

Press Release: Thousands of migrants living in poverty miss out on cost of living support in Autumn Statement, warn 59 charities

- Despite welcome emphasis on “protecting the most vulnerable” in last week’s Autumn Statement, the Chancellor’s statement left hundreds of thousands of people living in poverty with little to no support to help them cope with runaway inflation, simply because of their immigration status;
- A coalition of 59 charities led by [Praxis](#) has written¹ to Government ministers calling for migrants living in poverty to be urgently included in cost of living support measures.
- The coalition, made up of migrant, homelessness and anti-poverty charities, human rights organisations, and trades unions working with migrant communities across the UK, is warning of an “entirely avoidable spike in the number of people left destitute or even homeless,” as thousands who are already at breaking point are offered no further support.
- Despite living and working in the UK, often for years, many people are denied access to the public safety net by their immigration status, due to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy – including thousands of UK-born national and UK citizen-children.
- The much-needed support distributed by the UK Government since the start of the cost of living crisis has [largely by-passed the hundreds of thousands of migrant families](#) struggling to make ends meet – even if they are working and paying taxes.
- You can find the letter with full list of signatories here: <https://www.praxis.org.uk/letter-to-home-secretary>

Quotes

Josephine Whitaker-Yilmaz, Praxis Policy and Public Affairs Manager, said:

“No household should be barred from vital support when it’s needed. No child should go hungry because of the fine print on their parents’ visa.

This Government has done the right thing in uprating benefits rates and extending targeted energy bills support - yet the Chancellor appears to have forgotten that thousands of migrants and their families are also living in poverty. Migrant communities are amongst the most vulnerable in our society, and this Government policies are preventing the most vulnerable from accessing this vital support.

If the Government is serious about “protecting the most vulnerable” through this cost of living crisis, migrants living in the UK must to be able to access public support if they are facing poverty, like everyone else.”

¹ See full letter here: <https://www.praxis.org.uk/letter-to-home-secretary>

Mohammed Shazad, Policy and Practice Advisor at The Children’s Society, said:

“Even before the cost of living crisis, many families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) were facing impossible choices between essentials like eating, heating and rent, despite working long hours.

“Children are suffering purely because of where their parents were born and living in poverty may cause long-term harm to their well-being, physical and mental health, and life chances.

“While we welcomed the Government’s decision to increase benefits in line with inflation, this will do nothing for children in families subject to NRPF and that is simply unacceptable.

“No child should be left facing hunger or homelessness and we urge ministers to act urgently to ensure all NRPF families are supported with the cost of living.”

Enver Solomon, CEO of the Refugee Council, said:

“We know from our work with refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK that they are disproportionately impacted by the worsening cost of living crisis, with many simply unable to afford essentials and going hungry as a result.

The Government should always provide a safety net to those who need it most, regardless of their immigration status, which is why these vital support measures must be made available to all households with NRPF who need it.”

Zehrah Hasan, Policy Director at JCWI, had this to say:

“Most of us want to see people in our communities supported through this winter and the cost of living crisis, but this government are cruelly denying thousands of families - mainly black and brown families - the safety net we all deserve.

We work with tens of families who've lived and worked here for many years, often decades, but No Recourse to Public Funds rules push many into insecure work, unsafe housing, and destitution. The cost of living crisis, that this government has fuelled, threatens to push many to breaking point. It's time this government took urgent action to ensure everyone in our communities has a safety net, regardless of where they or their parents were born.”

Notes to editors

1 – Praxis

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.

2 – Spokespeople

The following are available to talk about the impact of these policies on people in the UK:

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

People with lived experience might be available for interviews too.

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

No Recourse to Public Funds

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is a government policy which prevents millions of people who have made the UK their home from accessing most forms of public support, even when they are experiencing crisis.

The policy is applied based on a person's immigration status, to people in one of two categories: (i) those who have permission to live and work in the UK (estimated 1.3M people), and (ii) those without legal permission to be in the UK (estimated 650,000 people)².

No Recourse to Public Funds prevents people from accessing most publicly funded forms of support, including but not limited to child benefit, housing benefit and universal credit. The condition deprives people of a safety net when the worst happens – loss of a job, an accident, domestic violence, illness or even death can remove a family's entire income.

While not all of those affected by the NRPF policy will be living in poverty, it has been shown to be a key driver of poverty.

While many people with No Recourse to Public Funds are working, those on low incomes or in precarious jobs are pushed into destitution because they cannot access benefits designed to top up incomes and prevent in-work poverty.

Even those who are unable to work, for example due to care responsibilities, are denied access to government support.

Having no safety net also means that a crisis, such as the loss of a job, injury at work or an episode of poor mental health, can easily push families into deep poverty. Families affected by NRPF are

² <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2022/destitution-in-the-uk-how-the-no-recourse-to-public-funds-immigration-condition-affects-poverty/>

therefore more likely than the general population to be living in destitution, often for extended periods, putting them at high risk of homelessness, exploitation and abuse.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, among the general UK population [more than one in five live in poverty](#). If people affected by NRPF experience poverty at the same rate of the general population, then more than 400,000 affected by NRPF live in poverty. Yet, NRPF has been found to be a key driver of poverty, so the number of people with NRPF currently experiencing destitution – and with no access to public support – is probably higher than 400,000.

2022 Autumn Statement – what does it mean for those affected by NRPF

The Chancellor's Autumn Statement offered little to no help to those affected by the No Recourse to Public Funds policy:

- The extension of the Energy Price Guarantee to 2024 is welcome, and will benefit all bill payers. However, the increase in the cap to £3,000 from April 2023 will still make energy bills unaffordable to many of the poorest households;
- Those affected by NRPF are already unable to access most support with their energy bills. All of the additional support with energy for the “most vulnerable,” which will come into effect in April 2023, is tied to receipt of welfare benefits. This will also by default be unavailable to those with NRPF;
- Uprating of benefits and pensions in line with inflation is similarly welcome, but will be of little comfort to those who are ineligible to access benefits in the first place;
- Those who are working will benefit from the increase in the National Living Wage. However, this is likely to be offset by tax rises across the board. [Analysis](#) carried out by the Resolution Foundation indicates that the poorest quarter of the population will gain more from increases to Universal Credit than they will lose from tax rises. Those who find themselves in the poorest population group who are denied access to benefits will presumably find any gains from increases to the National Living Wage wiped out by increases to their tax bill.

Support to migrants in the cost of living crisis

The ad-hoc cost of living payments and support announced by the Government since the onset of this crisis have largely bypassed migrants living in poverty. The Energy Bills Support scheme has of course benefitted everyone that pays an energy bill. However, the remainder of the support package is not available to migrants because they are either classed as 'public funds' for immigration purposes, or only available to a person who is already in receipt of benefits – therefore out of reach for people affected by No Recourse to Public Funds.

Migrants affected by NRPF are therefore in general unable to benefit from the following support:

- £650 Cost of Living payment for those on benefits
- £300 Pensioner Cost of Living Payment
- £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment

- Winter Fuel Payment
- Cold Weather Payment

[The Household Support Fund can be distributed at local authorities' discretion](#) and therefore may benefit those with NRPF, however a lack of clarity about whether those with NRPF can benefit from this fund has hampered access in many areas.