

## **Royal College of Nursing Briefing: Westminster Hall debate – Child poverty and No Recourse to Public Funds – 11 June 2025**

*The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the largest professional body and trade union for nursing staff in the world. We represent around half a million members who are registered nurses, midwives, students, and nursing support workers across the United Kingdom and beyond.*

### **1. Background**

- 1.1. Internationally educated nursing staff form the backbone of the health and care system in the UK. Data from the Nursing and Midwifery Council reveals that the percentage of internationally educated nursing staff as a total of the UK register has recently increased from 15% to 23% between September 2020 and September 2024.<sup>1</sup> These workers pay the same taxes and national insurance contributions, but live and work without access to benefits should they need them.
- 1.2. Access to public funds is only granted with Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) status. Recent changes announced in the UK Government's Immigration White Paper plan to extend the qualifying period for ILR from 5 to 10 years.<sup>2</sup> This doubles the amount of time that struggling health and care staff will go without a crucial safety net.
- 1.3. In 2024, the RCN published its report 'Without a safety net: The impact of no recourse to public funds on internationally educated nursing staff'.<sup>3</sup> The report included findings from a survey of around 3,000 internationally educated nursing staff which revealed the acute pressures faced by IENs without access to public funds. They were often left struggling to meet basic needs, getting into credit card debt, and in some cases relying financially on abusive partners.

### **2. Effects of the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition.**

- 2.1. Accessing public funds is an essential safety net to alleviate financial hardship. The International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s Nursing Personnel Convention states that all nursing staff should enjoy equal access to social security in their destination country.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, nursing staff on the Health and Care Worker visa are subject to the NRPF condition, barring them from accessing benefits such as housing benefit, child benefit, and Universal Credit.<sup>5</sup> The RCN calls on UK Government to abolish the NRPF visa condition for migrant workers on temporary visas as it is a key risk to the financial stability of internationally educated nurses and their families.<sup>6</sup>
- 2.2. In May 2025, the RCN published a report, 'Unreciprocated Care: why internationally educated nursing staff are leaving the UK' which surveyed over 3,000 members.<sup>7</sup> Findings showed 1 in 5 (22%) of survey respondents with an NRPF condition reported struggling to buy food or meet basic needs. Of those who did not have access to public funds, nearly 2 in 5 (39%) said that they were concerned about the lack of financial assistance available during times of emergency.
- 2.3. The challenges faced by international recruits have been exacerbated by the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. 38% of respondents faced challenges paying for utilities, such as energy bills. Some respondents shared they have had to rely on overdrafts, loans, and taking on additional shifts to compensate for higher expenses.
- 2.4. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those unable to access childcare support have childcare responsibilities. Legislation in England permits parents with NRPF to limited levels of government-funded childcare, with differing levels offered to residents in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. This means that parents often have to rely on paid private options, informal or family networks, or charitable support.

- 2.5. 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 require a migrant to be destitute or approaching destitution. The Home Office should establish a process allowing for representations from migrant workers for access to public funds in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.6. There is also no concession for victims of domestic abuse to access public funds if they are currently under the Skilled Worker visa. The Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) is applicable to migrants on a spouse visa as the dependent of a main applicant. The concession is based on the recognition that financial dependency can prevent individuals from leaving abusive relationships. A similar argument of financial dependency could be made in the case of vulnerable workers at risk of re-exploitation. The Home Office should introduce a process for migrant workers to request a grace period during which they can access public funds where they have been exploited by their former employer.
- 2.7. Low wages and restrictive immigration rules such as NRPF significantly impact on the retention of internationally educated nursing staff. Our data found that only one third (34%) of respondents intended to stay in the UK permanently. Respondents cited favourable immigration policies elsewhere as a factor in their decision making.

### **3. Member testimonies of NRPF conditions**

- 3.1. "No recourse to public funds is currently having negative impact on my family. It makes me work more overtime hours in order to care for my family. Due to childcare, my wife is unable to work enough hours to support." - **Nurse from Ghana**
- 3.2. "My salary has not increased as quickly as my house rent and council tax and sometimes, I struggle to pay the bills and couldn't afford even the basic food items by the end of each month, not able to save enough for my family." - **Nurse from India**

### **4. Suggested questions to ask the Minister**

- 4.1. What assessment has the government made of the impact of NRPF on overseas nursing staff working in the UK?
- 4.2. What consideration has the government made of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s Nursing Personnel Convention that states all nursing staff, regardless of their country of training, should enjoy equal access to social security in their destination country?
- 4.3. Will the Home Office consider the introduction of a process for migrant workers or their representatives to request a grace period during which they can access public funds in cases where they have been exploited by their former employer?

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<sup>1</sup> [Registration data reports - The Nursing and Midwifery Council](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Restoring control over the immigration system: white paper - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Without a safety net | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Convention C149 - Nursing Personnel Convention, 1977 \(No. 149\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Benefits that are public funds | NRPF](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Unreciprocated Care: why internationally educated nursing staff are leaving the UK | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Unreciprocated Care: why internationally educated nursing staff are leaving the UK | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)