

# ANNUAL REPORT

24/25

---

## Introduction

The last year has been busy for SYMAAG, as the many meetings and activities outlined below demonstrate. We were fortunate to elect a large Executive at our AGM in July 2024, which enabled us to maintain a healthy level of activism. This is just as well, as a year into the Labour Government, the environment for people seeking asylum and migrants in general is more hostile than ever and racist hate is on the rise in our communities, as far right parties flourish, fuelled by our government's anti migrant rhetoric.

In October the Executive identified the following priorities for attention in the year ahead:

- Campaigning around refugee and migrant homelessness
- Seeking accountability and learning from the serious incident at the Manvers hotel
- Strengthening information and practical support for those reporting to Vulcan House
- Building links with groups working with those with lived experience of the asylum system

9 months on from the above session, we have developed an Information Pack for those wishing to support reporting at Vulcan House. We were part of the lobbying of local MPs to successfully keep the Manvers hotel closed. Our meetings have involved much higher numbers of people with lived experience; we have strengthened links with VVIDY and together with Melinda from City of Sanctuary with residents of a local women's hostel; and we have renewed joint working with LASS (Lesbian Asylum Seekers Sheffield). Our aim is to get more people with lived experience on our Executive.

Our members have engaged with the Lift the Ban campaign, which has been the most visible campaign we've engaged with over the last 12 months. We will continue with that as well as focussing on migrant homelessness as this continues to be a complex challenge and is proving hard to address. Much as we would like to shift from reactive protests to more ongoing work, this is difficult in the current climate.

However, the activities summarised below show our continuing focus too:

- Tackling racism in all its forms and centering lived experience.
-

- 
- Education and solidarity around international issues, including in members' home countries and Palestine.
  - Celebration and cultural events, including film showings.
  - Solidarity with campaigns to end reporting, detention and deportation.
  - Collaborative working with local and national partner organisations.

## **August**

### **Fascist and Far-Right Violence in Rotherham**

SYMAAG joined a counter-protest against the fascist and far-right violence demos in Rotherham. Our members attended events in both Sheffield and Rotherham on the day and those in Manvers Rotherham witnessed a harrowing turn of events with the Hotel in Manvers being set alight. Politicians and the media played a significant role in spreading disinformation leading up to this event and over the last few years, which is why we at SYMAAG continue to fight against these harmful narratives.

SYMAAG co-facilitated a large follow up event convened by City of Sanctuary, aimed at highlighting the impact of the Manvers attack and starting to identify ways forward.

## **September**

### **Monthly Meeting**

During our monthly meeting, we discussed the recent increase in racist and fascist violence against refugees and our efforts to mobilise against it. This is part of our ongoing discussions throughout the year.

### **Cinema Screening**

SYMAAG organised a cinema viewing of 'My Favourite Cake' at the Showroom Cinema. The film tells the story of a woman pursuing her desires in a country with heavily restricted women's rights.



## October

### Monthly Meeting

At our monthly meeting, we made banners for a demonstration against Hassockfield Detention Centre. Over 15 women from a local hostel joined us. So, we could take our banners to Durham for the National Day organised by No to Hassockfield.

### No2Hassockfield National Demonstration

SYMAAG organised a coach from Sheffield so we could attend the annual national demonstration against the Hassockfield Detention Centre. Our co-chair, Nadia, spoke on behalf of SYMAAG - it was uplifting to see so many people there, with the view of ensuring that the women could hear our speeches and messages of solidarity on the day we were joined by groups across the country.



---

## **SYMAAG Strategy / Priorities Session**

The SYMAAG Exec arranged a session to review priorities and strategy for the coming months, deciding on key issues to focus on throughout the rest of the year into the next AGM.

### **November**

#### **Monthly Meeting**

Victor a long standing SYMAAG member and founder member of Voice of the Voiceless Detention Yorkshire (VVIDY) attended our monthly meeting to discuss their work and the upcoming Freedom Seekers International Festival, which was about the empowerment, self-determination and the uplifting of voices of the global South - The event focussed on dismantling colonial legacies and envisioning migrations systems that don't stigmatise the displaced, dispossessed and indigenous communities.



### **December**

#### **Monthly Meeting**

Our December meeting was a time to reflect on the past year's work. We had guests from a local womens hostel, and we enjoyed singing, dancing, eating, and creating arts and crafts. It was a wonderful evening filled with joy and creativity.



### **Volunteer accompanying support guidance Document**

Following some discussion around how best to support people attending Vulcan House, Fran and Nadia helped put together an overview of the process and guidance for anyone wanting to volunteer. This resource was shared with others supporting groups to ensure all points were covered and can now be shared with our members. SYMAAG co-chairs Manuchehr and Nadia also agreed to host a session with City of Sanctuary Sheffield for a wider volunteering group via zoom to include the support documentation and an overview from groups in the region doing similar work.

You can read the support guidance document here:

<https://www.symaag.org.uk/local-resources/how-to-support-reporting-vulcan-house/>

### **Bus Pass Campaign**

SYMAAG produced a motion to Sheffield Trades Council and other Trade Union branches to request support for the campaign and to provide donations to SYMAAG so that we could share the funds with groups and people seeking asylum to enable bus travel- to date SYMAAG has raised £1,400 to the generous donations from a variety of Trade Union branches.

## **January**

### **Monthly Meeting**

---

The main topic of our January meeting was the Government's threat to Syrian refugees. Our guest speaker, Yazan, shared his moving and insightful lived experience, highlighting the plight and complexities experienced by Syrian refugees.

## **February**

### **Home Affairs Joint Submission + Monthly Meeting**

Holly, one of our SYMAAG executive members, worked with Melinda, one of our longstanding members and a key member of staff from the City of Sanctuary to send a joint submission to the Home Affairs Committee, who were calling for evidence about the asylum accommodation system.

During our monthly meeting, Holly and Melinda presented their joint report on asylum accommodation. They shared examples of the challenges faced by people seeking asylum with housing, whether private or government provided. We hope to have a follow-up session once the Home Affairs Committee shares the outcome of the submissions they received.

You can read the report here:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/136616/pdf/>

### **SYMAAG, Right to Remain & Migration Research Group Workshop**

SYMAAG collaborated with the Right to Remain Team and the Migration Research Group at Sheffield University to host the full day workshop "Thinking with Our Communities - Detention and Beyond." The event featured lived experiences from various panels and highlighted key campaigns for attendees to get involved in. Many thanks to our co-chairs, Nadia and Manuchehr, for coordinating this much needed workshop, where we interacted with and made new connections with other groups and individuals within the region. We hope to have more events with RtR and the MRG in the coming months.





### **Nablus Delegation Exchange Event**

SYMAAG and City of Sanctuary organised an event with the Nablus delegation who were visiting Sheffield, titled 'Working with refugees for change - a Palestine/Sheffield exchange event.' The delegation travelled to Sheffield to exchange ideas and lived experiences. The evening was filled with inspiring speeches, singing and food, thanks go to Emma and Melinda for organising such an important event.

### **March**

#### **Labour Party Yorkshire Region Protest Coordination**

SYMAAG helped coordinate a joint protest with the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid, at the Labour Party regional conference, which was being held within the city. Thanks to Fran for coordinating on behalf of the SYMAAG exec and to Barnaby, Sam, and Nadia for creating new banners for the protest.



### **International Women's Day + Monthly Meeting**

Our March meeting was dedicated to International Women's Day with a panel discussion featuring amazing speakers. The theme was 'Crossing Borders,' with lived experiences shared of resilience, resistance, and life beyond borders. The panel was truly inspirational and sisters that are active within SYMAAG and the wider Migrant network. Over 50 people joined us on the night and our evening concluded with celebrations, food, dancing and music.



### **Letter to Sheffield MPs - concerns with Keir Starmer's Statement**

The SYMAAG exec sent a letter to all Sheffield MPs following the dehumanising statements made by the current leader of the Labour Party, we asked the MPs to reassure constituents they did not hold the same views as Keir Starmer regarding migration, we also encouraged



---

all members to right to their MPs and provided contact details to help facilitate this along with wording from our letter.

## **April**

### **Monthly Meeting**

At our April meeting we heard from several local groups about their work fighting for migrant rights in South Yorkshire and beyond, Monica from Medact Sheffield - a collective of health workers fighting to end the hostile environment and ensure fair access to healthcare for all. Alex from Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) - a revolutionary global union fighting for better conditions for workers and economic democracy. Student leaders Sam and Barnaby with updates on recent student movements and protests.

## **May**

### **Limbo screening**

As part of the joint working with the Anti-Racist /Anti-Fascist Coordinating Group for May Day, SYMAAG, CoSS and Sheffield Transformed arranged for the screening of the BAFTA nominated film “Limbo” at the City of Sanctuary. The film was about people seeking asylum on a remote Scottish island taking cultural awareness classes whilst awaiting their leave to remain.



### **Festival of Debate**

SYMAAG hosted its first FoD event, focussed on Activism across Borders which explored the complexity, resonances and value of the contribution to the fight for freedom here in the UK. The event consisted of a panel discussion and Q&A with three local activists and SYMAAG members: Manuchehr (Iran), Maria (Chile) and Boucka (Afrika). Facilitated by one of SYMAAG's co-chairs, Emma.



## **June**

### **Monthly Meeting**

At our June monthly meeting, we hosted Tom from South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice, who provided an insightful overview of the work SYRLJ is undertaking in light of recent changes in immigration regulations and their potential impact on asylum seekers. Additionally, we were joined by Patricia from the Migration Research Group, who presented an overview of MRG's ongoing initiatives and we explored opportunities for future collaboration on various projects.

### **Community Response Meeting**

In response to the government's increasing hostility towards people who are migrants and seeking asylum, we arranged a follow-up meeting with SYRLJ to provide up-to-date information on the implications of the proposed Government immigration changes. The meeting was opened up to the community, and included an open discussion where people shared their thoughts and experiences. We hope to have further discussions to generate practical ideas for supporting the community and people seeking sanctuary in Sheffield.