



LONDON
SPECIALIST
ADVICE
FORUM

London Legal Support Trust

London Specialist Advice Forum – Meeting notes

Wednesday 16 September 2026, 10am – 12pm

**Chair: Chofian Abobakr, Senior Programme Manager,
London Legal Support Trust (LLST)**

This document contains notes from the September 2026 London Specialist Advice Forum meeting. The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

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1. Welcome and opening remarks

Chofian Abobakr (Senior Programme Manager, LLST) opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees, introducing herself as the Chair, and giving a brief overview of the agenda for the day. Attendees were also informed that the meeting would be recorded.

The September session of the London Specialist Advice Forum brought together advice organisations to explore the Sub-Regional Immigration Advice Service (SIAS) and how it works. The forum highlighted the significant value of the SIAS model and the challenges involved in supporting highly vulnerable clients.

2. Presentation: Introduction to SIAS (Sub-Regional Immigration Advice Services). Emma Livesey, North Kensington Law Centre

2.1 Context

- Rough sleeping in England has reached a record high, with 4,793 people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in autumn of the previous year, increasing annually for four consecutive years. Migrants are disproportionately affected by homelessness and destitution due to restrictions linked to immigration status.
- Key factors contributing to migrant destitution include: No recourse to public funds (NRPF), lack of right to work or rent, difficulties opening bank accounts, barriers accessing services.
- Changes in immigration policy, including the Hostile Environment, Brexit, the Nationality and Borders Act (2022), and Illegal Migration Act (2023), have increased vulnerability among migrants. Refugees face additional homelessness risks during the 42-day move-on period after being granted refugee status.

2.2 What is SIAS?

- A London-wide project providing specialist immigration advice to non-UK nationals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, designed to address the link between immigration status and homelessness. It was originally commissioned by London Councils and now overseen by the Greater London Authority (GLA). SIAS supports rough sleepers, people experiencing hidden homelessness (e.g. sofa surfing), and individuals at imminent risk of homelessness.

2.3 How SIAS Works

- London is divided into four sub-regions: Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, Southeast. Each sub-region has: A lead legal advice provider; Partner legal organisations; Immigration link workers.
- Referrals are typically made through: Outreach teams; Local authorities; Homelessness charities.
- Referrers complete: Detailed referral form; Consent and information-sharing documentation; Cases are triaged and allocated by regional coordinators.
- Support workers remain involved throughout the immigration process to: Facilitate engagement; Support attendance at appointments; Gather evidence and documents; Maintain contact with clients
- Examples of Key Partner Organisations: St Mungo's; Thames Reach; Crisis; British Red Cross; Local authorities; Smaller community organisations such as Hope for Southall Street Homeless and Firm Foundation.

3. Panel Discussion

Panel Members: Shilpa Caute (North Kensington Law Centre), Victoria Fernandes (Praxis), Sanne Roeven & Chiara Iacuzio (St Mungo's), Louis Colley (Royal Borough of Greenwich)

3.1 Question and Answer Discussion

Question: Throughout the SIAS process, from first identifying a rough sleeper with immigration needs through to making a successful immigration application for them, hopefully leading to safe and sustainable accommodation, what are some common issues encountered along the way?

Answer:

- Some of the key challenges are lack of documentation and evidence. Many clients have lost identification and vital documents due to long-term rough sleeping and destitution, gathering supporting evidence for immigration applications is often difficult, and subject Access Requests and medical evidence requests can cause significant delays.
- Clients frequently present with multiple and complex needs, which can affect engagement with services and immigration advice processes. Clients may be difficult to contact, or experience disillusionment and mistrust.
- Panel members stressed that immigration advice would often be impossible without support workers assisting clients throughout the process.

Question: What makes a referral for immigration advice under the SIAS project a valid referral? What minimum information, consent and evidence are needed? What information would be provided at referral stage in an ideal world for the effective triaging of the referral and how can missing identification, unclear immigration status or a lack of documents affect the referral process?

Answer:

- Essential Criteria: Individuals should be homeless or at risk of homelessness, have an immigration issue requiring advice, be located within the relevant SIAS sub-region, and not already be receiving immigration representation on the same matter.
- Minimum Information Required: Signed consent for referral and information sharing, basic immigration background, safeguarding concerns, housing situation, contact details for support workers/referrers.
- Challenges: Information is often incomplete, clients may not know their immigration status, clients may be reluctant to disclose personal histories,

missing ID is common but not usually a barrier to referral, significant time is required to gather evidence for applications.

- Good Practice: Advisors stressed that referral agencies should not undertake detailed immigration assessments themselves, Information gathering should avoid re-traumatising clients through repeated questioning.

Question: Immigration cases and housing needs operate on different timescales. What steps do different partners take to try to keep someone safe, contactable and engaged while their immigration matter is progressed, particularly where NRPF or unclear eligibility restricts accommodation?

Answer:

- Multi-Agency Working. Panel members emphasised: Strong relationships between organisations, shared knowledge of available resources, effective communication between legal advisers, support workers, local authorities and homelessness services.
- Flexible Accommodation Solutions. Examples included: SIAS-funded emergency accommodation, spot-purchased accommodation, combining funding streams to extend placements where necessary, Home Office accommodation where clients become eligible.
- Trauma-Informed Practice. Important approaches included: Building trust over time, establishing client-led support plans, understanding individual patterns and needs, managing expectations about timescales and outcomes.
- Communication. Good practice includes Using interpreters appropriately, using accessible language, recognising power imbalances, checking that clients fully understand advice and next steps.

Question: Do situations arise where there are no immigration applications available to a rough sleeper who has been referred to the project? How are these cases handled?

Answer:

- Key Points: Not every client will have a viable immigration route. Immigration advisers must assess instructions, evidence, legal eligibility
- Panel members highlighted that honest, accurate legal advice is valuable, clients often receive conflicting or poor-quality advice elsewhere, and meritless applications can worsen immigration histories.
- Supporting Clients Following Negative Advice: approaches include providing clear explanations, using interpreters where required, confirming advice in writing, delivering advice sensitively and safely, and ongoing Support
- Where no immigration route exists, clients may be supported to explore alternative options. Reconnection and voluntary return services may be appropriate. Cases may be re-opened if circumstances change, such as

significant health deterioration, new evidence, changes in legal circumstances, safeguarding.

- Panel members noted the emotional impact of negative advice and the importance of support workers helping clients process outcomes safely.

Question: Who is still least likely to reach SIAS before crisis and why - and what practical changes would make a genuine 'No Wrong Door' approach possible?

Answer:

- The panel identified hidden homelessness as a major concern, particularly women experiencing homelessness, individuals remaining in abusive relationships, people sofa surfing, and migrants who avoid services due to fear of deportation.
- Barriers include fear of immigration enforcement, lack of understanding of available support, cultural and language barriers, mistrust of authorities, and long-term rough sleepers.
- Challenges include repeated rejection of services, complex needs, and difficulties sustaining engagement.

3.2 Key recommendations and themes

Earlier Intervention

- Increased focus on prevention rather than crisis response, identifying immigration issues before homelessness becomes entrenched.

Improved Awareness

- Strengthen understanding of SIAS among frontline staff, housing teams and other services.

Strengthen No Wrong Door Approach

- Develop shared guidance across organisations, improve knowledge of referral routes and escalation pathways, create clearer information about available services and key contact

Maintain Multi-Agency Collaboration

- Continue strong partnership working between legal providers, outreach teams, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations, support workers.

Focus on Hidden Homelessness

- Improve identification and support for women, sofa surfers, migrants avoiding services, people at risk before street homelessness occurs.

4. Small group discussion

Attendees then broke out into breakout rooms, each led by a member from the panel, to discuss specific 'case study' scenarios in the context of SIAS. The scenarios that were discussed can be found [here](#).

5. AOB and closing remarks

The panel discussion concluded with acknowledgement of the significant value of the SIAS model and the challenges involved in supporting highly vulnerable clients.

Participants then moved into breakout sessions to discuss anonymised real-life case studies and identify barriers, effective practice and recommendations.

The next forum meeting will take place on Thursday 3 December at 3-6pm (in person), with further details to be shared soon.

Links and Resources

- [Slides from Emma Livesey's presentation on SIAS](#)
- ['Real life' SIAS scenarios used in small group discussion](#)
- [Updated SIAS St Mungo's link worker map](#)