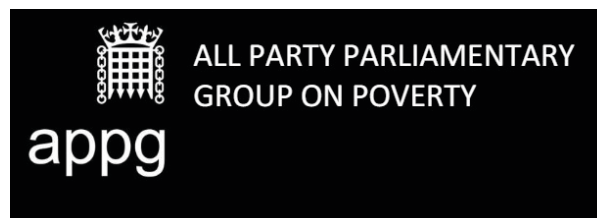


# The Effects of UK Immigration, Asylum and Refugee Policy on Poverty: A Joint Inquiry by the APPG on Migration and the APPG on Poverty

April 2024



*Work on this Inquiry was carried out by The RAMP Project, who provide the secretariat for the APPG on Migration, and The Equality Trust, who provide the secretariat for the APPG on Poverty.*

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# Foreword

## From APPG Officers and Members

We are delighted that the All Party Parliamentary Groups for Poverty and for Migration have come together to take a shared look at whether and how immigration and asylum policies are contributing to poverty in the UK. At a time of intense cost pressures on individuals, families and public services it is vital that policies intended to secure our border and manage migration do not push migrants and their families into destitution.<sup>1</sup> Reducing poverty should be a policy objective shared by the whole of government. We all have a shared interest in ensuring that people who settle in the UK can thrive and be fully included in our communities. Yet all too often poverty and migration are treated as separate issues in policy debates.

We have listened to leading experts on poverty and migration policy as well as hearing from those with lived experience of our immigration system. We have been moved by the volume and quality of evidence presented. We are saddened to see that people born outside of the UK are significantly overrepresented in the numbers of people facing poverty and destitution. Hearing the powerful testimony of those with lived experience brought to the fore the challenges that many people face. Those we heard from were desperate to work and contribute to society, to stand on their own two feet and, where possible, to reduce their reliance on the state. Instead they often find themselves prevented from doing so by immigration policies that can leave them trapped in poverty and destitution.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that policy is sometimes designed to push people into poverty in the hope that it will deter others from moving to the UK, even though there is little evidence that this would indeed be a deterrent. And it is clear that poverty and destitution are sometimes caused by a lack of coordination and shared purpose between different parts of government. Due to a number of changes to immigration policy in recent years the number of people affected by these issues has increased significantly and the costs to local authorities, service providers and the voluntary sector have also increased.

Whilst there is of course a legitimate debate to be had about the UK's immigration policy, we do not believe that pursuing policies which push people, including long-standing residents, into poverty and destitution, is a desirable outcome. Supporting newer arrivals to participate in the workplace and in our communities is not only good for their health and wellbeing but also for the economy, and for us all, and when people are destitute they are more vulnerable to exploitation.

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<sup>1</sup> This report generally uses the term 'migrant' to include all those who have moved to the UK from elsewhere, including those who are naturalised British citizens. This term includes many different groups with very different experiences, including asylum seekers and refugees - the report focuses on some of the specific issues facing different groups in later sections. For a discussion of definitions and their consequences see [Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their Consequences](#), Anderson & Blinder, Migration Observatory 2024

We are pleased that this report sets out a series of sensible recommendations for policy changes that people we heard from say will make a tangible difference to their lives. As we saw during the Covid pandemic, when we decide to, we can flex the policy environment to ensure that no one is left destitute and we hope that many of these changes will be adopted to allow more people who have made the UK their home to live better and safer lives, and to contribute to our economy and our communities. We hope that these recommendations are seriously considered and that we can move towards a fairer, more effective immigration system.

Olivia Blake MP - Co-Chair of the APPG on Migration

Tim Farron MP - Vice-Chair of the APPG on Migration

Lord German - Member of the APPG on Migration

David Linden MP - Chair of the APPG on Poverty

Baroness Lister - Co-Chair of the APPG on Poverty and Vice Chair of the APPG on Migration

Baroness Mobarik - Member of the APPG on Migration

Rt. Hon. Sir Stephen Timms MP - Member of both the APPG on Migration and the APPG on Poverty

## Summary

This joint Inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Migration is an attempt to bring together policy and political conversations about migration and poverty and to explore the implications of migration policy for poverty in the UK.

Evidence suggests that rates of poverty are generally higher for migrants than for the UK-born population. It is also clear that migrants are much more likely to face deep poverty and deprivation. Migration experiences and immigration policies have a significant effect on risks and rates of poverty for some groups – this is the focus of this report.

The Inquiry received almost 200 submissions of evidence from experts with lived and learnt experience of poverty and the UK immigration system. The Inquiry heard powerful evidence about the impacts that this has on individuals, families and communities.

Most migrants in the UK are not living in poverty. But immigration policy in the UK can increase some people's risk of poverty in a number of ways, including:

- Restricting their right to work, limiting their ability to secure their employment rights, or increasing their risk of discrimination;
- Limiting their access to the safety net of social security and to public services which drives some into unsafe and exploitative work;
- Imposing high direct costs on families and individuals to remain in the UK legally throughout the course of their journey to settlement, including immigration and nationality fees;
- Pushing them into insecure housing, or increasing the risk of homelessness;
- Failing to provide the support that would enable them to integrate effectively into communities.

These factors combine to create deep poverty and even destitution among the most vulnerable groups, put additional pressures on families with children, and have long-term impacts on long-settled migrants and their families (including British citizens).

This report's recommendations build on shared principles and values that reflect the concerns of both the APPG on Poverty and the APPG on Migration:

- Government should commit to ending destitution in the UK, and destitution should be 'designed out' of the UK's social security and immigration systems.
- Reducing poverty, and helping people to get out of poverty, should be a key strategic objective of policy across government.
- There is a shared interest in ensuring that people who settle in the UK can thrive – a successful migration policy is one that enables people to integrate and contribute (economically and socially).
- Poverty has long-term and community-wide negative impacts (including because of impacts on local government resources and wider public services), beyond immediate implications for quality of life.
- Poverty, and particularly deep poverty/destitution, makes people vulnerable to exploitation and helps unscrupulous employers and businesses, as well as criminal gangs - undermining community safety for everyone.
- Policies which move and hide costs (to local government, to civil society, to communities themselves) are inefficient, and tend to obscure the real impact of decisions made by central government.
- Poverty is an inhumane and ineffective tool for enforcing UK immigration policy. The evidence that poverty or destitution is an effective deterrent or incentive in influencing migration decisions is weak.

There are a number of steps that national government could take to reduce the direct impacts that immigration policy has on poverty in the UK, including:

- Reducing the length of time that people spend subject to immigration control, including shortening routes to settlement and tackling backlogs. In particular, the current '10-year route' should be reduced to 5 years.
- Reducing fees and charges. Immigration and nationality fees (including the health surcharge) should be reviewed with the aim of reducing costs for lower income households who are already resident in the UK in particular (i.e. with a focus on in-country applications). A priority change should be to reduce fees to cost price for children and young people who are on a path to settlement and British citizenship.
- Giving those seeking asylum in the UK the right to work after 6 months, allowing them the chance to support themselves and escape poverty and destitution.
- Urgently reviewing the levels of asylum support. Whatever level is set, provision should be put in place to ensure that asylum support payments are regularly updated in line with inflation
- Strictly time-limiting the application of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions for those on routes to settlement in the UK - nobody on a path to settlement and citizenship should be subject to NRPF conditions for more than five years. The scope of these conditions should also be reduced, for example to enable families with children to access Child Benefit and those in the most urgent need to access emergency welfare support.
- Ensuring that all services for children and young people, including early years provision and post-16 Further Education, are available regardless of immigration status.
- Tackling the acute housing challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, including by extending the 'move-on period' for newly-recognised refugees from 28 to 56 days.
- Working in partnership with devolved, regional and local government to develop a comprehensive refugee integration strategy.
- Implementing the recommendations of the Windrush Lessons Learned Review, including the creation of a Migrants' Commissioner, to ensure that those who are affected by immigration policy have their voices heard. The level of engagement with this Inquiry from those with lived experience of immigration and poverty shows the potential gains to be had from engaging directly with those who are affected by policies in this area.

This report has only been able to briefly address some of the ways in which immigration policy affects poverty in the UK, but it is clear that the impacts are wide-ranging and significant. If the government is to take seriously the dual tasks of reducing poverty and making migration policy work it will need to better connect policy-making and data across government departments and between national, devolved, regional and local government; and work in partnership with civil society.

# 1. Background

Poverty in the UK is a concern across the political spectrum. The pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis focused attention on the issue, and highlighted how poverty leaves people vulnerable to events outside their control. Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of people in the UK living in deep poverty, or facing destitution, as illustrated by the huge increase in demand for emergency support from food banks and similar services.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the UK government has been re-shaping migration policies after Brexit, and grappling with its response to the challenge of small boat arrivals and the resettlement of people displaced by conflict and instability around the world. Migration can provide significant benefits both to migrants themselves and to the communities which receive them. Most migrants to the UK are not in poverty, and indeed migration is for many an opportunity to progress in education and work, with all the long-term benefits that it delivers. But in some circumstances migration can also leave people vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. Formulating and implementing migration policy requires governments to confront complex political challenges around fairness, entitlements, contribution and community.

This joint Inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Migration is an attempt to bring these two political and policy conversations together, and to explore the implications of migration policy for poverty in the UK.

The Inquiry, and this report, focuses on the direct effects of migration policy on poverty in the UK, and in particular on the ways in which policy can increase the risk of poverty among some groups of migrants. We have not considered the wider economic or fiscal impacts of migration policy on the UK. It is important to note though that poverty does not just affect the individuals and families who experience it. Poverty affects public services and local economies, communities and our wider society. If immigration policies put some migrant groups at higher risks of poverty, this has implications for integration and the long-term economic and social impacts of migration on the UK.

The importance of these issues, and the widespread concern about them, is well illustrated by the very high levels of engagement that this Inquiry has received. We received almost 200 submissions of evidence, from experts and advocates and from communities and those with lived experience of poverty and the UK immigration system. The Inquiry held two evidence sessions in Parliament and heard powerful and convincing evidence that elements of the UK immigration system make poverty and even destitution inevitable for some groups, and increase the vulnerability of many others.

This report has also benefited from the breadth of existing evidence and analysis of both poverty and migration in the UK. Although we highlight some gaps in the available data, in general the UK policy debate is well-served by expert and committed analysts and advocates. We would, though, encourage them to work more across the poverty/migration boundary as there is a tendency at present to work in separate 'silos'.

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<sup>2</sup> See [Destitution in the UK 2023](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2023 and [Going Without](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2022



## 2. Context

### 2.1 Poverty in the UK

Poverty in the UK has remained high and entrenched since 2010, and has increased in recent years after modest reductions during the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> In the most recent year for which data is available (22/23), more than one in five people in the UK (some 14.3m people) were in poverty.<sup>4</sup> This was even higher among families with children, with three in ten children living in poverty.<sup>5</sup>

Inflation, and in particular rapid increases in the cost of some essentials including energy, have put disproportionate pressure on low-income households. Partly because of this, the number of people in the UK who are in deep poverty (with an income less than 50% of the median) or very deep poverty (less than 40% of the median), and even destitution (unable to afford the most basic physical needs) has significantly increased.<sup>6</sup> Around 3.8m people in the UK experienced destitution in 2022,<sup>7</sup> and data from 2023 showed 3.4m households in the UK reporting not having enough money for food.<sup>8</sup>

At least some of this increase in poverty, and in particular the increase in deep poverty, could be reversed via changes to government policy. For example, it is clear that the two child limit and the benefit cap have increased the risk of poverty for children in larger families.

### 2.2 Migration in the UK

Migration to and from the UK has seen significant changes in recent years, not least as a result of Brexit. Net migration to the UK has remained high, and reached a record level of almost 750,000 in 2022.<sup>9</sup> Underneath this broad trend, there have been a number of significant changes in migration policy and flows which are relevant to this Inquiry:<sup>10</sup>

- Brexit meant the end of free movement between the UK and the EU. This has led to a rapid reduction in migration from EU countries to the UK, with net migration to the UK from the EU estimated to be negative in the year to June 2023.
- At the same time, migration to the UK from non-EU countries has significantly increased. This reflects increases in migration via a number of different routes, with the majority of the increase being accounted for by migration for work and study. The most recent statistics show a rapid increase in the number of people moving to the UK to take up roles in the health and social care sector.<sup>11</sup>

3 Official measures of poverty generally count households in poverty if their income is below 60% of median income after housing costs are taken into account. On this measure poverty in the UK fell slightly during the pandemic due both to temporary increases in government support for low income households (which boosted the real incomes of those households) and to the negative impacts of the pandemic on median incomes (which effectively lowered the relative poverty line).

4 Data from [Department for Work & Pensions](#), 2024. These figures refer to the relative poverty line (i.e. below 60% of median income, after housing costs). For more background see [UK Poverty 2024](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2024

5 Ibid

6 Ibid

7 [Destitution in the UK 2023](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2023

8 [UK Poverty 2024](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2024

9 For a discussion of migration trends see [Net Migration to the UK](#), Sumption et al, Migration Observatory 2024

10 [Latest Government data](#) are for the year ending December 2023

11 Data from [Migration Observatory 2024](#)

- The UK has opened up a number of new humanitarian migration routes, including for people from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong.<sup>12</sup>
- Recent years have seen a significant increase in applications for asylum in the UK, including many from people who have made dangerous journeys across the Channel in small boats.<sup>13</sup> In response, the Government has passed a number of laws (including the 2022 Nationality and Borders Act and the 2023 Illegal Migration Act) which have significantly restricted access to asylum for new arrivals.

It is important to note that most of these changes (with the notable exceptions of asylum applications and small boat crossings) are the intended result of UK Government policies.

For the purposes of this Inquiry, there are a number of important implications which have a direct bearing on the relationship between migration and poverty:

- The shift from EU to non-EU migration, and post-Brexit restrictions on EU migration (including for those already in the UK), means that an increasing number and proportion of migrants in the UK are subject to UK immigration control, including (for many) restricted eligibility for various benefits and services.
- Changing policies around access to migration for work, including in the social care sector, seem likely to have increased the number of people in the UK who are both subject to immigration control and working in relatively low-wage sectors.
- Changing migration patterns, including increases in forced migration, have meant an increase in the number of migrants to the UK who may be vulnerable in various ways.
- The combination of rising asylum applications and slow rates of processing (not least due to changes in policy following the 2022 Nationality and Borders Act and the 2023 Illegal Migration Act) has left large numbers of people reliant on the UK asylum support system (see below).

### 2.3 Poverty and migration in the UK

There is no universal or typical migration journey or experience. Migration patterns, policies and experiences have varied hugely over time, meaning that data and evidence pertaining to those who migrated to the UK in the past may be of limited relevance to those arriving today. Even within one time period, the varied routes and histories of migrants mean that their experiences are likely to be more heterogeneous than the non-migrant population of the UK.

It is also important to note that there are significant limitations to the data about migration and poverty in the UK. Most data on poverty is not broken down by migration status or history, and there is little longitudinal data to show how migration routes and experiences affect people's incomes over time. Indeed, one recommendation of this report is that better data would support better policy in this area (see below).

All that said, evidence does suggest that rates of poverty are generally higher for migrants than for the UK-born population. For example, a 2016 report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) found a poverty

<sup>12</sup> The various 'bespoke' schemes for different groups have different conditions and entitlements, are administered via different government departments, and are associated with varying levels of funding for local authorities to cover costs and support arrivals.

<sup>13</sup> There were 67,337 asylum applications in the UK in 2023 (a 17% decline since 2022, but a level not seen since the early 2000s) and 36,307 recorded 'irregular arrivals'. Data not yet available on the proportion of asylum applicants who arrived via small boats in 2023, but in the year to June 2023 small boat arrivals accounted for 37% of the total number of people claiming asylum in the UK. See [Irregular Migration to the UK, Year Ending December 2023](#), Home Office 2024

rate of 32% among non-UK born people, compared to a rate of 19% for UK-born people.<sup>14</sup> This does not only affect migrants themselves. The same study found a poverty rate of nearly 45% for children with foreign-born parents, of whom 70% had been born in the UK (compared to 24% for children with UK-born parents) suggesting significant inter-generational effects.

It is also clear that migrants are much more likely to face deep poverty and deprivation. Another recent JRF study found that 27% of those in destitution in the UK were born outside the UK (less than 15% of the UK population was born outside the UK).<sup>15 16</sup>

There may of course be a range of factors which explain these differences (for example, the age profile of migrants differs significantly from the UK-born population). In this context it is important to note the relationship between migration and race. We know that some minority ethnic groups suffer from very high levels of poverty, including deep and persistent poverty.<sup>17</sup> The reasons for this are complex, but it is safe to say that many migrants will have suffered the effects of racism, which may have increased their risk of poverty. Whatever the reason, it seems certain that migration experiences and immigration policies have a significant effect on risks and rates of poverty for some groups (and indeed that this is part of the explanation for higher rates of poverty among some minority ethnic groups) – this is the focus of this report.

The Inquiry heard powerful evidence from those with lived experience of migration and poverty about the impact that this has on individuals, families and communities. Those who gave evidence spoke about the negative effects of poverty (and in particular of deep poverty and destitution) on their physical and mental health, on their sense of self and on their ability to engage with their communities and integrate in the UK.

Many of these impacts of poverty will be similar to those experienced by others living in poverty, but migrant experiences of poverty will be different in some key respects. For example, migrants may be separated from family, friends and support networks, may not know how to access support in the UK, and may also find that their agency in the situation is limited by restrictions on the steps they can take to get out of poverty (see below). For some groups, especially those seeking safety, poverty in the UK may also follow traumatic experiences in their countries of origin and/or during their journeys to the UK.

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14 [Foreign-born people and poverty in the UK](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2016

15 [Destitution in the UK 2023](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2023

16 See also [Understanding Migrant Destitution in the UK: Literature review](#), COMPAS 2023

17 [Ethnicity and the heightened risk of very deep poverty](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2022, and also [Inequalities amplified: The alarming rise of child poverty in the UK](#), Women's Budget Group 2023

## 3. How does UK migration policy affect poverty?

This Inquiry received 76 submissions of evidence from people with lived experience of immigration and poverty, and 120 submissions of evidence from individuals and organisations with professional experience on these issues. Members of the APPGs heard oral evidence from people with both lived and learnt expertise. In addition, the Inquiry benefited from insights gained from a lived experience roundtable convened by The No Accommodation Network (NACCOM) and the University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS). In total the Inquiry received just over 165,000 words of evidence and we are incredibly grateful to everyone who took the time to respond. The Inquiry received a range of submissions from key organisations in both the migration and poverty sectors including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, WPI Economics, The Institute for Public Policy Research, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), Praxis, the British Red Cross, the Trussell Trust, the Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium, Refugee Action and the NRPF Network. [For more detail on the evidence received, see Appendix on page 33-35]

The evidence received by this Inquiry has highlighted a number of ways in which UK migration policy has a direct bearing on poverty, which are explored in this section of the report.

### 3.1 Employment and wages

For most people, employment is a necessary (if not always sufficient) condition for avoiding or escaping poverty. Those who gave evidence to the Inquiry based on their lived experience of migration and poverty were close to unanimous in their desire to undertake paid work, with the right to work (for example for asylum seekers) representing the most popular suggestion when asked what they would like to change in the current migration system.

But many migrants in the UK face restrictions on their rights to work. In particular, most people awaiting the outcome of an asylum claim have no right to work (there are some limited exceptions after 12 months for those who are qualified to work in jobs on the Shortage Occupation List<sup>18</sup>). With many asylum applicants now facing long delays for initial decisions (and even longer waits for appeals), this means that many asylum seekers face many months and even years with no right to work in the UK. Migrants with irregular immigration status similarly have no right to work, and even those who may in due course be entitled to remain in the UK (for example due to long residence) face even longer periods without the ability to access regular employment.<sup>19</sup>

This was identified as a key driver of poverty by those who submitted evidence to the Inquiry.

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18 The replacement of the Shortages Occupation list with the new Immigration Salary List will significantly reduce the number of jobs covered by this exception including ruling out most higher paid jobs, and jobs in the health and education sectors.

19 Note that some victims of trafficking and modern slavery who are going through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) also have no right to work (depending on their previous immigration status). Delays in the NRM process mean that many remain in this position for well over a year.

Evidence submitted by JRF stated that allowing asylum seekers to undertake paid work would not only help alleviate poverty but would:

*“allow people to use their talents, support themselves and their families, contribute to the local economy and put down roots in their local communities. It could also decrease the risks of exploitation, forced labour and modern slavery...Overall, this is a policy change which could bring a wide range of benefits – both to people seeking asylum, and to the UK more widely – while bringing the UK in line with international norms around the right to work.”*

However, as it stands, restrictions on the right to work leaves asylum seekers dependent on inadequate Asylum Support payments (see below), and can also lead people to accept low-paid and exploitative employment in the informal economy.

An inability to access employment can also have longer-term impacts – submissions to this Inquiry highlighted the difficulty of maintaining professional skills and qualifications, as well as broader implications for people’s confidence and employability. This means that exclusion from the labour market for a period may increase the risk of unemployment, low pay and poverty even once the right to work is obtained.<sup>20</sup>

Some giving evidence to this Inquiry highlighted the counter-productive nature of policies which keep people who want to work out of the workforce at a time of widespread labour shortages in some sectors (including some which rely on other migration routes). Such policies also have a substantial fiscal cost in lost tax and national insurance contributions, more asylum support payments and long-term support needs (e.g. for mental health). The Lift the Ban coalition estimates that given asylum seekers the right to work after 6 months could save the UK economy over £312 million per year.<sup>21</sup>

In their evidence Women’s Alternative Economy said:

*“If 75% of asylum applications go on to be awarded... the Government is spending millions on (often substandard) housing for those going through the asylum process for many months. Denying people’s access to support themselves seems wholly unnecessary. This decision.... makes no financial sense, with the outcome of further impoverishing people who simply want the opportunity to support themselves and the loss of tax revenue for the Exchequer from their employment.”*

More broadly, migrants may face a range of barriers in the UK labour market which can increase their risk of poverty due to unemployment or low pay. These include:

- Visa restrictions which limit the ability of some migrants to easily change their employer (e.g. sponsorship requirements), which may reduce the ability of migrant workers to negotiate better terms and conditions, and may leave some vulnerable to exploitation including breaches of minimum wage legislation.<sup>22</sup>

20 Many of these points are well covered in the recent report: [From Arrival to Integration: Building Communities for Refugees and for Britain](#), the Commission on the Integration of Refugees 2024

21 Figures provided in a Lift the Ban Parliamentary briefing which contained refreshed figures based on the methodology set out in their 2020 report [Lift The Ban: Why Giving People Seeking Asylum the Right to Work is Common Sense](#).

22 Recent changes which prevent migrant care workers from bringing their spouses to the UK may further increase the risks of exploitation faced by this group, by leaving them dependent on one employer.

- Discrimination on the grounds of their race, nationality or migration status. There is some evidence that right-to-work checks and increased penalties for employers under the so-called 'hostile/compliant environment' have led to some migrants (and indeed others) facing discrimination in the labour market even when they have the right to work.<sup>23</sup>
- A lack of access to training, including English language courses, may limit the ability of some migrant groups to increase their skill and income levels over time, leaving them trapped in low-skilled and low-paid employment.
- The complexity and cost of having educational and professional qualifications recognised in the UK prevents some migrants from working in high-skilled jobs, pushing them into lower-paid employment.
- Lack of access to social security and welfare support (see below) can leave some unable to afford the essentials which can in turn affect their ability to apply for, commute to, and hold down higher-paying jobs. The evidence received by this Inquiry suggested that this particularly impacts women.

For example, in their submission to this Inquiry WPI Economics said:

*“Those (on NRPF) already on low income have no access to social welfare to gain better housing support, free childcare, universal credit, child benefit, among others. Indirectly, certain groups like women and people with particular needs are often pushed out of the workforce or are limited to part-time work in low paying jobs as they cannot access public funds to improve their situation.”*

### 3.2 Access to social security and welfare support

The UK's social security system is not adequate to the task of preventing poverty, or even preventing deep poverty. Benefits have failed to keep pace with the cost of living or with earnings, and by international standards the UK system is relatively ungenerous.<sup>24</sup> So we know that access to social security is not sufficient to prevent poverty for many.

But many migrants lack access to even this imperfect safety net. Many submissions to this Inquiry, including from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), WPI Economics, COMPAS, CPAG and Manchester City Council highlighted the limited access those in the UK migration system have to social security and welfare support, and the impact that this can have.

Millions of people (an estimated 2.6m at the end of 2022) resident in the UK with temporary leave to remain (including those who have come to work, study, or join family) are subject to 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) conditions which prevent them from accessing most social security benefits and welfare support (as well as social housing).<sup>25</sup> Those who are resident in the UK but who have irregular migration status (a population estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands) are in effect subject to the same restriction by default. In addition, Brexit has left many EEA citizens with uncertain access to social security and welfare support (e.g. those with pre-settled status and those who missed the EUSS deadline) – submissions to this Inquiry highlighted significant delays in access even in cases where eligibility was eventually established. In

23 [The UK's Hostile Environment: Deputising Immigration Control](#), Griffiths & Yeo, 2021

24 For example weekly unemployment benefits are currently worth around 14% of weekly average earnings. For more detail see: [Report on the \(In\)adequacy of Social Security](#), The All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty, 2023

25 This includes most emergency welfare provision, and means that most households with NRPF restrictions did not benefit from emergency support provided during the pandemic/cost-of-living crisis. For more background see: [Deprivation and the No Recourse to Public Funds \(NRPF\) Condition](#), Migration Observatory, 2023

most cases, UK-born children (including those with British citizenship) will not be eligible for social security or welfare support if the immigration status of their parents includes an NRPF restriction or otherwise prevents them from accessing such support.<sup>26</sup>

Many of those subject to NRPF restrictions will be in a financially secure situation, but for a significant number of households this lack of access to social security and welfare support can push them below the poverty line.<sup>27</sup> Evidence submitted to this Inquiry particularly highlighted the impact of NRPF conditions on:

- Low-income households with dependent children, who would otherwise be eligible for Universal Credit and Child Benefit;
- Spouses and children of visa holders where family relationships have broken down, including victims of domestic abuse. This disproportionately affects women; and
- Those with disabilities or long-term health conditions, who are unable to access support to cover additional costs, and who may not have any means of support if they are not able to work.

For many households with NRPF restrictions the result is deep and persistent poverty. NRPF conditions can be lifted in some circumstances in cases of destitution and/or where the basic needs of children are not being met, but many in deep poverty do not meet this threshold and even for those who do, the process of applying for their conditions to be lifted is often unclear or inaccessible.<sup>28</sup>

Evidence submitted by WPI Economics emphasised this point:

*“Policies like No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) make it harder [for migrants] to avail themselves of help to remove themselves from poverty and improve their financial condition. The group most affected are NRPF households with children who are in poverty.”*

Evidence submitted by IPPR further highlights the impact of NRPF:

*“There is considerable evidence to suggest that the NRPF condition has contributed to destitution and financial hardship across the UK. Research on the experience of NRPF by families and children has highlighted that benefit restrictions have left many experiencing poverty, homelessness, substandard accommodation, severe debt, and other financial difficulties. Evidence also points towards the disproportionate impact of NRPF on those from ethnic minority backgrounds: a study by Citizens Advice found that more than 80 per cent of their clients who sought advice on NRPF and non-EU migrants’ access to benefits were from ethnic minority backgrounds.”*

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26 The Work and Pensions Committee conducted a detailed report in 2022: [Children in poverty – No Recourse to Public Funds: Work and Pensions Committee publishes Government response to report](#), 2022

27 The Work and Pensions Committee, among others, have called on the government to collect and publish better data on those subject to NRPF conditions, including on their risk of poverty, Ibid

28 Home Office data shows that in 2023 just over 3,500 applications for a change of conditions were made, with around two thirds of applications being accepted. Existing literature also explores how many migrants with a precarious immigration status may be too fearful of coming forward to request access to public funds (British Association of Social Workers, 2020; Jolly et al, 2022; Leon, 2023) in case it jeopardises their immigration status or future applications for leave to remain, or leads to their children being taken into care.

Local authorities do have obligations to provide support for households with NRPf restrictions in some circumstances, particularly families with children and those with care needs. This often leads to local authorities providing long-term support for households facing homelessness or destitution, with an average period of support of more than 600 days for families with children, and longer for adults with care needs. This support is inconsistent, expensive, and not adequately funded, which reduces local authorities' ability to provide other services – these issues were highlighted by a number of submissions to this Inquiry from local government.<sup>29</sup> The costs borne by local authorities (estimated at close to £80m per annum<sup>30</sup>) mean that NRPf conditions are not providing as big a saving to UK taxpayers as might be expected or intended.<sup>31</sup>

Evidence submitted by COMPAS highlighted the scale of this problem:

*“Our research shows that over 10,000 destitute vulnerable migrants were supported by local authorities in 2021/22 as they were locked out of mainstream social security and housing assistance, due to their immigration status.”*

Support provided by local authorities can be a lifeline for those with NRPf restrictions, but levels of support are usually significantly below the level that would be provided by mainstream social security benefits. There are no clear statutory standards for support levels, which vary significantly as a result. Despite some good practice and innovation from devolved, regional and local government in response to these challenges, national policy, and lack of funding, places significant constraints on the ability of local government to act.<sup>32</sup>

Those seeking asylum in the UK have no access to mainstream social security benefits. Without the right to work, the vast majority of this group are dependent on Asylum Support payments. Levels of asylum support have not kept pace even with other social security benefits even as those have fallen behind living costs and earnings (there is no automatic process of regular uprating for asylum support), and are now roughly half the level of Universal Credit (less than £50 per week per person at the standard rate).<sup>33</sup> For those in 'full-board' Home Office accommodation support is even more meagre (less than £9 per week per person, a level which was reduced from £9.58 in January 2024). This means that the majority of asylum seekers in the UK are living in deep poverty and many in destitution.

Evidence gathered from the Inquiry's lived experience oral evidence session highlighted the potential consequences of the low level of asylum support. One contributor said:

*“The asylum seeker support is not enough, it pushed me into poverty and resulted in me being exploited by criminal gangs in the black market.”*

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29 The Household Support Fund, introduced in response to the cost-of-living crisis, has been one source of funding for local authorities providing emergency support to families with children and those with care needs. Uncertainty about the future of this fund will put further pressure on local government support for these households.

30 [Reducing Pressures on Councils: How government could reduce pressures on councils arising from supporting people with no recourse to public funds](#), NRPf Network 2024

31 [Social Cost Benefit Analysis of the no recourse to public funds \(NRPf\) policy in London](#), Benton 2022

32 Local government is taking steps to make provision for those with NRPf restrictions more consistent and joined up through a variety of innovative practice and policy. See for example the 'Ending destitution together' strategy produced jointly by COSLA and the Scottish Government, or the local government partnership represented by the NRPf Network

33 Until 2008 Asylum Support levels were set at 70% of the rate of Income Support, on the basis that asylum seekers' accommodation would be provided separately.



As waiting times for asylum decisions have lengthened, more people are reliant on asylum support payment for extended periods. Government and the public should be clear-sighted about the fact that this means tens or hundreds of thousands of people, including children are living in deep poverty and destitution.<sup>34</sup> Those who spoke to this Inquiry about their experience of this system were grateful for the protection and support they had received but they also made it clear that the levels of deprivation it left them in had a hugely negative impact on their physical and mental health, and stripped them of their dignity and sense of self.

One lived experience respondent in their evidence said;

*“we are just entitled to £9 each week which makes living very difficult and frustrating. I can barely afford the basics. Life has been depressing.”*

Another said;

*“I have £9 a week from the government. I eat in a hotel. I have a mental problem... I lost consciousness twice from nervousness and lack of food.”*

If an asylum application is successful, a newly-recognised refugee is entitled to access mainstream social security support. If they are unable to find employment immediately, they are entitled to Universal Credit. However, there is a 35-day minimum wait for a Universal Credit payment (this can often be longer, for example if the applicant does not have sufficient support to correctly complete the application, or has trouble opening a bank account), and newly-recognised refugees are only given 28-days of Asylum Support payments and accommodation after their claim is decided (often less, in practice - see also section 3.4 below). This moment of transition means that for many refugees in the UK a successful asylum claim, which should be a positive moment, is instead marked by a period of destitution which is hardwired into the system, and this can leave them very vulnerable, including to exploitation.

### 3.3 Access to (public) services

The relationship between poverty and access to public services is two-way – in some cases poverty prevents people from accessing services, and in other cases a lack of access to services can push people into (deeper) poverty, limit their ability to get out of poverty, or worsen the impacts of poverty on their health and wellbeing.

Submissions to this Inquiry, including from the Limehouse NHS Primary Care Practice, The Bike Project, the SnowDrop Project and Refugee Action highlighted the various ways in which migrants and refugees can find themselves unable to access key public services.

Most migrants who are legally resident in the UK are entitled to access NHS services (noting that many must pay a health surcharge – see section 3.6 below). However, the significant population of people with irregular or undocumented immigration status may be charged for access to secondary health services. This Inquiry heard evidence of significant hardship caused by medical debt incurred in these circumstances,

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<sup>34</sup> At the end of September 2023 there were over 123,000 people in receipt of asylum support, a 23% increase on the previous year: [How many people do we grant protection to?](#), Home Office 2023

with people on very low incomes liable for thousands of pounds of NHS charges for essential healthcare (including cancer treatment and antenatal care).

There is also often a lack of clarity about entitlements to access NHS services. This can lead to migrants who are entitled to care not accessing it due to fear of charges. It can also lead to migrants being wrongly charged for services, or even denied care based on a misunderstanding of entitlements. The experience of the Windrush generation showed that even long-settled migrants may struggle to prove their entitlement to free-at-point-of-delivery NHS services. For low-income households, medical charges and debt, or the fear of medical charges and debt, can have significant impacts.

Evidence submitted by the Limehouse NHS Primary Care Practice, based in Tower Hamlets, makes clear the impact of the hostile environment on migrants' ability to access NHS services:

*“Anyone whose citizenship can be questioned can be put off from attending hospitals because they may be liable to be asked to prove their entitlement to NHS services, and if treatment is essential and is provided, they may be consigned to permanent indebtedness as a result.”*

Poverty can also directly prevent people from accessing the health services to which they are entitled. In particular, those who are in deep poverty or destitution may struggle to afford transport or ancillary charges such as prescriptions. This Inquiry heard evidence that this is preventing or limiting access to healthcare for those reliant on asylum support in particular, including examples of people unable to attend urgent medical appointments due to a lack of access to funds for even short journeys by public transport.

Children are entitled to access compulsory education (up to the age of 18) and social care services, regardless of their immigration status.<sup>35</sup> For children living in poverty, school can be an important source of stability and support. The recent decision to permanently extend eligibility for free school meals to children subject to NRPF conditions is welcome, and also ensures that schools are able to access associated funding (e.g. pupil premium). However, some groups of migrant children may still struggle to access education. For example, submissions to this Inquiry included a number of examples of children from families seeking asylum or receiving humanitarian protection being unable to access consistent education due to being moved between accommodation at short notice. It is also the case that children living in deep poverty or destitution (including many children in families seeking asylum) will struggle to succeed in education due to the direct impacts of poverty.

Entitlements to Further and Higher Education are more complex (and vary across the UK), and some people (including young people who are entitled to, but do not yet hold, British citizenship) find it difficult to evidence their entitlement. Limited access to Higher and Further education can leave some migrants unable to access higher-skilled employment which would allow them to get and stay out of poverty.

More widely, a lack of understanding and clarity about entitlements can lead to some migrants (and others) being unable to access a range of services, including financial services. For example, this Inquiry received submissions highlighting that some newly-recognised refugees have been unable to access banking services, leaving them in turn unable to receive social security or access employment, with obvious implications for their risk of poverty.

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<sup>35</sup> Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are a very vulnerable group with specific needs. This issue is beyond the scope of this report, but the Local Government Association have set out a range of recommendations here: Debate on accommodation of asylum-seeking children in hotels, House of Commons, 7 June 2023, Local Government Association 2023

Finally, a number of submissions, as well as the evidence of those with lived experience who spoke to this Inquiry, highlighted a fear that data would be shared with the Home Office for the purposes of immigration enforcement as a barrier to accessing services (including the criminal justice system). These barriers particularly affect vulnerable groups including victims of human trafficking and domestic violence. Sometimes fears about data sharing are well-founded, but even when they are not, the perceived risks of engaging with public services may further limit the opportunities of those with irregular or undocumented immigration status in particular.

### 3.4 Housing

Many of the housing issues faced by low-income migrant households are held in common with similar UK-born households – a limited supply of social housing and in particular council housing, housing benefits that have failed to keep pace with rising costs, insecure and poor quality housing in the private rental sector, and house prices that are far out of reach for many. Poor quality or insecure housing can worsen and prolong poverty.

But as with access to social security, some groups of migrants in the UK face significant additional challenges. Poverty can lead to homelessness, but it is more likely to do so among some migrant groups. Homelessness has direct and severe impacts on people's wellbeing, but it also makes it even more difficult to access the social security support or employment which might provide a route out of poverty.

Those subject to NRP restrictions, or without secure immigration status, are ineligible either for social housing, or for housing-related benefits. This can force them to accept overcrowded or unsafe housing, and puts them at greater risk of homelessness. If they are at risk of homelessness, or become homeless, they may be unable to access the 'last resort' safety nets that exist to prevent homelessness and provide emergency accommodation, and are more likely to end up sleeping on the street as a result.

A number of submissions to this Inquiry including from the IPPR, CPAG and the Greater Manchester Migrant Destitution Fund highlighted the particular risks faced by some EEA nationals after Brexit. EEA nationals who had been homeless before the deadline to apply for settled status often found themselves unable to access the scheme, or to evidence their eligibility, leaving them with irregular or undocumented immigration status and further complicating their routes out of homelessness and poverty. Other EEA nationals who were granted pre-settled status have become homeless due to long delays in determining their entitlements to social security or welfare support, and are often ineligible for homelessness support.

Evidence submitted by IPPR highlighted homelessness among EEA nationals:

*“Analysis undertaken by IPPR and Heriot-Watt University finds that around 9.3 percent of the core homelessness population are from the EEA and indicates that the risk of an EEA household experiencing core homelessness was 1.7 times higher than for all households in Britain. In the case of rough sleeping the risk for EEA citizens was 2.7 times that for British people.”*

Right-to-rent checks as part of the so-called 'hostile/compliant environment' mean that some landlords and housing providers are reluctant to offer tenancies to non-British tenants, which can lead to higher housing costs. As with other issues of entitlements this can affect those who are entitled to rent as well as those who are not. A number of submissions to this Inquiry highlighted the impact of this, including but not limited to households in poverty.

Evidence from Shelter shed light on how right to rent checks can force migrants into exploitative situations:

“The right to rent policy also pushes migrants into unsafe housing arrangements, exposing them to the risk of domestic and sexual servitude. With no safe housing available to them, those without a right to rent may be forced to accept housing in less-detectable informal lodgings within the shadow housing market and gives rogue landlords even more power to exploit their situation.”

Evidence received from Manchester City Council also highlighted this:

“The government’s hostile policies have meant that migrant communities do not have choice of accommodation and are left in accommodation with mould, damp, and other infestations. Migrant communities are left open to exploitation and intimidation from landlords, gangs and criminals”

More broadly, newly-arrived households may find it difficult to satisfy the general requirements of landlords and housing providers, for example lacking savings to pay a deposit, or references from previous accommodation. This can push people into expensive or substandard accommodation and put financial pressure even on those who would be expected to have sufficient resources to support themselves (e.g. international students).

The evidence submitted to this Inquiry, however, makes clear that the most acute migration-related housing issues currently face those who arrive in the UK via asylum or humanitarian routes, who are often dependent on government-provided accommodation (and indeed may be required to live in such accommodation). This accommodation is often of poor quality, and delays in decision-making mean that people may remain in it for many months, or years. The transition out of Home Office accommodation is also difficult. For example, the latest figures show that there was a 109% increase in the number of households facing statutory homelessness after leaving asylum accommodation in July-September 2023, compared to the same quarter in 2022.<sup>36</sup> The number of people sleeping rough in England who had left asylum support in the previous 85 days rose from fewer than 50 in July 2023 to more than 450 in December 2023.<sup>37</sup> Refugee homelessness was worsened by the Government’s August 2023 decision to shorten the ‘move-on’ period for newly-recognised refugees to just seven days. This decision was later reversed, but evidence submitted to this Inquiry made clear that even 28 days is often insufficient to find suitable housing.

For the purposes of this Inquiry into migration and poverty it is important to highlight the following points:

- Asylum seekers and resettled refugees often have no choice about where they live. This may limit their ability to find appropriate employment (if and when they are able to work) and/or to gain support from communities and civil society, increasing their risk of poverty in the medium-long term.
- The 28 day ‘move on period’ which forces people to leave Home Office accommodation within 28 days when refugee status is granted (and sometimes sooner, in effect) all but guarantees homelessness for some refugees, and makes it very difficult for local authorities and voluntary sector organisations to deliver the homelessness safety net that they would provide for others. Moving from deep poverty in the asylum support system directly into homelessness as a newly-recognised refugee means that for too many a grant of refugee status is a route further into poverty rather than out of it.

<sup>36</sup> [Statutory homelessness in England: July to September 2023](#), Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities 2023

<sup>37</sup> [Tables on rough sleeping](#), Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities 2024

- A failure to plan for and resource medium-long term housing for those resettled in the UK through various humanitarian schemes (including those from Ukraine and Afghanistan) has left many vulnerable people at increased risk of homelessness.
- Poor communication between the Home Office, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and local government often means that vulnerable families ‘fall between the cracks’ and makes it difficult or impossible for local authorities to discharge their duties towards some homeless migrant households. In general, points of transition within the asylum and resettlement systems are moments of high housing/ homelessness risk. Evidence submitted to this Inquiry suggests that as demands on these systems have grown, and due to the piecemeal nature of policy and implementation, these transitions have become both more numerous and more risky.

### 3.5 Communities and integration

Strong communities can both reduce the negative impacts of poverty, and help people to get out of poverty. But poverty, particularly deep poverty, can itself make it harder for people to participate in social and community life, and to build relationships with others. This is particularly true for recently-arrived migrants, who will often lack existing networks and relationships, and who may face additional barriers (including language).

The importance of integration was underlined by a number of submissions to this Inquiry, including by JRF, South Gloucestershire Council, Detention Action, ACH and Havering Council. Many organisations, including Havering Council, celebrated the Homes for Ukraine scheme as a specific policy which provided integration support for some groups;

*“Under the Homes for Ukraine they are supported by the Sponsor and we have assisted them with integrating into the UK.”*

With Havering Council going on to say that;

*“with the Homes for Ukraine Scheme integration support is available to help access benefits, employment and housing.”*

The support that the Homes for Ukraine Scheme has afforded refugees to integrate into Britain was widely acknowledged, but so was the need to apply this level of support to all demographics of refugees. ACH stated in their evidence that the government should;

*“extend the welcome and support that Ukrainians have received to ALL other demographics of refugees, to extend the Homes for Ukraine scheme and move on support for all – so that support and welcome is not selective.”*

But this recognition is not consistent, and many migrants receive very little support to integrate into the UK or their local community.<sup>38</sup> English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) entitlements and provision are inconsistent, and language remains a key barrier for some groups. For example, submissions to this Inquiry highlighted a lack of flexible ESOL provision that enables people to work and fulfil their caring responsibilities, as well as a more general lack of funding and provision in parts of the UK.

Inconsistent support from central government puts pressure on local government, particularly in some areas with high areas of need. In a context where funding for local government has been cut across the board, funding for integration has been significantly reduced. As outlined above, the costs of responding to destitution and homelessness are high, and have put further pressure on local government's ability to provide other services. Local government is working proactively and collaboratively (including with devolved and regional government) to improve the services that they provide, and to engage with national government on these issues, but a number of submissions to this Inquiry highlighted the challenges of doing this effectively with the resources available.<sup>39</sup>

The UK benefits from a vibrant and active civil society sector supporting migrants, particularly the most vulnerable groups. Indeed, the evidence heard by this Inquiry confirms that many of those facing destitution and deep/persistent poverty are entirely reliant on the provision of emergency support by charities, religious groups and local communities. But this civil society provision is often itself poorly funded and its availability varies across the country.

### 3.6 Direct immigration and nationality costs

The immigration system itself imposes direct costs on migrant households, and these costs are increasing rapidly. Since 2003, the UK government has charged fees for visas, extensions and citizenship applications, to cover processing costs and fund the wider immigration system. Government income from immigration and nationality fees rose from under £200m in 2003 to well over £2bn in 2022 (not including health surcharges or employer levies).<sup>40</sup> These fees are paid by migrants and their families, and continue to rise in real terms – in October 2023 fees were increased by between 15 and 35 per cent.

Many submissions to this Inquiry highlighted the impacts of the direct costs faced by those in the UK immigration system, including those from COMPAS, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), The Children's Society and Women's Alternative Economy.

These fees are substantial. For example, an application for indefinite leave to remain in the UK now costs nearly £2,900 and naturalisation (British citizenship) £1,500. For those on low, or even middle incomes, immigration and nationality fees may be enough to push them below the poverty line.

In addition to immigration and nationality fees, many migrants to the UK must also pay an annual health surcharge. As of February 2024, this charge is now more than £1,000 per year for adults in most visa categories.<sup>41</sup> Although this is calculated based on an assessment of the average cost of providing healthcare, it is charged in addition to normal taxation.

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38 It should be noted that even for those groups receiving more integration support there are concerns about its sufficiency to equip them for the long-term – for example see [DELIVERING ON 'OPERATION WARM WELCOME'](#): Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy Project Reflections on the Welcome and Integration Support provided to Afghans evacuated under Operation Pitting

39 The [Commission on the Integration of Refugees](#) has proposed a radical overhaul of integration support for asylum seekers and refugees, based on local integration partnerships.

40 [UK immigration fees](#), McKinney et. al 2024

41 [The immigration health surcharge](#), Gower & McKinney 2024

Evidence submitted by COMPAS highlighted how these fees contribute to poverty:

*“In addition to struggling on low incomes, many people with NRPF are also required to comply with immigration policy, having to save up in order to afford immigration application fees and the NHS surcharge every time they apply to renew their leave. Ensuring compliance with immigration policy to maintain their leave to remain can take a significant toll on people’s finances, pushing them into further debt... Families we interviewed described the impossible situation they faced in renewing visas to extend their leave in the UK and having to prioritise only renewing visas for some of the family as they could not afford the fees for the whole family, leaving some family members falling into irregularity.”*

The cost and perceived unfairness of the NHS surcharge was highlighted in evidence submitted by those with lived experience:

*“We shouldn’t be paying thousands of pounds up front to use the NHS when we don’t use it.”*

*“It was also costly to pay for the NHS every time I extended my visa considering I was already working and paying taxes in the UK.”*

Costs for families and for those who need to make multiple applications (for example those who want to settle in the UK and become citizens) can rapidly mount into tens of thousands of pounds. For example, a family of two adults and two children on the ‘ten year route’ to settlement in the UK must pay application fees of over £4,000 every two and half years, health surcharges of over £3,500 per year, and fees of over £11,500 to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain at the end of the process, with a total cost of well over £50,000 for fees and surcharges alone (with fees for any subsequent citizenship application in addition).<sup>42</sup> Recent research has shown that many people on this route to settlement (of whom there are around 170,000 in the UK)<sup>43</sup> struggle to afford utilities and food, and over 80% had incurred debt in order to pay fees.<sup>44</sup>

Those who cannot afford to pay fees to extend their leave to remain risk falling into irregular migration status, with all the attendant risks, including continued poverty and limited entitlements. Although fee waivers are available in some circumstances, these are often difficult to access. For example, fee waivers are not automatic even for those who have sufficiently evidenced their destitution in order to lift NRPF conditions, and are not available for applications for indefinite leave to remain or citizenship.

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42 A single adult going through the same route would face total fees and charges of over £16,000.

43 It is also important to note that in some cases people are on this route precisely because they have low incomes (for example if they cannot meet the Minimum Income Requirements for shorter family routes).

44 [‘A Punishing Process’: Experiences of People on the 10-Year Route to Settlement](#), Mort et al 2023

On top of the various fees and charges, many migrants will incur significant costs to obtain legal advice and support in making applications (including for changes of conditions, or for fee waivers). Most immigration-related matters are not supported by legal aid, and capacity in the voluntary sector to provide advice is limited and over-stretched. In addition, some migrants incur other costs to come to the UK (including agency fees), which may result in debt. There are increasing concerns about unscrupulous and even criminal charging of inflated fees by agencies and ‘middlemen’, including in the social care sector.<sup>45</sup>

We have seen above that a number of factors may limit incomes and access to services for some migrants, putting them at greater risk of poverty. High immigration fees and costs mean that, *even all else being equal*, migrant families are at greater risk of poverty, deep poverty and destitution.

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45 [Expendable Labour: The Exploitation of Migrant Care Workers](#), Unison 2023



## 4. Migration and Poverty in Focus

The sections above have set out some of the main ways in which UK immigration policy can affect the likelihood and experience of poverty in the UK. But for individuals and families who experience the effects, different issues can combine to create very difficult conditions, and multiple barriers to escaping from poverty. This is something that came through very clearly in the evidence received from those with lived experience of the immigration system. We can't recount the details of every story that was shared, but this section sets out some of the key ways that policy implications can intersect, based on cases presented as evidence to this Inquiry.

### 4.1 Destitution among those seeking asylum and newly recognised refugees

The Inquiry heard directly from a number of asylum seekers who had faced destitution in the UK, and reports of many other cases, due to combinations of:

- Delayed decision-making, including years-long waits for initial and final asylum decisions, and protracted processes for securing immigration status.
- No right to work, including people with skills and experience in sectors suffering from skills and labour shortages (for example in health and social care).
- Insufficiency of asylum support to cover the basics, particularly for those in Home Office accommodation (for example the Inquiry heard evidence of children losing weight due to insufficient food).
- Poor continuity of support, including people who had been made destitute and homeless upon being granted refugee status and leaving the asylum support system

On the effects of delayed decision making with no right to work, one lived experience respondent said:

*“Please after so long time waiting in the system to have a decision I only expect to have my full right to work and be able to restart my life. Please help me because I am afraid to not be alive anymore.”*

As one roundtable participant said:

*“If the asylum seekers are not allowed to work, they need to process their claims much faster ... because ... no person can live like this without affecting their mental health”*

The inadequacy of asylum support, especially for those in Home Office accommodation with young children was made clear by another lived experience respondent:

*“My immigration status impacts the ability to afford some daily essentials like food. Because I'm being housed in a hotel for now, I can't cook proper food for my baby and I am only allowed to eat what the hotel provides which isn't great especially when I have an 11 months old baby who is starting to eat more solid. The money received is also too little to afford public transport and child related costs.”*

Many spoke about having to rely on the goodwill of their friends:

*“I waited three years until I was able to apply for my first credit card this summer. Later I was taken as a lodger by my friends, this saved me from homelessness or an extremely deprived lifestyle.”*

Many submissions from those with lived experience highlighted the risk of homelessness:

*“Putting this kind of restriction on people leads to homelessness and destitution. And that is ... violating a human right. You have to have some sort of income to live. But some people such as myself, I don't have any of these benefits. So that's why people lead into homelessness.”*

*“It becomes even more difficult for us ... due to our immigration status. Councils ... it gives them a chance to turn a blind eye or not to acknowledge their duty of care... sorry we can't do that, you have to be on the street. So that again then pushes us into becoming homeless with children. And again, then that starts the cycle of impact on daily life, where you're gonna live, how you're going to survive”*

It was clear from the evidence received that destitution has an immediate and serious impact on physical and mental health, as well as on people's self-esteem. As one person who gave evidence to the Inquiry described it 'I don't see myself as myself.'

One respondent told the Inquiry;

*“I really don't know how we all are getting by with our ... day-to-day lives. It's really pretty miserable ... It's affects everything. It just affects all aspects of your life ... mental health crisis and having no accommodation, stress, education of children. In short ... everything is affected and impacted in a very severely negative way.”*

Respondents also described the impact that their immigration status had on their children

*“Being an asylum seeker is very difficult financially which affects your physical and mental wellbeing. I am a single mother with three young children. The money I receive every week is not enough for all of us. I have to cut down on so many things to be able to cook three meals a day for my children.”*

*“A weekly stipend of £47. It is not enough and my weekly expenditures prevent me and my children from having our basic needs and even some family time out of the home; we can't afford the expensive bus fares. We stay indoors mostly.”*

## 4.2 Multiple pressures on families with children

There are particular pressures and impacts on families with children. Regardless of immigration status or issues, families with children (and particularly larger families and families with younger children) have higher rates of poverty than other groups.<sup>46</sup> For families with children who are subject to immigration control (including families with British-born or British citizen children), a number of additional factors can combine to increase their risk of poverty, or push them deeper into poverty:

- Families with NRPF restrictions cannot access Child Benefit or other social security payments targeted at the costs of supporting children, and most have missed out on much of the support made available during the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.
- Parents may be unable to work (even if they have the right to work) because they are not able to access sufficient childcare (for example parents who are subject to immigration control are excluded from the extended provision aimed at working families through the ‘30 hours offer’ for 3 and 4 year olds).
- Immigration fees and health surcharges may be incurred for multiple members of the family, increasing the risk of debt.

The Inquiry heard evidence from a number of people who had found themselves trapped in a cycle of fees and debt:

*“With the visa fee especially is that when we say “saving” ... This community doesn’t have anything to save ... We’re already struggling. So it’s not that we can afford to save... There’s nothing to save.’*

*“[It] means people are going to go and borrow money. It could be most of the time from unsafe sources. Which is really is like pushing them to towards that which is quite horrible’.*

The Inquiry also received reports from those with professional experience. One such report was from Ilona Pinter, titled *A Lifeline for All Children with NRPF* which details the effects NRPF policy can have on children and families;

*“The imposition of the NRPF condition on families with dependent children gives rise to child poverty and hinders the integration of families who are entitled to settle in the UK permanently.”<sup>47</sup>*

...

*“Living in poverty has significant detrimental effects on children’s outcomes, both in childhood and later in life. Living on low income negatively affects children’s school attainment, cognitive and behavioural development, and their physical and mental health, even for short periods of time.”*

46 [UK Poverty 2024: The Essential Guide to Understanding Poverty in the UK](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2024

47 [A Lifeline for All Children and Families with No Recourse to Public Funds](#), Ilona Pinter 2020

### 4.3 Long-term impact on settled migrants and British-born/citizen children and young people

Many of the most acute effects of immigration on the risk and experience of poverty occur shortly after arrival in the UK (e.g. during an asylum application). However, these experiences can in turn have long-term effects which persist long after people leave the immigration system behind, settle permanently, and become British citizens. One person described his friend's situation:

*"he was a failed asylum seeker, he was here for a long time ... He was a qualified person but he could not work for a long time. So by the time he got his status, he tried to go back ... to his work ... He couldn't...do it. Because he's been out of work for so long. And then his confidence is ... literally down. ... People's mental health has had a hammering ... from these kinds of policies."*

There are also particular effects on children and young people. Growing up in poverty can negatively affect educational achievement, physical and mental health, and can also lead to children and young people being excluded from opportunities, particularly Further and Higher education.

*"Our children they are here, they've been to school here, and they've been to college here. But when it comes to going to the university, they are not allowed to go to university. So it's impacted ... their mental health as well ... because our children are seeing their friends... going on holidays, they are going on the trips to different countries, but they are not, they are not eligible to go outside of the UK. Because of their parents' status, you know. So I think it's really very hard and it's unfair for the children who come as a dependent to the parents.'*

## 5. Recommendations

This Inquiry brings together the work of the All Party Parliamentary Groups on Poverty and Migration. Many previous recommendations separately made by both APPGs would contribute towards tackling the issues highlighted in this report. For example, implementation of the recommendations made in the APPG on Poverty's 2022 report on the (in)adequacy of social security benefits would help alleviate poverty for many vulnerable migrant groups (including refugees), as would the steps identified in the APPG's 2022 report on in-work poverty. Similarly, previous recommendations made by the APPG on Migration, including on reforms to the EU Settled Status scheme and new family visa rules would help some groups of migrants to evidence and claim their entitlements and thus reduce their risk of poverty.

But as this report has shown, reforms which aim to tackle the broader issues of poverty may be insufficient to help some groups of migrants, due to restrictions imposed by the immigration system. Similarly, reforms to the immigration system may be inadequate to the task of ensuring that vulnerable migrant groups can escape poverty and destitution without a broader view of poverty and integration. These recommendations are therefore focused on the specific intersections between immigration policy and poverty, but should be read in the context of the wider reforms that are needed on both policy agendas.

These recommendations build on a number of shared principles and understandings, reflecting the concerns of both the APPG on Poverty and the APPG on Migration:

- Government should commit to ending destitution in the UK, and destitution should be 'designed out' of the UK's social security and immigration systems.<sup>48</sup>
- Reducing poverty, and helping people to get out of poverty, should be a key strategic objective of policy across government.
- There is a shared interest in ensuring that people who settle in the UK can thrive – a successful migration policy is one that enables people to integrate and contribute (economically and socially).
- Poverty has long-term and community-wide negative impacts (including because of impacts on local government resources and wider public services), beyond immediate implications for quality of life.
- Poverty, and particularly deep poverty/destitution, makes people vulnerable to exploitation and helps unscrupulous employers and businesses, as well as criminal gangs - undermining community safety for everyone.
- Policies which move and hide costs (to local government, to civil society, to communities themselves) are inefficient, and tend to obscure the real impact of decisions made by central government.
- Poverty is an inhumane and ineffective tool for enforcing UK immigration policy. The evidence that poverty or destitution is an effective deterrent or incentive in influencing migration decisions is weak.

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48 This principle has been proposed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, see: [Destitution in the UK 2023](#), Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2023

## 5.1 Immigration routes

**People migrating to the UK should have clear and relatively short routes to permanent settlement and citizenship, should be able to expect prompt and correct decisions on their applications, and should be able to easily prove their immigration status.** This would help ensure that people can secure their rights, and reduce the number of people at risk of poverty due to limited entitlements and rights.

Securing indefinite leave to remain, and becoming a naturalised British citizen, help to ensure that people can access the entitlements and rights that help to prevent poverty. Routes to settlement and citizenship should be shortened, and the number of points in the process which require additional applications and fees should be reviewed. No legal route to settlement in the UK should take more than 5 years. In particular, the current ‘10-year route’ should be reduced to 5 years.

People subject to immigration control often struggle to prove their entitlements to benefits and services. Current proof of status arrangements should be reviewed (particularly in light of recent problems<sup>49</sup>), including opportunities for feedback from migrants about their impact and effectiveness. For example, the APPG on Migration’s 2023 Inquiry into the EU Settlement Scheme made a number of recommendations related to digital status verification, many of which also apply to other schemes and groups. The proliferation of different immigration routes and schemes, particularly for humanitarian protection and refugees, is also confusing for service providers, employers and others. Government should look to consolidate schemes with similar goals, and to ensure consistency of entitlements between schemes.

Delays in decisions about immigration status can leave people in poverty and even destitution. A concerted effort to clear backlogs across the immigration system (including appeal backlogs), and to speed up decision making, would help some of the most vulnerable groups to avoid or escape poverty. There is obviously an urgent need to reduce the number of people waiting for asylum decisions (and appeals), but steps should also be taken across the system to prioritise decisions which impact on people’s rights and entitlements (for example the cases of those subject to NRPF restrictions who are destitute and receiving support from local authorities<sup>50</sup>).

People with irregular or undocumented immigration status are at higher risk of poverty, including deep poverty and destitution. It should be an aim of immigration policy to reduce the number of people at risk of falling into irregularity contrary to the intention of policy. For example, the intention of the EUSS scheme and pre-settled status was to enable legally-resident EEA nationals to remain in the UK, but elements of the policy and the way it has been implemented have led to many people in this group falling into irregular or undocumented immigration status. The Government’s recent commitment to automatically upgrade pre-settled status holders to full settled status is welcome, but further steps are needed to simplify processes, deal with complex and delayed cases, and make it easier for holders of pre-settled and settled status to evidence their status and entitlements.<sup>51</sup>

Government should support civil society groups to ensure that vulnerable migrants can access good quality advice and information to help them navigate the system. This has the potential to reduce administrative costs at the centre, and the costs associated with destitution and deep poverty (including for local government).

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49 [Home Office immigration database errors hit more than 76,000 people](#)

50 This is a recommendation supported by the NRPF Network, which works with councils across the UK: [Summary of Policy Recommendations](#), NRPF Network 2024

51 The APPG on Migration’s 2023 report on EUSS contains a number of detailed recommendations that would help EEA nationals in the UK to secure and evidence their status: [APPG Inquiry into the Impact of the EU Settlement Scheme on EU citizens in the UK](#), All Party Parliamentary Group on Migration 2023

## 5.2 Fees and costs

**Reducing the burden of fees and costs for some immigration routes and groups would directly reduce poverty in the short term, and increase the ability of migrants to integrate and thrive in the medium-long term.**

Immigration and nationality fees should be reviewed with the aim of reducing costs for lower income households who are already resident in the UK in particular (i.e. with a focus on in-country applications). This review should include consideration of the costs which are imposed on local government and civil society by the current system of fees (e.g. costs of support for people stuck on the 10-year route as a result of prohibitive ILR fees, for which there is no fee waiver).

Given the higher costs faced by families, and the higher rates of poverty among families with children, a priority change should be to reduce fees to cost price for children and young people who are on a path to settlement and British citizenship.

Existing arrangements to waive fees for those who cannot afford them are not working – the process needs to be simplified to ensure that it is possible for people to apply without specialist or legal advice. Eligibility for fee waivers should be widened to include applications for indefinite leave to remain and citizenship. Fee waivers should be automatically extended to those who have had NRPF conditions lifted on the grounds of destitution and those in receipt of support from local authorities.

The health surcharge has risen very rapidly in real terms since its introduction, and a re-examination of its impact would therefore be timely. This should inform a review of how the health surcharge is set and applied, including possible wider use of existing exemptions for those on lower incomes.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of changes to routes to settlement (see above), nobody should be required to pay the health surcharge for more than five years.

## 5.3 Employment

**Access to good work with fair pay, is essential for lifting people out of poverty and for enabling migrants to establish themselves in their new home. Immigration policy should move away from restrictions on rights to work, and government should take steps to ensure that all workers can secure their employment rights, including the minimum wage.**

Preventing people from working legally for extended periods while they await the outcome of asylum decisions not only forces them to depend on inadequate asylum support payments (see below) but can also reduce their ability to secure and progress in employment when they do gain the right to work. Asylum seekers should have the right to work if there is a delay of more than 6 months in granting an initial decision on their application or further submissions, and should be able to access employment support in the meantime, including ESOL provision and help to get professional qualifications recognised.<sup>53</sup>

Migrants who have the right to work may struggle to prove this to employers – the recommendations made above about proof-of-status arrangements are essential in reducing poverty via employment. Employees may also struggle to secure their rights (including to fair pay) if visa conditions restrict their ability to move employers. Immigration routes for work should be reviewed to ensure that it is as easy as possible for visa

<sup>52</sup> This includes some lower paid health and social care workers who may still have to pay and then reclaim health surcharge under current rules. See: The Health Surcharge, Unison 2024

<sup>53</sup> These recommendations, and more, have been made by the Commission in the Integration of Refugees: [From Arrival to Integration: Building Communities for Refugees and for Britain](#), the Commission on the Integration of Refugees 2024

holders to change employers. This should include the provision of better information about the register of sponsoring employers so that visa holders can easily identify alternative employment in particular sectors or regions.

Labour market rights need to be enforced, and migrants face particular barriers to securing their rights through enforcement action. In particular, there need to be clear firewalls between labour market enforcement and immigration enforcement.<sup>54</sup> Government should also consider how enforcement action can be taken against exploitative agencies and employers who overcharge migrant workers for visa fees and other costs.

#### 5.4 Social security and welfare support

**Immigration rules should not consign people to long-term poverty, or to destitution. Social security and welfare support systems should aim to ‘design out’ destitution, and ensure that restricted entitlements are strictly time-limited for those on a path to settlement in the UK. In considering social security policy and entitlements, national government must take account of the costs which are incurred by local government.**

Asylum support is destitution by design and should be urgently reviewed. Given the recent high grant rates for those seeking asylum in the UK, a system which leads almost inevitably to deep poverty or destitution (with all the attendant effects of this) feels particularly short-sighted given so many people experiencing this will end up making the UK their permanent home.

In 2023 the APPG on Poverty recommended that benefit levels be set based on a clear understanding of their purpose (e.g. preventing destitution, ensuring a minimum standard of living, allowing for dignity and social participation) and that benefits should at the very least ensure a minimum income level that covers basic needs. These principles should be applied to asylum support. As a starting point, a review should consider returning to the position of setting asylum support at 70% of the level of mainstream social security benefits.<sup>55</sup> Whatever level is set, provision should be put in place to ensure that asylum support payments are regularly updated in line with inflation.

If asylum support remains significantly below the level of mainstream benefits, the time that people waiting for asylum decisions remain dependent on it should be limited. For example, government could give asylum seekers access to mainstream benefits if they wait more than 18 months for a decision on their application. If backlogs were reduced and those seeking asylum had the right to work after 6 months (see above) this would only apply to a small cohort of complex cases.

Receiving refugee status should not push people into destitution. The ‘move-on’ period should be extended from 28 to 56 days, not least to allow for the built-in 35-day wait period for Universal Credit.

As with asylum support, the scope and nature of NRPF conditions should be reviewed based on a clear understanding of their purpose, and in light of the evidence that they push many people into (deep) poverty. There should be a particular focus on the application of NRPF conditions for migrants who are likely to settle permanently in the UK and become citizens, i.e. those on routes to settlement or on visas with direct

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54 For more detail on the possible scope and focus of a future labour market enforcement regime, including a proposed Single Enforcement Body, see: [Enforce for Good: Effectively Enforcing Labour Market Rights in the 2020s and Beyond](#), Judge & Slaughter 2023

55 Setting Asylum support at 70% of mainstream benefits (as was the case until 2008) is widely supported by organisations working on this issue (e.g. see <https://asylumatters.org/campaigns/support-rates/>). 70% is suggested on the basis that accommodation is provided separately, but the implementation of this would need to be considered in light of the move to Universal Credit which has occurred since this policy was previously in place.



routes to settlement. Regardless of any changes to immigration routes (see above), nobody on a path to settlement and citizenship should be subject to NRPF conditions for more than five years. This builds on a recommendation from the Work and Pensions Committee that no family with children should be subject to NRPF conditions for more than five years.<sup>56</sup>

Current policies and processes for lifting NRPF restrictions are too limited – destitution or imminent destitution should not be required before an application is possible, and the application process should be simplified. Destitution and deep poverty could also be reduced by removing benefits that are designed to support children (including Child Benefit and the Healthy Start scheme) from the definition of ‘public funds’ for the purposes of NRPF restrictions, as recommended by the Work and Pensions Select Committee. Similarly, discretionary and emergency welfare support should be removed from the definition of ‘public funds’ to allow local authorities to more easily support those who face extreme poverty.<sup>57</sup> All victims of domestic abuse should be eligible to gain access to public funds under the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC), regardless of their immigration status.

NRPF policies are also placing heavy burdens on local government, and impacting their ability to support both people subject to NRPF conditions and other vulnerable groups. Central government should provide full funding to cover the costs incurred by local authorities who provide support to NRPF households under homelessness and social care duties, and the Home Office should prioritise case resolution (including fee waivers) for vulnerable people receiving long-term support from local authorities.

## 5.5 Public services

Entitlements to public services do not guarantee access in practice, and those living in poverty are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from public services. Access to consistent and reliable proof of immigration status is essential, and destitution can present immediate barriers to accessing services. Data sharing between public services (in particular the NHS) and the Home Office should be reviewed, with the objective of reducing barriers to people accessing the services to which they are entitled.

Given both the higher rates of poverty among families with children, and the long-term impacts of poverty on children, there is a strong case for ensuring that all services for children and young people, including early years provision and post-16 Further Education, are available regardless of immigration status.

## 5.6 Housing

Immigration policy clearly places some groups of people at increased risk of homelessness, and unable to access support to prevent this. As with destitution, policy should seek to prevent homelessness in the UK, regardless of immigration status. Steps that could be taken to achieve this goal would include giving EEA nationals with pre-settled status a clear entitlement to homelessness assistance, and funding local authorities to provide homelessness assistance to those with NRPF status, drawing on the learning from ‘Everyone In’.

There is a particularly urgent need to resolve the acute housing challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. This should include a new approach to procuring asylum accommodation, based on

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<sup>56</sup> [Children in Poverty: No recourse to Public Funds: Government Response](#), House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee 2022

<sup>57</sup> The future funding and delivery of discretionary/emergency welfare support at the local level is uncertain - future policy decisions about the wider system should include consideration of migration, and NRPF restrictions in particular.

partnerships with local and regional government, with a focus on integration support that enables newly-recognised refugees to quickly and smoothly access employment and integrate into communities. The ‘move-on period’ for newly-recognised refugees should also be extended to 56 days, in line with normal timescales for sourcing accommodation. All resettlement and humanitarian schemes need to include a medium-long term plan for housing, based on a dialogue with local authorities.

## 5.7 Communities and integration

Local government, civil society and local communities have a crucial role to play in ensuring that all those who move to the UK are able to integrate, thrive and contribute. At the moment they are all too often ‘picking up the pieces’ when it comes to migration and poverty, but examples of innovation and good practice (including community sponsorship of refugees) show that communities can be part of the solution.<sup>58</sup>

National government should work in partnership with devolved, regional and local government to develop a comprehensive refugee integration and support strategy.<sup>59</sup> This should include a review of support provided by local authorities across the various recent resettlement schemes, with a focus on learning and consolidation.

Entitlements, funding and access to ESOL provision should be simplified. Given the essential role of English language skills, there is a strong argument for making this provision free at the point of delivery for all UK residents, regardless of immigration status.

## 5.8 Better policy making

The level of engagement with this Inquiry from those with lived experience of immigration and poverty shows the potential gains to be had from listening to those who are directly affected by policies in this area. The Home Office should implement all the recommendations of the Windrush Lessons Learned Review, including the creation of a Migrants’ Commissioner, to ensure that those who are affected by immigration policy can have their voices heard. Recent experience with policies including the EU Settled Status Scheme has demonstrated that both policy and implementation can be improved when there are feedback loops that allow user experience to be reflected in policy and practice, but that such feedback loops are often absent or too slow.

It is clear from this Inquiry that immigration policy and poverty are closely linked, but datasets on migration and poverty are difficult to connect. It is welcome that the Home Office have committed to working with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Department for Work and Pensions to explore how data on migrant poverty can be improved – this work should be prioritised.<sup>60</sup> The Home Office should also work with partners including local government to collect better longitudinal data on the outcomes for particular cohorts including refugees.

In the same spirit we would encourage civil society organisations working in the anti-poverty and migration/refugee sectors to work together to further the aim of preventing and reducing poverty among migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers.

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58 Initiatives such as [Inclusive Cities](#) are already supporting partnerships in some places to develop new approaches.

59 The Commission on the Integration of Refugees has recently recommended a ‘new settlement for refugees’ based on new regional and local partnerships.

60 [Children in Poverty: No recourse to Public Funds: Government Response](#), House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee 2022

## 6. Conclusion

This Inquiry set out to bring together two important and active policy debates in the UK – about migration and about poverty. This report has only been able to briefly address some of the ways in which immigration policy directly affects poverty in the UK, but it is clear that the impacts are wide-ranging and significant. It is also clear that, if government is to take seriously the tasks of reducing poverty and making migration policy work, it will need to better connect policy-making across departments and between national, devolved, regional and local government; and work in partnership with civil society. The principles set out in this report provide a potential starting point for this process.

The beneficiaries of more joined-up, more evidenced-based and more humane policy making will not just be migrant households and communities but also the wider community, local government, voluntary organisations and employers. While the lack of clear data on the intersection of migration and poverty makes it difficult to put a precise cost on different policy interventions, the social and economic benefits of action - in both the short and long term - are clear. Poverty is an inhumane and ineffective tool for enforcing UK immigration policy and we must work together to ensure that no one in the UK faces deep poverty or destitution.

# Annex

## Overview

In total, the Inquiry received just over 165,000 words of evidence, which included just under 29,000 words of evidence from those with lived experience of the UK migration system. The Inquiry received a range of submissions from key organisations in both the migration and poverty sectors including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, WPI Economics, The Institute for Public Policy Research, Praxis, British Red Cross, the Trussell Trust, NACCOM and NRPF Network. A full list of organisations who made an official submission can be seen on page 17.

The written call for evidence received 140 submissions from expert organisations in the migration and poverty sector as well as 76 submissions from those with lived experience of the UK migration system.

Two oral evidence sessions enabled parliamentarians to hear directly from nine professional experience organisations and seven individuals who had lived experience of the UK migration system.

A further oral evidence session was conducted by NACCOM, who spoke with a lived experience cohort of nine individuals.

## Priorities identified by those with professional experience

### Top Priorities for Employment and Wages

The top suggestions for employment and wages related to right to work, access to ESOL and work visas.

- The most common suggestion related to work and employment was that, while waiting for their asylum application to be decided, refugees should be able to work.
- The second most common suggestion was for greater access and funding to ESOL classes.
- The third most common suggestion was for policies which would enable work visa holders to be able to change jobs more easily to avoid exploitative jobs or employers.

### Top Suggestions for Access to Social Security and Welfare

The top suggestions for access to social security and welfare related to NRPF and the inadequacy of asylum support.

- The most common suggestion related to levels of asylum support being inadequate, with respondents calling for asylum support to be increased.
- The second most common suggestion was for changes to NRPF policy which included reduced application of conditions as well as a simpler process to lift conditions.
- The third most common suggestion related to increasing funding to support Local Authorities in assisting asylum seekers and ensuring they are able to access social welfare support at an earlier stage.

### **Top Suggestions for Access to Public Services**

The top suggestions for access to public services related to ESOL classes and the hostile environment.

- The most common suggestion called for the NHS to stop sharing asylum seekers' data with the Home Office, increasing the likelihood that asylum seekers would use the NHS without fear of Home Office intervention.
- The second most common suggestion related to limited English language skills being a barrier to access public services, with respondents therefore supporting better access to affordable ESOL provision

### **Top Suggestions in Housing**

The top suggestions for housing were related to notice to quit asylum accommodation, right to rent checks and housing allowance.

- The most common suggestion for housing related to calling for increasing the notice period to quit asylum accommodation for newly-recognised refugees.
- The second most common suggestion called for Local Housing Allowance to be increased as well as made more accessible.
- The third most common suggestion called for the right to rent checks to be abolished.

### **Top Suggestions for Direct Immigration Costs**

The top recommendations for direct immigration costs related to the health surcharge and visa fee costs.

- The most common suggestion was a general reduction in all visa fee costs including abolishing or reducing the health surcharge.
- The second most common suggestion was the abolition of visa fees for children.
- The third most common suggestion was the introduction of a fee waiver for Indefinite Leave to Remain applicants.
- The fourth most common suggestion was to create a more simple and straightforward visa fee waiver process.

### **Lived Experience Written Call for Evidence snapshot**

The Inquiry received 76 written submissions from those with lived experience of the UK migration system. These submissions obviously do not provide a representative sample of migrant experiences in the UK, but they do provide a useful snapshot of the challenges which some groups face.

The greatest number of submissions came from those who identified themselves as asylum seekers, representing 39% of all submissions. 'Limited Leave to remain' accounted for 13% of submissions while 'indefinite leave to remain' and 'refugee status' accounted for 13% and 9% respectively.

**Snapshot: Q4 - Has your immigration status made it difficult for you to access any of these public services? If yes, please tick all the public services you have had difficulty accessing.**

In total 89% of respondents had found it difficult to access at least one of these services because of their immigration status. At least half of all respondents found it difficult to access key public services including education (56%), housing (51%) and social welfare (54%).

**Asylum Seekers**

- In total 93% of Asylum Seekers said they had difficulty accessing asylum support or other financial support.
- Social welfare was the public service which asylum seekers found the most difficult to access, with 60% stating they had difficulty accessing asylum support or other financial support.

**Indefinite Leave to Remain**

- In total 90% of those with Indefinite Leave to Remain said they had difficulty accessing at least one public service.
- Financial services was the service that those with Indefinite Leave to Remain found the most difficult to access, with 60% stating they had difficulty accessing Financial Services.

**Limited Leave to Remain**

- In total 90% of those with Limited Leave to Remain said they had difficulty accessing at least one public service.
- Housing was the public service that those with Limited Leave to Remain found the most difficult to access, with 70% stating that they had difficulty accessing Housing.

**Refugee Status**

- In total 57% of those with refugee status had difficulty accessing at least one public service.
- Housing was the public services that those with refugee status found the most difficult to access, with 43% stating they had difficulty accessing Housing.

**Snapshot: Q6 - Do you feel your immigration status impacts your ability to afford all the daily essentials you need? If yes, please tick all the essentials that you have difficulty affording.**

Overall, 89% of respondents said that their immigration status makes it difficult to afford at least one daily essential. 69% of all respondents said that their immigration status impacts their ability to afford essentials such as food, while 60% said they were unable to afford public transport because of their immigration status. Half of the respondents were unable to afford basic personal hygiene products such as toiletries.

**Refugee Status**

- In total 71% of those with refugee status had difficulty accessing at least one daily essential.

### **Asylum seeker**

- In total 93% of those with asylum seeker status had difficulty accessing at least one daily essential.

### **Indefinite leave to remain**

- In total 70% of those with Indefinite Leave to Remain status had difficulty accessing at least one daily essential.

### **Limited leave to remain**

- In total 90% of those with Limited Leave to Remain status had difficulty accessing at least one daily essential.

## Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful to all of the organisations and individuals who submitted written and oral evidence and who contributed to the Inquiry in some way. We are also grateful to the group of parliamentarians who helped frame the terms of reference for this work, participated in oral evidence sessions, and who commented on drafts of this report. And we would like to express our gratitude to Sarah Mulley for her considerable support with drafting the Inquiry report.

### *List of organisations who submitted evidence in the Inquiry*

ACH	DEWA (Deaf Ethnic Women Association)
African Rainbow Family	Foster Carer with North Yorkshire Council
Asylum Link Merseyside (ALM)	Generation Rent
Asylum Matters	Global Link
AWE (Women's Alternative Economy)	Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum seekers
Baca	Good Things Foundation
Barnardo's	Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit
Bevan Healthcare	Greater Manchester Migrant Destitution Fund
Blackburn with Darwen Borough council	Hackney Council
British Red Cross	Haringey Migrant Support Centre
Care4Calais	Havering Council
CAY	Head of service
Central England Law Centre/KIND UK	Health Visiting NHS
Central Liverpool Primary Care	Hibiscus Initiatives
Centre for Care at the University of Sheffield	Human Rights Watch
Cheshire West & Chester Council	IMIX
Chester South PCN	Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)
Child Poverty Action Group	JCWI
Citizens UK	Jesuit Refugee Service UK (JRS UK)
City of Sanctuary UK	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
COMPASS	Just Fair
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)	Kent Law Clinic, University of Kent
Coventry University	King's Arms Project
Crossroads Community Hub	Latin American Women's Rights Service
Detention Action	



Leeds Beckett University (views are my own)  
Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network  
Lifeline Options CIC  
London Borough of Newham  
Manchester City Council  
Manchester Refugee Support Network  
Mental Health Foundation  
Migrant Help - Refugee Resettlement  
Migrant Help Ltd  
Migration Yorkshire  
MSRN  
NACCOM  
NHS Somerset  
Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum  
One Strong Voice  
Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers  
Praxis  
Preston City of Sanctuary  
Project 17  
Refugee Action  
Refugee and Migrant Centre  
Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium  
Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London -  
foreign national rough sleeper team  
Refugee Resettlement, DCC  
Refugee Support Devon  
Sheffield Women's Aid  
Shelter  
Snowdrop Project  
Somerset Council  
South Gloucestershire Council  
St Augustine's Centre, Halifax  
St Vincent's Support Centre  
Stand As One, Sheffield  
Stoneycroft Salvation Army  
Stroud District Council  
Survivor Speak OUT  
Swansea Asylum Seekers Support  
Tai Pawb  
The Avengers  
The Bike Project  
The Birth Partner Project  
The Children's Society  
The EU Rights & Brexit Hub  
The Lift the Ban Coalition  
The Limehouse Practice, NHS Primary Care, Tower  
Hamlets  
The St Vincent de Paul Society  
The Trussell Trust  
the3million  
Thread Ahead  
Trafford Social Services  
University College London  
University of Huddersfield  
University of Plymouth Law Clinic  
University of Reading and University of Leeds  
Urban local authority in south east England  
Voices  
Voices in Exile  
Welcome House Hull  
Welsh Local Government Association and the  
Wales Strategic Migration Partnership  
Wirral Council  
Work Rights Centre  
WPI Economics

*Organisations who participated in the professional experience oral evidence sessions*

Child Poverty Action Group

COMPAS

IPPR

Islington Council - NRPF Network

Praxis

British Red Cross

Shelter

Women for Refugee Women

Work Rights Centre

*Organisations who helped to facilitate in the lived experience oral evidence sessions*

NACCOM

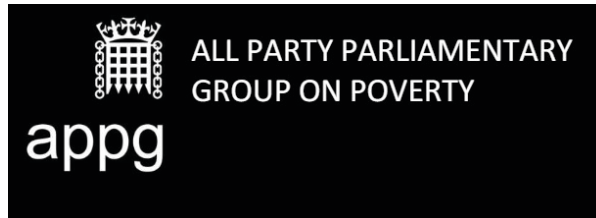
Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network

Women for Refugee Women





All-Party Parliamentary  
Group on Migration



ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY  
GROUP ON POVERTY

