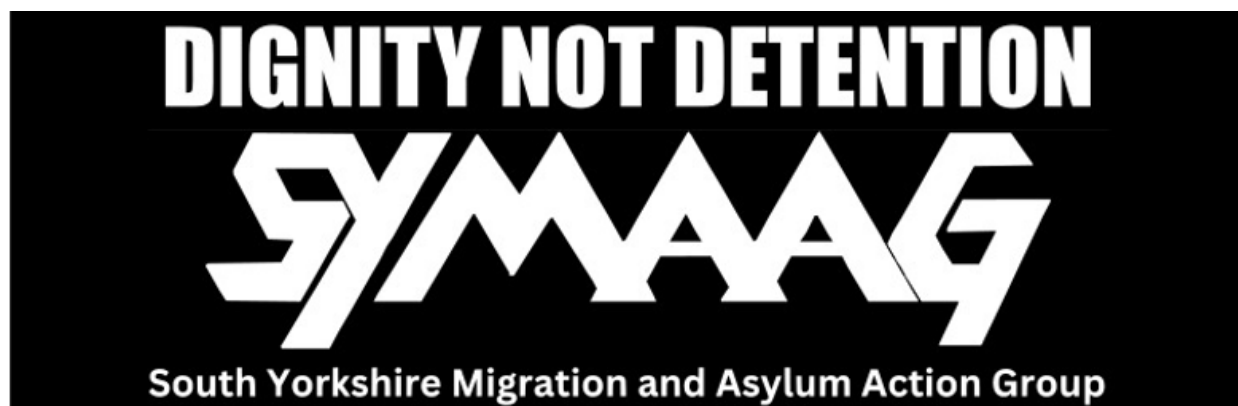




Annual Report 25/26

INTRODUCTION

At our last AGM, Manuchehr set out two clear ambitions. The first was to increase participation in our organising team with people with lived experience and from diverse backgrounds. The second was to ensure our work was shaped by the voices of those with lived experience, so that our priorities truly reflect what matters to a migrant led organisation.

We are really proud to have made strong progress on both. As a result, we now have one of the most diverse organising groups we've seen in recent years, and our September meeting provided a strong platform for people with lived experience to define the priorities for our campaigning work and year ahead.

Over the past year, our focus has shifted back towards being more outward-facing and political, with the aim of campaigning locally and nationally to improve the lives of people seeking asylum, migrants and refugees.

SEPTEMBER PUBLIC MEETING 2025

The new SYMAAG organising group made a conscious decision to ensure that this year's priorities were shaped by people with lived experience. As a result, our first meeting following the AGM focused on listening to people seeking asylum and identifying the issues that mattered most to them. This insight would guide our work over the coming year. An overview of these priorities is set out below:

1. **Support for Lift the Ban** – Actively backing the existing Sheffield-based campaign, with a particular focus on political campaigning where additional capacity and impact are most needed.
2. **De-escalation and self-defence training** – Responding to recent incidents and wider concerns about safety by exploring inclusive, in-house training options, aligned with the motion agreed at STUC.
3. **Community education and dialogue** – Increasing awareness and understanding of migrants' rights and the asylum system by engaging with schools and community spaces, building on early interest from schools in Doncaster.
4. **Access to English language learning** – Addressing gaps and barriers in access to English lessons by mapping existing provision and exploring new approaches, including student-led tutoring and community-based teaching within hard-to-access settings.
5. **Free bus pass campaign** – Strengthening and rebuilding capacity around the free bus passes campaign for asylum seekers, working collaboratively with local groups and student organisations.

OCTOBER 2025

AR/AF Committee Leaflet

As part of our work with the anti-racist and anti-fascist committee, Nadia worked with Sheffield Trades Council and other partners to design an anti-racist leaflet aimed at engaging people who may be being drawn into far-right narratives that divide communities and unfairly blame people seeking asylum. The leaflet has since been used successfully, helping to foster some constructive conversations at a "Raise the Colours" event and will be used for others, where appropriate. A similar version of this leaflet was also produced for use within work environments, to counter the narrative as the far-right are actively targeting workers with their disinformation.

We Are Sheffield Anti-Racist Committee

We are members of trade unions and community groups who oppose any attempts to divide working-class communities.

Everywhere around the world, working-class people are suffering. Successive governments have attacked workers' rights, cut public services, and allowed a cost-of-living crisis. Meanwhile, we're creating millions of refugees whose homes have been bombed and destroyed.

And yet, while we're struggling, in 2024, the wealth of the world's billionaires class grew by over \$2 trillion in 2024.

There is enough money in this country to give everyone a proper standard of living and fund high-quality housing, hospitals, schools and public services.

But, to keep working-class people divided, the establishment pits us against each other. We need to recognise these tactics and fight together for a better life.

People seeking asylum should be allowed to build a proper life and contribute to our communities. But the government has isolated them in temporary accommodation and refused them the right to work. They are left isolated and demonised.

Let's address the real problems in society – spiralling bills, eye-watering rents, overloading prisons, and low wages together. The only way to do that is through united working-class action in our communities and in our workplaces.

We are here today because we oppose all attempts to divide working-class communities in Sheffield, South Yorkshire and beyond.



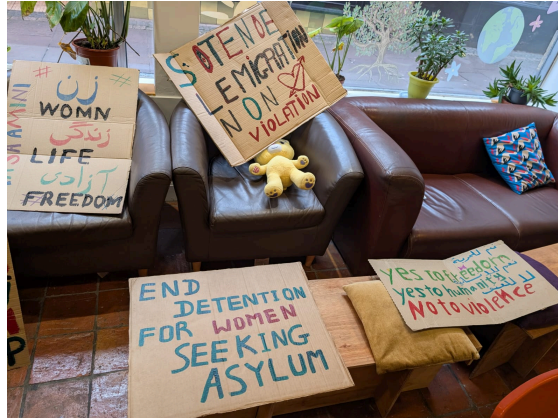
What We Demand:

- Raise the minimum wage to £20 an hour NOW! No more subsidising low wage employers with in-work benefits. Worker's pay should be enough to live on.
- Repeat the anti-trade union laws NOW! Britain has the most repressive anti-union laws in Europe. These stop workers organising to fight for better pay, job security and decent terms and conditions.
- Stop fire and robins, zero-hour contracts and bogus self-employment. Everyone deserves secure employment.
- Nationalise public services under democratic control – from water to trains we are being ripped off by private monopolies.
- Stop housing people seeking asylum in hotels – we need purpose built accommodation suitable for families and safe legal routes for refugees to apply for asylum. No more kids in hotels!
- NHS waiting lists are a disgrace – and the privatisation, investment in health and social care for any for profit.
- Decent housing for all – we need to build millions of council houses with affordable rents and put an end to exploitative landlords.
- Social security you can live off – working class people deserve a decent standard of living when they are sick, disabled or elderly and unable to work. Stop labour's cuts to disability benefits.
- Cancel the new in Palestine – stop the genocide and end arms sales to Israel.
- Give people seeking asylum the right to work – people fleeing wars and oppression deserve the right to earn a decent living.



October public meeting

We hosted an informal banner making meeting with food, ahead of our annual visit, this was an opportunity for members to learn more about the N2H campaign, as well as creating banners those attending could show at the demonstration.



No to Hassockfield National Day

As part of our annual commitment, we joined the National Day organised by No to Hassockfield. **25 SYMAAG members** travelled up to Durham – Sozan, one of the organisational group members, spoke courageously about her personal experience, along with others from across the country.



NOVEMBER 2025

The November public meeting was cancelled due to a UKIP march at Sheffield Cathedral, close to our meeting venue as we didn't want to risk the safety of our members, particularly those of our members seeking asylum, who are often the main target of these far right protests. Despite the full member meeting being cancelled, that didn't stop our work, see updates below that were undertaken by SYMAAG members during November.

Community Education

As part of our priority to educate the community and raise awareness of migrants' rights and the asylum system, Maria and Holly delivered a session at our first school in Doncaster (Hungerhill School). The session was well received by both pupils and staff. We are committed to working collaboratively with SHARE (Sheffield Anti-Racist Education) to further expand and strengthen our work in this area.

SCC November Full Council

A number of SYMAAG Members raised questions at the full council meeting on behalf of Lift the Ban Coalition. See pages 85 - 95 for the full questions and responses, along with the supplementary questions raised - following this full council meeting, Manuchehr and Maria along with Melinda had a follow up meeting with the leader of the council, see our further update in December

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s84986/PublicQuestionsStatementsMasterLog202526.pdf>

Letter to South Yorkshire Police to Stop the UKIP march in Sheffield

We joined other local organisations, community groups, and residents, to express our strong and urgent objection to the decision to permit a UKIP demonstration to take place outside the Holiday Inn hotel on Blonk Street.

DECEMBER 2025

December Public Meeting

Our December public meeting was a winter celebration, food and socialising and reflecting on the activities since the AGM.

Lift The Ban Coalition work

As part of our LTB coalition work, and it being a key priority identified at our September meeting, an initial meeting was held with Sheffield City Council after the Lift the Ban motions presented by SYMAAG and others at November's Full Council. Manuchehr, Maria and Melinda met with Tom Hunt to explore how the Council could work more effectively with the Lift the Ban Coalition and how that could be taken forward into 2026 and beyond the next council elections. We hope to continue this work with the new leaders of SCC.

Self-defence courses

As part of our key priorities, December gave us the opportunity to take forward self-defence and deescalation training - Maria and Joe had secured funding through Sheffield Trades Council for Strike First to conduct some training, this enabled additional self-defence classes on the 7th and 14th December. This built on existing provision delivered through our AR/AF committee coalition, including sessions at Mums United where de-escalation training had been offered for several weeks.

JANUARY 2026

At the start of the year, we chose to move from monthly meetings to an every-other-month schedule. This created more space to focus on meaningful work beyond meetings, with an emphasis on quality and outcomes rather than frequency of public meetings.

FEBRUARY 2026

February Public meeting

We used this opportunity to share updates on the organising group's progress against our key priorities and to explain the rationale for moving to an every-other-month schedule for public meetings. We also confirmed that, following changes to our signatories, access to our bank account had been successfully restored and we provided an update on our financial position. In addition, we continued to include a food element at each public meeting, helping to create a more welcoming and social space that encourages connection with women from Jasmine Court and others currently navigating the asylum system who attended our session.

MARCH 2026

Understanding Iranian Protests

SYMAAG led by Manuchehr, the Migration Research Group, the Kurdish Society at the University of Sheffield, and Iran Solidarity Net Sheffield organised a panel bringing together diverse perspectives on the current protests and conflict in Iran. The panel featured experts and individuals with lived experience, exploring the causes, narratives and global implications of the situation for Iran and the rest of the world.

**Panel: Understanding Iran
Protests: Domestic and
International Perspectives**

WOMAN LIFE FREEDOM

Meeting with Migrant Champion (Sheffield City Council):

Nadia and Manuchehr met with Sheffield City Council's Migrant Champion at the Town Hall, in March, to raise several key questions and received responses to each of those questions which are reflected below:

- **What is the housing criteria for people in Sheffield who have been in the UK for less than three years?**
 - We were told that time spent in Home Office accommodation should count towards the new three-year residency requirement. People with the right to remain who do not have accommodation should be prioritised for housing support. However, potential changes to Home Office guidance may shift responsibility for asylum accommodation to local councils, with unclear funding creating uncertainty, confirmation of this is yet to be provided (we also raised questions to the Housing Committee: [Questions by SYMAAG members to Housing Committee](#)).
- **What safety measures are in place for people staying in asylum hotels?**
 - The Migrant Champion was working with the Council, police and regional stakeholders to review and strengthen safety measures for residents. Mental health support remains a significant concern.
- **SYMAAG would like to restart the working group with councillors and migrant groups**
 - There was a positive response, with openness to reconvening the working group to improve coordination and engagement across Sheffield.
- **Has any funding been allocated to displaying flags in Sheffield (similar to Rotherham Council)?**
 - No funding has been allocated to display flags. Council funding is instead being used to remove flags, particularly near places of worship, schools and community centres. In some cases, flags remain due to safety concerns, including threats of violence towards staff attempting removal.

The Lift the Ban Coalition

One of our key campaigns as coalition partners, submitted follow-up actions from the December meeting attended by Manuchehr, Maria and Melinda to Sheffield City Council. This submission set out a [comprehensive proposal outlining what the Council could and should do](#), building on previous motions and ongoing discussions.

Sheffield City Council's March Council Housing Committee Meeting

SYMAAG Members raised questions to the council on issues surrounding the council's responsibility for asylum housing, the three year local connection rule and the people becoming homeless following being granted refugee status. See pages 289 - 292 for the questions and responses received.

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s84986/PublicQuestionsStatementsMasterLog202526.pdf>

Letter to MPs alongside a number of other Sheffield organisations supporting people seeking asylum and refugees, we wrote to all local MPs urging them to oppose the new Home Office asylum proposals. We argued that these proposals would worsen conditions, prolong uncertainty, remove essential support, and undermine Sheffield's commitment to being a City of Sanctuary:

LETTER TO SHEFFIELD MP FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF SHEFFIELD ORGANISATIONS CONCERNED WITH ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION

NEW HOME OFFICE PROPOSALS ON ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION

We represent the organisations working to support refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants in Sheffield. Some of us are religious institutions. We are writing to you as our Parliamentary representatives to express our deep concern at two documents published by the Home Office last November: 'Reforming control over the immigration system' and 'A new pathway to settlement'. While the latter focuses on refugees and asylum seekers, other migrants will suffer as well.

At present, asylum seekers are poorly treated in the UK. They are not allowed to work. The support that they receive is well below normal social security levels. They often wait years for their cases to be resolved. When they are accepted as refugees, their accommodation and support are inadequate for two or three years, leading to more cases of homelessness.

Instead of remedying these problems, the Home Office now proposes to make refugees' lives even more difficult and to subject them to a cruel regime of prolonged uncertainty - a state of limbo. Most refugees will be expected to wait 30 years for settlement and be subjected to reviews every 10 months. Additionally, there are opportunities to identify this period for legal work, study, and volunteering. If there are any difficulties in a refugee's status and any other irregularities, given the Home Office's failure to open with its workload in recent years, we cannot imagine how it will cope with the massive extra workload created by these proposals.

We are shocked that the Home Office proposes to affect this new regime on existing refugee families who came here when quite different rules were in force. This is completely unfair and unacceptable.

There are many other proposals in these Home Office documents which require us, such as the removal of the current legal obligation to provide support to certain refugees who would otherwise be destitute and the removal of the right to family reunion.

These policies are an intensification of the hostile environment policy originally introduced by Theresa May in 2012. At that time many in the Labour Party opposed the hostile environment. The hostile environment policy led straight into the 'Windrush scandal'. It drove distressed asylum seekers from coming. The old proposals came to shift from right wing parties like Reform. Why is a Labour Government now adopting such policies?

We are proud of the fact that in 2017 Sheffield City Council unanimously declared Sheffield a City of Sanctuary - the first City of Sanctuary in the country and a place where asylum seekers would be welcome. The policies like this will undermine our efforts to make Sheffield a welcome asylum seekers.

We urge you as our Parliamentary representatives to call on the Home Secretary to abandon these policies.

The letter has been signed by leaders of the following organisations:

- ASIST
- City of Sanctuary Sheffield
- Crimson Ashes - Sheffield
- Communities Club Sheffield
- Edgeway Organiser Yorkshire and Humber
- Islam
- Islam
- South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group (SYMAAG)
- South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice (SYRLJ)
- Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS)

APRIL 2026

April Public Meeting

We used our public meeting as an opportunity to support the Silent Walk for Palestine, marking Palestinian Prisoners' Day, organised by Sheffield Coalition against Israeli Apartheid with participants joining us afterwards at the Sanctuary for food. This provided space to discuss our ongoing work and build new connections with those who attended.



MAY 2026

As part of our Lift the Ban coalition work, Maria secured a speaker slot at the Chesterfield May Day rally and spoke on behalf of the LTB campaign. We also joined the march with our banners in a migrant block alongside hundreds of trade unionists. Recognising that our strength lies in unity and our shared fight for dignity and the right to work, we stood together in solidarity and rejected division and the narratives that the far-right are spewing within our communities.



JUNE 2026

AADD National weekend of action - Community Resistance to the Far Right

SYMAAG members were invited by Sabrina, one of our newest organisational members, to attend the AADD national meeting to explore what opportunities we could bring to Sheffield as part of the “Break Up the Border” weekend of action on 20–21 June. We were joined by Co-operation Sheffield and Sheffield Transformed to help coordinate a Sheffield-based event.

The day combined both panel discussions and interactive workshops, featuring speakers from **Migrants Organise**, **VVIDY**, **Lift the Ban**, **SCARF**, and the **Walkley Anti-Fascist Group**. The workshops focused on three key themes: **How to Set Up a Local Anti-Fascist Group**, **How to Engage People Who Aren’t Already ‘on-side’**, and **How to Move Beyond Reactivity**.

Overall, the event was a great success. A debrief is being planned, and next steps will be taken forward—updates will be shared in due course.



Sudan event at Sheffield Hallam

SYMAAG collaborated with numerous other groups and organisations in the city - City of Sanctuary, SOS4Sudan, Sheffield for Sudan, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield - to hold an evening of solidarity and awareness raising about the current situation in Sudan. We heard from a Sudanese expert who gave an overview of the ongoing conflict, had a panel discussion with activists and humanitarian organisations working both internationally and on the ground in Sudan, and had a short film screening and discussion with a Sudanese refugee living in Sheffield. The evening ended with delicious Sudanese food cooked by SOS4Sudan and some live Sudanese music.



Counter-protest against far right march and donation for Day Trip

On 13th June, Raise the Colours held a march and protest in Sheffield City Centre, marching from the Peace Gardens (ironic) to a hotel where people who are seeking asylum are living. Several groups organised counter protests which some SYMAAG members went along to. As well as attending the counter protests, SYMAAG made a £100 donation towards a day trip to the Peak District, which was organised for the people staying at the hotel, so they could be out for the day.



[Please find our Financial Statement for the year here.](#)