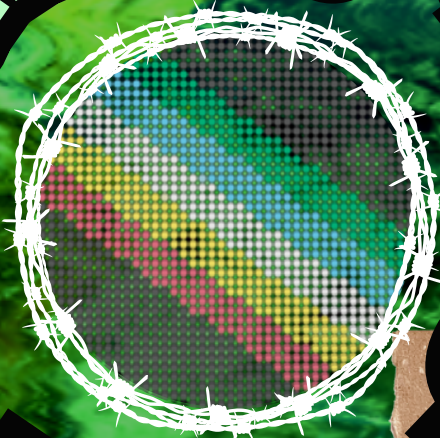


# disability + migration



a "who is welcome?"



# zine

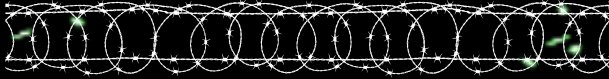


**Migrants' Rights Network**



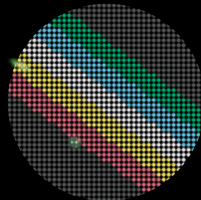
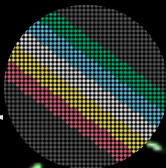
# ***Borders disable + debilitate.***

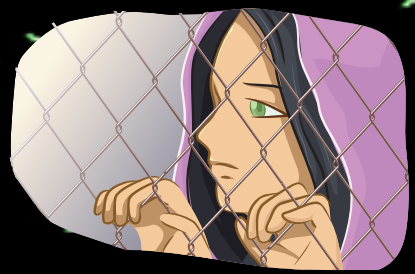
# intro



***Migrants with disabilities are an incredibly overlooked group. They often face barriers due to ableism, racism, xenophobia, classism and precarious immigration status. They often fear making their disabilities known in case it may negatively affect their immigration or asylum case, and may struggle with the stigma of being visibly or openly disabled.***

***The mental and monetary cost of being disabled in an ableist world can also present barriers to accessing healthcare, housing and other entitlements. The narrow definition of disability can also act as a gatekeeper, with the effect of excluding some migrants with disabilities from support.***

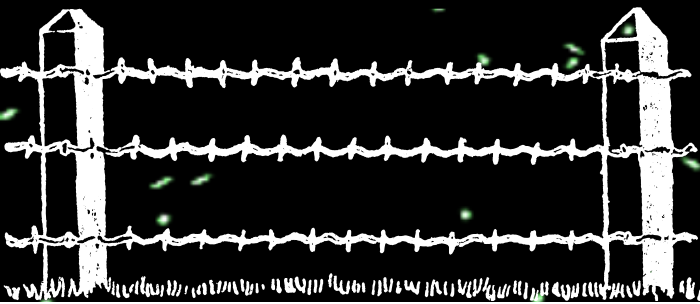


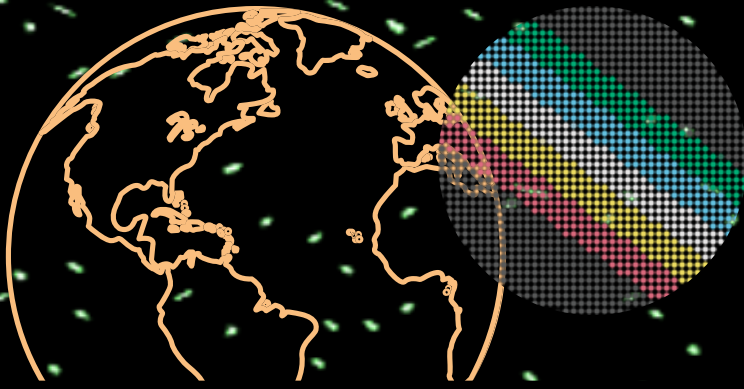


**At the Migrants' Rights Network, we use the holistic model of disability, and acknowledge that disability is a term encompassing a huge number of conditions and experiences.**

**The holistic model recognises that someone's experience of disability is determined by multiple factors and societal barriers. It examines the interplay of social and medical factors in how people experience disabilities. It also accounts for how intersections such as race and gender affect how people experience disability. Our acknowledgment of the holistic model is informed by members of our Network with lived experience of disability.**

**MEANWHILE, LEGAL DEFINITIONS OF DISABILITY ENCOMPASS ANY PHYSICAL OR MENTAL IMPAIRMENT THAT HAS A "SUBSTANTIAL AND LONG-TERM ADVERSE EFFECT" ON THE ABILITY OF SOMEONE TO CARRY OUT "NORMAL DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES".**



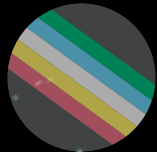
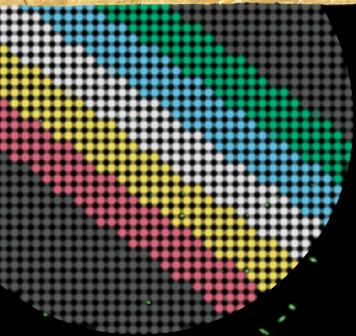



***WE WISH TO EMPHASISE THAT 'DISABILITY' IS NOT STATIC; MANY PEOPLE GO THROUGH EXPERIENCES THAT ARE DISABLING AND/OR DEAL WITH THE FLUCTUATING IMPACTS OF VARIOUS IMPAIRMENTS. RELATEDLY, DISABILITY IS NOT NECESSARILY SOMETHING AN INDIVIDUAL IS BORN WITH; MANY MIGRANTS ALSO EXPERIENCE DEBILITY AS AN "EXPECTED IMPAIRMENT" OF THE WORK THEY ARE FORCED INTO BY THEIR PRECARIOUS STATUS, OR BY PRE-MIGRATION CONDITIONS OF LIVING UNDER OCCUPATION, IN CONFLICT ZONES OR IN POVERTY.***

***Centering the agency of migrants with disabilities is crucial. Alongside people in our network, we look at how disability intersects with other aspects of their identity in different ways. We also have examined some discriminatory practices impacting migrants with disabilities in other countries such as the US and Canada to gain a better understanding of what these policies look like, and how they could be implemented in the UK.***



# WISIBILITY



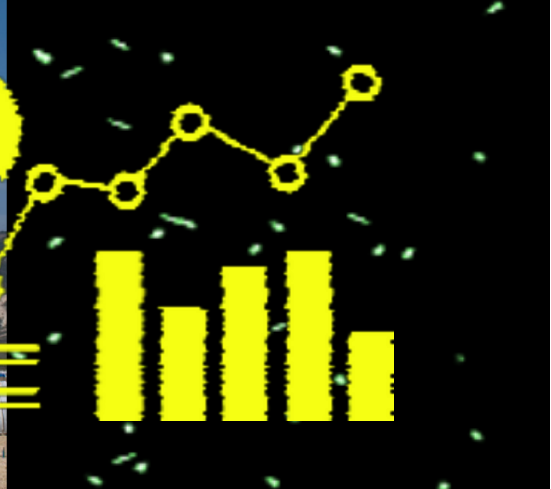


**Visibility is often thought of as a good thing when it comes to challenging the conditions that marginalised groups are subjected to. However, the visibility that migrants with disabilities get is often negative, and because of this, society fails to listen to and engage with the needs of migrants with disabilities.**

**Migrants with disabilities are regularly referred to through the euphemistic language of 'vulnerability', which prevents definitive steps to be taken to accommodate them. Vague references to "vulnerable migrants" are not elaborated upon: they only exist to acknowledge the existence of migrants with disabilities.**

**THIS LANGUAGE ALSO NORMALISES THE STATUS OF VULNERABILITY: IT INSINUATES THAT MIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES ARE INNATELY "VULNERABLE", AND BLAMES THEM FOR IT, INSTEAD OF EXAMINING THE SYSTEMS OF NEGLECT AND VIOLENCE THAT RENDER THEM "VULNERABLE".**

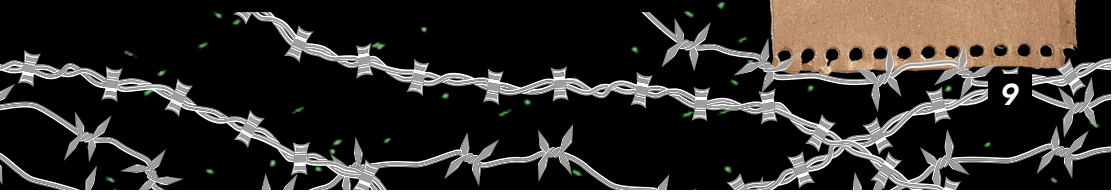
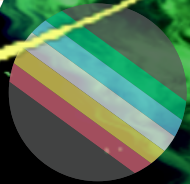
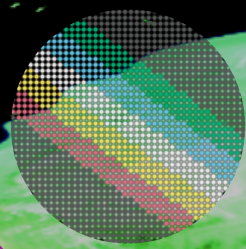
**The consequence of this is the poor provision of services for migrants with disabilities. There is also a glaring absence of procedures for understanding people's needs, as well as a lack of training for staff working in NGOs or the Home Office.**



***The negative effects of this kind of language are exacerbated through the lack of data collected on migrants with disabilities. This poses a barrier to understanding the full extent of the problems they face. Migrants with disabilities are also overlooked in the sense they are denied a platform to speak or for their voices to be heard, and so their needs are often dismissed. As a result of this neglect, people working directly with migrants, either as part of the Home Office or an NGO, have reported often not knowing of the existence of migrants with disabilities, particularly asylum seekers with disabilities.***

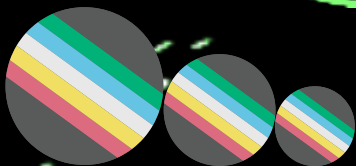
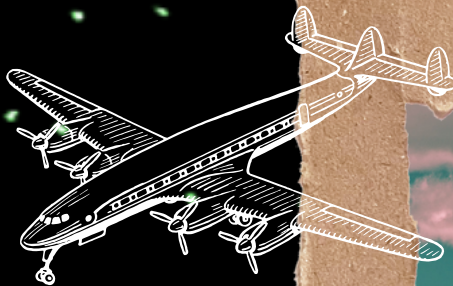
***MORE INFORMATION ON MIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES MUST BE COLLECTED, TO UNDERSTAND THEIR STRUGGLES AND EXPERIENCES BETTER.***

# DEPORTATION + DENIAL OF STATUS



The eight-page equality impact assessment accepts that rough sleepers with disabilities “may experience greater disadvantage” if deported to countries with poor access to support services.

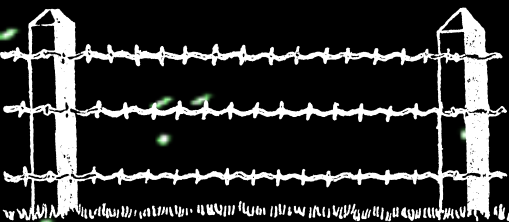
***For migrants with disabilities, the barriers put up by an ableist society further hinder their full participation in their communities. As a result, migrants with disabilities are left particularly vulnerable to deportation.***

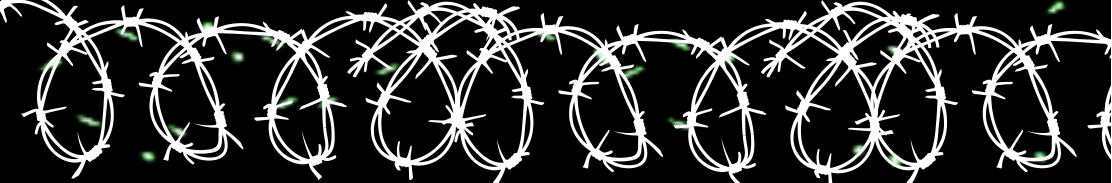


**SIGNIFICANT FACTORS IN PERMANENT RESIDENCY APPLICATION DECISIONS ARE PREJUDICED AGAINST MIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES. IT IS ESSENTIAL WE ACKNOWLEDGE POLICIES ENACTED IN OTHER COUNTRIES IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND IF, AND WHEN, THEY COULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE UK.**

**In 2019, changes to criteria in permanent residence decisions in the US added the (likelihood of) use of public services, such as food assistance and state-subsidised healthcare, as a significant factor against granting someone status. While this rule is now not enforced, public charge factors in immigration decisions have a long history in the US of purposefully keeping out certain populations deemed 'undesirable'.**

**Disability is also a legitimate grounds for deportation in Australia; the 1958 Migration Act allows for the deportation of entire families where a child has a disability, even if they were born in Australia. This has commonly been invoked for children with developmental disabilities like Down Syndrome and cerebral palsy. Permanent residency in Canada has been denied to people on similar grounds.**





**Additionally, asylum seekers with disabilities have often struggled with achieving refugee status on the basis of their disability/ies, where it has been ruled that their discrimination does not amount to persecution. In some cases, people have been granted refugee status where their disability has intensified discrimination on other grounds to the point of persecution: disability has been treated as an additive factor, but not as a factor in its own right. While there have been some cases where the state's neglect towards disabled people has been ruled as persecution, this is rare.**

**ABLEISM IS NOT DEFINED AS A GROUNDS FOR PERSECUTION UNDER INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE LAW, AND AS A RESULT, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE OFTEN UNABLE TO PROVE PERSECUTION.**

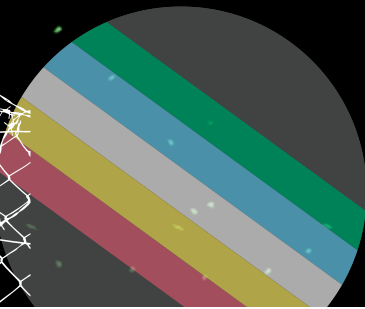
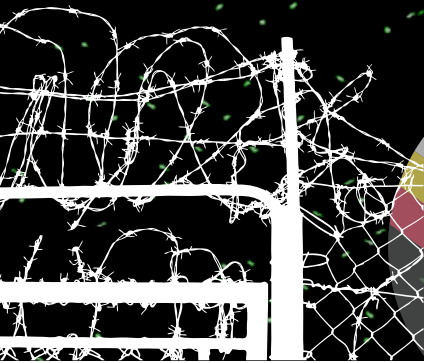




# ***Borders exacerbate disability.***



# Barriers



# The added cost of disability: monetary cost

**MIGRANTS ARE PERCEIVED TO BE UNDESERVING OF BELONGING AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS ARE VISIBLE IN THE NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS (NRPF) POLICY, WHERE MIGRANTS DON'T HAVE FREE ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES LIKE UNIVERSAL CREDIT.**

**This policy disproportionately affects migrants with disabilities, as they may therefore be unable to afford certain measures to alleviate their condition, such as dietary changes or timely physiotherapy. Additionally, many asylum seekers and refugees are unaware that they are entitled to access to healthcare\*.**



**\*All migrants in general are entitled to free A&E treatment.**

# **The added cost of disability: mental cost**

**Stigma can also prevent migrants from accessing disability support services, as they may not acknowledge themselves as being disabled or may not make their condition(s) known to migration authorities.**

**SPOON THEORY ALLOWS US TO UNDERSTAND THE MENTAL COST IN MORE DETAIL, WHETHER IN RELATION TO SELF-ADVOCATING OR ACCESS TO CARE. THIS THEORY SPEAKS TO THE EXTRA WORK PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HAVE TO DO TO BE ACCOMMODATED, WHICH IS A MENTALLY BURDENSOME PROCESS. THIS INCLUDES REPEATEDLY HAVING TO "PROVE" ONE'S CONDITION.**

**Even where there is tailored support available to migrants with disabilities, and even where they know about the existence of such support, the draining process of applying for support can have detrimental impacts. Having to navigate the stresses of the immigration system, including securing visas, can also increase mental anguish. Migrants with disabilities may, therefore, not have enough emotional capacity to go through long administrative processes related to their disability, such as assessments for Home Office accommodation.**

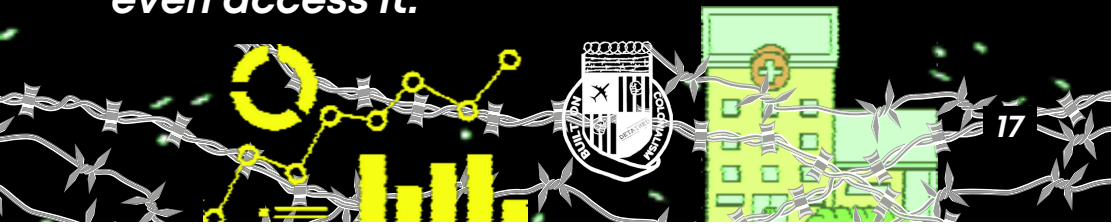
# Hostile Environment: Access to healthcare



The barriers to healthcare access are exacerbated for undocumented migrants with disabilities. Where different migrant groups are entitled to varying access to healthcare, the ever-expanding Hostile Environment has made it increasingly risky for undocumented migrants to access healthcare.

**INCREASED DATA-SHARING BETWEEN THE NHS AND THE HOME OFFICE HAS MADE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS TO ACCESS VITAL HEALTHCARE, ESPECIALLY IF THEY HAVE A FEAR OF BEING REPORTED, OR DENIED CARE BY HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS. THIS MEANS THAT UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES MAY OFTEN FORGO TREATMENT THAT WOULD HELP MANAGE THEIR CONDITION(S), PARTICULARLY IF IT INVOLVES ACCESSING SECONDARY CARE. AS A RESULT, THEIR CONDITIONS WILL OFTEN DETERIORATE.**

Hostile Environment policies have also meant that migrants entitled to free NHS healthcare have been denied this treatment; instead, they are charged 150% of the cost of treatment before they can even access it.



# Hostile Environment: Access to housing

**ASYLUM SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO BE DESTITUTE. THIS IS ESPECIALLY NOTABLE AS PART OF THE CRITERIA FOR DESTITUTION IS UNMET HOUSING NEEDS: ASYLUM SEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES HAVE OFTEN BEEN PLACED IN INACCESSIBLE ACCOMMODATION. THESE LIVING CONDITIONS MAY ALSO WORSEN PEOPLE'S DISABILITIES AND/OR RESULT IN NEW IMPAIRMENTS.**

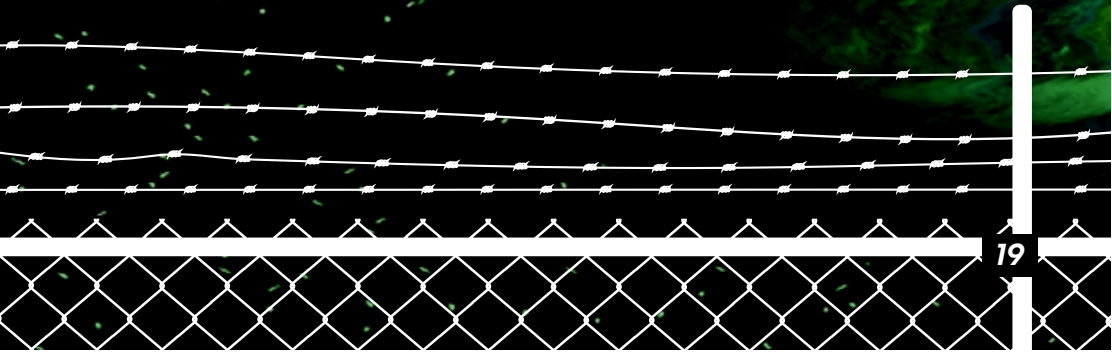
**Asylum hotel managers may also not pass information on the needs of asylum seekers with disabilities on to relevant Home Office services. Migrants with disabilities may have seen other migrants with disabilities being denied (appropriate) accommodations and therefore do not see the point in self-reporting.**



# BE C O M I N G



# DISABLED



*We have to make space for a wide range of experiences of disability. But since disability is very rigidly defined, some people with disabilities fall through the cracks, for example people with fluctuating disabilities, people who lack an official diagnosis, or people who don't identify as disabled.*

*Not all disabilities are congenital, i.e. from birth, yet some countries define disability in relation to refugee law in this way. The development of disabilities later in life can, therefore, prevent someone from self-identifying as disabled, and/or from accessing strictly gatekept identity-based entitlements.*

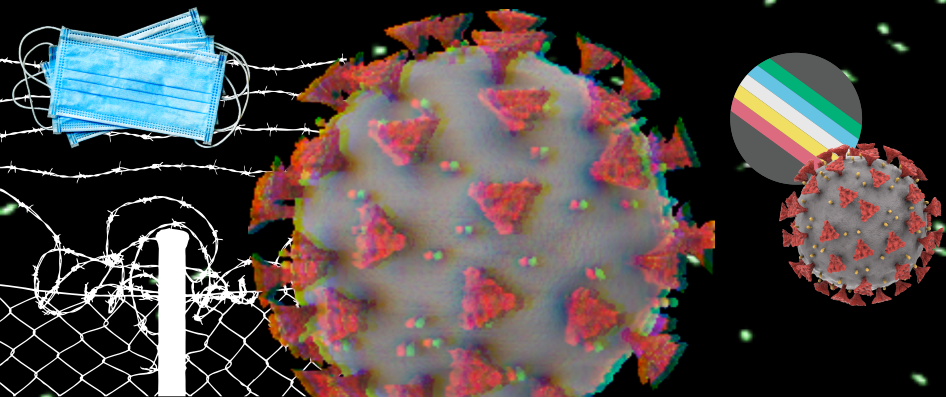
**THE NOTION OF STATIC AND CONGENITAL DISABILITY IS ONE THAT MANY DISABLED ACTIVISTS PUSH BACK AGAINST. INSTEAD THEY ADVOCATE FOR THE IDEA THAT ANYONE CAN BECOME DISABLED, AT ANY TIME, OR IN OTHER WORDS: "YOU'RE ONLY ABLE-BODIED UNTIL YOU'RE DISABLED".**



**A FLUID UNDERSTANDING OF DISABILITY HAS BECOME ESPECIALLY PERTINENT THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: IT'S A DISEASE THAT CAN 'DISABILISE' PEOPLE THROUGH LONG-TERM EFFECTS ON THE BODY - I.E. 'LONG COVID'. MIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES HAVE HAD DISPROPORTIONATE EXPOSURE TO CONDITIONS THAT CAUSE THEM TO CONTRACT COVID-19 AND, CONSEQUENTLY, LONG COVID.**

**These conditions include barriers to basic hygiene measures, the necessity of touching surfaces for support, the difficulty of social distancing in group living and/or care support, and lesser access to healthcare.**

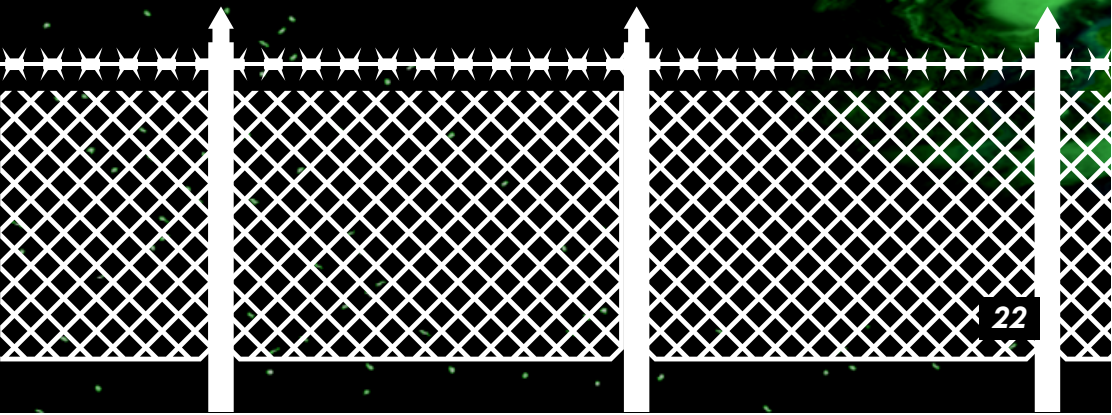
**Furthermore, once contracting COVID-19, certain migrants have disabilities that make them particularly vulnerable to the more adverse effects of the disease, for example immunocompromised migrants. This has intensified as COVID-19 has continued, where immunocompromised migrants are now less likely to have access to testing and PPE free of cost.**



DEBILITY

VERSUS

DISABILITY



**THE CONCEPT OF DEBILITY BRINGS INTO FOCUS THE WAYS THAT MIGRANTS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY PUSHED INTO SITUATIONS WHERE A GRADUAL DEGRADATION OF THEIR BODY IS ANTICIPATED AS AN EXPECTED CONSEQUENCE.**

***This is particularly visible in the kind of work some migrant workers partake in, including physical labour that has an expected debilitating effect of chronic joint pain. The gradual nature of debility also often forecloses migrants experiencing this from accommodations that other migrants with disabilities may be entitled to.***

***Furthermore, migrants can often become debilitated from being forced into immigration detention, or from the long wait for their immigration decisions. There are others that will become debilitated through having to overwork themselves so that they can afford their visas.***





**The framework of debility can help us complicate the binaries of disability and ability, and allow us to look at [dis]ability more comprehensively and expand our understanding of it.**

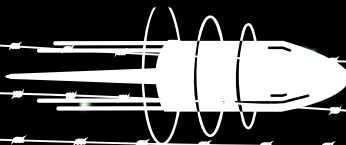
**Disability is more about “an event” that creates a clear before and after moment: a clear “exceptional” moment in time that renders someone disabled. It allows for clear cut identity constructions that allow people to mobilise for rights under a static notion of identity.**



**However, debility is a more gradual, “endemic” “slow wearing down of populations”, not linked to a single event of “disablement”, and looks at those who are constantly becoming debilitated or who are “sustained in a perpetual state of debilitation” due to State violence or neglect.**



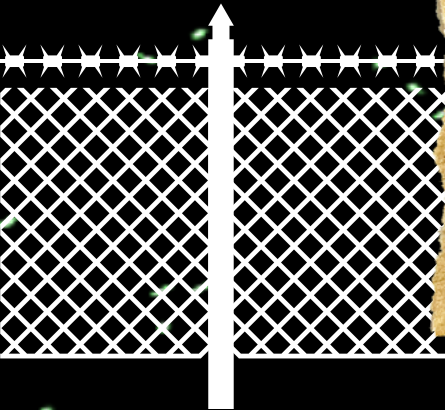
**A NARROW DEFINITION OF DISABILITY IS UNABLE TO CAPTURE VARIOUS INSTANCES OF CHRONIC DEBILITATION: HOW WE ARE COLLECTIVELY INCAPACITATED BY CAPITALISM, HOW ENTIRE POPULATIONS ARE DEBILITATED BY NEOCOLONIALISM OR IMPERIALISM, OR HOW ENTIRE POPULATIONS ARE SENTENCED TO “SLOW DEATH” THROUGH A WITHHOLDING OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS.**

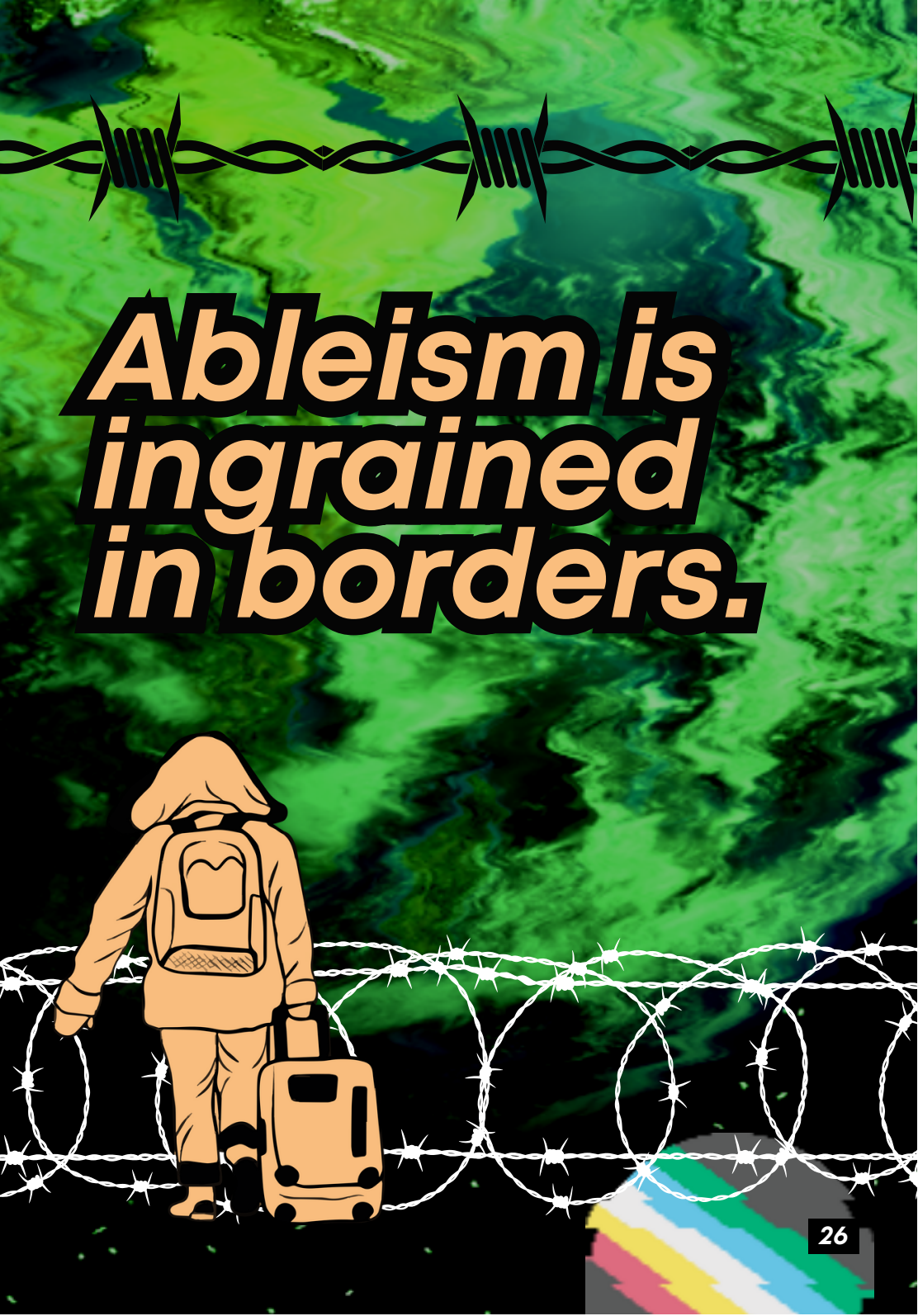




*There is also a distinction between “targetting the disabled” and targetting in order to debilitate. Whilst people with disabilities are targeted, discriminated against by the immigration system or are denied support (as touched on earlier within this zine), the State through its actions or inactions, debilitates and disables certain migrant or racialised populations.*

**DEBILITY THEREFORE COMBINES SYSTEMS LIKE BORDERING, CAPITALISM, RACE, IMPERIALISM, GENDER AND CLASS TO ILLUMINATE THE WAYS IN WHICH MARGINALISED POPULATIONS GLOBALLY ARE PLACED INTO LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS THAT MAKE THEM SUSCEPTIBLE TO FUTURE DISABILITY.**






***Ableism is  
ingrained  
in borders.***



# Conclusion



***Both migrants and people with disabilities have been deemed unwelcome in our society due to neoliberal rhetoric and policies. Migrants with disabilities are a diverse and overlooked group who are made to be particularly precarious and isolated due to the way the Hostile Environment, a punitive asylum system, and structures of ableism function.***

***At MRN, our intersectional approach to migrant justice implores us to highlight and understand their experiences and struggles; we can only achieve migrant justice if we include all migrants. We will therefore be continuing research on the experiences of migrants with disabilities, including input from people in our network, as part of our Who is Welcome campaign.***

***WE ENCOURAGE DISABILITY JUSTICE AND MIGRANT JUSTICE ORGANISATIONS TO CONSIDER THE UNIQUE OPPRESSION THAT MIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES FACE. ALL OUR STRUGGLES ARE INTERCONNECTED, AND WE MUST SHOW SOLIDARITY ACROSS MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE.***



***Migrants' Rights Network is a UK charity that works alongside migrants in their fights for rights and justice. We co-curate campaigns using anti-oppression practices to create transformational change, extending beyond the individual impact on migrants' lives, to tackle oppression at its source.***

***We are a values-led organisation with an intersectional approach. Our work is led by a diverse team majority led by migratised people and People of Colour, essentially first and second generation migrants, who also have numerous other intersecting identities, including religion, nationality, age, gender, sexuality and those with disabilities. These wide ranging identities and experiences inform our work, and particularly our work on language and how we challenge policies, established norms and narratives.***



# Migrants' Rights Network



[www.migrantsrights.org.uk](http://www.migrantsrights.org.uk)



migrants\_rights\_network



migrants\_rights



Migrants' Rights Network

Unit 405, Pelican House, 138-148 Cambridge Heath Road,  
London E1 5QJ

Tel: 07534 488696

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