in any other rooms, so we just had a barrier as a pillow. My partner on the other side and a pillow barrier for me and my baby so the burden is on me.*

Another woman who was undocumented mentioned the growing hostility in accommodation because of needing to remain at home because of COVID-19:

> *We had challenges with accommodation… The place I was in, the environment was becoming a bit hostile. People were becoming agitated because of COVID. In this house sharing setting, I'd just see some strange reactions and characters from people due to people not having an understanding of what's going on which may have caused people to think you are taking them personally yet it's more because they are feeling tense. Then, I just wanted to leave.*

These COVID-19-specific challenges to do with finance, insecurity, and accommodation all affected the participants' well-being and their capacity to release and build resilience in general terms and over the course of the project. In addition, nearly all the survey participants and interviewees who were in the legal process were concerned about the delays in their claim for asylum, and if they had been refused asylum, how to begin a fresh claim when organisations were closed. Across the board, participants reported that getting status - indefinite leave to remain - would make their lives better. Alongside the need for status, the participants noted the ability to work, to have enough money, and to provide for their children when they have

status. The participants almost always noted their need for stable and safe accommodation, to 'be settled', to be able to make plans for the future, and to have 'freedom' to move and to travel.

Crucially, some of the participants went into detail about how the delays by the Home Office because of COVID-19 had affected them and the people in their networks. One participant said: *'Home Office is using Covid as a reason/excuse for any delay, even when the fact shows that is not true.'* while another remarked:

> *[The] Impact of Covid for me is lots of delays, it's hard to meet with my lawyer and also with friends and (group) support system. It's also very mentally challenging during covid.'*

Similarly, another participant in the media training said:

> *Due to the lockdown, the interview was postponed and we faced various financial problems. We had difficult days. Our case has been delayed and undecided for 15 months and we can do practically nothing and we cannot focus on any subject.*

Another participant reported his issue with the delays in detail, again in the media workshops. He said:

> *As a torture survivor, which I am suffering from PTSD, depression, and anxiety, also getting Covid make me life more difficult with extra suffering, all of which has been very clearly explained in the repeat letters sent to the home office about my case. I am extremely vulnerable! I have taken every measure to ensure the home office have strong evidence for my case. I have had references from lawyers, GPs and medical professionals proving my case to be true. The government have my case, and they have every piece of evidence they could possibly need from this man. Numerous documents, records and evidence for his case proving everything in his story to be factually correct. I have been waiting for a decision for more than 15 months, yet the government feel it's acceptable to delay my case further, using a timescale usually given to people who have no evidence in order to build a case.*

Further participants reported myriad ways in which the asylum system in general debilitated them and inhibited their capacities to release and build their resilience.

For example, one participant in the media training workshop said:

> *We are at the mercy of the system. They will use your education against you, educated, used against you, uneducated, used against you, married, used against you, unmarried, used against you. We are not a herd of cattle. It shatters any hope you have to live.*

Finally, another woman said, poignantly:

> *It has been really tough for me and my son given that we have no recourse on public funds and we're still seeking help with our application. We are not receiving any financial support etc. We struggled with everything. I have suffered from depression and anxiety. I had a couple of breakdown and panic attacks, thinking and worried not about myself but for my child. I have lived here for 13 years now and all my application has been rejected and now that I have a child from a British National I am hoping that the home office would finally grant us the right to live in the UK.*

And another: *'I am waiting, waiting, waiting for the Home Office. it is not fair'.*

Again, the perspective from one participant encapsulates the debilitating impacts of Home Office procedures and delays when he said:

> *I have become stateless. The UK has become my home (maybe: thanks to the generosity of the UK, this is now my home). I am an engineering graduate and I want to work, support myself with dignity, and contribute to the UK. But as a stateless person I am not allowed to work here, nor can I get access to any help from the state. All I ask is for the Home Office to show empathy/compassion/whatever and give permission for me to remain, with immediate effect. Then I can look after myself and contribute.*

Releasing and building resilience within these circumstances is challenging. In the absence of money, safety, and security, a level of vulnerability always persists.

During the workshops, the participants also reported several other ways in which their resilience was compromised and inhibited through systemic injustices that were centered around a lack of status and public funds.

There are several examples of such statements. In terms of healthcare and wellbeing:

> *If someone says your care is not urgent you must pay first, then you are being denied healthcare, but only a doctor can say that and hospitals do get it wrong when it comes to charging people. When my wife had a baby, I was still an asylum seeker, NHS was charging for delivery and baby treatment to the cost of £11,000 because the home office status was showing I was "Overseas". The solicitor sorted and documents proving I was inside the category but though the NHS confirmed I didn't have to pay I then got a second bill and solicitor had to come in again showing Incorrect status on the home office system.*

These perspectives are perhaps best summarised by a quote from one participant: '*The society is making people sick.'*

In terms of accommodation and rights:

> *When people have the appeal rights should you not be made homeless?*
> *The position of somebody who had lost his home, because he lost his job, because of Covid, the company laid off people because of Covid, it's an independent household but then income problems, lost the home. The housing options, at the council, should process…. take the application.*
> *People seeking asylum, scared to report about how they are being treated in their housing even by [redacted].*
> *Housing: "When people have the appeal rights should you not be made homeless?"*
> *[Redacted] is another example in [redacted], with a five month old baby, told to go to [redacted]. I've got three people (me and two small children), in one bed in one room. We have a double bed now.*
> *Somebody who lost his son because of Covid and he didn't want to carry on living there, it's too sad. [Redacted] said, 'Because of the real shortage of housing', struggling to relocate during Covid, it's very problematic.*
> *People being relocated because of Covid. There are people with Covid and then they are relocated but then everyone else in the house is still there.*

And in terms of work and rights, participants said:

> *Many of us are being exploited but too frightened to report the employers.*
> *[I want to] escape my violent employer.*

> *My work environment is very unwelcoming.*

Finally, the participants were acutely aware of the negative discourses that surround migrants[47] and mentioned, for example:

> *Media (Daily Mail, the Sun) perpetuate demonisation of migrants that they said they were coming in dinghies bringing COVID*
> *Politicians including Nigel Farage*
> *Department of Health sector - Narrative that migrants come here and abuse our healthcare system*
> *Laws that criminalise migrants*

In all, capacities to release and build resilience during the pandemic seemed to be enabled by uncovering individual strengths and coping mechanisms, feeding strength-building through rights-based work and maintaining, where possible, a sense of hope. The participants reported, however, that they continued to experience several systemic issues - health care, finance, accommodation, and status-seeking, that significantly inhibited their capacities to release and build resilience in a sustained way.

One woman who was in the legal process and working with victims of domestic violence who had fled, said:

> *The impact of Covid has been most on asylum seeking migrant community. The need for physical, mental and financial support has been paramount. But the negligence and hostile approach of the HO has amplified the suffering of our community beyond the pandemic. Personally, it has been a tough time mentally as it was difficult to cope with the prison style lockdown. It triggered my PTSD and I suffered from depression and anxiety.*

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[47] Cohen, S. 2006, *Deportation is Freedom. The Orwellian World of Immigration Controls,* Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.
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Tyler, I. 2013, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain,* Zed Books, London.
Connor, P. and Krogstad, J. M. (2018). Many worldwide oppose more migration – both into and out of their countries, Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/many-worldwide-oppose-more-migration-both-into-and-out-of-their-countries/.
Bhatia, M. (2020) "Crimmigration, imprisonment and racist violence: Narratives of people seeking asylum in Great Britain", *Journal of Sociology (Melbourne, Vic.)*, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 36-52.

Give status to everyone in the country now'

Finally, the current section will set out a summary of clear ideas that the participants had for change throughout the project. The ideas very much centered on the need for status for everyone - indefinite leave to remain - as the only remedy for systemic injustices, and the only way to ensure safety and security for everyone. A comment from a Community Enabler sums up this need: '*The solution is for the Home Office to give status to everyone in the country now.*'

The participants were also aware, however, of the challenges associated with convincing the state to provide refuge to migrants (see Section 2. Socio-political context, for a brief summary of how the UK's hostile environment[48] continues to grow) and had additional ideas also about what would make their lives better and safer. Listed, these included:

1. Restrictions to be open to migrants to work
2. Allow people to work outside the occupation list
3. Better, safer housing
4. Support for migrant communities
5. Education on our rights
6. Accessing support, particularly for women who are victims of violence
7. The Home Office to comply with the rules, honour and implement Wendy Williams review, instead of just lip servicing and make no change to the hostile environment, Home Office should be accountable and be transparent

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[48] Galindo, G. (2018). *UN: Migrants face "hostile environment" in post-Brexit Britain*. [online] Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/tendayi-achiume-un-brexit-racism-uk-migrants-face-hostile-environment-in-post-brexit-britain-un/
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Yeo, C. (2018). *Briefing: what is the hostile environment, where does it come from, who does it affect?* [online] Available at: https://www.freemovement.org.uk/briefing-what-is-the-hostile-environment-where-does-it-come-from-who-does-it-affect/

6.   Conclusions

The UK's hostile environment did not abate during the Building Resilience project. If anything, it continued to grow in scope and severity so that a lack of status, and the basic access to money, safety and security that accompanies it, was pitted against participants' capacities to release and build resilience.

The abilities of people to keep themselves safe from acquiring and/ or transmitting COVID-19 was severely impacted by financial limitations and overcrowded accommodation, as well as the need to travel during the restrictions, on public transport in the main. Pre-existing health conditions and a lack of primary health care services further put the participants at risk of serious illness from COVID-19, including the perceived and actual barriers to accessing vaccines.

Many of the participants were concerned about their physical health and the toll that the pandemic and the lockdowns were taking on their mental health. Participants were isolated, fearful of contracting or transmitting the virus, and affected by financial worries, while existing mental health conditions were exacerbated.

Basic needs such as paying bills and buying food were impacted by people's changes in finances, and with no access to the usual financial channels available to British citizens, groups that were already marginalised were further put at risk, underscoring the precarious nature of living as someone with insecure status. Many participants were not able to afford food and other basics, and a large number did not have consistent access to the project's platforms.

There was a notable increase in despondency in the period between the survey and the interviews; interviewees were clearly less hopeful about the future than the survey respondents. There were examples of mothers with new babies being paid nothing because of an absence of recourse to public funds and to accessible and clear information about how to secure such funds. As a recently published European report on statelessness and health observed[49], *'States should consider regularising all stateless people during public health emergencies in order to guarantee the right to health.'* (p. 23)

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[49] European Network on Statelessness. (2021). *Situation assessment of statelessness, health, and COVID-19 in Europe*. [online] Available at: https://www.statelessness.eu/updates/publications/situation-assessment-statelessness-health-and-covid-19-europe

Social support was crucial for the participants in the project, although a significant number reported that they were not connected with any support networks before the project. As the project progressed, evidence emerged about the individual, group, community and political level process and impact outcomes experienced by participants in the project. Through the events that took place, designed to work collaboratively with participants to release and to build resilience, and to begin to establish networks of resilience, participants valued awareness-raising, working with others, and personal and political learning. Despite all the difficulties they endured, groups and communities did find ways to work together to begin to release and build resiliences, demonstrating that '*participation is the child, not of power but of communal need*'[50] (p. 238).

Networks of resilience are important and meaningful. And for as long as the UK's hostile environment remains in place, individuals from the most marginalised and isolated communities who make up networks of resilience will be compelled to continue to find ways to release and build resiliences through which they search out pathways to status and better access to basic rights.

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[50] Revans, R.W. (1980). *Worker participation in action learning. Action Learning.* London: Blond and Briggs