



The Right Honourable Gillian Keegan MP
 Secretary of State for Education
 Department for Education
 20 Great Smith Street
 London
 SW1P 3BT

8th November 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

As a group of 21 charities and organisations working with children and families across the UK, we write to urge you to take action to ensure that all children living in the UK can access a properly-funded early education and childcare system, regardless of their parents' immigration status.

The extension of 30 hours of early education and childcare for working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds to younger age groups provides a timely opportunity to begin to include parents from migrant backgrounds. We urge you to remove the immigration status-based restriction on eligibility for this scheme as it is rolled out.

Many people who have migrated to this country are subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) visa condition, which acts as a blanket ban on most mainstream benefits like Child Benefit or Universal Credit, including for those earning low incomes. The NRPF visa condition also excludes parents from most government support with the costs of childcare, including 30 hours' childcare for working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds. While migrant families can access the universal provision of 15 hours per week for this age group, they are locked out of the extended offer even if they are working the requisite number of hours. Although not considered a 'public fund' for immigration purposes, regulations have been written so that those who are 'subject to immigration control' are not considered as being present in the UK for the purposes of this support.ⁱ It is worth noting that parents subject to NRPF restrictions are also excluded from Tax-free Childcareⁱⁱ and Universal credit childcare cost payments.

These restrictions currently prevent thousands of parents already living in the UK from working or increasing their hours, because they cannot afford the high costs of childcare. This prevents working parents from accessing most support with the costs of childcare. It also prevents thousands of children from accessing vital early education and childcare, even where they are themselves British citizens.

Unaffordable childcare is a huge and growing issue for all families in the UK, particularly as the cost-of-living crisis continues.ⁱⁱⁱ For migrant parents, it creates particular barriers for women, single parents and those in lower paid and less secure jobs,^{iv} and the evidence is clear that cost is even more of a barrier for migrant

parents than for those born in the UK.^v Studies have highlighted that migrant parents, especially single parents (the majority of whom are women), suffer from reduced labour force participation rates due to being excluded from government support with childcare costs.^{vi}

Locking migrant parents out undermines the policy objectives of the 30 hours' scheme by creating barriers to labour force participation for this group. The convoluted treatment of these parents who are demonstrably resident in the UK as being "not present" in the country makes it more difficult for them to get a job, increase their hours and contribute economically. It also creates a vicious cycle of exclusion, by heightening the already higher-than-average risk of financial hardship and material deprivation faced by migrant households. Any barrier to these parents' ability to work, including lack of affordable childcare, can have severe consequences because of their lack of access to the social safety net.

Enabling migrant parents to work and look after their families is a precondition for better outcomes for their children.^{vii} Exclusion limits children's access to early education, known to be a key factor in improving both school readiness and longer-term life outcomes. Children in migrant households are already significantly more likely to experience poverty and destitution than their counterparts^{viii} and may be further excluded by other factors such as language, making their access to good quality early education of paramount importance.

Without reliable data, it is difficult to say precisely how many working parents are excluded from support with the costs of childcare. One study suggests there are approximately 20,000 migrant households with children aged 3 or 4 years old who would be eligible for government-funded childcare were it not for NRPF restrictions, and calculates that it would cost £51 million per year to extend the scheme to this cohort.^{ix}

Your Department's action since 2019 to extend provision of childcare to 2-year-olds in families on low incomes who are affected by NRPF has been welcome. Including working families with NRPF in the 30 hours scheme would unlock the labour market for parents already resident in the UK and allow them to contribute their skills, including in sectors currently struggling with recruitment. It would also enable households to increase their incomes, enhancing families' self-reliance and bringing significant benefit to children.

We would be happy to meet with you or your officials to discuss our proposals and/or provide further detail as needed.

Yours faithfully,

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Ellen Broome, Acting Managing Director, Coram Family and Childcare

Dan Paskins, Director of UK Impact, Save the Children

Alison Garnham, Chief Executive, Child Poverty Action Group

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Nick Beales, Head of Campaign, Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London

Denise McDowell, Chief Executive, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit

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Rosario Guimba-Stewart, CEO, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network

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Jane Yilmaz - Co-founder and Director, Reunite Families UK

Michael Boyle, Director, The Unity Project

Jemima Olchawski, CEO, Fawcett Society

Joeli Brearley, Founder and Director, Pregnant Then Screwed

Katherine Hill, Strategic Programme Manager, 4in10 London's Child Poverty Network

Sian Summers-Rees, Chief Officer, City of Sanctuary

Leyla McLennan, Founding Director, Routes Collective

Sara Rebeca, Campaign Coordinator, Nanny Solidarity Network

Madeleine Evans, General Manager, Haringey Migrant Support Centre

ⁱ The Childcare (Early Years Provision Free of Charge)(Extended Entitlement) Regulations 2016: Section 12(2)(b):

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2016/1257/regulation/12/made>

ⁱⁱ Childcare Payments (Eligibility) Regulations 2015: S7(3)(c): <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/448/regulation/7>

ⁱⁱⁱ Jarvie, M, Shorto S, Kunwar Deer L and Goddard E (2023), *Childcare Survey 2023*, Coram.

<https://www.coram.org.uk/resource/childcare-survey-2023/>

^{iv} Fernandez-Reino, M and Rienzo Cinzia (2022), *Migrants in the UK labour market: an overview*.

<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/MigObs-Briefing-Migrants-in-the-UK-labour-market-an-overview.pdf>

^v Fernandez-Reino, M (2022), *Children of migrants in the UK*.

<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/children-of-migrants-in-the-uk/>

^{vi} Woolley, A (2019), *Access denied: the cost of the 'no recourse to public funds' policy*, The Unity Project. <https://www.unity-project.org.uk/research>

^{vii} OECD (2020) Migration Policy Debates: How to strengthen the integration of migrant women? Briefing. No25, November 2020: <https://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/migration-policy-debates-25.pdf>

^{viii} Vizard, P, Obolenskaya, P and Treebhohun, K (2023), *Going backwards? The slowdown, stalling and reversal of progress in reducing child poverty in Britain during the second decade of the 21st century, and the groups of children that were affected*, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics.

https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/CASE/_NEW/PUBLICATIONS/abstract/?index=9937

^{ix} Benton E, Karlsson J, Pinter I, Provan B, Scanlon K and Whitehead C (2022), *Social Cost Benefit Analysis of the no recourse to public funds (NRPF) policy in London*, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics.

<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/scba-nrpf-policy-in-london#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20the%20Greater%20London%20Authority%20%28GLA%29%20commissioned,with%20work%20related%20visas%2C%20and%20their%20family%20members.>