

LIVING WITH DIGNITY



Praxis 
for migrants and refugees

**A CAMPAIGN TO END
THE NO RECOURSE TO
PUBLIC FUNDS POLICY**

ABOUT US

THE NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS ACTION GROUP

We are a group of migrants fighting for equality, justice and fairness for all. But above all, we are human beings.

We come together to tackle inequality created by the no recourse to public funds rule. We have lived experience of this policy, this is why we campaign against it. It opposes human dignity.

The treatment we are receiving is the consequence of hostile immigration policies, including the no recourse to public funds condition. These ignore our humanity and are putting people's mental and physical health at risk. We want to be treated fairly, we have human rights too.

We want to support other people affected by this rule and stop the ill treatment of migrants. We want to change the laws and the political system to a human rights-based system. We want to end the no recourse to public funds policy.

WHAT IS "NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS"?

No recourse to public funds (NRPF) is a government policy which prevents people from accessing the welfare system and most forms of government support when they're in need.

**MORE THAN 2 MILLION
PEOPLE IN THE UK ARE
DEPRIVED OF A SAFETY NET
BECAUSE OF THIS POLICY**

For most people, it can take 10 years to secure a permanent right to stay in the country. During that time, they have "limited leave to remain" – with a no recourse to public funds condition applied systematically – whether they are studying, working, joining their partners or caring for their children. No recourse to public funds also applies to people who are undocumented. People seeking asylum are barred from accessing the welfare safety net as well, and can only receive a living allowance of just over £5 per day.

The consequences of this policy are devastating: it traps individuals and entire families into cycles of poverty, pushes people into homelessness and leaves children hungry.

It targets migrant communities who are mostly communities of colour and further reinforces existing structural inequalities and patriarchal structures, disproportionately impacting single mothers, children of colour and people with disabilities. It deprives domestic abuse survivors of access to life-saving support.

It is possible, in some cases, to have the no recourse condition lifted from a visa, but the path to do so is complex and confusing, and requires expert advice and support. Many do not know this is an option, and cuts to legal aid mean accessing specialist advice and guidance when people are in crisis is extremely difficult. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the impact of this rule, compounding the impact of Covid-19 and hitting those in destitution the hardest. Between April and June 2020, there has been a 672% increase in the number of applications for change of conditions, compared to the previous quarter [1].

The no recourse to public funds rule pushes migrant communities to the margins, and deprives people of support even when they experience extreme poverty and crisis. For members of the No Recourse to Public Funds Action Group, being forced to live in unsafe conditions disregards people's dignity as human beings – which is why the group collectively chose to name the campaign "Living with Dignity".

We need to put an end to this policy. In this manifesto, we are laying out why, and what this campaign seeks to change.

[1] Home Office Immigration Statistics, June 2020

CHILDREN SHOULD BE SUPPORTED BASED ON THEIR NEED

Every parent wants to provide for their children, to make sure they have a roof over their heads, clothes to wear and enough to eat. But for some parents living with the no recourse to public funds condition, the stark reality is that this is a daily battle. They live knowing that if anything happens to them, if they face hard times, lose their job or fall ill, they won't be able to access any support to meet their families' most basic needs.

AN ESTIMATED 390,000 CHILDREN LIVE IN FAMILIES SUBJECT TO NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS

People with no recourse to public funds often need to work extensive overtime to be able to cover the costs of immigration fees, as well as pay the rent and other bills, and as a result they do not have a lot of time to take care of their children. Some have to call friends to get their children after school, they don't have time to look at their homework. And even in the morning, before school, they may not have the opportunity to see their children.

This policy is dividing families. In order to be able to feed their kids, parents can't spend time with them. When parents don't have a lot of time for their children, it has a great impact on the kids, their wellbeing and their social ability.

Children are not exempt from the no recourse to public funds rule, no matter their families circumstances. Children with no recourse to public funds cannot access Free School Meals [2], and new mothers are denied access to other schemes like the Sure Start scheme aimed at reducing health inequalities by ensuring pregnant people and their new-borns can access healthy and nutritious food.



Children can see the difference between them and their friends. They see them eating healthy food or hot school meals, while they do not have enough food. How do you explain to a child they can't get the same food as their friends because they have no recourse to public funds? Every child has a right to be treated well. Our children are here, and they are the future of this economy. Society should sow what they want to reap in the children of the future.

All children deserve care, protection, and equal treatment irrespective of their immigration status. If we want a society where child poverty is a thing of the past, we need to end policies that contribute to it, like the no recourse to public funds rule.

[2] Since April 2020 a temporary measure has allowed for some children with no recourse to public funds to access free school meals. But this remains time limited, and still excludes some children in need such as undocumented children.

ALL SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND TRAFFICKING SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCESS SUPPORT TO ESCAPE VIOLENCE

Experiencing domestic abuse is traumatic and leaving an abusive relationship is extremely difficult. Refuge spaces are usually covered by housing benefit, which people with no recourse to public funds are not able to access.

IN 2017, ONLY 1 REFUGE SPACE PER REGION IN ENGLAND WAS AVAILABLE FOR WOMEN WITH NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS [3]

This leaves people forced to choose between remaining with their abusers, or leaving without the possibility of a safe place to turn, or any access to financial support.

Beyond escaping an abuser, safety for survivors includes being able to feed yourself and your family, accessing healthcare in order to heal and recover from trauma, and the knowledge that you can secure your own visa, separate from your abuser to keep yourself and your children safe from deportation or separation. But many are denied safety because of no recourse to public funds and hostile immigration policies.



PRISHA'S STORY*

I've experienced abuse at the hands of my husband. Back in 2016, I had applied for a visa to stay in the country but I did not have leave to remain yet. He beat me up badly. I tried calling the police, but he said they would take my daughter away, so I got scared, and I lied to the police when they came.

I became very depressed. I was feeling so bad that once I passed out and had to go to the hospital. Because I did not have a visa, I had to pay for medicine but I could not afford it. My GP was very worried and asked me to come every week so he could check how I was doing.

But things kept getting worse and in 2017, my husband beat me up violently again and it got really bad. I pretended to call the police, although I was really calling the solicitor who was dealing with my immigration case instead. I could not speak but he heard everything and called the police himself. They ended up arresting my husband and after this, I was put in touch with a social worker.

But I did not get the help I needed then. I only received £30 per week and lived in a horrible flat. I did not eat food just so I could feed my daughter. For 3 weeks I did not have a phone and was cut off from the world.

After everything I had been through, the abuse that had started when I was a child and then from my husband, I had started seeing a psychiatrist. When I told this to my social worker, he threatened to take my daughter away from me. I was terrified: she was the only reason I stayed alive. I spoke to my GP who in turn advocated for me. When I got support from Praxis and from a new social worker, things went better.

It all happened because I had no recourse to public funds and could not get support. I did not have a visa, any money or anywhere to go, how am I supposed to survive? I did not know how to apply, I did not know the rules.

This happens to many women, and they are scared of going to the police. Now I understand how things work so when I meet survivors like me, I help them and try to tell them how to get support. I have been through many struggles in my life, I am better for now but I know many others like me. The "NRPF" acronym is short, but its meaning and impact are very big.

[3] No Woman Turned Away Project report, Women's Aid, 2017

* Prisha's name has been changed to protect her identity

PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE TRAPPED IN POVERTY

Every time someone applies to renew their visa to stay in the country, they have to pay exorbitant fees to the Home Office, as well as an "Immigration Health Surcharge" to be able to access the NHS. On average, people pay £2,600 per person every two and a half years [4]. Families pay tens of thousands of pounds and these costs have kept increasing, including during the pandemic:

THE IMMIGRATION HEALTH SURCHARGE ROSE BY MORE THAN 50% IN 2020

Compounded by no recourse to public funds when in crisis, these fees force many into poverty and debt. If people cannot afford to pay the fees to renew their visa, they risk losing everything – their right to work, to rent, to live in the UK altogether.

Many people with no recourse to public funds are stuck in low paid jobs. They often cannot access higher education or get a student loan because of their immigration status, which means they are not able to access better paid roles that could help them afford costly immigration fees. It is sometimes possible to request not to have the no recourse to public funds condition imposed when applying for a visa, but solicitors don't always do it. There needs to be better awareness on this matter.

If people with no recourse to public funds cannot meet their financial obligations, if they lose their jobs and can't find another one to pay their rent, they can end up on the streets. They don't have access to Universal Credit or other support to help prevent this. Homelessness can affect anyone, whatever their nationality is, but people with no recourse to public funds have limited options when they find themselves in this situation.

People experiencing homelessness and who are subject to the no recourse to public funds condition are excluded from mainstream homelessness provision. This means they cannot access bed spaces or support when they are at risk of homelessness or already sleeping rough.



Even though these restrictions were temporarily lifted during the pandemic, many were unable to access more settled accommodation, and without access to services to address the root cause of their homelessness, or welfare support to help them back on their feet, are still trapped in destitution.

BY THE END OF SEPTEMBER 2020, AROUND 2,000 PEOPLE WHO REMAINED IN HOTELS AND OTHER EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION IN LONDON WERE INELIGIBLE FOR WELFARE SUPPORT [5]

Poverty and homelessness are affecting people with families. The Home Office is fully aware that we have to work, pay taxes and take care of our children, yet every year they raise the amount of the immigration fees and apply the no recourse to public funds condition on us. People have to renew their visa every two and a half years, and it costs thousands of pounds. How do you do this if you are a single mom? If you work with an agency on a zero hour contract? This goes against common sense, and it needs to end.

[4] "Fee waiver policy: who qualifies and what does the Home Office guidance say?", Free Movement

[5] "Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic", Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, January 2021

DECENT HOUSING MUST BE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

People who live in destitution with no recourse to public funds are often pushed into inadequate housing because they cannot afford private rents and are ineligible for social housing. Local authorities have a duty to support families where a child's health is at risk, or adults with special care needs if they face destitution. However, support is inconsistent from one council to another and can be inadequate. Some local authorities wrongly deny support to people with no recourse to public funds, or provide accommodation of extremely poor standards.

If you are a poor family in this country, social services and family support workers are supposed to have your back, even if you have immigration issues. They have powers, but many of them do not use these powers, they do not follow policies that exist.

We get turned away from help, are told we will be accommodated in another city where we have no family, friends or connections to support us, entire families get housed in rooms no bigger than a toilet. And if we protest, they say we have to take what they give us. We are threatened to be deported, or have our children taken away. Today a lot of families are complaining about the issues they face, they should have had social services supporting them. Why is it not the case?



Poor housing conditions impact individuals and families' health and wellbeing in many ways: children do not have space and quiet to study, families live in houses without decent cooking or hygiene facilities, and people share rooms with strangers. This also increases the risk of abuse, sexual harassment and exploitation, in particular for women, by landlords who might take advantage of their precarity. In addition, people with special needs may be forced to live in homes that are not equipped for their needs, preventing them from being autonomous and living with dignity.

FRANCOIS'S STORY*

A few years ago, I reached out for support from my council because I needed help with accommodation. They refused on the basis that I had no recourse to public funds, they did not want to have anything to do with me.

I was seeking asylum, but the accommodation provided by the Home Office was not equipped for my needs as a blind person. I knew my council had a duty to support me, but it took over a year of back and forth and the intervention of a solicitor for them to even start considering doing so. Then, they conducted an assessment and somehow determined that I was fine where I was. My solicitor had to challenge them again.

When local authorities finally agreed to house me, they took me to a dilapidated building. I was given a bedspace, it was technically a room with kitchen and a toilet. The original mapping of the space was not meant to be a studio. Again, they said they could not give me anything better because I had no recourse to public funds. It felt like they were putting the blame on me.

It was completely unsuitable, no blind person would be able to live in a space like this. But they forced me to live there. There were rats coming in my flat, breaking into my cupboard, eating my food. The damage in the house kept getting worse, but when I tried to contact them they would not answer my calls, unless it was my solicitor. I felt really frustrated, it's not like we were asking them to do anything special, just what they were supposed to do in the first place.

I also had other things to deal with, I was battling with the Home Office regarding my immigration case. They had denied my asylum claim but I appealed, challenged them with judicial reviews, and kept fighting though it was a very tedious and humiliating experience.

Now I am finally moving out of the flat, I have lived there for nearly 6 years. It also took 8 years for me to get refugee status.

* Francois's name has been changed to protect his identity

WE NEED TO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Digital exclusion exacerbates inequality, preventing people living in poverty from accessing services, education, learning and the wider benefits that digital technology provides. It is estimated that 9% of children in the UK do not have home access to a laptop, desktop or tablet, and 880,000 children and young people are living in a home with only a mobile internet connection [6].

For families experiencing poverty, it can be impossible to afford data, broadband and devices, especially when denied access to wider support. Temporary social services accommodation for destitute families are not equipped with broadband, and the government scheme providing support with laptops and tablets during the pandemic has been calculated based on the number receiving free school meals, excluding children with no recourse to public funds. This has further reinforced the digital divide for people with no recourse to public funds, and leaves many, in particular children and young people, isolated from their community and the rest of society, and unable to adequately access education and learning opportunities.

Even before the pandemic, digital exclusion was a problem. The pandemic just magnified this issue and amplified its impact. Many children with no recourse to public funds experiencing hardships have limited access to a digital connection and equipment and as a result, they may lag behind when it comes to home schooling. When you have 25 minutes of broadband monthly, you can't connect. If the children can't learn, they get behind and lose confidence, it is really affecting them. In school, you can see the difference between those who have access to digital facilities and those who don't; for them it is difficult to learn on the same level as others.

It's an issue many people in society are confronted with, but there are particular issues caused by the no recourse to public funds condition. First, because much government and statutory funding for support is conditional on people getting benefits. Children should not be excluded because they have no recourse to public funds: we need to make sure if support is provided to other children, it is provided to them too.



In addition, parents with no recourse to public funds may have to work even more than others, really long hours, as they can't rely on any support, so they might not even be able to be at home to help their kids. Even when they have devices and internet access, they may not be able to help at home because they do not know how to use computers and tablets, or do not understand English well - but these issues are not always taken into account.

The mental health impact of exclusion and, more broadly, poverty and insecurity, mean in turn that children and adults are further marginalised, impacting their well-being not only in the short-term but in the long-term too. It is detrimental to society and to our communities.

[6] "As millions of children remote learning suffer bad connections, internet providers have to offer free data", Independent 7 January 2021

IN CONCLUSION

The no recourse to public funds rule seeks to create hierarchies between those who are deserving and undeserving of support. Although it has been in place since 1971, its application was extended to many groups as part of the hostile environment in 2012. The hostile environment itself is a product of a colonial history which has and continues to perpetrate violence against migrant communities and migrant communities of colour in particular, while reinforcing social exclusion.

It's mostly Black and Asian migrants and their children who are suffering from the impact of this policy, so it's also about racial justice. Black people are more impacted by poverty than others. People of colour have worked endlessly even throughout the pandemic, and have experienced a higher death rate. Yet we are the least recognised by people in power. We give so much but get so little, how is this fair?

If we care about dismantling racist systems, we must end practices and policies that contribute to the marginalisation of people of colour - and among them, the no recourse to public funds policy.

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN

Everyone should be able to live in a safe, decent home, put food on the table, and live free from exploitation. The no recourse to public funds rule prevents many people from meeting these basic needs. It is simply inhumane.

We need better support for everyone who faces hardship. We want the government to put an end to this policy, which is keeping us from building a fairer society: where children can fulfil their potential, no one is left into extreme poverty and homelessness, and everyone is cared for based on what they need, not where they come from.

**JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN FOR CHANGE, SO THAT EVERYONE
CAN HAVE THE SAFETY NET THAT THEY NEED**

Find out more: praxis.org.uk/campaigning

At Praxis we provide expert support to people in migrant and refugee communities. Every year we help around 2,000 people through immigration advice, housing and peer support groups. We take a holistic approach, recognising that people are complex, and so are their problems. We have become a leading expert in finding pathways out of destitution and supporting migrants facing homelessness, as well as survivors of trafficking and domestic violence, young people, EU citizens and long term residents struggling to find the support they need.

Together with experts by experience, we are campaigning against the no recourse to public funds policy, to remove barriers to support so everyone has a safety net when they're in need, regardless of their immigration status.

This manifesto has been co-produced by Praxis and the No Recourse to Public Funds Action Group, a campaigning group of people with lived experience of the policy.



To find out more about our services and campaigns, or to support us, please visit our website:

www.praxis.org.uk

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Praxis Community Projects, Pott Street, London E2 0EF



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