

Royal College of Nursing response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Migration Call for Evidence: Impact of Recent Immigration and Asylum Rule Changes on Poverty

About the Royal College of Nursing

With a membership of over half a million registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing across the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world. RCN members work in a variety of hospital and community settings in the NHS and the independent sector.

The RCN promotes patient and nursing interests on a wide range of issues by working closely with the Government, the UK parliaments and other national and European political institutions, trade unions, professional bodies and voluntary organisations.

1. Summary

- 1.1. There are more than 200,000 nursing staff registered in the UK that undertook their nursing education in another country, making up 25% of the UK's total nursing workforce.ⁱ Approximately 77,000 entry clearance visas have been issued to nursing professionals since the beginning of 2021.ⁱⁱ These staff make enormous contributions to the UK's health and care service each day. However, the UK government's proposals to reform indefinite leave to remain (ILR) fail to recognise the value of our colleagues educated outside the UK.
- 1.2. In May 2025 UK government announced plans to reform pathways to permanent settlement (or indefinite leave to remain) which included doubling the standard qualifying period for ILR from five to ten years; a fifteen-year route to settlement for staff in roles below RQF level 6; retrospective application of these rules to apply to those already living and working in the UK; the requirement for dependents to earn settlement in their own right; and adding an NRPF condition to ILR. Government has only provided assurance that registered nurses and doctors working in the NHS will continue to be eligible for five-year routes to settlement. There are currently around 375,000 nurses working in England's NHS, but this only represents around half of the total registered nursing workforce. Similar exemptions have not been guaranteed for nursing support workers, registered nurses working outside of the NHS, or the wider health and care workforce.
- 1.3. Extending the baseline qualifying period to 10 years would increase financial pressure on nursing staff by increasing the number of years they are subject to visa costs and subject to a no recourse to public funds (NRPF) condition which is attached to their visas. RCN research has found that of members with an NRPF condition, one in five (22%) reported struggling to buy food or meet basic needs and nearly two in five (39%) said that they were concerned about the lack of financial assistance available to them during times of emergency.ⁱⁱⁱ When asked about the potential changes to the qualifying period, 53% of respondents to a 2025

RCN survey of international staff reported they are extremely concerned about the impact on their financial security.^{iv}

1.4. UK Government has also suggested that it is considering adding a NRPF condition to indefinite leave to remain. The RCN is extremely concerned by this proposal, and we have repeatedly raised concerns regarding the impact of NRPF on the financial safety of internationally educated nursing staff.^{v,vi} These proposals are not only cruel but are directly at odds with governments ambitions to reduce child poverty. In addition, increasing the time that staff must wait for ILR also makes them more vulnerable to labour exploitation, particularly in the care sector where they are at a higher risk.^{vii}

1.5. **RCN recommendations:**

- The "no recourse to public funds (NRPF)" condition applied to migrant workers on temporary visas is a key risk to the financial stability of internationally educated nurses and their families. The UK Government should remove this condition immediately.
- Currently, migrants can apply for a 'change of conditions' (request to access public funds), under certain circumstances. However, the conditions that need to be met to be granted public funds are very high, and often require a migrant to be destitute, or approaching destitution. The Home Office should immediately establish a process allowing for representations from migrant workers or their representatives to request a grace period during which they can access public funds in exceptional circumstances.
- Government must abandon plans to add a no recourse to public funds condition to ILR. Nursing staff, whatever their nationality, are all expected to pay into the same system of tax and national insurance, but those working in the UK on a visa are unable to rely on that system for support when they need it most. Extending this inequity to those with ILR will undermine their integration into British society and put them and their families at increased risk of poverty.

2. The impact of the NRPF condition

2.1. International nursing staff working in the UK on temporary visas such as the Health & Care Worker visa are typically subject to the 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) visa condition. This means that migrant workers are unable to access certain benefits that are classed as 'public funds for immigration purposes', including housing benefit and child support.^{viii}

- 2.2. In 2024, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation cost of living tracker found that low-income families affected by NRPF were at very high risk of hardship, with 8 out of 10 families going without essentials, and half taking out loans to pay for them.^{ix}
- 2.3. In March 2026, the Home Affairs Committee published their report “Earned Settlement: Examining the Government’s proposed reforms”.^x It cited evidence from organisations including Barnardo’s that cases of children in poverty experiencing malnutrition and stunted growth have been linked to the NRPF status of their families. While local authorities have a legal obligation to safeguard the wellbeing of children, regardless of their immigration status, the report notes that in practice many children in families with NRPF that are in poverty will be unable to access local authority support. Where this support is accessed, the proposed changes will increase financial pressure on local authorities. The Committee have therefore recommended that additional costs to local authorities of supporting families subject to NRPF will have to be included in the Government’s calculations of the fiscal impact of their proposals.
- 2.4. Nurses subject to NRPF working at Band 5 could miss out on more than £1,000 a month compared to colleagues with British Citizenship or ILR. Take the example of two nurses, one UK national and one non-UK national with no recourse to public funds. Both are working at Band 5, and single parents to two children under the age of 10. For the year 2025/26, the UK national nurse would be entitled to benefits of around £1,255.75 a month, on top of a monthly salary of £2,083.88 after pension deductions, with a combined income of £3,339.63. By contrast, the non-UK national with no access to public funds, even after forgoing pension contributions, would only have a total take home pay of £2,302.66. This is a difference of £1,036.97 between two nurses doing the same work, before taking the impact of discounted childcare into consideration. With such little disposable income, families of nurses with NRPF are extremely vulnerable to a sudden job loss or other change in financial circumstances.
- 2.5. In 2024, the RCN published its report “Without a safety net: The impact of no recourse to public funds on internationally educated nursing staff”.^{xi} The report included findings from a survey conducted in January 2024 of around 3,000 internationally educated nursing staff. The findings revealed the acute pressures faced by IENs without access to public funds, leaving them struggling to meet basic needs, getting into credit card debt, and in some cases relying financially on abusive partners.
- 2.6. 30% of internationally educated respondents reported that they were struggling with their living costs and increasingly worried about their financial situation. International staff were twice as likely to report this concern compared to UK-educated staff (reported at 14%).

- 2.7. International nursing staff are more likely to be responsible for all household costs or the main financial contribution to their household (72% of internationally educated respondents compared with 58% for UK-educated respondents). One respondent reported going into severe credit card debt and picking up extra day and night shifts to support their family. Others reported not being able to feed and clothe their children, citing the NRPF condition as having a significant impact on their family's wellbeing.
- 2.8. Internationally educated nursing staff were also slightly more likely to have caring responsibilities (46% compared to 39%), with 43% of those caring for one or more children under the age of five. Just 44% of internationally educated respondents with a child under the age of five reported that they could rely on support from family and friends, compared to two thirds (66%) of UK trained staff. Almost two-thirds of internationally educated survey respondents (62%) have considered leaving the UK and returning to their country of training due to the high cost of living.
- 2.9. In March 2026, the RCN Foundation published "From Arrival to Survival: Exploring the Hardship Struggles of Internationally Educated Nurses and Midwives"^{xii}. The report revealed that between 2022-2025, the RCN Foundation has seen a 475% increase in hardship grants awarded to individuals with NRPF. Grant recipients faced a range of issues including maternity and childcare issues, increased cost-of-living, unexpected loss of employment, and NMC fitness-to-practice referral. Data from the RCN Foundation shows that while staff with NRPF were generally less likely to face financial hardship as a result of ill health, debt or housing issues, they were more likely to require support with childcare or when facing an unexpected loss of employment.

3. Extending the qualifying period

- 3.1. Current Government proposals suggest that the qualifying period for staff working below RQF level 6 (below degree level) may be forced to wait up to 15 years for indefinite leave to remain. The Home Affairs Committee has highlighted that this policy will impact lower income earners, for example staff in roles such as nursing support worker roles, health care assistants and care workers, who are typically paid less than registered professions.^{xiii}
- 3.2. Typically, the NRPF condition is lifted when ILR is granted. In November 2025 the UK Government announced sweeping changes to the qualifying period for ILR, and its conditions. This included consulting on plans to extend the NRPF condition to those with ILR, with the condition only to be lifted after a successful application for citizenship. Citizenship can typically be applied for after 12 months of ILR.

- 3.3. Evidence published by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) in March 2023 suggested that the ten-year route to settlement was already experienced by around 170,000 people, with “detrimental impacts” on families without access to public funds.^{xiv} Analysis from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) highlights that increasing the qualifying period will mean 309,000 will face an increased wait for settlement.^{xv} The Work and Pensions Committee has recognised NRPF as a significant contributor to child poverty, specifically increasing the risk of living in insecure and crowded housing.^{xvi}
- 3.4. By proposing to remove access to public funds, even after ILR has been granted, the Government risk putting additional barriers to integration in place. Nursing staff, whatever their nationality, are all expected to pay into the same system of tax and national insurance, but visa holders are unable to rely on that system for support when they need it most. Extending this inequity to those with ILR will only contribute to a sense of exclusion amongst international nursing staff and undermine their feelings of integration into British society.
- 3.5. Alongside preventing access to public funds, extending the baseline qualifying period for ILR to 10 years will increase financial pressure on people by extending the period they are liable for visa fees. High visa fees create a vicious cycle for those on lower incomes or with larger families, with new costs always having to be met or saved for. If proposals to extend the standard qualifying period from five to ten years went ahead, international health and care workers could be required to pay an additional £608 per family member, before applying for ILR and its associated costs.^{xvii} When asked about the potential changes to the qualifying period, 53% of the respondents reported they are extremely concerned about the impact on their financial security.^{xviii}
- 3.6. It is also the intention of the Government to decouple dependents and main applicants’ route to settlement. This means that dependents will have to ‘earn’ settlement in their own right and therefore may be subject to longer qualifying periods than the main applicant.^{xix} In the case where a main applicant is a nurse and their spouse is a care worker, the latter may be subject to a 15-year route to settlement, delaying their access to benefits. Though it is currently unclear whether a family in this position would be able to access social housing or Universal Credit, the changes may stand to significantly increase financial pressures on nurses’ households based only on the occupation of their dependent.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. Alongside improving access to health care, nursing staff drive progress on addressing poverty, exclusion and inequality, educating populations, and improving nutrition.^{xx} Nursing staff play a crucial role in identifying and assessing needs and ensuring that the appropriate services are commissioned and delivered equitably,

prioritising and meeting the needs of vulnerable people and groups. Population health, and the role of public services in enabling optimal health outcomes, is pivotal to the wider goals of government, including ensuring children and young people thrive in education.

- 4.2. The RCN has been consistently raising the impact of NRPF on nursing staff in recent years and will continue to do so. Whether they are employed in public services or providing essential care elsewhere in our communities, the contributions these staff make to the UK cannot be reduced to their taxable earnings. It cannot be right that nursing staff and their families are themselves denied access to vital safety nets when they fall on hard times.

ⁱ [Registration data reports - The Nursing and Midwifery Council](#)

ⁱⁱ [Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Unreciprocated Care: why internationally educated nursing staff are leaving the UK | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

^{iv} [Unsettled: How the proposed change to indefinite leave to remain could affect the retention of internationally educated nursing staff | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

^v [Without a safety net | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

^{vi} [Unreciprocated Care: why internationally educated nursing staff are leaving the UK | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

^{vii} [Unsettled: How the proposed change to indefinite leave to remain could affect the retention of internationally educated nursing staff | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

^{viii} [For full list of all benefits considered 'public funds' for immigration purposes, see \[Benefits that are public funds | NRPF \\(nrpfnetwork.org.uk\\)\]\(#\)](#)

^{ix} [Families with no recourse to public funds are trapped in hardship | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

^x [Earned Settlement: Examining the Government's proposed reforms](#)

^{xi} [Without a safety net | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

^{xii} [RCN Foundation report exposes financial struggles among IEN/M | RCN Foundation](#)

^{xiii} [Routes to Settlement](#)

^{xiv} [A punishing process': Experiences of people on the 10-year route to settlement | IPPR](#)

^{xv} [Far from settled: The government's 'earned settlement' consultation | IPPR](#)

^{xvi} [Children in poverty: No recourse to public funds](#)

^{xvii} [Health and Care Worker visa: How much it costs - GOV.UK](#)

^{xviii} [Unsettled: How the proposed change to indefinite leave to remain could affect the retention of internationally educated nursing staff | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

^{xix} [Home Office consultation template](#)

^{xx} [Leaving No-One Behind | Royal College of Nursing](#)