

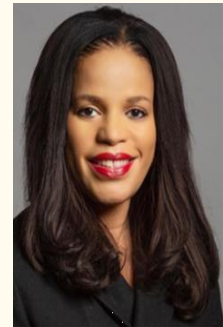


Claudia Webbe MP

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The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State for Home Affairs
Palace of Westminster
London
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12th August 2020

Dear Home Secretary,

RE: Abolish No Recourse to Public Funds

I am writing to you regarding the need for the government to abolish the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) immigration status.

I am aware that The Home Office has extended the criteria for granting recourse to public funds to people who apply for leave to remain on the family or private life routes, following a legal challenge brought by an eight year old British child in the case of R (W) v The Secretary of State for the Home Department & Anor [2020].

According to recently released Home Office statistics, between the first and second quarter of 2019 – when the coronavirus hit - the number of migrants with NRPF applying for destitution funds increased by 572% to 5665. The data release indicates that the acceptance rate for these applications has risen from 41% in 2017 to 89%. However, this does not include the fact that 49% of all applications are pending. I would be grateful if you could clarify if this means that 2795 migrants facing total hardship are still waiting to hear if they and their families will be able to avoid severe poverty?

The statistics also revealed that it took the Home Office an average of 30 days to decide on these applications, for which the requirement is destitution, imminent risk of destitution, or where there are particularly compelling reasons relating to the welfare of a child. In order to speed up the process and enable families to access emergency support, I would be grateful if you could clarify whether the Home Office will commit to making these NRPF change of financial condition decisions within 24 hours?

The Home Office release of data showing an exponential increase in applications to have the No Recourse to Public Funds lifted seems to accord with the many individuals and families who have approached me facing destitution during the coronavirus pandemic. In order to develop an effective local response, it is important to understand the scale and extent of the numbers involved.

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Thus, I am also concerned that the government does not deem it necessary to record the number of UK residents with NRPF. You will be aware that a recent letter from the Office for Statistics Regulation to Daniel Shaw, The Home Office Chief Statistician, urged your department to 'take this forward' and 'provide alternative data' in the meantime.

I was disappointed that Mr Shaw responded by saying that it is not practical for the Home Office to produce an estimate of the total population subject to NRPF present in the UK at any one time. I would be grateful if you could urge your department to reconsider this position, as it is essential that the government is aware of our most vulnerable residents. Further, it is contrary to reason to develop policy without knowing how many the NRPF condition affects.

As well as migrants without leave, my constituency of Leicester East is home to many workers with NRPF, for whom it is impossible to survive without attending work – often in unsafe conditions. Many of the workers in Leicester's Garment industry who have approached me for help are British Citizens, however there are also a significant number of workers with the NRPF condition, who are unaware of the small number of benefits that they are able to access and are employed by unscrupulous firms which have no union recognition and where health and safety measures have not been implemented.

The government's Coronavirus furlough and self-employment schemes are inaccessible to those of my constituents with the NRPF condition as many are on informal or zero hour contracts, and these schemes do not provide any support to those who have seen their contracts terminated or hours reduced. In addition, many will already have been in debt before the crisis, due to the thousands in exorbitant visa renewal fees and surcharges that must be paid every two and a half years.

It is clear the measures outlined by the Government provide little in the way of real help to the many individuals and families with the NRPF condition struggling to survive through this crisis, and are completely inadequate to support them through this pandemic and the economic recession the UK now faces.

I believe that all residents, regardless of their immigration status, must be able to afford to stay safe during the continued lockdown. I am calling on your government to ensure that all migrants have automatic access to resources without fear of detention or deportation by abolishing the NRPF provision. This policy is endorsed by the Local Government Association, and the Home Affairs Select Committee.

I look forward to your response and action on this crucial issue.

Yours sincerely,

Claudia Webbe MP

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