

BIG ISSUE NORTH

THE INDEPENDENT STREET PAPER | WORKING NOT BEGGING



VENDOR AUDIT 2019



VENDOR AUDIT -

Big Issue North gives people with limited other means the opportunity to earn an income. The people who sell Big Issue North may not be able to access mainstream employment for many reasons, such as their mental health, drug or alcohol dependence, lack of skills, homelessness or because they are new to the country.

In 2019, Big Issue North was sold by around 250 people at any one time in towns and cities across the North of England. Fifteen years ago (2004), there were 270 vendors selling the magazine at any one time – around 20 vendors more than today.

118 vendors completed the vendor audit in 2019 from Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Sheffield. Of the vendors who completed the audit, 51% were based in Manchester, 16% in Liverpool, 19% in Leeds, and 14% in Sheffield.



About Our Vendors :

	2019	2004
MALE	60%	90%
FEMALE	40%	10%
16 - 20 YEARS OLD	13%	3%
21 - 25 YEARS OLD	14%	14%
26 - 30 YEARS OLD	8%	23%
31 - 35 YEARS OLD	8%	29%
36 - 40 YEARS OLD	11%	18%
41 - 45 YEARS OLD	13%	9%
46 - 50 YEARS OLD	13%	2%
OVER 50 YEARS OLD	20%	2%

2019

In the last fifteen years, the demography of our vendors has changed dramatically. This is largely driven by the decrease in heroin use and the migration of Roma people from Romania. In 2019, only 28% of our vendors described themselves as British, compared to 85% in 2004. 66% are Romanian and the remaining 6% of vendors comprise nationalities including Polish, Slovakian, Czech, Latvian and Italian.

While the oldest vendor in 2004 was 65, our 2019 audit recorded five vendors aged between 61 and 65, one vendor between 66 and 70 and one vendor between 76 and 80. The amount of older vendors has also increased since our last audit in 2016, when only 15% of our vendors were over the age of 50.

This year also demonstrates the greatest similarity in the amount of male and female vendors to date, with a slight increase of female vendors compared to our last audit, when women made up 39% of our vendor demography.

LANGUAGE

64% of vendors do not speak English as a first language, and of that 64%, 92% say that selling the magazine helps them to improve their English skills.

FAMILY

84% of vendors have regular contact with their family, a very similar statistic to our previous audit. This drops to 59% among British vendors, and 74% among male vendors. 5% of all vendors do not have any family at all.

BACKGROUND

Overall, 11% of vendors said they had been in care during childhood, 7% had been in the armed forces, and 18% had been in prison at some time in their lives. This is not significantly different from the data collected during our last audit, although we now have more vendors who were previously in care. All of these statistics were highest among British men.

Selling Big Issue North

Of the 74% of vendors who have now been selling Big Issue North for more than 2 years, 53% have been selling for 5 years or longer.

This demonstrates a significant change since our last audit, when 30% of vendors had been selling for less than a year, 13% had been selling for 1 – 2 years and 56% of vendors had been selling for more than 2 years. This could suggest that vendor retention has been more successful, but also reflects recent difficulties in recruiting new vendors.

LENGTH OF TIME PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SELLING THE MAGAZINE FOR

	2019	2004
LESS THAN 6 MONTHS	7%	36%
6 - 12 MONTHS	7%	16%
1 - 2 YEARS	12%	27%
MORE THAN 2 YEARS	74%	21%

HOW MANY DAYS VENDORS SELL IN A WEEK

26% of vendors sell for 2 – 3 days a week (19% in 2016)
 51% vendors sell for 4 – 5 days a week (46% in 2016)
 23% vendors sell for 6 – 7 days a week (35% in 2016)

This slight decrease in vendors selling the magazine 4 or more days a week (from a total of 81% in 2016 to 74% this year) reflects the increasing number of Roma women who balance their work with childcare responsibilities.

WHERE PEOPLE SELL BIG ISSUE NORTH

34% vendors sell the magazine in city centres and 66% in out of town areas. The amount of vendors selling the magazine in out of town areas has increased over the past 15 years, and even very recently – 40% of vendors sold the magazine in city centres in 2016 – which reflects the fact that Roma vendors are more able to organise to travel to out of town to work: 80% of non-British vendors work in out of town areas, compared to 25% of British vendors.

VENDORS SAY SELLING THE MAGAZINE HELPS THEM BY:

- Providing a way to earn an income: 88%
- Improving their confidence and/or motivation: 57%
- Improving their budgeting skills: 21%
- Providing a structure to their day: 29%
- Giving them something to do: 41%
- Signposting them to support services: 13%
- Providing support from staff to make changes: 19%

These figures are very similar to those retrieved during our last audit. The most significant difference is in the amount of vendors who identified signposting to other support services as a means by which Big Issue North helps them – this was identified by 25% of vendors in 2016. However, this coincides with the significant decrease in the amount of areas in which vendors identified themselves as needing help or advice (see page 10).





MOVING ON AND EMPLOYMENT

48% of vendors see themselves moving on from selling Big Issue North, while 26% are content to continue to sell the magazine for the foreseeable future, and the remaining 26% are uncertain what the future holds.

EMPLOYMENT

This demonstrates a slight decrease in the amount of vendors who expressed certainty about hoping to move on since our last audit, when the figure was 54%. However, this audit has also identified a greater sense of uncertainty – in the previous audit, 45% of vendors described themselves as happy to continue to selling the magazine, with only 1% expressing uncertainty about their future plans.

British vendors are also far more likely to see themselves moving on from selling the magazine (69%) than non-British vendors (40%), and men are more likely to see themselves moving on (61%) than women (28%).

EMPLOYMENT

45% of vendors have previously been in employment. The most common types of work people have previously done include delivery, painting and decorating, cleaning and factory/warehouse work.

This compares to 75% in 2004, when most vendors had previously worked in elementary occupations (31%), skilled trades occupations (25%) and process/plant/machine operatives (13%). However, this year's figure is substantially higher than the figure of 34% of vendors with previous work experience identified in 2016.

Men are far more likely to have previous employment experience (67%) than women (13%).

WHEN VENDORS LAST HAD A JOB (FOR THOSE WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY WORKED):

This has been a consistent trajectory, with 18% of vendors in 2016 having last

worked in the last year, 20% having last worked between 1 and 3 years ago and 62% having last worked over 3 years ago, possibly reflecting the increase in jobs which require higher qualifications.

	2019	2004
In the last 6 months	8%	11%
6 – 12 months ago	0%	13%
1 – 2 years ago	17%	11%
2 – 3 years ago	6%	15%
Over 3 years ago	69%	50%

EDUCATION

Only 25% of vendors have formal qualifications, compared to over 92% of the general working age population. Vendors' qualifications include A Levels, GCSEs, NVQs, specific qualifications in driving, care, web and graphic design, painting and decorating, welding, joining and carpentry, cleaning, food hygiene, customer service, business administration, massage therapy and engineering, and even degrees.

This demonstrates a decrease in the amount of vendors with qualifications, compared to 28% of vendors in 2016 and 49% in 2004 holding formal qualifications, which reflects the fact that Roma vendors have had less access to education and training than British vendors – 50% of our British vendors hold formal qualifications, compared to 15% of our non-British vendors. Men are also much more likely to hold formal qualifications (37%) than women (6%).

PROBLEMS VENDORS

ASPIRATIONS

Vendors cited a range of jobs that they would like to move on into – these included cleaning, warehouse or factory work, delivery, painting and decorating, and shop or retail work, among others. 19 vendors (16%) said that they would be open to any kind of work, while 16 (14%) said that they would not like to move on from Big Issue North for the foreseeable future.

We also asked vendors what they would like to achieve over the coming year. 113 vendors responded, and 16% of that 113 said they had no immediate goals. Of the remaining answers:

- 27% of vendors said that they would like to make more money.
- 17% of vendors said that they would like to move into new accommodation.
- 16% of vendors said that they would like to get a new job.
- 14% of vendors said that they would like to spend more time with their families.
- 8% of vendors said that they would like to be in better health.

In total, 35% of all the vendors we surveyed said that they would like to either make more money or get a new job in the coming year. This suggests that although only 6% of vendors said they face problems pertaining to finances (see page 10), many vendors, while possibly more financially stable than they were prior to selling the magazine, do still struggle financially.

WHAT TRAINING PEOPLE NEED TO GET THE JOBS THEY'D LIKE

Vendors were very open to accessing training, specifying particular training needs, including getting CSCS cards and driving licences and access to ESOL/English language courses. They also highlighted they would like more support around CV writing and job searches.

51% of vendors who answered this question stated they would not require any training, indicative in some places of previous training and experience, but also possibly suggesting a lack of understanding/knowledge of the specific training needed to progress into employment.

This is also suggested by the fact that 9% of vendors who answered this question stated that they were unsure what training they would require, while others gave vague answers such as “any qualification”, “whatever will be needed then” and “more courses”.

Likewise, 35% of the vendors who told us what support they felt they needed to achieve their goals responded “nothing”, possibly suggesting a lack of awareness of the processes required to achieve them or of the support available to them.

The problems vendors face have also changed over the years. Only 9% of vendors now report having a problem with drugs (compared to 61% in 2001) and only 12% report having a problem with accommodation (compared to 54% in 2001). This reflects that Roma communities often share accommodation and support each other when they move to this country.

HOUSING STATUS

Are all Big Issue North vendors homeless?

Vendors do not have to be homeless to sell Big Issue North – selling the magazine gives people with few other means, who may be at risk of homelessness as a result, the opportunity to earn an income.

Two thirds of vendors now live in either private rented or local authority/housing association accommodation, compared to just 19% in 2004.

WHERE VENDORS LIVE

- 48% of vendors live in private rented accommodation
- 19% of vendors live in local authority or housing association accommodation
- 27% of vendors are currently living with friends/family
- 3.5% of vendors were sleeping rough at the time that they were asked through the audit

This reflects a significant decrease in homelessness among our vendors in the past fifteen years, which is most likely due, at least in part, to the fact that there is now a significantly greater number of vendors who have been selling the magazine for over a year, during which time they have been supported into housing.

However, at the time of our last audit, 71% of vendors lived in private rented accommodation, reflecting that homelessness among our vendors has recently begun to increase again.

Non-British vendors are more likely to be homeless (35%) than British vendors (28%), though they are also more likely to live in private rented accommodation (59% compared to 19%). Women are also more likely to be homeless (40%) than men (27%).

S FACE



WHERE VENDORS SLEPT THE NIGHT BEFORE THE AUDIT

The night before the audit, of the 88 vendors who answered this question, 85% reported sleeping at home, while 8% stayed with friends or family, 1% stayed at a B&B and 6% slept outside. 25% of vendors have slept rough in the last 12 months, and 34% of vendors at some point in their lives. This again demonstrates an increase since 2016, when 13% of vendors had slept rough in the last 12 months, and 36% at some point in their lives.

Reasons for rough sleeping included hostels being full, having no connection to the local area, having rent arrears, being in a relationship, having no ID, owning a pet, alcohol/drug use, bullying in hostels, referral problems, and not knowing where to look for accommodation.

Of those people who slept rough, 68% did not try to get a place in a hostel – an increase from 63% in 2016.

The length of time people have slept rough for varies from a day to 22 years,

with 35% sleeping rough for under 6 months, 7.5% between 6 months and 1 year, 10% between 1 and 2 years, 35% between 2 and 5 years, 7.5% between 5 and 10 years and 5% for over 10 years. In 2001, 46% had slept rough for less than a week and 52% between one week and one year.

HOW VENDORS BECAME HOMELESS?

Of those vendors who categorise themselves as homeless (don't have their own tenancy):

- 8% became homeless as a result of being new to the country
- 19% as a result of relationship problems
- 21% as a result of drug/alcohol issues
- 11% after leaving prison
- 2% after leaving the armed forces

Other reasons included relocation to a different city, leaving care, the loss of a job, bail conditions, a breakdown in mental health, bereavement and fleeing domestic violence.

This demonstrates a significant alteration in the predominant causes

of homelessness since 2004, when the most common reasons were splitting up with a partner (26%), being kicked out by parents (23%) and leaving home due to family problems (18%). It is also substantially different from 2016, when 36% became homeless as a result of being new to the country, 25% as a result of relationship problems, 7% as a result of drug/alcohol issues and 5% after leaving prison. Again, this reflects the fact that Roma vendors often share accommodation.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- 19% of vendors believe they have a disability, defined as a long-term illness/health condition which limits their daily activity. This increases to 47% among British vendors. Conditions include mental health issues, learning difficulties, dyslexia, asthma, COPD, diabetes, osteoporosis, arthritis, back pain, mobility issues, circulation problems, epilepsy and hepatitis C.

- 17% of vendors consider themselves to have a mental health problem. Of that 17%, 36% are currently accessing mental health services. This increases to 47% among British vendors, with 31% accessing mental health services.
- 14% of vendors are drug users. Of that 14%, 20% use heroin, 16% use crack cocaine, 16% use cannabis, 2% use legal highs such as spice, 5% use amphetamine, 5% use benzos and 9% use prescribed methadone. 68% of vendors who use drugs started using them over 10 years ago. British vendors are more likely to use drugs than non-British vendors (41% compared to 3%), and men are more likely to use drugs than women (21% compared to 2%).
- 7% of vendors believe they have a problem with alcohol. This figure comes exclusively from male vendors. British vendors are more likely to believe they have a problem (22%) than non-British vendors (1%).

These figures are similar to those obtained in 2016, although the amount of vendors reporting disabilities and mental health problems and problems with alcohol have slightly increased.

OTHER SERVICES USED BY VENDORS:

- 91% of vendors are registered with a GP, compared to over 99% of the population. Women are more likely to be registered (96%) than men (89%).
- 39% of vendors are registered with a dentist, compared to 51% of the general population. Again, this figure is higher among women (51%) than men (31%).
- 29% of vendors have used a foodbank

and 30% have used soup kitchens, compared to an estimated 8% of the general population. Men are much more likely to access these services than women, with 33% of male vendors and 21% of female vendors having used foodbanks and 43% of male vendors and 9% of female vendors having used soup kitchens.

- 27% of vendors who use drugs/alcohol are engaged with drug/alcohol services.

These figures are similar to those obtained during the last audit, although there are now more vendors who have used foodbanks and soup kitchens but also who are registered with a GP, while fewer vendors are now accessing dental care and drug/alcohol services.

ID AND BANK ACCOUNTS

- 37% of vendors don't have a birth certificate and 50% don't have a passport.
- 58% of vendors have no form of bank account.
- 15% of vendors have a driving licence.
- 8% of vendors have a medical card.
- 61% of vendors have an NI number.
- 10% of vendors have verification of self-employment.
- 58% of vendors have a European Identity card.

These figures differ substantially from those obtained in 2016. While the number of vendors with a birth certificate has increased from 52% to 63%, just 30% of vendors had no form of bank account in 2016, while 21% had a medical card, 71% had an NI number and 22% had verification of self-employment.

CRIME

- 16% of vendors were involved in criminal activity before selling Big Issue North.
- 79% of vendors who have been involved in criminal activity say that since selling Big Issue North, they have committed less crime.
- 18% of vendors have been a victim of crime.
- 32% of vendors who have been a victim of crime believe it was because of their race and/or nationality.
- 14% of vendors have been a victim of crime while selling the magazine, 7% whilst sleeping rough and 4% while staying in a hostel.

These figures are generally very similar to those obtained in the last audit, although it is notable that the impact of selling Big Issue North on reducing criminal activity has increased significantly, from 64% in 2016.

BEGGING

25% of vendors begged prior to selling the magazine, a figure which increases to 56% among British vendors and 36% among men.

Of that 25%, 69% say that selling the magazine has reduced their begging, and 94% claim that since selling the magazine, their begging has either decreased or stayed the same.

Again, this demonstrates a significant improvement since 2016, when 71% of those who had begged claimed that their begging had either decreased or stayed the same since they began selling the magazine.





Areas where vendors feel they need help or advice

	2019	2016	2004
Drugs	7%	9%	56%
Accommodation	8%	12%	53%
Finances	6%	26%	51%
Employment	6%	36%	35%
Physical health problems	5%	18%	33%
Eating well	5%	7%	33%
Mental health problems	7%	9%	23%
Education/training	4%	9%	17%
Alcohol misuse	3%	4%	17%
Committing crime	1%		9%
Being a victim of crime	1%	4%	
Gambling	1%	2%	3%
Language barrier	3%	23%	
No/restricted right to work	1%	<1%	
Other	9%	4%	5%
None of the above	64%	36%	

The problems that vendors face have changed over the years. Only 8% now report having a problem with accommodation, compared to 12% in 2016 and 53% in 2004. This reflects that Roma communities often share accommodation and support each other when they move to this country. However, the fact that 14% of all surveyed vendors reported aspirations pertaining to accommodation suggests that many still face housing concerns.

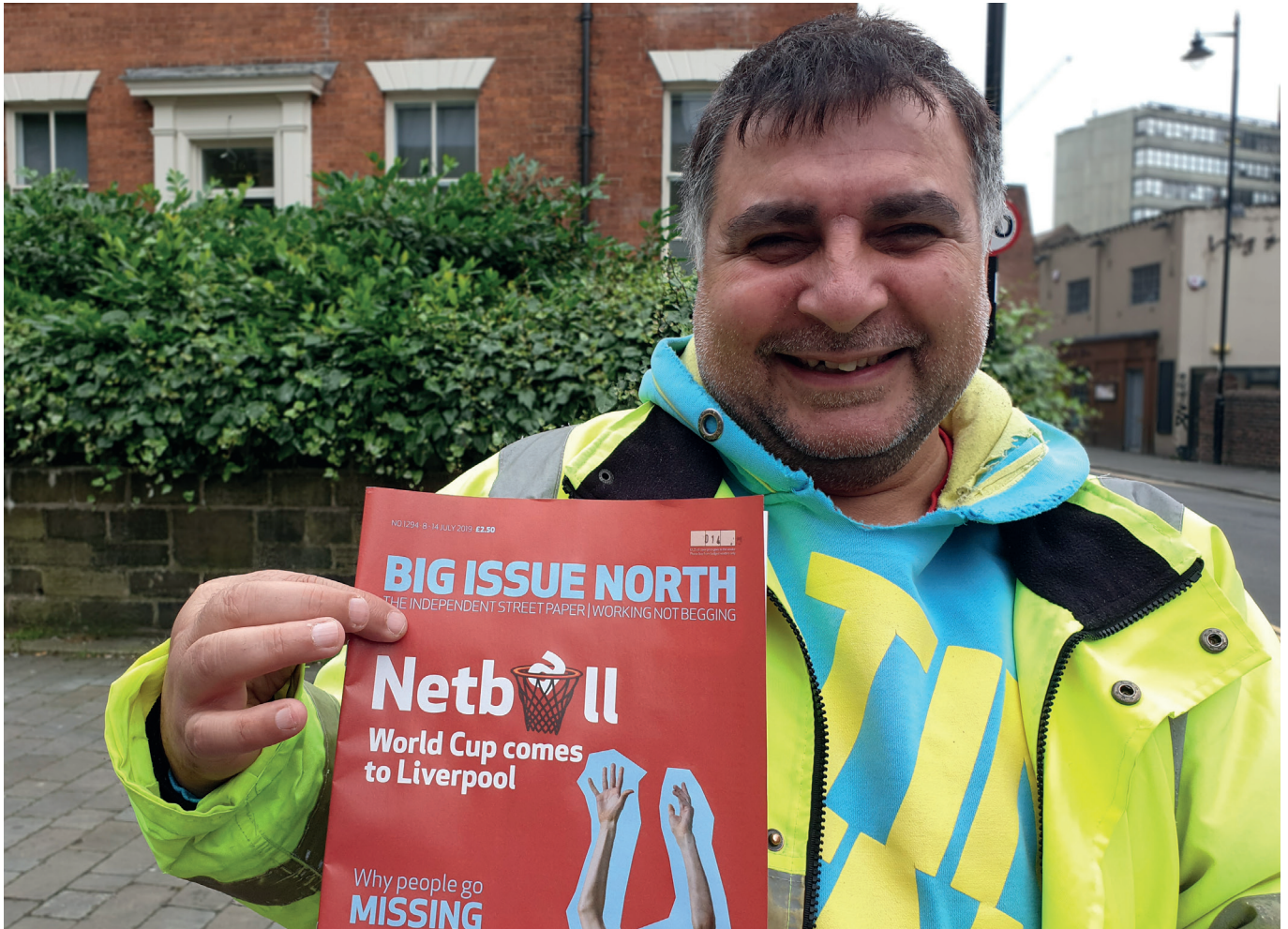
It is also worth noting that while only 7% of vendors report a problem with drugs and 3% report alcohol misuse, 14% of those surveyed identified themselves as drug users and 7% answered 'Yes' in response to the question 'Do you

think you have a problem with alcohol?' Likewise, while only 3% of vendors identified language barriers as an issue in response to this question, 42% identified it as a barrier to moving on from Big Issue North, and while only 4% of vendors identified education/training and 6% identified employment as an issue, 75% do not hold formal qualifications and 45% have no previous work experience. Again, the amount of vendors who requested help with their finances is also substantially lower than those who expressed financial aspirations.

Significantly fewer vendors also identified health problems (both mental and physical) as a problem here compared to those who disclosed

disabilities or mental health problems in other sections of the audit, and while 18% have been a victim of crime, only 1% identified this as a problem here.

This disparity again possibly suggests that vendors are unaware of the help available to them or of how to access it. Alternatively, it could suggest that they do not want or feel that they need help in dealing with these issues, or, in the case of drug users, that they do not view drug use as a problem. Vendors may also feel that they do not need support with employment as they consider selling Big Issue North to be their job and do not feel desperate to move on.



Our service

96% of vendors rate the service they receive from Big Issue North as good or very good
 97% of vendors feel supported by Big Issue North staff

WHAT WE DO WELL

Feedback from vendors around what we do well included providing support to people (mentioned in 57% of responses) and helping people to earn an income (mentioned in 32% of responses). Praise for staff included:

“They help people to survive. If it was not for Big Issue North, I would not have a job at the moment.”

“Big Issue North has brilliant staff working to fulfil vendor queries when needed, as well as providing good customer service and friendly words of advice.”

“They look after the people that sell the magazine and also ask how they are going with their personal life, which shows they really care about the people they work with.”

“Big Issue North has helped me every time I needed it.”

WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER

There were 113 responses regarding what we could do better, and 42% of these consisted of “don’t know”/“nothing”. Of the suggestions made:

- 32% covered operational issues such as extending opening hours, recruiting more staff, pitch development/management and outreach.
- 20% concerned the price and content of the magazine, with vendors sharing concerns that members of the public are unwilling to pay £2.50.
- 15% requested greater provision of support services.
- 11% regarded increasing advertising for the magazine.

