

Better Pathways project: Briefing Paper 4

Developing specialist multi-agency NRPF support

1. Introduction: the Better Pathways briefing series

The Better Pathways four-part briefing paper series responds to current areas of challenge arising for cross-sector frontline practitioners who are supporting individuals and families with the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition. Each briefing paper collates up-to-date information on legal definitions, policy changes, insights from academic research, shares reflections and good practice from frontline practitioners across the statutory and third sectors, and signposts to useful resources. Each briefing ends with working recommendations to develop more supportive pathways to better outcomes for people with NRPF. The briefings can be used as helpful guides for frontline practitioners and as a continuous professional development tool to keep abreast of current NRPF issues from practice and research.

Key points from Briefing Paper 4:

- NRPF is a wide umbrella term under which sits several visa statuses, with specific challenges and bespoke support needs within each.
- people with the NRPF condition on family visas and Hong Kong BNO visas can be supported to apply to have the NRPF condition lifted.
- many people in particular NRPF situations, such as overstayers, are living in fear, with a lack of understanding of their rights, a lack of social support, and facing issues of stigmatisation and discrimination.
- the NRPF condition heightens the impacts of particular under-the-radar crimes, such as modern slavery and domestic abuse.
- as well as general advocacy and wider holistic support, people with the NRPF condition should be signposted to specialised charities that have expertise in the unique issues different groups face, such as people who have been trafficked, or international students.
- clearer post-decision guidance is needed for people with NRPF across statutory and voluntary sectors to provide appropriate pathways to support according to positive or negative decision.

2. 'The NRPF umbrella'

NRPF is a wide umbrella term that can affect a large group of individuals who hold various types of visas. These include:

- **'Visitors'**: individuals who are visiting the UK are generally not entitled to access public funds during their stay.

- **‘Limited Leave to Remain’:** individuals with limited leave to remain in the UK, such as those on work visas, student visas, or certain family or private life visas are not entitled to access public funds.
- **‘Failed asylum seekers’:** this includes individuals from asylum-seeking backgrounds whose asylum claim has not been approved and they do not qualify for refugee status or other forms of protection.
- **‘Spouses and partners’:** people who are the spouse or partner of British citizens or settled persons are not able to access public funds.
- **‘Overstayers’:** individuals who have stayed longer in the UK than their leave or visa specifies are classed as ‘overstayers’ and are unable to access public funds. People may also be treated as overstayers if they used false documents or obtained a visa by fraud, or if they failed to mention something that could have led to their visa being refused, such as a criminal record (Citizens Advice, 2024).

3. NRPF: national context

Following a high increase in immigration after the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit, the number of people in the UK with the NRPF condition has increased significantly since the end of 2020 to the end of 2022 from 1.48 million to 2.58 million people (Cuibus & Fernández-Reino, 2023). Due to the small numbers of people who successfully apply to have the condition lifted, it is considered that this number of people in the UK with the NRPF condition is likely to be very similar at this point in 2024. In terms of what this number looks like across different visa types, a large proportion of this figure comprises people on study visas (987,000), work visas (965,000), family visas (446,000) and Hong Kong British Nationals Overseas (BNOs) (157,000). People in the latter two categories can apply to have their NRPF condition lifted, whilst other groups cannot (ibid). There is an absence of official statistics concerning the numbers of individuals with no visa or whose visas have expired and are therefore living in the UK without legal status, and therefore gaps in understanding the needs of people who fall within this situation.

(i) **Support for people applying to have NRPF condition lifted**

People on family visas and Hong Kong BNO visa holders who are at risk of destitution or where there are child welfare issues present should be supported to apply for a change of conditions in order to have their NRPF status lifted. Further information regarding applying for ‘a change in conditions’ is available at the following:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-public-funds-within-family-private-life-and-hong-kong-bno-routes>

<https://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information-and-resources/rights-and-entitlements/support-options-for-people-with-nrpf/immigration-options/leave-to-remain-with-nrpf-change-of-conditions>

4. Spotlight on current challenges and specialised practice according to NRPF visa status

This section brings to the fore some of the current challenges associated with different visa types subject to the NRPF condition. These challenges have been shared by the Better Pathways NRPF service user advisory group as well as frontline practitioners from the voluntary and community sector (VCS). The case studies bring to the fore some examples of where frontline practice is working well in offering bespoke support to people with specific challenges arising from their NRPF visa status.

4.1 NRPF and ‘overstayers’

The Home Office do not remind people when their visa or leave expires, and it is therefore the duty of the individual as a UK visa holder to check this date on their biometric residence permit, online immigration status, or stamp in their passport. If someone applies for an extension and is refused, they can make an appeal within 14 days of the date of refusal (Andonian, 2024). If people do not leave the UK within 30 days of their leave or visa expiration date they may be deported. If a person leaves after the 30 days since their leave/visa expiry date they could be banned from re-entering the UK for between 1-10 years, unless they are applying for a family or partner visa or were under the age of 18 when they overstayed (Citizens Advice, 2024).

(i) ‘Shirley’s story’

Shirley (pseudonym) is a 61-year-old Jamaican woman who has lived in the UK for over 20 years and is classed as an overstayer. She is part of the Better Pathways advisory group.

Shirley

‘I came to the UK in 2001 from Jamaica. First, I was studying at college and had a visa to study. Then my Jamaican passport expired and I sent for a new one there and it got lost on arrival in the UK and I never received it. After that, things started to get difficult because I wanted to finish college in London and I became classed as an ‘overstayer’. I had a relationship here that broke down, and I started staying at friends’ houses and doing bits of cash-in-hand work. Now I have some health issues and have a lot of trouble walking. I’ve been here 23 years and applied to the Home Office 3 times, firstly on the basis of being from a Commonwealth country, but was turned down and since then on the basis of the 20-year rule but they said I didn’t have enough continuous evidence to prove I’ve been here that long. So I didn’t know where to turn. I am now getting some support from the Wolverhampton Refugee and Migrant Centre to help me apply again. I just feel I live in constant fear and stress and I don’t know of any support groups of other people who are overstayers like me. I was even scared to go to the GP and dentist even though I needed emergency dental treatment at one point.’

(ii) **Better Pathways Bespoke Support Case Study**

Shirley’s story, combined with the case study below, highlight the way that support for people with NRPF comes in diverse forms: it can be as complex as supporting people through multiple immigration applications and gathering over twenty years of evidence, or as basic as providing people with essential toiletries which can make a considerable difference to a person’s dignity and wellbeing. Below, a practitioner from the Refugee and Migrant Centre in Wolverhampton highlights the ways in which they supported Shirley in terms of accessing essential healthcare. The HC2 Certificate referred to is a support provision that can be applied for by people with NRPF in order to access essential primary GP, dental and eye healthcare [see <https://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information-and-resources/rights-and-entitlements/nhs->

[treatment/prescriptions-dental-care-and-sight-tests#:~:text=A%20person%20can%20apply%20for,any%20assistance%20they%20are%20receiving for more information on HC2 eligibility\].](#)

‘Supporting people classed as overstayers to access essential health care and hygiene’

(Grace Kaplan, Refugee & Migrant Centre Wolverhampton)

‘A 61-year-old female attended Wolverhampton RMC with various needs. I was aware of the challenges she had faced in UK, and the difficulties and barriers she had been up against as an overstayer in the UK with NRPF. I wanted to make sure that she knew help was available. The client’s HC2 Certificate had expired, and without a certificate in date, she was vulnerable without this health care support.

The client was provided with the necessary help in completing a HC1 Application to request a new HC2 Certificate and once authorised, the client was able to receive free NHS services including medicines from a GP prescriber, NHS dental and NHS sight tests, and cover for travel, if referred by a doctor, optician or dentist. The HC2 Certificate is valid for another 6 months to receive health care support, as and when required.

The client has previously also been helped with a GP registration, to access primary care support. The client had doubts about being to access GP support as an overstayer. GP practices are not required to ask for proof of identity, address or immigration status from patients wishing to register. NHS guidance on how to register with a GP surgery clearly outlines that a practice cannot refuse a patient because they do not have proof of address or immigration status. This was explained to the client, and she was reassured about having the right to register and received treatment from a GP practice.

Due to the client being an overstayer and having no NRPF, no family to turn to, and not being allowed to work, she was limited to get access to essentials such as toiletries. The client was given a mixture of essential toiletries to help support her needs and to feel like she was able to maintain good personal hygiene, and to feel physically and emotionally better in herself. Whilst being a basic necessity, this was also viewed as a luxury to the client without money. Thanks to a local charity, Periods Matter, we were able to provide the client a good variety of personal hygiene products. The client was able to be supported thanks to the kindness of the local community of Wolverhampton, from donations received by Periods Matter charity. The client was made aware that when she needed any other support, to return to us and we would do our best to help support her.’

(iii) Further support for overstayers:

It is important to remind people who have overstayed their visa or leave that they still have rights. For example, they can still send their children to school until the age of 16, use emergency services in the UK, and access essential and emergency healthcare including treatment whilst pregnant (Citizens Advice, 2024). People who have overstayed their visa should be signposted to seek immigration legal advice to help determine whether they have a ‘valid reason’ for overstay or whether they would qualify for exceptional assurance, and to guide them with the necessary evidence they would need to prove this (Andonian, 2024).

4.2 NRPF and international students

Higher education (HE) course fees are part-funded by the UK Government for students in England who qualify for 'home' fees. As HE funding is not classed as a public fund for immigration purposes, a person can access home fees, or receive student support, if they are subject to the NRPF condition. However, 'to qualify for home fees and student support, a student must meet requirements relating to their immigration status and length of residence in the UK' (NRPF Network, 2024). People who do not qualify for home fees are considered international students and they must pay overseas fees which are significantly higher.

The Migrants' Rights Network (2024) refer to international students as 'an often overlooked area of migration' in which people can face particular challenges associated with temporary migration and having NRPF, as well as encountering often false assumptions based on wealth. The Migrants' Rights Network is carrying out ongoing research with international students and, so far, have raised financial issues due to the limited number of hours per week they can work and challenges in accessing adequate support structures in HE, such as a lack of financial support from hardship funds (ibid). Additional work is currently being carried out with the London Renters Union to provide detailed housing information to international students due to the challenges they face in the private rental sector, including 'poor housing conditions, excessive costs, and harassment from landlords, which can all heighten the risk of destitution and exploitation.'

(i) Better Pathways Bespoke Support Case Study

'Providing a holistic approach to support for international students in need'

(Tom Drinan, Resources Coordinator, Brushstrokes Community Project)

International students have a right to be in the UK, and support for them should be focused on building their capacity in different aspects of their lives in the UK. Below, Tom Drinan from Brushstrokes charity, explains some of the current practice-based challenges in supporting people who are international students. Also shared, are some examples of where a holistic and comprehensive approach to support is working well in order to support individuals and families to develop financial independency through employment, as well as wider social support to help them become part of a community.

'The number of international students registered for our food bank at Brushstrokes has increased significantly in the last year. In May 2023 we had between 40-50 people in total registered for our food bank services, and now we have 200 people registered: of these numbers we have 40% of people with other NRPF visa statuses and people with EUSS status, and we now have an additional 40% on top of this figure that are international students with NRPF. Part of the requirements for the international student visa is that you can support yourself financially, but we are finding that this is not always the case and that some families on international student visas are living on the edges of destitution.

This large increase means we are at times struggling to cope with capacity and have had to adapt our assessment process to ask more detailed questions about financial circumstances in order that we can ensure we are supporting those most in need. This is obviously a highly sensitive topic, and it is important to interact with people with compassion and empathy. We now ask whether the individual has a tenancy agreement; whether their partner is entitled to work full-time; whether they are doing any cash-in-hand employment roles; and whether they are registered at any additional food banks; as

well as ask questions about their study arrangements to ascertain whether they are actively attending Higher Education provision.

We have also made it a condition of accessing our food bank service that individuals who themselves are entitled to work or their partners are, engage with our employment team. We also refer people to our housing, benefit, immigration, and family support teams to ensure we are supporting people in a holistic way and ultimately supporting them to be financially independent whilst living in the UK.'

(ii) Further support for international students:

The UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) are a charity and membership organisation supporting international students and all who work with them. They provide a range of advice for international students, such as in the areas of Brexit, immigration, fees and wellbeing (UKCISA, 2024). Practitioners can signpost international students to this resource at: <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/>.

4.3 NRPF and single adults

As well as exacerbating poverty and destitution (Jolly et al., 2022), evidence from research and practice shows further connections between vulnerability to exploitation for people with the NRPF condition. Victims of domestic abuse and modern slavery are particularly impacted by the NRPF condition which heightens the risk of victims enduring abuse and exploitation behind closed doors as they are unable to access essential support (Centre for Social Justice [CfSJ], 2021). Amongst these victims, women are particularly impacted as the NRPF condition limits access to women's refuges for some migrant women and takes away the safety net of financial and housing support, leading to a choice of either dependency on their abuser or to become homeless (Small, n.d.; de Felice, 2024). The case study below, as well as that in Section 4.4, highlight different cases of individuals from the EU who have received support for their specific vulnerabilities and highlight different forms of support from VCS organisations working on similar issues.

(i) Better Pathways Bespoke Support Case Study

Being attentive to signs of vulnerability to better provide specialised support pathways

(Karolina Borkiewicz-Singh, NRPF Senior Adviser, Brushstrokes Community Project)

'LW is a 60-year-old Polish citizen, widowed, homeless with a long history of rough sleeping, and is a victim of modern slavery and human trafficking. When he first approached our organisation, in mid of June, he did not have any valid ID or immigration status in the UK, he was unemployed, destitute, struggling with the alcohol misuse, suffering from depression, and struggling to access health care due to lack of address.

Initially the casework was focused to secure the client's immigration status under the EU Settlement Scheme. We started our support work with him by arranging a passport appointment for him and finding him a place to live. We were able to get an accommodation place in Tabor House in Birmingham city centre from the beginning of July. Since then, the client was required to engage with our services in terms of receiving weekly destitution support of £20. Slowly we were able to build a trusted relationship with the client and while looking for the proofs of his residence in the UK, we could find

out more details about his life in this country and the background from the home country.

It appeared that the client was trafficked to the UK in October 2007 by polish Roma travellers. They have paid for his bus ticket, arrange his accommodations and job in the UK. Since he arrived at this country he was under their “supervision”. For many months he had to give back 70% of his salary to pay-off his ticket and rent, the NINo was applied and possessed by the gang, they also took a loan of £8000 using his identity and appointed him as director of the company he was never aware of. Back home he was convicted to many, minor criminal offences. He was raised by a single mother and because they were struggling financially, he had been forced to go to work when he was 14. He had been imprisoned in total 16 times between 1983 and 2007 in Poland. Once he left the prison, he struggled to settle and find a job, he was vulnerable, and this is when he was targeted by the people who brought him to the UK.

After a few months he managed to escape from the traffickers, he moved to Ashton, near Manchester and managed to find a job. When everything was getting better, he became unwell and was unable to work due to his health condition. He claimed JCA from 2014-2017 but once he was no longer eligible to receive benefits, he started sleeping rough. He was sleeping in a tent by the canals in Ashton, until one day all his belongings were burnt. Following that, he was placed in temporary accommodation in Ashton but due to language barriers did not receive further support or advice.

In April 2023 he decided to move back to Birmingham and slept in a tent in different public parks until he was referred to Brushstrokes. At the beginning of November, we made his referral to the Modern Slavery team at Sandwell Council. That was followed by a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referral at the beginning of December after the client given his statement. Now he is in a safe house, has got immigration advice, health, and mental health support in place and the Salvation Army is taking care of him.’

(ii) Further support for vulnerable adults

The Better Pathways Briefing Paper 3 (Brushstrokes, April 2024) set out the support available for single adults with social care needs, including individuals who are experiencing domestic abuse. Regarding the latter, the options open to people with NRPF who are experiencing domestic abuse are summarised by the CfSJ as follows: ‘if they came to the UK on a spouse or partner visa, they can apply for financial support through the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) and also Indefinite Leave to Remain under the Domestic Violence Rule (DVILR)’ (2024: 5). Practitioners should direct people in this situation to immigration advisers in order to support them to make the decision most suitable for an individual’s situation and to inform them of the necessary evidence they would need to gather.

In terms of victims of modern slavery with NRPF, people have the option of entering the NRM, which gives them access to some short-term support and protection offered by the Home Office and the devolved nations (CfSJ, 2021). However, victims cannot apply directly to the NRM and would need to be referred by a designated First Responder who identifies indicators of modern slavery and obtains consent to the victim’s data being submitted to the Home Office. Support (which does not constitute general recourse to public funds or access to mainstream benefits) would then be provided for a minimum of 45 days in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and 90 days in Scotland, although delays in decision-making can mean that this support

is extended. The CfSJ explain that at the end of the NRM process: ‘if they are formally confirmed as a victim by the Home Office, in England and Wales survivors are entitled to a 45 day ‘move on period’ of additional support; this may be extended by the Home Office under the Recovery Needs Assessment (RNA) process if victims have ongoing recovery needs that cannot be met by mainstream or asylum services’ (2021: 5).

In cases where modern slavery is suspected, frontline practitioners should also seek support from charities who specialise in this area, such as Adavu in the West Midlands (<https://www.adavu.org.uk/>).

4.4 The transition from NRPf to permanent status: supporting people from asylum seeking and EUSS pre-settled status backgrounds

As well as the multiple challenges associated with having the NRPf condition, specific challenges can arise when a person has been granted Leave to Remain or settled status and they transition into a different set of circumstances once the NRPf condition is lifted.

Research carried out by the Refugee Council (2014), for example, focused on the challenges for newly-granted refugees who had previously had the NRPf condition and were receiving asylum support. This research found that potential destitution remained a prevailing challenge due to the 28-day rule for finding accommodation and securing financial support. The research found that delays were often due to the Home Office and Job Centre Plus and therefore out of the control of individuals. The Refugee Council’s (2014) report includes a number of recommendations, many of which can be applied to other forms of visa status once the NRPf condition is lifted, such as EU migrants who previously had pre-settled status. They suggest that support from the Home Office should remain in place until other support can be accessed, as a preventative measure to reduce the exacerbation of challenges caused by potential destitution. Another recommendation referred to improved communication and guidance from the UK Government to banks and other service providers regarding the types of documentation refugees have in their possession: adjusting their policies accordingly for people from refugee backgrounds and with this reducing the potential for delay further. Additionally, it is recommended that refugees can access financial support from Government to pay for a deposit in the private rented sector,

(i) ‘Fatoumata’s story’

Fatoumata (pseudonym) is a 28-year-old woman from Ghana who has lived in the UK for nine years. She claimed asylum in the UK and has now been granted Leave to Remain. She is part of the Better Pathways advisory group and below shares both the support she has received since being in the UK, such as from the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, as well as specific challenges she has encountered following the granting of her status.

Fatoumata

'I arrived to the UK in 2015 and was classed as an overstayer. I had no recourse to public funds for two years and then got my leave to remain around six months ago. Things were challenging for me when I was pregnant as I wasn't under Social Services at that time. However, I got lots of support from the Coventry RMC for things like clothes, toiletries, money and food. Although I was happy to get my status, things have been challenging in a different way since then, mostly with accommodation. I have a toddler and a new baby and I had a lot of problems living high up in a high-rise block of flats with the lift always breaking and issues with drugs in some of the flats. I felt more supported and safer when I had NRPF as suddenly when that's gone you feel on your own and more depressed than ever. The health visitor has been so helpful though and the support from local charities like the Coventry RMC and church where I went to English classes. Now I'm about to take my GCSE English exam'.

(ii) Better Pathways Bespoke Support Case Study

Local VCSO organisations working together to improve post-decision pathways

(Emma Thomas, Restricted Eligibility and Migrant Pathways Worker, SIFA Fireside Birmingham)

'We recently supported a Romanian client who had been in the UK for 5 years but had never applied for pre-settled status and was homeless. We were able to refer him to the European Welfare Association for support in applying for settled status. We were able to help him in gathering evidence of his time here in the UK (e.g. contacting previous employers, accessing medical records). We were able to refer him to Tabor House in Birmingham for accommodation as he had permission to work whilst waiting for his settled status decision. He was then granted his EUSS and we then supported him in navigating the process of applying for Universal Credit, getting a national insurance number, referring him to the Council for housing. He was then referred to Pure Project and Shaw Trust for support in writing a CV and for looking for work.

For asylum seekers, we support them in ringing Migrant Help and advocating for them, supporting them in collecting evidence/writing statements, and for people whose asylum case has failed, we refer them to Hope Projects, another charity in Birmingham that supports people in this situation.

We also refer clients to charities such as the Refugee and Migrant Centre or Brushstrokes for immigration advice and we are able to refer clients to the mental health team, social services, and Homeless Health Exchange provision amongst others. In a few cases where there is likely to be some change or outcome in the next few days, we are able to liaise with the Council to ask for some emergency provision but in many cases, unfortunately, we are not able to offer any accommodation to clients. In these cases, we are able to offer breakfast/lunch, showers, washing machine, and some clothes and snacks.'

(iii) Further support for people post-NRPF

Frontline practitioners supporting people who are applying for permanent status in the UK should signpost people to clear information in advance of a decision so that they can start to prepare mentally and practically for what will come next. For example, the Citizens Advice website is a useful resource to signpost people to information about accessing mainstream benefits according to particular migration statuses:

5. Working recommendations

This paper has given only a small insight into some of the lived experience and practice-based issues according to some of the visa statuses associated with NRPF and has not had the scope to cover all visa statuses. Additionally, it is important to note that whilst some challenges may be general across the visa types, each individual or family case is itself unique and as such challenges can be deeply complex and wide ranging. Below we outline some working recommendations in response to some of the issues and best practice examples shared in this paper:

- local authorities develop clearer post-decision guidance for people with NRPF, appropriate to positive or negative decision.
- VCS organisations involve people with lived experience of NRPF in designing local NRPF policy / service review provision.
- VCS organisations provide support groups for overstayers to help them develop social relationships, access essential support, and address stigmas.
- whilst some bespoke support according to visa status is necessary, more general VCS support should be holistic and include multiple areas such as employment, social/wellbeing, family-based, and advocacy.
- develop communication channels between practitioners working across the statutory (local authorities) and non-statutory (VCSOs) to keep abreast of current issues according to particular NRPF and visa status in order to develop a joined-up approach to support, underpinned by a cross-sector ethos of working together rather than in opposition.
- cross-sector practitioners support those who are eligible in applying to have NRPF condition lifted (e.g. people on family visas and Hong Kong BNO visas) in order to minimise risk of destitution and exploitation.
- develop communication with local MPs and councillors regarding support for particularly vulnerable groups, such as women experiencing domestic abuse, to open up routes to access women's refuges.
- more research is needed to understand and address some of the challenges encountered by people who are not captured in official NRPF statistics, such as overstayers.

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