

STRATEGIC LEGAL FUND
ADVANCING JUSTICE FOR MIGRANTS IN THE UK


Migrant Legal Project



Public
Law
Project

Biometric appointments for refugee settlement applicants: new data

Background

This report developed out of a concern that Migrant Legal Project ('MLP') clients were feeling compelled to pay unaffordable sums to attend biometric appointments as part of their refugee settlement applications. As a result, MLP were funded by the Strategic Legal Fund to gather evidence from their own cases about the impact of the outsourced system for providing biometric appointments. Public Law Project additionally spoke via telephone to two of MLP's clients about their experiences of attending their biometric appointment.

This statistical report analyses this data, detailing the number of people impacted by biometric appointment issues and the level of damages they suffer. Public Law Project has assisted with the data analysis and report writing.

Ongoing concerns with biometric appointments

A person granted five years' limited leave to remain as a refugee or on grounds of humanitarian protection may, on its expiry, apply for indefinite leave to remain. Once their settlement application is submitted, before it is decided, the person must record their biometric information and failure to do so can result in the application lapsing, losing s.3C leave and the person becoming an overstayer.

MLP has identified two significant, overlapping issues with this system:

1. Free appointments to register biometric information are scarce. It can take weeks of regular logging-in to the third party contractor's website (Sopra Steria) to secure one. Many people ultimately resort to booking a paid-for appointment due to being unable to secure a free one.
2. Free appointments are only available in Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Croydon, Manchester and Glasgow. For some, even the closest of these is hundreds of miles away. Travel costs are not paid for by the Home Office and can be extremely expensive, particularly if the appointment is for a large family. Often, these costs are such that supposedly free appointments cannot properly be categorised as such, because of the travel costs incurred.

Methodology

MLP collected data on 95 of their cases who had attended biometric appointments from April 2020 to February 2022. Nine of these cases were lacking information about the city in which the appointment occurred *and* the cost of the appointment. As a result they have been deleted from the data set – this report will explore the remaining 86 cases.

Number of cases in raw data from MLP	95
Cases with no data on appointment city AND no data on appointment cost	9
Total cases in data set <i>Even though some data is still missing from these cases, we can still draw some conclusions relating to EITHER travel OR appointment costs from the data we do have on these cases. We have only discounted cases where we don't have data on either theme.</i>	86

Number of people impacted

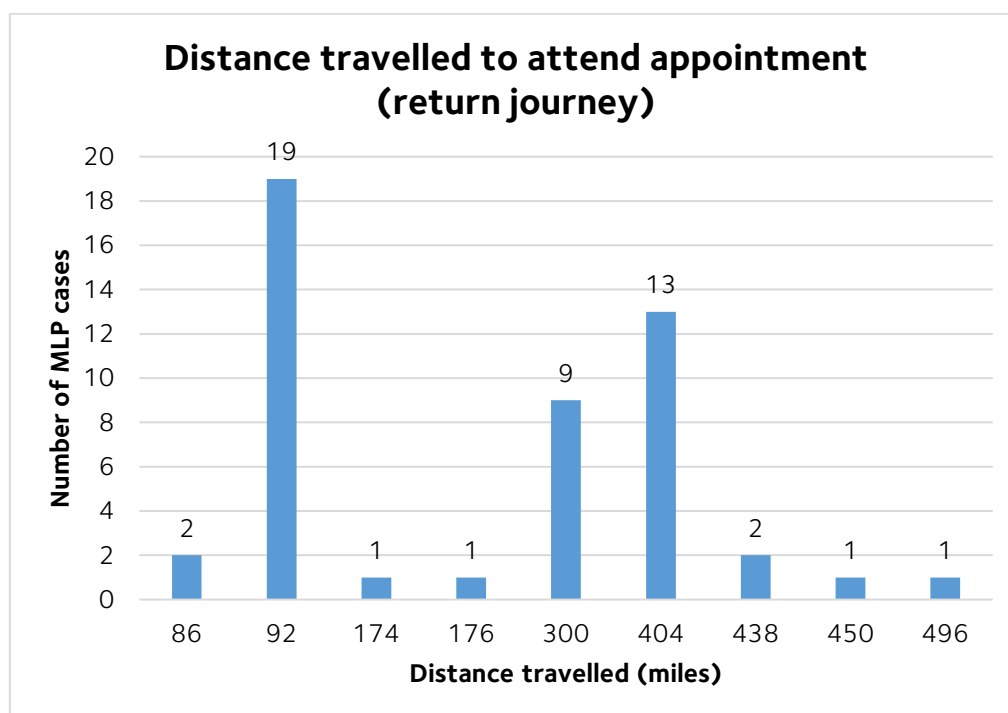
In 30 cases, clients attended an appointment in their home city, or within Greater London, or via the IDV app. In a further 7 cases, we do not have data on either the client's home or appointment city, but we do have data on the appointment cost which is why they remain in the data set. Overall, this leaves 49 cases who we know travelled outside of their home city for a biometric appointment.

Client attended appointment in their home city, or within Greater London, or via the IDV app.	30
Cases with no data on home or appointment city.	7
Total cases known to have travelled outside of their home city for a biometric appointment.	49

In 19 cases, clients paid for their biometric appointments. In 4 of these cases, multiple applicants attended biometric appointments that were paid for (for example, a family), bringing the total number of clients who paid for their biometric appointments up to 27.

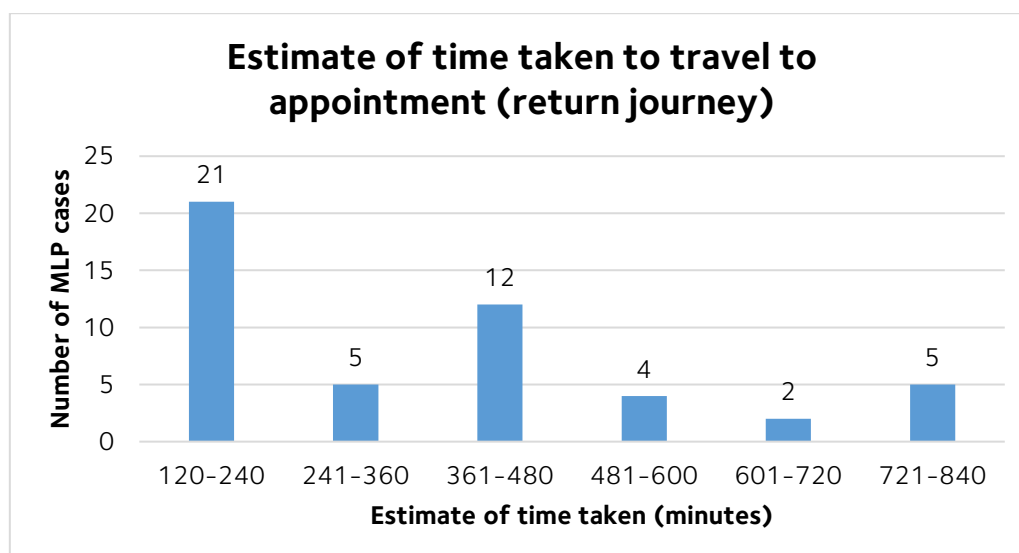
Cases where clients paid for their biometric appointments.	19
Total number of clients who paid for their biometric appointments	27

Distance travelled to attend biometric appointments



Of the 49 cases where clients travelled outside of their home city to attend a biometric appointment, they travelled from between 86 miles (Bristol to Cardiff) and 496 miles (Truro to Birmingham), as a return journey. The most common journeys were from Plymouth to Exeter (92 miles) and Plymouth to Birmingham (404 miles).

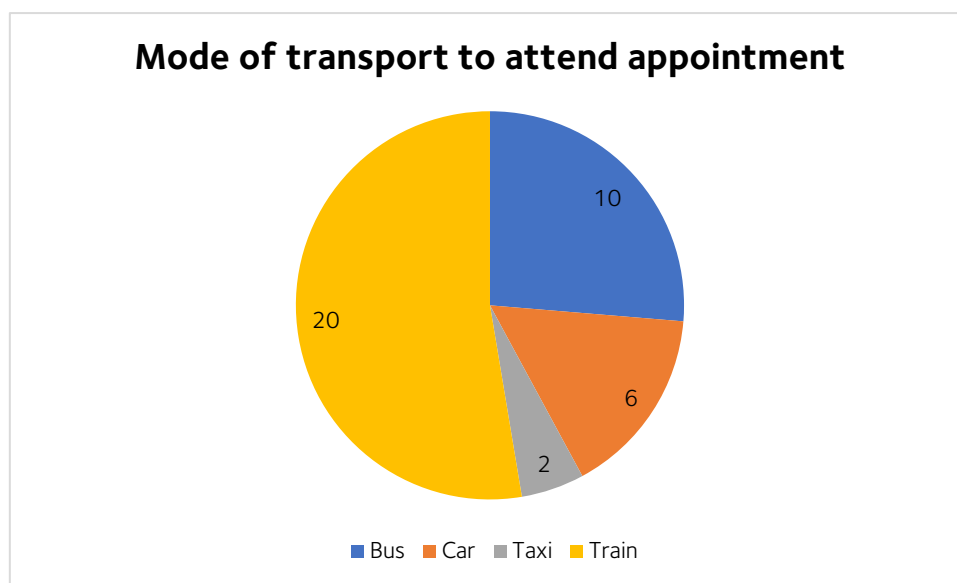
Time taken to attend biometric appointments



Of the 49 cases where clients travelled outside of their home city to attend a biometric appointment, they took between 2 and 14 hours to attend their appointment, as a return journey. In 21 cases applicants travelled for between 2 and 4 hours to attend their appointment. Almost half (47%, 23 cases) travelled for between 6 and 14 hours, including 7 cases who travelled for more than 10 hours.

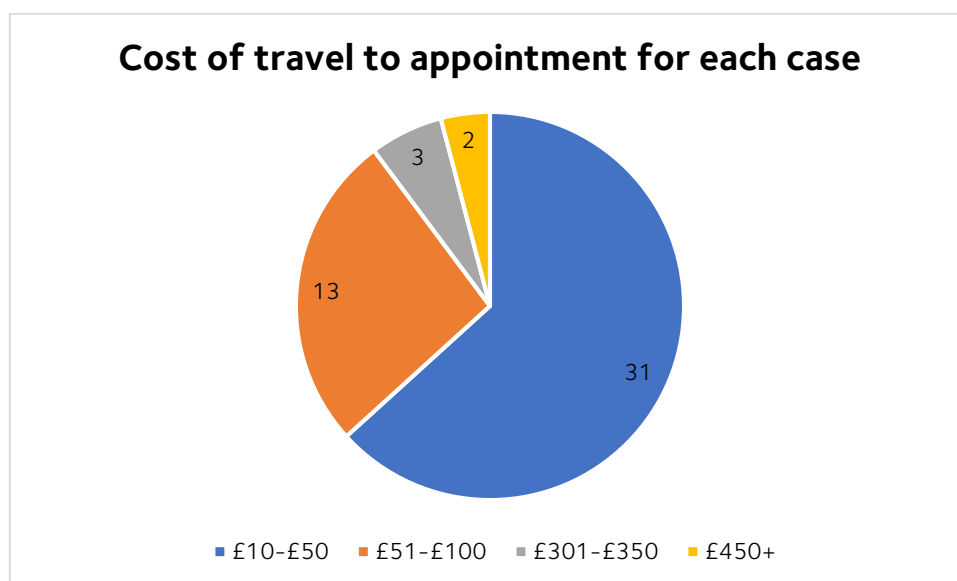
In these estimated travel times, breaks are not factored in. However, the two clients we spoke to both travelled with children in private cars to their appointments and told us that breaks were essential and added at least an additional hour onto each leg of their journey. Both clients we spoke to made journeys from Plymouth to Birmingham by car and told us that making the return trip within a day was their only option, because they did not know anyone to stay with in Birmingham and hotels were too expensive.

Mode of transport



Of the 49 cases where clients travelled outside of their home city to attend a biometric appointment, we have data on how 38 of them travelled to their appointment. The most common mode of transport was the train.

Cost of travel to attend biometric appointments

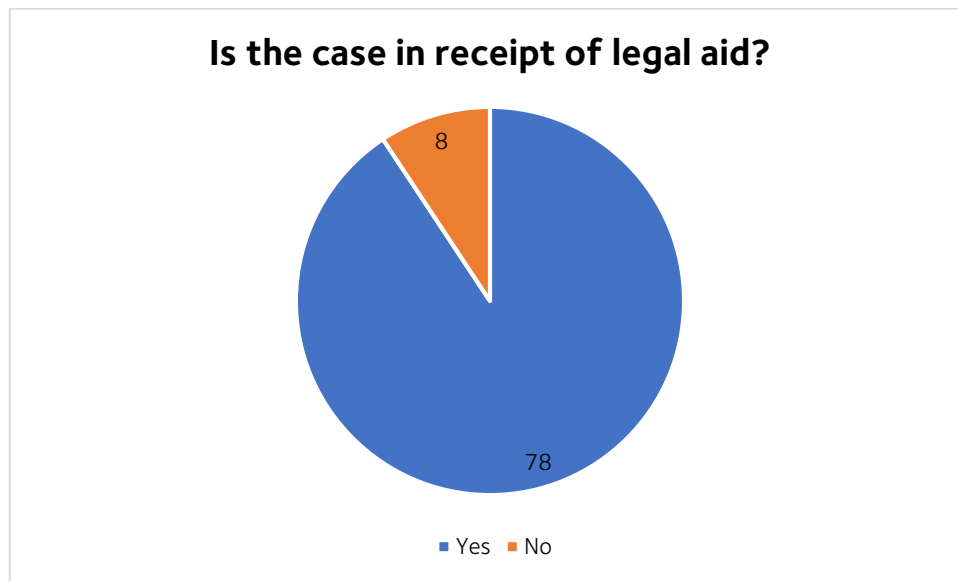


The cost of travelling for a biometric appointment varied enormously – from £13 for a return car journey from Bristol to Cardiff, to £504 for a return taxi journey from Plymouth to Birmingham. The majority of cases spent between £10 and £50 travelling to attend their appointment, but a not insignificant proportion (27%) spent between £51 and £100. In 5 cases, applicants spent more than £300 travelling to attend their appointment. These were applicants travelling from Plymouth to Birmingham by train, or Plymouth to Birmingham/ Plymouth to Cardiff via taxi.

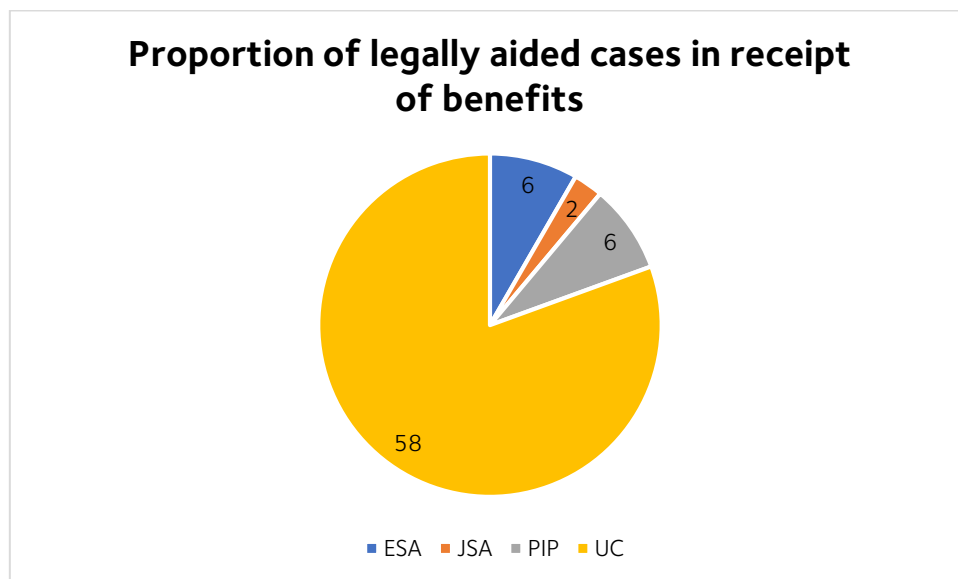


Of the 49 cases where clients travelled outside of their home city to attend a biometric appointment, we have data on who paid for 32 of them to travel to their appointment. The vast majority (89%, 28 cases) paid for travel themselves.

Clients' financial circumstances

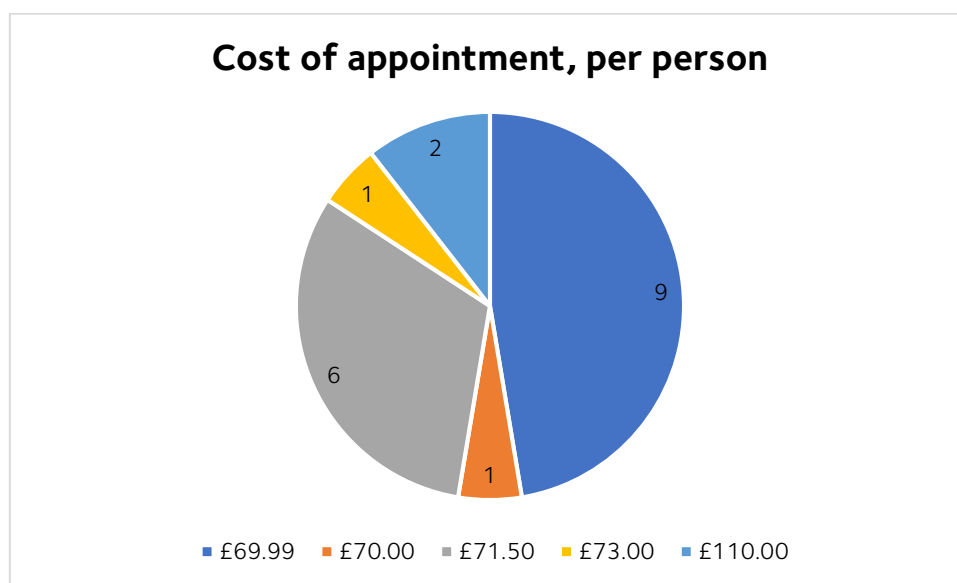


Of the 86 cases in the data set, the vast majority (91%, 78 cases) were in receipt of legal aid.



Of these 78 cases in receipt of legal aid, 72 involved clients who received some form of state benefit, the most common being Universal Credit (81%, 58 clients). As a proportion of the total data set of 86 cases, 67% received Universal Credit.

Cost of appointments



Of the 19 cases who paid for their biometric appointment, the vast majority paid £73 or less per person (89%, 17 cases). A small minority (11%, 2 cases) paid £110 per person for their biometric appointment.

Cumulative costs

One client we spoke to could not find any appointments nearby that were free and so had to travel from Plymouth to Birmingham in order to secure free appointments for themselves and their family. The limited provision of free appointments therefore simply displaced the cost – instead of having to pay for biometric appointments, the client incurred the cost of a long journey.

However, some cases experienced a dual financial cost of attending their biometric appointments and experienced *both* the cost of travelling to a biometric appointment *and* the cost of the appointment itself. In 14 cases, the appointment incurred a cost and it was outside the client's home city, meaning the travel also incurred a cost. In 2 of these cases, one or both of these costs was paid for by a local authority or charity. In 1 case, we do not have data on who paid for the travel. In 11 cases, both the appointment and travel costs were paid for by the client. In one of these latter cases, the client incurred an estimated cost of £501 for a return car journey from Plymouth to Birmingham and 4 biometric appointments. When we spoke to this client, they said the full cost was closer to £550 for the journey and appointment costs for their family. Another client told us that it was not just the petrol costs that the journey incurred, it was also the costs of feeding their family for the day-long journey in expensive outlets such as in service stations.

Total costs of appointments	Who paid for appointments?	Who paid for travel?	Estimated cost of travel
£69.99	Client	Client	£22
£69.99	Client	Client	£14
£69.99	Client	Client	£22
£69.99	Client	Client	£20
£69.99	Client	Client	£20
£69.99	Client	Client	£20
£69.99	Client	Client	£22
£71.50	Client	Client	£14
£71.50	Client	Client	£14
£214.50	Red Cross	START	£22
£71.50	Client	Client	£14
£73.00	Client	Cornwall Council – Syrian Resettlement Scheme (Tesco voucher)	£57
£440.00	Client	Client	£61
£330.00	Client	N/A	£26

Conclusion

A majority of the cases in this data set involved clients who were in difficult financial circumstances (91% were in receipt of legal aid) and yet in 49 of these cases, they travelled to biometric appointments outside of their home city and in 27 cases paid for their own biometric appointments. This represents an unreasonable burden for SET(P) applicants and their families.

Appendix 1: Note on statistical data

We have tried to reflect the actual experience of clients travelling to appointments, as far as possible, in terms of calculating journey times to the specific service points in a city and for a time of a day they would have been likely to travel at. Nevertheless, in making these calculations we have made a number of assumptions. These are outlined below.

1. Location of service points: Where the appointment city is Cardiff, we use the central Cardiff service point rather than Cardiff Bay. Where the appointment city is Croydon, the larger Bedford Point Service Point is used, rather than the Lansdowne Road Service Point. Where the appointment city is London, the most central London service point (London Mark Lane) is used.
2. Estimate of distance travelled: Miles to drive from centre of home city (as defined by Google Maps) to appointment city's UKVCAS Service Point (as listed on their website) using 'fastest route' on Google Maps. Rounded to nearest mile. Return journey.
3. Estimate of time taken: Average time in minutes from centre of home city (as defined by Google Maps) to appointment city's UKVCAS Service Point (as listed on their website) via the fastest route to arrive by 10am on a weekday morning via car, bus or train on Google Maps. Where no mode of transport is specified, car time is used. Doubled to give a return journey estimate of travelling at peak times.
4. Bus journeys: On some routes, there are no buses that will get you to the appointment centre by 10am. Instead we give the average journey time for buses across a weekday, arriving before 5pm. These journeys therefore may also have incurred an overnight stay cost, depending on the client's appointment time.
5. Estimate of cost of travel: The estimation of the cost of travel is to the nearest pound, based on the transport mode and route. For the train and bus route estimates, the cost is based on an anytime return ticket for an adult to reflect the fact that clients may need to travel at peak times to attend their appointment. We do not know how much notice clients had of their appointment and so these estimates are based on the assumption that they were not able to book advance tickets, although we recognise that some clients may have been able to. Train estimates are based on prices given by National Rail and bus estimates are based on prices given by National Express. Both are based on a journey from the home city train/ coach station to the appointment city train/ coach station, so do not include local transport in either location. For the private car route estimates, the cost is based on the government advisory fuel rate for a 1401 - 2000cc petrol car engine (15p per mile). Taxi estimates are based on a return journey from the home city train station to the UKVCAS Service Point, based on the cheapest quote available on www.taxipricecompare.co.uk. I corroborated these prices by looking at the cost of booking a local cab through Uber and they give similar results. Where no mode of transport is specified, car cost is used. All estimates are for a return journey.
6. Time and cost estimates were accurate at time of checking (24/03/22).
7. There are 86 cases in the data set presented here. Of these, some involved multiple applicants (for example, a family) and so the total number of clients involved is 197 people. We use the term 'case' when referring to each case MLP worked on (86 in total), and 'client' when discussing individual applicants (197 in total).

Appendix 2: Statistical summary table

Date of appointment	No. of applicants	Legal Aid (Y/N)	If Y – Benefits?	Home city	Appt city	Total cost of appts	Total cost of appts per person	Who paid for appts?	Travel	Who paid for travel?	Distance travelled (miles)	Estimate of time taken (minutes)	Estimate of cost of travel (£)
27/07/20	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	Client	300	350	£45
IDV app	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	IDV app	Free	Free	N/A	Client did not travel	N/A	0	0	£0
16/07/20	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	£69.99	£69.99	Client	Train	Client	92	166	£22
27/07/20	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	300	394	£94
29/07/20	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	300	394	£94
14/07/20	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	£69.99	£69.99	Client	Car	Client	92	130	£14
IDV app	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	IDV app	Free	Free	N/A	Client did not travel	N/A	0	0	£0
20/08/20	3	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	404	516	£300
17/09/20	2	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	300	394	£94
09/10/20	3	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	404	516	£300
16/09/20	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	300	394	£94
06/10/20	4	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Birmingham	£440.00	£110.00	Client	Car	Client	404	460	£61
13/10/20	3	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	Client	Car	Client	404	460	£61

09/02/21	6	Yes	JSA	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	Client	Car	Client	404	460	£61
09/02/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Cardiff	Free	Free	Client	Bus	Client	300	644	£45
11/11/20	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	£69.99	£69.99	Client	Train	Client	92	166	£22
01/12/20	1	No	N/A	Plymouth	Exeter	£69.99	£69.99	Client	Train	Client	92	166	£22
15/02/21	3	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	404	516	£300
19/04/21	1	Yes	PIP	Plymouth	Exeter	£69.99	£69.99	Client	Bus	Client	92	160	£20
19/04/21	1	Yes	PIP	Plymouth	Exeter	£69.99	£69.99	Client	Bus	Client	92	160	£20
19/04/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	£69.99	£69.99	Client	Bus	Client	92	160	£20
19/05/21	3	Yes	ESA	Plymouth	Croydon	Free	Free	N/A	Bus	Client	450	794	£45
31/08/21	5	Yes	Low income	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	Bus	Client	404	740	£41
08/07/21	1	No	N/A	Plymouth	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	Car	Client	92	130	£14
24/09/21	1	Yes	UC	London	Croydon	Free	Free	N/A	Bus	Client	0	0	£0
04/11/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Train	92	166	£22
01/11/21	1	No	N/A	Exeter	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
16/03/22	2	Yes	ESA	Plymouth	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	Bus	Client	300	644	£45
09/11/21	1	No	N/A	Exeter	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
29/11/21	2	Yes	UC	Plymouth	London	Free	Free	N/A	Bus	Client	438	750	£45
20/01/22	3	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	Bus	Client	404	740	£41
08/12/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	92	166	£22
08/12/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	92	166	£22
08/02/22	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	92	166	£22
07/02/22	1	Yes	ESA	Plymouth	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	92	166	£22
10/03/22	5	Yes	UC	Plymouth	London	Free	Free	N/A	Bus	Client	438	750	£45
04/09/20	3	Yes	ESA	Bristol	Birmingham	£330.00	£110.00	Client	N/A	Client	176	252	£26

09/11/20	1	Yes	Destitute	Exeter	N/A	£69.99	£69.99	Client	N/A	Client	N/A	N/A	N/A
18/12/20	1	Yes	ESA	Nottingham	Nottingham	N/A	N/A	Client	N/A	Client	0	0	£0
30/03/21	6	Yes	CB/TC Low Income	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	Taxi	Plymouth Council – Syrian Resettlement Scheme	404	460	£504
15/12/20	1	Yes	Low Income	Exeter	Exeter	£69.99	£69.99	Client	N/A	Client	0	0	£0
30/03/21	5	No	N/A	Cardiff	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
19/05/21	3	Yes	JSA	Plymouth	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	Taxi	Plymouth Council – Syrian Resettlement Scheme	300	350	£430
24/02/21	2	Yes	ESA	Bristol	N/A	£140.00	£70.00	Client	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
15/04/21	3	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	Client	404	460	£61
19/03/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	£71.50	£71.50	Client	N/A	Client	92	130	£14
22/03/21	1	Yes	UC	Exeter	Exeter	£71.50	£71.50	Client	N/A	Client	0	0	£0
20/04/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	Client	300	350	£45
29/04/21	6	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	Client	404	460	£61
25/05/21	5	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	Client	404	460	£61
07/05/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	£71.50	£71.50	Client	N/A	Client	92	130	£14
03/06/21	1	Yes	PIP	Cardiff	Cardiff	£71.50	£71.50	Client	N/A	Client	0	0	£0

04/08/21	6	Yes	UC	Exeter	At Home Pop UP	Free	Free	N/A	Client did not travel	N/A	0	0	£0
09/07/21	3	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	£214.50	£71.50	Red Cross	Train	START	92	166	£22
30/06/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	£71.50	£71.50	Client	N/A	Client	92	130	£14
N/A	4	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
20/10/21	4	Yes	No	Exeter	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	Client	0	0	£0
28/09/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	N/A	N/A	N/A	Train	Client	92	166	£22
20/10/21	1	Yes	UC	Plymouth	Exeter	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	92	166	£22
08/11/21	1	Yes	UC	Bristol	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	Train	Client	86	122	£21
08/12/21	1	Yes	UC	Gloucester	N/A	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
25/11/21	2	No	N/A	Sheffield	Sheffield	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
16/12/21	5	Yes	UC	Taunton	N/A	Free	Free	NA	N/A	Local authority	N/A	N/A	N/A
02/12/21	4	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
16/12/21	4	Yes	UC	Taunton	N/A	Free	Free	NA	N/A	Local authority	N/A	N/A	N/A
22/12/21	4	Yes	UC	Plymouth	N/A	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	1	Yes	UC	Cheltenham	NA – on mobile	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
N/A	1	Yes	Low income	Bristol	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	Client	86	122	£13
23/03/22	3	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	Bus	Client	0	0	£0
19/08/20	1	Yes	PIP	Cardiff	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
05/08/20	2	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
02/09/20	1	Yes	PIP	Cardiff	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
02/09/20	1	No	N/A	N/A	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

19/09/20	2	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
05/01/21	4	Yes	PIP	Plymouth	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	N/A	N/A	404	460	£61
10/05/21	1	No	N/A	Cardiff	Cardiff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
16/02/22	4	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
21/01/22	1	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
21/03/22	2	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
16/03/22	2	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	£0
22/06/21	5	Yes	UC	Truro	Birmingham	Free	Free	N/A	Car	Cornwall Council – Syrian Resettlement Scheme (Tesco voucher)	496	540	£74
02/06/21	1	Yes	UC	Truro	Exeter	£73.00	£73.00	Client	Train	Cornwall Council – Syrian Resettlement Scheme (Tesco voucher)	174	306	£57
26/10/21	5	Yes	UC	Sidmouth	At Home Pop UP	Free	Free	N/A	Client did not travel	N/A	0	0	£0

07/01/21	4	Yes	UC	Falmouth	At Home Pop UP	Free	Free	N/A	Client did not travel	N/A	0	0	£0
09/02/22	4	Yes	UC	Truro	At Home Pop UP	Free	Free	N/A	Client did not travel	N/A	0	0	£0
28/02/22	3	Yes	UC	Cardiff	Cardiff	Free	Free	N/A	Bus	Client	0	0	£0

Note: N/A is used to indicate where information is unknown or not relevant to a specific case.