



Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex & London

IMPACT
REPORT

2024

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INTRODUCTION

In 2024, RAMFEL continued to grow and expand our services in a difficult environment. We delivered much-needed legal advice to more people than ever before and continued to grow the expertise of our staff team. Public discourse though was increasingly polarised, especially during the racist riots in the summer. We're proud to have been able to continue representing and advocating for migrants in these difficult times.

We supported the highest number of clients in a year so far (2535 + their 2431 dependents/partners), and continued contracts with 10 London boroughs to provide advice for vulnerable people, taking referrals from the Council and their outreach partners as well as local specialist organisations. Through our advocacy and campaigning we worked to change immigration policy where it harms our clients and prevents them from getting on with their lives; pursuing strategic litigation, driving policy recommendations and engaging with media and MPs to bring about change and raise awareness about systemic injustices.

There is still huge pressure on the immigration advice sector, particularly with the ongoing lack of Legal Aid availability. Less than half of asylum seekers are being provided with Legal Aid advice, this is a shocking degradation to access to justice. With frequent poor decision-making on asylum claims the need for Legal Aid representation is greater than ever. However, fewer organisations have contracts, and those that do are limited to a few key areas of law. RAMFEL were awarded a Legal Aid contract in 2023, and have been trying to navigate the minefield of being a contract holder with the support of local authorities. Organising and delivering this work is resource-intensive and high-risk, as costs are only reimbursed after a case is closed. Nonetheless we are glad to be contributing to a reduction of this massive gap in service provision, supporting clients who have been separated from family members or received unlawful decisions. We hope that through being a legal aid provider we can gain an understanding that allows us to contribute to reforming it in the long term.

The Government broadened the digitalised visa system from only EU visa holders to other routes. RAMFEL was one of the organisations contracted to help transition clients from biometric residence permit cards (BRPs) to E-visas. We advised on or applied for E-visas for 306 clients in the last quarter of the year.

Divisive rhetoric and increasing pressure from the far-right about the 'small boats' from Northern France, along with the tragic events in Southport and subsequent misinformation, led to racist riots in several areas of the UK. While RAMFEL was not directly targeted, we took additional security measures where possible,, recognising that each staff member had a different response and level of personal concern. At one point we closed our foodbank due to security concerns. It is unacceptable that we should fear for ourselves and our clients' safety whilst offering support. The Government and all political parties must consider their part in creating a society in which people are safe to go about their daily lives.

Though we were relieved that the Rwanda scheme was scrapped when Labour took over in July, unfortunately we have yet to see real efforts to dismantle the hostile environment.

Our Experts by Experience group of former and existing clients, rebranded themselves as Freedom at 10 (F10) and started to deliver their own campaigning work, including preparation of an open letter to all party leaders ahead of the election on the need to scrap the 10 year route to settlement, with more participative research and campaigns planned for the year ahead.

The numbers of rough sleepers in need of immigration advice in London have not fallen, despite the thousands of clients already granted leave and the increased capacity within our team and across the sector. The Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government's funding to address this gap has been extended until 2026. In 2024, our team expanded to over 7 full-time equivalent caseworkers.

While we have continued frequently posting on social media, we also had an average of 10,000 unique visitors to our website on a quarterly basis, and continue to engage with major media outlets including The Guardian, The Telegraph, The Evening Standard, The Metro and The Independent. We plan to further grow our online presence in 2025-2026.

We want to thank all funders and partners for their continued support, our staff for their dedication and hard work year-round, but most importantly our clients for their perseverance in the face of such a hostile environment and such complex immigration systems.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Tullett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

James Tullett, CEO

OUR GOALS

- 01 SUPPORT** - Ensure holistic support for people in crisis to reduce extreme poverty, homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 02 REPRESENT** - Improve access to justice for people unable to afford advice or secure legal aid.
- 03 CHALLENGE** - Amplify the voices of Refugees and Migrants to challenge and change the systems that stand in their way.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS



2024

5000 Clients and dependents supported

906 Rough Sleepers supported

727 Applications submitted

326 Grants of Leave to Remain secured

221 Grants of Indefinite Leave to Remain secured

79 Mainstream support applications submitted

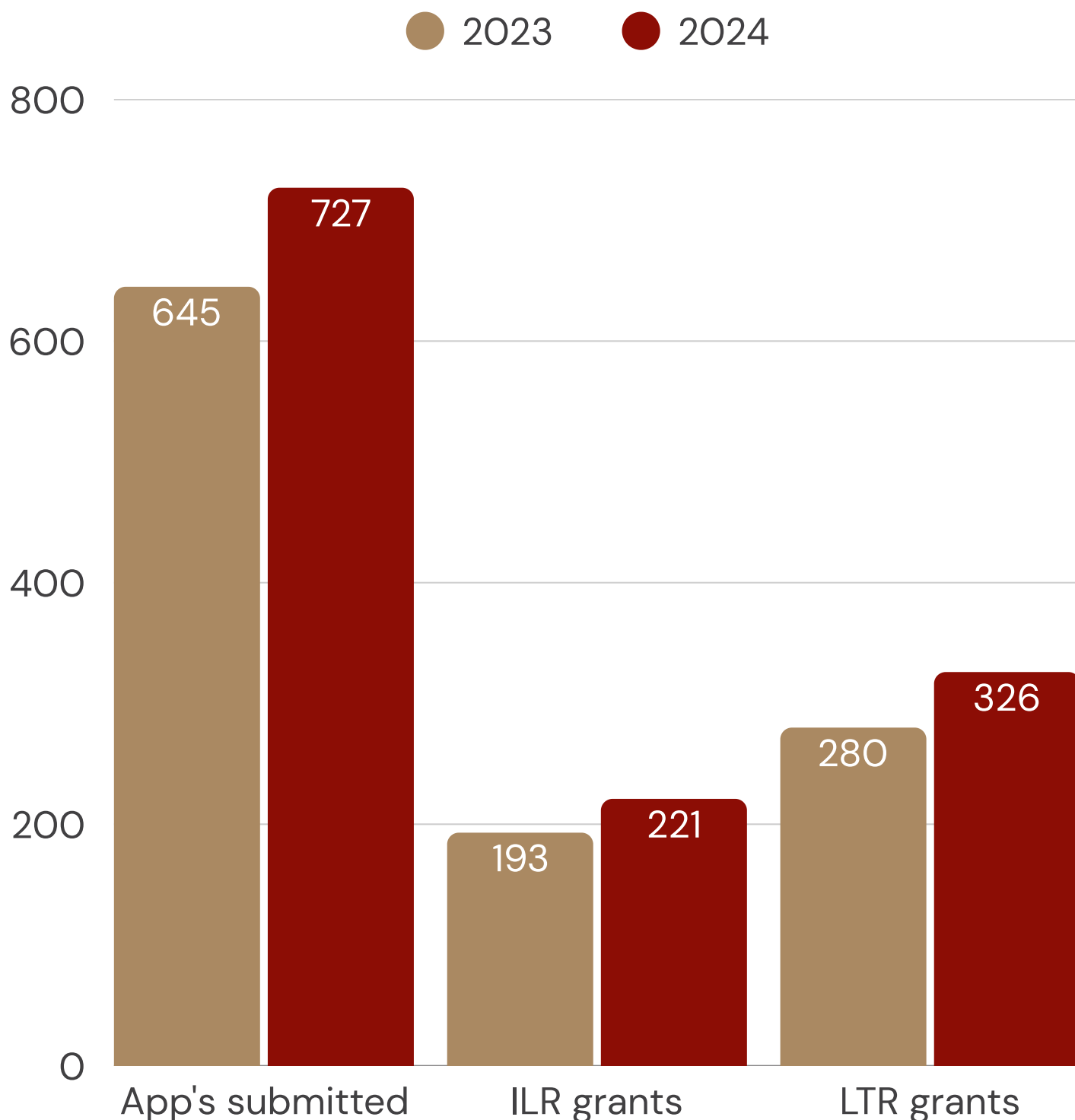
48 Appeals lodged



The below chart shows the increase in the number of applications and grants from 2023–2024.

LTR = Leave to Remain, generally granted for 30 months.

ILR = Indefinite Leave to Remain, which equates to permanent settlement in the UK.



FEEDBACK FROM CLIENTS

Very kind, supportive and nurturing. I always felt safe talking to her and she gave me hope that all was going to be fine. Thank you so much [Caseworker]. Thank you for allowing me cry into your ears. I am going to miss you. May God bless you so much.

My caseworker was very supportive and gave me reassurance that everything is going to be alright and supported me all the way. I am very pleased.

My caseworker was exceptionally helpful and patient in ensuring my family Visa renewal is successful. His effort towards restoring my husbands job after his employer temporarily terminated his employment due to visa renewal is phenomenal. Thank you!

All I can say is thank you for your help and support, I'm really grateful .

Your attention to detail and ability to navigate complex legal matters with such clarity and confidence gave me peace of mind during what could have been an overwhelming process. It is evident that you genuinely care about your clients and their well-being, and for that, I am deeply appreciative.

RAMFEL has been a lifeline for my family and myself. We went through various hardships when I was made homeless but RAMFEL's support in making sure I had somewhere to go with meals provided. I also approached RAMFEL for my application for LTR and I have never been disappointed. The dedication and honesty in dealing with my immigration case has been amazing.

ADVOCACY & CAMPAIGNING

BIG WINS



1

Section 3C Leave

For years, people renewing their visas have waited months and years for the government to process their applications. Whilst waiting, these people have no proof of their immigration status and have routinely been trapped in the “hostile environment”, in the same way members of the Windrush generation were. We challenged this in the courts, and in June 2024 it was held that the government had a legal obligation to provide people digital proof of their status. This change will benefit hundreds of thousands of people.

2

Bereaved partner concession

The government was charging grieving widows £3,000 to secure immigration status. If they couldn't pay this, they faced removal from the UK. With the Public Interest Law Centre, we challenged this, arguing it discriminated against women and was irrational. Eventually, the government conceded and agreed in October 2024 to introduce a fee waiver for this concession. Grieving widows will no longer be priced out of immigration status to which they're entitled.

3

Family Reunion report published

Our ground-breaking report, Safe Routes to Nowhere, was released on 15 June 2024. The culmination of over 2 years of work, this details the systemic failings in the UK family reunion system and makes 5 recommendations for change.

SECTION 3C LEAVE – RAMFEL won our judicial review challenging the government’s failure to provide people on 3C leave proof of their immigration status. We won the claim on 3 of the 4 grounds advanced, with the judge finding that the government was behaving irrationally by not providing documentation and was also in breach of his legal duties to safeguard and promote the welfare and best interests of children in the UK. This victory received nothing but credit across the immigration sector, and was reported in [The Telegraph](#), [Guardian](#) and [The Metro](#). It also went semi-viral on social media, with our tweet revealing the news viewed over 100,000 times being re-tweeted well over 300 times.

Following this victory, we issued guidance on how practitioners should now seek to secure their clients proof of status. Regrettably, the Government has appealed this judgement, and next year the Court of Appeal will consider the case. In the meantime, we are continuing to request digital proof of status for clients, and gathering data of the problems people are continuing to encounter whilst unable to prove their status.

BEREAVED PARTNER CONCESSION – Another major success was the judicial review challenging the lack of fee waiver for the “bereaved partner concession”. Until this challenge, people who had been in the UK on the basis of their relationship with their British or settled partner were being forced to pay thousands of pounds to secure their status immediately after the death of their partner.



One of our clients wrote a harrowing account of the sacrifices she made to save this money, which was published in Open Democracy and our Head of Campaigning, Nick Beales, also penned an op-ed in The Metro about this. The Mirror meanwhile covered the judicial review and Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick's heartless approach towards our clients who were being priced out of ILR. Wes Streeting and Jon Cruddas, 2 Labour MPs, also wrote to Jenrick about this issue and 63 other MPs signed our early day motion supporting the introduction of a fee waiver.

On 10 September, the government finally announced that a fee waiver for the bereaved partner concession will be introduced, coming into effect on 9 October. The outcome was covered in the Evening Standard and Daily Mirror. This is a big win and a positive step towards ending the hostile environment.

In 2025-2026 we will continue to campaign for the introduction of a fee waiver for all ILR applications.

FAMILY REUNION REPORT – Safe Routes to Nowhere was released on 15 June. The culmination of over 2 years of work, this details the systemic failings in the UK family reunion system and makes 5 recommendations for change. Publication was covered in: The Guardian; Big Issue; and Info Migrants. We also hosted a launch event in July, with Garden Court North barrister Lucy Mair and Afghan human rights advocate Zahra Joya speaking on a panel also including our own Melanie Vasselin.

DELAYED DECISION-MAKING – In 2024, clients have faced unexplained delays in seeing their visa and citizenship applications processed, with the government increasingly justifying these delays in individual cases by referring to unexplained "IT issues". Hot on the heels of the Horizon Post Office scandal, we broke this story of more government IT problems in I News, with it being their front page story on 11 March.

Another application subject to severe processing delays was waiver requests. We again broke this story in The Guardian, and following this news coverage we are pleased to confirm that the delays have significantly reduced.

We made submissions responding to the Independent Commissioner on Borders and Immigration's Call for Evidence on fee waivers, highlighting delays and proposing simple changes, such as automatically passporting some applicants, that would greatly improve processing efficiency.

NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS – We have continued to explore avenues for challenging the cruel NRPF policy. One RAMFEL case was reported in The Independent. This concerned the government twice refusing applications from a seriously disabled man to remove the NRPF condition from his grant of leave to remain.

We have shared briefings on our NRPF work with GLA contacts, aiming to convince Councils to oppose the continued operation of this counter-productive policy that pushes families and vulnerable individuals into destitution.

LEGAL AID – We submitted evidence to the Legal Aid Authority on the problems with how Legal Aid is currently run and managed. After being awarded a Legal Aid contract in Autumn 2023, we have seen first-hand how difficult managing a contract is. This hinders access to justice for vulnerable people who would otherwise be unable to pay for legal representation.

Alongside Asylum Aid and other Legal Aid contracted organisations, we made submissions to the Ministry of Justice on the problems with Legal Aid.

FREEDOM AT 10 – Our 'Experts by Experience' group made up of former and existing clients, now re-named Freedom at 10. With visa fees increasing in 2023 and 2024, we have done a lot of work highlighting the impact this will have on RAMFEL clients. Freedom at 10 published their first public statement on our website calling on the government to reverse course, and alongside other organisations such as Praxis, JCWI and Migrant Voice, we worked with MP Stephen Timms to table an Early Day Motion opposing the pending increases.

Freedom at 10 shared an open letter ahead of the election calling on all party leaders to commit to scrapping the 10-year route to settlement.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS



One of the family's we have reunited this year, with Melanie, their caseworker

In 2023, we were awarded a Legal Aid contract, allowing us to take on more Family Reunion cases, as well as asylum claims and appeals. Family separation is hugely traumatic for everyone involved. We have helped 15 families reunite, bringing a total of 25 family members to the UK, and giving them the support to settle and move on with their lives. We also secured Humanitarian Protection for 3 clients and Refugee status for 2 clients.

We also continued to deliver legal advice and support for Refugees and asylum-seekers (destitution). The demand for the service has been at an all time high. Accommodation problems are the most consistent, but we also supported clients who had had their claims wrongfully withdrawn, and/or were being denied asylum support.

In 2024 we:



Submitted 30 asylum support applications and 3 appeals. We also worked on asylum support issues in 342 instances (e.g. challenging suitability of accommodation and support provision)



Submitted 79 benefits applications



Submitted 25 homelessness applications, and provided advice and support with housing and homelessness – 415 cases



Supported people to access medical services, including mental health support – 265 cases



Submitted one-off cash grant applications or requests for specific items and issues sim cards – 298 cases



Supported with accessing education and employment (or employment support) – 32 cases

Successes

We have built up our expertise over the years which has allowed us to assist clients with complex immigration and casework issues. The quality of our services is exemplified through the number of 'word of mouth' referrals that we receive, where clients have advised friends and relatives that they should contact us for help and advice.

We have been able to assist clients with a broad range of immigration applications, from refugee family reunion to applying for settlement for refugees. This advice and support is crucial in allowing clients to maintain their right to work, preventing many in the community from falling into destitution, including families and children.

We have also supported newly granted refugees with their next steps. For many clients, the 'move-on' period from asylum accommodation following a grant of refugee status, is a traumatic and exhausting process, and for those with limited English and/or no experience navigating UK bureaucratic processes it is highly confusing. Having been stuck in limbo for years with no right to work, people suddenly have 28 days to find work, save a deposit and secure private accommodation. Many are left homeless and/or destitute whilst trying to find income and housing. We assisted clients to access housing and employment, to take steps to live more financially secure and independent lives in the UK.

Challenges

The demand for the service often significantly outstrips the supply, meaning that we are unable to take on every referral. It is difficult to prioritise cases when there is such need in refugee and asylum communities across London.

Whilst overall positive news, 2024 saw the UK grant a significant number of people (68,564) refugee status. This has placed added pressure on RAMFEL and across the sector as clients seek to access mainstream support when their asylum support ends.

As mentioned, newly recognised refugees have just 28 days to secure work, access mainstream support and alternative housing after being granted refugee status. This means they have one month to navigate the complex support and housing options independently, unless they can obtain support from services such as ours. We have seen numerous new refugees who are street homeless, approach our service for help and advice because they have been unable to navigate securing housing and income after being granted refugee status.

Safeguarding issues present an ongoing and significant demand on our services. Many of our clients frequently present with mental health concerns. We follow a rigorous safeguarding policy, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the families and individuals that we work with. This includes implementing holistic support, such as referrals to therapy services, engaging with NHS mental health services and, in some cases, making urgent GP referrals or contacting emergency services. Unfortunately for many of our clients, their RAMFEL caseworker is their only reliable source of support and they will often reach out in times of mental health crisis.

One of the other main challenges in our immigration work is long Home Office delays in processing applications. The significant amount of evidence needed for complex immigration applications, such as Family Reunion applications, means that these applications take several months to prepare. We are then seeing frequent delays, sometimes of over a year to make decisions. This intensifies our workload as further actions must be taken to expedite these applications. In the meantime, we must support clients who may be experiencing mental health decline, often due to fears for family members abroad. Similarly, we have seen many poor Home Office decisions which have forced us to go to appeal, another lengthy and arduous process requiring expert legal representation. Even if ultimately the appeal succeeds and the family is reunited, a better Home Office decision-making process would avoid long delays in reunification and would save resources for all involved.



IMMIGRATION

Our immigration project is our most varied, taking on clients with issues ranging from obtaining and retaining immigration status, citizenship for children and their parents, freeing clients who feel forced to stay in abusive relationships due to precarious immigration status, and informing clients of their rights with regards to employment and housing.

Many of our clients have limited knowledge of their rights or the UK's legal system when they are referred to us. We bridge this gap by:

- Ensuring clients know their rights and options (including providing interpreting so non-English speakers can also understand their cases and make informed decisions).
- Providing free legal assistance to those who otherwise could not afford it.
- Increasing access to justice for vulnerable and marginalized populations.

Successes

Immigration status is often tied to access to housing, employment, and social services. Our project has successfully:

- Prevented clients from becoming homeless by securing immigration status or allowed them to get access to housing when they didn't have this right before.
- Helped clients access mainstream support, emergency grants and/or employment, reducing poverty and destitution.
- Ensured that children and families have access to education, healthcare and a better sense of belonging by helping them regularize and retain their immigration status.

Many of our clients experience trauma, anxiety, and fear due to their uncertain immigration status. The success of our project includes:

- Helping clients feel safer and more secure by resolving legal uncertainties.
- Providing trauma-informed care and referrals to mental health services.
- Reducing stress by explaining complex legal processes and providing consistent, compassionate support.

Challenges

Immigration laws are complex and change rapidly. Our job is to provide up to date and accurate advice to clients and this is a challenge with the ever-changing laws and ensure we represent their best interests.

Due to people on the 10-year route to settlement needing to renew visas every 30 months, the majority of our immigration clients need repeat representation to navigate the complex leave to remain application process. Funding is sadly insufficient to meet the demand for our services and this has been identified by referring organisations.

Many people may not have access to necessary identity documents, such as passports, birth certificates, or proof of residency. This is particularly common for individuals fleeing abuse or who have lived a transient lifestyle. Without proper documentation, it can be incredibly challenging to build a solid legal case. This places additional strain on immigration advisors who must work around these limitations.

Overcoming these challenges requires a combination of resourcefulness, community collaboration, ongoing advocacy, and, in some cases, changes to the broader legal and political environment. We have been fortunate to benefit from partnerships with legal professionals, mental health experts, and community organizations to address these obstacles more holistically. Visa processing delays and backlogs is also a challenge as government decision-making routinely takes months of even years. This leads to prolonged uncertainty for clients, including an inability to retain or secure employment due to employers mistakenly assuming peoples' immigration status has expired.

ROUGH SLEEPING

The Rough Sleeping project is our largest current project. We take referrals from Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, Islington, Westminster, Redbridge and Waltham Forest councils, as well as homelessness outreach partners in those boroughs including St Mungo's, Change Grow Live and All People All Places. We run drop-in advice sessions in each borough, and accept referrals on a daily basis. Even with such a large team, we generally have a waiting list in the boroughs with higher numbers of rough sleepers; Camden, Haringey and Westminster. We work closely with outreach teams to prioritise those who are most vulnerable.

As 2024 was our sixth year working with rough sleepers, the team have built up significant experience, and refined the service to best meet the needs of our clients. We are as flexible as we can be with appointments, and take a much broader merit assessment than in other projects, recognising and advocating that prolonged periods of housing insecurity make it almost impossible to retain documentation.

Successes

Beyond the success of individual cases, we made progress on advocating for rough sleepers at government level and pushing our key policy asks. In July the Home Office Customer Safeguarding Strategy was updated to recognise that periods of housing insecurity render a person vulnerable; staff are encouraged to acknowledge homelessness as a vulnerability and take a person-centred approach with individuals experiencing homelessness. We now quote this section of the guidance in our representations for rough sleepers to encourage discretion and flexibility from decision-makers.

In December 2024 the Home Office's Homelessness Escalation Service (HES) reconsideration scheme began, which allows applicants who are rough sleeping but have had an application for leave to remain refused, to request a 'reconsideration' in the hopes of avoiding an unnecessary, lengthy and resource-draining appeal.

If successful, this significantly reduces the time a client has to wait to regularise their immigration status, continuing to sleep rough or being blocked from work and mainstream support. It also saves RAMFEL and other representatives, as well as the Home Office, significant time and resource. We have found the reconsideration route to be a positive development so far.

Challenges

We saw an increase in the numbers of refusals for long residence applications. While we still have an over 90% success rate, we feel that Home Office decision-makers have taken a step back in acknowledging homelessness as a vulnerability and exercising discretion accordingly.

We are seeing applications refused without consideration of the individual circumstances. Without explicit instruction on how homelessness affects applicants in policy / casework guidance, we will continue to see this happen. Where applications are refused, we are taking them to appeal, but this process often takes 12-18 months during which time our clients are likely to be rough sleeping and exposed to all the dangers this presents.

Homeless outreach and support organisations are also significantly overcapacity in the busier boroughs and struggle to apply for mainstream support and help clients get into work once they have been granted permission to do so.

While we can prove the need for immigration advice and the immediate benefit for a rough sleeping client regularising their immigration status, successive governments continue to misunderstand the links between lacking immigration status and sleeping rough.



PATH OUT OF HOMELESSNESS



CLIENTS WORK WITH
OUTREACH TEAMS, WHO
IDENTIFY NEED FOR
ADVICE



OUTREACH TEAM REFERS
TO RAMFEL



RAMFEL ASSESSES
CLIENT'S CASE, AND
USUALLY REPRESENTS



WHEN STATUS IS
SECURED, WE REFER
BACK TO OUTREACH



CLIENT CAN THEN
ACCESS HOUSING AND
MAINSTREAM SUPPORT



WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT,
THE CLIENT ESCAPES
HOMELESSNESS AND CAN
GET ON WITH THEIR LIFE

FOOD BANK



On Thursdays we run a food bank and drop-in advice service in Ilford, funded by the Lottery, Redbridge council, local faith communities and donations. The food bank is open to asylum-seekers, people without immigration status, and those who have the NRPF condition attached to their leave. We regularly see around 60 families per week; some are regular attendees, and some coming for the first time or to access advice. Our advice service is always in very high demand, partly because the team offers holistic support (see above). We also offer ESOL classes and other wellbeing activities.

The demand for the food bank and our voucher programme is concerning. Our voucher programme is limited to 30 clients/families at any one time and we have to limit the length of time clients can stay on it to ensure fair distribution. People with NRPF, complex asylum cases or from countries that were not on the 'fast track' asylum decision-making route can often be stuck in limbo and unable to support their families for years at a time. We recognise that pressure on our services is a reflection of the economic struggles of the people we work with, exacerbated by a punitive immigration system.



LOW-FEE ADVICE PROJECT

We run a low-fee paying project to support clients that already have status but need to renew their leave to remain, or want to apply to naturalise / for child citizenship. These clients come to RAMFEL when they are unable to afford representation from a private firm.

In an ideal world we would offer to renew applications for free, but with limited capacity we need to prioritise those who are most vulnerable – i.e. those without immigration status, or who have an NRPF condition imposed on their permission to be in the UK. The low fee-paying projects allows us offer a cheap option to our returning clients, often those who now have a more reliable source of income. Many clients are working in the NHS and Care sectors, receive some form of mainstream support to be able to make ends meet, and need a fee waiver to be apply to renew their status as they cannot afford extortionate visa application fees; or are forced to borrow funds in order to apply for settlement as there is still no fee waiver option for ILR.

CONCLUSION

While 2024 was a brilliant year for RAMFEL, we recognise that our services are in such high demand because of a gap in provision. There is a shortage of free or low-cost legal advice available for migrants in London and beyond. The ongoing set of policies known as the 'hostile environment' blocks people from employment, education, housing and financial support, either deliberately or indirectly. This leads to prolonged dependence on Council and charity services. Our long waiting lists are testament to the unmet needs of non-UK nationals, including many households with children.

In 2025, we aim to contribute to the dismantling of the hostile environment through advocacy and legal challenges; in the meantime, we strive to support as many people as we can, by working as efficiently as possible without reducing the quality of our work. We'll also continue to work with peer organisations to expand the capacity of the sector however we can.



THANK YOU

DONORS

Access to Justice / Barnet Council / Barking & Dagenham Council / Big Give / British Red Cross / Camden Council / Charles S French / City Bridge Trust / Disrupt / Dentons UK and Middle East / Essex Community Foundation / Evan Cornish / London Catalyst Samaritan Grant / London Churches Refugee Fund / Mbili Foundation / Enfield Council / Hackney Giving / Haringey Council / Home Office E-visa Fund / Hobson Charity / Islington Council / National Lottery / Newham Small Grants / North London Housing Partnership / Redbridge Council / Souter Trust / Single Homeless Project / Trust for London / Waltham Forest Council / Waltham Forest Migrant Action / Westminster Council

PARTNERS

All People All Places / Asylum Aid / British Red Cross / Camden Women's Respite Service / Change Grow Live / Haringey Migrant Support Centre / Crisis / Homeless Action in Barnet / Hackney Migrant Centre / KWEMO / Latin American Women's Aid / Mulberry Junction / North London Multi-Disciplinary Rough Sleeping Hub / Saint John of God Hospitaller Services / Single Homeless Project (various services) / Solace Women's Aid / St Mungo's (various services, including NSNO & Westminster SOS) / ThamesReach (various services, including EPTS) / Welcome Centre Redbridge

Website: www.ramfel.org.uk

Instagram: [@RAMFEL_UK](https://www.instagram.com/RAMFEL_UK)

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LinkedIn: [Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex & London \(RAMFEL\)](#)

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