

Press Release – Windrush Day 2022

More than four years since the Windrush scandal was brought to light, human rights charity Praxis is concerned that, far from righting the wrongs caused to thousands, seeing the ‘face behind the case’ or transforming itself into a more compassionate institution, the Home Office is instead doubling down on a hostile and punitive policy agenda that continues to destroy lives.

Despite the Home Secretary’s claims of progress, a recent [review](#) carried out by Wendy Williams of the Government’s 30 commitments to change was damning, with only 8 out of 30 commitments fully delivered. Williams highlighted a lack of leadership on culture change at the highest levels of the Department as a particular concern.

Many of the specific measures put in place to right the wrongs of the Windrush scandal are still falling woefully short. The compensation scheme is too complex for many to access, while payouts are slow and not proportionate to the harm caused. Lack of free legal advice means that, in practice, the scheme is still inaccessible for most.

- Official figures from the Windrush Compensation Scheme starkly demonstrate the Government’s failure to right the wrongs caused by years of policy making without regard for the impact on individuals:
- Of the 15,000 compensation claims expected by Government, [less than 7%](#) have actually been made;
- Close to [three quarters](#) of those who have managed to claim compensation since 2019 are yet to receive a single penny.

The Government’s latest policy proposals - criminalizing people seeking safety in the UK and transporting them to Rwanda, demonstrates that the Home Office all too often fails to see people as human beings.

Sally Daghlian OBE, CEO of Praxis, said:

“On Windrush Day 2022, it’s difficult to find much to celebrate. Four years since the Windrush scandal first came to light, the Government is failing on its commitments to change, as the independent reviewer’s latest report highlights.

Despite lives being wrecked and thousands of people being driven into poverty and destitution by the Government’s actions, only a tiny number of people have been able to make a claim for compensation and the fact that only a quarter of those who have managed to make a claim have actually received a payment makes a mockery of the Government’s commitment to right the enormous wrong it caused to thousands.

The Windrush compensation scheme is overly complicated and poorly advertised, seemingly designed to make it difficult to claim. What’s urgently needed is a fair, accessible, independently-administered compensation scheme, and a real plan to make sure everyone who is entitled to recompense knows how to get it and has help to do so.

Despite the Home Secretary’s claims that her Department has become more compassionate, the Home Office’s latest policies demonstrate conclusively that this is not the case, as they seek to criminalise people for seeking safety in the UK and trade cash for humans with Rwanda.”

Joseph, a campaigner at Praxis with lived experience of the migration system, said:

“The Home Office has not improved its policies since the Windrush scandal came to light – if anything it’s the opposite, everything is still as hostile as it has always been.

It's a slap in the face of migrants – on the one hand you show a veneer of compassion to migrants through the establishment of the Windrush Day; on the other hand you make draconian policies that are harmful and detrimental to the lives of people who have chosen to make the UK their home, and who are contributing to this society and to the UK at large.

If the Home Office really wants to celebrate us, it needs to scrap harmful policies such as deporting people to Rwanda or No Recourse to Public Funds as a matter of urgency.

Instead of pushing ever more harmful policies, the department should create an environment that is truly welcoming to migrants who have chosen the UK as their home and are dedicating their lives to this country.”

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Notes to editors:

1 – [Praxis](#) is a human rights charity. For over 35 years we have supported people who have made the UK their home with immigration advice, peer support and campaigning. We use the evidence from our frontline work to influence change so that all people in the UK can live in safety and dignity.

In 2018 we played a key role in exposing the Windrush scandal, by providing evidence and supporting people affected in speaking with the media.

2 – **Spokespeople** – the following are available to talk about this campaign:

- Josephine Whitaker-Yilmaz, Praxis' Policy and Public Affairs Manager

Interviews with people who have lived experienced of the immigration system and its harmful policies can be arranged.

Please contact Laura Stahnke, Stories and Media Coordinator, if you'd like to arrange an interview.

Email: laura.stahnke@praxis.org.uk Phone: 07862007367

3 – Policy Notes

Windrush Scandal

The Windrush scandal came to light in late 2017, when The Guardian journalist Amelia Gentleman begun to report that a growing number of Commonwealth citizens, many of whom were from Caribbean former British colonies, had been wrongly detained, deported and denied their rights¹.

People affected were increasingly asked to provide documents that they had never been asked before – they had moved to the UK decades prior, often at a time when freedom of movement was in place between the UK and former colonies. Yet authorities were now requesting stamps and proofs that didn't exist or weren't issued to them at the time of their arrival in the UK.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/windrush-scandal>

As a result, their lives got shattered. Unable to prove their rights, an increasing number of people, many of whom elderly, were becoming homeless, weren't able to access lifesaving treatment, had lost their jobs and all sources of income.

Initially this phenomenon was dismissed, and cases were thought to be isolated mistakes. Yet over the course of a few months it became clear that the Windrush scandal was of much bigger proportions: dozens of people were relentlessly speaking with The Guardian and many other national and international media outlets about their experiences of losing their jobs, their homes, access to the NHS, or the ability to come back to the UK after a trip abroad because they couldn't prove their rights to live in the UK.

Praxis was one of the few charities supporting people affected with legal advice and casework; providing key evidence to the media about the scandal; and supporting those affected to speak with journalists.

Following widespread outrage, the government issued repeated apologies, and eventually the then Home Secretary Amber Rudd resigned from her role for misleading parliament over deportation targets.

A fast-track task force was established at the Home Office to issue vital documents for the victims of the scandal, so they could be able to access their rights again.

A compensation scheme was also set up. The scheme has attracted widespread criticism: it is too difficult to access, it's slow and pay-outs don't reflect the level of suffering that people have gone through because of Home Office policies.

An independent review of the Home Office was commissioned and carried forward by Wendy Williams, with the aim of identifying what led to the Windrush scandal, and set a way forward to improve the department².

The 'Windrush Lessons Learned Review' includes a set of 30 recommendations, which in September 2020 the Home Office pledged to honour. Despite its promises, there is little to no evidence that the Home Office is following these recommendations, or that it's becoming a "more compassionate department".

The Nationality and Borders Act, and deporting people to Rwanda

The Nationality and Borders Act is a new Home Office policy that obtained royal assent on 28 April 2022. Set to overhaul the UK asylum system, the Act introduces a number of measures that severely undermine the rights of people seeking refuge in the UK. Crucially, it introduces provisions that penalise refugees based on their mode of arrival to the UK. Those who don't reach the country via government-sanctioned routes now risk being imprisoned, or have their case dismissed by the Home Office.

Even if they are granted refugee status, they will obtain fewer rights than before the Act came in place. Crucially, they risk losing access to public support, or the ability to reunite with their family. This happens within the context of extremely limited avenues for reaching the UK via government-sanctioned routes. With the exception of Ukraine, people fleeing most countries have simply no options to reach the UK legally, as safe and legal routes do not exist for them.

The plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda also falls within the context of the new Act. People who have reached the UK via routes that are not government-sanctioned – such as on small boats crossing the channel – run the risk to

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874022/6.5577_HO_Windrush_Lessons_Learned_Review_WEB_v2.pdf

[Praxis, for Migrants and Refugees](#)

www.praxis.org.uk

be deported 4,000 miles away, to a country many will have no connections with, and have their asylum case processed there.

The plan has attracted widespread criticism from all parts of UK civil society. The first flight deporting people to Rwanda was set to leave the UK on 7 June, but a last-minute judgment by the European Court of Human Rights eventually prevented the operation. In July a court hearing will establish whether deporting people to Rwanda is legal, yet the Home Office has already announced that plans for the next flight deporting people to the African country are already under way.