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Hostile Environments in Times of Austerity: The 'Generative Consequences' for UK-Based Social Care Practitioners Working with Members of Migrant Families

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Abstract

Internationally, anti-migrant policy narratives claim that migrants add pressure to a nation's welfare state provision to legitimise punitive bordering practices that exclude migrants from welfare state services. In this paper, we reject this perspective and argue that, conversely, hostile environments increase pressures on social care agencies providing welfare support to migrant families, pressures exacerbated in inadequately funded welfare states. Studies spanning Sociology, Social Policy and Health and Social Care illustrate that 'everyday bordering' practices and wider 'hostile environment' ideologies are harmful, and 'manufacture precarities' for migrant families and limit their agency in meeting their own basic needs. Drawing on new data generated in the UK, we extend this interdisciplinary analysis of bordering practices to the 'networks of support' services that provide social care to families living in mixed welfare economies. In doing so, we reveal that diverse social care professions subsequently expend additional labours addressing migrant families' state 'manufactured' support needs. We thereby assert that what we conceptualise as the 'generative consequences' of exclusionary 'everyday borders', combined with austerity-induced impacts on services, increase social care practitioners' workloads, adding complexity to workforces already facing multiple pressures. By developing understandings of the deleterious consequences of hostile environments for migrant families and, in turn, practitioners' workloads, we make an important and timely challenge to pervasive narratives that position migration as a threat to a country's welfare provision.

Keywords: hostile environment; migration; austerity; social care; workload

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1. Introduction

Migration receives significant international attention in contemporary media and policy debates (Eberl et al. 2018). Related discourse in 'receiving' countries gives substantial focus to claims that migration negatively impacts on welfare states (Dwyer et al. 2019; Jubany and Mayblin 2024), which then informs exclusionary health and social care policy (Speed and Mannion 2020). Restricting migrants' access to welfare has, therefore, long been a feature of immigration control. In the UK, several policies were implemented during the 1990s; for example, the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 introduced the condition of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), limiting a person's access to housing, welfare benefits and services, dependant on their migration status. However, in 2012, the then UK government announced that they intended to create 'a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants' (Sanders 2021). Subsequently, post-2012, a series of policy changes occurred with the intention of

intensifying welfare exclusions to further deter migration. In particular, immigration control functions have been dispersed across a range of public and private institutions and actors. As such, some professionals that provide health and social care services are required to enact immigration-related checks and exclusions—or what Yuval-Davis et al. (2018) refer to as 'everyday bordering' practices—that can exclude documented *and* undocumented migrants from welfare state support, amongst other things.

In mixed welfare economies, 'social care' services for families and children are delivered by statutory and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) actors (Günzel et al. 2023). In the UK, practitioners across this workforce have some of the worst working conditions, and the highest levels of staff turnover and burnout, when compared with other sectors (Ravalier et al. 2023). Research examining the causes of burnout in social care identifies the relationship between high workload and inadequate resources as contributing factors (Yürür and Sarikaya 2012)). As such, austerity measures introduced by the UK government in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis (Bywaters et al. 2017) have had devastating resourcing consequences for public services, with ramifications for social care practitioners' workloads and wellbeing (Cunningham et al. 2021; Grootegoed and Smith 2018). In the context of austerity and hostile environment policies, practitioners supporting members of migrant families may have to enact 'everyday borders' whilst also navigating service users having reduced access to welfare support due to the varied conditions of their migration status, and reductions in funding for aspects of service provision. Furthermore, the ambiguity of practitioners' roles in their knowledge and enactment of exclusionary immigration politics and the ways in which this interacts with their professional values (Essex et al. 2022; Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025 brings further complexity; a dynamic also evidenced in diverse national contexts, for example, Sweden and Bulgaria (Walsh et al. 2022) and Finland (Anis and Turtiainen 2021).

The literature focusing on the impact of bordering practices in social care provision is limited and focuses on particular professional contexts and/or work with specific migrant communities, for example: people seeking asylum and refugees (Lewis et al. 2014; Walsh and Ferazzoli 2023); and, in the UK, distinct fields of State, VCS and private sector provision (Bloch and McKay 2015; Guentner et al. 2016). Similarly, studies examining the impacts of austerity on service providers are restricted in their focus on either public services *or* VCS organisations supporting people in the UK (Briggs and Hall 2023). Taken together, existing studies show how austerity *or* immigration-related welfare controls shape practice within particular institutional settings, and how non-state organisations can absorb gaps in statutory provision. Little attention is, however, given to the ways in which austerity and hostile environment policies coalesce to shape the labours that flow between and across sectors and professions.

In this paper, we draw on data generated during the 'Everyday Bordering in the UK' study and contribute by examining the combined impacts of hostile environments and austerity on practitioners working across the social care workforce, a workforce spanning the statutory and non-statutory services that constitute a migrant families' 'network of support services' (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025). By bringing together the literature relating to everyday bordering practices, welfare conditionality, and workload, we show that in 'manufacturing precarity' (Kooy and Bowman 2019), hostile environments create harmful conditions of vulnerability (Käkelä 2026) whereby migrant families can require support that they might not otherwise need. We assert, therefore, that in sectors struggling under the weight of austere resourcing reductions (Bywaters et al. 2017), social care practitioners' relationships with migrant families are dominated by addressing these state manufactured support needs with differing impacts on practitioners from across the 'network', and their workloads and wellbeing. In doing so, we argue that everyday bordering (Yuval-Davis

et al. 2018) practices are not only harmful to migrants living in the UK, but that they do not reduce pressure on the welfare state. Rather, we argue that the 'generative consequences' of these punitive state imposed welfare exclusions and wider hostile environment ideologies add pressure to the UK's already overstretched social care workforce. As such, we present an important challenge to powerful and pervasive policy and media narratives that position migration as a threat to a country's welfare provision.

The paper begins by outlining the characteristics of the UK's hostile environment towards immigration, the impacts of austerity on service provision and the working conditions of UK social care practitioners. Our conceptual framing is outlined, including 'everyday bordering' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018), 'welfare conditionality' (Taulant and Jones 2018), 'workload' (Koca et al. 2024) and 'manufactured precarity' (Kooy and Bowman 2019). Following this, an account of the study's research design is provided. Finally, we present research findings, detailing the combined impact of hostile environment ideologies and austerity on social care practitioners' everyday practices and we finish by presenting conclusions applicable to the UK context and beyond.

1.1. Hostile Environments, Everyday Borders and Manufactured Precarity

In Europe, immigration is positioned as a problem that needs to be controlled. Whilst this continues to occur at physical national borders, scholars argue that 'borders' exist on multiple levels and that, since the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of internal bureaucratic and more 'abstract' bordering practices with symbolic functions (Brambilla et al. 2015). In the UK, for example, restrictions on migrants' access to welfare were significantly tightened during the 1990s: the Immigration and Asylum Act 1996 withdrew a range of non-contributory benefits from people seeking asylum, and the previously noted Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 introduced the condition of NRPF. More recently, in 2012, the UK government announced their intention to create 'a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants' (Sanders 2021). As a result, the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts made 'everyday bordering' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018) practices a more ubiquitous tool of control; health and social care professionals, bank administrators, and private landlords are now expected to ask about and/or check a person's immigration status, extending the 'hostile environment' further into everyday life (Bloch and McKay 2015; Crawford et al. 2020).

Whilst ostensibly intended to further deter 'illegal immigrants' from settling in the UK, Griffiths and Yeo (2021) assert that the 'hostile environment', rather than being defined in one policy, is a pervasive ideology, shaped across multiple policy areas and sectors, with adverse impacts on all who appear to be migrants. As such, stratified access to social welfare, defined by a person's migration status, has intensified in the hostile environment era. In 2012, for example, the government extended the NRPF condition to people granted the status of 'temporary leave to remain', who had previously, typically been granted access to welfare (Cubis and Fernandez-Reino 2023). Successor governments have also expanded the NRPF condition to include some European migrants, in the wake of the UK electorate's vote to leave the EU in 2016; a referendum in which populist politicians propagated fears about EU migrants' access to social welfare benefits (Dwyer et al. 2019). As such, there has been an amplification of policy narratives that position all migrants—within a racialised hierarchy—as a 'problem' that presents a burden to State-funded and other support services (Demetriou 2018); a problematic narrative that underpins the justification of harmful exclusionary bordering practices.

This relationship between welfare services and immigration legislation is an established feature of immigration control, with a person's access to services being based on a range of conditions, including their immigration status (Taulant and Jones 2018). However, in an era of intensified 'everyday bordering' practices (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018), professionals

working in diverse social care settings are increasingly required to check the immigration status of members of migrant families to ensure their entitlement to services. As such, they may act in ways that generate and/or challenge patterns of hostility towards those they aim to support (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025). Indeed, for Essex et al. (2022), hostile environment restrictions increasingly 'weaponize public services' and embed a wider sense of institutional xenophobia with far reaching consequences for documented and undocumented migrants in the UK (Sanders 2021). Grzymala-Kazlowska (2015) shows, for example, that for newly arrived people to reconstruct their lives, they need to establish 'footholds', and that social interactions with people—including professionals—are central to this. The 'hostile environment' is, however, characterised by exclusionary policies, which are complex and ever-changing (Griffiths and Yeo 2021) and limit migrants' ability to engage in these interactions. Scholars further argue that welfare exclusions create politically induced conditions of precarity whereby populations face increased insecurity and dependency, restricted protections and are afforded lower social value (Butler 2004; Jubany and Mayblin 2024). Within migration scholarship, this has been described as 'manufactured precarity', where states actively produce damaging conditions of uncertainty and restricted rights through legal, bureaucratic and policy mechanisms (Kooy and Bowman 2019).

Furthermore, associated exclusions vary across migrant groups: while borders are 'everywhere' (Balibar 2004, p. 1), this is not the case for all migrants all of the time and only for certain people sometimes (Burridge 2014). Most overtly, successive UK asylum policies are shown to create a 'dynamic of exclusion' whereby compulsory dispersal, inadequate financial provision, a status of no right to work, and limited access to services curtails a person's ability to establish a new life (Coddington 2019; Mayblin and James 2018). However, Taulant and Jones (2018) show that the UK's exit from the EU has also created confusion for European migrants—relating to their changing rights and entitlements—and undermines their sense of security in the UK. Linked to this, the increasing numbers of migrants living in the UK with NRPF—including access to welfare benefits and social housing—extends the number of people that are vulnerable to destitution and homelessness (Greenfields et al. 2026; Shelter 2023). As such, this body of work evidences the ways in which UK hostile environment politics and everyday borders result in exclusions that manufacture otherwise avoidable layers of precarity for holders of different migration statuses (Griffiths and Yeo 2021). Here, we acknowledge and reject the adverse impacts of these welfare exclusions on migrants living in the UK. However, our primary aim is to build on our previous work and examine how these state manufactured precarities impact on the 'networks of support' services (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025) that aim to support members of migrant families.

1.2. Austerity, Hostile Environments and Social Care Practice

Parallel to the propagation of exclusionary bordering practices, austerity measures introduced by the UK government following the 2008 global financial crash have led to diminished publicly funded service provision (Bywaters et al. 2017). Underpinned by a neoliberal narrative of competition increasing 'value for money', there has been a concurrent reduction in services directly provided by central and local governments and an increase in services external providers are commissioned to deliver (Loeffler and Bovaird 2019), a shift characteristic of wider mixed welfare economies (Bode 2006; Günzel et al. 2023). The confluence of hostile environment ideologies, austerity politics, and increasingly mixed welfare provision thereby adds complexity to the work of a range of professionals delivering support services; practitioners working across an under-resourced social care sector are required to navigate differential State requirements related to migrants crossing borders (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025) whilst also working to meet migrant families' support needs that we contend are, in part, created by hostile environment policies.

The literature examining the impact of bordering practices in social care practice focuses on specific migrant communities and distinct fields of service provision. Studies concerned with statutory social work emphasise, for example: the impact of irregular migrant families being excluded from most mainstream provision (Griffiths and Yeo 2021); the mental distress challenges faced by adults seeking asylum (Phillimore and Cheung 2021); youth transitions and the challenges faced by young unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors (Wade 2011); and families with a specific ethnicity, such as Roma (Humphris 2019). There is also a growing interest in how civic society 'fills the gaps' (Mayblin and James 2018) in State provision created by exclusionary immigration policy—but not austerity—and the ways in which NGOs and practitioners in the UK and beyond act against the hostile environment (Wroe 2019; Zogata-Kusz 2022) by, for example, providing humanitarian support (Garkisch et al. 2017). Considering these bodies of work together suggests that bordering does not stop at a single organisational boundary but, instead, flows between services with varied roles and responsibilities. Knowledge of the ways in which the consequences of hostile environment ideologies coalesce with austerity induced cuts, and if and how these impacts flow between practitioners working across the social care landscape is, however, absent.

1.3. Manufactured Precarity, Austerity and 'Generative Consequences' for Practice

We contend that exclusionary everyday borders, in austere contexts, have 'generative consequences' for the labours required of practitioners; whilst related policy primarily affects the lives of migrant families, there are subsequent consequences for practitioners supporting them. By 'generative consequences', we refer to the additional practical, emotional and bureaucratic labour generated for practitioners by policies that restrict migrant families' access to welfare and ability to meet their own needs.

Elsewhere, we show that families and children's social care in the UK is provided by a range of practitioners that create 'networks of support' services (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025), characterised by practitioners with differing professional values, social workers delivering statutory services, but also youth and community workers, community educators, and family support workers employed in the VCS. Social workers in statutory services are, for example, guided by the primary principle, to 'promote the rights, strengths and wellbeing of people, families and communities' (Social Work England 2024), yet they are also agents of the State, and subject to rising governmental control that can limit their discretion (Murphy 2023). By contrast, the historical independence of the VCS, made up of multiple professions, affords employees more professional discretion and the ability to establish sustained relationships with service users (Macmillan and Ellis Paine 2021). Bringing the perspectives of these diverse practitioners together is analytically important, because migrant families often rely on both statutory and VCS services. Recognising the connected nature of the social care workforce thereby allows for the combined impact of exclusionary welfare policies and resource constraints on the network to be examined.

Practitioners across these 'networks' of provision have some of the worst working conditions in the UK, and the highest levels of burnout—mental, physical and emotional exhaustion—when compared to other sectors with the relationship between high workload, inadequate resource, and role ambiguity, identified as contributory factors (Yürür and Sarikaya 2012). While 'workload' refers to the effort required for a person to accomplish their job role, 'perceived workload' varies between people in the same role and can be affected by the resources available when attempting to achieve what is required. As such, noted reductions in public funds allocated to service provision have led to practitioners reporting limited and/or insufficient access to resources and a perception that their heavy workloads are even higher (Koca et al. 2024). Furthermore, experiences of 'role ambiguity' in social care, whereby practitioners are unclear of what their job entails and its goal, interact

with workload levels and available resources (Yürür and Sarikaya 2012). Whilst practitioners across the workforce exercise varying levels of discretion in order to navigate the resulting tensions, the austerity-induced role ambiguity experienced (Murphy 2023) often adds to practitioners' 'emotional burden' (Grootegoed and Smith 2018) and the resulting 'emotional labour' expended, the effort required to appropriately manage emotions and relationships in paid work (Hochschild 2012). Notably, research shows that this is exacerbated for those working with migrant groups; social workers supporting refugees are, for example, more likely to expend additional emotional labour in their work and experience mental health distress, secondary trauma, burnout (Tessitore et al. 2023) and seriously reduced job satisfaction (Brendel et al. 2023).

In the UK context of austerity and hostile environment policies, practitioners supporting members of migrant families thereby manage a range of complexities, including the impacts of reduced funding for aspects of service provision (Bywaters et al. 2017); service users' access to welfare support being contingent upon their varied migration status (Jubany and Mayblin 2024); the ambiguity of their roles in managing the consequences of exclusionary immigration politics for service users; and the ways in which these challenges interact with their differing professional values and restrictions (Essex et al. 2022; Humphries 2004). However, there is little understanding of the ways in which hostile environment policies—in contexts where services are inadequately funded—influence practitioners' real and perceived workloads, including the emotional labour expended by social care practitioners working with members of migrant families. In this paper, we draw on the narratives of practitioners working in the UK to address this empirical and theoretical gap. In doing so, we contend that hostile environment policies, combined with impacts of austerity on service provision, have what we conceptualise as 'generative consequences' for the workloads of social care practitioners. In doing so, we illustrate that the UK anti-migrant policy context does not protect welfare provision; rather, it *manufactures* precarity and migrant families' resultant support needs with unintended but deleterious effects of the levels and nature of labour required of practitioners. We thereby make an important and timely challenge to the ongoing and increasingly damaging political and media narratives that aim to justify exclusionary everyday borders by positioning migration as a threat to a country's welfare provision (Dwyer et al. 2019; Jubany and Mayblin 2024).

2. Methods and Methodological Approach

Analysis presented draws on the study, 'Everyday Bordering in the UK: the impact on social care practitioners and the migrant families with whom they work'. The project broadly aimed to explore whether, and in what ways, the UK's hostile environment towards immigration impacts on social care practitioners, and the migrant families they support. A multi-method ethnographic approach was adopted, underpinned by values of co-production and informed by collaboration with two social care providers in different English cities: one in Hull and one in Sheffield. The study is shaped by an ontology that strives to reduce barriers between service providers and users; recognises individuals as experts in their lives; and conducts research with people and communities (Facer and Enright 2016).

Fieldwork took place between spring 2020 and winter 2021, working with practitioners from the VCS and statutory sector and members of families with varied migratory motivations. As the early phases of fieldwork took place during the COVID-19 pandemic's public health restrictions, we developed online ethnographic activities, including innovative reflective conversations with practitioners to address some of the challenges this posed to our collaborative approach (see Walsh et al. 2023). We also recorded observations in field notes and conducted online focus groups and individual interviews with practitioners. When in-person approaches became possible, we worked with migrant family members

using participatory methods alongside semi-structured interviews. Here, we focus on the accounts of practitioners.

We applied a broad definition of 'social care' to understand the experiences of a range of professions providing support to migrant families, including social workers, family support workers, youth and community workers, housing support officers, and community educators. During the grant application's development, we worked with senior practitioners in collaborating organisations to co-define the broad scope of the project. However, at the start of the fieldwork, the research foci were refined via a process of discussion and reflection with practitioners. Initial unstructured focus groups (19 participants) then enabled participants to explore experiences of working with migrant families. Preliminary themes were identified by those present during the focus group and then developed as a written summary. This was then shared with participants for feedback, after which agreed themes were used to prompt discussion in subsequent semi-structured 'mid-point interviews' (n-15). We also conducted interviews with practitioners in collaborating organisations' professional networks (n-13). Some participants were required to enact bordering practices in their work—checking migration status and entitlement to welfare—whilst others were not, and the families with whom they worked had varied migration backgrounds, including people seeking asylum, refugees, people who came to the UK as EU citizens (some prior to the UK leaving the EU), and those in the UK with family reunification visas.

Our Hull collaborators are a medium-sized charity we call 'Connect' who serve the housing estate in which they are located, but also people across the city. Staff backgrounds are diverse and include youth and community workers, community educators, family support workers, social workers and advice workers, amongst others. Services they provide include holistic help and training for adults with leave to remain; housing support for refugees; and early intervention services for families, young people and pregnant women. They hold contracts with the local authority (LA), the Home Office, and they also generate income via charitable trusts. Our Sheffield collaborators are a smaller charity we call 'Young Voices', who aim to empower young people in the region. Staff are primarily youth and community workers, delivering projects that promote the wellbeing of young people; give young people 'voice' in their communities; promote cohesion and inclusion; and provide advocacy where required. One such project is a weekly 'friendship group' that supports newly arrived young members of migrant families, including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). This group provides an opportunity for those attending to build social networks, whilst also accessing support to navigate welfare and health services, as well as their asylum claims. The work of Young Voices is partly state-commissioned and partly funded by charitable grants.

Relevant anonymised details of study participants quoted in the Results and Research Findings Section are noted in Table 1, below.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the institutional review body prior to the start of fieldwork. Research ethics were revisited throughout, recognising the sensitivities of discussing migration status and related practice interactions, and the added pressures that participation risks bringing to practitioners' heavy workloads and migrant families' busy lives. Collaborative approaches aimed to support convenient and beneficial participation and standard good practice ensured additional protections: early fieldwork phases prioritised building trusting relationships to facilitate open, reciprocal interactions; participation was fully informed and consent checked throughout the study; data were stored securely and anonymised by removing identifiable characteristics and replacing participant and organisational names with pseudonyms.

Table 1. Participant details—practitioners.

Pseudonym	City and Type of Practitioner	Employee and Sector
Annalise	Statutory social worker (SW)—Sheffield	Local Authority (LA), children's social care, statutory
Nigel	Statutory social worker—Sheffield	Local Authority, children's social care, statutory
Jo	VCS manager—Sheffield	Young Voices, non-statutory
Fiona	VCS manager, youth and community worker (YCW)—Sheffield	Young Voices, non-statutory
Sophie	VCS project officer, youth and community worker—Sheffield	Young Voices, non-statutory
Charlotte	VCS, family support worker (FSW)—Sheffield	External partner, non-statutory
Vicky	Statutory social worker—Hull	Children's social care, statutory
Azeeb	Statutory social worker—Hull	Children's social care, statutory
Annabel	VCS, family support worker—Hull	Connect, non-statutory
Kim	VCS, family support worker—Hull	Connect, non-statutory
Irena	VCS, family support worker—Hull	Connect, non-statutory
Sue	VCS, family support worker—Hull	Connect, non-statutory

Once interviews were complete, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and a thematic analysis applied. After multiple readings of the data, the research team identified codes, which were systematically applied to the data corpus and organised using Nvivo. This supported the emergence of 'identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behaviour' (Aronson 1995, p. 3). As is usual, empirical data presented in Section 3 is representative of the themes that emerged from the corpus of data generated with practitioners, rather than exhaustive. For this reason, 12 practitioner participants are cited, rather than all 39 who contributed (see Table 1).

3. Results and Research Findings

As discussed elsewhere, social care practitioners (statutory and non-statutory) can enact bureaucratic everyday borders by checking a persons' immigration status, as a legal or service funding requirement (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025). However, our data expands analysis of the wider impacts of exclusionary 'everyday bordering' practices and shows that they are also productive with 'generative consequences' for migrant families and, in turn, practitioners working within the 'networks of support' previously described; 'consequences' that can create tensions for practitioners from different organisational contexts with varied duties and professional values (ibid.).

Our data further show that, when these impacts combine with austerity politics, practitioners can experience 'role ambiguity' with implications for workloads, and the differing labours expended in statutory and VCS settings. Consequently, we reveal that practitioners from across the network dedicate considerable time, and physical and emotional labour, to helping service users address issues largely created by the UK's hostile environment towards immigration. As such, we illustrate that the 'generative consequences' of 'everyday

borders' include the documented pressures practitioners experience when they are required to enact border controls in their practice (ibid.), but that they also produce mediated and contingent care environments, adding diffuse pressures to already stretched services across mixed welfare provision.

3.1. Generative Consequences: Manufactured Precarities, Austerity and Impacts on Practice

UK austerity politics have increased demand for social care support (Cunningham et al. 2021) whilst reducing service capacity (Benwell et al. 2023). Concurrently, the hostile environment has well-documented stratified adverse impacts for migrants living in the UK (Jubany and Mayblin 2024), including limiting their ability to access necessary material goods, food, and reasonable quality housing in areas that also support social network formation (Shelter 2023), as scholars argue everyday borders 'manufacture precarity' (Kooy and Bowman 2019). However, data show that these harmful impacts for migrant families also have 'generative consequences' for practitioners; participants in our study consistently report that migrant families they support require help with crisis management and practical support caused by the hostile circumstances imposed upon them.

In our first example, practitioners describe the ways in which exclusionary everyday borders result in them regularly providing migrant families with support relating to housing. Whilst securing good quality housing is, to varying degrees, problematic for many newly arrived migrants in the UK (Greenfields et al. 2026; JCWI 2015), examples provided here focus on support practitioners provide to migrant families facing the most restrictive welfare and immigration conditions. Vicky (SW, Hull), explains that families seeking asylum often request help to address poor living conditions in accommodation provided by the Home Office (Guentner et al. 2016) but that, despite wanting to help families, the limited protections afforded to people seeking asylum (Lewis et al. 2014) prohibit her from doing so:

> '[Families] have legitimate reasons in terms of, it's mouldy or it's, you know, it's damp, [...] but if they're deemed to have had appropriate accommodation and leave that accommodation and they present themselves as homeless [...] there is no legal obligation to rehome'.

Annalise, a SW within a LA team dedicated to supporting families facing destitution resulting from their NRPF condition, also reports frequently helping families to find suitable housing, 'because they're not eligible for council housing, which is frustrating [...] [so] we would make referrals to a community housing project that we have a link with'. Although some families with NRPFs may be eligible for state support under the Children's Act 1989, this is not the case for the families Annalise refers to here. Taken together, these accounts evidence the ways in which housing precarity is produced through the differentiated immigration and welfare rules to which a person is subject, and that this, in turn, *manufactures* support needs. In response, practitioners have to acquire knowledge to understand the complex differential impacts of a person's migration status and develop networks to attempt to navigate the ways in which immigration restrictions and their wider professional duties interact. At a time when children's social work is under unprecedented pressure (Public Services Committee 2021), precarities manufactured by hostile environments thereby add to workloads; this navigation takes time and adds complexity to statutory work, but referrals to organisations within the network can transfer elements of this *manufactured* burden to providers beyond the LA.

Our second example illustrates the ways in which practitioners consistently describe supporting migrant families that are unable to meet their wider basic needs—including buying food and essential material goods—also as a result of their welfare exclusions and restricted entitlements. Vicky, (SW, Hull) describes how she identifies and addresses

migrant families' needs by necessarily asking, 'OK what is available to them, what charities can help, where can we access this support as opposed to just spending money'. As such, by attempting to navigate the restrictions families face and pressures on LA budgets, she expends additional time sourcing goods and referring clients to charitable organisations.

In turn, VCS practitioners' workloads are however affected by such austerity-induced referrals from statutory services, *and* impacts of restrictive bordering practices for the migrant families with whom they already work. Examples of the harmful policy impacts that they report helping families address include families facing financial difficulties who are subject to NRPF (Mayblin and James 2018); people seeking asylum having inadequate financial support and no right to work (RtW) (Coddington 2019); few newly arrived people being provided with accessible information about support services (Simpson 2020); and application processes for accessing support being prohibitively complex (Griffiths and Yeo 2021), particularly for speakers of other languages. Rather than further evidencing the influence of hostile environment policies in 'manufacturing precarity', our analytical contribution is however to show that these state-manufactured support needs also impact on the labours required of practitioners. Annabel (FSW, Connect)—who supports pregnant women—reports that bordering induced challenges, including deprivation and the need for food and material items, are so frequently the primary support need of migrant families that her team's initial assessment prioritises asking

> 'What do you have for your family? What do you have for the baby? So, that can then lead to us showing them where they can get stuff if they've got money to buy it or telling them where there's agencies [that can] [...] Food parcels have become one of the biggest things that we are providing. I did phone calls for my post-natal mums, yesterday, or the day before and I got three food parcels ordered'.

Irena (FSW, Connect) provides a more specific explanation of how hostile environment policies create precarity when describing supporting a family with the RtW, but subject to NRPF. When faced with a gap in employment, the family were unable to access financial welfare benefits; although 'dad' was working, the family's migration status meant that they had little choice but to approach her organisation for advice and food provision. Irena explains that

> 'They couldn't manage and they didn't have any benefits. And that was quite a significant factor for that family and obviously that goes in-hand with the money. They had debts—council tax arrears, things like that—and so that was a top priority that the family needed support with [...] There are two children aged seven, the school only bringing once a week food parcel. That's what they survive on'.

Data thereby show that practitioners representing diverse professions and sectors work hard to understand and address the differential, manufactured impacts of the hostile environment on a families' ability to secure appropriate quality housing and to meet their own wider basic needs (Griffiths and Yeo 2021; Guentner et al. 2016). Participants from across the 'network of support' examined describe common experiences but institutionally distinct responses and tensions; in a context of constrained local authority finance, practitioners with statutory roles navigate supporting families within the bounds of their duties and limited budgets, while VCS practitioners absorb statutory referrals and provide practical support to families whose needs remain unmet. Nevertheless, whilst the interventions are primarily a short-term 'sticking plaster'—depending on the severity of exclusions families face—practitioners are universally driven to try and help. As such, we confirm that

exclusionary characteristics of hostile environments 'manufacture precarity' (Kooy and Bowman 2019) and build on this to show that this also has 'generative consequences' for the workloads of practitioners in our study. As such, combined with UK austerity measures, we evidence that everyday bordering exclusions inform practice decisions, add complexity to the strategies practitioners develop, and can partially shift costs to a VCS sector that Briggs and Hall describe as 'running on empty' (Briggs and Hall 2023, p. 5).

3.2. Generative Consequences: Austerity Amplifying Hostile Environments with Impacts on Practice

In Section 3.1, we show how exclusionary borders increase demand for social care services that, in the context of austerity, are already stretched. Here, we also consider how austere funding reductions affect services directly relevant to migrants living in the UK, in ways that support hostile environment ideologies with further implications for practitioners' workloads. The examples upon which we focus are reduced budgets for translation and interpretation services (Essex et al. 2022) and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision and government agencies failing to provide timely information in formats accessible to newly arrived migrants (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2023). Whilst these factors undermine all migrant families' ability to establish 'footholds' in their new lives (Grzymala-Kazlowska 2015), this is compounded for those with the most restrictive status—NRPF and people seeking asylum—having restricted access to ESOL classes to enable them to learn English (Refugee Action 2017).

In line with this, practitioners consistently describe the practice impacts of restricted translation and interpretation budgets and accessible timely information, and how this leads to them expending additional labour to ensure that service users understand what is happening to them. On one level, this is a feature of the hostile environment rather than austerity, with Nigel (SW, Sheffield) reporting how Home Office decisions to not translate documentation for those arriving in the UK shapes his work; as a practitioner supporting UASC, at their first meeting, he manages the confusion created and explains their 'documents' to them because

> 'When they come into the UK, usually at Dover, they kind of get given some documents and told, 'hold on to this', and they hold on to it not knowing what it is. Not being able to read it because it's all in English. And then we're having a look at it for them'.

However, Annabel (perinatal support worker, Connect) describes the direct impact austerity has had on VCS translation and interpretation budgets, because 'When I started the job [pre-austerity], I had nearly £7000 [annually] worth of money that I could allocate to interpreters. I've got £600 a year now!'. As statutory services also have limited budgets and/or time to build relationships with service users, and many newly arrived migrants are unfamiliar with UK welfare services (Dwyer et al. 2019; Guentner et al. 2016), VCS practitioners report becoming a point of information for families from migratory backgrounds. Sue—Annabel's peer—explains that this informs her work with migrant women who speak little English, because 'A lot of the time women are misunderstanding information given to them at the hospital and normally we fill that gap, and explain things after the appointment to them in a way that we know mum will understand.' Kim (FSW, Connect) further describes regularly supporting newly arrived migrant families to access health services, because

> '[...] There are a lot of areas where there's been a breakdown in communication. The Health Visitor's not been involved, so it's about re-establishing the

> relationship between them again, and I see that happen quite a lot if there's a language barrier'.

However, whilst the VCS characteristically provides advocacy and develops meaningful relationships with service users (Macmillan and Ellis Paine 2021), being the main point of information often extends to practitioners taking on tasks that are not part of their roles, despite the sector facing chronic funding shortages (Briggs and Hall 2023). Sophie (YCW, Young Voices) is, for example, employed part-time to facilitate a weekly social group for newly arrived young people, including UASC. Nevertheless, the psychological impacts of the UK's asylum system on people seeking asylum (Mayblin and James 2018; Walsh and Ferazzoli 2023), combined with some young people being unfamiliar with the welfare system and speaking little English, results in Sophie's role extending to advocating for the young people. As such, she spends

> 'A lot of the time on the phone to mental health services, particularly the crisis team [...] because young people will not—understandably—advocate for themselves in those situations where they're maybe in crisis. Whereas I don't mind phoning up the crisis team and saying, "You said you'd phone yesterday you didn't"'.

Data show then that in an era of retrenchment of service funding, austerity inflates features of the hostile environment with further impacts on migrant families, but also adverse consequences for the public sector and VCS. Practitioners from across sectors report how state failures to provide timely accessible information to new arrivals, and reductions in translation and interpretation budgets contribute to the precarity of those they aim to support. This results in increases in practitioners' real workloads but with added impacts on the VCS; statutory services can rely on the flexibility of the VCS and their skills in providing advocacy to ensure service users understand what is happening to them. Nevertheless, participants working in both statutory and VCS provision report that perceived workloads also increase because they are working hard to support families, but without adequate resources, including the support of translation and interpretation. By extending analysis to statutory and non-statutory providers across the 'networks of support' described (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025), we assert that rather than migration adding pressure to welfare states, austere funding reductions amplify hostile environments to produce further, diffuse 'generative consequences' for services provided by stretched mixed welfare states.

3.3. Generative Consequences: Hostile Environments, Role Ambiguity and Increased Physical and Emotional Labour

Data presented show then that practitioners from across the 'network of support' services' (ibid) described work to soften pernicious impacts of UK exclusionary immigration politics (Crawford et al. 2020) and austerity (Benwell et al. 2023), on members of migrant families with consequences for real and perceived physical workloads. Data illustrate that practitioners also expend additional emotional labour attempting to address support needs manufactured by hostile environments; they express but manage emotional expression as part of their professional work role (Hochschild 2012).

In addition to compassion for service users—evident in previously presented data—professionals in both cities and sectors describe the emotions they experience and manage because of the restrictions to practice they face when working with migrant families. In terms of statutory SW, in earlier sections (see Section 3.1), Annalise expresses 'frustration' at not being able to house families subject to NRPF in LA housing and having to refer them to independent housing providers. Further, Vicky describes her irritation at the impenetrable

nature of the webs of exclusionary bureaucracy that inhibit her from supporting families to address inadequacies in Home Office accommodation. Similarly, Azeeb (SW, Hull) reflects on the helplessness he feels when supporting families that are seeking asylum, because they are unable to access opportunities and 'they can't contribute to society in the way they'd want to, cos very often they come here and they wanna work and they wanna learn'.

A range of emotions are also managed by VCS practitioners, with Jo (YCW, Young Voices) expressing deep empathy for newly arrived young people that she supports—many of whom are UASC—noting that understanding immigration systems and accessing services 'must be extremely upsetting, frustrating, bewildering'. Other VCS staff also note the direct emotional impact on them as professionals when they are unable to support families in ways congruent with their professional roles. Indeed, Charlotte (VCS, FSW, Sheffield) expresses exasperation when describing being unable to support families facing complex exclusions; here, she gives an example of advocating for an 'EU national' mother and baby with NRPF or RtW:

> 'Because it wasn't just housing it was, well, she doesn't have a right to work, and she's got a baby. She doesn't have a right to work at the moment. Are you then going to, you know, how is she going to pay her bills, how is she going to pay this [...] it was very frustrating'.

Analysis highlights, then, that the nature of the 'manufactured precarity' that families face means that the assistance practitioners can provide is inevitably limited. Subsequently, they are often driven to support members of migrant families but the limitations they face increase their emotional labour and feelings of role ambiguity; their personal and professional values drive their empathy for members of migrant families, but in hostile and austere contexts their practice goals and how to achieve them are unclear (Yürür and Sarikaya 2012). Indeed, Sue, (FSW, Connect) describes the sadness she felt when supporting a woman seeking asylum with few resources or networks:

> 'We bought her everything for that baby. It was all second-hand. She was just living in a shared property with three other women that were from a similar background. She didn't have any money. She just didn't have anything. She didn't have any family and the pain in her eyes, I just felt for her. I just wanted to take her home. And it is frustrating'.

The relational effort practitioners put into, as Jo at Young Voices notes, 'doing what we can' with limited capacity thereby adds to the emotional labour they expend in order to soften and/or challenge impacts of the hostile environment (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025). In turn, data show that practitioners expend additional physical labour planning and implementing strategies to attempt to manage emotional impacts of their work on themselves and colleagues. Azeeb (SW, Hull) describes, for example, working to address his concerns for his team by improving their skill set; when practitioners reported UASC receiving 'inconsistent support', he successfully 'put proposals forward for the specialist team', resulting in a service with which he and his team were more satisfied, because 'it just comes up to a level of expertise now in terms of knowing the young people'.

The physical, mental and emotional labour involved in understanding differential and fast-changing conditions of migration statuses, providing advocacy, signposting to services, and helping service users' meet their basic needs, is time-consuming and adds to real and perceived workloads in the ways described previously. Furthermore, it remains that practitioners often feel 'role ambiguity' when they are unable to support members of migrant families in ways that align with their professional values: acting independently of the State and developing meaningful practice relationships for the VCS (Macmillan and

Ellis Paine 2021) and promoting 'the rights, strengths and wellbeing' of families for social workers (Social Work England 2024). Indeed, Kim (FSW, Hull) is astute in her articulation of how this manifests for her:

> 'It's sad because, obviously, in this role, I've a very caring nature and I want to help and support people, and if I see this gap in support I want to fill it and say, "Actually, no you should have these equal rights and equal access." And I feel like I want to be doing so much more than I can [...] I just feel like I don't give the best to the families that I do to other people. I do feel that there is a big difference, and I try to bridge that, but I think it'll always be there. It is sad'.

In a context of retrenchment of service provision (Bywaters et al. 2017), and restrictive hostile environment policies, participants from across sectors that make up the 'network of support' services working with migrant families, thereby, experience what Grootegoed and Smith (2018) describe as a 'moral trap'; they feel frustrated and sad when they are unable to provide meaningful support, in ways that impact on them emotionally and undermine job satisfaction. Furthermore, whilst emotional labour can have a protective function for professionals working in challenging environments, the physical, emotional and mental effort required in addressing what are essentially manufactured support needs adds to heavy workloads. In so doing, this also 'manufactures' the burden imposed on services in ways that can deplete a person's energy (Bodenheimer and Shuster 2019).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, we draw on new empirical findings to interrogate if and how everyday bordering practices impact on the work of social care practitioners providing services to migrant families living in the UK. In doing so, we show that immigration policy does not exist in isolation from other policy contexts—here the impacts of UK government austerity policies—and confirm that hostile environments are harmful and manufacture varying levels of precarity and vulnerability for migrant families living in the UK (Käkelä 2026; Kooy and Bowman 2019). However, we extend analysis to show that this can lead to migrant families accessing a range of support services that they may not otherwise need and that this has what we conceptualise as 'generative consequences' for the workloads and wellbeing of practitioners in sectors already struggling under the weight of far-reaching cuts to service funding. This is not to say that there would be less pressure on social care practitioners if migration were further restricted. Rather, that policies, ostensibly designed to deter migration, are not only harmful to migrants living in the UK, but that they do not reduce pressure on the welfare state. Instead, it is these policies—not migration—that produce 'generative consequences' for, and add pressure to, the UK's already overstretched social care workforce. The extant literature documents the ways in which features of the hostile environment influence specific sectors and professions in isolation (Essex et al. 2022; Garkisch et al. 2017) or the experiences of practitioners supporting groups with a particular migration status (Greenfields et al. 2026; Walsh and Ferazzoli 2023; Lewis et al. 2014). Similarly, the impact of austerity measures on practitioners' workloads—physical and emotional—has been given attention, but in distinct sectors (Bodenheimer and Shuster 2019; Grootegoed and Smith 2018). Analysis presented thereby moves beyond documenting the separate impacts of everyday bordering practices, the wider hostile environment, and austerity on distinct areas of social care supporting migrant families living in the UK. Instead, it shows how contemporary policy landscapes coalesce in ways that are productive, identifying three 'generative consequences' for the workloads of practitioners delivering services in mixed welfare economies: hostile environments manufacture precarities that, when combined with the impacts of austerity, increase pressures on practice; austerity-

induced funding cuts can amplify hostile environments with additional impacts on practice; and hostile environments contribute to feelings of role ambiguity and increase emotional and physical labours expended by practitioners whose workloads are already unmanageable due to insufficient service funding.

Furthermore, we build on our previous work to show that the 'generative consequences' described flow between and across services within 'networks of support' characteristic of mixed welfare economies (Walsh and Ferazzoli 2025), statutory and VCS services working with migrant families facing differential exclusions. In doing so, we show that families facing the most restrictive migration status—including people subject to NRPF conditions and people seeking asylum—face the highest levels of manufactured precarities (Benwell et al. 2023; Jolly and Gupta 2022) that, in turn, generate the most pronounced support needs. However, we also illustrate that wider features of the hostile environment, justified by austere funding restrictions, also create avoidable support needs that increase workloads for practitioners working with migrant families with more diverse statuses. Crucially, the ways in which workloads are increased and navigated can differ across sectors within the 'network of support' services examined: statutory workers spend time understanding families' entitlements and their legal duties and develop strategies to navigate these, while VCS workers often absorb statutory referrals and provide the advocacy and material aid that statutory services do not. We affirm, therefore, that VCS services can disproportionately find themselves filling these gaps created by hostile policies (Mayblin and James 2018) *and* austerity, but also evidence that government-imposed everyday bordering practices and hostile environment ideologies add pressure—albeit to varying degrees—to the workloads of *all* professions considered in our study: social workers, youth and community workers, family support workers, and community educators. Nevertheless, taking an approach that examines the impact of 'generative consequences' on the 'network of support' is useful precisely because it makes these similarities, differences, and the diffusion of this manufactured burden between sectors visible.

Overall, then, policy and media narratives in 'receiving' countries increasingly claim that immigration legislation necessarily protects welfare states from the so-called burden created by migration (Demetriou 2018; Jubany and Mayblin 2024). In this paper, we instead evidence that everyday bordering practices and wider hostile environment policies have 'generative consequences' for a social care workforce sector already facing multiple pressures. Whilst the character of these practices and consequences vary across contexts, we assert that the welfare conditionality at the heart of everyday bordering and hostile environment towards immigration creates, rather than alleviates, the pressures faced by an under-resourced and eroded social care sector. As such, we present an important challenge to pervasive policy and media narratives that increasingly position migration as a threat to a countries' welfare provision, narratives that are used to justify harmful exclusions from essential welfare support and that add fuel to already volatile anti-migrant sentiments.

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