

6. In which areas of children's social care do you think there is very robust research and evidence?

We believe there is robust evidence demonstrating the relationship between family's immigration status and children in needs access to, and support through, social care. Further, there is robust evidence on the devastating impact this can have on the health, wellbeing and development of children living in families where their carers have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). See evidence outlined below:

- The Children's Society, [A Lifeline for All – Children and Families with No Recourse to Public Funds](#), 2020
- Project 17, [Local Authority Responses to People with NRPF during the pandemic](#), 2020
- Project 17, ['Not Seen, Not Heard: Children's Experiences of the Hostile Environment'](#), 2019
- Project 17, ['Domestic Abuse in Families with No Recourse to Public Funds'](#),
- University of Oxford, [Safeguarding children from destitution: Local authority responses to families with 'no recourse to public funds'](#), 2015
- [The Unit Project, 'Access Denied: The Cost of the No Recourse to Public Funds Policy'](#), 2019

7. What do you think are the key findings from this research?

We believe the evidence from these reports clearly demonstrates that:

1) Families in which the carer is barred from access to benefits due to having no recourse to public funds (NRPF) contributes to children in these families experiencing extreme poverty and to having to seeking support from local authorities under Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989.

'No recourse to public funds' (NRPF) is a restriction imposed on people 'subject to immigration control' and affects families without a secure immigration status as well as most with temporary leave to remain in the UK. People with NRPF are prohibited from accessing most mainstream welfare benefits and statutory homelessness assistance. It is estimated that this restriction directly affects more than 350,000 children in the UK¹. Families with NRPF are also unable to access support and services – such as the Sure Start scheme, Healthy Start Vouchers, Free School meals², and some extended childcare services etc - which are designed to provide relief for families with a low income but which are tied to qualifying benefits. Having no access to welfare support forces adults in many of these families to work long hours, often in poor conditions, in an attempt to meet their and their children's needs. In addition, families often have to pay high immigration fees in an effort to regularise their status in the UK which pushes the families further into debt. As a result, the NRPF restriction enforces destitution on families across England on a daily basis and leads many children to experience street homelessness, hunger, stress and associated mental health issues, digital

¹ Jolly (2020) ["London's children and young people who are not British citizens: A profile"](#) Greater London Authority & Pinter et al. (2020) ["A Lifeline for All: Children and Families with No Recourse to Public Funds"](#), The Children's Society. This number does not take into consideration the impact of the NRPF policy on British children with parents subject to NRPF or the unknown number of EEA nationals unable to establish eligibility for welfare benefits or homelessness assistance."

² Even with the extended provision during Covid-19 many families with NRPF remain excluded from the Free School Meal provision

exclusion and domestic abuse. Research has found women, disabled people, and BME British children are disproportionately affected by the NRPF condition and more likely to experience destitution³.

2) Children in families where the carer has NRPF often experience difficulty in accessing support from local authorities.

Destitute families with NRPF are often left to approach local authorities for support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Section 17 imposes a statutory duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of 'children in need' in their area. Though not its intended purpose, this statutory provision has become an essential safety net for children whose parents are unable to access mainstream welfare support because of their immigration status. The children in such families grow up in exceptional poverty. They are at high risk of homelessness, exploitation and abuse.

Project 17 works to end destitution among migrant children. We work with families experiencing exceptional poverty to improve their access to local authority support. As part of this work our caseworkers experience how difficult it is often is for families to access support under Section 17. One in six families supported by Project 17 are wrongly refused assistance by local authorities and many more are subjected to aggressive gatekeeping tactics designed to deter families from seeking support. These include threats to take children into care and exhausting and intrusive interview processes which are often excessively focused on the credibility of parents at the expense of a focus on the child.⁴

3) Where children in families with NRPF are supported by local authorities this support is often inadequate

Where families are supported under Section 17 the level of financial support provided is often well below benefit rates and sometimes even below Asylum Support rates - which the Home Office have set as the minimum required to avoid a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. The level of support provided leaves many families unable to afford basic necessities such as enough food, clothing, school uniform, and transport. Many children supported under section 17 are living in poor conditions, without enough space or privacy, often far away from their schools, friends, and support networks. The failure to provide adequate support has a significant emotional impact on children and young people with many left feeling socially isolated, distressed, ashamed, and unsafe.

4) In depth research carried out by Project 17 and others demonstrated that the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges for children in families with NRPF and that the local authority response has been inadequate to protect children in families with NRPF during this difficult time.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated and made more visible the extreme poverty and precarity experienced by children in families with NRPF. Many families who were previously managing to get by have found themselves destitute as a result of loss of employment and decreased support from friends and family.

³ ['Access Denied: The Cost of the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' Policy'](#). The Unity Project (2019)

⁴ ["Not seen, not heard. Children's experiences of the hostile environment"](#) Project 17 (2019)

8. In which areas of children's social care do you think there are evidence gaps or conflicting evidence?

9. Do you know of any evidence, analysis or research that challenges current practices in children's social care?

We also strongly urge the review to ensure it speaks to children and families who are supported by social care under Section 17 as a result of an NRPF condition on their immigration status. These are some of the most marginalised children in the country.