

# Hostile Environments

## Immigration and Food Poverty in the UK



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## Summary of Findings

*It very much falls on charities and falls on organisations outside of mainstream statutory support. That's entirely designed and intentional from government, and from the Home Office. In creating the 'no recourse' condition, it's basically the expectation if people are here with limited leave, then they shouldn't be a burden, or a cost on society, **but in practice we know that the system is, kind of, a bit broken.***

Paul (Case Worker at a Refugee and Migrant Support Charity)

Citizens Advice estimate that approximately 1.37 million people have a 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) condition attached to their immigration status in the UK, meaning they will have limited access to state support, even in times of crisis (Jolly et al., 2021; NRPF Network, 2018; Smith et al., 2021). Those with NRPF are at a higher risk of experiencing food poverty and often rely on third sector support organisations for food (e.g. food banks; Dexter et al., 2016).

As part of The Food Foundation's wider project to re-shape the public narrative on food and inequalities, this research was commissioned to focus on families with NRPF and food poverty. The aim of this study was to explore the challenges experienced by families with NRPF in affording and accessing food. Secondly, we sought to understand the role of support services and organisations. Thirteen families with NRPF took part in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Two focus groups were undertaken with six representatives from organisations supporting families with NRPF and 11 organisations took part in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Organisations included front-line, advocacy and campaign groups, such as food banks, community centres and groups providing immigration case support.

The findings from this study indicate that living with NRPF can be characterised as a perpetual indeterminate state of uncertainty, hostility and hardship. This system therefore necessitates the ongoing intervention and support of charities and advocacy groups. The continuous uncertainty and challenges associated with having NRPF mean that diet and healthy eating are compromised due to more urgent priorities, such as inadequate housing, long working hours and/or lack of income. Many families found themselves reliant on food bank parcels, which were often inadequate for their needs.

Support organisations explained how funding cuts to the public sector had dramatically reduced the support they are able to provide for families with NRPF. Some expressed the view that the system was deliberately designed to dissuade people from settling in the UK. This has led organisations to change the type of support they provide. Whilst the pressures of the immigration system and the impact on families varied, the hostility and lack of agency or control over their own lives remained a constant feature and challenge. Key recommendations, as suggested by organisations, are provided.

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## Background

Non-UK nationals who want to live in the UK require a visa and are 'subject to immigration control' (unless exempt). Depending on the type of immigration status or visa granted by the UK Home Office, they may have a 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) condition imposed on them (e.g. family visa, student visa, certain work visas), meaning they will have limited access to state support.<sup>1</sup> Even in times of crisis (e.g. unemployment, illness, homelessness), they are prohibited from accessing certain welfare benefits and public services classified as 'public funds', such as universal credit, child benefit, council housing and 'Sure Start' maternity grants (Jolly et al., 2021; NRPF Network, 2018). In some cases, those with NRPF can access *limited* welfare benefits. However, there is often a strict eligibility criteria, such as their nationality, whether they are permitted to work or have made National Insurance contributions (The Children's Society, 2020).

NRPF status is also imposed on asylum seekers (i.e. those applying for 'Refugee Status') in the UK. Asylum seekers are not permitted to work and receive minimal support from the Home Office whilst their asylum case is being processed (Asylum Matters, 2020); £40.85 per person per week on a pre-payment card and temporary accommodation, but only if they are currently or likely to become 'destitute' (as per section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999). This money is expected to cover all essential and necessary living costs such as food, medication, clothing and travel. Many families struggle on this limited income for months or years whilst they await a decision on their asylum claim from the Home Office (Asylum Matters, 2020). This is particularly concerning for families with children, given the growing evidence suggesting causal associations between income and children's cognitive, social and behavioural development (Cooper & Stewart, 2017).

Approximately 1.37 million people with valid 'leave to remain' (excluding those with 'indefinite leave to remain', citizenship or a pending asylum claim) have NRPF status, of which, 60 per cent are behind on rent payments and 18 per cent are unable to afford enough food (Smith et al., 2021). This leads to families having to borrow money (from formal lenders, friends or family) to afford the basic essentials, often trapping them in a cycle of debt, poverty and hunger. Families on low incomes are disproportionately affected by NRPF policies, but this impact is further exacerbated for black and ethnic minority populations, those with disabilities, single parents, women (especially pregnant women) and children (The Children's Society, 2020; Woolley, 2019).

The Children's Society (2020) argue that "NRPF and other immigration policies are leaving thousands of children growing up in long-term poverty, trapped in cycles of homelessness, destitution and mounting debt and segregated from their communities and peers." (p. 4). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, children from families with NRPF were not eligible for free school meals (Brannen & O'Connell, 2022; O'Connell, 2022). However, free school meals were temporarily extended to these families during the pandemic and this extension became permanent in April 2021 (subject to income thresholds; Department for Education, 2022).

Those with NRPF are at a higher risk of experiencing food poverty and often rely on third sector support organisations for food (e.g. food banks; Dexter et al., 2016). Discrimination and stigma also create barriers when obtaining food (Govan Community Project, 2021). Current immigration policies are "creating hunger among children and families who have [NRPF], leaving them totally dependent on charity." (O'Connell et al., 2019, p. 129). Therefore, there is a need to understand the experiences and impact of the NRPF immigration policy on families' abilities to feed themselves, especially those with children. As such, this research was commissioned by The Food Foundation to explore the challenges experienced by families with NRPF in affording and accessing food across the four nations of the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> There are some exceptions, depending on the individual's circumstances. The types of immigration status and visas that are 'subject to immigration control', and have NRPF conditions attached, are detailed by the NRPF Network (2018).

## Research Design

The Food Foundation is conducting a three-year project called '**Changing the Story of Dietary Inequality**'. The aim is to re-shape the public narrative, develop evidence and inspire action from policymakers on dietary inequalities in children across the UK. As part of this wider project, the research team was commissioned to carry out this study, focusing on families (with children) who have NRPF conditions attached to their immigration status. The primary aim of this study was to explore the challenges experienced by these families in affording and accessing food. Secondly, we sought to understand the role of third-sector-support organisations, local authorities and national government. The objectives were as follows:

- Examine the challenges and role of having NRPF status in accessing and affording food in the UK.
- Examine the role of support services and the factors that impact their ability to support families.
- Explore potential solutions for local authorities and government to address the challenges of accessing and affording food experienced by families with NRPF.
- Explore potential solutions for local authorities and government to address the factors impacting organisations' ability to support these families.

To address the aims and objectives of this study (and the wider Food Foundation project), a qualitative approach was undertaken with two participant groups: (1) families (with children) who have NRPF; and (2) services and organisations supporting families with NRPF. Ethics approval was granted by the University of Hertfordshire (Protocol No.: aHSK/SF/UH/04760(1)). Interview topic guides were informed by discussions with organisations supporting those with NRPF (and/or asylum seekers specifically). Fieldwork took place from January to June 2022. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim. All participants gave informed consent, pseudonyms were assigned and transcripts were anonymised.<sup>2</sup> Where photographs were sent to the research team, these were used as supplementary contextual data during analysis. Transcripts were then subject to thematic analysis.

### Families Living with NRPF Status

In-depth interviews were carried out with 13 families (10 with children) who had NRPF at the time of or 6 months prior to the interview, as outlined in **Table 1**. One adult from each family was interviewed and all families lived in London. Support organisations circulated the study details in their newsletters and/or contacted families known to them. Participants then contacted the research team directly to arrange an interview. Due to the scope and timescale of the study, the interviews were carried out remotely via telephone and lasted 25 – 40 minutes. All participants were reimbursed for their time with supermarket vouchers worth £35.

During the interview, participants were asked about the following: the circumstances related to their NRPF status (e.g. why and how long they have had this status); their housing situation and who they live with; financial and/or other support they receive (e.g. from local authorities, food bank, friends); how and where they access food from and the challenges experienced in doing so; the types of food and meals their family eats; available storage, cooking and dining facilities; and what they said would improve their situation now and in the future (e.g. what local and national government can do). To examine the impact of NRPF policies and provide context, participants were also asked how their responses related to having NRPF and subsequent low income. If they did not have NRPF status at the time of the interview, they were asked about their past experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> Consent forms were completed prior to the interview electronically or via telephone with the researcher.

**Table 1:** Description of families recruited for in-depth interviews (n=13).

	<b>Sex &amp; Ethnicity</b>	<b>NRPF Status</b>	<b>Adults &amp; Children</b>	<b>Housing Status<sup>1</sup></b>
Grace*	Female Nigerian	Visa Related 3 years	2 Adults and 4 children (aged 10, 8, 5 and 1 year)	Temporary shared housing with two private bedrooms. Previously in a hostel for homeless families.
Martha*	Female Nigerian	Family Visa 4 years	1 Adult and 4 children (aged 22 (twins), 10 and 5 years)	Temporary shared housing with two private bedrooms.
Agnes	Female Nigerian	Asylum Seeker 3 years	2 Adults and 4 children (aged 11, 9, 6 and 2 years)	Temporary shared housing. Previously in shared housing with one bedroom.
Mary*	Female Nigerian	Asylum Seeker 1 year	1 Adult (no children)	Flat via Housing Association homelessness scheme. Previously in a homeless shelter.
Rose*	Female Nigerian	Asylum Seeker 6 months	1 Adult (no children)	Privately rent. Previously in a temporary hostel (no kitchen).
Victoria	Female Nigerian	Asylum Seeker 2 years	1 Adult and 1 child (aged 4 years)	Temporary shared housing with one private bedroom.
Faith	Female Nigerian	Asylum Seeker Unclear	1 Adult and 4 children (aged 12, 8, 6 and 4 years)	Living with two friends.
Joy	Female Nigerian	Asylum Seeker 5 years	1 Adult and 4 children (aged 4 – 10 years)	One bedroom flat.
Evelyn	Female Nigerian	Asylum Seeker 5 years	1 Adult and 2 children	Shared housing (NASS) with one private bedroom.
Samson	Male Nigerian	Visa Related 4 years	2 Adults and 2 children (aged 8 and 6 years)	Privately renting a one bedroom flat.
Patience	Female Nigerian	Asylum Seeker 6 years	1 Adult and 2 children (aged 6 and 3 years)	Temporary shared housing with one private bedroom.
Adam	Male Chinese	Overstayed Visa 17 years	1 Adult (no children)	Private bedroom with 'host family' (via charity). Previously homeless.
Theresa	Female Nigerian	Asylum Seeker 1 year	1 Adult and 2 children (aged 5 years and one month)	Temporary shared housing with one private bedroom.

<sup>1</sup> All shared housing includes communal spaces such as living room, kitchen and bathroom.

\* Did not have NRPF status at the time of the interview.

## Support Services and Organisations

A total of 17 services and organisations involved in supporting families with NRPF (and/or asylum seekers specifically) were recruited to the study, including front-line, advocacy and campaign groups providing support (e.g. food, housing, legal advice), as outlined in **Table 2**. Study details were shared with relevant professional contacts and networks, some of which agreed to share the details within their own networks. The researchers

also searched online for organisations and contacted them directly. Organisations initially took part in focus groups. However, during recruitment, several major events occurred (e.g. the Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent UK ‘cost of living’ crisis) which directly impacted the availability of the services and organisations being recruited for this study. Therefore, the research team took the decision to conduct interviews, instead of further focus groups, to allow more flexibility for participants’ limited availability.

Six participants took part in one of two focus groups (three per group) and the remaining 11 took part in individual interviews. The focus groups and interviews were carried out remotely (e.g. via Zoom or telephone) and the same topic guide was used for both methods. Focus groups lasted for 60 minutes and interviews for approximately 25 minutes each. During the focus groups and interviews, participants were asked about the following: the type of service or organisation they work for, its role and how it is funded; the support it provides and to which population groups; the main issues relating to NRPF policies; the impact of having NRPF on children and young people; families’ diets; other related issues such as housing and language barriers; barriers/facilitators families have when accessing the organisation; potential solutions to help families with NRPF; and what government can do to support organisations who support those with NRPF.

**Table 2:** Description of organisations recruited for focus groups and in-depth interviews (n=17).

	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Support Provided</b>	<b>Country</b>
Kaleem	Children’s Charity	Policy Advisor	Campaigns	England
Daria	Community Support Centre	Immigration Advisor	Advice and Support	England
Paul	Refugee and Migrant Advice Charity	Case Worker	Advice and Food Bank	England
Scott	Local Food Bank	Operations Manager	Food Bank	England
Andy	Refugee Support Charity	Manager	Advice and Support	Wales
John	Refugee and Migrant Advice Charity	Food Bank Coordinator	Advice and Food Bank	England
Lauren	Community Youth Charity	Programme Manager	Youth Support	Northern Ireland
Brian	Community Youth Charity	Project Manager	Youth Support	Northern Ireland
Paula	Community Faith Organisation	Programme Manager	Social Support	Scotland
Stuart	Housing Support Charity	CEO	Housing and Support	England
Amira	Culture and Education Centre	Organiser	Food Bank	Wales
Beth	Social Supermarket	Volunteer/Pastor	Social Supermarket	Wales
Nabeel	Muslim Welfare Centre	Manager	Food Bank	Wales
Alicia	Community Integration Charity	Manager	Social Support	Scotland
Sonya	Food Charity	Leadership Role	Food Bank	Scotland
Juliette	Refugee Support Charity	Campaigns Coordinator	Advice and Support	England
Claire	Food Charity	Manager	Food Bank	Scotland



## Findings

### Experiences of NRPF Status: Hostility and Uncertainty

Living with 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) can be characterised as a perpetual indeterminate state or a type of 'limbo', during which uncertainty, hostility and hardship are endured. As explained by the support organisations interviewed, the process of obtaining 'indefinite leave-to-remain', refugee status, and/or citizenship requires substantial effort and engagement (in a non-native language) with an inflexible and demanding system: 'one of the major stressors for asylum seekers is actually the system itself' (Paula; Community Faith Organisation in Scotland). This system therefore necessitates the ongoing long-term intervention and support of charities and advocacy groups. Participants described complex local and national networks of third sector organisations that primarily assist with immigration legal advice, whilst offering support in relation to the social determinants of health, especially food, income and housing. Representatives of these organisations were very much aware of the plight and challenges faced by those with NRPF, as explained by Paula, the manager of a Community Faith Organisation for those on low incomes in Scotland:

*The Home Office is there to... help you navigate the asylum process. But it's never that easy and so people wait long times to get letters, people wait long times to get hold of lawyers, lawyers don't phone them back, they can't always understand the lawyers, so they get a translator or interpreter. There might be issues with interpreting and going for your substantive interview, which is the big interview where you get questioned on the 'Why are you here? Why are you fleeing your country?' So preparing for that is a huge life event and people who are traumatised anyway can get quite forgetful and panicked about stuff and then the Home Office just doesn't believe them. So it's very stressful just that navigating the whole asylum process and sometimes the case is refused and they have to reapply and always the threat of having to be sent back home. (Paula; Programme Manager, Community Faith Organisation in Scotland).*

The combination of being simultaneously in the hands of the Home Office and dependent on charities or community groups for essentials (for months or years at a time) had a devastating impact on quality of life and mental health. Participants described the toll that living with constant pressure, uncertainty and hardship took on them. This made it more difficult for mothers to care for their children in the way that they wanted to. They worried constantly about how their anxiety and depression was associated with their situation and how it would negatively impact their children. Agnes, who has had NRPF for more than three years whilst seeking asylum, explained how she tries to hide her distress from her young children:

*Yeah, mentally, but it's just because the kids, that's the things that keep me going. I don't want to break down in front of them, and I just mask myself. Mentally, it's not been easy, but I am thankful I've got support. I go for counselling... to the Red Cross. Yeah. And because the other people that were in the same situation, and now we talk. [...] We'll keep fighting anyway, so just keep fighting [...] No recourse to public funds is a stigma, and it should be taken off people. I mean, it makes people - like, it makes people, it makes you look as if you're a failure and which you are not, because you are trying your best to do everything possible, to make sure that your life is good. (Agnes; Mother living with her partner and four children).*

On a day-to-day basis, 'trying your best to do everything possible' (Agnes) meant making sacrifices. Participants reported doing 'whatever' they had to in order to avoid destitution and look after their children. Often, this meant working long hours at multiple jobs; some legal employment was described by those permitted to work and some 'cash-in-hand' who were not legally permitted. This was made worse by the pandemic and resulting mitigation measures, which served to widen inequalities and amplify marginalisation. Once again, participants reported that this, in combination with having NRPF, negatively impacted upon their capacity to care and provide for their children in the way that they wanted and needed to. As a result of these circumstances, a concern for their children's wellbeing was a constant source of anxiety for parents. Martha, a single mother with four children (two who are dependent on her) who previously had NRPF conditions attached to her Family Visa, explained how the pressures to earn enough money meant that she could not spend enough time with her children. This was a situation that caused her a great deal of distress:

*During the pandemic... I was not entitled to anything for my children, it was really, really hard. And not just to me, to all my friends, it was really difficult for us. And then we had to even leave the children at home, even when they said nobody should go to work, because we have to feed the kids. We have to - still have to go out to look for work, and most of my friends got sick. I was lucky not to get Covid... And mostly being a single mother, and working, it's difficult for us because we don't have supporting to pay the childcare... So, and it's affecting the children, because the children don't even have time to see, to get to know you, the mother, because you are always working to make sure that the house has been paid. The house rent has been paid, the children school lunch is being paid, even their after-school hours because there's no support from anybody... you need that money. (Martha; Single-mother with four (two dependent) children).*

Most people with NRPF, and who are applying for UK citizenship, live here for years with an uncertain wait, which is made more difficult by a lack of state support. Specifically, a lack of support with or access to welfare and adequate housing. This can leave them in a state of perpetual instability in relation to the basic requirements needed for their survival, such as shelter and income. Low incomes, financial uncertainty and insecure housing can all contribute to food insecurity and dietary health inequalities. Families were very clear about how having NRPF had led them to use food banks, which severely compromised the quality of their own and their children's diets. Grace, a mother of four young children, explained how her past experience of having NRPF had left her without the means to buy food or the ability to secure stable accommodation:

*Yeah, I couldn't have access to anything, because I don't have no recourse to public funds. Yeah. So I live on a food bank... I had to sleep, like, in the church, where they have space in the church, that's where I was... Yeah, with my children... I slept, like, one year. (Grace; Mother living with her husband and four children).*

## How NRPF Status Impacts Families' Diets

Participants explained how having NRPF changed the way they ate, mostly for the worse and in a myriad of ways. At the most basic level, the constant pressures, challenges and uncertainties of having NRPF served to deprioritise diet and notions of healthy eating. There were simply too many other pressing priorities to worry about. In some cases, they were so traumatised by the experiences and circumstances that led them to travel to the UK that they were simply left unable to function effectively in their new environment (see **Case Study 1: Patience**). As explained by Beth, a Volunteer/Pastor for a social supermarket in Wales:

*A lot of people that are coming to us have come from situations where they've been incredibly traumatised, or they've been trafficked. So, actually, it's not even that they're not allowed to work. It's just that, actually, their everyday functioning is impaired by the emotional and mental traumas they are facing in the UK. I feel like, for me, I know that in conversations with some people, you just know they're trying to make their whole life work in a completely different country, out of all of their support systems, often without very good English. [...] It's impossible for them to do the everyday of everyday life when you have been through a war, or been trafficked, or been raped. It's not just as simple as, "They can have this money, so they could go the shop and buy their own food". (Beth; Volunteer/Pastor, Social Supermarket in Wales).*

### Case Study 1: Patience

Patience lives in temporary shared housing with her two children (aged 6 and 3 years) and two other single-mothers and their children. She has one private bedroom between herself and her children. The other rooms (e.g. kitchen) are shared with the other families. To prepare food for her children and leave for school on time, she has to wake up very early each morning to use the shared kitchen before the other families are awake.

Patience is seeking asylum in the UK. She has been awaiting a decision on her claim for six years, but is optimistic that her 'Refugee Status' will be granted this year. Patience was trafficked from Nigeria into Europe by a 'family friend', under the guise of paid-employment. She was forced into prostitution for three years, until she was helped to escape to the UK: "I'd cry all the time. I'd cry because this was not the life I wanted, this is not what she [the 'family friend'] told my parents. So it was a bit hard for me, but there was nothing I could do."

Due to her limited income and having NRPF, Patience struggles to afford food for her family and often uses food banks. However, her children rarely eat the food she receives from the food bank. She also volunteers for a charity choir, which provides her £15 'cash-in-hand', a hot meal and free childcare once per week. She tells friends and family in Nigeria not to come to the UK because the immigration system is 'the worst thing ever for anyone', but they do not believe her. Despite wanting to go home to Nigeria, she cannot, due to the danger posed to her family by the violent people traffickers.

In other cases, this included more immediate concerns of personal safety and exploitation. In rural England and Northern Ireland, charities and advocacy groups told us about undocumented migrants and those with NRPF undertaking agricultural work for 'food and lodgings'. These illegal agricultural workers typically lived in overcrowded accommodation alongside other migrants, working long hours for little or no money. This was particularly difficult when feeding and caring for their children because they were out all day and night without proper access to a kitchen. Working long hours in remote areas and, for most, not being able to speak English

also meant they had no time or capacity to shop for food. In which case, food was provided by their employers or hosts, but they had little or no control over the type, quality or quantity they received. Families with NRPF were effectively dependent on their 'gang masters' for their survival, housing, income and food. This meant they were often unwilling or unable to seek help for fear of being ostracised or punished. Such people are rarely in a position to buy or prepare their own food and do not have the capital nor capacity to prioritise their diet. The manager for a Community Youth Charity in Northern Ireland explained how changes in the agricultural sector had put additional pressures on local families with NRPF:

*What's happening, and I don't want to demonise farmers in any way... but we've had quite a large diversification of farming, so people who would traditionally farm but have now gone into mushroom houses or chicken houses... but suddenly overnight they've become an employer with 50, 60 and I suppose in some respects they're completely out of their depth... all of a sudden they have lots of people who are very vulnerable [...] where they're not getting the minimum wage or they're living in shared accommodation. Or they're not guaranteed a wage... how all that can have a knock-on effect to end up with poverty, in particular food poverty. [...] They call it a gang master, which I think is just a terrible name. You're meant to be a licensed gang master to be involved in the recruitment industry, but within some of those cultures there is that kind of hierarchy, there is this informal internal sort of justice system and elders that exist... So there can be a bit of a grey area sometimes with that man who is helping you get a job, but actually is he the equivalent of an illegal recruitment agent because he's taking a cut of your wage. Within some communities, that's his role and he's an elder... but what we find is that some of those people who are walking into some of these mushroom plants and saying, 'OK yeah, I can find you ten people' but the wages go to them for distribution. It gives that person an element of control over people who can't speak English... sometimes that can turn very bitter when something starts to go wrong like withholding passports or wages and stuff if somebody is not seen to be behaving. (Brian; Project Manager, Community Youth Charity in Northern Ireland)*

There were different challenges for those who did have at least semi-secure housing and the ability to work legally. Working long hours for little money meant that parents often lacked the money to buy good quality fresh food, lacked the time to prepare meals and/or didn't have the kitchen facilities needed. Participants said that this meant a deterioration in their own and their children's diet quality. They had to eat cheaper convenience foods that they considered to be unhealthy. Martha was very aware of the impact this had on her family's health and weight, but it was described as a necessary sacrifice because she did not have enough time to spend with her children, much less cook for them:

*First of all, the children don't - they don't have the parental care they have, they need, because the mum is outside looking for money to take care of the children. So the children misbehave. Then, again, the children are becoming obese because they don't eat all day, and we just give them food that will keep them full for a longer time, so they don't keep asking for food every time. Instead of giving them fruit, we prefer to give them Nigerian food, the pounded yam, which is too much of starch or too much of sugar. Just give them, so that they will not complain of, yeah, I'm feeling hungry, I'm feeling hungry every time. Because if you're going out to buy food, it costs a lot of money. Imagine working in five hours for £10 per hour, and you use that money to buy food for the children. So you have to use that money to buy something that will fill the children, and not what they need, it's what you have. (Martha; Single-mother with four children).*

Having to use food banks (or similar) was a defining characteristic of having NRPF. Gratitude and appreciation were consistently expressed by families for the help that they had received from these organisations. They were described as life savers. However, the food on offer at food banks was far from ideal for an overall nutritious diet, for example tinned and dried food, with little fresh produce. For recent migrants, the challenges this posed were amplified. They found themselves reliant on food banks for most of their food, unable to prepare the donated food they received because they did not have adequate preparation space, storage facilities or resources. Further, they were often unable to consume the donated food because it was not considered culturally appropriate. As summarised by Paula:

*People who come from other countries, from African countries and Middle Eastern countries, they're all used to cooking their own food fresh from fresh ingredients. There's not really a tradition of tinned food and the kind of food that we eat a lot of here. So I think people find it initially quite difficult to know what to do with tins of baked beans and when really what they want is some onions and a bit of chicken and some potatoes or whatever... if they're staying in a hotel or a hostel, you can't cook at all, because you're just in this room... And how do you heat up your food? It's a nightmare. I had a guy who had some kind of like Crohn's disease or something and honestly, the poor guy was really suffering. He couldn't eat the kind of food that could keep him well. So often that's a real problem for people, especially if they're staying in that temporary accommodation, how do they access and cook? (Paula; Programme Manager, Community Faith Organisation in Scotland).*



**Figure 1:** Traditional Nigerian meals prepared by Evelyn (single mother of two children).

Families spoke passionately about their desire to cook and eat freshly prepared and culturally appropriate food (see **figure 1**). They had to compromise this when surviving mostly on donated food. For some, tinned food was considered unhealthy, unhygienic and they could not bring themselves to eat it. Mothers described how they compromised their diets due to lack of food and to ensure their children were fed. For example, eating pork when it was against their religion and consuming foods that they disliked or that they did not know how to cook properly. What caused them the most distress, however, was not being able to feed their children

healthy, freshly prepared meals appropriate to their cultural upbringing (see **Case Study 2: Agnes**). Watching their children struggling or refusing to eat unfamiliar and unhealthy foods was upsetting for parents, especially when they did not have the resources to provide them with an alternative. As explained by Evelyn, a single-mother with two children who has had NRPF for five years whilst seeking asylum:

*You don't get what you want to eat, and you eat what you see [in the food bank parcel]... But we just have to manage, because sometimes my son will say, mummy, I don't want to eat pasta. But that's what I have to offer, so I feel bad for him sometimes, but we just have to eat it [...] I would say it's the most - it's terrible, it's frustrating, it's hard, because why you can't do, you can't do work, you can't buy the food you want. You can't eat what you want to eat. So it's the worst thing anybody can experience, for me, because it's if I have the documents, I will stay at home to wait for government money. I'd rather go with my money and get the food that I want to eat. (Evelyn; Asylum Seeker, single-mother with two children).*

## Case Study 2: Agnes

Agnes lives in London with her partner and four children (aged 11, 9, 6 and 2 years) in temporary housing. But they lack the space needed for a family of six: "It's detached, so it's like the rooms are not big, so there's no space for the children, not to have play dates or anything." She originally came to the UK from Nigeria with her partner. When their visas expired, they were advised to apply for asylum. They have had NRPF for three years.

Agnes and her family have long been reliant on food banks and have are supported by a local charity. She is grateful for the food they receive and speaks highly of the volunteers. She struggles with the mostly tinned food, which her children won't eat. As her local food bank has become busier over the past year, she has started to experience some hostility when she asks for food that her children prefer: "I feel nervous going, but I just have to be strong for myself, and I have to be strong for the children." She finds this upsetting, especially as she is not in a position to stop using the food bank. Living with NRPF has put a tremendous strain on her mental health, but she is able to access counselling services and she says this has really helped her cope.

Providing adequate food for children is further complicated by the fact that having NRPF has long been a barrier to accessing free school meals, despite living on a low income. Although eligibility has recently been permanently extended to children in families with NRPF (subject to income thresholds), it had caused families months, sometimes years, of additional hardship. This earlier ineligibility is one of the reasons families were kept reliant on food banks, in a cycle of poverty and marginalisation. Having limited funds or resources and having to 'make do' with food bank donations makes family meal times at home very difficult, stripping the enjoyment from them. Agnes, who has four children (three of school age), explains how using food banks and a lack of support, particularly for housing and income, made it difficult to look after and feed her children:

*I can't get social housing. I can't access funds. I mean, and my kids are missing out a lot, like the first school meal, they don't get it. If they want to go on a trip... I don't have the money. Most of the money we're working with, is used to pay the rent and every other thing. Sometimes we really rely on food banks, and then when you go to the food bank, because I am African, my kids they eat like the African food. And they are not into all those cans, but because I don't have a choice, I have to, like, make do with what is available and try to incorporate it into their meal. But it's not something they enjoy, so it's really very, very difficult. (Agnes; Mother living with her partner and four children).*

## The Challenges for Support Services and Organisations

The landscape of support and provision for families with NRPF is changing. Support organisations explained how funding cuts to public services have dramatically lessened the support available for immigrants and those with NRPF. Daria, an immigration advisor for a Community Support Centre, detailed her frustration at the welfare and immigration systems that she felt were designed to put people off settling in the UK, rather than welcome them:

*I mean, I'm not the biggest fan of the Home Office, I'll be honest, and I'll try not to swear. But I think this hostile environment thing, I think it's just a part of that, to be honest. Why offer help to somebody, when you can just try and coax them to go back to a different country? That's literally all it comes down to as far as I'm concerned. (Daria; Immigration Advisor, Community Support Centre in England)*

The resulting hardships from these 'hostile environments' have, more recently, been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis. These pressures have seen a change in the way that NRPF support services operate in the community and nationally. Organisations explained that they have gone from providing support mostly related to immigration legal advice and advocacy, to providing more holistic support. The increasing hardship faced by families with NRPF has forced the third sector organisations that support them to diversify into assisting with housing, income, welfare and food. In some cases this has meant establishing their own food banks or forming close relationships with local food aid networks. As described in earlier sections, it has also meant that support workers have had to become adept at diagnosing, confronting and intervening when they suspect that their clients are experiencing food poverty. There is an acceptance and expectation that those with NRPF, and particularly those seeking asylum, will experience food poverty as a result of their NRPF condition. Immigration support and the provision of food aid now go hand-in-hand. As Paul, a caseworker for a Refugee and Migrant Advice Charity (and food bank) in England explained when asked what his organisation did: 'We do generalist advice work, immigration, case work up to level two, and we also run a foodbank'.

Setting up a food bank specifically for immigrant and clients with NRPF may seem like a drastic step for organisations that do not specialise in food, especially against the backdrop of a proliferation of existing food banks that clients could use instead. However, the 'emergency' foodbank model, short-term support through an acute crises, is not appropriate for those with NRPF. As previously stated, having NRPF can last for months or years with little improvement in income or living standards. Therefore, families with NRPF need more than the typical food parcel limit imposed by most food banks. As demonstrated in earlier sections, families are also uncomfortable with unfamiliar foods, especially tinned foods, meaning that established food banks do not meet their food needs. Often, holistic tailored services are needed to support the culturally specific and longer-term needs of those with NRPF. The food bank sector has demonstrated its agility and flexibility in responding to the specific and complex needs that families with NRPF often present.

Foodbanks in Scotland are experiencing record numbers of families with NRPF and are now having to develop tailored policies and responses within their local communities. The professionals and volunteers supporting those with NRPF in Scotland were very much aware of the Scottish Government's ongoing consultation on 'Ending the Need for Food Banks' (Scottish Government, 2021b). One participant sent an extract from the Trussell Trust's official response to this consultation, from a section focused on 'better support for people with no recourse to public funds' (The Trussell Trust, 2022). She felt this was particularly pertinent to the severe issues facing families with NRPF and the organisations that support them:

Our State of Hunger 2021 research found that before the pandemic, 2-4% of people referred to food banks were likely subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition, this rose to 11% in mid-2022. The Scottish Government's 'Ending Destitution Together' strategy is welcome but if we are to end the need for charitable food aid in Scotland, better support for people with no recourse to public funds needs to be integral to the action plan. Asylum seekers are almost all destitute, receiving just £5.66 per day to live on, making food insecurity a daily reality. These rates mean that **destitution is built into the asylum system**. If we are to end the need for food banks and charitable food aid in Scotland, we need better financial support for people with NRPF. (The Trussell Trust, 2022, p. 14)<sup>3</sup>

## Example of Good Practice from a Food Bank

One food bank we spoke to, have seen a steep rise in migrants with NRPF, especially asylum seekers, arriving in the local area over the last few years. This often occurs with little or no notice, and without consultation with local support services. The local food bank network has worked hard to assist these new families and adjust their practices to suit their needs, even providing 'welcome packs' for those newly arrived. As Scott (the food bank operations manager) explains:

*Over the last 12, 18 months particularly with having influx of refugees, migrants... so we've had to understand what their needs are. It has caused numerous problems. Obviously, we have language barriers. They turn up en masse to our centres... asking for food and what we've had to do is work with the Red Cross, Care4Calais, those sorts of people, to find a way how we can support these people in a correct and managed way. [...] they'll turn up with the whole family, eight people, and our volunteers find it a little bit overwhelming because you have three or four families turn up with eight members or so of their family and it has been quite overwhelming... We have had some funding through grants to help us, and I'm not sure which channel it came through. It came through one of the supermarket channels, I think... and get some additional funding to buy food. I would say we've seen over the last 18 months the amount of people that have [NRPF] is probably now 20% of our clientele... At one stage we were getting just vehicles turning up to a [Housing Estate], just along from our [Town], and they were literally just putting four or five people in houses, random, you know, 'You're in 26, you're in 35, you're in 48' and they were just put in there.*

*The other issue, they would all then turn up to a food bank with a voucher and all ask for a parcel of food... and quite often it was food that wasn't geared for the clientele as well. So obviously they like pasta and tomato sauce, passatas, that sort of stuff, and we were giving them tinned, the standard boxes have got ham and pork and all sorts of stuff in it. So, we've had to do a lot of work working with, just to say, 'If this is what's going to happen, we need to look at things differently' [...] So, it has been an ongoing slog and I'm not saying it's all over and it's all hunky dory now, not by any stretch of the imagination, we continue to monitor things, continue to talk to the relevant people so we can get them right. [...]*

*So, there's a real, from my side, you know, having seen that there's a real sympathy for that sort of scenario... you have some sort of, try and think through their eyes that they've arrived in this strange country, they're escaping persecution for whatever role it is, and they're desperate. And you can see they're desperate, you can see that... they won't send them away without anything. Even if they turn up and they've had vouchers before and all the rest of it, you know, they always go away with food.*

<sup>3</sup> The 'Ending Destitution Together' strategy was published in March 2021 (Scottish Government, 2021a).



The challenges and concerns of many of the support organisations are summed up in a quote from Paul (Case Worker for a Refugee and Migrant Advice Charity): ***'It seems really clear that the system is designed to impoverish and keep people into relative poverty or destitution... So, in that sense, the system is broken.'***

Food aid providers and other support services find themselves redistributing food in place of what is really needed; a secure and adequate income. Unfortunately, this is outside the remit of what they can offer. Nevertheless, services and charities still make a huge difference to people's lives. In Scotland, schemes such as community gardening groups, which help new arrivals to the country to better understand the range of local produce and make friends, are increasingly popular. Those who are unable to work because of their visa status can spend time growing food and learning how to cook vegetables they may be unfamiliar with. These activities have a therapeutic value and help families feel as though they are part of the community. Similarly, a food co-operative in Wales launched a social supermarket that catered to their needs. They provide long-term support and a 'buddy-system' to help clients learn more about the food on offer in the UK and to feel comfortable trying new things. They also have a 'living room' space in the social supermarket, to help make clients feel welcome and encourage social interactions (see **figure 2**). Despite the difficulties facilitating cash-first responses for families with NRPF, some support services have been able to do this and, in doing so, afforded families a little more dignity and the agency to budget for themselves, even if only to a limited degree.



**Figure 2:** Living space at Charitable Social Supermarket in Wales.

### **Example of Good Practice from a Children's Charity**

A children's charity based in England described how difficult it is for non-statutory organisations to secure public funding to enable them to support families over the longer term. This has become harder still over the last few years. Some funding streams are available from larger charities and local organisations can be commissioned to provide support from statutory funders. This children's charity managed to continue funding their work and has been able to give money to some families, as Kaleem (a policy advisor) explains:

*We started a pilot scheme about 13 years ago due to the fact the families had no recourse to public funds. I think it was one of the first to be run to the country at the time... So, we had a year of internal funding. Since then, the only time we've [had] stable funding has been from the Lottery, so three years' Lottery funding. Within that Lottery funding for a few years, we used to give a one-off payment grant of £250 to families, and women who were pregnant.*

## Supporting Families in Relation to Food

There has been some acknowledgement, from national and local governments, of the dietary hardships experienced by those with NRPF. For instance, free school meal provision has been extended to children from families with NRPF and there are ongoing calls for the permanent extension of the 'Healthy Start' scheme too. Support organisations and families with NRPF highlighted the need for change and considered what could be done to improve access to enough affordable food that meets both their cultural and dietary needs.

However, making recommendations for food-related policies and interventions is not without complexity, especially in relation to immigration and NRPF policies. Food poverty, for any group or demographic within the UK, is not a discrete problem that can be addressed in isolation, because food poverty is a **symptom** or 'side-effect' of **poverty** and deprivation more generally. It is a symptom of existing structural and social inequalities. Fundamentally, it is the result of income inequality and marginalisation. Therefore, whilst it can be mitigated, it cannot be *solved* by the redistribution of food (O'Connell et al., 2019; Thompson, 2022a).

The organisations we interviewed, including those providing food, were acutely aware of this. As such, most of the recommendations suggested did not focus on food, but prioritised a review or the abolishment of NRPF policies altogether. They recognised that NRPF policies caused and/or exacerbated the hardship experienced by the people they support. Most commonly cited, in relation to food poverty, was the need to provide cash-based crisis support to those with NRPF and to provide greater financial support for children.

In the context of this overarching caveat, there were two main practical and food-related recommendations that participants suggested could help mitigate food poverty for those with NRPF: (1) provide tailored support; and (2) enable households to fully use their food skills.

The first was to **provide 'tailored support'**. As discussed in previous sections, supporting the dietary health for this specific group of people tends to become a long-term endeavour, rather than an acute 'emergency'. Those with NRPF often find themselves in a protracted state of 'limbo', with their immigration case sometimes taking years to resolve. As such **food aid and community food providers advocate building strong relationships with clients who have NRPF and, where possible, increasingly actively involving them in decisions about the food they receive**. A food bank manager in Scotland explained how they were piloting a model of delivery that was heavily focused on community input and feedback. They hope that this will help facilitate the tailored, targeted and long term support this particular group requires:

*The [City] food banks are hoping to create more opportunities for everyone accessing the food bank to feedback about their experience, and their experience with the food bank service. And as part of that, that will definitely be finding out more about people with no recourse to public funds [...] they're really committed to embed in participation... and involving people with lived experience. (Claire; Manager, Food Charity in Scotland).*

The manager of a food bank in a Muslim Welfare Centre in Wales described a similar scheme by which community organisers took on the role similar to that of a 'case worker' for each of the approximately 25 families with NRPF that the organisation supported:

*So even to the point in terms of what we actually provide them, so we know the families, the size of the families, the number of children, etcetera. What we worked out was, we're probably saving them between £30 and £40 a month, in terms of what they would ordinarily spend on food. (Nabeel; Manager, Muslim Welfare Centre in Wales).*

The second practical and food-related recommendation was to ‘**enable households to fully use their food skills**’. Specifically, this was to secure investment to fund interventions. The experiences of those with NRPF can be characterised by an external locus of control, especially with regards to housing and income; two of the biggest drivers of food poverty. Families often found themselves in accommodation without adequate food preparation and storage space or they were unable to save up to buy kitchen equipment and cooking utensils. Whilst they may well have the food preparation and cooking skills needed to consume a good quality diet, they were unable to use these skills and often became reliant on unhealthy convenience foods.

Lauren, a manager for a community youth charity in Northern Ireland, described the success of a scheme where they bought cooking equipment for families, alongside providing a series of classes to show them how to use the equipment and adapt their existing recipes. While such interventions can be relatively expensive, they can ultimately result in families having greater control, choice and responsibility over their own diets:

*Like a slow cooker programme, provided the equipment and stuff so some of them may be not able to afford those appliances and stuff but we were able to provide that and the utensils and stuff to use that as well... a lot of these families are displaced. People just don't have the money and they just can't afford the hike in prices and they can't afford even the increase in food and stuff as well and those essentials, so we're just finding the need worryingly high at the minute. (Lauren; Programme Manager, Community Youth Charity in Northern Ireland).*

## Conclusion

The findings from this study indicate that living with NRPF can be characterised as a perpetual indeterminate state of uncertainty, hostility and hardship. People are having to engage with an inflexible and demanding immigration system to obtain 'leave-to-remain' and/or citizenship (Jolly et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). This system therefore necessitates the ongoing intervention and support of charities and advocacy groups. The uncertainty can often last years, leaving families in destitution with little income and poor housing, unable to afford or access sufficient amounts of quality food. The families who took part in this research have been living in the UK with NRPF for between 6 months and 17 years. This combination has devastating effects on quality of life and physical/mental health.

The continuous uncertainty and challenges associated with having NRPF mean that diet and/or healthy eating are compromised due to more urgent priorities, such as inadequate housing, long working hours and/or lack of income. Low income and poor housing are associated with poorer health outcomes and contributes to dietary health inequalities (Ridley et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2019; Thompson, 2022b). Some participants also experienced trauma, trafficking and/or exploitation.

Many families found themselves reliant on food banks and whilst they were grateful for the food parcels they received, this was often culturally inappropriate and/or inadequate for their needs. Moreover, some families were unable to cook this food because they had inadequate preparation space, storage facilities or resources. Existing research show that food bank parcels are typically energy dense, high in sugar, and low in nutrients. They also tend to consist mostly of tinned and dried food, with little fresh produce (Fallaize et al., 2020).

Since 2010, funding and welfare support has been increasingly withheld by successive UK governments as a tool for controlling immigration (O'Connell & Brannen, 2019). Most support organisations who took part in this study explained how funding cuts to the public sector have dramatically reduced the support they are able to provide families with NRPF. Some expressed the view that the system was deliberately designed to dissuade people from settling in the UK. Due to austerity, the COVID-19 pandemic and recent cost of living crisis, organisations have increasingly moved from providing support mostly relating to immigration legal advice and advocacy, towards providing holistic support, such as housing, income and by opening food banks.

In some ways, families with NRPF are in a perpetual state of 'advanced marginalisation' (Wacquant, 2007). Whilst the pressures of the immigration system and the impact on families varied somewhat across the four UK nations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales), the hostility and lack of agency or control over their own lives remained a constant feature and challenge.

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## Family Case Summaries

### Case Summary: Grace

Grace is from Nigeria and lives in South London with her husband and four sons (aged 10, 8, 5 and 1 year(s)) in temporary shared accommodation. Although there is not much space, Grace is happy with her current housing. Her children have their own bedroom and they have access to a washing machine. Grace had NRPF status for three years due to visa issues. During this time, they lived in a church homeless hostel for one year. Grace and her family prefer home cooked Nigerian food. Whilst living in the hostel, they were reliant on food banks and cooked meals from charity and could sometimes access the hostel kitchen. It was difficult to get her children to eat because they had little or no choice. Grace no longer has NRPF and can access welfare benefits, but she still cannot afford to buy enough food. She is still using food banks regularly, but struggles with canned food, which the family do not eat. She is also reluctant to give her children out of date food.

*Yeah, I do, I do borrow money to buy some food, some foods. Yeah, because it's not everything that food bank will give you.*

*I don't save money, I buy it [food]. And that's because we are like family of five now, and I don't save money, I buy food for my children.*

*So I don't give them [my children] anything soup because it affected me. My stomach was - I suffered. So anything I cook for them, I make sure I washed it very well before they would eat it. Yeah, that's why I don't want anything in a can, I don't give them any canned food. I don't.*

### Case Summary: Martha

Martha is a Muslim woman from Nigeria who lives in East London with her four children (aged 22 (twins), 10 and 5 years). When she first moved to the UK, she had NRPF status attached to her 'Family (Parent) Visa' for four years. During this time, she lived in temporary shared accommodation. She had to work multiple jobs with long hours and rarely got to see her children or cook and eat with them. It was also very difficult to cook because other residents would take her food. Her children became overweight because they relied on convenience and unhealthy foods given to them by their childminder. Martha says she was very depressed during this time. She was taking antidepressants and also put on a lot of weight. She still regularly uses food banks. Whilst most of the people she encounters there are kind, she finds it a shameful way to live.

*Yeah, what will fill them [her children] up, so they don't keep... but it's a problem because every minute they are saying they are hungry, they want this, they want that. And you can't work, being a single mother and after, because if you work, being a single mother, and [NRPF] for you.*

*I didn't have time for myself, no privacy... Because as the children are becoming obese, I became obese. I found myself going to food banks most of the time, just to get myself, supporting myself. And it devalued your dignity, and people seeing you lining down, lining up in food banks to collect food, especially people that you know, like, they will see you, and they'll see you lining up at the food bank to collect food for your kids. So it affects you a lot.*

*Because sometimes going to food banks, especially being a Muslim, there are some things they offer you that you don't eat. And most times, I know there was a food bank and they gave me... something that contains pork and I tried to remove them and say, sorry, I don't eat pork, can you change me something else? And the lady... to me said, 'sorry, if you can't take it, that's all we have'.*

## Case Summary: Agnes

Agnes is from Nigeria and lives in London with her partner and four children (aged 11, 9, 6 and 2 years) in temporary accommodation. She has lived there for three years. Agnes came to the UK to join her partner on a 'student dependent' visa, but was invited to apply for asylum by the Home Office when her visa expired. She still has NRPF status. Agnes has experienced mental illness and attends counselling regularly for this. Although she is employed as a support worker and loves her job, she still has difficulties in affording food and is dependent on food banks. Agnes loves to cook and her family prefer Nigerian food, but she often doesn't have the time or money to cook Nigerian meals and she finds it hard to cook meals from the tinned food often provided by food banks. She feels guilty turning down some food offered by food banks, but she says she doesn't want to waste it and it might help someone else. She has experienced hostility when she visits some food banks (if her partner can't), which she finds very stressful.

*I'll say no [to certain food in food banks].... Because there is no point taking it and throwing them away, while there are other people will need it. But I tend to take little, so they don't think I don't appreciate what I get. But with the fruit and vegetables, I take those and I take the sardines. But like all this mash and every other thing, my kids won't eat them.*

*You see, my kids now, most of them are now aware of the fact that there is something called no recourse to public funds. Initially, when you go, the kind of the way they will look at you, and think maybe you're just lazy, you don't want to do anything.*

*Sometimes you meet the good, the bad and the ugly people in the food bank. And I don't blame them, and they have a lot of stress now, because the rate, the number of people going to food banks now, it's much. So the stress is on them, but then they don't have to take it [out] on me.*

## Case Summary: Mary

Mary lives alone in London. She does not have any children or family in the UK. Already living in the UK, when she turned 18 years old the Home Office gave her NRPF status as an asylum seeker. It took one year to correct. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she was very isolated, relying on food bank deliveries and support from friends. Mary has ongoing health problems and restricted mobility. Having NRPF meant she was unable to access benefits and her health problems left her unable to work. She was reliant on charities for a long time, spent extended periods of time staying with friends (and their children) and lived in a homeless shelter. She says she had so little money at one point, that she had to start shoplifting, experienced mental health problems and felt suicidal. Mary was supported through this difficult time with the help of charities. She has her own home now via a housing association homelessness scheme, and she no longer relies on food banks. She is finding it hard to readjust to eating fresh food and Nigerian food again, after having lived on tinned and convenience foods for so long.

*It was hard for me, just me. Just imagine I had a kid, sofa-surfing and I'm homeless, what would I do? I would lose my mind.*

*They [food bank] can give me like bread or baked beans, some tinned tomato. That's all they gave me, really. Sometimes they asked me what I want, but it's mostly bread*

*I resorted to - what is this being called? Shoplifting. So I couldn't buy clothes, I couldn't buy anything, I had to shoplift from Asda, Tesco's, Primark, wherever I go, to survive.*



### Case Summary: Rose

Rose lives alone in London in privately rented accommodation. She is from Nigeria and came to the UK as an asylum seeker. She had NRPF status for 6 months whilst she was awaiting the outcome of her asylum claim. During that time, she lived in a 'Home Office hostel' for six months with other asylum seekers and survived on donated food and clothing. The hostel also had a cafeteria that provided three meals per day, but the food was of poor quality and consisted mostly of bread and watery soup. On better days there was rice and beans. She no longer had NRPF status but is still reliant on food banks and finds that some days she either doesn't want to eat or doesn't have enough food to eat. She is preoccupied with paying bills and often forgets to eat. When she has the money, Rose prefers to shop for fresh foods at street markets that sell Nigerian food. Unfortunately, she has to travel quite a distance to access these so doesn't do it very often. She has very little money to buy food and has to manage a strict budget.

*I lack the nutrition of it, I'm not going to lie. I do lack a lot, maybe because I wasn't - I don't know, I haven't been used to it, or I don't eat it, or I don't know. But I lack that generally, and I don't eat veg. I don't, I struggle to eat veg, I really, really struggle. So whenever I try to do that, I honestly do try.*

*Normally in the hostel we had the government, the Home Office provided, like, I don't know what you call them, it's like a cafeteria where they cook you a meal for morning, afternoon and night. So whenever it's breakfast in the morning, you have to come downstairs. So we had like a whole dining area, where we eat whatever is given to us. And the food, oh, my God, it was more like leftovers, or more like all this kind of food they are not properly nutrition. So anything we eat was watery.*

*I just eat in my room or on the floor. I just sit on the chair. I don't have a place set up for that*

### Case Summary: Victoria

Victoria is originally from Nigeria and lives in London with her four year old daughter. She came to the UK as an asylum seeker and has had NRPF status for two years. Victoria and her daughter were being supported by social workers. They helped her with housing and referrals to various support agencies and charities, including food banks. Although she only uses them 'when desperate'. Victoria is unable to work and has mental health issues, including PTSD and anxiety, and she also suffers with chronic back pain. Initially, Victoria was in temporary accommodation where she shared a room. Whilst she is still in temporary shared accommodation, she currently has a room to herself and daughter. However, the kitchen is shared and that makes it difficult to store and cook food. She is also aware that she could be moved again at any time, which she finds extremely stressful. She does not like the tinned foods available at the food bank. When she is able to, she likes to cook her own soup and jollof rice. She doesn't like takeaway meals and says she often goes hungry to make sure that there is enough food for her daughter.

*First of all, to the government, I don't see a reason why there should be no recourse to public funds. I think it should be accessible for everybody, because now it's as if it's now, it's looking discriminative.*

*Sometimes no, but sometimes I go hungry, but I just have to make sure my daughter is okay, so she eats first, yeah.*

*We need money, we need mental support, like counselling [...] We need good food, like we should have choice of - I know it's not easy to supply here, but we need choice of food as well.*

### Case Summary: Faith

Faith lives in London with her four children (aged 12, 8, 6 and 4 years) and two friends. She is currently seeking asylum from Nigeria and has NRPF status. She has to manage on little money and has found it impossible to afford enough food. The stress of this situation is having a negative impact on her physical and mental health. She is reliant on food banks, sometimes having to pick the food up herself, and sometimes getting deliveries. Faith says that she does not like the food available from the food bank, as it is mostly tinned and never the Nigerian foods that she prefers to eat. She really appreciates the toiletries and household goods she gets from the food bank, as these help her limited funds go further. She always feeds her children first and then, if there is enough food left over, she will have something to eat herself.

*The only money I have is from the organisation who is supporting me.*

*Sometimes because of my situation, so this organisation [...] so they'll send me a parcel, a bag [of food].*

*No, it's not Nigerian food, it's more British food. We will go around there to see something that you would like.*

### Case Summary: Joy

Joy lives in South London with her four children (aged 4 – 10 years). She originally came to the UK from Nigeria as an 'undocumented' migrant. She is currently seeking asylum and has had NRPF status for five years, meaning she can't work or access welfare benefits. She relies on a weekly statutory payment from the local authority, her local church and a charity for support. She currently lives in a one bedroom flat, but the property has mould and damp issues. Joy's case worker has referred her to food banks and they have become a permanent fixture in her household food practices. However, she struggles to get her children to eat non-Nigerian foods supplied by the food bank. She thinks that the social supermarket she also uses (at a cost of £3 subscription) to be much more helpful because she can access fresh food and it gives her more choice about the food she can take home. Joy says that having NRPF for so long has had an impact on her physical and mental health.

*As an asylum seeker, they [local authority] just pay the weekly something, the £35 weekly, they give. So that's what I have to manage with, and my church do help sometimes. [...] So I get money from the church, from the members and some family friends.*

*And the tins we collect from the food bank, half of it has expired already, and being that the kids don't like it, so I still need to go to the shop to buy the proper African food that they like.*

*The canned food is like the baked beans, it's like the tomato soup, it's like the garden peas, carrots. And, me, I'm a diabetes patient, so I can't eat this kind of food, because of the sugary.*

## Case Summary: Evelyn

Evelyn lives in North London in 'National Asylum Support Service' (NASS) temporary shared accommodation with her two children and three other women (and their children). She has one private bedroom for herself and her children. There is no supermarket within walking distance of her accommodation, which makes it very difficult to shop and feed her family. She originally came to the UK from Nigeria as an asylum seeker and has had NRPF status for five years. Evelyn's family are reliant on food banks, even though they largely find the (mostly) tinned food given to them unpalatable. She tends to choose rice, pasta and tinned tomatoes from the food bank when available because she can use these to cook Nigerian dishes. Evelyn's children get free school meals and she finds this really helpful. She explains that her children tend to enjoy them. Her ambition is to study midwifery.

*I can't complain, but it's really, really hard for us. Because with that money [£78.50 per week], we have to buy clothes, we have to buy food, we have to take a bus, a different bus pass [...] I get some help from the school charities [...] So sometimes I get some £10 from them, sometimes £12. I just go around just to get money to survive, yeah.*

*To eat what you see, instead of what you like, so it's a bit difficult. But we just have to manage, because sometimes my son will say, mummy, I don't want to eat pasta. But that's what I have to offer, so I feel bad for him sometimes, but we just have to eat it.*

*It's terrible, it's frustrating, it's hard, because why you can't do, you can't do work, you can't buy the food you want. You can't eat what you want to eat. So it's the worst thing anybody can experience, for me, because it's if I have the documents, I will stay at home to wait for government money. I'd rather go with my money, and get the food that I want to eat.*

## Case Summary: Samson

Samson lives with his partner and their two children (aged 8 and 6 years) in a one bedroom flat which they rent in London. They originally came to the UK from Nigeria four years ago and have had NRPF status since arriving. He was previously working before the COVID-19 lockdowns, but has been unable to find work since losing his job. Samson and his family are being supported by various charities and a case worker tried to resolve his NRPF status without success. His wife has health problems and high blood pressure, which makes it difficult for her to shop and cook food. His family regularly use food banks, and while he is grateful for the food, he says that his children do not like eating the tinned foods provided. However, the food bank they use often provides fresh fruits and vegetables and breakfast cereals, which are much more suitable for the children. His family are on a very low income and he worries that he can't afford more for his children, especially food.

*But when you get there [food bank], as I said, most of this is tinned food, which is not too okay for us. But I don't blame them, it's a free gift.*

*It's stress. It's stress. It's stress.*

*They [my children] say, my friend have this, he have this, he have this. Then we continue to start talking to them, look at the situation. So kids like that, and if you start talking to them, and explaining the situation to them, they feel... They don't feel happy, because if their friend can afford, let's say, a sandwich and themselves, they can't afford a sandwich from the shop.*

### Case Summary: Patience

Patience lives in North London with her two children (aged 6 and 3 years), two other women and their children in temporary shared accommodation. She has one private bedroom for her and her two children, but the house is small and the kitchen is in disrepair. Further, there are no supermarkets within walking distance. Patience is originally from Nigeria and was a victim of trafficking, an experience which has left her severely traumatised. She lived in a different European country for seven years, before escaping her traffickers and coming to the UK as an asylum seeker. Patience has lived in the UK and had NRPF status for six years. She is not able to work and, other than statutory local authority payments, cannot access welfare benefits or state support. She does not get to eat African foods as often as she would like because they are expensive. She manages to feed her family with food bank donations and shopping at cheaper supermarkets, when she can afford to.

*But most times I go to Iceland. Most of the week, I just buy what will last us for the week. But before the week runs out, the money is all gone.*

*So most of the things I get from the food bank, is really not what the kids eat [...] So I don't take them, and I just take them the most, because I don't want to bring it home and it's wasted.*

*No support, no nothing. It's really hard. I feel so sad for them. I don't know how to explain it. I really feel sad for them, and thank God that they are not those kind of kids that complain a lot. Sometimes they ask me, mummy, I want to watch TV. Why don't we have TV?*

*Okay, for my people back home, if you tell them anything like that, they just say... They don't really believe you*

### Case Summary: Theresa

Theresa lives in a temporary shared hostel in North London with her two children (aged 5 years and one month old), where she has one bedroom for herself and her two children. The kitchen and bathroom are shared with six other women and their children. Theresa came to the UK from Nigeria to join her husband, but he left her soon after. She is now seeking asylum and has had NRPF status for one year. In the kitchen, she has a key to her own food cupboard. Theresa says she has to wake up at 5am to get her daughter washed and dressed in time for school because there is only one bathroom. It is almost impossible to cook without getting up in the middle of the night or the early hours of the morning when the other residents are asleep. As yet, Theresa has been unable to get any help from food banks or other charities.

*He [husband] tell us to come out for settle down with him, but when I come here, things has changed, he's totally changed to me immediately I come after two weeks, and I arrive. He's just changed to that he don't want me again, and my mum have told me that don't marry him before. So I can't tell my mum and dad this is exactly what is happening.*

*I went to [the] library to go and discuss with them [food bank], everything is going on. But they asked me to bring my tenancy agreement to that. Definitely they will help me, but when they see that, no recourse public funds that is there, so they said they can't help me.*

*We don't have rota at all, so anybody that comes first, they will do something, what they do in the kitchen.*

## Case Summary: Adam

Adam lives in London with a 'host family' (a retired couple) that he was placed with by a charity. He has been living there for two months and is very happy, as it gives him a chance to improve his English and share mealtimes. Adam came to the UK from China 17 years ago. He 'overstayed' his visa when it expired and became homeless. He was sleeping on the streets whilst looking for 'cash-in-hand' work, mostly in kitchens. The working conditions were unpleasant and the employers exploited the fact that he has NRPF status, but getting paid, even just a little, meant that he could eat. When he wasn't working, he tried to sleep on the bus or tube and sometimes in airports. He came across a homeless charity almost three years ago, and they have been supporting him ever since. When he was sleeping on the streets, Adam found it very difficult to get enough food and he was often unable to ask for help because he didn't speak sufficient English. He also lost a lot of his teeth, which only made it more difficult for him to eat. Adam is having dental treatment now and his host family take care to cook him soft foods. Adam's ambition is to be able to work legally and get a job with a charity so that he can help other people.

*I mean, people want to work, but there's no chance to work, and that's really made the life really difficult. And if we all could work and pay the tax, and that would make everything better.*

*Yeah, because sometimes I can get cash in hand, as well, so I can buy a sandwich from the supermarket. Yeah, because a sandwich meal at Tesco, or Sainsbury's is just £3, and now it's £3.50. And so sometimes I had just one meal for a whole day.*

*The money I got, I couldn't - enough to pay the rent, so sometimes I stayed on the bus, tube or even the airport.*

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