



Executive Summary

Currently, there are no free transport passes in England and Wales for people seeking asylum. This means that most people seeking asylum are stuck at their hotel or other NASS accommodation, completely isolated from the world around them, for years at a time as they await an outcome to their case.

Help us connect people seeking asylum to their support networks and communities through free public transport!

Free Public Transport for People Seeking Asylum

Freedom to Connection Pass: A campaign for the mobility of people seeking asylum in the UK

October 2024

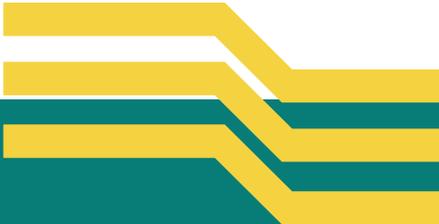


Context

People seeking asylum that are eligible for Home Office support can receive as little as £8.86 per week for their allowance, a reality for many of our service users. In fact, only 2% of our survey respondents indicated that they always had enough funds for public transport.

This low weekly allowance provided to people seeking asylum makes it impossible for them to afford travel to even the most essential of services, such as their GP or lawyer, without having to sacrifice other essential needs such as buying food.

Key Concerns



LACK OF ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The importance of being able to reach friends and support networks cannot be understated, however the issue of public transport can also become a barrier to accessing essential services such as healthcare, solicitors, counsellors, education and much more.

Sadly, one of our own service users, named James, has his own experiences with this hugely impactful problem. James is currently dealing with several health issues, including bodily trauma inflicted upon him by human traffickers before arriving in the UK and tuberculosis. Despite the severity of his healthcare needs, he has been unable to attend several of his treatment appointments as he could not afford the transport to the hospital. We strongly feel that this is a miscarriage of justice.

ISOLATION

When somebody seeks asylum in the UK they can apply for Home Office housing, which is normally in a hotel or shared houses provided by NASS. One of the many difficulties with this is that they have no choice as to where they are relocated to and can be moved again at any time. This makes it near impossible for people to form meaningful connections, access support networks and settle in their community – especially when they are placed in rural areas with little access to support services. This is more pronounced for LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum.

By not being able to access public transport regularly, people are often left isolated in rural areas which then leads to decline in their mental health and wellbeing.

LOSS OF DIGNITY

Having the ability to move freely is a legitimate human right as outlined in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(1948\)](#). By withholding people seeking asylum's access to public transport, through either low personal allowances or the lack of a right to work and earn a suitable wage, we strongly feel that this right is being ignored and curtailed in the UK.

To be able to reach friends, access support services and visit new places gives us a sense of freedom and autonomy in our own lives. By trapping people in a place that has been designated to you, without any resources to leave or move around; the UK asylum system is stripping people seeking asylum of their human dignity and essentially leaving them detached from all the resources that any human being needs to live a fulfilled life.



James' Story



I'VE HAD TO MISS MY HOSPITAL TREATMENTS BECAUSE I COULDN'T AFFORD THE BUS

James fled his home country of Liberia after his father was beaten to death for being a gay man, as he realised the dangers that he faced as a gay man himself. After fleeing through several countries in North Africa, he was then captured and enslaved by human traffickers in Libya for 1.5 years, during which time his brother was killed. He eventually was able to make it to the UK to make a claim for asylum, but sadly his battle was not yet over.

James has been in the asylum system for 2 years and receives £8.50 per week from the Home Office, which he says is hardly enough for food. James needs to attend his nearest hospital, which is 45 minutes drive away, on a regular basis to get treatment for the injuries he sustained while held captive by human traffickers, as well as tuberculosis. Shockingly, James told us that he has had to miss multiple hospital treatments because he could not afford the bus fare. In addition to this, it takes James 3 hours to reach his legal-aid solicitor by bus, as the faster train option is not affordable – meaning that James spends up to 6 hours just to travel to access legal support and back.

James told us: *“free public transport would make a big change, a big difference, because then life would be easy and I can go and see friends or come to organisations like African Rainbow Family. Then it would reduce stress about money. All people seeking asylum would be happier for that change.”*



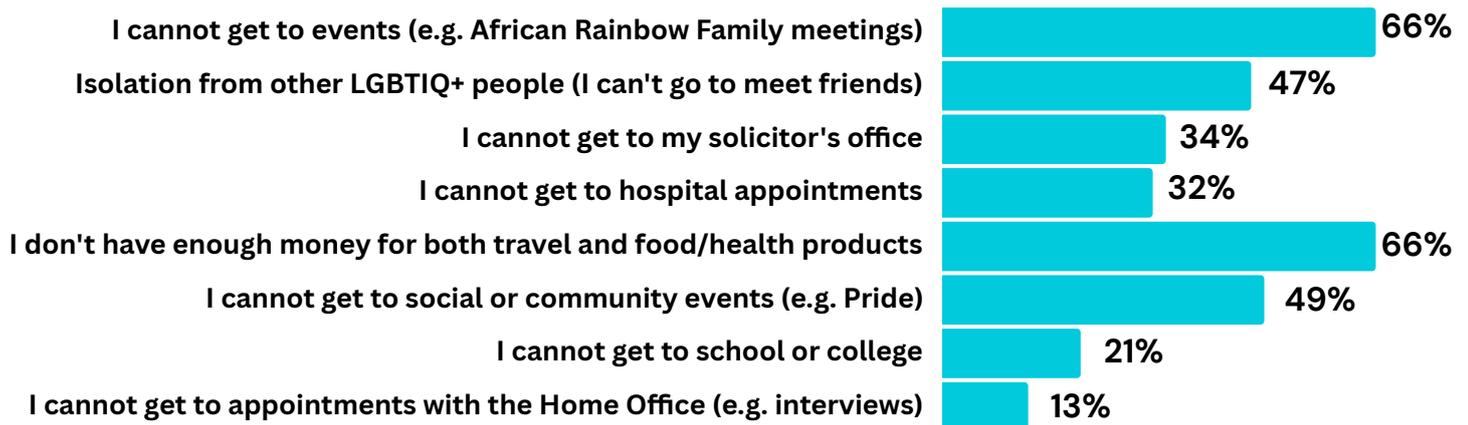
Our Research

As part of this campaign, we carried out an internal survey with our service users to gauge their experiences with public transport as people seeking asylum. There was a total of 53 responses, belonging to our various centres – 42% in London, 34% in Manchester, 17% in Leeds and 8% in Birmingham centre.

98%

of the service users that we interviewed had been forced to miss out on at least one of monthly meetings due to the cost of public transport

Main issues that not being able to afford public transport causes for our service users (%)

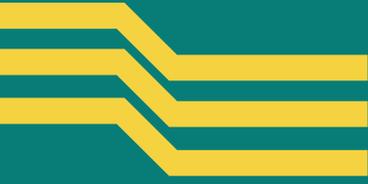


The successes of similar schemes



Between March 2022 and April 2024, Wales offered a [Welcome Ticket scheme](#) that enabled any person seeking asylum in Wales to access bus and rail services for free. This was deemed to be 'beneficial and well-received' by ministers and an estimated 1 million journeys were made through the scheme! While the scheme was ended earlier this year, Welsh ministers shared that this decision was made in order to review the scheme and make improvements before a reintroduction at a later date.

Given that the Welcome Ticket Scheme was a resounding success, providing a transport lifeline to people seeking asylum all around Wales, we are confident that further introductions of such schemes around the UK will be extremely effective in reducing isolation, increasing access to essential services and giving people seeking asylum back their sense of freedom and mobility.



**AFRICAN
RAINBOW
FAMILY**
LGBTIQ EQUALITY

Recommendations

We firmly recommend that a free public transport pass be introduced for people seeking asylum in the UK

We are aware of several free public transport schemes in the UK, notably for people with disabilities or older people. We are campaigning for people seeking asylum to be included within the scope of these existing free transport schemes. We will first campaign for free public transport on a local level within our headquarter city of Manchester, but aspire to work with key stakeholders to enact a free public transport pass for people seeking asylum on a national scale.

Author Details

African Rainbow Family (ARF) is the Leading National Expert by Experience Charity Campaigning and Advocating for Racial Justice & Human Rights of LGBTIQ+ Refugees and People Seeking Asylum of African Heritage & the Global Majority

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