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Assessing the Impact of NRPF Policies on Immigrant Family Stability and Local Authority Social Work Interventions

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ABSTRACT

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policies, applied to certain categories of immigrants in the United Kingdom, restrict access to welfare benefits, housing assistance, and other forms of state support. While designed to manage immigration control and reduce public expenditure, these policies have significant social implications, particularly for vulnerable families. From a broader perspective, NRPF intersects with debates on social justice, human rights, and the role of welfare systems in supporting marginalized populations. For immigrant families, the policy can precipitate acute financial insecurity, housing instability, and restricted access to essential services, all of which threaten overall family stability and child well-being. In this context, local authority social work teams face mounting pressures to respond to the needs of NRPF-affected households despite limited statutory obligations and constrained resources. The absence of eligibility for public funds often forces social workers to operate within complex legal frameworks, balancing safeguarding duties with immigration policy compliance. This tension can lead to inconsistent interventions, ethical dilemmas, and increased caseload burdens. Moreover, children in NRPF households many of whom are British citizens or long-term UK residents may face disproportionate risks of poverty, educational disruption, and social exclusion. Addressing the impact of NRPF policies requires coordinated strategies that bridge immigration and social care policy, alongside advocacy for policy reform that prioritizes child welfare. Strengthening multi-agency collaboration, enhancing cultural competence in service delivery, and developing emergency support pathways are essential to mitigating harm. By adopting a rights-based and equity-focused approach, local authorities can better safeguard the stability of immigrant families while navigating the constraints imposed by NRPF legislation.

Keywords: NRPF Policy, Immigrant Families, Social Work Interventions, Family Stability, Welfare Access, Child Protection

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Understanding No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Policies

The term *No Recourse to Public Funds* (NRPF) refers to a legal condition imposed on certain categories of migrants, restricting their access to specific state benefits and housing assistance in the United Kingdom [1]. This restriction applies to individuals subject to immigration control under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, including those on work, family, or student visas, as well as undocumented migrants [2]. The scope of “public funds” is defined in the Immigration Rules and covers welfare benefits such as Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, and Child Benefit, alongside forms of local authority housing support [3].

The legal basis for NRPF lies in both immigration legislation and welfare policy frameworks, designed to limit public expenditure and deter irregular migration [4]. However, these restrictions often apply to households with children, many of whom are British citizens, creating complex tensions between immigration control objectives and child welfare obligations [5].

The implications extend beyond individual hardship, influencing family stability, access to essential services, and housing security [6]. These vulnerabilities place NRPF-affected households at increased risk of destitution, especially when coupled with sudden income loss or health crises [7]. As shown later in Table 1, the NRPF condition intersects with safeguarding duties under the Children Act 1989, compelling local authorities to provide limited support in certain circumstances [8].

Transitioning from the legal definition, this article examines how such policy restrictions interact with broader socio-economic pressures, shaping both the lived experiences of immigrant families and the operational responsibilities of local authority social work teams [9].

1.2 Global Migration and Welfare Access Trends

Welfare access for migrants varies significantly across jurisdictions, reflecting divergent policy approaches to immigration, integration, and public resource allocation [10]. In some countries, such as Sweden and Canada, social protection frameworks extend many welfare entitlements to documented migrants, recognising their contributions to the economy and community cohesion [11]. By contrast, countries including the United States and Australia implement varying degrees of benefit exclusion, particularly for temporary visa holders [12].

These policy differences are influenced by political, economic, and social factors, as well as public attitudes towards migration [13]. Restrictive welfare access measures are often framed as tools to manage immigration flows, preserve public resources, and maintain public support for migration programmes [14]. However, evidence suggests that such exclusions can exacerbate poverty, increase reliance on informal economies, and undermine long-term integration [15].

The UK's NRPF policy is one of the more stringent examples, explicitly embedding welfare inaccessibility into immigration status conditions [16]. This approach creates a bifurcated system in which two households in identical socio-economic circumstances may receive different levels of support solely based on immigration status [17]. In urban centres, where living costs are high and housing insecurity is prevalent, NRPF restrictions can accelerate family vulnerability [18].

Table 1, included later, situates the UK's NRPF framework alongside comparable international welfare restrictions, highlighting the UK's narrower access provisions relative to peer nations [19]. This comparative perspective underscores the distinctive nature of NRPF and its particular relevance for understanding the interplay between migration policy and local authority safeguarding obligations [20].

1.3 Rationale for Studying Family Stability and Local Authority Roles

The intersection of NRPF policy and family stability warrants focused attention because the restriction of welfare access can have cascading effects on children's safety, housing conditions, and educational continuity [21]. Families subject to NRPF often experience income volatility, food insecurity, and overcrowded living arrangements, all of which can compromise child development and wellbeing [22]. These conditions may trigger social work involvement, even when the precipitating factor is policy-induced deprivation rather than parental neglect [23].

Local authorities play a pivotal role in responding to NRPF-related needs under statutory safeguarding frameworks, such as Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, which obliges them to provide support to children in need regardless of immigration status [24]. This creates a policy paradox: while NRPF restricts access to most public funds, local authorities remain legally and ethically bound to intervene when child welfare is at risk [25].

Figure 1 in the subsequent section visualises the decision-making process for local authority interventions in NRPF cases, while Table 1 maps the legislative instruments that govern these responsibilities [26].

This article is structured to first set out the policy and legal context of NRPF, then examine its socio-economic impacts on immigrant families, followed by an analysis of how local authority social work teams navigate these tensions. The final sections present comparative case studies and strategic recommendations for aligning immigration policy with child

welfare imperatives [27]. In doing so, the discussion seeks to contribute to both policy reform debates and the practical improvement of support mechanisms for NRPF-affected families [28].

2. POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Historical Development of NRPF in the UK –

The *No Recourse to Public Funds* (NRPF) condition has its legislative roots in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which codified welfare restrictions for individuals “subject to immigration control” [6]. Although restrictions on welfare access for certain migrants existed prior to this, the 1999 Act consolidated and expanded these limitations, formally linking immigration status to benefit entitlement [7].

Subsequent Immigration Rules, periodically amended under the Immigration Act 1971 framework, have defined and updated the list of “public funds” from which NRPF-affected individuals are excluded [8]. This list includes income-based benefits, housing assistance, and certain disability allowances. Over time, the policy’s scope has broadened, affecting a wider range of visa categories, including family route visas, work permits, and leave granted outside the rules [9].

Significant policy shifts occurred during the 2012–2016 “hostile environment” reforms, which sought to make staying in the UK without lawful status “as difficult as possible” by limiting access to essential services [10]. These reforms, underpinned by the Immigration Acts 2014 and 2016, reinforced NRPF as a central tool in immigration control [11]. The expansion of NRPF conditions during this period coincided with increased scrutiny from advocacy groups, who argued that the policy disproportionately harms children in mixed-status households [12].

Today, NRPF operates as both an immigration control measure and a welfare policy lever, intersecting directly with local authority safeguarding responsibilities. This historical trajectory has created a policy landscape where immigration enforcement priorities and child protection duties frequently collide, a theme explored further in relation to the Children Act 1989 and Care Act 2014 in Section 2.2 [13].

2.2 Interaction Between Immigration Law and Social Care Legislation –

NRPF restrictions sit at the nexus of immigration law and social care obligations, creating operational and ethical challenges for local authorities. Under the Children Act 1989, Section 17 imposes a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need within their area, regardless of immigration status [14]. This means that where a child is at risk of homelessness or destitution due to parental NRPF status, local authorities may be required to provide accommodation or subsistence support [15].

The Care Act 2014 extends safeguarding duties to vulnerable adults, including those with care and support needs, but its application to NRPF-affected individuals is more limited, often requiring a human rights assessment to determine eligibility [16]. This assessment considers whether denying support would result in a breach of rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), particularly Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) [17].

These duties create a policy paradox: while immigration law restricts access to welfare, social care law mandates intervention in cases of significant need. Table 1 summarises key legal provisions relevant to NRPF-affected families, highlighting where statutory duties override immigration-based exclusions [18].

Table 1: Key Legal Provisions Relevant to NRPF-Affected Families in the UK

Legislation / Instrument	Key Provisions	Relevance to NRPF Cases	Circumstances Where Duties Override NRPF Restrictions
Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Section 115)	Defines categories of migrants with “no recourse to public funds” and lists excluded benefits.	Establishes the legal basis for restricting welfare access to certain migrants.	None directly; forms the foundation of NRPF designation.
Children Act 1989 (Section 17)	Imposes duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need.	Enables provision of financial or accommodation support to NRPF families with children.	Duty applies regardless of immigration status if a child is assessed as “in need.”
Care Act 2014 (Sections 18–20)	Provides framework for adult social care and wellbeing support.	Allows NRPF adults with care needs to receive support where necessary to avoid breaches of human rights.	Duties override NRPF if withholding care would breach ECHR rights.
Human Rights Act 1998	Incorporates European Convention on Human Rights into UK law.	Protects against inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3) and upholds family life (Article 8).	Local authorities must provide support if refusal would result in rights violations.
Housing Act 1996 (Part VII)	Governs homelessness support and allocation of social housing.	NRPF families are excluded from housing assistance in most cases.	Limited duties apply if required to prevent breach of human rights obligations.
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)	Sets out rights of children to protection, development, and participation.	Guides interpretation of statutory duties in child welfare.	While not directly enforceable in UK law, informs safeguarding obligations that can influence decisions in NRPF cases.

In practice, this legal tension results in variability between local authorities in how support is assessed and delivered [19]. Some councils adopt a more restrictive interpretation to manage limited budgets, while others prioritise safeguarding obligations even where immigration restrictions apply [20]. Figure 1 in Section 3 will illustrate the decision-making pathway for NRPF cases, showing how statutory duties interact with immigration controls at key intervention points [21].

2.3 International Human Rights Considerations –

International human rights instruments provide a critical lens through which to assess the compatibility of NRPF policies with the UK’s broader legal obligations. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by the UK in 1991, requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (Article 3) [22]. It further obliges states to ensure every child enjoys the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27) without discrimination of any kind [23].

Similarly, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) imposes enforceable obligations on the UK, particularly under Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) and Article 3, which prohibits inhuman or degrading

treatment [24]. Denial of basic subsistence or housing support to NRPF families in severe destitution could, in some cases, breach these provisions [25].

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also affirms the right to social security and an adequate standard of living, though it has not been fully incorporated into UK domestic law [26]. While these treaties do not automatically override immigration legislation, they inform judicial interpretations and human rights assessments undertaken by local authorities [27].

Advocacy groups have argued that NRPF policies may conflict with these international obligations, particularly when applied to children who are British citizens but live in households affected by NRPF [28]. As reflected in Table 1, human rights considerations often act as a legal counterbalance, providing a framework for challenging overly restrictive interpretations of NRPF rules [29]. These obligations underscore the need for a rights-based approach in balancing immigration control with safeguarding responsibilities [30].

3. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

3.1 Household Financial Insecurity

Families subject to NRPF conditions often face acute household financial insecurity due to restricted access to welfare benefits combined with limited employment options [11]. While some visa categories allow employment, others impose work restrictions, and undocumented migrants are barred entirely from lawful work [12]. Even for those with the right to work, employment is frequently insecure, low-paid, and concentrated in sectors vulnerable to economic fluctuations, such as hospitality and care work [13].

The inability to access income-based benefits, including Universal Credit and Child Benefit, exacerbates poverty risk [14]. In urban centres with high living costs, NRPF households may struggle to cover rent, utilities, and food expenses, leaving little to no buffer for emergencies [15]. This financial precarity increases reliance on informal economies, charitable assistance, and food banks, which, while offering temporary relief, cannot substitute for systemic income support [16].

Income instability also creates challenges for managing unexpected expenses, such as medical costs not covered by the NHS or school-related fees [17]. As outlined in Table 1, NRPF restrictions intersect with local authority safeguarding duties, meaning that emergency support may only be provided if children are assessed as being “in need” under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 [18]. This threshold-based approach leaves many families in a “policy gap” where they are neither eligible for mainstream benefits nor sufficiently destitute to trigger local authority intervention [19].

Persistent income instability not only undermines immediate financial stability but also erodes long-term resilience, perpetuating cycles of poverty that affect future opportunities for both adults and children in NRPF households [20].

3.2 Housing Insecurity and Homelessness Risks –

NRPF households face heightened risks of housing insecurity because they are excluded from most forms of public housing assistance [21]. Under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, local authorities have a duty to prevent homelessness, but this duty does not extend to individuals “subject to immigration control,” except in narrowly defined circumstances [22].

In practice, this exclusion forces NRPF families into precarious housing arrangements, including overcrowded shared accommodation, informal subletting, or temporary stays with friends and relatives [23]. Such arrangements are often unstable, with eviction risk heightened by informal tenancy agreements and exploitative rental practices [24].

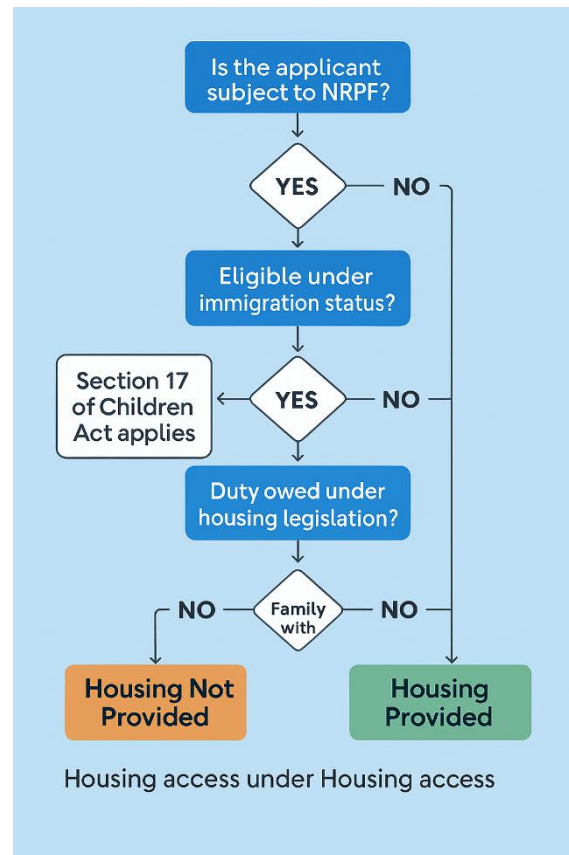


Figure 1 illustrates the decision-making pathway for housing access under NRPF, showing how eligibility is filtered at multiple points based on immigration status and statutory duties [25]. This flow diagram highlights the points at which safeguarding provisions under Section 17 of the Children Act can override housing exclusions for families with dependent children [26].

However, local authorities often require proof of imminent risk to a child's welfare before offering accommodation support, creating delays and uncertainty [27]. In high-demand housing markets, such delays may result in homelessness or repeated relocations, further destabilising family life [28]. Without stable housing, children's education, community integration, and emotional wellbeing can be severely disrupted [29].

3.3 Implications for Child Wellbeing

Material deprivation resulting from NRPF restrictions directly impacts child wellbeing across multiple domains [30]. Financial hardship limits access to adequate nutrition, safe housing, and educational resources, all of which are critical for healthy development [31].

Educational continuity is frequently compromised when housing instability forces children to change schools multiple times within short periods [32]. Disruption to peer relationships and inconsistent learning environments can lead to academic underperformance and social isolation [33].

Health outcomes are also affected. While children in NRPF households can access NHS primary care, barriers such as transportation costs, language differences, and parental fear of immigration enforcement can deter engagement with healthcare services [34]. These factors can delay the diagnosis and treatment of medical or developmental conditions, compounding long-term risks [35].

As seen in Figure 1 and outlined in Table 1, the intersection of NRPF policy with safeguarding law provides limited safety nets. However, these mechanisms are reactive rather than preventive, often intervening only once harm has already occurred [36].

3.4 Case Study of an NRPF-Affected Family

A family of four, comprising two parents on spousal visas and two British-born children, provides a clear illustration of NRPF's systemic barriers. Both parents were employed in low-wage jobs until the father lost his position during an economic downturn [37]. Without access to Universal Credit or Housing Benefit, the family quickly fell into rent arrears [38].

Initial approaches to the local authority for assistance were declined on the grounds that the family did not meet the statutory threshold for support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 [39]. Only after eviction proceedings commenced, and evidence of the children's deteriorating school attendance was presented, did the local authority intervene to provide temporary accommodation [40].

During this period, the family relied heavily on a local food bank and charitable grants to meet basic needs [41]. While eventual support was secured, the delay resulted in lasting educational disruption and emotional distress for the children [42].

This case, consistent with the decision-making pathway shown in Figure 1, underscores the reactive nature of local authority intervention under NRPF and highlights the reliance on community-based support networks to bridge policy-induced welfare gaps [43].

4. LOCAL AUTHORITY SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS

4.1 Eligibility Assessment and Gatekeeping

Eligibility assessments for NRPF-affected families form the first operational stage in determining whether local authorities have a duty to provide support [15]. These assessments typically involve structured tools that collect detailed information on immigration status, financial circumstances, and living arrangements [16]. Immigration status verification is central, as eligibility for most mainstream benefits is precluded if the applicant is "subject to immigration control" under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 [17].

The assessment process also examines whether a child meets the statutory definition of "in need" under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, which includes considerations such as homelessness, destitution, or lack of essential resources [18]. Local authorities are often under pressure to interpret these criteria narrowly due to resource constraints, creating a gatekeeping culture that can delay or prevent access to support [19].

In high-demand urban areas, decision-making pressures are compounded by high caseloads, budget limitations, and political scrutiny over immigration-related expenditure [20]. Table 1 highlights the statutory frameworks guiding these decisions, illustrating the narrow legal routes through which support can be lawfully extended to NRPF families [21].

While eligibility assessments are designed to ensure compliance with immigration and safeguarding law, they can create adversarial dynamics between families and authorities, particularly when families perceive the process as overly intrusive or biased [22]. Figure 2, presented later in this section, shows the flow of NRPF intervention pathways from initial referral through assessment to service provision or refusal [23].

4.2 Provision of Section 17 Support under the Children Act

When eligibility is established, local authorities may provide Section 17 support in the form of financial assistance, accommodation, or both [24]. This support is intended to safeguard the welfare of children deemed to be “in need” and is not contingent on the immigration status of the child or parent [25].

Accommodation may involve placing families in temporary housing, hostels, or bed-and-breakfast arrangements, though quality and stability vary widely between jurisdictions [26]. Financial support is usually calculated to meet basic subsistence needs, often aligned with the minimum levels set for asylum seekers under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 [27].

However, Section 17 support is discretionary in scope and level, allowing significant variation in how much assistance is provided and for how long [28]. Some councils review cases frequently to reassess need, which can create uncertainty and instability for families [29].

As indicated in Figure 2, the decision to provide Section 17 support typically follows a structured process involving needs assessment, human rights consideration, and managerial approval [30]. While these safeguards ensure lawful compliance, they can also delay service provision in urgent situations [31].

In practice, Section 17 has become the primary statutory mechanism through which NRPF-affected families receive local authority support, but its discretionary nature means it functions as a safety net of last resort rather than a guaranteed entitlement [32].

4.3 Multi-Agency Collaboration

Addressing the complex needs of NRPF families requires coordinated efforts across multiple sectors [33]. Social work teams frequently collaborate with schools, healthcare providers, charities, and faith-based organisations to fill service gaps left by NRPF restrictions [34].

Schools often serve as early identification points for children in NRPF households, noticing signs such as irregular attendance, hunger, or poor clothing [35]. Healthcare providers, including GPs and community health visitors, play a key role in documenting health impacts related to poverty and housing insecurity [36].

Charities and NGOs often provide practical assistance such as food parcels, clothing, and legal advice, while also advocating for policy change [37]. This multi-agency approach can help mitigate the negative effects of delayed or limited statutory support, particularly in urgent safeguarding situations [38].

Table 1 underscores that while statutory duties provide a framework, much of the day-to-day resilience for NRPF families depends on voluntary sector engagement [39]. Coordinated case conferences and information-sharing protocols, in line with data protection law, are essential for ensuring interventions are timely and effective [40].

4.4 Ethical and Professional Challenges for Social Workers

Social workers navigating NRPF cases face profound ethical and professional challenges, particularly in balancing safeguarding duties with immigration control compliance [41]. On one hand, they are bound by the Children Act 1989 to act in the best interests of the child; on the other, they must operate within legal constraints that limit the scope of available support [42].

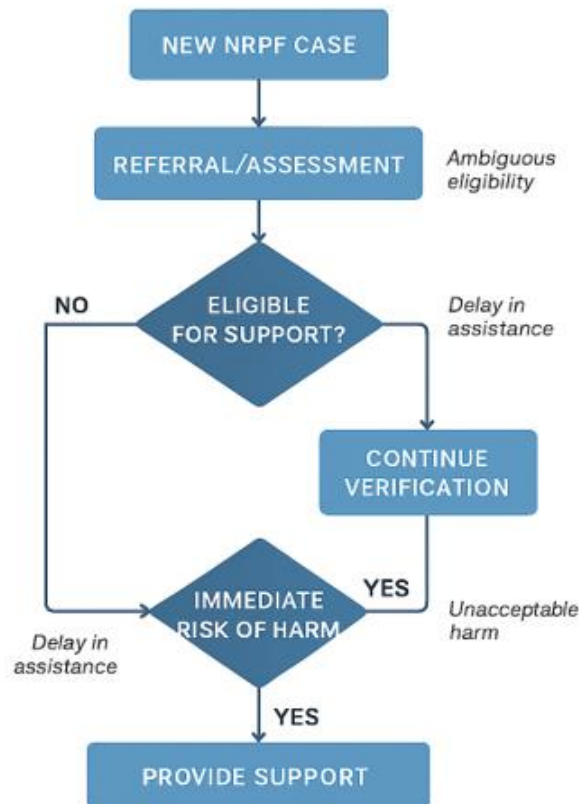


Figure 2 maps the intervention pathways for NRPF cases, highlighting decision points where ethical dilemmas commonly arise such as determining when to escalate a case despite ambiguous eligibility criteria [43]. In some situations, practitioners must make rapid judgments on whether delaying assistance to complete verification could expose a child to unacceptable harm [44].

There is also a tension between respecting the dignity and privacy of families and fulfilling statutory requirements for evidence gathering, which may feel intrusive or adversarial [45]. These dynamics can erode trust, making ongoing engagement with services more challenging [46].

Professional codes of ethics emphasise advocacy for vulnerable populations, yet social workers in NRPF cases often find themselves constrained by budgetary and political pressures [47]. The role requires not only legal literacy but also cultural competence, negotiation skills, and the ability to broker multi-agency cooperation under challenging circumstances [48].

5. BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION

5.1 Resource Constraints and Funding Pressures

Local authorities across the UK operate under significant budget constraints, a situation exacerbated by rising demand for social care services, including those linked to NRPF households [19]. Funding reductions over the past decade have resulted in fewer resources being available for discretionary services, forcing councils to prioritise statutory obligations over broader welfare support [20].

For NRPF cases, this fiscal environment creates a tension between the safeguarding duties set out in the Children Act 1989 and the immigration-related restrictions imposed by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 [21]. Providing Section 17 support often requires councils to draw on general funds, as NRPF families are ineligible for mainstream welfare

funding streams [22]. This can lead to restrictive eligibility interpretations or heightened gatekeeping measures, as shown in Table 1 [23].

The financial burden is particularly acute in urban areas with higher migrant populations, where caseloads are dense and housing costs are high [24]. In some cases, councils have reported diverting resources from other vulnerable groups to meet urgent NRPF needs, creating political and operational challenges [25].

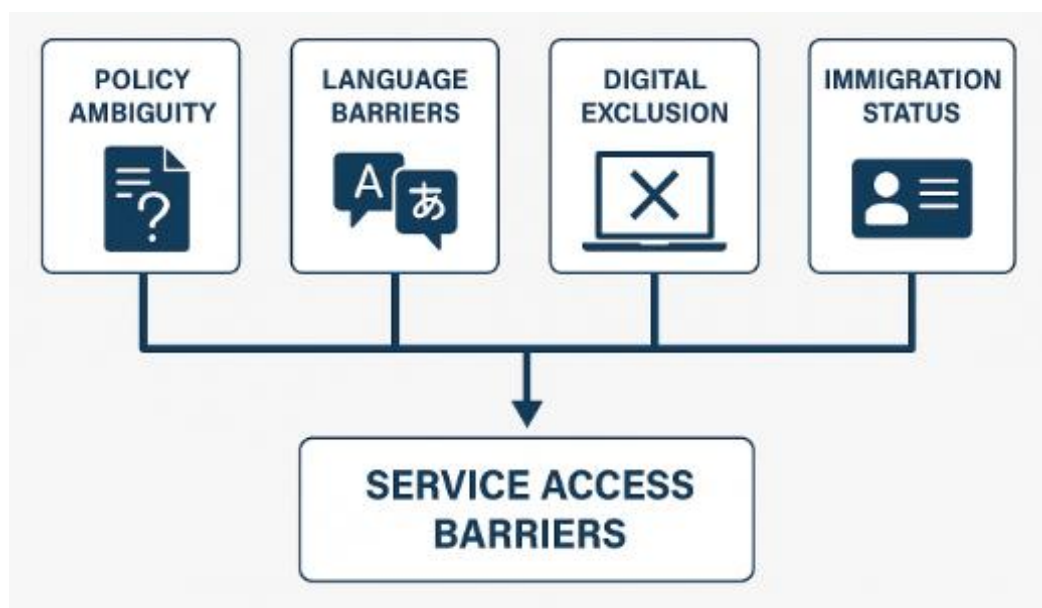
Moreover, the lack of ring-fenced funding for NRPF support means expenditure is subject to annual budget negotiations, which can result in fluctuating service levels [26]. This unpredictability undermines long-term planning for both local authorities and affected families, increasing the risk of instability [27]. The resource gap is further magnified when multi-agency collaboration requires pooled budgets, as partner organisations may also be operating under financial strain [28].

5.2 Policy Ambiguity and Legal Complexity

The legal framework governing NRPF cases is inherently complex, requiring social workers to interpret intersecting provisions of immigration, housing, and social care law [29]. Ambiguities arise because statutory guidance often leaves room for local interpretation, resulting in significant variability in how policies are applied across different councils [30].

This variability can manifest in differences in evidence requirements, thresholds for “child in need” determinations, and the types of support offered [31]. For example, while one local authority might provide extended accommodation under Section 17, another may only approve short-term emergency shelter for the same set of circumstances [32].

Case law, while clarifying some procedural points, has also introduced new interpretive challenges, especially when judgments hinge on nuanced human rights considerations [33]. The relationship between domestic statutes such as the Care Act 2014 and international obligations under the ECHR further complicates decision-making [34].



As highlighted in Figure 3, these complexities act as service access barriers, particularly when families must navigate multiple procedural layers before receiving support [35]. Inconsistencies in policy application not only impact fairness but also erode trust between migrant communities and public institutions [36].

5.3 Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

Cultural and linguistic differences can create substantial obstacles for NRPF families seeking support [37]. Many affected households include recent migrants with limited English proficiency, making it difficult to navigate the complex language of legal and welfare processes [38].

Interpreter services, while essential, are not always readily available or consistently funded, especially for less common languages [39]. This can lead to delays in eligibility assessments, misunderstandings during interviews, or incomplete documentation submissions [40].

Cultural perceptions of authority and government can also influence engagement with local services. In some cultures, mistrust of official institutions often stemming from experiences in countries of origin may deter families from disclosing the full extent of their needs [41]. Social workers must therefore employ culturally sensitive engagement strategies to build rapport and encourage disclosure [42].

As shown in Table 1, while statutory duties mandate consideration of communication needs, the absence of a standardised national framework for interpreter provision leaves access uneven across regions [43].

5.4 Digital Exclusion and Service Accessibility

The increasing digitisation of service access has introduced new challenges for NRPF families [44]. Many local authority application processes for Section 17 support or housing assistance require online submissions, which presumes access to the internet, devices, and digital literacy [45].

NRPF households, already facing financial hardship, may lack the resources to maintain internet connectivity or possess the necessary skills to navigate online forms [46]. In some cases, applications are abandoned due to the complexity of digital platforms or the absence of language translation options [47].

Figure 3 illustrates how digital exclusion intersects with other barriers such as policy ambiguity and linguistic challenges to reduce service accessibility [48]. Without alternative in-person or paper-based channels, digital systems risk deepening inequalities for already marginalised groups [49].

6. MEASURING THE IMPACT OF NRPF POLICIES

6.1 Key Indicators of Family Stability

Assessing the stability of families affected by NRPF requires a multidimensional framework incorporating housing security, income stability, and child welfare outcomes [23]. Housing security is a critical determinant, as unstable accommodation whether through temporary shelters, overcrowded housing, or risk of eviction undermines overall wellbeing [24]. Research indicates that housing instability in NRPF households correlates strongly with increased school absenteeism and poorer health outcomes among children [25].

Income stability is another essential metric, encompassing both regularity of earnings and the capacity to meet basic living costs [26]. Employment restrictions for many NRPF migrants often confine them to informal or insecure work, leaving them vulnerable to sudden income shocks [27]. This economic fragility can push households into cycles of debt and reliance on charitable support, as demonstrated by trends outlined in Table 2 [28].

Child welfare outcomes, including physical health, mental wellbeing, and educational attainment, provide a direct measure of family resilience under NRPF constraints [29]. Limited access to healthcare and nutritious food, combined with the psychological stress of financial precarity, can negatively affect developmental milestones [30]. The intersection of these factors means that instability in one domain often cascades into others, amplifying the overall impact on family functioning [31].

Table 2: KPI Framework for Monitoring NRPF Impacts

Domain	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Measurement Method	Purpose / Relevance to NRPF Context
Housing Security	Percentage of NRPF households in stable accommodation for 6+ months	Local authority housing records; NGO shelter data	Tracks housing stability and risk of homelessness under NRPF restrictions.
Income Stability	Median household income relative to Minimum Income Standard	Self-reported surveys; anonymised income verification	Assesses economic vulnerability linked to work restrictions and benefit exclusions.
Child Welfare Outcomes	School attendance rates among NRPF children	Education authority data; school registers	Identifies potential educational disruption due to housing or financial instability.
Health Access	Percentage of NRPF families with a registered GP	NHS registration records; community health clinic logs	Monitors healthcare accessibility for affected families.
Emergency Support Demand	Number of crisis grants or food bank referrals issued to NRPF households	Local authority crisis teams; NGO food bank data	Captures dependency on charitable and emergency relief resources.
Safeguarding Interventions	Cases of statutory safeguarding action involving NRPF families	Children's services case files; safeguarding boards	Flags risk escalation requiring formal protection measures.

Table 2 presents a KPI framework for monitoring NRPF impacts across these domains, enabling local authorities and NGOs to identify emerging risks and target interventions more effectively [32]. However, without consistent data inputs, even the most robust frameworks may fail to capture the full scope of challenges faced by affected families [33].

6.2 Data Collection and Monitoring Challenges

Accurate assessment of NRPF impacts is hindered by significant inconsistencies in local authority reporting practices [34]. While some councils maintain detailed records of NRPF cases, others aggregate data in ways that obscure specific trends [35]. This lack of uniformity makes it difficult to conduct comparative analyses across regions or to track changes over time [36].

A further complication is that many local authorities do not disaggregate NRPF data by household type, immigration status, or length of stay in the UK [37]. Without this granularity, policymakers cannot accurately evaluate how different subgroups experience policy impacts [38].

Reporting gaps are compounded by resource limitations, as overstretched departments may lack the capacity to invest in specialised monitoring systems [39]. Even when data is collected, it may be siloed within departments such as housing, education, or social care making it challenging to produce a holistic picture [40].

Figure 3 and Table 2 together illustrate how incomplete datasets hinder efforts to identify service access bottlenecks and evaluate intervention effectiveness [41]. The absence of nationally mandated NRPF data standards exacerbates this challenge, leaving councils to develop their own collection methods [42].

Furthermore, privacy and safeguarding considerations may restrict data sharing between agencies, particularly when dealing with sensitive immigration information [43]. While these safeguards are important, they can unintentionally limit the capacity for coordinated, evidence-based responses [44].

6.3 Community-Based Evidence and Advocacy Data

Given the limitations of official datasets, community-based organisations and NGOs play a crucial role in documenting the lived experiences of NRPF families [45]. Through frontline service delivery and advocacy work, these groups gather qualitative evidence that often reveals trends not visible in formal statistics [46].

For example, charities providing food banks or legal aid frequently maintain detailed case records, capturing patterns in household needs, service gaps, and the effectiveness of interventions [47]. This grassroots data can be especially valuable for highlighting systemic issues, such as delays in eligibility assessments or barriers created by digital-only service models [48].

Advocacy reports produced by NGOs have been instrumental in influencing local and national policy debates on NRPF, providing policymakers with concrete examples of how restrictions impact family stability [49]. In some cases, such evidence has informed judicial reviews or contributed to changes in local authority practice [50].

By working in partnership with local authorities, NGOs can help bridge the information gap, integrating community-level insights into broader policy monitoring frameworks, such as the KPI system outlined in Table 2 [51]. This collaborative approach strengthens the evidence base, supports targeted interventions, and ensures that the voices of those directly affected are reflected in decision-making processes [52].

7. COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES

7.1 London Borough Response Models

Several London boroughs have developed tailored NRPF response models that combine innovative funding arrangements with multi-sector partnerships [27]. These approaches aim to address gaps created by national policy constraints while safeguarding vulnerable families. For example, certain boroughs have established pooled budgets between children's services, housing departments, and local charities to fund emergency accommodation and subsistence support [28]. This collaborative financing mitigates the burden on any single department and ensures continuity of care for NRPF households.

In addition to internal collaboration, boroughs have increasingly partnered with voluntary sector organisations to extend service reach [29]. Such partnerships facilitate access to food banks, legal advice clinics, and culturally competent mental health services. These community-based resources often provide critical lifelines where statutory provisions fall short [30].

Some boroughs have also leveraged external funding sources, including charitable grants and corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds, to maintain dedicated NRPF caseworker roles [31]. These specialists not only coordinate support but also act as liaisons between statutory services and community groups, improving information flow and trust.

A notable innovation has been the development of shared data platforms enabling multiple agencies to track NRPF cases more effectively [32]. These systems reduce duplication of effort, allow for early identification of risks, and streamline the process of connecting families to appropriate resources.

As highlighted in Figure 4, such borough-level models contrast sharply with more fragmented approaches in other regions, underscoring the potential benefits of integrated local strategies [33].

7.2 Scottish Local Authority NRPF Support Framework

The Scottish approach to NRPF support is shaped by legislative and policy differences that create a more robust welfare safety net compared to England [34]. While UK-wide immigration restrictions still apply, Scotland's devolved powers over social care, housing, and aspects of welfare allow for greater flexibility in responding to the needs of NRPF families [35].

Under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, local authorities have clear duties to safeguard children regardless of immigration status [36]. This legislative framework provides a stronger legal basis for delivering accommodation, subsistence, and safeguarding interventions without the same level of gatekeeping pressure faced by English councils [37].

In practice, Scottish local authorities often adopt a more preventative approach, intervening early to prevent destitution and homelessness [38]. This includes the provision of temporary housing and direct financial assistance while immigration issues are resolved [39].

Partnerships with third-sector organisations are also integral to the Scottish model, with coordinated service hubs offering legal, health, and welfare advice in a single location [40]. Such integrated delivery reduces the administrative burden on families and increases uptake of available support.

The Scottish Government has also issued national NRPF guidance, which promotes consistent practice across councils and encourages collaboration with the Home Office to identify potential routes to regularise immigration status [41].

As indicated in Figure 4, Scotland's NRPF support framework demonstrates how legislative autonomy and centralised policy guidance can produce more equitable service outcomes, offering valuable lessons for other jurisdictions [42].

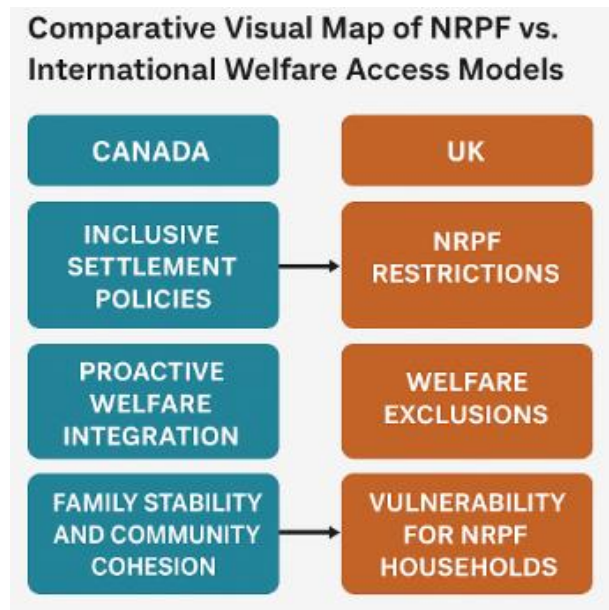
7.3 International Comparison: Canada's Settlement Support Programs

Canada's settlement support programs provide a useful international benchmark for integrating immigrant welfare access with broader social inclusion strategies [43]. While immigration regulation is a federal responsibility, settlement services are delivered in partnership with provincial governments and community organisations [44].

Key features include the provision of housing assistance, language training, employment support, and access to healthcare for newcomers, including some with precarious status [45]. These supports are grounded in a policy framework that views settlement as a shared societal responsibility rather than solely an individual burden [46].

Unlike the UK's NRPF restrictions, Canada's model prioritises early integration, recognising that access to basic welfare provisions can accelerate economic self-sufficiency and reduce long-term public expenditure [47]. For example, housing subsidies and targeted employment programs have been shown to improve labour market participation among immigrant families [48].

The Canadian system also emphasises data-driven monitoring, using centralised reporting mechanisms to track service usage and outcomes across jurisdictions [49]. This coordinated approach enables evidence-based policy adjustments and targeted funding allocations.



As illustrated in Figure 4, the contrast between Canada's inclusive settlement policies and the UK's NRPF restrictions highlights the potential of proactive welfare integration to improve family stability and community cohesion [50]. Lessons from this model suggest that embedding welfare access within a broader integration strategy could mitigate many of the vulnerabilities currently faced by NRPF households in the UK [51].

8. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Policy Reform Proposals

Reforming the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) framework requires targeted adjustments that balance immigration control with safeguarding responsibilities [32]. One proposed reform is the introduction of statutory exemptions for households with dependent children, ensuring that their basic needs for housing, subsistence, and healthcare are met regardless of immigration status [33]. This would align domestic law more closely with the UK's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, reducing the conflict between immigration restrictions and safeguarding duties [34].

Another proposal involves narrowing the scope of NRPF to exclude individuals with long-term UK residence or those awaiting the outcome of immigration applications [35]. This would prevent unnecessary destitution for families with established community ties. Local authority flexibility could be strengthened through clearer statutory guidance, reducing inconsistent application of support provisions between regions [36].

Furthermore, a national hardship fund, jointly administered by central and local government, could be established to support NRPF families during emergencies [37]. This would relieve the budgetary strain on individual councils and ensure equitable access to crisis assistance. As noted in Table 3, such policy reforms would require coordinated action from central government, local authorities, and voluntary sector partners to achieve measurable impact [38].

Table 3: Practice-Level Interventions to Support NRPF-Affected Families

Intervention Area	Specific Actions	Required Enablers	Intended Outcomes
Emergency Accommodation	Establish rapid-response housing schemes for NRPF	Dedicated funding streams; agreements with local	Reduce immediate homelessness risk and

Intervention Area	Specific Actions	Required Enablers	Intended Outcomes
Provision	families in crisis	housing associations	family disruption
Integrated Case Management	Assign multi-disciplinary teams including social workers, housing officers, and immigration advisors	Inter-agency data-sharing protocols; safeguarding boards' oversight	Improve service coordination and reduce duplication of assessments
Access to Basic Needs	Partner with NGOs to provide food, clothing, and hygiene products	Charitable grants; community volunteer networks	Mitigate material deprivation and support child wellbeing
Legal Support and Advocacy	Provide on-site immigration advice clinics at family centres	Pro bono legal partnerships; interpreter availability	Increase legal literacy and facilitate status regularisation
Digital Inclusion Initiatives	Distribute internet-enabled devices and offer digital skills workshops	Corporate social responsibility (CSR) sponsorship; training resources	Enhance access to online services, education, and job opportunities
Monitoring and Evaluation	Implement KPI-based outcome tracking linked to Section 17 support cases	Centralised data management system; annual reporting cycles	Measure intervention impact and inform future policy decisions

8.2 Practice-Level Interventions

At the practice level, enhancing cultural competence within social work teams is essential to improving engagement with NRPF families [39]. This includes training staff in the cultural norms, languages, and migration experiences of client communities, enabling them to build trust and deliver context-sensitive interventions [40]. Partnering with community leaders and faith organisations can also enhance outreach, particularly in communities where mistrust of statutory services is prevalent [41].

Proactive case identification is another critical intervention. Local authorities could implement early-warning systems that flag families at risk of destitution due to NRPF restrictions, enabling timely referrals to support services [42]. Joint working with schools, health services, and voluntary agencies can expand the reach of such systems and reduce the likelihood of children experiencing severe deprivation before help is offered [43].

Embedding NRPF liaison officers within multi-agency safeguarding hubs could improve information sharing and case coordination [44]. These officers would act as a bridge between immigration compliance requirements and safeguarding imperatives, ensuring that neither is compromised.

As shown in Table 3, practice-level interventions must be supported by appropriate funding, inter-agency agreements, and mechanisms for monitoring impact, ensuring that initiatives are sustainable and adaptable to changing policy contexts [45].

8.3 Research and Data Priorities

Robust evidence is crucial for shaping effective NRPF policy and practice [46]. Currently, there is no consistent national dataset on the prevalence of NRPF households, the duration of support needs, or the long-term outcomes for affected children [47]. This lack of standardised data hinders the ability of policymakers and practitioners to assess the true scale of need or to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of different interventions [48].

Future research should prioritise longitudinal studies tracking NRPF families over time, capturing both quantitative outcomes (e.g., housing stability, school attendance) and qualitative experiences (e.g., psychological impacts of prolonged uncertainty) [49]. Collaboration between local authorities, academic institutions, and the voluntary sector could facilitate richer datasets while ensuring that research is ethically sound and community-informed [50].

Developing a centralised NRPF case reporting platform, integrated with existing local authority systems, would allow for real-time monitoring of trends and resource demands [51]. As summarised in Table 3, these research priorities require cross-sector commitment to transparency, shared standards, and the integration of community-based evidence into formal policymaking processes [52].



A conceptual framework for equitable local authority responses to NRPF (Figure 5) integrates these policy and practice recommendations into a coherent model. It places child welfare at the centre of decision-making, supported by coordinated actions from central government, local authorities, and the voluntary sector. The framework emphasises early intervention, clear referral pathways, community partnerships, and continuous monitoring to assess impact and inform future adjustments.

9. CONCLUSION

The cumulative evidence presented throughout this report underscores the profound and multifaceted impacts of the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition on vulnerable families, particularly those with dependent children. NRPF restrictions exacerbate financial insecurity, limit access to safe and stable housing, and place children at increased risk of material deprivation, poor health outcomes, and disrupted education. Local authorities are positioned at the critical intersection of immigration control and safeguarding duties, often having to navigate the tension between legal compliance and child welfare imperatives.

Policy challenges arise from the complex and often ambiguous interplay between immigration legislation and social care responsibilities. The absence of clear statutory guidance results in inconsistent local authority responses, leading to a postcode lottery in the provision of essential support. Furthermore, the lack of adequate, ring-fenced funding exacerbates the strain on council resources, forcing difficult gatekeeping decisions that can delay or deny assistance to families in crisis. These challenges are compounded by cultural and linguistic barriers, digital exclusion, and the absence of reliable national data to guide evidence-based interventions.

Opportunities for reform lie in rebalancing the NRPF framework to better align with human rights obligations and safeguarding principles. Policy changes could include statutory exemptions for households with dependent children, clearer national guidelines to standardise practice, and the establishment of an emergency hardship fund to relieve local authority budgetary pressures. At the practice level, culturally competent engagement, proactive case identification, and multi-agency collaboration can enhance support pathways, ensuring families receive timely and effective assistance.

Ultimately, addressing the systemic challenges posed by NRPF is both a moral and strategic imperative. Equitable responses not only protect the welfare of children and uphold the UK's human rights commitments but also foster stronger, more resilient communities. By adopting an integrated approach that combines legislative reform, resource investment, and culturally sensitive practice, the UK can move towards a more just and effective system one in which no child's wellbeing is compromised by their family's immigration status.

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