

Heathrow is my home

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Let's revise some vocabulary from the previous lesson

- 1. To be able to buy or do sth because you have enough money or time*
- 2. Sth that can be eaten*
- 3. To look for sth and move things around carelessly*
- 4. To eat up*
- 5. Thrown away*
- 6. To feel that you want to do/have sth*
- 7. Full of sympathy*

1 a) These words appear in the text. What can the text be about?

- busiest airport
- passengers waiting
- delayed flights
- departure hall
- passport and ticket
- leave the terminal
- permanent residents

- wheeling suitcases
- business trip
- loud announcements
- bustling passengers
- security staff
- cold bus terminal
- escape from debts
- legal problems

As dusk approaches at Heathrow, Europe's busiest airport quiets down for the night. Night cleaners begin their shifts and passengers waiting for delayed flights curl up on benches in the departure hall. One woman, Eram Dar, has found a cosy spot on the floor next to a vending machine. There is nothing to distinguish her from the waiting passengers around her, except that she has no passport and ticket and is in no hurry to leave the terminal. For well over a year now, it has been her home and she isn't the only one. Eram is one of well over 100 people who live permanently at Heathrow airport. 5

Most people would have difficulty in telling these permanent residents of Heathrow apart from the thousands of travellers that pass through the terminals each day. Wheeling suitcases full of their only belongings, they dress in Hawaiian-style holiday shirts or even business suits in order to give the impression that they are on a business trip or flying to a sunny destination.

Eram, a middle-aged ex-law student who became homeless after she could no longer pay her rent, actually considers herself fortunate to live in Heathrow. She says, "I liked it here immediately. I have never felt lonely because there are so many people. I don't mix much with the other homeless, although they are of all ages and from every walk of life. We all recognise each other, but I just like to keep to myself." There are showers in every terminal where Eram can stay clean and presentable. She can sometimes help herself to food passing by the caterers, and while away her time reading magazines and newspapers left behind by passengers.

It's difficult not to suspect that Eram is just putting on a brave face. It's hard to believe she's truly satisfied with this way of life. Once a week, she travels to London to pick up a cheque for £60 from a charity. "The cash goes nowhere," she says. "Buying food at the airport is expensive. I don't eat anything at breakfast because, if I do, it makes me feel more hungry." Living in Heathrow isn't easy for Eram. Besides being awakened by the jangle of coins as a passenger buys something from the machine, loud announcements and bustling passengers, she has to engage in a full-time cat-and-mouse game with the police and security staff. It's illegal to sleep at Heathrow unless you have a flight to catch, so along with the rest of Heathrow's homeless population, Eram has to wash and change her clothes every morning in order to not stand out from the crowd and be detected. If she is, she faces a night in the cold bus terminal or worse, being thrown out into the rain. "The builders who work overnight at the airport are very kind and don't report the homeless to the authorities," she says. "The cleaners turn a blind eye too."

Night workers aren't the only ones trying to help this unusual group of people. Broadway, a homeless charity, visits the airport weekly to offer the airport's homeless temporary accommodation, help to get travel documents for migrant workers and attempt to reconnect people with their families. But, as a Broadway worker points out, "Homelessness is a way of life. It can be very difficult to convince people to receive help." Like the passengers escaping to sunny holiday destinations, many of Heathrow's homeless are also in search of escape from debts, legal problems or family responsibilities.

The saddest fact is that unless they are arrested or fall ill, many of Heathrow's homeless will stay there for the foreseeable future. "I don't really see a different future," Eram Dar admits. "In fact, I could be living at Heathrow forever."

2 For questions 1-6, choose the correct answer (A, B, C or D). Justify your choices.

1 What does the writer focus on in the first paragraph?

- A what Heathrow airport is like at night
- B what Eram Dar does at night
- C what the homeless at Heathrow are like
- D how to spot homeless people at Heathrow

2 Heathrow's homeless have to pay attention to

- A their belongings.
- B their behaviour.
- C their speech.
- D their appearance.

3 What does the writer find surprising about Eram?

- A how she spends her days
- B how she became homeless
- C her background
- D her attitude towards her situation

4 What is meant by 'just putting on a brave face' in line 24?

- A trying to make others feel sorry for you
- B refusing to help yourself
- C pretending to be happy
- D making things sound worse

5 The phrase 'cat-and-mouse game' mentioned in line 31 refers to

- A the fact that the authorities pretend not to see Eram
- B the difficulties Eram faces every day to survive
- C the fact that Eram is breaking the law
- D Eram's struggle to avoid being caught by authorities

6 What is Eram's attitude towards her future?

- A She is hopeful that her life will get better.
- B She expects her situation to get worse.
- C She doesn't know how to help herself.
- D She doesn't see her situation changing.

3 Choose the correct word.

- 1 She was in a **hurry/rush** to catch a taxi to the airport.
- 2 He had **trouble/difficulty** in telling his family he had lost his job.
- 3 He is a **permanent/steady** resident of London.
- 4 She likes **keeping/holding** to herself and doesn't mix with others.
- 5 She **joins/engages** in charity work.
- 6 He turned a **blind/cover** eye and didn't report her to the police.
- 7 His job at the airport is **provisional/temporary** so he is looking for another one.
- 8 He is in **pursuit/search** of a new place to live.