

# A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

**Through the lens of lived experience:**

No Recourse to Public Funds, the violation  
of human rights, and resilience to it.

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This report is based on a collaborative photovoice research process conducted by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University, and Project 17's lived experience group, United Impact. Members of United Impact took photos to document their lived experience of the immigration condition No Recourse to Public Funds over a six-month period. The photos were curated into an exhibition and displayed at the Space gallery in East London for two days in March 2023. Members of the public and policy makers were invited to view the exhibition, and they also witnessed testimonies from participants of United Impact over the two days. This report presents the photos that were taken and their accompanying narrative, so that the knowledge that was produced about NRPF is digested beyond the gallery exhibition.



# Table of Contents

Foreword	6
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<hr/>	
Introduction	8
Box 1: Project Partners	11
Box 2: The Right to Food	13
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<hr/>	
No Recourse to Public Funds: The Context	14
NRPF Is Part of The Hostile Environment	16
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<hr/>	
Methodology: Photovoice and Participatory Action Research	18
Box 3: Photovoice Method - A Conceptual Overview	20
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<hr/>	
The Photos and their Narratives	22
Creative Writing Pieces About NRPF	66
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<hr/>	
What We Collectively Found About Living With NRPF	70
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
<hr/>	
Conclusions	78
Post-script from Project 17	80
Acknowledgements	81
References	82

## FOREWORD

There is ample evidence that the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy causes devastating effects on the lives of migrants in the UK, with an estimated 1.4 million people subjected to the condition. The hard work by organisations such as Project 17 and parliamentarians on the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee have ensured this has been clearly documented.

The testimony of migrants living with the NRPF condition have informed this work, however it is also important to learn directly from their lived experiences. As Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on NRPF, I have been grateful to hear members of United Impact speaking at numerous events about how NRPF causes poverty, destitution, homelessness and poor mental health, amongst other hardships.

I congratulate United Impact on the photovoice project, culminating in this powerful book, documenting their experiences and showing the lived reality of the NRPF policy. United Impact must be commended for their hard work to raise awareness of, and campaign against, the cruel government policy that makes their lives so much more difficult. I also echo their calls for the NRPF policy to be abolished, which could dramatically improve the lives of so many overnight.

The contributions made within this book are vitally important, and I believe it is a valuable addition to existing knowledge about NRPF. I hope everyone who picks it up takes something away and that you will agree that we cannot accept the current state of affairs.

**Kate Osamor**  
Member of Parliament for Edmonton

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights –

This is not only the opening provision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but it is also a reminder. The fact that we have to state that all humans are free and equal in a formal international document is a reminder that we must often repeat certain truths no matter how self-evident they may be. It is a reminder that denying people access to work, education, adequate food, and social security because of their legal status denies people their dignity.

The immigration law referred to as ‘No Recourse to Public Funds’ denies people access to essential aspects of the social safety net based on their legal status. Without access to a social safety net, migrants are made vulnerable to extreme poverty, hunger, and destitution. This has disproportionately harmed women, especially racialized women. This has also made children vulnerable to harm in ways that can have long-term impacts on their lives. The community group subjected to ‘No Recourse to Public Funds’ worked on this project by forming United Impact and working with researchers from Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, Coventry University and Project 17. Through this project you can hear women’s hopes and fears, as experienced in their daily life in the community, when faced with the discriminatory effects of ‘No Recourse to Public Funds’.

In some ways, it is not that those harmed by this law are voiceless as such. This project highlights that you have to know how to listen to hear their voices. In fact, this project helps people position themselves so that they can listen, bear witness, and understand how people are struggling against such discrimination and indignity. And the women, by producing their images and narratives, claimed their dignity and power.

**Michael Fakhri**

UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

In a 2012 newspaper interview, Theresa May announced a commitment to reducing immigration figures by creating a ‘hostile environment’ for undocumented migrants (1). This ‘hostile environment’ has been perpetuated by the state in the form of a restriction of access to basic social services, social security, work and education.

Critics point out that these immigration laws are indeed hostile because they deprive many migrants - documented and undocumented - of their basic human rights, such as access to work, education and social security. Unsurprisingly, these immigration laws that underpin the hostile environment are known to cause extreme poverty and hardship. Furthermore, without access to judicial processes, tens of thousands of people are detained yearly in immigration detention centres across the UK and some, as the Windrush scandal has shown, have been unfairly deported (2–4). Many commentators have also argued that Black and People of Colour communities are disproportionately affected by these immigration laws (1,5).

Rather than examine every aspect of immigration law, which is far reaching and complex, we are concerned here with the stipulation in immigration law referred to as ‘No Recourse to Public Funds’ (see chapter two). We have focused on No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) because we believe that it is not widely known that this immigration condition specifically excludes many migrants from a range of entitlements that are deemed public funds, such as, but not exclusively, social security. Because NRPF deprives migrants of the social safety net, many migrants experience extreme poverty, hunger and destitution (6–8).

Given the lack of social safety net, and arguably the lack of awareness of the harmful effects of the NRPF immigration condition, the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University and Project 17 (see box 1) developed a partnership to raise awareness about NRPF, and its role in violating a range of human rights and depriving many migrants of a humane life. Project 17 hosts a community group called United Impact where the members have the lived experience of being subjected to NRPF. This project was a collaboration with United Impact so that those with lived experience of NRPF have the opportunity to speak



# IMMIGRATION

Conservative

- End freedom of movement after the UK has left the European Union. EU immigrants to "only be able to access unemployment, housing and child benefit" after five years.
- "Require new arrivals to contribute" to funding the NHS.
- "Overall numbers" of immigrants "will come down", with "fewer lower-skilled migrants"
- "Review" border controls to "make them more effective".
- Establish a "humane" immigration system and scrap Conservative migration targets.
- Provide compensation to those affected by the Windrush scandal.
- Keep freedom of movement if still in the EU; "subject to negotiations in case of Brexit."
- "Fix the broken immigration system by scrapping the Conservatives' hostile environment, ending indefinite detention and taking powers away from the Home Office."
- "Give asylum seekers the right to work three months after they have and resettle 10,000 unaccompanied refugee children in the next ten years."
- End the 'hostile environment' set of policies
- Close all immigration detention centres
- Suspend all deportation flights
- applications are considered
- Bring forward a "new"
- Press for an urgent
- "Supr"

about the impact it has on their lives. By doing so, we at CAWR, Project 17 and their group United Impact, hope to raise further awareness of the harmful effects of NRPF, to create public discussions on the need to abolish NRPF, and to highlight the need to advance social protections against the worst effects of extreme poverty. To this end, this investigation was enabled with funding by FIAN International, an organisation that advances the right to food (see box 2) as a form of social protection against one form of extreme poverty, food insecurity. As such, this investigation is two-fold, in that it explores the lived experience of NRPF here, and separately, much more closely, the relationship between NRPF and right to food violations, which is discussed in further detail in an additional report (9)

This research was conducted with Project 17's support group, United Impact, which has around seventy participants with personal experience of NRPF. Amongst other things, their aim is to raise awareness of the extremely difficult conditions that families with NRPF are forced to endure. United Impact was newly formed at the time when the research was being conceptualised, and thus this research process also provided an ideal opportunity for United Impact to better understand collectively how NRPF impacts the lives of individuals within the group.

Before the research process started, we wanted to avoid reproducing some of the problems associated with knowledge production, namely where the researcher narrates community experiences for them, rather than with them (10,11). Here, we used the method photovoice (see chapter three), which supports the aim of ensuring that those subjected to NRPF are able to narrate their own experience of it. By taking pictures for themselves, participants of United Impact visually documented their lived experience of NRPF. Participants from United Impact met weekly and took photos to demonstrate the ways in which NRPF impacted their lives. The photovoice inquiry was conducted from November 2021 to February 2023. Members of United Impact are passionate about their cause, and they work with decision makers, local authorities and campaigners to collectively fight against NRPF, so that that all families in the UK are given equal rights, entitlements and are supported to thrive. The photos were, therefore, used to curate an exhibition so that policy makers, MPs and the general public could better understand the lived experience of NRPF. The exhibition, it was hoped, could influence decision makers to abolish NRPF, and to simultaneously develop new forms of, and strengthen existing social protection mechanisms, as a safeguard against the worst forms of harm associated with NRPF.

**“Because NRPF deprives migrants of the social safety net, many migrants experience extreme poverty, hunger and destitution”**

The exhibition was displayed at the SPACE gallery in Ilford, East London, and we intend to show the exhibition at other venues, including Parliament. However, we are also mindful that exhibitions have a limited shelf life. This report, therefore, aims to present the photos that were taken and their accompanying narrative, so that the knowledge that we produced is digested beyond the gallery exhibition.

The report also includes:

- An explanation of the NRPF immigration condition.
- An explanation of the method photovoice used in this research process.
- The photos taken by members of United Impact, and some of their portraits.
- A short summary of some of the discussions that United Impact had about the photos that they took.
- An exploration of possible ways to tackle the harmful effects of NRPF by advancing social protections, such as the right to food and other rights, and
- A brief conclusion about NRPF.

## **BOX 1:**

### **Project Partners**

CAWR's research focuses, amongst other things, on the right to food. Project 17, a small charity based in London, aims to reduce homelessness and severe poverty among migrant families excluded from mainstream welfare by their immigration status, specifically the immigration rule, No Recourse to Public Funds. In particular, Project 17 ensures that local authorities comply with their duties under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need. Section 17 enables local councils to provide accommodation and financial support to prevent children from being taken into care. This duty exists even if the family has no right to work, no access to welfare benefits and no leave to remain.



## BOX 2:

# The Right to Food

Levels of food insecurity have been rising since 2008 and up to ten million people go without sufficient nutritious food in the UK, despite it being the fifth biggest economy in the world (12). A lack of nutritional and culturally appropriate food causes profound physical and mental health hardships for families and individuals. The reasons for these rising levels of food insecurity are complex and linked to, but not exclusively to, inadequate social security, inadequate pay and poor working terms and conditions, the immigration condition of NRPF, the rising costs of living, structural racism, ableism, and sexism (9,13–17).

Food insecurity remains a problem, even though the UK government is currently a signatory of a range of United Nations instruments and conventions that ask nations to ensure that no one goes hungry or experiences food insecurity. For example, the UN Convention on Human Rights 1948 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1976 both advance the right to food. Dowler and O’Conner (18) identify a simple and powerful idea at the heart of discourse around the right to food: they argue that if access to food were considered a fundamental human right and incorporated into domestic law, this would compel the government to transform policies and social conditions that lead to wide-spread food insecurity (19–20). Since this is not currently the case, the state does not have a legal responsibility to ensure that all households and those without housing have access to nutritious food.

Viewing food as a human right is already part of domestic law in many countries across the globe, including Scotland (21). A Right to Food campaign is gaining ground because many commentators argue that this social protection ought to be extended to the rest of the UK (22). Right to food violations are often caused by poverty. Given that inadequate purchasing power has an impact on all aspects of life, the right to food also needs to be advanced alongside other social cultural and economic rights which also tackle poverty, such as the right to adequate housing and access to adequate social security.

Universal inalienable rights are mediated through the relationship between the state and the citizen. However, people seeking asylum are largely overlooked when it comes to their universal and inalienable rights, as they are not considered ‘members’ of a given state; in effect they are often rendered stateless and thus legally viewed as ‘non-citizens’. One of the goals of the right to food is for it to be incorporated into domestic law, to enable entitlements to tackle food insecurity. However, such a law might not apply to those considered non-citizens, and if the entitlements are considered public funds, they certainly would not apply to people who have NRPF. There is a real risk, therefore, that the entitlement afforded through right to food, and other social cultural and economic rights, may not apply to people subjected to NRPF, and this indicates that the challenge of hunger is arguably bigger than incorporating rights into law alone (9).

## CHAPTER TWO

# No Recourse to Public Funds: The Context

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the immigration condition No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), and outlines some of its negative impacts. NRPF is part of immigration law that was first introduced through the Immigration Act 1971. In its simplest form, NRPF is a term used by immigration law to restrict public funds to most migrants entering Britain. In other words, the immigration rule imposes conditions on entry and remaining in the country, where an individual will have to financially maintain and accommodate themselves and their dependents without access to public funds, legally referred to as ‘without recourse to public funds’. The public funds that are denied are most social security entitlements, such as universal credit, council house allowance and local authority homelessness assistance (6,7,23).

The NRPF rule applies to most people subjected to immigration controls. Due to this, people who migrated to study, work, visit or join family or spouses, and people who are seeking their international right for asylum, can all have no recourse to public funds. The exact number of people on NRPF is not clear, but it has been estimated that around 1.4 million people are subjected to the immigration rule (24). People who have overstayed on their visas, or those that are undocumented, by legal default, do not have access to public funds, and this adds to the uncertainty regarding the number of people who do not have access to public funds.

Given the restriction around accessing social security, NRPF denies many migrants a social safety net. According to a systematic review of reports and academic literature, Jolly et al (6) concluded that NRPF causes destitution and extreme poverty, that support services are often underfunded and inadequate in responding to critical needs, and that these services can view migrants through the lens of mistrust and racism (6). These services were also viewed with caution by people with NRPF because of concerns about deportation, experiencing further destitution and state intervention with regards to their children (6).

Studies have also found that people subject to NRPF can be living in inadequate housing and/or overcrowded shared accommodation (6,25). The inadequate housing also exacerbates food insecurity, as a lack of suitable cooking facilities inhibits the ability to cook nutritious food (26). As such, those on NRPF are disproportionately dependent on food banks to feed themselves.

Women with NRPF frequently report experiences of domestic violence (27,28). Research has shown that the NRPF rule has been used by men to coerce women to stay in abusive relationships, which has forced some women into the informal economy (28). Because of this, many advocacy groups understand NRPF within current patriarchal structures, and argue that NRPF worsens conditions for women, and that it urgently needs to be abolished (27–29).

Whilst the NHS is not listed as a public fund in relation to immigration policies, the NHS surcharge and prescription costs limit access to health care and increase vulnerability to Covid, HIV and tuberculosis (30). Access to education is also limited by NRPF, especially training, further and higher education (7,31). Disruption to child education and well-being is also a common experience for NRPF households. Some people on NRPF also live in anxiety of immigration raids and wait, often for up to ten years, to legally remain in the country indefinitely. Furthermore, people with NRPF are also disproportionately Black or People of Colour, and thus face additional forms of discrimination and microaggressions. Unsurprisingly, negative mental health issues were also triggered because of the hardships that NRPF causes (7,26,32).

Some migrant families can seek additional support through Section 17 of The Children Act 1989, which places a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under their jurisdiction through concrete support with accommodation and subsistence (33). Receiving this support is uneven, however, as it varies widely between local authorities, and often advocates are needed to ensure that the local government complies with their duties. Those who are undocumented can access Section 17 support if a human rights assessment concludes that the rights of the child are found to be threatened, and if there are legal and practical barriers in returning to their country of origin.

**“Many advisory groups understand NRPF within current patriarchal structures, and argue that NRPF worsens conditions for women”**

## NRPF Is Part of The Hostile Environment

Whilst NRPF has been around for a while, it is very much part of the 'hostile environment' policy which was introduced by the then home office minister Theresa May in 2012. The hostile environment was implemented through the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Act and following immigration laws. These laws have provided the government with further powers to monitor migrants. It is important to note that these powers have changed the contours of where people are monitored for immigration purposes. For example, immigration controls used to be mainly conducted at border controls at airports and other points of entry, but with these Acts they have also been extended into the everyday fabric of society. Yuval-Davis (34) calls this far-reaching surveillance of migrants an 'everyday bordering'. Under this border regime, landlords, health providers, educational staff and private sector workers are all

enlisted to check immigration status before providing a service to any individual. This everyday bordering regime is also known to disproportionately affect communities who are racialised as Black and People of Colour (POC) (34). Immigration raids are often targeted in neighbourhoods with large ethnic minority populations. In one study, 70% of businesses inspected by UK border forces were found to be from a Black or POC background (34). The NRPF immigration rule should also be considered in this wider context, where migrants live under surveillance, and face everyday forms of racism, alongside economic precarity, deprivations of human rights, and fear of detention and deportation. Furthermore, as the Windrush scandal has shown, the right to remain, even if someone has been in the country for decades, is precarious, and even those who migrated to the UK decades ago could face and have faced arbitrary deportation (3).



NO ONE IS ILLEGAL



## CHAPTER THREE

# Methodology: Photovoice and Participatory Action Research

There are a variety of ways to centre the voices of those most affected by NRPF. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a methodology widely used across the world to prioritise marginalised voices in research and community development processes, and has the potential to be utilised more often in examining the way that a range of human rights and dignity are undermined by NRPF. The methods used in PAR include, but are not limited to, citizen juries, theatre, video, deliberative inclusive processes, oral history and photovoice. In this project, we used the method photovoice (see chapter three), as it provided a medium that was accessible, in that everyone involved in the project has access to a mobile phone camera. Furthermore, this method makes no assumptions on levels of literacy or familiarity with conducting research. The method provides a creative and accessible way in which to produce knowledge on NRPF from an embodied experience.

United Impact meets every Wednesday morning on Zoom calls. The number of participants varies from week to week, but approximately thirty people attend, primarily but not exclusively women. The immigration status of individuals varies across the group, but many of the group are currently or have been previously subject to NRPF. Whilst the method of photovoice positions the power-to-narrate with the participants, the facilitators of this project wanted to ensure that the questions of consent and the right to withdraw from the project were just as prioritised as the narrating of their lived

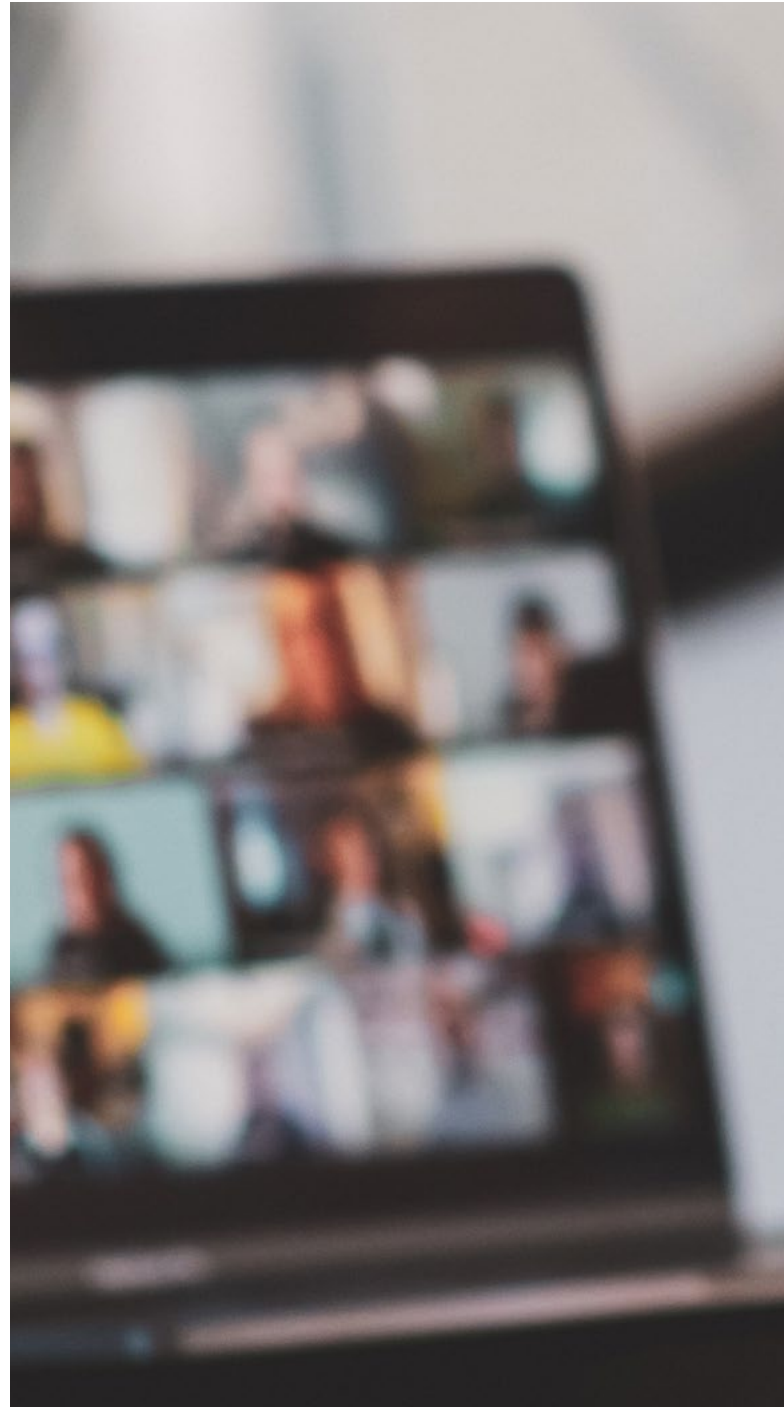
experience. To centre ethics and care, we organised three meetings on informed consent and the right to withdraw. We also worked through changing contexts, such as scenarios where photos taken of children today might be consented, and how this might change as the child grows up into adulthood. Through these discussions, we decided to blur out photos of children in the final exhibition.

The group started taking photos of their lives to get familiar with the photovoice project. The framing of the objectives was wide: 'take any picture that speaks to your life in the week'. The photos were discussed the following week as a group to better understand each other's lived experience and to collectively develop the photovoice practice. Each week we narrowed the focus of the photovoice inquiry to deep dive into how, specifically, NRPF influences their lives.

As the weeks of photo taking progressed, we held an additional workshop where we invited a professional photographer, Yaneva Santana, to share their skills and experiences of taking photos (35). In the workshop the participants could learn more about technical and artistic aspects of photography, the lighting, textures, colours, landscapes, and capturing emotions aesthetically. Following the workshop, the group recommenced with taking photos over a six-month period. The photo taking did not happen every week; living within a hostile environment is emotionally taxing and showing up each week unaffected

was not always possible, nor a realistic expectation. It was important that other activities were planned during the process, such as interventions that centred care. The photovoice project was interspersed with sessions on yoga, joy and celebration, and mental health workshops to ensure that there was emotional balance within the process.

The photos shared vary from individual to individual, and each photo presented by an individual was shared collectively. The reason for this approach was to connect with the principle of PAR, where research is also a process of pedagogy, where participants, researchers and community organisers learn from each other and from the pictures that are taken. Each week we shared our individual photos with each other over zoom calls. By doing so, each week the zoom call became a learning space where we gained an understanding of the impact that NRPF had on each individual. Also, through sharing the photos collectively, we gained a better understanding of how NRPF impacts the group as a whole. Our collective analysis, therefore, is based on the photos that were taken and their accompanying narratives, and on our 'field notes' that capture the collective conversations that were stimulated through discussing each individual photo. The individual photos, and their accompanying narratives, are shown in chapter four. Through our collective analysis, there were clear themes related to NRPF experiences, which are further discussed in chapter five.



## BOX 3:

# Photovoice Method - A Conceptual Overview

Sutton-Brown (36) provides an overview on how to use the photovoice method, including examples and guiding principles. However, a short summary of the method is outlined in this box. Photovoice was developed and conceptualised in the 1990s by Wang and Buris (37). The method is mainly conceptualised as a tool for social justice, and specifically informed by participatory action research, feminist theory and documentary photography (37–39). The feminist dimension of the method is based on the idea that women take the pictures, thus their viewpoint is utilised to conduct their own research. This approach also disrupts the male gaze inherent in epistemologies (40). Given that photovoice is sensitive to gaze and ensures that the voice of the research is grounded in the bodies of those taking the photos, this method seemed ideally suited to collaborating with migrants experiencing NRPF.

The typical procedure is as follows: cameras are given to individuals in a community group, who then take pictures to visually narrate their lived experience (36,37). In photovoice projects, the researcher takes on the role of facilitator

with two objectives: prioritising the voice of participants and decentring the researcher as the “expert”. Participants normally have the cameras for a number of weeks, which allows them to contextualise their lived experience in both the public and private spheres, and in the social spatial environment around them (36,41). The method fosters dialogue wherein participants can discuss the meaning and aesthetics of the photos with each other, and with the facilitator-researcher to create reflexive narratives (36,42,43).

Whilst there are clear benefits to using photovoice, there are a number of limitations and contradictions as well. Photovoice has been critiqued for the way in which the researcher selects images, or because images can be taken out of context, and thereby misrepresent the individual or community (44). It is also important to note that photovoice does not necessarily dissolve the power dynamics between researchers and participants, and thus, calls into question the assumption that a photovoice participant is free from the researcher’s influence (45).



## CHAPTER 4

### **The Photos and their Narratives**

Members of United Impact met weekly on Zoom calls to learn about photovoice, photography, and to share individual photos taken about living with NRPF with the rest of the group. The number of participants who contributed to the photovoice project varied from week to week, but United Impact has seventy members in total. Members of United Impact are primarily, but not exclusively, women. The immigration status of individuals varies, but many members of United Impact are currently or have been previously subject to NRPF.

Through this photovoice process we identified the impact that NRPF has on each individual, but through sharing the photos collectively, we also gained a better understanding of how NRPF impacts the group as a whole. Through our collective analysis, there were clear themes related to NRPF experiences, which are further discussed in chapter five. The photos that made the final cut for the exhibition are presented below. Furthermore, portraits of some of the participants who took photos are also featured in this chapter. For ethical reasons, United Impact decided to blur out photos of children in the final exhibition.



*“We are a family of four having to share a house with many other families, provided by Children’s Social Services. As the bathroom is often occupied, my son has had to use the potty in our room, where we also have to sleep, eat and where the children do homework.”*

Amara



*“The dangerous fungi is also growing inside our meter cupboard. It terrifies me that it will harm us if we touch it, especially the children.”*

Bola

*“This is the state of my kitchen, and this shows the state of the homes provided to us by Children’s Social Services. When you raise a disrepair issue or concern, it falls on deaf ears, so we are stuck with the issues and hazards, and not enough money to fix it”*



Bola



*“These are food bank cans I’m stuck with, as we are not allowed to choose what we think our families could eat. The food banks put marks on them so we cannot return them or exchange in a normal store, eg Tesco, Asda, Corner store, etc.”*

Bola





*“Captured here are poisonous mushrooms growing on the outside of our building, at the same spot as the mould growing inside our house. These are dangerous and cause me a high level of stress about my children’s safety.”*

Bola

*“We have black mould growing on the walls in our house. I am very worried about the safety of my children, as black mould can cause and lead to respiratory issues and other medical conditions, or even death.”*

Bola



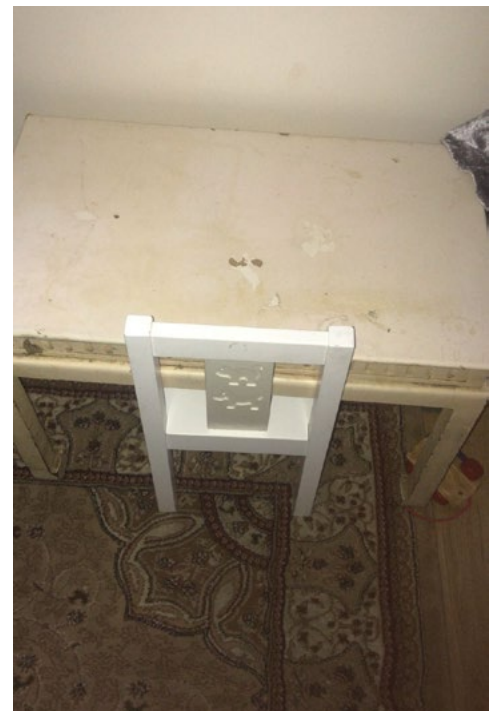


*“This photo shows the lack of space for my children to play together and develop, in our accommodation provided by Children’s Social Services.”*

Mary

*“I found this used and abandoned table and chair outside on the road side. I cleaned them up for my child to use, as we were given accommodation without adequate furnitures, fittings and fixtures.”*

Mary





*“My apartment was given to me empty. I saw carpet where the rubbish is collected, I ignored it at first but went back to collect it later as I could not afford the cost of a new one. I dragged it in with my baby on my back. I swept it for 2 hours. This is my furniture for the week. I was so worried we had no carpet, but then I found my inner strength, we have this until we find some free furniture.”*

Mary

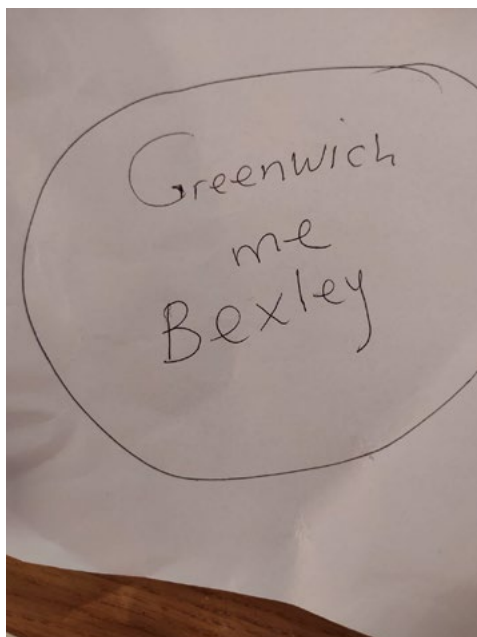
*“This photo shows the lack of space for my children to play together and develop, in our accommodation provided by Children’s Social Services.”*

Mary



*“In our accommodation provided by Children’s Social Services, this is my children’s bedroom. There is a lack of space. I made their bed and the shelves above it myself, to find space to store their books and toys. They should not need to be kept above their beds as it’s dangerous, or stuffed in a tower of boxes next to the bed. We would like families to be provided with enough space for children to thrive.”*

Francisca



*“I’m supposed to be supported by Greenwich Children’s Services, but they put me in housing in Bexley. When I need something I’m being told by Greenwich that my postcode is not in Greenwich, so they can’t help me anymore. So my children and I are left in the middle without adequate support.”*

Francisca

*“We don’t have enough money to top up the electricity, even though it’s so cold. It is now even harder for people with NRPF, with the rising cost of living.”*

Francisca



*“My accommodation was provided to me by the NRPF team of Children’s Social Services. I live high up on the second floor, yet there’s no lift. There are just a lot of stairs to carry shopping bags up with two children. At the time my children were both too young either to be left alone or to keep climbing up and down with me. If I leave my shopping downstairs so I can take my children upstairs first, the shopping would be stolen before I return downstairs. I believe the authorities should consider the needs of the family before providing and placing us in unsuitable housing. To top this off, I had just had a cesarean operation, due to walking up and down, my stitches were infected and I had to return to hospital.”*

Francisca



*“We are living in a disheartening condition. Our flat is full of black mould, I try to clean it but it doesn’t go. I have reported it to Children’s Social Services who are supporting me, but nothing has been done. My baby blacked out and was taken by ambulance to A&E, due to a reaction to the mould. They have not moved us. I am so worried that this might become a fatal situation, especially after seeing the news of the little boy that died from a similar situation.”*

Seke



*“This is how bad the black mould is in my place, provided by the NRPF team at Children’s Social Services. It is more black in other parts. I emailed the council about it. I spend £100 a week on the electric heater, which leaves us without money for other essentials like food. The bed is close to the walls. It’s worse in winter.”*

Martha



*“My family shares a house with other people, provided by the NRPF team of Children’s Social Services. This is the shared toilet and bathroom. Some people just go there to smoke and anytime my child goes to toilet, the smoking triggers his asthma. I have complained to the council but nothing was done.”*

Kehinde





*“This is the main passage in the building of our shared house. The ceiling is falling in and dangerous, we are scared to walk underneath it.”*

Kehinde





*“This photo was taken recently and we feel quite lost. I was trying to figure out which way to go. My son sat on the stairs tired and waiting as we had been walking for a while. This is similar to our current situation. Now that we are on the brink of homelessness, we don’t know which road we need to take... when will we ever find a place that my son could finally call HOME.”*

Yvette



*“This photo was taken while waiting outside my son’s school. My son said to me, “Mama look a rainbow. I wish I could find the end of that rainbow so I could get the pot of gold.” I asked him, “What will u do with the pot of gold?” He answered, “I will give it to you so you have money to buy our house and money for the taxi, so we don’t need to walk everyday to school, and also buy you some seafood, I know it’s your favourite!”*

Yvette

“This is a photo of my son playing at the beach. I used an app to create the oil painting effect. It symbolises freedom! My son and I have been stuck inside a box for so many years now with NRPF, blocked by the walls on each side and nowhere else to go! Seeing my son playing freely in the waters makes me worry about his future.”

Yvette



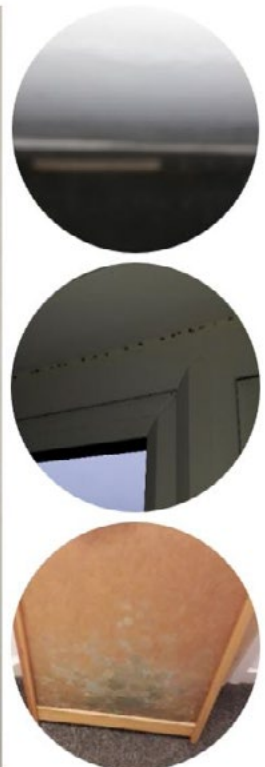


*“We love taking a walk especially when there’s lots of sunshine, enjoying some fresh cool air and putting all the worries of life aside.”*

Steph

*“This is one of the problems I’m dealing with since last winter. I monitor this mould and clean it off, but it returns quickly because the main problem hasn’t been fixed. I have to use harsh chemicals to get rid of it which isn’t healthy for my daughter. I spray the mould, and have to open all the windows and go outside with my daughter to wait”*

Steph





*“Cooking food with passion is one of the greatest gifts I can give to those I love, however accommodation provided to families with NRPF don’t always come with cooking facilities. This leaves us with no other option then to feed our children fast food which is not healthy for them and can lead to health problems, now and in later life.”*

Emelia



*“My shared accommodation was provided by the NRPF team of Children’s Social Services. Another tenant takes hard drugs, he forgot to put this in the rubbish after his use. I am very worried about the safety of my children.”*

Olaitan



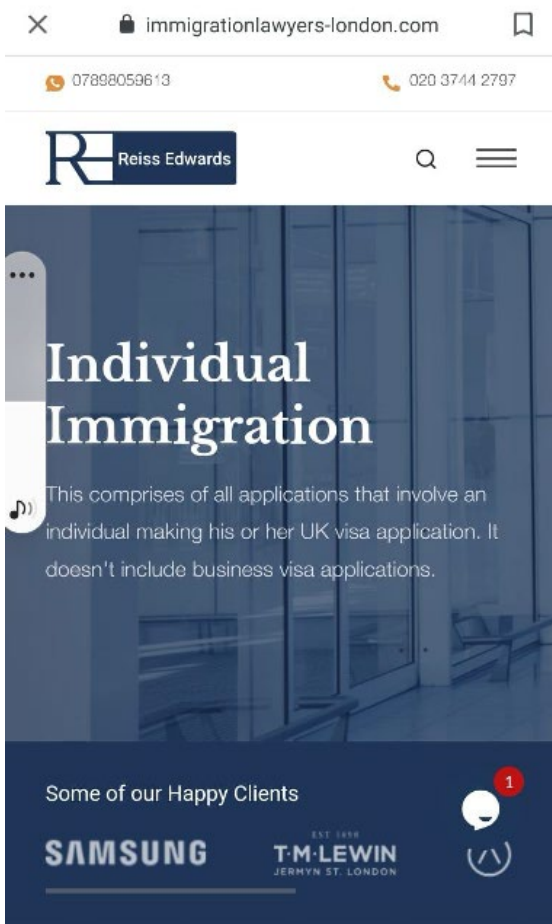
*“This is my daughter’s drawing, she always wants and draws a big house, but because we are not entitled to public funds, it’s very hard to afford. She expresses her wishes and emotions in her drawing book.”*

Ayanthi

*“We are five people in my family and we are living in a one bedroom flat. We have only got one electric heater in the flat, and we still can’t use it because we can’t afford it. Winter is a really difficult time, we hope this struggle will end soon.”*

Ayanthi





*“For me, immigration costs are a big concern, because the money Children’s Social Services are giving to us is not enough. I have to pay my solicitor and all living costs. I have to raise almost £1500 for legal fees now plus the application fee which is now over £2000 per applicant. It’s really stressful, I’m not sure if someone can look into this.”*

Fiona

On the 4th of October 2023, the government increased visa fees, and in January 2024 the cost of the immigration health surcharge will rise. The cost of one 30 month visa application for one adult including the immigration health surcharge rise, will increase from £2,608 to at least £3,845.50. Over ten years on a route to settlement, this will cost one adult over £18,000; that is £5,000 more than before the proposed increases.

*“Our first impression of this property given by Children’s Social Services was so bad, I had to complain about it. The door did not lock properly, and was not safe. After a week with no response, they eventually came to fix it. It’s sad for people living in this kind of environment, people without good luck. I want to share my concern about the kinds of housing given to families with kids. The council really needs to look at the properties beforehand. Poor quality housing is provided, it has a bad impact on people’s mental health.”*



Fiona





*"This is my son, he is 10 months old. I introduced him to an African food called Amala and Ewedu, to my surprise he loved it. However traditional foods are not provided at food banks, and are not sold in stores where you can spend the vouchers given to us by Children's Social Services."*

Balakis

*“This is a dress made by me for my princess. Even with the difficult situation we’re going through, we have had to improvise in order to clothe my children as I can’t always afford what they need.”*

Pratima





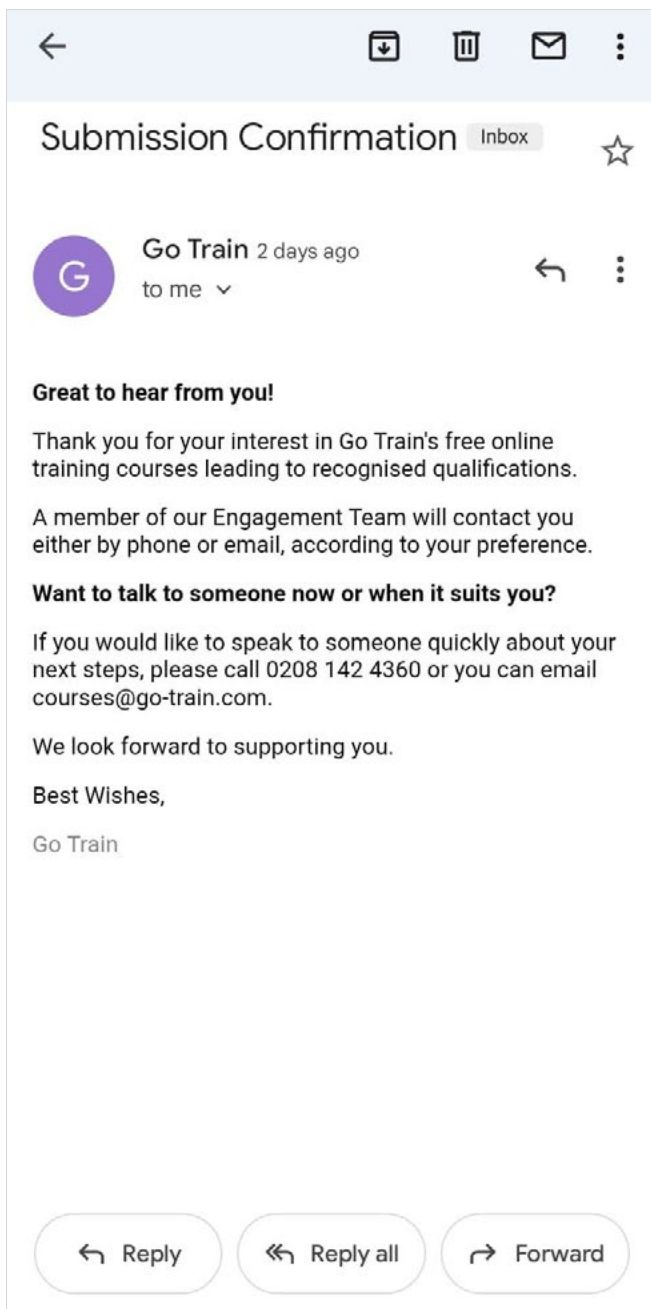
*“The little and inexpensive things cannot be purchased by some people, especially by families with NRPF. A lady went to the shop with her two younger children to buy a small bowl of peppers for just a pound, so she could make a meal for her children. She searched through her small bag countless times but couldn’t find enough coins to pay, so she had to leave. A fellow customer had to pay for her. It’s important to emphasise that families don’t always find good samaritans in times of need, so would have no choice than to go without with is needed. Due to the delays in the application process by the Home Office, and in the ever increasing cost of living crisis, more families with NRPF are being left hungry and destitute.”*

Linda



*“I live in accommodation provided by Children’s Social Services. This is our washing machine that has been broken for a long time. I have to spend an average of £30 a week at the launderette, this is money that I would spend on food or bills. The social workers and landlords did not reply to my complaints. I have to take the bucket and the basket full at least twice a week, because there are three of us and my son’s school uniforms. Some properties are even provided without washing machines, so we have to wash clothes by hand.”*

Nelva



*"I wanted to train here for a change of career in to cyber security. The course is about £1200, but free for those who have recourse to public funds. It's so disheartening to know that no recourse to public funds can cost you a future, and even deprive you of career development choices. We are forced to wait a long time for Home Office decisions and do nothing, it makes us very depressed. NRPF is a form of discrimination."*

Beauty



*"I found purpose working and am grateful to be able to give back to my community. We believe that everyone should have the right to work, regardless of your immigration status."*

Oluwaseun



*“This is a typical Colombian dish that we enjoy eating. However, we can only have it occasionally on a Sunday after church due to the lack of financial support we receive from Children’s Social Services. Traditional foods are not provided at food banks, and are not sold in stores where you can spend the vouchers given to us by social services.”*

Nelva

*“These are basic everyday vitamins, that families with NRPF cannot afford. Despite struggling to have varied nutritional diets due to low financial support, it’s also hard for people to buy medication or vitamins. This is very unjust as our health is a primary need.”*

Hannah

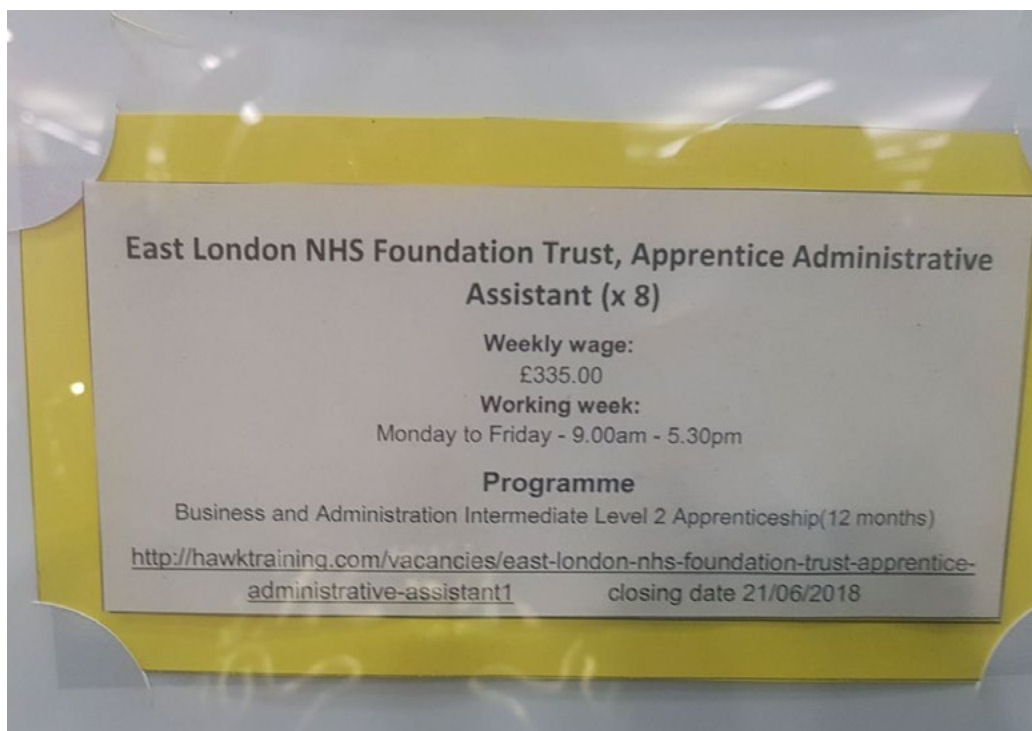






*“I was in an abusive relationship. When the father of my baby left us, my child and I had no money for food or nappies for seven months, or hot water for three months. Children’s Social Services refused to help me, they told me my child was not in need, and to rely on friends and the church who were buying me some food. Social workers tried to persuade my abusive ex partner to take my child, due to me having NRPF. I was very ill with Covid 19, couldn’t breathe and was being evicted. After advocacy, social services eventually started supporting us and we were able to remain in this house. It was a very painful time that I will never forget.”*

*Miss Q*



*“People with NRPF face barriers to career development, training and education. This is an advert I saw for an NHS apprenticeship position. People with NRPF are not eligible to apply.”*

*Tosin*



*“The NRPF team of some local authorities, provide families with supermarket vouchers instead of cash. This restricts people and prevents them from being able to shop cheaply at shops or markets of their choice, or to buy and make traditional foods. Inadequate financial support from local authorities also impacts this, and it’s harder with the rising cost of living.”*

*Tosin*

*“Many parents are required to purchase school uniforms which cost around £320 - £350 per child. Yesterday my son ripped his trousers, so I have to buy him a new pair, this becomes more expensive and difficult for families. Families with NRPF rely on charities for uniforms, shoes, clothes and hygiene products. When this can not be provided, children have to go without or go to school in ripped clothes. This leads to bullying and other mental health issues.”*

*Tosin*



## The Portraits

During the photovoice project, we discussed and agreed that the photos that the participants took would remain anonymous. For example, we would not say which participant took which image. At the same time, we discussed the importance of recognising that the photos were taken by real human beings subjected to cruel immigration policies, with participants expressing the desire to showcase the human being behind the lens. Professional photographer Yaneva Santana, therefore, visited some of the participants in their homes or in the neighbourhood in which they lived and took their portraits. In this way we hope to think about NRPF in a more embodied way, as a condition that has a deep and profound impact in people's everyday experiences of life, and that behind the lens are real people.















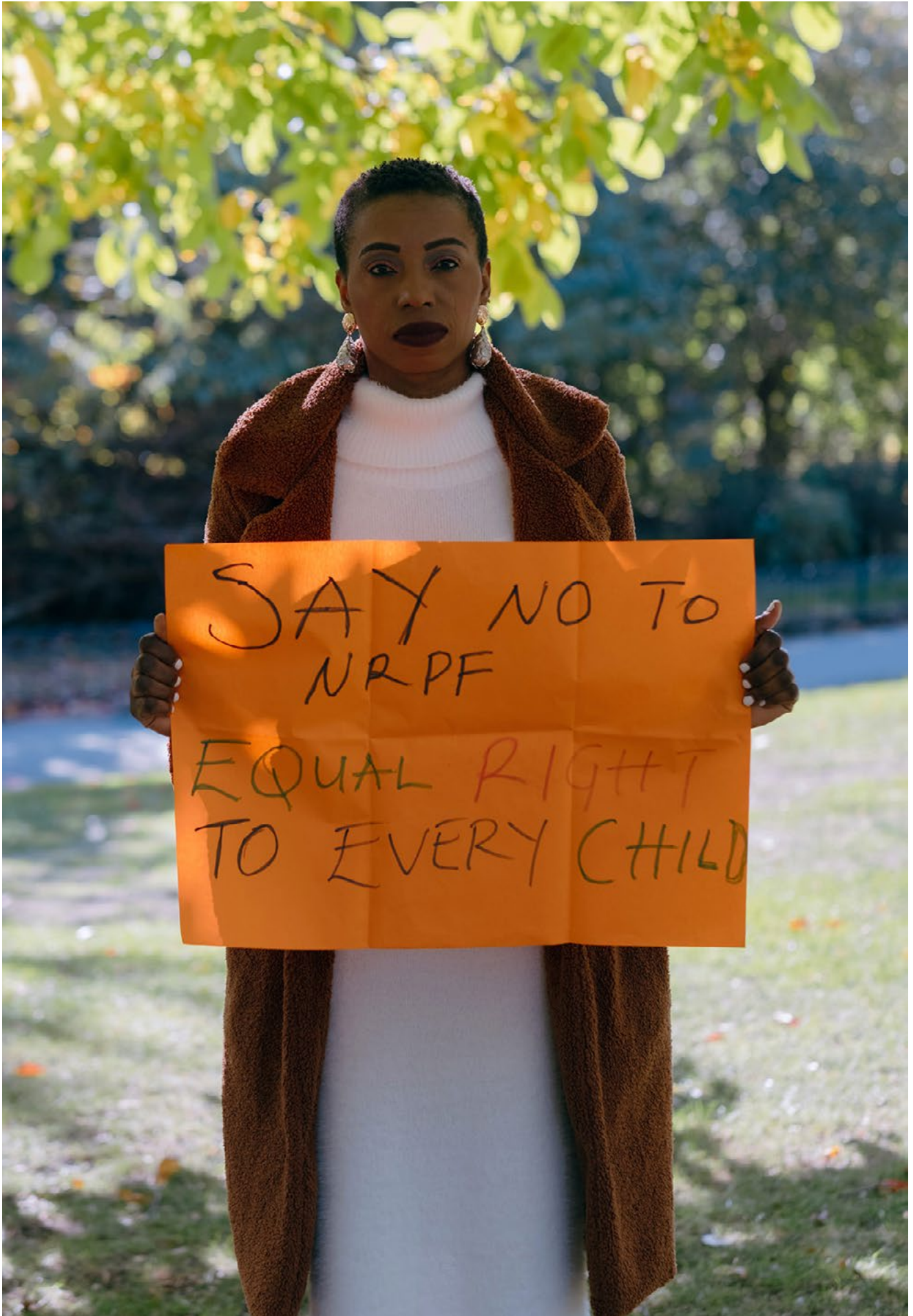
















## Creative Writing Pieces About NRPF

As part of this photovoice project, we also hosted a creative writing session. During that session, three members of United Impact wrote poems that we have included here.

### Participant of United Impact:

“WHAT A TATTERED STATE MY ONCE GLORY-FILLED UNITED KINGDOM HAS BECOME! A DEEP INSIGHT INTO THE ORDEALS OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.”

Your royal highness; the adored King of the most sought-after land for every future-minded individual.

The eminent King of the most hallowed space on the Earth's surface, where highest premium was once placed on human lives and their wellbeing.

The liberal King of an exquisite nation where love reigned; laws worked; economy was well managed; and human rights were seriously protected.

The virtuous commander of the United Kingdom that we all once knew as a promising home, of myriads of people from all spheres of the universe; the reason why the attention of every asylum seeker went nowhere but here – the once fertile land.

But dear King; why? Why is it that what used to be a bed of roses for lawful and law-abiding citizens and immigrants is now an underworld?

Oh! I cry.

In fact, we cry.

We cry of being unfairly treated.

We cry of being treated as dregs.

We cry of being treated as second class citizens.

We cry of being intimidated and humiliated.

We cry of being emotionally battered.

We cry of not being adequately listened or attended to.

We cry of being handed poor and far-away accommodation.

We cry of being offered unworthy jobs with lean pay that cannot fairly sustain us.

We cry of what seems to be like the life of an alien in the wilderness.

We left our individual nation as a result of abject poverty and suffering and here we are; further groaning.

Is this not a scenario of jumping from a frying pan into fire?

It saddens my heart to see that the difficulties I ran for from my home country is now what I have to deal with everyday all over again.

It touches my sensitivity when I see bankrupt immigrants thrown out of their abodes due to incapacitation.

It stresses and destabilizes me each time I am intermittently thrown around from one far abode to another.

We are in search of prospects for ourselves and our posterity, migrated here but what we developed instead are problems. Yeah!

Problems.

Problems of health accruing from the anxiety of being attacked by gangsters lurking around.

Problems of health emanating from the unfit houses we are handed to live in.

Problems of health springing from the fear of being unjustly deported.

Oh! Dear King; where do we go from here?

Immigrants are weeping and yet, no comfort.

Immigrants are yearning and still, no quenching.

Immigrants are lacking and yet, no succour.

Immigrants are suffering and still, no hope in sight.

Immigrants are dying and yet, no rescue.

There seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel for the immigrants.

Dear King; hear our cries and come to our rescue.

Immigrants beg for better treatment from a nation under you and the government. Do not let us die in despair; the majority of us mean so well for the United Kingdom, and in time overcoming hard work we would optimally harness our potential, and meaningfully impact this land and the lives in it.

Long-live my UK, long-live London.

May God bless the King.

Thank you.

### **Participant of United Impact:**

You are broken, you are stuck. Your voice is lost completely in obscurity. You feel intimidated and as if your opinion doesn't count. Just because you are an immigrant with NFPF, you are totally isolated like a plague. You are so frustrated and downcast forever. Your hope is drowned; only God can help you. Say no to NFPF.

### **Participant of United Impact:**

Equal rights for all children

Stop discrimination between children

It's time to stop the pain

It's time to end the tears of children

No equal rights for children makes parents have depression.

They need that love to make them stronger.

Putting smiles on every child's face, without being discriminated against goes a long way for both the children and parents.

Coming into the world is not the children's fault, so equal rights are very important

for those children, so that there won't be

questions to be answered by their parents. They ask why am I not entitled to this or

that, which is frustrating and causes a deep depression, which I have experienced.

**“You are broken, you are stuck. Your voice is lost completely in obscurity. You feel intimidated and as if your opinion doesn’t count. Just because you are an immigrant with NFPF, you are totally isolated like a plague. You are so frustrated and downcast forever. Your hope is drowned; only God can help you. Say no to NRPF.”**

Participant of United Impact



Departures to Toronto 12:15 PM  
Arrivals from Toronto 12:30 PM  
Way out 12:45 PM

← Platform 2  
Trains to Highways 4 and 7 from Canada West

## CHAPTER FIVE

# What We Collectively Found About Living With NRPF

This section attempts to summarise the key issues that emerged through the discussion about the photos taken and some of the collective messages that the photos communicate about living with NRPF. A range of negative outcomes associated with NRPF was shown to be commonplace among the group. Many of the photos that were shared and discussed revealed poor housing conditions, including inadequate cooking facilities, financial precarity in terms of purchasing food, energy, transport, and toys and play activities for their children. Some of the photos and discussions revealed that there were significant amounts of black mould in people's houses making children sick, a lack of space to crawl/walk, hostile treatment from social workers, and refusals of Section 17 support when families were entitled to it. Families also described how they had to use supermarket vouchers exclusively as they had no access to cash for food or buses. The combination of these negative factors were perceived to be affecting the children's development and creating poor outcomes for families. The key themes that emerged from the photovoice process are detailed below, with the accompanying photos in chapter four.

### Housing

The published literature on NRPF has widely recognised that housing is a key challenge because there are structural restrictions in place in accessing social housing or governmental homelessness assistance (26,31). Unsurprisingly, people subject to NRPF and undocumented migrants

are the fastest growing demographic group experiencing homelessness. Some participants in the group were provided with housing by the local authority because of the rights of the child as articulated in Section 17 of the 1988 Children's Act. Some participants, however, were living in poor housing conditions that are all too typical of people living on low incomes and facing poverty. As such, it is quite typical for people on NRPF to experience overcrowding, insecure tenancy, exploitative landlords, the risk of evictions and even living in temporary night shelters. The quality of housing is also known to be poor, where cooking facilities and shared spaces can be of low quality.

The photos and the discussions on housing conditions echoed the problems outlined in the published academic literature (6,7,23). But there are also some other key concerns around housing that the photovoice discussions revealed. The houses in which people lived were often cold even before the energy crisis, but recently (2022-2023), because of the increases in energy prices, heating became unaffordable, leaving many people to experience and suffer the biting cold. There was also a serious lack of space, and the structure of the shared accommodation worked against many of the families in United Impact. For example, the bedrooms for children were often cramped, if they had one, and where they did, the furniture had to be arranged in ways to maximize the small space; every inch was vital and it required innovative and creative means to make the space count.

**“Many of the photos that were shared and discussed revealed poor housing conditions, including inadequate cooking facilities, financial precarity in terms of purchasing food, energy, transport, and toys and play activities for their children”**

Furniture in itself was also a challenge, and some people in United Impact obtained their furniture from the street, cleaned it, and found resourceful ways to use it in the home, as furniture was too expensive to buy on already stretched budgets. Some of the group also did not have access to a TV in the house, and sometimes it was hard to entertain the children, especially as financial barriers prevented access to public transport or paid play activities. Many of the mothers constantly had to find inventive ways to entertain the children even when they were tired and cold themselves. One of the participants, Sarah (name changed), also discussed the difficulties of being frequently constrained to the home because of limited budgets to participate in social activities outside of the house. Sarah and her children were often at home during the cold winter and she remarked that, ‘people can’t really leave the place, we have to stay home with no TV, it’s a real stress with the children, it feels too much’.

One of the participants used to live in a house where the kitchen was on the first floor and they lived and slept on the fifth floor, and the inconvenience for her and the children to obtain a snack when they needed one exacerbated the strain and tiredness associated with poor housing conditions. Some of the participants also had to walk up many flights of steps with heavy shopping and children as there was no lift or the lift was in disrepair. In some housing, the photos reveal how sharing a bathroom with non-family members also caused significant distress, especially where there was evidence of drug taking in the bathroom, which was particularly disturbing for mothers to experience as these spaces were also used by their children. As such, children were unnecessarily exposed to drugs. Furthermore, a family and two babies under the age of three had to share the bathroom with other families. In another example of poor housing conditions, one family lived in only one room, and because

of a lack of adequate toilet facilities, the children had to use a potty in their one room where they slept, gathered, ate and did their homework.

Perhaps the most striking and emotionally charged housing problem experienced by many of the participants was, and continues to be, excessive mould. The black mould could be seen ascending up and across the walls, and into the ceilings. We know that

**“In one house, a fungus in the form of a mushroom ballooned out of a kitchen cupboard, a clear warning sign that the house was too cold, damp and inhospitable”**

the spores from the fungus are slowly being released into the house, and into the lungs of children and anyone else who inhabits those homes. In one house, a fungus in the form of a mushroom ballooned out of a kitchen cupboard; a clear warning sign that the house was too cold, damp and inhospitable. Bleach was used to clean the mould, but this either proved to be a short-lived break, or completely ineffective, as the mould was persistent and wide-spread and thus could not be controlled. The feelings amongst the group were often of intense sadness, despair and rage. The discussions around the photos of the black mould especially revealed the extent of emotional skill that the mothers were being forced to exercise in order to deal with this environmental hazard. Parents had no choice but to show emotional strength, resilience, faith and hope for a better day, no matter how distant that hopeful horizon was, as recourse to any form of civil justice in tackling mould and other poor housing outcomes, whilst not impossible, was difficult to achieve.

Tina (name changed) was worried about the health of her children; they were housed in shared accommodation where people smoked cigarettes and cannabis regularly. Tina was worried about the children's asthma, and it was difficult to alter the behaviour of the adults in the house that she shared with as they did not seem to



make any concessions for children being in the house. Tina explained how being in the house was 'killing her child, and that it was heart-breaking, but important to speak about it'. During this discussion, it was clear that many people from United Impact shared this heartbreak, and Lisa (name changed) remarked that 'the children will remember, they are small, but they will remember'; echoing the feeling in the discussions that children see and remember the negative experiences that they face. During our discussion, there was a recognition that the poverty that NRPF was causing was also triggering immeasurable trauma now, and in years to come. Studies have backed up these concerns. Structural oppression and inequalities that cause poverty and ill health, are also known to be causing long term emotional trauma (46). Haines (46) argues that tackling the trauma and ill health requires radical transformation of the structures of power and oppression that cause them.

People in the group also reported about how they were housed in different areas from where they were living in before, or far away from their children's school. In some instances, people were dealing with one local authority, but housed in areas outside of that local authority's jurisdiction. For example, some people were living in Streatham when their local authority assistance was located in Woolwich, and one person was even allocated housing in Birmingham despite spending most of their life in London. One of the participants remarked that 'they wanted us to die before we get papers', making reference to the way in which local authorities paid little regard to where people were living, or any recognition that people subjected to NRPF also built

lives around communities, their family, friends and networks. These networks were a source of care, love, and life, and the local authorities did not adequately consider these thoroughly human aspects when sourcing housing provisions.

## Financial Challenges

It is well recognised that people with NRPF face destitution, an extreme form of poverty (6,8,25). To illustrate, food insecurity and reliance on food banks and other food relief projects, the difficulty in heating homes, and barriers to accessing transport consistently have been directly attributed to the poverty that NRPF causes (6,25). Similarly, here, the photos and connected discussion clearly demonstrated the ties between NRPF and financial hardship. It is important to note that, whilst this project does not attempt to precisely measure food insecurity amongst this group, it was evident that food insecurity was a common reality for them, and that many in the group felt anxious and distressed, and experienced feelings of indignity by rising energy and food costs. One of the participants remarked that, 'the bills are rising but the income is not'.

Whilst food banks were seen as a good thing overall, there were significant problems associated with using them. There were the difficult emotions around having the need to go to them, such as the shame associated with being reliant on food aid and not being able to feed yourself and your family (47,48). Furthermore, the lack of food choices was also a subject of concern. Most of the food from food banks was canned. They were heavy to carry up flights of stairs. The nutritional value of

**“A family and two babies under the age of three had to share the bathroom with other families. In another example of poor housing conditions, one family lived in only one room, and because a lack of adequate toilet facilities, the children had to use a potty in their one room where they slept, gathered, ate and did their homework”**

tinned food was also contested amongst the group. Some of the food from food banks, the group noted, was processed and had a high salt content, and therefore was not suitable for the wellbeing of their children. Furthermore, there was no fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy or meat at the food banks, and this lack of nutritional value weighed heavily on the minds of parents.

It was also distressing that there was no African food at food banks, and thus it was clear that no kind of African cuisine could be cooked from the produce. This was just another demonstration to the participants of United Impact that they were economically and culturally marginalised by the effects of NRPF, and this was particularly challenging as the vast majority of people at United Impact loved African food. It was disheartening for them, that the limited choice at food banks undermined the reality in which many people lived, a

diverse multicultural Britain around them, which was not reflected in the food bank parcels. Many of the participants at United Impact also received vouchers instead of cash to purchase food. These vouchers cannot be used in all stores or to purchase all products, particularly baby milk, and this felt unfair for many people at United Impact.

Medication was another expense that stretched weekly budgets too far. During her child's illness, Ifeoma (name changed) needed to obtain nasal spray at cost of £4 - £5 to ease the discomfort that her child was facing. Ifeoma was aware that this simple purchase tipped the balance in terms of purchasing other necessities, food and heating. This situation caused significant distress across the group, as easing a child's discomfort from illness was not a choice but a necessity, and the financial trade off that involved was hard to bear.



In winter months, especially with rising energy costs, heating was a particularly distressing problem. The colder it became during the winter period, the harder it got to cope without steady warming heat. One of the participants, Adaeza (name changed) was living in a converted pub with an industrial style heating system. In addition to other energy costs, Adaeza could pay up to £500 per month for heating during the winter period. Adaeza had the right to work and had a part time job, so she had more than some people on NRPF. However, she still had to take the children to and from school, and thus did not have enough time to work full time. These challenges, and the fact that Adaeza was barred from Universal Credit entitlement, demonstrates, in her own words, ‘the painful reality and lack of empowerment’ she had in this hostile environment. Whilst Adaeza was resilient and resourceful, the context tested her resolve, and understandably, pushed her to the difficult edges of emotions. As Adaeza

discussed her plight, the rest of the group showed immense empathy in the knowledge that the situation Adaeza faced was not too different from their own. The empathy was also an act of solidarity with Adaeza, and the value of United Impact is that each participant of the group bears witness to the struggle that each individual faces.

Despite the clear challenges of living with NRPF, it was difficult to get consistent and good support to navigate emotional and legal challenges. Getting legal support to deal with immigration status issues, navigating the local authority, housing, and mental health services, were all cited as obstacles. One of the participants remarked that despite these obvious challenges, it was, ‘still difficult to get support, and to be traumatised for so long, it is hard without adequate support, to survive. There is no support from charities, we fall through the cracks, mental health support is needed, the kids are getting traumatised’.



## Exclusion from Training and Education

Immigration policies also restrict access to education and training. Some of the participants have thus faced barriers and have been denied access to training. As such, in a highly competitive job market, there is a real risk that when NRPF is removed from an individual, they will still continue to face barriers in accessing the labour market, as they would not be competing fairly with individuals who have had access to training.

## Everyday Racism

Everyday racism is a term often used to describe the microaggressions and racist

incidents which occur on a daily basis, be that on public transport with name calling or attacks, or through the practices of less overt discrimination. The 'dirty look', the ignoring, the intersectional and gendered assumptions made about ethnicity, Islam or Blackness. Here, we acknowledge that racialised groups subject to NRPF face a matrix of racisms and are penalised for their race, gender and immigration status separately. These social penalties also overlap and work in combination, furthering the discrimination. These overlapping forms of discrimination that people with NRPF face, is what Kimberly Crenshaw refers to as intersectional discrimination (49). Intersectional discrimination is a framing to pay attention to the ways in which gender intersects with race, sexuality, and in these cases, immigration status, with the effect of deepening discrimination and oppression.

**“Faced everyday intersectional racism which included discriminatory practice within schools and the local authority, as well as microaggressions more generally in society. The lived experience of living with NRPF is also about living with the corrosive nature of everyday intersectional racism”**

Many people at United Impact, therefore, faced everyday intersectional racism, which included discriminatory practice within schools and the local authority, as well as microaggressions more generally in society. The lived experience of living with NRPF is also about living with the corrosive nature of everyday intersectional racism. Most of the participants from United Impact are from an African background, so have to also experience specific forms of anti-black racism, which is known to be widespread across institutions and within society more broadly.

## **Hope and Resilience**

Despite all the challenges caused by NRPF, there is an immense resilience and joy within each individual and as a group. On small

budgets, delicious and colourful African food is prepared and enjoyed. At the United Impact meetings, a Spotify playlist is danced to, and solidarity and support is palpable across the group. In these ways and more, an ethos of care runs through the group daily. It is also striking that faith and religion for many is fundamentally important and a considerable source of strength for the group. The group often discussed the idea that faith was the foundation for hope and resilience against NRPF’s daily violent assaults.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusions

Participants of United Impact conducted a photovoice inquiry to show the nuances and granular experiences of living with NRPF. The photos were used to curate an exhibition so that they could amplify their perspectives, with the aim to bring about changes to immigration policies that advance the NRPF rule. This report aims to provide an opportunity to view the photos in perpetuity, as the exhibition has a limited shelf life. Some of the conversation that occurred whilst individuals shared their photos are also included.

Our photovoice inquiry supports existing published research, and further shows that people who are subjected to NRPF are disproportionately Black and People of Colour, and that they face a range of negative outcomes associated with extreme poverty and destitution. The photovoice inquiry shows that NRPF is intertwined with poor housing conditions, food insecurity, a lack of warmth in homes, poor mental health causing low self-esteem across families, in particular for children, and a lack of adequate access to healthcare and to education/training providers. NRPF also caused considerable financial barriers to accessing prescription and non-prescription drugs, furniture, toys, clothes and transport. Alongside extreme poverty, the conversations during the inquiry show that many people in United Impact face intersectional forms of everyday racism. Furthermore, cultural marginalisation was a common experience, and this was particularly so when it came to food insecurity. For example, the food parcels from the food bank lacked nutritional value and did not cater for African cuisine. Eating food from the food bank, whilst vital, causes distress, because the comforts

and the affirmations that participants feel when eating African food were absent from the plate. Also, there are the obvious negative nutritional outcomes for parents and children from eating tinned food, rather than fresh vegetables, fruit, meat and fish. It is well known by the group that hungry children face a range of challenges in schools, and more broadly in society. Due to the combination of these factors, it was noted by the group that food insecurity caused additional emotional distress. Participants of United Impact firmly believed that these experiences of food insecurity, and other negative aspects of NRPF, undermined a range of human rights, such as the right to quality housing, education, employment and their right to food. Members of United Impact were clear that these social, cultural and economic rights need to be fulfilled for all people across the UK, regardless of their immigration status. Housing was a shared problem across the group. For example, the shared accommodation that some participants of the group were housed in by the local authority was not suitable for most families, in terms of sizes of rooms, bathrooms and layouts. Some of the behaviours of adults in shared accommodation were also viewed as being unsuitable. For example, children would often passively inhale cigarette smoke, or even be exposed to adult drug consumption. Furthermore, some people were housed far from their community, friends and family. The knock-on effect of this was a lack of support in raising children, and in taking children to and from school, which caused significant emotional distress and hardship for both parents and children. The isolation from family and friends, and the financial barriers in accessing public transport, were also cited as stressful

and upsetting experiences. Mould was a persistent problem in homes, and this caused significant worry and distress, because of the fear that the mould spores would negatively impact health conditions by causing respiratory issues, especially for children. The tragic death of Awaab Ishak also heightened the worry for parents, as mould spores have been proven to be lethal to children (50).

Yet, despite these palpable hardships and traumas, many of the individuals subjected to NRPF in this group also showed emotional strength, joy and resilience. The group, therefore, served as an important space for support, understanding and solidarity. Many people in the group also felt that it was important to talk about NRPF, and even rail against the hardship that it brings, so that the general public and policy makers could know and understand more about its harmful effects.

Whilst not currently experienced by participants at United Impact, it is important to note that arguably some of the worse manifestations of NRPF include homelessness, and the way that financial precarity makes it more difficult for women to leave situations of domestic violence. The latter shows that the NRPF is also gendered in its outcomes. There are cases where women are financially forced to stay in toxic and abusive relationships, precisely because of the NRPF immigration rule. Husbands mobilise the NRPF rule to stress to women that they are financial dependent on them, leaving many women with the harsh situation of either facing destitution or staying in an abusive relationship (27). Whilst there have been limited gains made with the Destitution Domestic Violence

Concession, the way that NRPF worsens gender rights further strengthens the need to abolish the immigration rule.

In the absence of NRPF's abolition, meanwhile, social protection instruments need to be immediately put in place to universally safeguard against the harmful effects of extreme poverty. One way in which social protections against extreme poverty could be achieved, is through incorporating human rights that safeguard rights to food, housing, education and social security. Currently, the UK is a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1976, which, in combination, recognise the right to food, adequate housing, and social security. As such, incorporating these social, cultural, and economic rights into domestic law could offer avenues to build social protections against extreme poverty, destitution and human right violations, which are all associated with NRPF.

We also recognise that human rights have their limitations, namely that human rights are quite specific in that they mediate the relationship between that state and its citizens. There is the risk, therefore, that these rights might not apply to people who are marked as non-citizens, which is often the case for people seeking asylum and other migrants, until they obtain citizenship. Given the limitation of human rights, if we are to have any chance of living in a country that treats people universally with care, respect and dignity, we will also need to tackle the underlying tide of structural racism and xenophobia, that has arguably led to the hostile environment and anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK.

## Post-script from Project 17

Project 17 originally set out to establish United Impact partly in recognition of the fact that structural injustice experienced by individuals can be alienating and disempowering. Through Project 17's work with United Impact, we are working to unite the voices of those affected, galvanising the community through training, solidarity and peer support, and bringing the voices of people with lived experience directly to decision makers, in order to challenge policies and poor practice that negatively affect thousands of people subject to NRPF. Our photovoice project is an effective example of the power and potential of letting people with lived experience lead the conversation, and how important it is that the rest of us learn to be better at listening.

Although supported by Project 17, United Impact sets its own agenda and priorities. Real change can only come about by centring the voices of those directly affected by NRPF policy. Project 17 is working towards adopting United Impact's strategic priorities as part of our efforts to ensure our work is rooted in, and accountable to, the communities we support. We are tremendously proud of what United Impact has achieved here, and hope that we can support the group to become an undeniable call for change, both in the sector and beyond. Congratulations to all involved.



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