

FIGHTING ASYLUM DESTITUTION THROUGH QUALITY LEGAL ADVICE

EVALUATION OF THE HOPE PROJECTS
(WEST MIDLANDS) LEGAL SERVICE



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Contents

Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
The challenge of advice provision.....	3
Summary of evaluation findings on Hope Projects legal service	4
Good practice in the provision of high-quality advice	6
A. Introduction.....	8
A1. Background.....	9
A2. Factors impacting advice for refused asylum seekers	16
A3. The future of asylum advice	20
A4. Evaluation questions	21
B. Findings, Implications and Recommendations	22
B1. Progressing the legal case	22
B2. Promoting clients' understanding of their legal case.....	35
B3. Improving clients' material circumstances	49
B4. Clients' experiences	58
B5. Legal, policy and practice implications and recommendations.....	63
C. Discussion: Assuring quality in legal advice and representation	66
C1. Six principles of procedural fairness.....	66
C2. Striving for individual fairness within systemic unfairness.....	67
C3. Initial Hope evaluation findings and priority areas	68
C4. Hope's developments in its legal advice.....	69
C5. Conclusion and wider implications	70
Appendix 1: Methods and Sources of Information	71
Appendix 2: Client Feedback on the Key Findings	75

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Executive Summary

This is the final report of the evaluation of Hope Projects (West Midlands) Ltd. legal advice service, conducted by staff from Nottingham Trent University. It draws on a review of the academic literature, survey responses from 92 clients, 90 in-depth qualitative interviews and a focus group with 58 clients, a documentary case review of 20 client care letters, 18 in-depth interviews with Hope staff, volunteers, trustees and partners, and Hope's own monitoring data on client outcomes.¹ Summary findings are outlined below, organised against each of the evaluation questions, and expanded on in the main body of this report.

The challenge of advice provision

UK asylum laws operate on the principle of mistrust – assuming that anybody claiming asylum is lying unless they can prove otherwise.² The expectations for evidence to prove one's claim have been found by numerous studies to be wildly unrealistic, given that the desperate flight to safety often leaves no opportunity to gather extensive paperwork. In the absence of recognition as a refugee, the British state denies those seeking protection many fundamental rights. The majority are denied the right to work. Where state benefits are offered, these are below the poverty line. Where housing is offered, this is on a no-choice basis, often of very low quality, and subject to repeated relocations around the country, disrupting formal and informal support networks. For those who have been refused asylum and have exhausted their rights to appeal, many are deprived of all access to housing and benefits, and are still not allowed to work. This is reinforced by prohibitions on private renting, bank accounts, and driving licences, exorbitant fees for many types of healthcare, and requirements for service providers to report to the Home Office which creates a climate of fear and discourages people from accessing even those services to which they are entitled. The result is state-orchestrated harm and levels of destitution that are disastrous for mental and physical health, and with particularly severe consequences for some groups, such as pregnant women.³ These conditions, produced by the state, directly render people vulnerable to multiple forms of exploitation and represent a severe failing in safeguarding responsibilities.

The provision of legal advice to refused asylum seekers has significant challenges, both in terms of the complex needs of the clients and the legal process itself. The Solicitors Regulation Authority has previously identified worrying examples of legal practice including irregular and inadequate training, poor legal knowledge, lack of suitably competent interpreters and poor interview technique. They also reported evidence of some solicitors deliberately overcharging or confusing fee-paying clients. These external challenges have increased over the course of this evaluation, requiring

¹ Some clients will have contributed through more than one of these formats, while some may have only contributed through one, for example giving an interview but not completing the survey.

² Hynes, P. (2017). Trust and mistrust in the lives of forcibly displaced women and children. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 6 (2), 219-237. <http://doi.org/10.1332/204674317x14861127722366>

³ Vickers, T. (2012) *Refugees, Capitalism and the British State*. Routledge. Canning, V. (2017) *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System*. Routledge. Vickers, T. (2019) *Border, Migration and Class in an Age of Crisis*. Bristol University Press.

Hope Projects to be highly adaptive in its provision, and even greater changes are expected in coming years.

Austerity policies have inevitably resulted in a significant reduction in free legal services offered by not-for-profit organisations. Changes to legal aid following the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 have left many vulnerable clients unable to access high quality private advice. In 2020, when Hope commenced this phase of its legal advice provision, it was already extremely difficult for refused asylum seekers to access high quality immigration advice, and all the evidence in this evaluation points to this having become even more challenging since then.

At the same time, the immigration rules are incredibly complex and inaccessible without this specialist, professional advice. Even experienced judges report that they are struggling to interpret and apply the provisions.⁴

Refusals based on credibility are particularly difficult for clients to accept. Official transcripts of interviews can be far from accurate as they have been subject to repeat edit and summary by interpreters, transcribers, and caseworkers. Legal providers need to have the time and resources to unpick the case, including any previous legal advice, and explain it for the client. There may also have been new developments that have implications for a client, such as changes to country guidance, legislation or case law, and which need to be taken into account for any new submission. Clients need to know what documents they need and why before they attend a solicitor's appointment. Most further submissions depend on this evidence.

Lengthy delays in the asylum process contribute to destitution and susceptibility to exploitation. Refused asylum seekers are vulnerable to exploitation as they may have no income or accommodation and are often fearful of asserting their rights. Delays also prevent recovery and can impact on the ability to recall events accurately and consistently, which can in turn undermine credibility. There is a severe lack of appropriate mental health provision. These factors represent particular challenges for legal advisors who will first need to build trust, potentially following a client's experience of previous legal advice which might have been poor, so that they can provide the best possible service.

Summary of evaluation findings on Hope Projects legal service

- *Hope's client needs:* According to Hopes' own monitoring data, of 364 clients assessed by Hope between June 2020 and 27 March 2024, 88% were homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.
- *Progressing the legal case:* Across two rounds of the client survey in 2022 and 2023: 57% of respondents said Hope had helped them secure legal representation and we project 265 clients being assisted to do so between

⁴ McKinney, CJ Tribunal judge publicly criticises Home Office presenting officers, 8th Nov 2017 Free Movement

2020 and 2025. 50% said they had made further submissions since coming to Hope and we project 233 clients doing so between 2020 and 2025. 18% said they now have leave to remain in the UK, a proportion confirmed by Hope's own monitoring data which shows 65 out of 364 clients had been granted leave to remain by 27 March 2024 (in most cases with refugee status). This allows us to project 83 clients making this full transition to leave to remain between 2020 and 2025 (and likely more due to the time some cases take to be prepared and then resolved by the courts, with some clients who registered with the Hope advice service in 2020 still awaiting the outcome of their case in 2023). Many clients expressed increased confidence in the likelihood of their case being successful since coming to Hope.

- *Promoting clients' understanding of their legal case:* This was found to be the most challenging goal for the Hope legal service, and the area of greatest learning and innovation since 2020. The UK asylum system is highly complex and has undergone frequent changes, and even highly trained professionals such as judges and solicitors report difficulties grappling with its complexities. Many clients have very limited understanding of the asylum process or important details of their case, including the reasons their previous asylum application was refused and the evidence they need for a new application. Such legal details are often difficult to disentangle from feelings about fairness. Many clients are understandably exhausted, traumatised, or otherwise unwell, which in some cases affects their capacity to focus and communicate. This evaluation found that Hope responded to these challenges with great patience and care, and a highly reflective approach. Early findings of this evaluation that identified many clients failing to understand the advice they had been provided were responded to by Hope with changes to the format for client care letters, the provision of additional information translated into clients' first language, the development of action plans to clarify what needed to be done next, and additional check-ins with clients about their understanding. 71% of clients who were asked in 2023 if Hope Projects had helped them to understand their case better answered in the affirmative, allowing us to project 330 people with self-assessed improved understanding over the 5 years of the project.
- *Improving clients' material circumstances:* 62% of survey respondents reported an improvement to their housing situation since coming into contact with Hope, enabling us to project an estimated 288 people with improved housing situations over the first five years of the legal service. 49% said their income had improved. When asked about material circumstances clients generally referred to direct provision of housing or financial support by Hope or other third sector organisations, and this was widely valued. According to Hope's own monitoring figures, 35% of clients had moved on to some form of statutory housing and welfare entitlement by 27 March 2024, either by securing leave to remain or access to asylum housing (usually Section 4). The evaluation notes that changes to the law resulting from the Illegal Migration Act 2023 are likely to further restrict opportunities for clients to move on to statutory provision, leading to increased requirements for charitable provision for more people and over longer periods.

- *Clients' experiences:* A large majority of survey respondents (87%) across the second and third rounds reported being Very Happy or Happy about their experience with the Hope legal service, with 9% saying they were Neither Happy nor Unhappy, 3% (3 clients) Unhappy, and 1% (1 client) Very Unhappy. This was consistent with interviews. Frequent themes in clients' positive comments about Hope included being listened to or having somebody check in with them and show they cared, increased confidence about the outcome of their case (and in some cases the successful conclusion of the case and award of leave to remain), and the responsiveness of Hope to their needs, which sometimes included services that went far beyond legal advice and housing.

Good practice in the provision of high-quality advice

Successful outcomes alone cannot be a measure of quality in individual cases as good advice and representation can still result in a negative outcome. The client's perception that the legal process has been fair has been shown to be extremely important to self-worth and esteem. It can also help clients to accept difficult outcomes. In an asylum process defined by a hostile environment where decision-making occurs in a culture of disbelief, the refused client is understandably likely to view the process as unfair. Nevertheless, interventions by Hope which strengthen procedural fairness may help individuals come to terms with negative outcomes and take ownership of their case, empowering them to make difficult choices. Enabling the client to have voice by listening without interruption is an example of a simple technique that can build trust and empower the client.

Although the Hope legal team does not represent most of its clients before tribunals, the principles provided by Trude and Gibbs⁵ can offer a useful guide for assessing the quality of asylum seeker representation and we have applied these to Hope's services. With reference to these principles, in summary it is evident from the data we have gathered that Hope are identifying and gathering relevant facts, evidence and argument that the client can then take forward to a legal representative. The case facts and history of previous refusals have been unpicked to provide coherent, balanced advice that addresses the strengths of the case and areas of weakness. Importantly, clients appear to trust the advice they have received from Hope which stands in contrast to some of their previous experiences. Partner organisations also express a high level of confidence in Hope's legal expertise. Hope thereby plays an extremely important role as a vital regional hub of expertise for the wider sector, enhancing the ability of other voluntary sector organisations to support their clients through partnership.

In summary, we can identify the following as key strengths of the Hope legal advice service that have been identified by this evaluation between 2021 and 2024:

- High quality, reliable and responsive legal advice
- Communication and understanding
- Attentiveness to process and outcomes
- Responsiveness to holistic client need

⁵ Outlined on page 68 of this report.

- A learning organisation with a genuine commitment to ongoing development of its practice
- An important hub role for the wider immigration and destitution sectors in the Est Midlands
- Demonstrated capacity to extend advice provision remotely

Hope has played a vital role for hundreds of destitute people during this period, and all the indications are that the need for such services will further increase in the coming years.

A. Introduction

Hope Projects (West Midlands) Ltd. (referred to hereafter as Hope) launched its legal service for destitute asylum seekers in June 2020, with funding for five years from The Oak Foundation. The legal service is delivered by two paid advisors qualified to OISC Level 3 and supported by volunteers, some of whom have extensive legal experience and qualifications. This represented an expansion of previous legal advice provided by Hope alongside its housing and destitution fund.

The legal service developed out of Hope Projects' housing provision, informed by an understanding that the severe levels of destitution and homelessness facing many refused asylum seekers could only be resolved sustainably by regularising their immigration status, and that this required specialist legal advice coupled with housing and financial provision to meet immediate needs.

“a lot of that [destitution] is because people don't understand how to challenge their refusals. Home Office decision-making is terrible. Court's decision making is better. But it's really difficult because people for really obvious reasons don't disclose everything at the start or they disclose things for which they have no evidence at the start. And it comes down to a judge saying either, 'How could I take that into account? Because you never told me because you didn't want to talk about the fact that you'd been tortured or you'd been raped.' Which is absolutely understandable. Or, 'You told me this, I've got no evidence. I just have to make a decision as to whether I believe you or not. And I didn't.' And it turns out that someone turns up six months later with evidence to prove that it's true. And so there are all sorts of reasons why people get decisions which are flawed, which can be challenged. And ... there is a clear route to challenge, but if you don't understand that you'll never bring that evidence. You'll never look for the right evidence. so that's coming back to the purpose of the project... there are lots of people who are made homeless by the asylum system... Part of the answer to that is about legal system ... which we can help with. And part of the answer to that is that people shouldn't be homeless as a result of the asylum system anyway ... even if you haven't got a case, and even if ultimately you're going to have to leave ... you should still not be left out homeless. And that's what we can't do anything about.” (S01, Hope staff member)

In short, it was understood that the UK asylum system is creating destitution, and high quality legal advice is needed as part of the remedy to that.

A team from Nottingham Trent University commenced an evaluation of this service, commissioned by Hope, beginning in January 2021. The evaluation has been supported by an Advisory Board made up of Hope staff, a Hope trustee, two Hope clients, a Hope volunteer, and a range of Hope partners.

This report presents findings from the evaluation between 2021 and 2024, comprising a literature review, survey responses from 92 clients, 85 in-depth qualitative interviews with 58 clients and a focus group, a documentary case review of 20 clients, 18 in-depth interviews with Hope staff, volunteers, trustees and partners, and monitoring data provided by Hope. Emerging findings were presented for discussion and

feedback at 12 meetings of the Advisory Board between January 2021 and December 2023 and in three rounds of additional focus groups and interviews with clients in 2021, 2023 and 2024, and a draft of this report was discussed with the Advisory Board in March 2024; the points raised at these meetings were used to fine tune the presentation of this report although the responsibility for any limitations of course lies with the authors.

The remainder of Section A outlines the context for clients and providers, before discussing particular factors that affect the provision of advice for refused asylum seekers, and finally outlines the questions that guided the evaluation. The report will then evaluate, in Section B, how Hope is meeting these challenges.

A1. Background

The target client group for the Hope legal service are destitute asylum seekers who have exhausted all rights of appeal, with the aim of supporting them overturning flawed refusals and preventing destitution, in many cases by supporting clients to make further submissions in their asylum case. According to Hopes' own monitoring data, of 364 clients assessed by Hope between June 2020 and 27 March 2024, 88% were homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. Of these:

- 133 were sofa surfing
- 32 were street homeless
- 51 were in Home Office accommodation to which they were about to lose their entitlement following an asylum refusal
- 31 were in local authority accommodation to which they had no long-term entitlement
- 30 were being temporarily housed by charities

The housing situation of 42 was unknown at the point of referral, and 40 were in Home Office housing but had come to Hope because their case had got lost in the legal system.

Before presenting the findings on the outcomes for the Hope legal service, it is necessary as context to review aspects of the asylum system, legal process, patterns of decision making, and key challenges facing those applying for asylum and those seeking to provide them with advice.

UK asylum laws operate on the principle of mistrust – assuming that anybody claiming asylum is lying unless they can prove otherwise.⁶ The expectations for evidence to prove one's claim have been found by numerous studies to be wildly unrealistic, given that the desperate flight to safety often leaves no opportunity to gather extensive evidence. In the absence of recognition as a refugee, the British state denies those seeking protection many fundamental rights. The majority are denied the right to work. Where state benefits are offered, these are below the poverty line. Where housing is offered, this is on a no-choice basis, often of very low quality, and subject to repeated

⁶ Hynes, P. (2017). Trust and mistrust in the lives of forcibly displaced women and children. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 6 (2), 219-237. <http://doi.org/10.1332/204674317x14861127722366>

relocations around the country, disrupting formal and informal support networks. For those who have been refused asylum and have exhausted their rights to appeal, many are deprived of all access to housing and benefits, and are still not allowed to work. This is reinforced by prohibitions on private renting, bank accounts, and driving licences, exorbitant fees for many types of healthcare, and requirements for service providers to report to the Home Office which creates a climate of fear and discourages people from accessing even those services to which they are entitled. The result is state-orchestrated harm and levels of destitution that are disastrous for mental and physical health, and with particularly severe consequences for some groups, such as pregnant women.⁷ These conditions, produced by the state, directly render people vulnerable to multiple forms of exploitation and represent a severe failing in safeguarding responsibilities. It is into this context that Hope Projects intervene.

This section will next address factors impacting on the demand for legal and specialist asylum advice in the UK and West Midlands. It will then consider how refused asylum seekers may present to legal advisors. Principles of good administrative procedures, adapted to reflect the client advisor relationship, are outlined with examples of good practice emerging from Hope client interviews.

A1a. Current asylum figures

There were 75,340 asylum applications in the UK in the year ending September 2023, similar to the number in the previous year⁸. 59% were adult males aged 18-49 and 6% were unaccompanied minors. A quarter were Afghan or Iranian nationals, the vast majority of whom will be successful in their asylum claim.

2022-3 has seen a much higher recognition rate overall with only 33% refused at initial decision. Around three quarters of these refusals are appealed, and currently 53% of appeals are successful.⁹ It is important to explain that many of those needing Hope's services have not benefitted from this high recognition rate yet will be nationals of countries with success rates of over 85%. This includes Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea, Libya, and Sudan.¹⁰ Changes to the political situation in Afghanistan, Sudan and Iran have been reflected in changes to policy and caselaw. Unfortunately, refused asylum seekers will need to make further submissions on how these changes might impact them and they were not included in the fast track system. Indeed, this changeability of UK asylum decision making is one of the reasons that the services provided by Hope are so important, because individuals who have had one or more applications for asylum refused may now have grounds for a new application, due to factors beyond their control, and may need advice prior to submission.

Delays continue to characterise the system, with only 16% of 87,366 asylum applications decided within 6 months in the year ending March 2023 (this is an

⁷ Vickers, T. (2012) *Refugees, Capitalism and the British State*. Routledge. Canning, V. (2017) *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System*. Routledge. Vickers, T. (2019) *Border, Migration and Class in an Age of Crisis*. Bristol University Press.

⁸ House of Commons asylum statistics Sept 2023.

⁹ Georgina Sturge Asylum Statistics House of Commons Library March 2024

¹⁰ Over three-quarters of Vietnamese nationals are also granted asylum at first instance.

improvement on the 7% decided in the year ending March 2022). Such delays reinforce the importance of Hope's wider array of services, including housing, financial aid and wellbeing services. While these are beyond the remit of this evaluation, they are important to note because of their role in supporting clients to meet the basic needs without which it is much harder to focus on building a legal case.

Hope Projects' clients have in most cases been refused asylum and will be looking to make further submissions. Once filed these can take up to 12 months to decide. The Home Office will only treat Further Submissions as a Fresh Claim for Asylum if the new evidence or information:

1. *Had not already been considered; and*
2. *Taken together with the previously considered material, created a realistic prospect of success, notwithstanding its rejection.*

There are no detailed statistics on fresh claims, although the relevant minister reported there 6,760 such applications lodged in 2021.¹¹ The majority are unsuccessful (it is suggested around 85%) and success often depends on expert evidence which can be expensive and difficult for clients to find without specialist help. It is possible to request a judicial review of a refusal to treat further submissions as fresh claim and the tribunal will consider if there is a realistic prospect of success, applying the principle of anxious scrutiny. Our evaluation suggests that over half of those who receive legal advice from Hope go on to make a further submission (and some already have a claim under consideration) and that success rates are considerably higher than the national average cited above (see pages 24-29 for further details).

A1b. Current system failures

Delays

The Government has repeatedly asserted that it has tackled the lengthy delays in the system, for example by introducing a questionnaire to target nationals of countries where there is a high likelihood of success.¹² By the end of 2022 the number of people waiting for an initial asylum decision had increased by 408% since December 2017.¹³ Two-thirds of applicants were waiting more than 6 months for their first decision, with the average wait being 449 days. Delays are not just problems for the asylum backlog. They are known to significantly impact memory and may undermine the healing process. Asylum seekers are unable to work for at least twelve months (after which point they can request permission to work in a role on the shortage occupation list). Those who are refused and have exhausted rights of appeal are prohibited from working or claiming state support unless they are unable to return, for example due to ill-health. Material deprivation characterises the asylum system and contributes to

¹¹ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-02-09/121813>

¹² It is reported that only 10% of these questionnaires were correctly completed, leading officials to interview most of the applicants. The nationals targeted for fast tracking were those applying from Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea, Libya, Yemen, Iran and Iraq.

¹³ Institute for Government *Asylum Backlog* Feb 2023. Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/asylum-backlog> (accessed 11th March 2024)

vulnerability and the risk of labour exploitation.¹⁴ Support is reinstated if an asylum seeker can advance new evidence to make further submissions to support a fresh claim – the legal advice provided by Hope is thus important both for clients' ability to exercise their right to asylum and for their access to vital state support.

Reductions in general and specialist advice provision

Overall, the number of law firms providing immigration and asylum legal aided work has decreased, leading to significant capacity issues. It is not uncommon for clients to visit several solicitors and be turned away due to capacity. One provider interviewed by Wilding reported turning away hundreds of clients. Nationally, there are twenty-six local authorities that receive dispersed asylum seekers but have no free legal advice provision. Whilst Staffordshire and West Midlands reportedly have 36 legal aid immigration providers, this does not mean that the firms have capacity to take new clients.¹⁵ Importantly, Hope has developed the capacity to provide legal advice remotely, enabling support to be provided to clients living in areas without any local provider.

Legal aid payments are insufficient to cover much of the complex work that is necessary for many asylum applications, and legal aid work has become increasingly unattractive to providers.¹⁶ Legal aid cuts were underpinned by an assumption that voluntary agencies could simply step in and fill the gaps.¹⁷ However, immigration and asylum are highly specialist areas and few general advice agencies now cover this work. Refugee Action and the No Accommodation Network surveyed 92 organisations working with asylum seekers in 2018 and reported that 87% of respondents now found it more difficult to refer people to legal aid solicitors when compared to 2012.¹⁸ Our evaluation suggests the situation has further worsened since then (see pages 20-21 for details).

In September 2021, seven councils in the West Midlands commenced legal action against the Home Office and refused to accept more dispersed asylum seekers.¹⁹ Their complaint noted that the region now accepts 13.35% of new arrivals (up from 11.86% in 2019) and argues that there is insufficient available accommodation and resources to provide adequate support.²⁰ The case was withdrawn after the Home

¹⁴ Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom, by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights London, 16 November 2018. Available at:

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf

¹⁵ Wilding, Jo *Droughts and Deserts. A report on the immigration legal aid market* 2019, University of Sussex p.9 Available at: <https://www.jowilding.org/assets/files/Droughts%20and%20Deserts%20final%20report.pdf>

¹⁶ Fouzder, M 'Civil legal aid review: MoJ deluged with evidence' *Law Society Gazette* 1st March 2024

¹⁷ Kirwan, S, (2017), 'The End of 'Tea and Sympathy'? The Changing Role of Voluntary Advice Services in Enabling 'Access to Justice'. in *Access to Justice and Legal Aid: Comparative Perspectives on Unmet Legal Need*. Hart Publishing, p179

¹⁸ Refugee Action *Tipping the Scales: Access to justice in the UK Asylum System* 2018

¹⁹ BBC News 'West Midlands councils stop resettling refugees amid court bid', 16th Sept 2020. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-58582874>

²⁰ 'West Midlands Councils in High Court challenge over bid to exit voluntary asylum dispersal scheme' *Local Government Lawyer* Sept 20th 2001

Office agreed to revisit asylum dispersal to find a more equitable national solution.²¹ Wilding's recent report for Refugee Action notes that Birmingham has a particularly high level of unmet need for victims of trafficking, EU settlement cases, and undocumented migrants.²² Based on the number of asylum applicants receiving initial support (5,875 plus 500 unaccompanied children in 2022) and the number of legal aid matter starts available, Wilding notes that it is highly unlikely that there is provision for fresh claims work in the West Midlands.²³ Across the UK, providers note that they are unable to meet demand for fresh claims work.²⁴

The shortage of advice capacity is obviously bad news for clients and the advice sector who are attempting to fill the gap but. Wilding also finds that poor quality providers benefit most from capacity issues:

“the level of demand, plus limits on capacity in high-quality providers, mean that poor-quality suppliers are virtually assured of a supply of clients who are unable to move elsewhere once their case is taken on. Far from ensuring quality, the market as currently structured actively protects the market position of poor-quality suppliers”²⁵.

Wilding argues the current situation results in a 'lemon market', in which the 'seller' is most rewarded for providing a below-average-quality service and is likely to incur financial losses when providing a better-than-average service. The consequence is that high-quality supply is reduced, while poor-quality supply is largely maintained or increased.

The regulatory framework pursuant to the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which is unique to immigration advice, generates its own capacity and resource issues. It is well known that there is a significant shortage of OISC Level 3 supervisors, which in turn prevents the training and support of Level 2 advisors. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation is a registered charity which has commissioned independent research on the justice gap for migrants. In their report by Hutton and Harris, two broad categories of particular demand were identified: people seeking asylum making fresh claims (because their initial application has been unsuccessful), and people who have irregular status and risk exploitation, destitution or violence as a result. The authors noted:

²¹ Weakley K 'Councils withdraw legal action after Home Office meets asylum dispersal demands' *Local Government Chronicle* 18th May 2022

²² Wilding, Jo *No Access to Justice. How Legal advice deserts fail refugees, migrants and our communities* Refugee Action. Good Practice. May 2022. Available at: https://assets.website-files.com/5ea9ba3a86899781dfe3c099/62bc314261e2f338e0953848_No%20access%20to%20justice%20-%20how%20legal%20advice%20deserts%20fail%20refugees%2C%20migrants%20and%20our%20communities.pdf

²³ Ibid, p 151.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Wilding (2019), p2

“The cases which threaten serious consequences for clients if not resolved require specialist input (OISC Level 2 and above) to unravel and progress, particularly given that many may have compounded the seriousness of their situation through a combination of previous contact with immigration or asylum authorities, inaction, poor advice or (knowing or unknowing) criminal activity. The most acute dearth in immigration advice provision is at this specialist level”²⁶

Paul Hamlyn is now working closely with the Justice Together Initiative to help support and fund advice agencies to develop this capacity. However, austerity and consequent budget cuts contributed to a 64% reduction in not-for-profit providers between 2005 and 2018,²⁷ which has certainly not been reversed since. In conversations with providers across the Midlands region, it has become very apparent that remaining advisors are finding themselves doing much more work for less remuneration. This picture is unsustainable. In this context, Hope Projects provide a vital service, meeting one of the highest priority gaps in provision identified by Paul Hamlyn and very unusually for a charity employing two Level 3 advisors as staff and working closely with a further highly experienced Level 3 advisor in a voluntary capacity.

Complexity and proliferation of immigration and asylum law

Refused asylum seekers often present with exceptionally complicated cases that need to be unpicked by new advisors. Solicitors do not have the time or resources to do this work under the legal aid scheme so there is a vital need for intermediaries with good legal knowledge. Wilding’s research identifies an ‘exponential’ increase in the complexity of cases. She identifies three key issues: first, the nature of asylum means that cases are often difficult to evidence, and evidential requirements are constantly shifting; second, the politicised nature of the issue means that frequent changes to law and policy, often aimed at imposing a harsher regime on migrants, drive legal challenges which have to deal with the lawfulness of policies and other provisions, not merely the facts of the individual case; third, the UK’s precedent-based legal system requires legal argument about previous cases, not only the law itself, and when precedent cases proliferate, complexity increases.²⁸ Recent reforms that have been widely termed the ‘hostile environment’,²⁹ have added further pressure as practitioners are required to advise on the intersection of housing, health and employment with immigration law (for example regarding the right to rent scheme). There has also been a notable increase in human trafficking cases whilst recent legislative reforms have restricted access to the national referral mechanism for some asylum seekers.

The division between immigration and asylum legal work has always been difficult to justify. The 2012 reforms to legal aid removed immigration matters from the scope of

²⁶ Hutton, C and Harris. *J Methods of increasing the capacity of immigration advice provision*, PHF and Trust for London 2020, p.13

²⁷ Refugee Action *Tipping the Scales* (2018); Bowcott 2019

²⁸ Wilding (2019), p.17 Wilding gives example of 49 substantive unlawful detention decisions in 2017 compared to 6 in 2007)

²⁹ Vickers, T. (2019). *Borders, Migration and Class: Producing immigrants and workers*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

funding. Whilst this doesn't impact directly on refugee protection, it will include applications for leave based on long residence (the so-called twenty-year route), leave based on family life, and family reunion. All three areas will be relevant to many Hope clients. It may be possible for clients to apply for fee waivers, but this requires a degree of legal and technical understanding that many clients will not possess.

Legal and administrative complexity characterise immigration and asylum work. Lord Neuberger, former President of the Supreme Court, has stressed the importance of the constitutional principle of the rule of law, which requires that "people should know, or at least be able to find out, what the law is".³⁰ Yet in countless immigration cases, judges have expressed their confusion, with Judge Easterman in the first-tier tribunal describing immigration law as "a total nightmare... I don't suppose the judges know any more about it than the appellants who come before them."³¹ Lord Justice Jackson in the Court of Appeal added "provisions have now achieved a degree of complexity which even the Byzantine emperors would have envied".³²

The Committee responsible for legislative scrutiny in parliament has examined the new 'simplified' immigration rules which now run to 507 pages and 50 pages of explanatory notes. This is additional to published policy statements and principles arising from case law (especially starred cases from the Upper Tribunal which establish important country guidance).

It should be apparent that refused asylum seekers are not in any position to navigate the immigration rules without legal help. Errors can be further damaging to credibility, and the consequence of making a mistake could not be more serious.

Failure to account for the impact of distress on asylum interviews

It is well documented that many asylum seekers face trauma and persecution in their home country and difficult journeys to host countries.³³ It is also well documented that the experience of being an asylum seeker and going through the asylum process in the host country can be very distressing.³⁴ What is less known is how the experience of trauma and distress can impact on the ability to process information, seek help and engage with the legal process which would enable a successful application process.

³⁰ Welcome address to Australian Bar Association Biennial Conference Lord Neuberger, President of the Supreme Court <https://www.supremecourt.uk/docs/speech-170703.pdf>

³¹ McKinney, CJ Tribunal judge publicly criticises Home Office presenting officers, 8th Nov 2017 Free Movement

³² *Pokhriyal v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2013] EWCA Civ 1568.. See a series of quotes from judges collated for the Free Movement blog by Colin Yeo How complex is UK immigration law and is this a problem? 24th January 2018 <https://www.freemovement.org.uk/how-complex-are-the-uk-immigration-rules-and-is-this-a-problem/>

³³ Ellis, B. H., Winer, J. P., Murray, K., & Barrett, C. (2019). Understanding the mental health of refugees: Trauma, stress, and the cultural context. *The Massachusetts General Hospital textbook on diversity and cultural sensitivity in mental health*, 253-273.

³⁴ Carswell, K., Blackburn, P., & Barker, C. (2011). The relationship between trauma, post-migration problems and the psychological well-being of refugees and asylum seekers. *International journal of social psychiatry*, 57(2), 107-119.

Some research shows impairments in attention and memory among those who are suffering from Post-traumatic stress following trauma.³⁵

All of these negative experiences are compounded by the feelings of distrust and fear to disclosing information, seeking help and engaging with authorities, which are a frequent part of many refugees' experience, and are often compounded by the UK asylum system. For example, our research inside immigration detention,³⁶ has shown that limitations in existing services were exacerbated by the perceptions of stigma, mutual distrust and reputation management concern from both those seeking support and those providing it. These lead to many undocumented migrants inside immigration removal centres to feel powerless, confused, dissatisfied and disengage from health services. These issues are further enhanced by the fact that only a small proportion of services provided fully engage with mental health needs of refugees and asylum seekers (Carlsson, et al., 2014).³⁷ Finally, there is variability of experience and response to traumatic and distressing events among the different refugee populations, and there is poor evidence to systematically capture this diversity.³⁸ These complexities are rarely acknowledged in the process of asylum decision making, where there is frequently an expectation that refugees will remember and be able to articulate clearly every detail perfectly from their first interview with Home Office officials, and to maintain this account consistently through every subsequent interview and court appearance; despite this being wildly unrealistic, failure to manifest such consistency is often treated as evidence that the claimant is unreliable at best and lying at worst.³⁹

A2. Factors impacting advice for refused asylum seekers

When refused asylum seekers seek advice they are likely to have experienced lengthy delays, with their cases potentially refused on more than one occasion. Disempowerment characterises the asylum process and clients often become disengaged from their own case. They may not have access to relevant information, such as the refusal letter or case notes, and are unlikely to have a current solicitor. The referral pathway is an important part of the process, but this can make it difficult for clients to understand the role of the different actors. Clients may have an unrealistic view of an advisor's ability to resolve their immigration situation; or they may question the advisor's independence, viewing them as another cog in the state asylum apparatus, or be reluctant to trust them because of past experience of poor advice

³⁵ Weber, D. L. (2008). Information processing bias in post-traumatic stress disorder. *The open neuroimaging journal*, 2, 29.

³⁶ Këllezi, B., Wakefield, J., Bowe, M., Stevenson, C., & McNamara, N. (2021). Healthcare provision inside immigration removal centres: A social identity analysis of trust, legitimacy and disengagement. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 13(3), 578-601.

³⁷ Carlsson, J., Sonne, C., & Silove, D. (2014). From pioneers to scientists: challenges in establishing evidence-gathering models in torture and trauma mental health services for refugees. *The Journal of nervous and mental disease*, 202(9), 630-637.

³⁸ Michalopoulos L. M., Unick G. J., Haroz E. E., Bass J., Murray L. K., Bolton P. A. (2015). Exploring the fit of Western PTSD models across three non-Western low- and middle-income countries. *Traumatology*, 21, 55-63; Hinton D. E., Nickerson A., Bryant R. A. (2013). Prolonged grief in Cambodian refugees following genocide: Rebirth concerns and avoidance of reminders. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 18, 444-460.

³⁹ Allsopp, J. (in press) The Story's in the Telling': Using Narrative Genre as a Lens to Explore the Wellbeing and Life Projects of Unaccompanied Young Migrants and Refugees. *Migration and Society*.

from other practitioners. Building a rapport and establishing trust is therefore vital to a successful client relationship. Whilst the advisor may not be able to get the outcome the client desires, they have an important role in returning agency to the client. The client needs to understand their case so they can make informed decisions about their situation (whether it be to make a new application, to return to their country or origin, remain without permission, or find an alternative immigration route). Restoring agency and building confidence are intrinsic goods. Perceptions of fairness in administrative processes are discussed further in Section C.

The process of re-opening an asylum claim is particularly challenging for clients, and by extension their advisors, for a variety of intersecting reasons, which need to be taken into account when evaluating Hope's services:

- i) Adverse credibility. Most refusals are based on adverse credibility findings. Being disbelieved can lead to a lack of confidence, frustration, anxiety, and/or anger. Clients seeking advice from Hope will experience at least some these emotions. Building a rapport is therefore an essential first step for advisors.
- ii) Evidence. Expert evidence is usually required for successful fresh claims and this requires careful navigation. The evidence needed for further submissions may seem difficult or impossible for clients to obtain. One example is when a client is asked to prove they have no relatives in a particular country. Clients may also not understand the need to verify documentary evidence.
- iii) Reasons for refusal. The reason(s) for refusal may be difficult or impossible for clients to identify in the refusal letter. It is not unusual for clients to misunderstand the reason why they have been refused and this can lead them to focus on unimportant or undisputed points. Client refusal letters need to be unpacked and explained by advisors (possibly on more than one occasion).
- iv) Previous poor advice. The client may have already experienced poor quality legal advice. The Solicitors Regulation Authority report found this to be a significant problem and this is corroborated by more recent research from Jo Wilding.⁴⁰ Difficulties in accessing affordable advice can push clients to seek unregulated advice.

Poor or unregulated past advice may have contributed to the refusal by undermining the client's credibility.

Many solicitors representing asylum seekers at appeal lack the experience and competence to piece together a strong case. The result is poorly

⁴⁰ Solicitors Regulation Authority Quality of Legal Services for Asylum Seekers 2016. Available at: Available at: <https://www.sra.org.uk/globalassets/documents/sra/research/asylum-report.pdf?version=4a1ab3> (last accessed 11th March 2024); Wilding, Jo *Droughts and Deserts* 2019 University of Sussex.

constructed or evidenced appeals with short statements, limited country information, and no medical or expert reports to support the case.⁴¹ The Solicitors Regulation Authority undertook case file reviews which identified examples of solicitors misinterpreting the grounds for appeal and failing to understand requirements for the correction and submission of statements and interview records.

Past experiences of poor legal advice also have the potential to undermine clients' trust. It can also make the advisor's work more difficult, as the client may not have the necessary paperwork, this is evidenced in the interviews with Hope staff.

- v) Client understanding. The client may have a limited understanding of the asylum process and their rights. This results in disengagement and disempowerment. They may have told their stories multiple times to different actors, but they are unlikely to feel that they have ever been heard. A study of refused asylum seekers in Nottingham found high levels of boredom and a sense of worthlessness, particularly for those in the system for longer periods.⁴² Re-building the client's confidence so they can take ownership of their case and make informed decisions is vital.
- vi) Material deprivation. Insecure immigration status is typically characterised by material deprivation. This can include periods of homelessness, extreme poverty, and ill-health. Clients are vulnerable to labour exploitation which can make them suspicious of authority and unforthcoming when asked personal questions.⁴³ This also impacts on the client's focus and organisation which may mean they struggle to respond to requests for timely information. Thus, advisors need to find different ways to communicate and have regular follow-ups.
- vii) Personal barriers. Clients may experience cultural and language barriers. The use of interpreters is not always straightforward with many reports of inaccuracy, including examples where clients reported that the interpreter did not even speak their language. The SRA report also found that some interpreters directed clients to inappropriate advisors. Clients may be suspicious or afraid of their interpreter, particularly when the facts of the case relate to intimate matters, such as sexuality or gender-based violence.
- viii) Inaccurate transcripts. Heavy reliance is placed on asylum substantive interview transcripts. Yet errors in interview transcripts are not uncommon. Research has found that official transcripts of substantive interviews can be very far from accurate records as they have been subject to repeat editing

⁴¹ Ibid.,

⁴² Vickers and O'Nions *Legal advice for Persons with insecure Status in Nottingham* (LAPIS) 2020 Nottingham Trent University

⁴³ Lewis, H. and Waite, L. Asylum, immigration restrictions and exploitation: hyper-precarity as a lens for understanding and tackling forced labour. 5 *Anti-Trafficking Review* 2015. pp. 49-67

and summary through interpretation, transcription and caseworker review.⁴⁴ Vianelli found that far from being accurate records, interview statements had often been “diluted, filtered and transformed before reaching the judge”.

- ix) The legal advice environment. There are acknowledged legal advice deserts in the UK where asylum applicants will struggle to find any provision. This situation has been made worse by the closure of many general advice services since 2010 and restrictions to legal aid since 2012. Jo Wilding has studied the provision of immigration legal advice by private providers since reforms to legal aid were introduced in the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 and concludes that there is ‘complete market failure’.⁴⁵ This means that for many clients, legal advice is neither affordable nor accessible.

The increased regulatory regime for immigration advice means that it is not easy for non-qualified advisors to fill this gap, even though they may have good knowledge of the law. If they are not solicitors, they must be accredited to provide advice at the correct level and work for an organisation that is OISC registered. There are three levels of advice and only level two and three offer anything of significant value to clients. There are significant challenges for organisations in getting accredited advisors due to the shortage of supervisory capacity at Level 3.

Thus, clients will very likely have struggled to obtain the specialist advice they need. This can be a problem when they are referred on to solicitors. Legal aid remuneration is insufficient to cover the unpicking and evidence gathering that is needed for further submissions. Clients may therefore visit multiple solicitors without getting representation. This is a particular problem for clients with certain nationalities where there is less likely to be a successful application. This helps to explain the positive experiences of many Afghan clients following the resurgence of the Taliban, because of the change this produced to the country guidance, and consequently the success rates expected by solicitors. However, it should be emphasised that even these clients need legal advice and support. There are several recent cases where the Home Office have attempted to return asylum seekers to Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan notwithstanding the significant risks they face.⁴⁶

- x) Culture of disbelief. Since 2012, the UK immigration system has been restructured to focus on creating a hostile environment for those who do not have permission to stay. The Home Office is known to operate within a

⁴⁴ Vianelli, L ‘The fiction of credibility assessment’ AsyFair Conference, July 2021

⁴⁵ Wilding, 2019.

⁴⁶ In 2022 the Home Office reportedly told Afghan, Syrian and Yemeni asylum seekers it was safe for their return, despite international advice to the contrary. See Taylor, D ‘Home Office tells Afghan and Yemeni asylum seekers they can return safely’ The Guardian 13th Jan 2022. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/13/home-office-tells-afghan-and-yemeni-asylum-seekers-they-can-return-safely>

culture of disbelief, as found by the independent review into the Windrush saga which saw British nationals of Caribbean heritage removed, detained, and refused medical treatment.⁴⁷

The impact of the hostile environment on the right to seek and enjoy asylum is very evident, with the current Prime Minister pledging to ‘Stop the Boat’s’ and the Home Secretary introducing legislation to override a Supreme Court ruling finding that proposed removal of refugees to Rwanda would breach human rights protection.⁴⁸

The UNHCR guidelines state that when an applicant’s account appears credible, s/he should, unless there are good reasons to the contrary, be given the benefit of the doubt. Yet there is ample research suggesting that applicants face an uphill struggle to convince the Home Office that they are credible.⁴⁹ Small inconsistencies in interviews that may have been undertaken many months apart, become evidence of deceit.

A3. The future of asylum advice

Since this evaluation commenced in 2021 there has been intense politicisation of asylum in the UK, with the Prime Minister making a pledge to ‘Stop the Boats’ one of five central policy commitments. New legislation has been introduced in the form of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and Illegal Migration Act (IMA) 2023. The decision to create a two-tier refugee protection system, based on the method of arrival into the UK, was abandoned within a few months of being introduced, but the IMA and attempts to remove those who arrive illegally to third countries, notably Rwanda, remain key tenets of current government policy. These plans do not directly impact on current Hope clients but they have generated a degree of anxiety and uncertainty in the advice sector and amongst those seeking protection. Removal to third countries will require a considerable expansion of the detention estate, and it is possible that going forward there will be greater use of detention and removal of those with insecure status (defined by the Supreme Court as anyone without indefinite leave to remain).⁵⁰

At the same time, the number of people succeeding in their claim for refugee status has increased significantly over this period. Whilst this is welcomed, it has precipitated a housing crisis for newly recognised refugees, who are now given at most seven days notice to leave Home Office accommodation (and potentially less where there are delays in tenants receiving this information). Concern over the cost of hotel accommodation for new arrivals has seen temporary accommodation, including disused army barracks and a commercial barge, repurposed as detention facilities. The health and wellbeing of asylum seekers detained in these environments is a cause of significant concern. In 2021 the High Court ruled that the Napier barracks was

⁴⁷ Williams, W *Lessons Learned review 2020* HMSO

⁴⁸ Safety of Rwanda (Immigration and Asylum) Bill 2024.

⁴⁹ Souter, J “Culture of Disbelief or Denial? Critiquing Refugee Status Determination in the United Kingdom”, *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration*, 1(1), 2011, 48–59; J. Thibaut & L. Walker, *Procedural Justice. A Psychological Analysis*, Hillsdale, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum.

⁵⁰ *Rhuppiah v Sec of State Home Dept* [2018] UKSC

unsuitable to accommodate the claimants, who included victims of torture and human trafficking.⁵¹ Detainees on the Bibby Stockholm barge were briefly removed from the vessel after dangerous Legionella bacteria was found in the water tanks. Many of the barge detainees have now been confined for six months and in December 2023, a young Albanian man committed suicide. This is the wider environment of precarity and harm in which Hope supports its clients.

A4. Evaluation questions

The specific research questions driving this evaluation are as follows, these provides the structure for the analysis and presentation of findings which follows in Section B:

1. How effective is Hope's legal advice service in *progressing the legal case* of individuals subject to flawed asylum decisions, including but not limited to:
 - a. securing clients' legal representation and;
 - b. securing clients' status/leave to remain in the UK?
2. How effective is Hope's legal advice service in promoting clients' *understanding of their legal case and what they can do to progress their case*?
3. To what extent is the legal service effective in *improving clients' material circumstances*, in particular in helping clients avoid destitution and street homelessness and secure sustainable forms of statutory support?
4. What are *clients' experiences* of Hope's legal service?
 - a. are the projects aims and approach clear and well understood by clients?
 - b. to what extent do clients feel empowered by the legal support they receive and to what extent are they in control of their legal case and wider circumstances?
 - c. does the service respond to client needs in a person-centred and appropriate manner?
 - d. what are the strengths and weaknesses of the service from clients' perspectives?
 - e. how, if at all, could the service be improved from a client perspective?
5. What are the *legal, policy and practice implications* of this longitudinal evaluation for Hope Ltd., it's local partners and wider stakeholders, and national government?

⁵¹ *R (O application of NB and others) v SSHD* [2021] EWHC 1489 (Admin)

B. Findings, Implications and Recommendations

This section presents findings from three rounds of data collection with clients and two rounds of interviews with Hope personnel and partners, between 2021 and 2024, detailed further in the Appendix to this report. The findings below are organised in line with the evaluation questions set out in section A3. Where there were indications of different patterns of experience between groups of clients, for example between men and women, these are indicated below – where no differences are indicated it can be assumed that a similar pattern was evident across the lines of difference we considered.

Due to the exceptional asylum housing measures that were put in place by the Home Office during the first years of the Covid-19 pandemic, the findings presented here from the client survey are limited to the later two rounds of data collection, which took place in 2022 and 2023. The survey responses presented here capture the experiences of 92 clients, 35% of the 259 clients who registered with Hope Projects between June 2020 and March 2023 and whose contact details were supplied to the evaluation team. We have used this data to construct projections for various positive outcomes across the approximately 500 clients expected to have registered with the Hope legal advice service during the first five years of its funding.⁵²

This survey data is supplemented by quotations from 90 in-depth interviews with 58 clients. Some information about clients is provided alongside these quotations, with information selected according to characteristics that are most relevant to help the reader compare different clients' experiences in context, while avoiding information that might risk individuals being identified. When extracts from the interviews are used, ... indicates words have been removed to improve readability. The Appendix provides information about the composition of the interview sample.

B1. Progressing the legal case

The clients seen by the Hope legal service have widely varying circumstances and needs, and the Hope service must assess each individual and decide what support is both feasible and likely to be helpful. Clients come from a wide variety of countries and migration routes – some may have been on a student, work or spouse visa before claiming asylum. Some speak fluent English, which some are entirely reliant on interpreters. Many clients do not have legal representation, and even some of those who do may have representation of poor quality. Many have received bad advice in the past, which may have seriously undermined their credibility. Most have had an asylum claim rejected and have exhausted appeal rights. Some have a new asylum claim already under consideration, but this may have been poorly prepared. Many clients have little or no understanding of the reasons their asylum claim was refused, or what they would need to do to make a new claim, or of the wider context of the UK

⁵² We make allowance for the likelihood that those who have not received positive outcomes may be harder to reach – particularly if they have been removed from the UK – by correcting the projections on the basis of the 18 clients whose contact numbers no longer work, representing 7% of the 259 clients who have been approached by phone. Extrapolating this to the expected 500 clients over the project's first five years, we therefore make projections based on a percentage of 465.

asylum system – while others are extremely well informed. Many are homeless and some are completely disconnected from the statutory asylum support system, even if they should be entitled to housing. Some are well connected with multiple other charities and/or communities, while some are entirely isolated. Some have been struggling for recognition as a refugee for many years – the earliest claims we encountered in this evaluation were from 2001 – and are understandably exhausted. In this context, Hope Projects aim to work flexibly and responsively to help each client to progress their legal case. The following case studies, compiled from multiple interviews with each client, illustrate just some of the varied forms of legal support provided by Hope (sometimes accompanied by support from other Hope services or partners), and the different pathways clients take:

CASE STUDIES

C02 arrived from Ethiopia via a long and difficult journey, they were found by British police while being transported in a lorry and were detained. They had not intended to come to the UK, but the agent gave them incorrect information about where they were being taken. They claimed asylum in 2016 and it took until 2019 for their substantive interview with the Home Office. They were refused asylum and appealed but were rejected. They described having received poor legal advice from their solicitor, who they had found from a list provided to them by the Home Office. They also described struggling with language, and by 2022 they were still reliant on interpreters. They registered with Hope Projects, who provided them housing and supported them to submit a fresh claim. They described how Hope Projects had helped them to understand how to talk to their solicitor, and the timescale for them to submit new evidence. While this claim was being considered they were able to move into Home Office accommodation. Their fresh claim was accepted in 2022.

C109 made their first claim for asylum in 2021, having arrived in the UK as a minor in 2001 and then continued here for some time on a student visa. Hope Projects helped them to gather evidence of their length of stay in the UK, and signposted them to another charity that supported them with a new asylum application, which resulted in a grant of three years leave to remain.

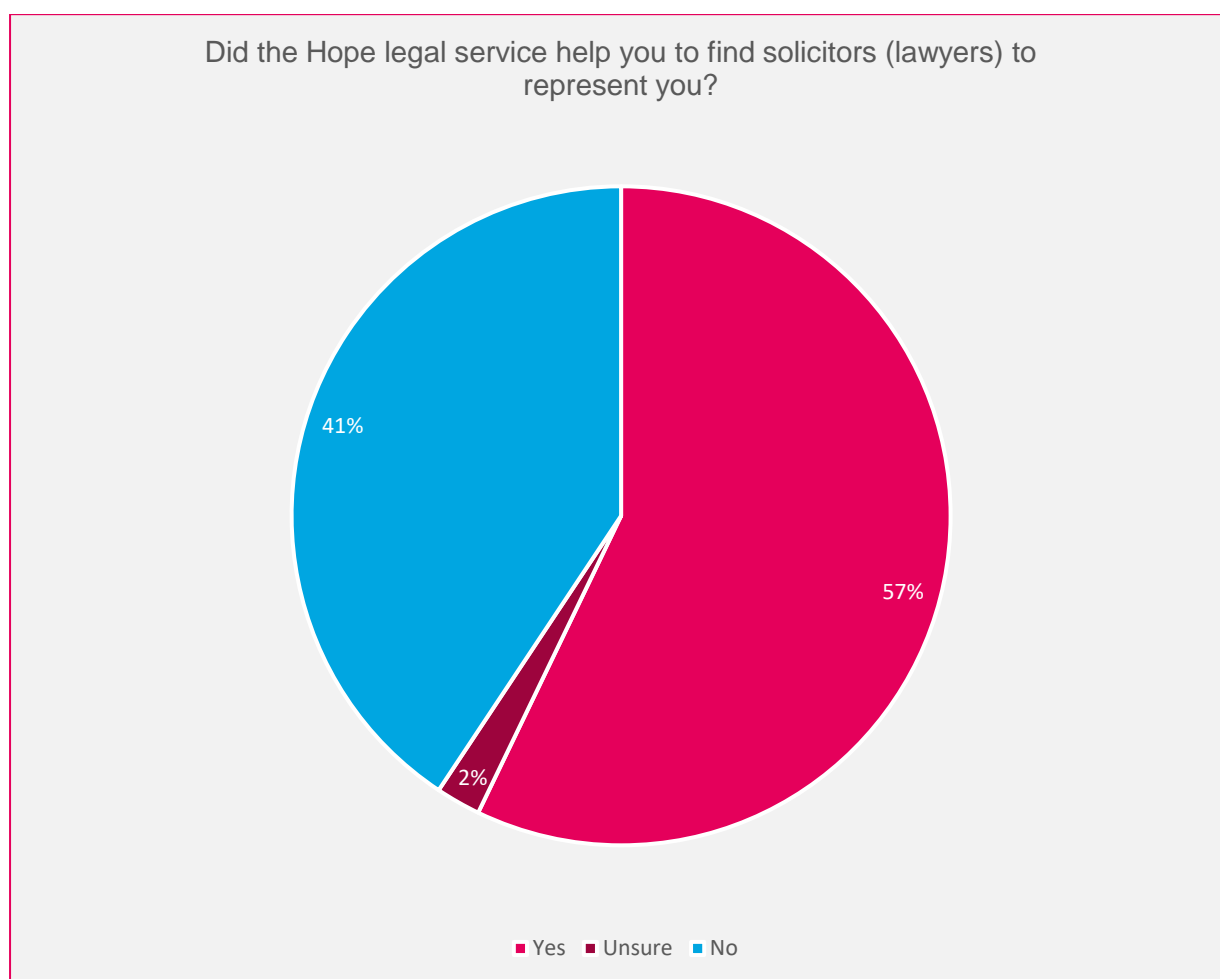
C143 claimed asylum from Nigeria in 2021. At the time they were referred to Hope Projects they had a solicitor and an asylum claim under consideration, but they were not in contact with their solicitor and they were homeless, having been refused Section 95 support because the judge was not satisfied they were destitute. This was in a complex context of domestic abuse which made it difficult to prove housing need. Hope provided them housing, advised them on their legal rights and supported them to understand their case, helped them establish proper communication with their solicitor, and supported them to make a Section 95 application which led to them moving into Home Office accommodation. They described the support they received from Hope as “life-saving”.

C89 claimed asylum from Pakistan in 2010, they were refused and had their appeal rejected, and were then evicted from Home Office accommodation and were detained. After their release and registering with Hope Projects, Hope housed them and gave them direct legal representation in submitting a fresh claim, which was still under consideration at the time of our most recent interview in 2023.

Three questions in the client survey related directly to Hope's aim to progress client's legal case for asylum, by asking about Hope assistance finding legal representation, making further submissions, and securing leave to remain in the UK. The breakdown of responses from the 92 clients who responded to the second and third rounds of the survey are provided below, alongside relevant findings from client interviews.

B1a. Finding legal representation

Figure 2: Hope assistance finding legal representation



Based on this finding, we can predict that over the first five years of the project Hope will have helped an estimated 265 clients to find legal representation who otherwise lacked this. Given the complexity of the UK asylum system, the difficulty evidencing many well founded asylum claims, and the and the challenging legal work required to 'unpick' a case that has already passed through at least one failed application, high quality legal representation is vital if most of these individuals' claims are to be properly considered. This is therefore a highly valuable outcome of the work undertaken by the Hope legal service.

Some clients already had legal representation before coming to Hope, although not all of this was high quality, and in some cases part of Hope's assistance was reported to

lead to finding a better solicitor, where the current representation was considered to be unsuitable:

“When I met them [the Hope legal service], they took our contact and invited me to their office to understand my case. They questioned what my asylum case was all about and who my solicitor was. In so doing, they realized that I was going through so much difficulties and also that this affected the input of my previous solicitor. They also found out that there was no improvement in my case with the previous solicitor. [The Hope advisor] advised that I withdraw my case file from my previous solicitor, and they recommended a new and experienced solicitor to better handle my file.” (C169, male)

In some other cases, Hope’s advice to clients on how to communicate with their existing solicitor was reported to improve the client’s experience:

“When I met the Hope Project, I was not communicating with my solicitor, the Hope Project helped me ... communicate with her directly and easily ... I had the intention of changing my solicitor. But the legal support [Hope advisor] said the solicitor is okay... they had to contact the solicitor to ... make her talk to me. And the solicitor kept calling and now the case is progressing.” (C143, Nigeria)

Given the difficulties finding new representation, such interventions that improve the responsiveness of existing providers or otherwise help clients to communicate with their solicitor more effectively is extremely valuable.

Hope’s aim to help clients secure legal representation is delivered through a mixture of direct representation by Level 3 OISC accredited Hope advisors and by signposting to external solicitors together with a Client Care Letter summarising the case, and which can be presented to solicitors as a summary. Decisions about who Hope will represent directly are made on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the strength of the case, whether there is a need for psychiatric or country expert reports (which Hope does not have funding for), and current caseload. Hope’s capacity for direct representation is limited, and so where possible Hope tries to help clients find an external solicitor.

In interviews some clients reported having found a solicitor following advice from Hope, and there were some very positive reports of clients’ experiences being represented directly by Hope:

“they’re helping me. You know, send emails, communicate with the Home Office as well as the courts, so that’s a good thing... [The representation from Hope is] one of the best. If it wasn’t for her, oh my goodness. I think I would be struggling... And she really takes the time to do it. She’s not in a rush. Then she does it properly.” (C41, Eritrea, first claim 2015, now has leave to remain)

“We have submitted a fresh claim with the help of [Hope Advisor]. Am 95 percent sure of the fresh claim we have submitted and this is because [Hope Advisor] worked very hard to build the case. In this case, [Hope Advisor] did what nobody has ever done before. She had numerous meetings with us in

preparation for the case, I am really satisfied somebody did hard work ... [Hope Advisor] contacted the Home Office to get our case file, she also assisted us in getting the medical report to prepare our current application” (C89, Pakistan, first claim 2010)

“I was in a situation and I was about to appeal after my application was refused by the Home Office, and because I did not have a solicitor, then solicitors were asking me for money and I did not have any job to provide this money. I called the British Red Cross and someone ... then directed me to ... the Hope Project. [A Hope advisor] helped me carry on with the appeal application.” (C102, Afghanistan, first claim 2009, now has leave to remain)

Of course this did not always lead to positive outcomes, but where the desired outcome was not achieved some clients described a continuity of advice and a sensitive flexibility by Hope advisors to their needs:

“When my previous solicitor messed up, [Hope Advisor] took over and did a further submission for me to get Section 4. This application was refused after a year and [Hope Advisor] asked me to get something else for her to file an application. At that stage I was tired and could not do anything further ... and they told me that I should wait for the twenty-year route.” (C30, Nigeria, first claim 2017)

Some clients also gave positive accounts of Hope helping them to find a solicitor:

“when I spoke with [Hope advisor], I felt really assured and that there is hope because anyone I spoke to prior to meeting her, they only asked for money but when I met her, she helped without taking money from me. They gave me information on how to get a solicitor which was really good... There is an existing application type for anyone who came to the UK as a minor and that is the application I made and I am waiting for the results.” (C109, Jamaica, first claim 2021)

“They did find a solicitor for me. They said they couldn’t help me make the application, so they just looked for a solicitor for me.” (C112, Zimbabwe, first claim 2008)

“Here in Scotland, I had to look for a solicitor to take my case all over again. The advice I got from the Hope Project then is what I used to look for the solicitor here. I explained my case to the solicitor here and they added their own knowledge to carry on with my case... The advice from the Hope Project has been helpful as it gives me ideas of what I can do and say when presenting my case.” (C116, Nigeria, first claim 2001)

Some clients expressed feeling quite hopeless about the prospect of finding a solicitor or said they had no idea how to do this. Money was the most frequently cited perceived barrier to getting a solicitor, raising questions as discussed above about the availability of legal aid. Some respondents said they had been given a list of solicitors by Hope

but had either phoned all of them and had been rejected or had not been able to face phoning solicitors after bad prior experiences:

“The only missing part is for them [Hope] to get a solicitor for me quicker than they are doing now.” (C75, man, Birmingham)

“I don’t have any solicitor at the moment. I don’t know how to go about it.” (C16, woman, Coventry)

“The Hope Project sent me to the Red Cross [to get help finding a solicitor] that is all ... The Red Cross sent me a list of solicitors but each time I called they keep requesting for [money] that I do not have... they only insist that they need their fee.” (C83, man, Birmingham)

“I did tell them about my case and they said they do not have a solicitor to offer me at that time. I got a solicitor through [a local legal firm] but she later on told me that she is no longer working with the legal aid. The Hope Project did not support me with a solicitor and my claim was refused by the Home Office and now I do not have any solicitor or someone to prepare me for my further claim... My fresh claim was refused and I am at the stage of appeal now... My friends gave me some numbers to call but whenever I called, they say they are busy.” (C194)

Hope staff we interviewed in early 2024 consistently described it becoming increasingly difficult to find new legal representation over the few years since the beginning of the project:

“the reduction in the amount of legal aid that’s available and the number of people who are providing legal aid-funded legal advice ... the model that we’ve got assumes that if somebody’s got a case, we’ve written a Client Care Letter, which outlines what that case is, they can take it to a solicitor and a solicitor will pick it up and will represent them. And increasingly we’re unable to find solicitors to take even strong cases because there’s just not enough solicitors out there... it’s definitely getting harder and harder to be able to get legal aid funded legal representation, for fresh claims especially. And that is really difficult because people come into us ... we say, yes, we’ve looked at your case... We think you’ve got a really strong case and a really strong claim that can be made for asylum. But if you need help finding a solicitor, it just goes nowhere... there’s a few people that we’re housing right now where we think they’ve got pretty strong cases. We think they will win in the end, but they just can’t get solicitors. So, they’re stuck for months and months, which is incredibly frustrating.” (S01, Hope staff)

“I think what’s happened over the course of the three years is that ... the capacity to get lawyers to take on those cases has become more and more limited each year... And legal aid capacity within the region has got a lot worse within the last three years. And therefore, people have been staying longer within the housing, unable to make a new application.” (S04, Hope staff)

As a result of this, the latter member of staff suggested that in the future Hope may need to seek funding to provide more direct legal representation for clients, because without this, “people can't necessarily take it forward themselves”. A partner organisation made the same suggestion, also highlighting the necessity of skilled legal representation given the complexity of many clients' cases:

“a lot of these clients need to have a lawyer to help them in their case. They will not be able to do it themselves. Even if somebody sits down with them and explains to them in their own language what the process is and ... how to go about it, because the system is complex and it's difficult to navigate, even if you are qualified, so I think funding that allows people to have access to lawyers is what is needed... you can have ... know your rights and leaflets and fact sheets and all of that, but that's not going to help people ... especially the clients who ... have complex cases already refused.” (S10, partner organisation staff)

Another staff member reported that the lack of legal aid was already making it necessary to extend their support for clients who they were not directly representing, but who required more support in gathering evidence if they were to have any hope of progressing their case:

“I think probably we're doing more ... supporting people to gather evidence than we did, which is coming back to the lack of legal aid. And it's our attempt to help people have better chances of getting legal aid by having a case ready or maybe submitting it themselves if they cannot find anybody... there's more focus on supporting people to prepare a case, and maybe providing them with more information about how they can build their case, so more training, more information sessions, or like document checking that we're doing, where we can't represent them, but they can't find anyone else... A lot of the time, people who we're helping with these things are people who've been here for quite a long time, so it might be [evidence to] show that they've actually been in the country during that time. And that's something that just takes ages, and it's quite difficult to navigate for some people just requesting information. And ... those people, also they're more likely to be older, and then they're less likely to be able to understand how to do these things. So ... you just know that if you don't, nothing will change for them.” (S09, Hope staff)

It was also emphasised that the need for additional resourcing was particularly acute for cases where reports were needed:

“because we can't get people with legal aid solicitors we end up representing people ourselves, which we're legally able to do, but we still need to get the capacity to do. But that means that when you need to commission country expert reports or mental health, psychiatric or psychological reports, they cost a lot of money, and we still need to get the money to do that. Again, funding is a bottleneck there that stops us from doing the things that we see need to be done.” (S01, Hope staff)

One Hope staff member suggested that there were additional, more complex issues beyond the lack of legal representation, which also called for consideration of a wider

range of routes for clients to regularise their status:

“Certain people's credibility has been damaged so severely that we don't know how to restore it... Also, certain cases are just not strong enough... we can't fight those cases. The only thing that person has is to wait a period of time and create a private life in the UK [application], and that's the 20-year rule... People have come to hit the 15-year mark, and they're coming to us now more and more... we're putting them back on track, back into the system ... and explaining to them that if they're not in the system, they won't get the status they require. And some don't want to be in the system, which is quite difficult.” (S02, Hope staff)

Partner organisations emphasised the enormous value of Hope's direct representation in supporting their clients:

“They mostly take on people's legal cases because ... these people are appeal rights exhausted; we've only very rarely been able to help any of them get back into the system because we can't do it ourselves. There is no other legal aid immigration service [locally] that can do that either... So ... until this partnership, there would be no way that we would have been able to assist or refer appeals rights exhausted people to any legal help, and very occasionally, we would be able to find a solicitor for somebody, but that has become almost impossible because the resources just aren't there... And actually, the other thing I would say is it is very clear that they really are experts in what they do. And so, we have huge respect for them.” (S12, staff of partner organisation)

“Through our partnership with Hope Project, we also benefit greatly from their experience with providing client care letters, so we have more knowledge about asylum cases and why they have been refused; what advice can we provide them? I know we are not legal advisors, we only comment on the client care letter. So, we usually encourage them to listen or look at the client care letter and follow any instructions the [Hope] legal team provides. [And we say]: ‘Just let us know if you find it difficult to obtain such documents, and then maybe we can support you.’ We wish to continue that partnership.” (S13, partner organisation staff)

This respect for the expertise of Hope was shared by other partners we interviewed, clearly enhanced through their proactive networking activities. This made Hope a valuable source of expertise for other organisations to consult with as well as refer to, as expressed by partners:

“I think I have an example of a case where three organizations from the steering group actually worked together ... Hope gave us also some ideas on how to go about referring to other external organizations to support the client as best as we could. And that resulted in a very concerted effort to help that client, and she finally got her refugee status, and she's now moving on with her life and everything. So, I think the lesson was that when we collaborate and when we have we exchange information in a timely manner, and we are on top of things, then we can actually change people's lives.” (S10, partner organisation staff)

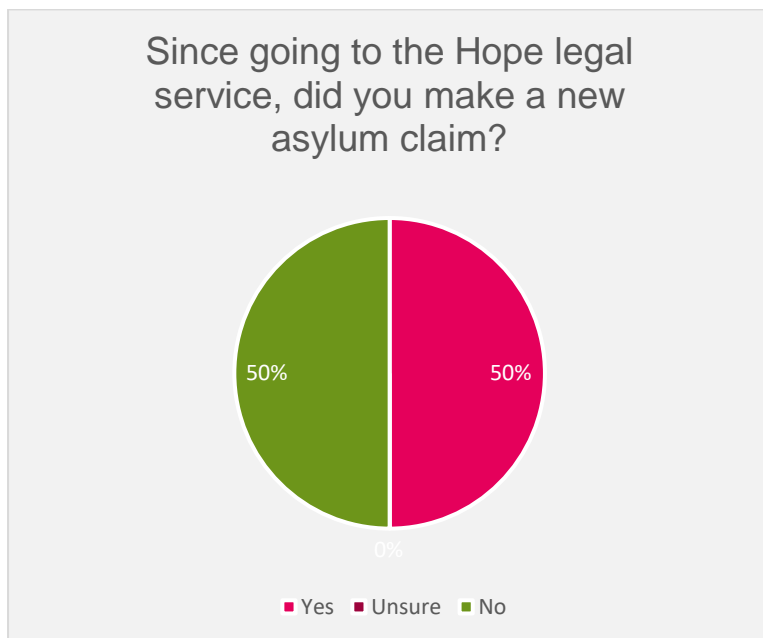
“I think the leadership that's provided in Hope is really first-class ... the style of leadership, the kind of leadership, and the quality of leadership they offer. And I think that's impressive. And that leadership is both in terms of having an enviable level of expertise. They really are specialist immigration advisors in a way that I think people in the sector have massive respect for. Still, also they understand how to bring groups together, lead them and have us working in an effective partnership... And that takes other skills that many immigration practitioners don't have... And I think that is quite remarkable and unusual. And I suspect that's the ingredient that makes them as successful as they are.” (S12 partner staff)

This emphasises Hope’s added value in strengthening the wider sector.

B1b. Further submissions

Overall, 50% of survey respondents said they had submitted a new application for asylum since coming into contact with the Hope legal service. This enables us to project an estimated 233 new applications over the first five years of the current Hope legal service. Taking into account the desperate legal position of many clients at the point they are referred to Hope projects, and the frequent difficulties securing evidence for a new claim, this is a very significant outcome toward enabling people to reengage with the asylum process.

Figure 3: Further submissions by Hope clients



Of the 44 clients who answered No to this question across the second and third rounds of the survey, 23 were already awaiting the outcome of an asylum application at the time that they received advice from Hope. This means that 76% of clients who were surveyed either already had a claim underway or submitted a new claim following advice from Hope.

The survey findings also reveal that many clients who already had an asylum claim under consideration at the time they came to Hope reported putting in a new application after receiving advice from Hope. This can be explained by the difficulties proving asylum claims and the prevalence of poor advice previously received by many clients from other providers, which contributed to many of the claims clients had previously submitted failing, and then new claims being submitted following advice from Hope. Or, in some cases clients reported withdrawing their active claim and submitting a new claim following Hope advice.

Advice regarding what evidence to gather and how to frame it was mentioned by some clients in interviews as being particularly helpful, as illustrated by the quotations below:

“[The Hope advisor] used to advise me and provide information concerning my case, information about the Home Office and how to answer questions when asked.” (C194, Ghana, no interpreter needed)

“When I am giving the witness statement, they told me to be specific about the events that happened. ‘Don’t speculate about the things that you cannot be sure about.’ This kind of things that I didn’t know about before. I was going to every detail which wasn’t important to be in the statement. So that is one thing. I understood about how to give a witness statement and also about why the previous times my claim has been refused.” (C128, Sri Lanka, with interpreter)

“[The Hope advisor] really helped me. She advised on the documents I would need to carry on with my case. Actually, other solicitors have collected money for me and promising to extend my stay in the UK but did not do anything until my visa expired. And [the Hope advisor] helped me in writing to the schools I attended when I came to the UK for them to confirm that I schooled here and those are the documents I used for my application.” (C109, Jamaica, no interpreter needed)

The latter client reported in a subsequent interview:

“From the last time we discussed, I was given three years [leave to remain] by the Home Office... the assistance of the Hope Project was very helpful in me getting my papers from the Home Office” (C109)

There was also evidence from partner organisations of the client care letters provided by Hope proving useful in directing them to the evidence they could gather to help their client’s case:

“It’s different from one case to another. But it’s also good for us when we look at the client care letter; we track the clients’ progress. Suppose he needs any support obtaining documents, for example.” (S13, partner organisation staff)

Judgements in the UK asylum system can be unpredictable, making the provision of advice very challenging. This is demonstrated by a report from one client, who

described succeeding in their case despite advice from Hope that their evidence was not suitable:

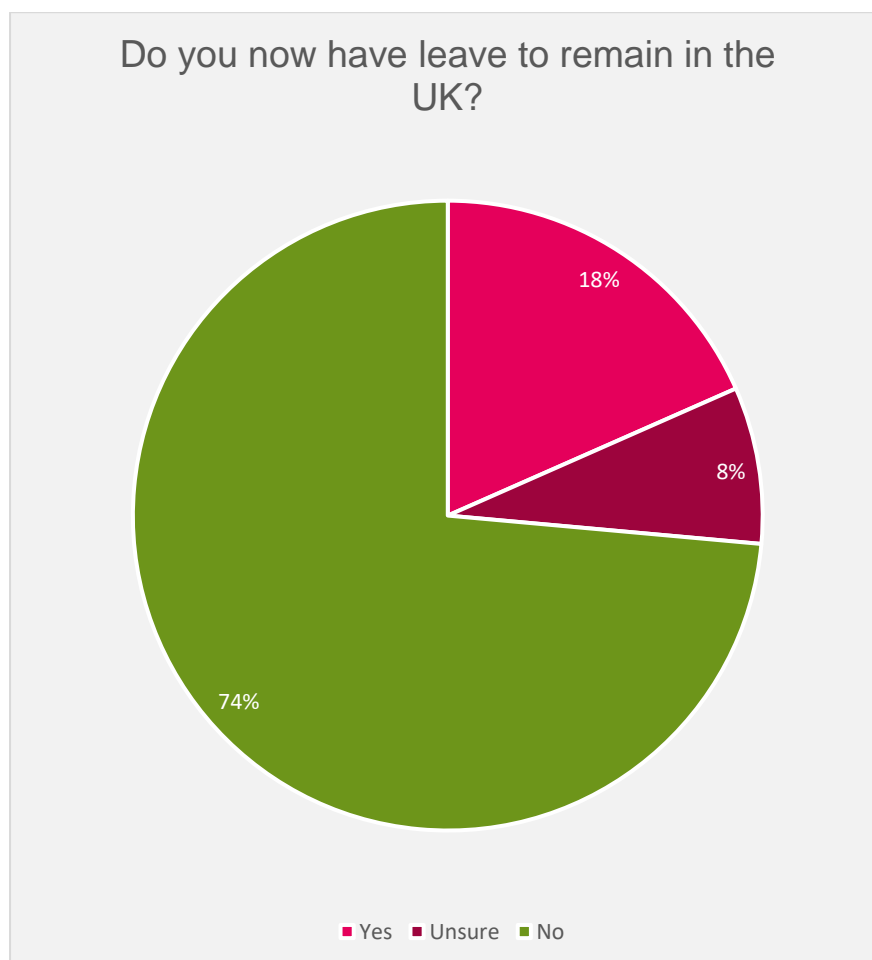
“The same evidence [the Hope advisor] called fake is what I sent to the Home Office via my solicitor and after seven months, I got my leave to remain. That is why I say nobody knows what happens with the cases at the Home Office, whatever happens at the Home Office is beyond our understanding, so there is no need castigating people and their evidence whenever they are before you.”
(C103)

It’s worth noting that although this client has some criticisms of the advice they received from Hope, they express the view that it is the inconsistencies in Home Office decision making that makes such advice impossible to give with certainty.

B1c. Securing leave to remain

18% of those surveyed in the second and third rounds – 16 people – reported having secured leave to remain since coming to Hope.

Figure 4: Grants of leave to remain for Hope clients



This is consistent with Hope's own monitoring figures – as of 27 March 2024, 65 of the 364 clients seen by the legal service since 1 June 2020 had secured some form of leave to remain, in most cases taking the form of refugee status. This enables us to project 83 clients making this full transition over the course of the course of the first 5 years of the legal service (and likely more due to the time some cases take to be prepared and then resolved by the courts, with some clients who registered with the Hope advice service in 2020 still awaiting the outcome of their case in 2023). Again, given the challenges faced by the client group Hope serves this is a highly important and impressive outcome. A final short survey in the final year of this evaluation (and after the publication of this report) will provide further validation of the number of clients who have secured leave to remain after accessing Hope's advice.

There was a widespread feeling among clients we interviewed that Hope's involvement in their case increased the likelihood of success. Multiple clients spoke about this having a very positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

"If I had the support the Hope project is offering me now from my previous solicitor then my application for leave for remain wouldn't have been refused. There is a big and positive difference now as compared to the past." (C02, Ethiopia, original claim 2015)

"The first day I met the solicitor assigned to me by the Hope Project, [named advisor], I was so happy after our first encounter, and I said in my mind that if I had this lady in my first application, the outcome would have been positive, and I would have had my leave to remain the UK by now." (C65, Cote D'Ivoire, original claim 2015)

"Am expecting good results but the problem I got here is the evidence required of me that needs to come from my country and I have no way to get that from my country." (C43, Iraq, original claim 2016)

"I'm sure that hopefully when we will, when we will get documents from Home Office, then [Hope advisor] will guide us properly, then what shall we do next. Because so many ladies in Hope project they have got their documents and, they said it, because [Hope advisor] advised them very good and she's a straightforward woman" (C89, Pakistan, original claim 2010)

Clients' hope and confidence is an extremely delicate element in the asylum-seeking process – without some hope of success clients may lack motivation to pursue their case, but overconfidence may leave clients mentally unprepared should their case be rejected.

Some clients reported succeeding in their asylum claims and gave significant credit to Hope for this, and in one case reported further support with family reunion:

"[The Hope advisor] took my case and prepared the new statement and submitted, then chased it until a decision was made. I was granted leave to remain and she went further to connect me to my family that I am struggling to bring over here." (C102, Afghanistan, direct representation by Hope)

"I received my refugee status ... a month ago... the advice really helped in my case ... because the Hope Project advised me to get the letter from the GP and the community." (C02, Ethiopia, first claim 2015, needed an interpreter)

"The Hope Project is best in the world because they changed my life. I had nothing, but now "Al hamdu lillahi" [praises to God] they placed me where I am today so I am hundred percent happy for the Hope Project... They gave me a solicitor and the solicitor fixed my case and after five to six months I was granted leave to remain in the UK." (C111, Afghanistan, first claim 2015, needed an interpreter)

This was further supported by a partner organisation:

"Of the clients that we have referred to Hope Projects, the majority of them have had their status resolved and actually have been granted leave to remain either because Hope Projects offered them a bit of respite with a house, a room, and some money. Then they were able to work on their case. And it was a wrong decision by the Home Office, so they overturned it. Or because the legal team at Hope Projects actually guided them and supported them in their application, and obviously, they did a really good job, and people got leave to remain or refugee status." (S10, partner organisation staff)

Some other cases highlighted clients still struggling to progress their case, even where they had a solicitor:

"I had a solicitor who left me and handed my case to another lady who is very difficult to contact.... I got a solicitor that they [Hope] are linked to... The only problem I got is that of my solicitor not responding to my messages on time" (C105, Afghanistan, direct representation by Hope)

"The solicitors [that I found with the assistance of Hope] were not helpful because they were not doing anything good to me... I recently got a new solicitor." (C32, Iraq, first claim 2009)

"From when I made the claim, everything has been slow and I don't know why. I have provided them with all the new evidences including that of the experts and I am waiting. I have moved to three different solicitors through the legal aids still yet nothing has been done." (C48, Ethiopia, first claim 2015)

Furthermore, this latter client said they had not sought further advice from Hope, because in their view, "the Hope Project is only helping people who are homeless". It is worth noting that this client registered with Hope early in the project's life, and Hope responded to these early evaluation findings by producing leaflets in multiple languages to promote greater understanding of the services they offer.

A series of supplementary interviews with clients in 2023 explored how to best manage the information provided to the clients so that they have a better understanding of what Hope can offer and what they themselves can do. Interpreters were already provided

but it had been suggested as part of the first round of the evaluation that also having written materials translated into the client's own language would be beneficial. One client also suggested a follow-up call where the Hope team can check the client's level of comprehension. The confusion clients experience is also related to the fact that they have interacted with different organisations over time which have diverse aims and purposes.

"Some people like me come from middle east and everything is different. Language is different, culture is different. Everything! We need someone who translates, interpreter. Need someone to call or be beside them [in the meeting]. Many people don't know English. Are shy. Don't want to ask. Don't know. People will choose their language because they prefer to read information easily in their language. They need more than written information; they need someone to call and ask if people understand. They need to make sure they understood. If they understood everything is fine. Hope project is completely different from Home Office so they need to understand what Hope does."

It is also worth bearing in mind here that translation is not only about words but also concepts, further emphasising the importance of checking that everything has been understood even where it has been provided in the client's first language. The same participant discussed the importance of allowing time for clients to build trust because they have approached Hope after having had a refusal from the Home Office.

"Some people don't want to talk because they don't have trust. ... Because whoever come to Hope project, they are refusals. They have had a lot of bad experiences. They don't trust. For example, me, I see Home Office as enemy. Any time I see they are treating like I am enemy for them. ... But they don't help, it is like acting. Hope will get someone who is refused. Before had bad experience. They don't have good feeling about people. If you are giving the trust, ok, look we are going to help you."

Considerable development was evidenced in this aspect of the project's provision over the first three years, including changes to the format of the Client Care Letter, to highlight the most important information for the client inside a coloured box, informational leaflets in multiple languages, and an extended process of checking back with clients if they had understood fully what had been communicated.

B2. Promoting clients' understanding of their legal case

A Hope staff member explained the importance of helping clients to understand their case more fully:

"People are in a system that they don't understand, that they're lost within it. And we're trying to help them navigate it, trying to help them find a way through it. We talk about people taking control of their cases, and they can only do that if they understand" (S01, Hope staff)

And as another member of staff said:

“I think education is the key, really, because a lot of people that come to us ... they don't know why they're refused even. So, by giving them that information, sometimes that is empowering to say: 'I'm in this situation, but I now feel that I have the hope of moving on because I understand why I've been refused and what I can do now.' Whereas before they may have just been floating along, relying on their solicitors who weren't telling them what they were doing or how the system works. So, I think ... access to information is really important and in ... the language that they speak as well... Sometimes we've come across people who've been refused several times, and they think they've been refused for a certain reason, and they're completely wrong about it. And once they've realized why they've actually been refused, they can then go and address that and then overturn the refusal. But without that knowledge, they wouldn't know how to do it... Legal advice is more than information; it's also how to present your case.” (S09, Hope staff)

It proved challenging to fully and reliably assess clients' understanding of their case, and consequently the extent of Hope's success in helping clients to understand their case more fully, because many clients gave only brief accounts in interviews of things as technical legal questions regarding their case, or the nature of the evidence that was needed for them to submit a new asylum application. It was not always possible to ascertain whether this indicated a lack of understanding, difficulties articulating the details, or simply a reluctance to discuss in detail issues that may have deeply traumatic associations. Insofar as was possible, we nevertheless explored clients' understanding of their case through comparison of their accounts during interviews with the information provided in their client care letter.

B2a. Assessing understanding through client care letters and client interviews

Hope's approach to client care letters has undergone considerable development during the project, as part of reflective practice informed in part by early findings from this evaluation. This section aims to present this approach over the course of its evolution.

The client care letters examine all the details of the case history so far and explain the findings of the tribunal decision so as to identify where the evidential gaps lie. They also provide contact details for the advisor and explain the advisor's role at Hope. The law requires that for further submissions to amount to a fresh claim, clients must produce new evidence and there must be a real chance of winning, and client care letters provide an important summary to help solicitors judge the strength of a client's case. They also have a potential role in clarifying issues for the client, to help them take ownership over their case. The evaluation treated the client care letters both as part of the toolkit by which Hope seeks to help clients understand their case, and a reliable legal summary which we could compare with client interviews to check the extent of their understanding.

In the first round of data collection in 2021, nine client care letters produced by the Hope legal service were selected for comparison with clients' interview accounts, using criteria set out below, in order to assess clients' understanding of their case, and to look for evidence of the extent to which the Hope legal service had helped to

strengthen this understanding. In the second round, in 2022, more than 40 client care letters were reviewed prior to interviews (some of these clients were not subsequently interviewed), and this review was used to inform targeted questions to explore clients' understanding of their case. Following the second round of interviews, eleven clients were selected for comparison between the account provided in the interview and their respective letter.

First Round (2021)

From the first round of the evaluation, the client care letters reviewed were of a very high standard. It was easy for the evaluation team to identify the legal issues and to get a sense of the case history. Some client care letters provided detail of the *new* evidence that might be required, but not all of them. Case prospects were not always easy to extract from the summaries. This feedback was used by Hope staff to further develop the format of the client care letters, including adding a box with the information the client needs to know.

Relevant sections of interview transcripts were assessed for the extent to which the client has shown they are able to:

- a) Explain the legal position with a degree of clarity and confidence
- b) Identify the prospects of success
- c) Identify the grounds to challenge the existing decision
- d) Show an awareness of the next steps required
- e) Or if they suggest little to no understanding of the current legal position

From the nine interviews included for comparison with client care letters in the first round there was a mixed picture. Most of the participants had awareness of the broad legal issues in their case but they did not always appreciate the precise legal issue(s) that needed to be addressed for a successful outcome.

Transcript analysis showed that participants struggled to distinguish overall fairness from legality and when asked about their understanding of the case they would consequently report that they could not understand the decision. In some cases, clients identified specific barriers to understanding such as lack of language support:

“I was given most of the letters in English and I could not understand what was in those letters. Also, I don't know why my application was rejected. *Interviewer*: Now, how much control have you got over your case and life? *Client*: No control over my life, I am hopeless and same thing to my case.” (C32, Iraq, first claim 2016)

In some cases, on closer inspection it became apparent that the client did not accept the decision and struggled to understand why they had not been believed. The legal issues of the case were often difficult to detach from this pervasive sense of unfairness. This is an important finding in itself, regarding the difficulty of supporting clients to understand their case in specifically *legal* terms. This was taken into account in subsequent rounds of interviews, in order to frame questions to tease apart the client's feelings about their experience of the asylum process and their factual understanding

of the legal reasons for their refusal and Hope's advice about their options and what evidence is required.

Most participants recognised that further submissions required them to produce new evidence but were less certain about what the evidence might be. For example, client C48 showed an awareness that they needed evidence and said they felt in control of their case. The client care letter suggested the case had limited prospects for success and set out the evidence that would be needed, but the client did not show an awareness of the specific evidence that was needed. In another case, the client was under the impression that evidence was being gathered by another organisation, but seems to lack knowledge about the stage this process is at or what they need to do to progress it:

“I have asked the Red Cross to go and trace my family and I am waiting for that document from them which seems not forthcoming” (C10, male, not requiring interpreter)

To some extent such uncertainty is understandable as decisions often suggest appellants produce evidence that is simply impossible to obtain, for example proof that there are no family members in a particular country (as was the case for client C10). This led some clients to struggle with how to implement the advice they had received from Hope:

“I can't have the new evidence now. For example [a Hope advisor] asked me to go to the GP I was with then in 2007, but then I was not attending the GP surgery because I was out of the system.” (C63, male, requiring interpreter)

Such an account raises questions of whether all clients are feeling able to raise such concerns with Hope advisors, where they could presumably be addressed, or if some clients may be going away from Hope with advice they feel they cannot implement but without having raised this with their advisor. This finding was responded to by Hope through the development of further check-ins with clients about whether the information they had been provided had been understood, and whether they were clear on the next steps they needed to take. The priority given to this by Hope advisors came through very strongly in interviews with Hope advisors in 2024.

In some other cases we reviewed in the early period of the project, Hope clients showed a partial awareness of their case, but seemed unaware of the need for new evidence. For example, C87 correctly outlined three grounds for his refusal, concerning contradictions over the date of his father's death, his tribal affiliation, and a delay in making the application. However, the letter also included other grounds that were given for their refusal, including adverse credibility resulting from the journey to the UK, which C87 did not mention in his interview. They also did not seem to have recognised the need to provide fresh evidence for a successful claim and therefore may have an elevated view of their chance of success.

Only one interview in the first round demonstrated that the client understood fully what evidence was required and how they would obtain that evidence. This did not

necessarily mean that other clients did not understand, but if they did this was not clearly articulated in the interview.

Three participants were unable to articulate their legal position with certainty and admitted to not knowing their current status (C33, C75, C65). There are two possible explanations for this i) lack of knowledge, ii) difficulties articulating the absence of status. It may not be reasonable to expect a participant to refer to themselves using legal terminology i.e. as 'refused asylum seeker'.

The crucial distinction between legal and factual/evidential issues was not well-understood. This is understandable as cases are often complex and refusals can highlight different issues, but it was surprising how few respondents could articulate the main reason for their refusal. For example, the client care letter for C02 confirmed that their case centred on the risk of persecution resulting from membership of a particular organisation. Unless it could be shown that this group was proscribed by the government the case prospects appear weak. C02 made some general observations about their legal case, explaining their understanding of the reasons for their refusal as follows:

“the first reason was that I did not have a body scar showing that I was detained and assaulted in Ethiopia. The second reason was that is that my case is not strong enough.” (C02)

Yet they did not mention the issue of their organisation membership at all, meaning that C02 may have an unrealistic view as to the prospects of success.

Such findings from the first round of the evaluation prompted reflections from Hope advisors that the most important information for clients might be getting lost among other information that needed to be included in the client care letter, and this informed a change to the format of the client care letter to highlight the key points for the client inside a green box, the significance of which could be pointed out to the client by the advisor.

Second Round (2022)

As part of the second round of the evaluation we assessed a further 11 client care letters, subjecting them to the same analytical comparison with these clients' interview transcripts as that adopted in the first round, and with the addition of two further codes, to identify:

- a) the client's own subjective assessment of their understanding
- b) any negative perceptions of advice provided by Hope

Overall, comparing the eleven clients included in the second round in 2022 with those included in the first round in 2021, clients in the second round appeared to have a better understanding of their case, with six showing some evidence of a strong, nuanced understanding, compared to none in the first round. Four explicitly recognised the role of Hope in providing this, as demonstrated by the following:

“[My solicitor got] a lot of documents specially about FGM ... because my child ... will stay in XXX [and that] is one of the countries that FGM is not allowed so she can go back to our country even though it's not allowed. But people practice it there behind the government. So, [the solicitor] brought ... a lot of reports from... NHS... UNHCR... and UNICEF... Also, regarding the opposition groups she brought so many... documents to support my case.” (C41)

This client is clear about the two aspects of her case that need further evidence. She does have a solicitor from Hope and they are clearly helping her as the case is very complex. She is acknowledging the help she has received from Hope. It is not clear she fully understands the prospects of her case succeeding which Hope identify as good. She understands the country guidelines have not been adhered to.

“Interviewer: Can you tell me why the Home Office refused your application at the first instance?

Because they don't believe in my case. They think I have a family in XXXX which I don't.” (C37)

He understands that much will depend on where his family are and whether they can support him if returned to his country of origin. Also, will he be able to obtain a valid identification card.

“I do not remember all of the reasons [for the initial refusal] but a few of them [were] that my country is safe and that I should return back home and that I came to the UK as a child and that I can now support myself... I made a fresh claim which was again refused and an appeal was made to the fresh claim before the leave was granted.

Interviewer: In the course of submitting your applications, what were the supporting evidence that you gave?

Client: There were so many things which I can't recall now. I had evidence to my relationship with friends here in the UK and that of my attending school here and how I have lived all my life here.” (C102)

This client received refugee status after an appeal on a fresh claim so Hope have evidently helped him as this was before the current guidance on returns. He seems to have a good understanding of the additional evidence required and managed to obtain that. It is understandable that he cannot recall all the detail of his case.

“[Hope] told me that I need 20 years.... They asked me for some letters or maybe church friends... I have proof I stayed in UK, my friend at church and my passport” (C30)

The client clearly understands now that the 20-year route is the only viable option. Her asylum case will not succeed. She is no longer talking about her asylum case as a route to remain so this suggests she is realistic about her prospects and knows what evidence she needs to obtain.

The number of clients who were assessed to have a very limited understanding of their case halved from four in the first round to two in the second. In one of the two interviews we reviewed where clients really seemed to be struggling to articulate their case, there was evidence of significant mental health issues that could impact on comprehension.

B2b. Impact of client care letters and other measures to improve understanding

In addition to the three rounds of client interviews, six supplementary interviews were carried out in 2023 with six clients to focus in greater depth on the experience and impact of the client care letters and overall communication with Hope Projects on clients' understanding of their case.

Because in all the cases clients were asked to reflect retrospectively about their experience of client care letters, which were provided to them some months or even years ago, it was not possible to obtain very specific and detailed comments about their initial experiences. Initial plans to discuss the changes to the client letters proved difficult because the client care letters can be discussed only when they contain the full information, and so it was not possible to provide a generic example of a letter in the new format.

Memory of the client care letter ranged from not being remembered at all to only a very general memory. No client was able to locate a copy easily.

“I do not remember much from the client letter and I do not know where I have put it.” (C194)

Where clients did remember the client care letter, they explained how important the letter was in understanding their case:

“The first meeting is just talking and then they give you help to write letters and access help... The client letter they give me was very helpful. Hope Project helped to apply again to make my case stronger, to find where is the weak in my case to apply for fresh claim and to make my case stronger ... The first meeting, [Hope advisor], she was the solicitor... They say it so you can do the right [thing]. She has spoken to me ... saying why you do that when you can do this one? Why do the mistake when you can do right? Because of her, I fixed so many ideas that I was doing wrong in my head. Because of that lady I fixed it to make it the right way. Since 2015 I write to so many solicitor but none helped me make the case the right way. They all asked for money 2 grand [£2,000], 3 grand [£3,000]. So [name of Hope legal adviser] told me the right way, which solicitor to speak to, so this was my first meeting. Hope Project they read the story because they say they can help you or not... they explained to me my case. They showed me the mistakes and they showed me the way to fix that... Before that I did not understand, I did not speak English well. They explain me the right way to fix the mistakes in my ideas.” (C150)

“It’s like all the history and everything we received in 2017. So, she [Hope adviser] write all the story and the previous thing in the letter. It was not the client letter but we signed and she told us she is our solicitor. They first phone you and check the case is strong enough so then they can decide if they can do the further submission. So, she phoned and told us there are so many things that are done wrongly, so she explained everything of what the mistakes [were] and what steps we should take to improve things. So, for improvement we need a new statement, the medical reports. So, before she start, she explained everything so we learn what the mistakes was on the past. So, wrong solicitor wasted time. She explained everything before starting the interview so we are mentally prepared of what steps it will take. And after that interview, step by steps ... giving us the proper information and advice... Every time I met she [Hope adviser] I learned from her... So [she said] don’t worry, I know these are difficult things and you have had a hard time, and when I am taking interview it was difficult. She prepared us for everything. Giving positive points of view. She explains that you need to tell the Home Office what happened to you and not what other people have said. You can only talk about your experience. So I learned I am doing the wrong thing. My solicitor never teach me what I am doing wrong.” (C89)

As these two extracts above illustrate, the information provided by Hope Projects was essential not only to understand the case but also to learn about the legal process and the best way to engage with the legal process. The learning of the legal process could encourage the clients to take on more responsibility about their case and to use the knowledge in accessing other rights in the UK. The legal process is not easily understood by non-professionals, especially by those who come from other countries and who have limited knowledge of the official language. The clients found the explanations very helpful in a context where other solicitors could not help them understand their case. The two accounts above also highlight the value of being heard, a sign of respect which the clients had not encountered in the past. Respect was essential to create trust and encourage clients to engage with the process:

“They do not waste time. They go to the point... I remember when I had solicitor, they did not know what it was about ... but [Hope advisor] read it and she knew what it was about. So, she said this is what we need to do and the account is going to be this. I remember they explained which part we had ... it is going to be strong to fight with that... So they explain what I need... so the process was good so after that they said send to us to check. Always the process of checking was a very good part of that and I liked that... When I compare Hope is very remarkable.” (C 71)

“My roommate is worried about telling their story. But I have no trouble talking. Sometimes very scared, even me because we don’t want to talk about this because of previous time with a lawyer ... But they are very kind and they are very human, they are acting as human beings. Actually, Hope ... deserved name because they always give you hope. It is very deserved.” (C 71)

Different forms of communications (via letter, in person, via email or WhatsApp) were reported; they all had their value and also reflected client's circumstances (e.g. if they did not have money to travel):

"Some people came to the house and they explained what we need to do and what they want to do. And explanation to us. It was good and clear and complete explanation and it was enough." (C156)

"We did not have much money to travel so instead of going to the office we used WhatsApp. And it helped." (C 71)

Some clients were also provided with phones by Hope, in situations where this was necessary to maintain effective contact.

One important part of the communication was Hope Projects workers taking into account the mental state during the exchange of the information.

"The situation is not easy sometimes. You have to help yourself through life and it is depressed, depressed, depressed. So they [Hope], helped me at the time and everything they said... I did understand them." (C194)

"During difficult times they came to the house. Whenever you want to talk about difficult subject they came to the house. We went downstairs and close the door and private thing. I have done this, it was so good. They are listening. If they can they give you advise they do, and if they cannot they will refer you somewhere else" (C 71)

As the above account illustrates, part of what was being communicated aimed at overcoming negative states and being more proactive in their cases. Sometimes, a firmer language was required to encourage clients to participate in the process more effectively. It would seem that the communication was adapting to the needs of the clients because this firmness was perceived positively by the clients:

"She is tough but very nice. Before [Hope advisor] we had so many solicitors, from our own country and they did so bad that we had to wait long time and had many bad experience. And then we met [Hope advisor] and we found she is a honest person. Hard working and did a great job. It was hard but she was great. Before that other solicitor ask if you have money. Without money they can't do anything for you. Helped with many different things" (C89)

We also found some clients with very limited understanding of their case, or indeed their current legal status. Seven clients (8% of respondents) across the second and third rounds of the survey responded to the question 'Do you now have leave to remain in the UK' with the answer 'Unsure' – it should be remembered here that these round of the survey were collected verbally, with additional explanation where needed, reducing the probability that these answers reflected confusion about the meaning of the question. This is supported by interview responses in which some clients expressed continuing confusion about their case.

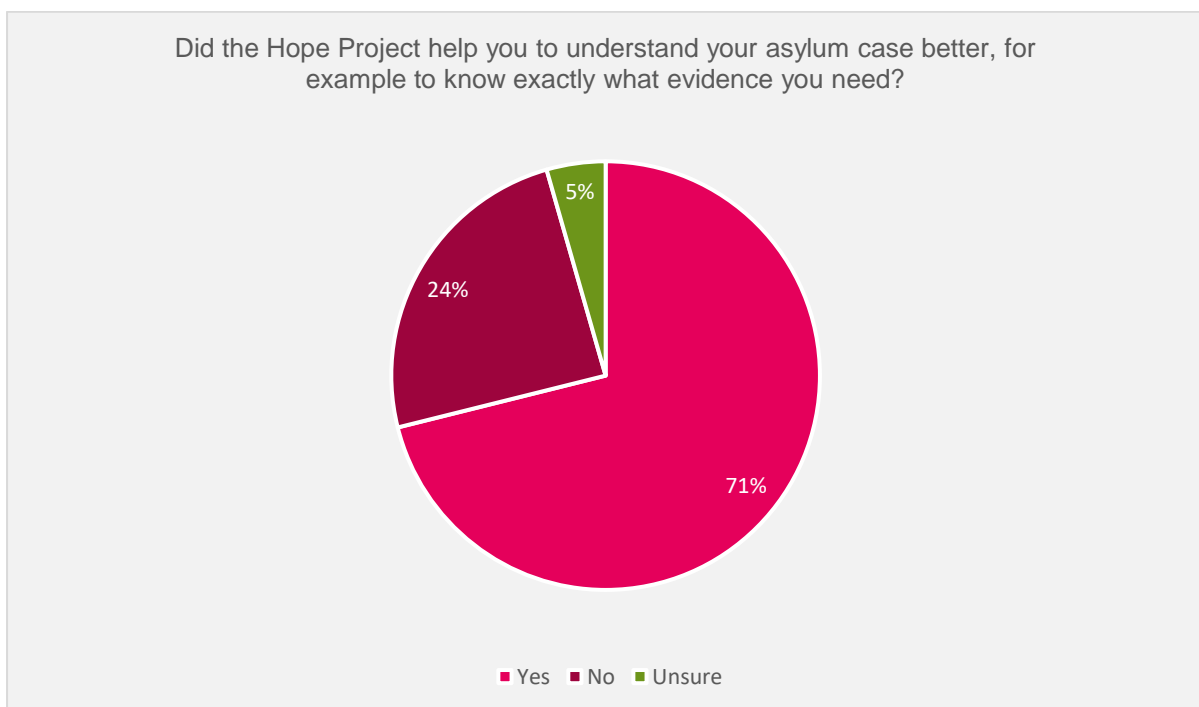
“I don’t really know the position of my case at the moment. The solicitor that I got, I am not hearing anything from them.” (C150, male)

Overall however, the written and other forms of communication with Hope were perceived as very beneficial in understanding and engaging with the legal process.

B2c. Client assessment of the impact of Hope on their understanding

A question was added to the third round of the client survey in 2023, asking clients to self-assess whether Hope Projects had helped them to understand their asylum case better, for example to know exactly what evidence they needed.

Figure 5: Self-assessed impact of Hope on understanding one’s case



This allows us to project 330 people with self-assessed improved understanding over the 5 years of the project. This was also supported by the accounts of many participants in interviews:

“[The Hope advisor] explained everything ... the case and ... the chances of success.” (C41)

“They also enlightened on my rights in the UK, and many other things I need to know about my case... When I came to the Hope Project, I had newly claimed asylum and had no confidence then and I was scared of being new in the country. I was scared because I was new in the county and did not know what to do or who to talk to, The Hope Project assisted me in building that confidence and prepared me for my case. They also taught me my rights in the UK.” (C143)

“[The Hope advisor] helps me a lot in explaining the law and what to do and that gives me hope.” (C175)

“I can see a difference now because I had no knowledge about my case in the beginning than now that I am with the hope project. They have made me to have a proper understanding of my case.” (C46)

“I received more explanation. They could open my eyes. I could find out more, I could learn more. More legal advice.” (C104)

“Hopefully we will [have] success because she’s [Hope advisor] doing very good like explaining the things which we haven’t explained last time.” (C89)

“You know the UK laws are strange to me, so all the information and updates of the laws given by [Hope advisor] on how to go about my case was very helpful.” (C109)

“I was so ignorant about the information that I could find. Because this thing was very new to me and I didn’t even know that I am able to, being an international student, to claim asylum. And so there was limited information that was available to me. So therefore, my claiming asylum was delayed about three months... Throughout the years I was with two legal representatives, but I really got to know the real work of the asylum case work, writing your statements and all that through the Hope Project. They really went to the very details of my case that the previous representative had failed to identify in my case. I think it was really helpful.” (C128)

“The Hope Project really helped me understand my case especially when my case was liquidized, they called the Home Office and got all information concerning my case.” (C181)

“I am being advised by Freedom from Torture and the solicitor given to us by the Hope Project. At this point, I am still preparing through the assistance of the Hope Project and Freedom from Torture and waiting for my substantive interview.” (C175, female)

“The assistance of helping me know what to say was really good news and this helped me so much in my case. They took my file to the Home Office and gave me feedback on what was happening and directed me on what to do with my case in court... I got the papers just two months ago and I am looking for a job now.” (C67, male)

Together, this provides strong evidence both of the difficulties facing asylum applicants, both in understanding the system and their own case, and the significant achievements Hope Projects has made in supporting many clients to understand this issues more fully and accurately.

B2d. Client empowerment and ownership over their case

The priority Hope gives to helping clients to understand their case is rooted in the idea that this can contribute to their empowerment. In this respect interviews gave a mixed

picture, demonstrating again the challenges associated with understanding one's case and further barriers translating this into a sense of ownership and empowerment. Some clients expressed confidence in Hope but little sense of agency:

"I don't know what they're doing, but they just take my information from the Home Office to check what was going on in the case..."

Int: Do you know what stages your case went through and things like that?

Client: No.

Int: OK, and do you know what information or what evidence do you need to provide?

Client: No" (C67)

"I got my solicitor before going there, and since I needed more advice, they gave me [Hope advisor] but it was not good between me and her because she was pushing me too much." (C103)

"I called the Home Office to know why my application was denied but they didn't tell me anything. I went to the solicitor and they said they can't do [any]thing for free... I have no idea why my application was refused... I don't know anything [about the grounds on which they appealed], because I don't have a caseworker and a solicitor, so I don't know anything... I have not taken any decision because I have not got the status." (C105)

"The first step is we have to do all the statements ... like ... in the previous case, the things we have not mentioned, we have to properly explain those things. So, at the moment I just know that we are doing this step and then hopefully when I finished the statement then she [the Hope advisor] will tell me what next time we will do... Hopefully we will [have] success because she's doing very good like explaining the things which we haven't explained last time." (C89)

"I don't know how long my case will take and if you got any idea then tell me." (C194)

However, some other clients were very explicit in describing Hope's support as empowering:

"The first [legal] representative I had [before coming to Hope]... it [was] a very controlling environment when you see the representative. It [was] very controlling. You can't ask questions; you are told off... She is the one that knows everything, she is the one who knows every available option to me. She is the one controlling. That is why I said a controlling environment, so that was the bad experience. I couldn't compare the legal service which I received before. Once I came to the Hope Project I can see clearly this distinguished attitudes of how to give legal advice. When they [Hope] first accepted my case, they wrote to me to get the client care report from previous... so everything done

accordingly. They got my full bundle which I didn't have with me. From the courts as well, which I couldn't get it... I had my say, my input on what I want to do. It is more like partnership. I felt that, really, my voice is being heard. Which I didn't have before. I felt that I am receiving a service from Hope Project.” (C128)

“They [Hope] can't go as far as taking your files to the Home Office. They can't do that. Or picking your files up at the Home Office. But the best they could do, that's what they are doing. They are making sure... they are pushing you where you know that yes you could get help. You could fight this case. You know sometimes you are a human and when you have a little bit of help, you feel relaxed. Sometimes we need to be pushed to do some things. We feel no, we are scared, and they are telling you your laws, your rights. The problem, I think, with asylum seekers is we don't know our rights. So, we feel everything is wrong, everything we do, we are not supposed to do them. No, no, we are illegal, so we are not supposed to do this. So, the Hope Project, they are making you know that you have a right... I had a lot of controls. I could talk to my solicitor about issues. She could tell me. I could ask the questions because I was scared. I don't know if I should ask this question or not ask this question. I could ask questions about my case, and she tells me whatever I want to know... They really helped me understand my case and understand when an asylum process is and understand my rights and understand ... the things we go through during the asylum process. Like things we could ask and things we should know... Sometimes they put us into seminars [about the asylum process].” (C143)

These accounts demonstrate considerable flexibility and adaptability in Hope's approach, but also the challenges meeting all clients expectations for regular communication with limited resources. In some cases, there may also be a tendency for Hope to be blamed for delays in the process over which they have no control.

B2e. Learning and innovation in Hope communication practices

A Hope staff member reflected on the importance of communication, the learning and development achieved since 2020, and the need to develop this further:

“I think that we've begun to understand the importance of communication. So, I think when we started [we focused] on being correct and so long as we understood someone's case and we could be clear and precise in how we explained it to somebody, we were confident that they then understood it. And I don't think at the beginning everyone did. So, I think that we've begun to realize that you need to have different approaches for different people and you need to just be clear that what as a guarantee that somebody understands at the end of it. And I think that's still an ongoing thing. You're dealing with people who are often very stressed and very traumatized. And what you think has been clear actually needs to be clarified. And so, when you go back to someone a month later and say, and talk to them, what they got out of that conversation is completely different to what you thought you'd got across. So, I think we're continually learning the importance of communication, and I think we're better at it now than we were when we started, but I think we've still got a way to go.” (S01, Hope staff member)

They expressed the expectation that communication would become even more challenging and important in future:

“I think that that will never stop needing to be better at communicating with people who are who are traumatized and desperate because even more so than now, that will be central. If you think that the authorities are the people who are going to detain you and remove you to Rwanda, then it's absolutely essential that you're able to very quickly build relationships of trust with people, or they just won't speak to you and you won't be able to help them... Even if technically you've got the knowledge and the information that will help them if you haven't built that relationship of trust, you can't use it.” (S01, Hope staff)

Another staff member described the practical steps the legal service has taken as a result of this learning:

“We've changed a lot of things... I would start with practically when NTU first came [to begin the evaluation] back with the language that we use in our letters. So, we have practically changed the language we use; we've simplified it, and we've changed the client care letter to make it a slightly better visual than before... We've made leaflets ... that explained what we would do and what the client would do. We brought in a plan of action in letters that were midpoint reviews [for clients in Hope housing], with practical things we've brought in to make things easier and to keep contact with the client and explain to the client over and over again. It's putting them on, keeping them on track. One of the key lessons for me was communication, how we were communicating... Giving [clients] more time to absorb what we're doing, ensuring that they understand where they are and what's happening in their case. The other problems we're finding are clients not knowing who's representing them or not knowing where they are in a case. And so, it's all giving us the impression that someone is their lawyer when they're not... again, it is all communication. It is ensuring that they understand. I think communication is one of the biggest things where we, I thought we were doing well. And I thought perhaps we're not doing this right. And I think that's where we learned a lot. And then we adjusted a lot of our work to assist.” (S02 Hope staff)

Another Hope member described measures that are being taken to make efficient use of resources through the provision of group information sessions, where this was appropriate:

“I think there's a lot of people where ... they just need some guidance. And those are the people where we're more likely to do a group information session rather than to say, we'll go and get it for you. So, we might be inviting them, saying we're doing a session about supporting letters or we're doing a session about Facebook... we've done a few community outreach things. So, we did it for the Afghan community when there was when the Taliban took over. We did something for Sudan when the war broke out, and we've got quite a few clients through that and been able to reach people who we wouldn't have reached without doing it. But what we've also been able to do is provide information

sheets where we talk about the new law on this or what your options are. And then we've had them translated, and we've put them online, and we've shared them with the community. So, it's a way of spreading information so it reaches further. Where we don't have to necessarily represent people or where it's something more generic, because those are cases where we might not be looking at the specifics, it might just be like, there's now a war there, so you can submit something." (S09, Hope staff)

In summary, strengthening clients' understanding and ownership over their case is clearly the most challenging and ambitious of Hope's goals, and has also proved the most difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, we can confidently say that Hope has helped many clients to improve their understanding of the UK asylum process and of their specific case, and this has translated into concrete outcomes for some of those clients in progressing their claims and accessing support, and in some cases securing leave to remain. This is also an area where Hope has demonstrated huge strengths in reflective practice and an approach of ongoing improvement whose results can be clearly evidenced.

B3. Improving clients' material circumstances

"Lots of things have happened to me [since accessing Hope Projects]. My health is improved, I was homeless, I was stressful and depressed and all that such as my worries of accommodation, worries of finance is all gone. The only thing [I am worrying about now] is the immigration. My health is improved, my financial state also improved, I can eat now, and got shelter, so all my life is improved." (C157)

"the Hope project give me a house... You can be hungry but being under a roof is something you can appreciate. Being under roof, getting water, that something I really appreciate more than anything else." (C33, Home Office housing)

Hope understands asylum seekers' housing and legal process as interdependent - people cannot pursue their legal case effectively unless their basic needs are met, and likewise cannot improve their housing situation in a sustainable way without progressing their legal case:

"when we meet clients, their first needs normally are not their [legal] case. The first needs are always food and shelter; those issues come first. And those needs to be met first before we can even continue... So, we do have to use other resources and services that Hope have. So, we have a Hope destitution fund for housing. That is an essential part of it. When someone's needs are met, they're in a place to talk about legal services." (S02, Hope staff)

These material needs were responded to through a combination of direct provision of housing and financial support, liaison with charitable partners, and support with applications for clients to access statutory provision. Below, we consider the evaluation findings regarding clients assessment of changes to their housing and

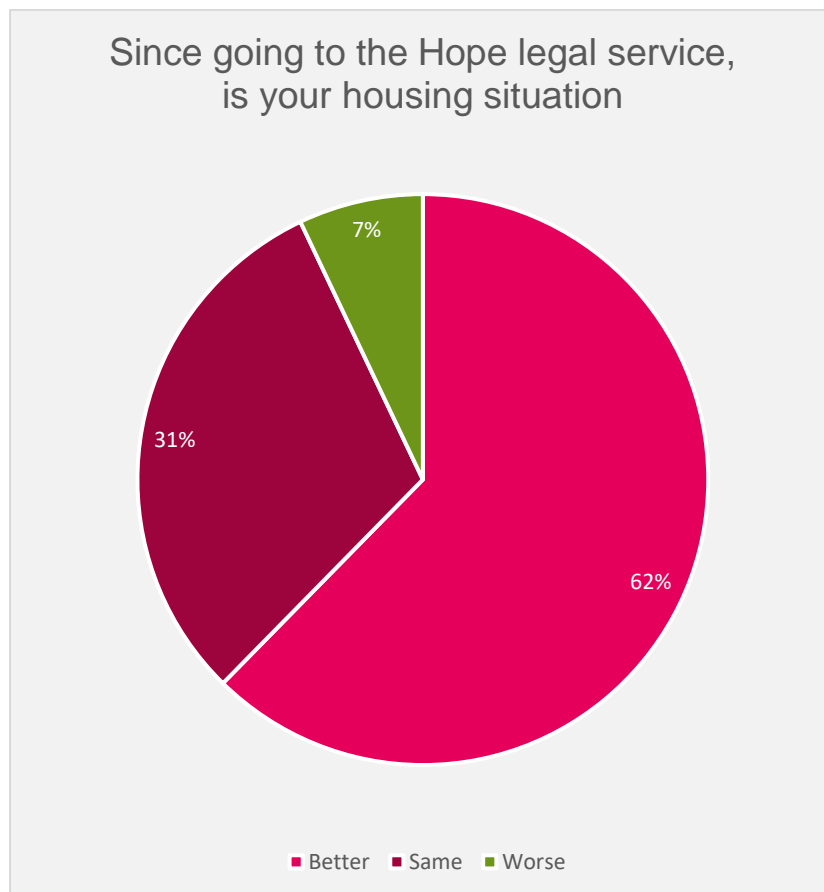
financial situation since first accessing Hope, their experiences of direct provision by Hope of housing and financial support, the transition of clients into statutory provision, and future prospects and need for this kind of service.

Hope staff showed a deep awareness that in many cases these material needs combine with the impact of insecure legal status and insecure housing on mental health, creating extreme states of anxiety and depression that were both extremely harmful in themselves and a very serious barrier to clients being in a mental state where they could effectively process information about their case and pursue their asylum claim. This meant that support for many clients had to be prolonged and multi-faceted, first meeting immediate material needs, which also had the effect of alleviating some of the most pressing psychological pressures, followed by a period of rest and emotional and social support, and only then was the client in a position to engage effectively with legal advice and pursue their asylum case, in turn opening up new options for access to long-term sustainable housing and finances. It needs to be emphasised here that this means the asylum system as it currently operates directly produces conditions of mental ill health which prevent many people from accessing their asylum rights, creating a vital need for projects like Hope. Hope staff also highlighted that in some cases clients need for mental health support went beyond what they themselves or their current partners could provide, and represented a significant gap in current provision.

B3a. Housing

62% of respondents reported that their housing situation had improved since first coming to Hope, enabling us to project an estimated 288 people with improved housing situations over the first five years of the legal service.

Figure 6: Changes to housing situation since going to Hope

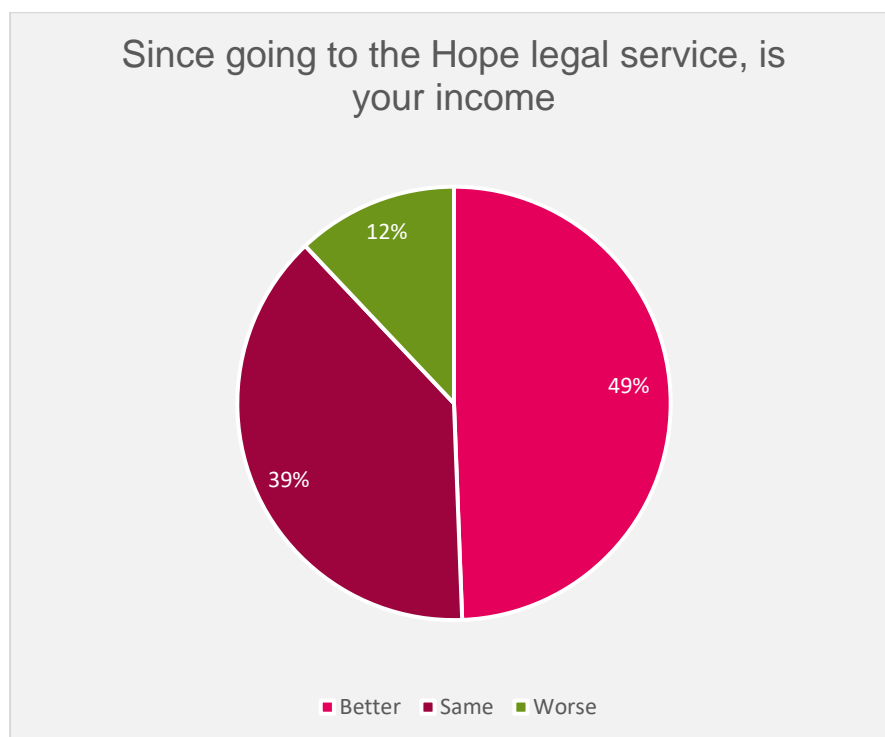


Of the 53 clients who reported their housing situation had improved, 23 (43%) were living in Hope housing at the time of the survey. This is important given Hope's aim of supporting people to move on to sustainable mainstream housing provision, which appears to have been achieved for a significant proportion of clients – the survey results indicate that 35% of clients had already achieved this outcome, with a further 27% having potential to do so but currently still in Hope housing.

B3b. Income

49% of respondents reported their income had improved since first coming to Hope.

Figure 7: Changes to income since going to Hope



Of these, 59% said they were currently receiving financial support directly from Hope.

B3c. Direct provision of material support by Hope

In qualitative interviews clients speaking about improvements to housing and income focused overwhelmingly on immediate charitable support from Hope or other projects, and this was highly valued:

“They [Hope] have done many things to me. They have given me a house, money and they have done so many things to me... The hope project to me is like having someone to go to when in need.” (C44, charitable housing)

“*Interviewer:* Is there any significant changes in your circumstance now? *Client:* Yes, they [Hope] took [me] out of homelessness. It is very important to accommodate someone even for a night.” (C48, since moved on to Home Office housing)

“They [Hope] gave me housing support and if I am in shortage of food, [named advisor] of the Hope Project helps me with the food bank.” (C71, charitable housing)

“[My family was] housed by the Home Office, and after our first refusal, we were evicted from the accommodation by the Home Office and we moved to

Birmingham ... we were homeless, we found the Hope Project and they gave us shelter” (C89, female)

“they gave me a house when I was destitute and living in the street... they took me out from destitution to a home and that to me is good.” (C181)

“They support me by providing me with food every month, and lots of activities and lots of advice. Sometimes, they invite some people to come and talk to us and counsel us. They talk to us on how to survive in the UK and other ways of going through the difficulties in the UK... I can advise them to increase the amount of money they give to us as what we get is not enough to carry on with our needs. Someone like me, I am sick and on crutches... Before meeting them, I did not even have a place to stay and I was homeless and through the Hope Project now I have accommodation. I can now sleep well and have nice food and nice shower. They have changed my life, I don't know where I would be if I didn't get to them.” (C194, charitable housing)

“I think the Hope Project has really helped me a lot. During covid they really helped me. I could have even slept on the streets and the criminals could have killed me. They really helped me a lot... When I no longer had been reprieved from the Home Office and I was kicked out, I remember that the lady had given me the details of the Hope Project and they helped me to find a way to stay... And number two, in terms of getting us help with financial aid or money. Number three, with food from charities and where to go and what do to legally when you are facing these challenges.” (C03, charitable housing)

“the house was very beautiful. It was so beautiful. I thought I was at home. It was just ... two lovely ladies, including me it was three. It was lovely. Everyone was welcoming. It was nice. That was the first time in my life I felt safe, yes, I had a bed for myself. Where I was coming from I was sleeping on the couch, the sofa. But I had a bed for myself. I had a room for my own self. It was like oh my god I could go to the kitchen and cook for myself. I was able to ... they were bringing voucher for food, foodbank. we were going to foodbanks to get food. So even the money ... they were giving us 25 pounds. I've never seen 25 pounds in my life. Because I never had money. I never used to go to the ATM machine to take out money. So at that point I was like oh my god . it was lovely. That's' how I got into the Hope Project... We were also given vouchers to go to the bank, go to the food bank. We were given sim card where you had data. And there was internet in the accommodation. So, you see? It was very, very easy. It was like the perfect life you have, like, you really didn't want to leave (laughs).” (C143, since moved to Home Office accommodation)

This focus on housing as Hope's defining service proved a challenge in recruitment to the evaluation, because some clients who had not been housed by Hope felt they did not have enough experience of Hope to be able to contribute to the evaluation, even though we explained that it is only the legal advice service we are interested in.

B3d. Moving on to statutory provision

Hope places a major emphasis on supporting clients to move into sustainable statutory housing. According to Hope's own monitoring figures, in addition to the 65 clients who had been granted leave to remain by 27 March 2024, a further 63 had been granted Home Office housing and financial support, mostly in the form of Section 4. Together this represents 35% of clients moving on to some form of statutory housing entitlement since coming into contact with Hope. Some clients interviewed as part of the evaluation gave positive accounts of assistance provided by Hope that helped them to move into statutory housing:

"The little things that I didn't know like claiming the Home Office accommodation. I was on my own for the most part of my asylum process." (C128)

"[Hope advisor] also applied for the section 4 and it was granted, so I am waiting for the Home Office to call me." (C71)

"I moved in [to Hope housing] when I was pregnant. So, I had to stay there for a while till I gave birth. But I left the Hope Project to the hospital. So from the hospital I was taken to Home office accommodation... they helped me with making sure my case is going better. And making sure I go back to asylum support... So I am really back to the system. And the case is really going well now it is really, really going well." (C143)

Some clients found reassurance in having Hope Projects to fall back on if their applications for Home Office accommodation were rejected:

"Hopefully within six months we have any progress ... we submit our case and for this submission and then we get chance to move to Section 4 support... If not, then ... the Hope Project will never kick us out, hope so ... they're very helpful. They will like give extensions to people those who have no place to live." (C89)

The importance of this increased sense of security can not be overstated.

There was little indication of a desire to move on into mainstream asylum housing provided by the Home Office, or of this generally being seen positively where it had occurred. This suggests some clients' goals and priorities relating to material support may differ from Hope's aims to help them move on - the quality of Home Office accommodation is likely to be a factor here, as is the positive sense of community and support from Hope staff that some clients report experiencing within Hope housing. However, it is worth noting that some of these same clients who restricted their comments on housing to direct provision by Hope were in Home Office accommodation by the time of the interview, which suggests that although they may not subjectively view this to be a result of Hope's intervention, or view this positively, the move into sustainable statutory accommodation was an objective outcome and consistent with the fulfilment of Hope's objective to see as many people housed as possible.

Many participants situated support they received from Hope within a wider array of sources of support, from sources that included other organisations, the Home Office and informal networks:

“In my case I got many of them working together for me. We have ... Hope Project ... my psychologist and ... Freedom from Torture who are all working together for me.” (C175)

“The LGBT Birmingham is helping me with food and clothing, and they are looking for a good accommodation for me. I also have the weekly £27 from the home office.” (C22, male, Birmingham)

“Hope project is the main group supporting me but I do go from time to time to collect food from charity food banks.” (C02, female, Birmingham)

This is positive in that these clients are not solely reliant on any one source of support, and this was described as a deliberate feature of the project design:

“because of the way that ... Hope works as a partnership, we're linking people up with other organizations. So, when they leave Hope when they've gone through that process, they're not on their own. They should have been linked up with the people they need to provide longer-term support. So, we expect people to have solved only some of their problems while they're with hope, but we would hope that they've got a proper direction and the resources to be able to do that... the work that we do is complimentary... And that's really important. It's why we don't try to do everything because we want to avoid competing with those people.” (S01 Hope staff)

In many cases, the urgency of material support overshadowed issues to do with legal advice and progression of the client's asylum application, creating a challenge for the evaluation in teasing out client satisfaction with the legal service in particular.

Accommodation in Hope housing also impacted on clients' experience of the legal service because Hope tenants inevitably had more regular contact with Hope staff, and this contributed to both actual and perceived greater ease of contacting the legal advice service. Consequently, some clients evaluated a transition from Hope to Home Office housing negatively, on the basis that they associated this with a reduction in the support they received from Hope, even though such a transition is consistent with Hope's aim to move clients into statutory housing:

“when I was in Birmingham, they [Hope] used to help me. But since I moved to Derby, now they are not helping me now with anything now... because now I'm in Home Office accommodation.” (C33)

“When I was in Birmingham, they were helping me with food and accommodation, but now that I am in Manchester, they are only concern with my case.” (C50)

There were also some accounts of repeated movements in and out of homelessness as a result of developments in a client's legal case:

"They [Hope] helped me put another application before the Home Office and from there I was awarded Section 95. I stayed at the Hope Project accommodation for four weeks then the Home Office took me to Leicester ... The claim I put in was refused by the Home Office. I am in the process of putting in a claim under the Long Stay, which is the twenty-year route." (C30, male)

Some participants expressed frustrations about the limitations of Hope's provision, for example regarding the length of stay or the lack of provision for mothers and children:

"They ... helped me in my section 95... I think they are doing a good job, but if they could step up and start accommodating mothers and children then that would be good" (C143, female)

Again, this may reflect differences between the aims of Hope to support clients to move on to statutory provision – in this case through a Section 95 application – and some clients' preference to remain in Hope housing for longer, where they are settled and which some consider to be of better standard than that provided by the Home Office.

B3e. Future development in material provision

Looking ahead, some stakeholders suggested there may be a need to increase levels of financial support and the duration for direct housing provision:

"one thing that I've been thinking about these days ... is ... our destitution fund ... is £30, 120 in a four-week month, and 150 in a five-week month. So, that's not enough to buy anything. I've been thinking about it over the past few weeks because I've dealt with clients who've got constipation. So, you can imagine when somebody gets 120 or 150, how do they have a healthy diet? ... And then I sometimes struggle to buy vegetables and fruit to make sure that I have a healthy diet. And then what about somebody who is getting 30 pounds a week?... I think we need probably to talk to supermarkets to see if they are happy to provide like those types of food that are closer to end dates to give us because it's like, they're not eating healthy because they can't afford it... we've also recently, I think it's about two months now, we've also agreed that housing provides a well-being report in that three-month stage ... and then that will be taken into consideration because then we take into consideration the aspect of safeguarding if we if the partners then are made aware of the safeguarding ... if they go back on the streets if we evict them, we are concerned about them because this is a safeguarding issue or there is a health issue." (S11, Hope staff)

Added to this, a staff member from one of Hope's partner organisations expressed the challenge for some clients to make progress with their case within the usual six months allowed in Hope housing (although the current process does allow for this to be extended):

“I think the other challenge is that some of the cases are genuinely really complex. And this is why they got refused maybe in the beginning, to begin with. And having results or progress within six months is really difficult. So there are some people that, it's not that they're not proactive, but the complexity of the case or the documents required is not something that can be resolved in, in months, but it might take longer than that. So, it's the challenge of having people staying in that accommodation for longer than you would have hoped.” (S10, Hope partner staff)

A similar view was expressed by another Hope staff member, who noted the prevalence of mental health problems discussed above:

“I think additional funding would help if it could help people, give them time. I think the problem I'm seeing is that everybody [funders] wants something done within a set period. So, we've got to get someone off the street within a week, get the paperwork within two months, get them assessed within... It doesn't work that way. People's mindset and their mental health are such, they need more time. We have had people living in our property for almost two years, and they are now in the right headspace, I would say, to start their case. And what have you been doing for the last two years? They were not engaging. No, it's not their fault. They were not engaging. They refused to go to the doctor. We can't force them. Refuse to meet with anyone... And then slowly, over a two-year period of working with Hope ... they begin to trust and slowly, the barriers come down. Now they're in a place... They need a headspace time before they before we step in.” (S02 Hope staff)

Added to this, a staff member predicted increased demand in coming years for Hope's services as a result of recent changes to the law:

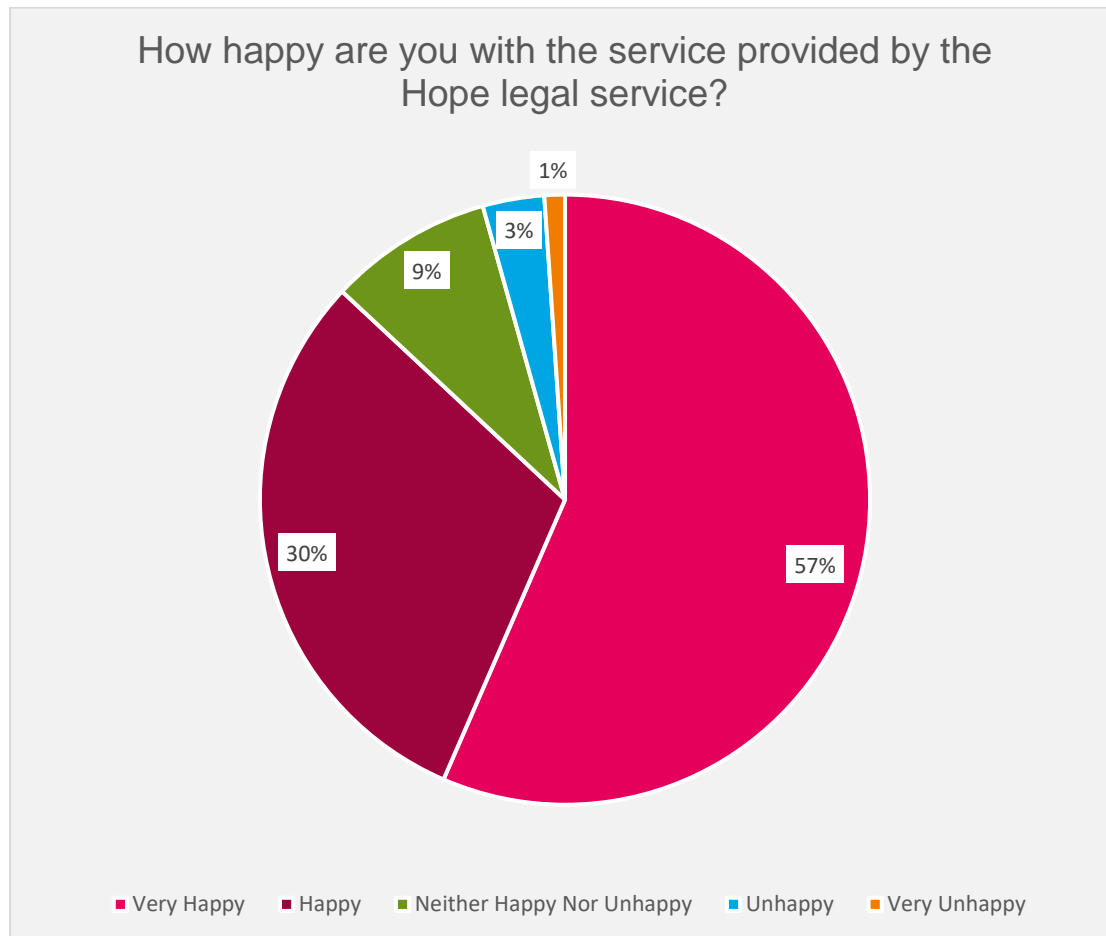
“After ... the Illegal Migration Act [2023] came into force, I would expect that if I claimed asylum, what would happen is that I would be detained and removed. So why would I even claim asylum? I'd just sleep rough instead and try and find my way through it. So, I think we're going to see more and more people rough sleeping and it's going to be a huge challenge to be able to find those people and advise those people and support those people. So, I think that's something that's coming down the line, but it's always been a problem. It's not new. It's just going to become more intense and bigger. It's complicated. So, I'd say rough sleeper services will become increasingly important, but they don't have legal expertise, so they need us. They really need us, and they need to work with us. But increasingly, we'll need them as well.” (S01 Hope staff)

In summary, we find that Hope has made good use of its available resources to improve clients' material circumstances, both through direct provision of housing and financial support, and through legal advice to support applications for statutory asylum support, and in many cases enabling transition to mainstream services following successful asylum applications. These different strands of Hope's work are highly complementary, because addressing immediate material need is often vital to enable clients to progress their legal case.

B4. Clients' experiences

A large majority of survey respondents (87%) across the second and third rounds reported being Very Happy or Happy about their experience with the Hope legal service, with 9% saying they were Neither Happy nor Unhappy, 3% (3 clients) saying they were Unhappy, and 1% (1 client) saying they were Very Unhappy.

Figure 8: Client satisfaction with the Hope legal service



A similar picture emerged from the in-depth interviews. For example:

“At this point, I would say the period I was with them I got the best one could ask for. One appreciates things when he or she needs them and they are provided, at that time, I was in need of these services in my life and the Hope Project was there to provide them to me. It was a starting point in my life. And I was glad I started there.” (C143)

“So even we are so lucky that we get chance that they are providing accommodation and dealing with our cases and so if I look at that way then and so that we are lucky that OK, like at least someone is there for us who is doing something for us.” (C89)

As noted earlier, the overriding importance of housing for many clients meant that even though this evaluation was explicitly focused on satisfaction with the legal service, it was clear that in some cases the responses to our questions about the legal service were heavily influenced by whether or not that client had received housing, and whether they were still receiving housing at the time of the interview. This was most explicit in a case where a client expressed very positive experiences of the legal service while still in Hope housing, but when they were interviewed again later, having been asked to leave Hope housing after the usual six-month term had ended, they expressed much more negative views about the legal service alongside a lot of negative feelings about losing their housing. It is also worth noting that one of those small minority of clients who reported being unhappy with Hope also reported that Hope helped them to find a solicitor, and that they subsequently secured leave to remain in the UK; this illustrates very clearly that unhappiness reported in response to the questionnaire does not necessarily mean a poor outcome for the client in legal terms.

Frequent themes in clients' positive comments about Hope included being listened to or having somebody check in with them and show they cared, the sense that Hope were now 'handling' their case, and an immediate improvement in their material circumstances, most frequently due to provision of housing:

"The reassurance. Always in contact with the client. And letting me know that every process what is going on. Things are getting delayed, coming back saying maybe this is being delayed, what is the next step? Maybe send a reminder or go to a different place... That kind of follow up I had throughout the year from the legal representation in the Hope Project... I had my say, my input on what I want to do. It is more like partnership. I felt that really. My voice is being heard. Which I didn't have before. I felt that I am receiving a service from Hope Project. I had that feeling." (C128)

"I have got a big difference in my life and case based on the huge support provided to me by this project. I got advice for my case and a lawyer and also financial support for myself." (C10, man, Coventry, Home Office housing)

"People who are seeking asylum or people who maybe have mental issues... They [Hope] will advise them – do they apply, do they appeal, do it this way... they give people confidence... They will not let people down... Hope Project, they've helped me ... for my life. Because they referred the case... They are providing us with care. They help you share your feelings... with other people. Help... by saying your problem. They make you to calm down ... your pain is minor... They let you be happy" (C30, woman, Home Office housing)

"other things when I need something, when I have a question, I can give them a call and they advise me as much as they can." (C104)

"what I've seen that they just want to see, us being saved ... being protected... they meet me halfway during my hard times ...they meet me halfway to manage to stand up... because you know, I was very down when I meet them,

but just meeting them... they honestly... After even Home Office took me from the accommodation which I was given in Coventry ... they still came to me again. They were still working with me... they lifted me. They lifted me. They motivated me. [A worker] took her time to come to where I was staying.” (C33, woman, Derby, Home Office housing)

Where clients expressed frustrations about Hope, these tended to relate to many factors outside of Hope’s control, such as frustrations with the speed of the legal process, or difficulties implementing Hope’s advice because of solicitors not taking on their case or necessary evidence that being unobtainable. It is important to recognise that these things are all outside of Hope’s control. Some clients also expressed a lack of knowledge about exactly what Hope would be doing next, or frustrations with the speed of communication.

“I can say they have done one thing by contacting the Home Office and they have all other papers from my previous court actions but I don’t know what they are to do next.” (C87, man, Home Office housing)

“I spoke to [Hope Advisor] to provide me with updates on my case and she promised to get back to me but since then I haven’t heard from her... I have texted her again and it shows that she has received the message but not replied yet... [Another Hope Advisor] said she was going to give my details to the solicitor but I haven’t heard anything from them... We ended at the fresh claim with [a Hope Advisor]. Gathering evidence for the fresh claim is the main problem that prevented myself and [the Hope Advisor] from continuing the case and because of that, she lose hope in the case.” (C150, male)

“I had a caseworker who left her job, then the Hope Project promised to get a new caseworker for me and it has been for long now I haven’t got a caseworker. I have not received anything from the Hope Project and I don’t have the number of any person to call from the Hope Project. With the pandemic, everyone is working from home and that makes it difficult to get to people now.” (C105)

“Initially when I told them my story, they did not call me till a year after that they called me. They asked if I got a solicitor and I said no. They recommended Baobab Women to me ... The Hope Project promised to call me when I was homeless but did not. I was directed to contact the Birch Network by the Human aid. It is the Birch Network that accommodated me from when I was homeless till I got accommodation from the Home Office” (C191, female)

Given the understandable anxiety arising from clients’ precarious positions, such frustrations are not surprising. There were some cases where repeat interviews with clients who had been with Hope Projects for some time showed frustrations with a lack of progress, even when that client had previously expressed very positive views about Hope:

“They didn’t call, they didn’t ask where do you stay, where do you live... When I struggled to live and then I called him, I explained to them when it stopped my support, last year ... I let them know, but they didn’t phone up, they didn’t call

me, they didn't do anything. I cannot highlight and say Hope Project is helping me, no.” (C30 second interview)

“apart from communication, sometimes I couldn't find her [Hope advisor]... And she doesn't ... give.... time... to discuss, you know what happened. Or maybe it's because she knows that I don't need to know, but for me because I needed to know, I was very worried. And I needed to have to give me an appointment to discuss what happened. What's gonna happen, what she's gonna do? She's was a little bit slow in that... She took my statement... but I think it was afterwards when I needed some explanation about you know what's gonna happen? Sometimes you know people worry if they need some kind of reassurance and for her I think ... she was super busy... but if there was something from the Home Office she would just let me know straight away.” (C41 second interview)

As mentioned previously, since the initial phases of the project, and taking into account the findings of this evaluation, Hope has introduced increased contact with clients, as well as additional checks that clients understand the process, what Hope is able to offer, and what clients need to do next to progress their case.

Some clients mentioned positively assistance they had received from Hope in helping them to access other services, including college, GPs, psychiatrists, and other organisations such as Red Cross and Freedom from Torture. For example:

“they facilitated my appointment with the dentist. I was pregnant and sick and couldn't go to school, and they facilitated my online studies by providing me with internet and a laptop.” (C143)

“They helped me in relation to housing, financing support, legal advice, legal representative. And other things when I need something when I have a question, I can give them a call and they advise me as much as they can... After Hope project registered me with a local college, I was very interested.” (C104)

“After accommodating us, they put me in contact with Freedom from Torture for therapy on trauma and other all other circumstances we faced in our country of origin. Freedom from Torture had sessions with me for more than one year with sessions ranging from counselling sessions from trauma and others. During these sessions, they discovered that there was improvement in my situation and Freedom from Torture made their conclusions and handed me over to the Hope Project.” (C169)

A partner praised Hope's adaptability to clients' needs, and the connections between different parts of their provision:

“Hope [is] adaptable. It's not just rigid. They're continuously adapting and changing the work the way they work... The Hope legal team ... is quite supportive in terms of, for example, if we just don't give you no legal advice or financial support, they also have a wellbeing team. For example, if a client needs to register with the GP and obtain a HC2 letter, they can directly contact

the GP Clinic and obtain history off the medical history of the client. And use it as proof, for example, to provide a further submission to the home office that the client's mental health has deteriorated. And if he gets deported to his country, he will not get the same amount of support here, and it will be difficult for him to integrate.” (S13, Hope partner staff)

As discussed previously, multiple Hope staff highlighted mental health provision as a particularly acute gap in service provision for their clients currently.

During the focus groups in 2021 participants expressed a lack of confidence asking for things, which has implications about the nature of engagement with organisations like Hope. The confusion of what Hope offers, was combined with their internalised fear of what they should be entitled to ask for and deserve to receive.

“I don't have too much expectations. ... Asylum seekers can't complain. This is what it is. ... I was speaking to the priest who said I look good and I said yes, because I don't want to show my problems. If I share my problems, my feelings, your day will be ruined. I don't want to do that because this is my person problem and I prefer to keep it hidden.”

The same participants reported that accessing Hope can be difficult because of travel expenses.

“Personally, I eat once a day because I want to cover other things. I want to pay bus ticket... whenever I go to Hope they are far away. If they can increase the financial things it would be helpful.”

Interviewer: “Have you asked about these things to the Hope project?”

“No, because I thought if it is available, they would give it to me. I don't want to ask for more. We are asylum seekers. I know we are human but we listen to what they give and we are thankful for that. I never ask or I don't know they can provide that. I have never heard anything from the others.”

These issues were responded to by Hope through the development of leaflets in multiple languages, providing information about the services Hope is able to offer, other partner organisations with which Hope works, and photographs of key workers from each organisation to improve understanding about the distinction between different organisations and where clients can go for specific types of support.

Overall, participants' needs varied widely, and Hope's capacity to adapt and be responsive was identified by the evaluation as one of Hope's greatest strengths, within the constraints imposed by the organisation's limited resources and often in conjunction with a diverse network of partners.

B5. Legal, policy and practice implications and recommendations

B5a. For service providers and civil society organisations

- This evaluation has identified the vital importance of connecting together different forms of material and legal provision – most prominently in this case housing, financial support, and immigration advice, but also extending to diverse wellbeing services and the identified need for further specialist mental health provision. The interdependence between having one’s basic material needs met and being able to effectively pursue one’s legal rights has broad relevance, particularly for organisations supporting people whose rights are in any way insecure or contested. This suggests that these different forms of provision need to operate in a coordinated way, whether this is through the same organisation providing diverse services or a network of organisations meeting these different needs as part of a coalition.
- The further severe curtailment of asylum rights that has resulted from the Illegal Migration Act 2023, which was highlighted by many stakeholders interviewed in the later part of this evaluation, will require substantial changes to the services provided by Hope and other organisations that provide services to asylum applicants. A narrowing of the terms on which asylum claims can be made – and new measures to render many claims inadmissible – mean that increasing numbers of people with legitimate fears of persecution will need to resort to other means than the asylum system to regularise their status in Britain. This calls for organisations to broaden their provision of immigration advice if they are to continue to assist refugees to remain in Britain, even if formal refugee protection is now unavailable to them.

B5b. For the UK Government

- This evaluation has documented the severe impact that destitution has in preventing refugees from exercising their legal right to asylum effectively. Furthermore, the numbers of people successfully resolving their asylum claim and securing leave to remain following support from Hope demonstrates that without Hope’s charitable services the UK asylum system would be failing even more people. Correct asylum judgements should not be dependent on charities ameliorating problems created by the British state itself. Furthermore, because the capacity of Hope and other charities falls far short of demand it is reasonable to expect that there are many more people whose asylum claims would be upheld if they received the proper support that is needed to enable them to present their case effectively. On that basis we recommend that the British government take urgent steps to end asylum destitution, most significantly by: allowing all asylum applicants to take paid employment; extending access to housing, statutory benefits and other forms of state support on equal terms irrespective of immigration status; increase the level of financial support for asylum applicants to the same level as British citizens.

- The findings gathered for this evaluation make clear the important difference quality legal advice can make for individuals' lives and for their engagement with formal immigration processes. It also identifies significant gaps in provision, which have worsened in recent years. There is therefore an urgent need for increased funding for legal aid.
- This evaluation adds to the growing body of evidence that shows memory and the representation of past events to be highly complex and shifting. This should be recognised by the Home Office when interpreting the accounts given by asylum claimants during interview, and changes in an individual's account should not be treated as inconsistencies that undermine credibility.
- Given the long waits many clients interviewed for this evaluation have had, during which they have severely limited access to state support, there is an urgent need to increase resourcing for decision making to reduce delays at first instance.
- Given the significant proportion of clients who this evaluation found to be granted leave to remain following a fresh application, and the high rates of success for asylum appeals, there is a need to investigate why so many initial decisions are incorrect.
- Maintain the right to make further submissions, taking into account the evidence of frequent misunderstandings in earlier representations and the high numbers of further submissions that have led to a grant of asylum or other leave to remain.
- Many of the clients interviewed for this evaluation, who were successful with the right support in proving their well-founded fear of persecution, would have their claims rendered inadmissible under the Illegal Migration Act 2023 – this demonstrates that this legislation prevents a serious barrier to the proper exercise of the right to asylum, and should be urgently repealed.

B5c. For charitable funders

- Given the significant gaps in provision for quality legal advice, and the severity of need, charitable organisations with funding to provide legal advice free at the point of provision play a crucial role. Funding should be urgently directed to enable an expansion of this work.
- Given that multiple partners to Hope have identified the added value Hope gives to their work via network-building and sharing of expertise – essentially an infrastructural role alongside the organisation's service provision – such activity should be supported via funding.
- As access to asylum and the associated access to mainstream housing becomes more difficult, in particular following the passage of the Illegal Migration Act 2023, more resources are urgently needed for direct provision of longer-term charitable housing, food and financial support, in conjunction with

good quality legal advice, is becoming more vital. The state is not only failing in its safeguarding duties for this population but is directly creating multiple forms of harm, and charitable and civil society intervention is urgently needed to ameliorate the consequences and to challenge government policy.

C. Discussion: Assuring quality in legal advice and representation

Success in achieving positive outcomes is an indicator of high-quality legal work. It is pleasing to see that many REF Hope clients have achieved status during the evaluation period. However, outcomes cannot be a sole measure of quality as good advice and representation can (and often do) result in negative outcomes for clients due to features of the UK asylum system that are outside the control of advisors.⁵³ This is particularly true of fresh claims, the vast majority of which will not succeed. In terms of assessing client satisfaction, outcomes are of course important but a perception of procedural fairness has been shown to have an even greater significance when people are asked to reflect on whether they have been justly treated.⁵⁴ Enhanced perceptions of fairness are also known to be relevant to increased rates of compliance in the criminal justice sector (although no such research exists for asylum cases).

It is difficult to accurately measure perceptions of fairness resulting from the clients' interaction with Hope, in part as clients are not always clear about who has helped them. However, we can obtain some evidence from interview transcripts data and in the satisfaction survey.

C1. Six principles of procedural fairness

There are several factors identified in the literature which are determinative in the assessment of whether a procedure appears fair. The main exponent of the social psychology theory of justice, Tom Tyler, lists six.⁵⁵ Studies identify that some factors are more important than others depending on the legal context and therefore the principles have been adapted to address the advisor-client relationship in asylum cases.

- Control/representation – how much opportunity was given to enable clients to have a voice and be heard?
- Consistency- how did their treatment compare to other clients and to previous legal interactions ?
- Impartiality – did they perceive the advisor to be honest and fair. Was there an absence of bias?
- Accuracy – did they receive accurate advice and clear communication as to next steps?

⁵³ Review of quality issues in legal advice: measuring and costing quality in asylum work

⁵⁴ Examples of literature include Thibault and Walker 1975; Walker, Lind and Thibault 'The Relation between Procedural and Distributive Justice' 65 Va. L. Rev. 1401 (1979); Lind and Tyler 'The Social psychology of procedural justice' 1998; Brems and Lavrysen 'Procedural justice in human rights adjudication: the ECHR' HRQ 2013, 35, 1 176-200

⁵⁵ Tyler, T "What is procedural justice? Criteria used by citizens to assess the fairness of legal procedures" 22 Law and Society Review, 1, 1988 103; O'Nions H "Navigating the Intersection of scepticism, gender-blindness and ethnocentrism in the asylum tribunal. The urgent case for empathy enhancement" 41 Refugee Survey Quarterly 2022, 498-528.

- Correctability – was there an opportunity to complain or challenge unfair or poor treatment?
- Ethicality – was the advisor polite and responsive and did they show concern for their rights?

C2. Striving for individual fairness within systemic unfairness

The prior experiences of refused asylum seekers are unlikely to conform to any of these principles. For example, voice is undermined by the need to communicate through legal representatives and/or interpreters and to only answer specific questions. Clients will frequently refer to friends and acquaintances who have received status with similar cases, suggesting that there is inherent inconsistency. This perception is supported by research which suggests that outcomes are something of a lottery.⁵⁶ Marshall argues that asylum outcomes are influenced by structural practices that perpetuate injustice.⁵⁷ As one aspect of the UK's hostile environment, the asylum system is highly unlikely to be viewed as ethical.

In terms of how Hope's legal project can instil fairness in the face of systemic unfairness, there are some simple actions that make a big difference. Representation and voice are principles where Hope can make a real difference, both will help the client feel more confident. Respondents to the LAPIS study in Nottingham reported how the formal legal process rarely offers an opportunity for the client to be heard. This is echoed in responses to the present evaluation, with clients emphasising the importance of being heard:

"I had my say, my input on what I want to do. It is more like partnership. I felt that, really, my voice is being heard. Which I didn't have before. I felt that I am receiving a service from Hope Project." (C128)

"My roommate is worried about telling their story. But I have no trouble talking. Sometimes very scared, even me because we don't want to talk about this because of previous time with a lawyer (...) But they are very kind and they are very human, they are acting as human beings. Actually, Hope ... deserved name because they always give you hope. It is very deserved." (C 71)

"They also enlightened on my rights in the UK, and many other things I need to know about my case.... I was scared because I was new in the county and did not know what to do or who to talk to, The Hope Project assisted me in building that confidence and prepared me for my case. They also taught me my rights in the UK." (C143)

On occasion, Hope will go on to represent clients but in most they will prepare the client to find appropriate legal representation. The client care letter is vital as it sets

⁵⁶ Bail for Immigration Detainees 'A nice judge on a good day' 2010; Schoenholtz, Ramjo-Nogales, Schrag (eds.) *Refugee Routlette. Disparities in Asylum Adjudication and Proposals for Reform* 2007.

⁵⁷ Marshall, E 'Are asylum outcomes really luck of the draw? Reconsidering the relationship between access to legal advice and structural injustice' *Asyfair* July 2021

out the details of the case and identifies why the case has been refused and where the client might find additional evidence. The client care letters show that Hope are identifying and gathering relevant facts, evidence, and argument that the client can then take forward to their legal representative. The case facts and history of previous refusals have been unpicked to provide coherent, balanced advice that addresses the strengths of the case and areas of weakness. Clients appear to trust the advice they have received even when this advice does not give them much cause for optimism. Managing expectations is a key part of good legal advice, it will help clients prepare for less desirable outcomes and consider alternative options.

When seeking to measure the quality of legal representation in asylum cases Trude and Gibbs interviewed providers, stakeholders and asylum seekers, and proposed the following definition of high-quality asylum legal representation:⁵⁸

Quality legal representation in asylum cases is provided when a representative, following professional standards and with sufficient efficiency, technical and personal skills, knowledge, judgment and experience:

- a) Identifies and gathers all relevant facts, evidence and argument in a timely manner and presents those to the decision maker in the best way;
- b) exercises tactical judgment and explores every reasonable legal avenue to ensure a full and fair hearing of the case;
- c) ensures the client knows the best case has been put forward on their behalf consistent with the relevant legal framework.

To do this the representative must establish trust and confidence and a mutually respectful relationship with the client. The representative must also establish a constructive relationship with the decision maker so that the best case is made and the decision maker is able to make an accurate assessment of the case for international protection.

Although the Hope Legal team are not often representing clients before tribunals, these principles provide a useful guide for the whole advice experience. Trude and Gibbs reported that asylum seekers identified five important aspects (in table below) of legal work. These principles were used as a guide during the initial evaluation.

C3. Initial Hope evaluation findings and priority areas

The first Hope evaluation interviews did not suggest that clients had a clear understanding of their legal case. They appeared unable to clearly explain their case, and the interview data was inconclusive as to their understanding. We revised the interviews for the second stage to enable us to focus more on this point by asking clients to explain their case and the reason why they had been refused. We then

⁵⁸ Trude, A and Gibbs, J *Review Of Quality Issues In Legal Advice: Measuring And Costing Quality In Asylum Work* 2010 Available at <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4c6249a52.pdf>

reviewed the interview transcript against the client care letter to assess the accuracy of their understanding.

From the initial evaluation report a few action points emerged (identified in red) and some evidence of good practice was found (identified in green):

i) The One to One Relationship between client and representative involves **factors such as trust, empathy, mutual respect, and the ability to deal with difficult emotions and situations.**

ii) Gathering and Presenting Evidence is about **listening to the client and taking all possible steps to present a strong case** built on well researched evidence and the use of appropriate witnesses. **Allowing the client to read and review their statement of evidence was also mentioned as an element of good quality legal work.**

iii) Case Management and Conduct of the Case involves the timely submission of evidence and documents, good handling of appeals at court, regular follow-up with the Home Office, a proactive approach to the case, and the management of client expectations.

iv) Communication is a key area frequently mentioned by respondents. Professional and neutral interpreters were essential so that evidence could be passed to the representative. Clients expected the representative to have **excellent listening skills, give their full attention to the client** and use appropriate and positive body language. **Information needs to be presented to the client in different ways and in a language which they understand. It should also be non-legal/simplified so they will be able to reflect post interview.**

v) Access to the representative/advisor is an essential part of the process for clients. **Representatives should be directly available or respond to clients within a reasonable time frame.** Clients appreciated a range of means of contact such as telephone, e-mail and written correspondence as appropriate. Being able to **provide timely appointments** and not being kept waiting for appointments were also mentioned.

The representative should establish “trust and confidence and a mutually respectful relationship with the client”, a “constructive relationship with the decision-maker,” and ensure “the client knows the best case has been put forward.”

C4. Hope’s developments in its legal advice

There have been significant improvements in communication over the course of the evaluation. It is recognised that good communication requires clarity and precision, but it must also be adaptable. It should take into account the specific position of the client. Changes to practice documented in this respect over the course of the project, and taking into account the findings of the first two rounds of the evaluation, include:

- Amendments to the format of the Client Care Letters to highlight the critical information the client needs to know for their case, placing this inside a green box.
- Provision of more written information in translated formats.
- Introduction of Plan of Action letters after three months for Hope residents.
- Production of informational leaflets in a range of languages about the asylum process.
- Client Care Letters have also been made available to partner organisations to help inform their ability to support clients.
- Informational leaflets in a range of languages about the specific forms of support available from Hope and partner organisations, accompanied by photos of workers to aid clients in accessing support and advocating for their needs.
- Additional checks by Hope advisors with clients to assess whether advice had been understood.

C5. Conclusion and wider implications

In summary, we can identify the following as key strengths of the Hope legal advice service that have been identified by this evaluation between 2021 and 2024:

- High quality, reliable and responsive legal advice
- Communication and understanding
- Attentiveness to process and outcomes
- Responsiveness to holistic client need
- A learning organisation with a genuine commitment to ongoing development of its practice
- An important hub role for the wider immigration and destitution sectors in the Est Midlands
- Demonstrated capacity to extend advice provision remotely

Lessons can also be drawn from this evaluation for the wider UK asylum system, client needs and advice provision. Firstly, legal advice for people seeking asylum is falling far short of demand, and is on a trajectory of further decline; this is a serious impediment to refugees' ability to enact their right to asylum, and seriously calls into question the UK's fulfilment of its obligations as a signatory to the Refugee Convention. Secondly, this demonstrates that there is a very significant and diverse section of society who have been rendered destitute by the asylum system but who have the capacity to reengage and meet the criteria for protection if they are offered the right support. Third, that legal advice is an effective and necessary element in moving many people out of destitution. Fourth, that the effectiveness of legal advice for destitute people can be greatly enhanced through combination with other services to meet their immediate material needs.

Appendix 1: Methods and Sources of Information

The evaluation research design was informed by the team's experience and findings from the literature, emphasising attention to organizational context, group skills, management ability, political dexterity, and sensitivity to multiple stakeholders.⁵⁹

“Impact evaluation assesses the changes that can be attributed to a particular intervention, such as a project, program or policy; (including) both the intended ones, as well as (ideally) the unintended ones”.⁶⁰

This was further informed by an understanding of the value of longitudinal evaluations in informing and improving implementation and for generating an evidence base about program effectiveness⁶¹, with the aim that the findings would contribute to both the work of Hope Projects specifically and wider efforts to address the unmet need for immigration and asylum advice,⁶² both during and beyond the time period of the evaluation.

The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach, organised through four work packages and accompanying focus groups and an Advisory Board.

Work Package 1: Three rounds of in-depth qualitative interviews with clients were conducted between 2021 and 2024. This was important to track the long term consequences of Hope's interventions, and to allow for the long process required for many people to conclude the asylum process.

We anticipated that retention of participants would presents major challenges, particularly in light of the many challenges facing asylum seekers, and the potential for further disruptions to participants' lives following the acceptance or rejection of their claim. Previous longitudinal studies with refugees and asylum seekers are instructive: for example, the Survey of New Refugees, conducted by the Home Office between 2005 and 2009, reported an attrition rate among original participants of 68% after 8 months and 83% by 21 months⁶³. However, in another study, which adopted a Community-Based Participatory Research approach, 70% of participants remained in

⁵⁹ Trochim, W.M.K., (2006) *Research Methods Knowledge Base* Available at:

<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/intreval.htm> [accessed 11th Nov 2020]

⁶⁰ World Bank Poverty Protection and Equity Group cited in Hayes, D and Deeming, C., (2011) *Guidance for Evaluating Public Legal Education*, University of Bristol. Available at: <https://lawforlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/guidance-final-version-nov2011-v2-371.pdf> [accessed 11th Nov 2020]

⁶¹ Goodrick, D and Sampson, E.,(2020) *Meeting people Where They Are Delivering Integrated Community Legal Services* Federation of Community Legal Services, Australia of community legal centres,

⁶² Wilding, J., (2019) *Droughts and Deserts. A Report on the Legal Aid Market* University of Brighton. Available at <http://www.jowilding.org/assets/files/Droughts%20and%20Deserts%20final%20report.pdf> [accessed 11th Nov 2020]

⁶³ *Cebulla, Daniel and Zurawan Spotlight on refugee integration: findings from the Survey of New Refugees in the United Kingdom*. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116062/horr37-report.pdf [accessed 12th Nov 2020]

the study after 36 months⁶⁴. Taking this into account, we aimed for a participatory approach, maintaining regular contact with participants and seeking to involve clients in the Advisory Board. We aimed to recruit 28 clients for interviews in 2021, 20 in 2022, and 10 in 2023, and with an estimated 50% retention rate each year we aimed for 89 interviews in total.

Across the three rounds of data collection Hope provided contact details for 259 clients who were registered between June 2020 and March 2023. All of these were texted an introduction, and 222 were also phoned at least once. 18 numbers were no longer working by the time they were phoned by the evaluation team. A very small number of these did not want to engage, either citing a lack of support from Hope (generally meaning rejections of housing), or saying they had never heard of Hope, or that they were so early in their contact with the legal project that they felt they would have nothing to contribute to the evaluation yet. The vast majority we spoke to were very positive about Hope and said they would be happy to contribute.

The process of arranging and conducting interviews proved very challenging, with many clients initially agreeing to an interview only to have to reschedule or withdraw due to unpredictable life events. In total, 90 in-depth interviews were conducted with 58 clients; four clients were interviewed in all three rounds and thirteen clients were interviewed in two rounds. In many cases, where clients were interviewed multiple times with a year in between, there had been little progress in their case. The composition of the sample of clients who were interviewed is outlined below:

- Interpreter: 38% of clients requested and were provided an interpreter, 62% said they were happy to be interviewed without an interpreter;
- Accommodation at the time of their first interview: 33% housed by Hope or another charity, 43% housed by Home Office, 15% housed by friends, family or other private housing, 5% housed by Social Services, 3% Council, 3% Housing Association;
- Country of origin: Afghanistan (10), Algeria (1), Cote D'Ivoire (1), DRC (3), Egypt (2), Eritrea (3), Eswatini (1), Ethiopia (4), Ghana (3), Guinea Conakry (1), Iran (2), Iraq (8), Jamaica (1), Mali (1), Nigeria (3), Pakistan (1), Palestine (1), Somalia (1), South Africa (2), Sri Lanka (1), Sudan (3), Zimbabwe (2) Unknown (2);
- Year of birth: Ranging from 1962-2000 (21 – 59 years old as of the start of the evaluation);
- Gender: 58% Men, 42% Women;
- City of Residence at time of interview: Birmingham (33), Coventry (9), Derby (2), Dudley (1), Glasgow (2), Manchester (1), Stoke on Trent (2), Swindon (1), Walsall (1), West Bromwich (1), Wolverhampton (4);
- First Claim for Asylum: 2001 (5%), 2003 (3%), 2005 (3%), 2008 (5%), 2009 (3%), 2010 (3%), 2015 (26%), 2016 (13%), 2017 (16%), 2018 (5%), 2019 (8%), 2021 (5%), 2022 (3%), 2023 (3%);

⁶⁴ Jini E Puma, Gary Lichtenstein, Paul Stein (2018) The RISE Survey: Developing and Implementing a Valid and Reliable Quantitative Measure of Refugee Integration in the United States, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 31, Issue 4, December 2018, Pages 605–625, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex047>

- Many clients were unsure of the name of the Hope advisor they had seen, but for those who could remember there was a broad spread.

Data from client interviews was thematically coded according to 12 themes derived from the evaluation questions listed in section A4 of this report. Comparative thematic analysis was then carried out to explore patterns of differences in whether clients required an interpreter, current accommodation provider, country of origin, year of birth, gender, city of current residence, and time since first asylum claim.

Work Package 2: An outcomes and satisfaction survey was conducted with as many clients as we could reach from among those who registered with the Hope legal service between June 2020 and March 2023.

In the first round, the survey was sent to 85 clients by post or email after they had agreed to participate by phone, producing 8 responses by web form and 18 by post, for a total of 26 responses. This represented a reasonable response rate of over 30% but it was agreed with the Advisory Board that for the later rounds the survey would be conducted by phone to further increase response rates. Some responses were also gathered at two Fighting Destitution conferences organised by Hope in 2022 and 2023. In total, 44 responses were gathered in Round 2 and 48 in Round 3, giving a combined response rate of 35%.

Results from the second and third rounds were used in combination to produce basic descriptive statistics that are presented above, and to construct estimates for total outcomes across the five years of current funding for Hope Projects.

Work Package 3: Review of a sample of client case files for comparison against the understanding of their case demonstrated during the interview.

Of the initial 27 clients interviewed in the first round of WP1, 11 discussed aspects of their legal case in some degree of detail enabling the reviewer to make sense of the data so that it could be legitimately compared with the casefile. The preliminary data from all these respondents was checked to ensure a broad range of nationalities were represented. Two were subsequently discounted as the file data was not available (in one case the client had left the area and in another there was no client care letter), to give a total sample of nine for review and comparison.

Unfortunately, the responses to interviewer's questions about clients' understanding of their case were not always sufficiently clear and sufficiently detailed to assess whether the participant had formed a good understanding of their case or their options. This led to changes to the evaluation approach for the second round, with 40 client care letters reviewed in advance of in-depth interviews and used to inform additional bespoke questions to further check the client's understanding of their case against the presentation in the client care letter. Of these, 11 clients provided sufficiently detailed description of their case within the interview to allow a full evaluation of their understanding.

We should acknowledge that some clients cannot be expected to reveal all the relevant details due to the sheer complexity of information. In some cases this was the

client's third further submission attempt so it can be hard for them to distinguish between initial refusal, tribunal hearings and subsequent refusals of further submissions. For example, participant C63 refers to 27 different reasons contained in the refusal letter.

A note on confidentiality: The decision to review a sample of case files was based exclusively on the availability of richer interview data. Given the particularity of legal cases it is possible that members of the Hope legal team may recognise clients from the snippets of case facts presented. The team has attempted to minimise this in three ways: i) requesting a much larger number of files than those that have actually been reviewed, so that it is not obvious which have been used and ii) providing only a brief reference to case facts and, iii) removing personal characteristics, such as age, nationality and gender. Hope staff were not made aware of which case files were being examined in more depth.

Work Package 4: Interviews with Hope staff, volunteers, trustees and partners. This initially aimed for a total of 10 interviews split between 2021 and 2024, but on the suggestion of the Advisory Board this was later expanded to give a fuller perspective - 8 interviews were conducted in the summer of 2021, focusing on the context and origins of the Hope legal service, and a further 10 in late 2023 and early 2024.

Focus Group: Three rounds of focus groups were planned with clients, as a further measure to strengthen validity by checking interpretations of findings against clients' understanding.

In the first round, two participants took part in an online focus group in 2021, in which they were asked to reflect on some of the key findings from the first round of interviews. This included questions about the aims of Hope Projects, the roles are for Hope and for clients, expectations and knowledge of Home Office housing, communication strategies to enhance client engagement and comprehension, and best methodologies to employ in the NTU evaluation.

Two focus groups were initially planned for early 2023 as part of the second round, one online and one offline. These were replaced with six individual interviews in order to enable confidential discussion of what each client had found most helpful in improving their understanding of their case.

As a final check for internal validity, five clients were interviewed again in 2024 to discuss and respond to key findings from this report, and to inform final revisions together with the Advisory Board discussion. The outcome of these interviews informed final revisions to this report and are reported in more detail in Appendix 2.

Advisory Board: Established at the outset of the evaluation, the membership of the Advisory Board has evolved due to changes in staffing and other developments, but has generally comprised up to two Hope clients, four Hope staff, one Hope Trustee, one Hope volunteer, and two staff from partner organisations. The Board met once every quarter between January 2021 and March 2024 and contributed to the evaluation design, delivery, refinement of findings, improvements to the evaluation methodology, and implementation of findings.

The above data collected by the evaluation team was supplemented by routine monitoring data collected by Hope Projects, covering clients housing situation at the point of referral, and the numbers known to have secured housing and/or leave to remain since referral.

Appendix 2: Client Feedback on the Key Findings

We interviewed five clients in 2024 regarding the key findings and recommendations presented in this report, as a final check for internal validity prior to publication. There was a clear division in the clients' perspectives. For some, all our conclusions about what Hope has provided to its clients matched their experience. For example, the first client quoted below explains how they felt Hope secured legal representation for them, increased their confidence and helped them to understand their case better, provided for their holistic needs, helped them engage and overcome the distress of the asylum process, made them feel listened to and cared for, treated people fairly, and were committed to make real change:

"We have [number of years] in this country, wrong solicitor and wrong advice. So Hope helped a lot and we are now back in the Home Office system. ... Solicitors we had in the past, they just wanted money. As asylum seeker we are not allowed to do any work so in Hope it is completely free advice, so were confident there is someone helping us. Big confidence.... Now were in the Home Office system, we are not allowed to travel anywhere because the cards only work in big supermarkets. But if we have any problems, I can call Hope and they will help. Even after we have left, they are still helping us, providing the advice. ... we have always communication, in WhatsApp and if one is not available someone else in the team will give help...

"Yes, it is very stressful. when you come from other countries, language is the first problem that you do not understand. And the second thing if you have wrong solicitor not giving proper advice you are in big trouble. Solicitors we had in the past, say if you want to continue you give us the fees. Even legal aid did not help us. So very bad experience, it is very stressful going through the asylum process. ...When we were with Hope, they had meetings every month and we asked about anything, we had legal, housing issues, anything... When we had trouble with the internet, they helped a lot in our life. When we had meeting, they are giving us the money back, like bus passes. So even little things but made big changes in life... there is not just a single, Muslims, Christians, Muslims. So we are all from the same place. Everyone is the same, same rights. Everyone treated equally.... If I compare them with Hope they are helping more than other organisations. They are more committed, they help more. It is not only the legal advice, they also help with those things which stress us out. They asked if everything is ok, if you need any help. They are very nice. They treated us like family. Never treat like we come from other countries. They treat us like a family and they are improving day by day. .. they provide us a card and cash to withdraw the money." (C89)

This next participant also confirmed many of the benefits of Hope's services, documented throughout this report. They also made some suggestions that the previous participant reported they had already received (e.g. money for the bus to attend meetings, and monthly follow-ups), suggesting limitations on resources may have prevented Hope from extending these elements to all clients:

"For me was very helpful legally, accommodation, housing, financial assistance, mental health. Everything for me was so good. But it would be helpful to provide ticket for transport... They even come to help when they knew we had COVID... they helped my flatmate with GP forms... The communication was also good. Hope project for me is a family. When you just move you think they forget about me. But it would be useful even if you can't do much, they can call them once a month. Even if they can't do anything, but just call them and listening what people can say, it would be useful." (C71)

For others who had left Hope housing and were now destitute again, reflecting on what HOPE offered them was very difficult.

"I have not heard from Hope in the last two years. I am not using their accommodation or financial support." (C150)

"Hope never provided me with solicitor just provided with housing. But then they kicked me out ... They do not like me, because of where I am from." (C194).

Given the wider context of asylum it is not surprising that the work of one organisation is not always enough, in a situation where there is so much need and there are many barriers to people securing leave to remain. In fact, one further recommendation for improvement for Hope is the increase of connections because as the following client argues only united it is possible to create impactful change:

"They need to have a union, be united. Then they will get the power and things will get easier. If they just rely on themselves, without any support, it will be very difficult. The problem [is] that the legal system in the UK is so powerful, and behind this curtain is the Home Office, the government, they don't like to let the asylum seekers come to the UK. But if they have a union, united, definitely as the community gets bigger, they have their own power. If they connect with other charities like Red Cross they will get more powerful. They have these links but they need to be stronger." (C71)

This underlines the importance of our findings elsewhere in this report, based on the consistent reports from partner organisations in the local area, which demonstrate that Hope is playing precisely such a unifying role or 'hub' in the region.



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