

28th June 2025

at

RESOURCE FOR LONDON,
356 Holloway Road, N7 6PA,
LONDON



DAMN BORDERS, END BARRIERS!

**DISABILITY
& MIGRATION
JUSTICE CONFERENCE**

2025 Conference report

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We must raise awareness that an alternative is possible – one with different forms of human relationships, personal development and interdependency that we cannot even imagine from the constraints of our current position.

— Ellen Clifford, *The War on Disabled People* 2020

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**Disability
And
Migration
Network**



**Barry Amiel &
Norman Melburn Trust**



The Lipman-Miliband Trust



**University
of Exeter**

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW



DAMN BORDERS, END BARRIERS!

DISABILITY & MIGRATION JUSTICE CONFERENCE 2025

The DAMN Borders conference brought together disabled people, migrants, and allies to build understanding, solidarity and resistance across our movements.

We are often treated as separate, but there are many similarities between government immigration and disability policies, many of us are disabled AND we migrate, and there are many similarities in our struggles and the restrictions we face.

The borders that shut out and oppress migrants and the barriers within the country that marginalise disabled people are deeply connected.

Borders restrict and divide us. National borders restrict people from entering the UK and barriers within the country restrict access to services and support.

Disabled people are scapegoated as “economically inactive”, while people seeking asylum are denied basic support and dignity, and many migrants are treated as disposable workers.

We refuse to be divided.

The conference was a chance to share our experiences, learn from each other’s struggles, and to build stronger, collaborative campaigns.

REPORTING FROM THE CONFERENCE



We began with briefly discussing the main struggles and hopes that we experience, working with people within the main space that we currently identify or organise – the disabled people’s movement, the immigration sector, and disabled people seeking asylum or with other forms of migration status.

People’s ideas were stuck onto a wall of boxes to symbolise the barriers, and a blue sky of our hopes.

From this we can see similarities and differences in our experiences.

POLICIES AND RESISTANCE

We used two washing lines to show how immigration and disability policies have developed in parallel in governments of different political parties.

Both types of policy divide people into 'deserving' and 'undeserving'.

Policies are frequently tried and tested on people in one sector before being extended to the other sector.

Examples throughout history:

The language of supposedly 'mercy killings' of people with 'incurable conditions' in 1930s Germany is not dissimilar to assisted dying legislation today.

1930s

No Recourse to Public Funds was introduced for certain groups of migrants in 1980 and it has been gradually extended. It is similar to the sanctions now being increasingly imposed on people in the wider population when seeking support from the welfare state.

1980

The 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act stopped people in the asylum system from:

- using the welfare state
- choosing where to live
- having any financial help with costs of disability

1999

There are many parallels with later welfare reforms, including the legislation now going through parliament.



**There has also
always been**

RESISTANCE



Some lessons from both movements that might be relevant to each other:

THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

The social model of disability has been core to the disabled people's movement for decades.

Some key elements of this are that:

It is disabling when people are denied access to services and support.

Society needs to be changed to meet everybody's needs.

Human value does not depend on our economic contribution.



The social model has been widely co-opted to simply mean addressing a few access barriers, and including Disabled people in business.

The reason it has been co-opted is because it is a powerful means of uniting people to focus on the causes of injustice.

THE SOCIAL MODEL COULD ALSO BE APPLIED TO THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

The asylum system is **DELIBERATELY** designed to restrict access to services and support. **It is actively disabling**

When our right to services depends on anything other than our needs, **some people will always be framed as undeserving.**

Our lives will then be framed as disposable.



Some key lessons about asylum and immigration that other people might not know

There is now no safe route to claim asylum

There is a huge burden of proof to claim asylum

People get limited access to

HEALTHCARE & EDUCATION

and it is illegal to work

People with ongoing asylum claims get

£9 per week if housed in a hotel

or **£40** per week if in housing

High levels of illness and, still more so, high levels of mental distress are widely considered normal because life in the asylum system is so tough

After getting refugee status, people are given

8 WEEKS

to find housing, get services and support set up

There have been protests to prevent people being detained, as well as inside and outside detention centres. Sometimes disabled people are not detained because the centres are inaccessible.

This shows the flaws in simple calls for inclusion of disabled people.

If an agenda is unjust, it is not transformed by including disabled people.

WORKSHOPS

The conference split into different workshops to learn from each other about our different struggles and how we can support each other to build stronger resistance

RESISTING THE ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCE OF BORDERS AND BARRIERS

Including research carried out by **Healing Justice**, **Institute of Race Relations** and in Calais

WEAPONISING WORK

With speakers from:

DPAC
RAPAR
Asylum Matters

INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

Including speakers from:

DPAC
Inclusion London
Liberation
RAPAR

IMAGINING JUSTICE

Facilitated by:
Migrants in Culture

RESISTING THE ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCE OF BORDERS AND BARRIERS

Chaired by Fazilet Hadi (*Disability Rights UK*), with China Mills (*Healing Justice*), Sophia Siddiqui (*Institute of Race Relations*) and Maria Hagen (*University of Amsterdam*) as speakers.

The workshop discussed the damage and death that is caused by the ways that social security and migration systems are designed. We discussed how we can build resistance and re-imagine / redesign these systems.

China introduced the work she has done in collaboration with John Pring on deaths by welfare and how the welfare system kills – this is not the result of a mistake of the system but by design – and the ways in which narratives around ‘burden’ are weaponised against communities.

Sophia continued the discussion on deaths as a result of the UK’s immigration system, focusing on conditions in asylum accommodation, the role of private companies and the lack of transparency and accountability after a death.

Maria focused on deaths at the UK-France border, drawing on the role of border securitisation and her involvement with Margelle Safehouse, which hosts people who have been injured at the border in Calais and provides support to bereaved friends and families.

All of the speakers foregrounded the role of resistance and grassroots work, drawing on families’ campaigns for justice, public commemorations, inquiries, hunger strikes, sit-ins and other collective mobilisation tactics.

We discussed how to improve conditions in the short-term, and how to build transformative change in the long term; how do we internalise borders and enact them on each other, and what we can do to resist this;

how do we bear witness to the violence that has taken place whilst also avoiding reproducing this violence; and the importance of a global and historical perspective in building connections between issues and communities.

WEAPONISING WORK

With speakers from *DPAC, RAPAR*
and *Asylum Matters*

This workshop discussed how only certain kinds of paid activities are seen as work. Caring for your Mum isn't work, but being an investment banker is. And 'working' is the measure of 'making a contribution'. To not engage in paid work is to be 'on the scrapheap'. A person has to work to be deserving of social recognition.

There are different ways that work is turned into a weapon:

For migrant workers, work is weaponised by tying migrants to sponsors or to particular jobs and by denying access to the welfare state through the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition.

For people within the asylum system, work is weaponised by not permitting access to the labour market, and pitiful allowances.

For disabled people, work is weaponised by forcing people into work and punishing those who cannot work by impossible conditionalities and cruelly low levels of entitlement.

In short, **for non-citizens**, work is a right that can be denied or made conditional.

For citizens, work is a duty that can be demanded.

Work is not only turned into a weapon against individuals and because it is weaponised in different ways for different groups it can divide our movement. For this reason, we start with justice and equality for all and reject the logic of deservingness.

The workshop explored how work is weaponised differently.

We learned from three people, two of them asylum seekers, one an activist with DPAC, and from a representative of Lift the Ban.

We learned about the government's welfare policies towards people within the asylum system, the status of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and how these are gendered.

We discussed the potential impact of the government's proposed welfare 'reforms' and the organising and campaigning against them. We also discussed the 'Lift the Ban' campaign and had an exchange about the relevance of bringing together access to the labour market and decent welfare entitlements.

INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

Including speakers from DPAC, Inclusion London, Liberation and RAPAR

This workshop discussed how people are currently resisting violence in different institutions. Whether people are forced to live in hotels or hospitals, in immigration or psychiatric detention, there are many similarities in our struggles.

Consequent to searing individual disclosures by workshop presenters the session discussions succeeded in demonstrating how, irrespective of citizenship status, the forms of institutional violence experienced in settings that range from our homes through to disability and detention sites are intimately connected: they all emanate from the same State.

In this sense the workshop succeeded in cultivating the sense of a future, shared purpose between different attendees.

IMAGINING JUSTICE

Facilitated by Migrants in Culture



Migrants in Culture led a creative workshop.

‘Imagining Justice’ was a space for people with lived experience of disability and/or migration and organisers.

We got to know each other and experiment with art and design to process, try things out, and articulate our need for and dreams of migrant and disability justice.

People made visualisations, from imagining justice as many layers of protection to demanding ‘sorry’ and reparations.

NEXT STEPS

How will we destroy the borders that divide us and reduce our lives?

We need ways to connect, learn and build solidarity with each other. We can do this without anyone having to take roles that they do not choose. People living in precarious conditions may not be able to openly campaign.

We need to seek each other's advice to build joint goals and avoid undermining each other's achievements.

We need to address the causes of our struggles.

Some tasks to address our different barriers:

We need many ways of coming together that are accessible to different people – in person, online, at each other's protests.

It takes time and resources to organise and to meet everyone's needs.



INTERPRETERS

People use different spoken and Sign languages. International Sign language interpreters are often deaf themselves, therefore relay interpreting is needed, with additional interpreters who are able to interpret between hearing people and the international interpreters.

We need to budget for this. And everyone needs to speak slowly and clearly.

Interpreters need copies of the texts that speakers will use. Documents translated into different languages and Easy Read must be provided in advance.



SUITABLE VENUES

For in-person meetings, accessible venues, transport and accommodation must be organised and funded.

REMOTE EVENTS

Remote meetings also need interpreters, and the means for everyone to access the internet.

WE NEED A MIXTURE OF WAYS OF COMMUNICATING

It would be helpful to provide more information in advance so that people know what to expect from events

SOME SUGGESTED SUBJECTS FOR ONLINE DISCUSSIONS:

International disability and migration work

**What can we learn from people
across international borders?**

**How can we
develop joint
campaigns on the
issues that matter
to us?**

**How can we
organise protests
as part of wider
disability or
migration action?**



We will learn from each other, show up for each other and build solidarity to resist any restrictions that prevent any of us from meeting our needs.

No human is undeserving.
No human is a burden.
No life is disposable.

Together we will build a world in which all our needs are met and we are all valued for who we are.

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END BARRIERS!**

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JUSTICE CONFERENCE 2025**

RESOURCES

DISABILITY AND MIGRATION NETWORK (DAMN)

disability-migration.org.uk
email: info@disability-migration.org.uk

RAPAR

rapar.co.uk

HEALING JUSTICE LDN

healingjusticeldn.org

INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS

irr.org.uk

MIGRATION MOBILITIES BRISTOL

migration.bristol.ac.uk

NATIONAL SURVIVOR USER NETWORK

nsun.org.uk

DISABLED PEOPLE AGAINST CUTS (DPAC)

dpac.uk.net
email: mail@DPAC.uk.net

DISABILITY RIGHTS UK

disabilityrightsuk.org

INCLUSION LONDON

inclusionlondon.org.uk

MIGRANTS ORGANISE

migrantsorganise.org

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS NETWORK

migrantsrights.org.uk