

Thousands of children from migrant families at risk of hunger unless free school meals are extended, charities warn

A group of 60 organisations have written to the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson MP, calling on him to prevent children from going hungry by permanently extending free school meals to pupils from low-income migrant families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

The Children's Society, UNISON, Action for Children and Project 17 are among the organisations that signed the letter.

New research provided to The Children's Society by the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford reveals that at the end of 2019, an estimated 175,643 non-EEA citizens under age 18 lived in families affected by the NRPF condition, which is a significant increase on the 2016 figures¹ that put the number at 142,496 such children.

NRPF is a condition imposed on migrant families who have not yet qualified for permanent residency in the UK. It prevents them from accessing essential welfare support, including Universal Credit, tax credits, and usually free school meals.

The condition disproportionately affects black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and removes the safety net of welfare support from families that are likely to already be struggling financially, with additional costs such as fees for leave to remain applications.

In April this year, the Government temporarily extended free school meals to children in some families affected by the NRPF condition while the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak impacts schools – a decision which the letter's signatories have praised as a positive step.

However, there is uncertainty over how long this vital support will continue, and the group is concerned that when this help is withdrawn, thousands of children will lose out on what could be their only nutritious meal of the day.

Sam Royston, Director of Policy and Research for The Children's Society, said:

"It is unacceptable that thousands of children, whose lives have already been turned upside down by the pandemic, could lose out on free school meals. Adjusting to being back at school will already be a tremendous challenge for most, but whether a child is able to eat should not depend on their parents' immigration status. The latest figures show that the number of children affected by the NRPF condition is increasing, meaning many more are now at risk.

"The extension of free school meals for children affected by NRPF has been a lifeline, but we know that the impact of the pandemic will be felt for years to come. The Government must permanently extend free school meals to all low-income migrant families who have no recourse to public funds, to help ensure that every child can return to school with the hope of a bright future."

The letter has been sent at the same time Matthew Gold & Co Ltd. Solicitors have been instructed to challenge the eligibility criteria for free school meals, calling them discriminatory and a breach of children's human rights.

ENDS

To read the letter please click [here](#)

¹ 2016 figures from *A Lifeline for All* report, p14

Media enquiries

For more information, please contact The Children's Society's media team on 0207 8414422 or email media@childrenssociety.org.uk. For out-of-hours enquiries please call 07810 796508

Notes to editor

The Children's Society is a national charity that helps the most vulnerable children and young people in Britain today. We run services and campaigns to make children's lives better and change the systems that are placing them in danger. We listen. We support. We act. Together with our supporters we're improving the lives of children today and building hope for a better future.

List of signatories:

Action for Children – Imran Hussain, Director of Policy and Campaigns
African Community School - Keith Hughes, Chair
Alexandra Rose Charity – Jonathan Pauling, CEO
Asylum Matters – Paul Hook, Project Director
Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team - Dave Stamp, Senior Caseworker
Barnardo's - Javed Khan, CEO
Bede Youth Adventure Project - Fokrul Meah, Senior Project Manager
British Association of Social Workers – Dr Ruth Allen, CEO
Caritas Westminster – John Coleby, Director
Chefs in Schools – Naomi Duncan, Chief Executive
Citizens UK – James Blatchley-Asfa, Lead Organiser
City of Sanctuary UK – Sian Summers-Rees, Chief Officer
Children England – Kathy Evans, Chief Executive
Child Poverty Action Group – Alison Garnham, Chief Executive
De Beauvoir Association – Kate McFarlane, Chair
Entraide Mutual Aid - Felix Kupay, Chairperson
FareShare – Lindsay Boswell, Chief Executive
Feeding Britain - Andrew Forsey, Director
Food Inequalities Rebellion - Dr Sharon Noonan-Gunning
Greater London Authority – Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement
Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit - Denise McDowell, Chief Executive
Guy's & St. Thomas' Charity – Sarah Hickey, Childhood Obesity Programme Director
Hackney Migrant Centre – Daf Viney, Director of Services
Haringey Migrant Support Centre
Health Equalities Group – Matthew Philpott, Executive Director
Help Refugees – Josephine Naughton, CEO
Helen Bamber Foundation – Zoe Dexter, Welfare and Housing Manager
Independent Food Aid Network - Sabine Goodwin, Coordinator
Jesuit Refugee Service UK – Sarah Teather, Director
Jewish Council for Racial Equality - Dr Edie Friedman, Executive Director
Latin American Women's Rights Service - Gisela Valle, Director
Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network – Rosario Guimba-Stewart, CEO
Leicester City of Sanctuary – Pete Hobson, Chair of Trustees
Made in Hackney - Sarah Bentley, Founder and Director
Magic Breakfast – Alysa Remtulla, Head of Policy and Campaigns
Mayor's Fund for London – Clara Widdison, Head of Social Inclusion
Migrants at Work - Ake Achi, Founder and Director
Migrant Voice - Nazek Ramadan, Director
Migrant and Children's Legal Unit - Lisa Payne, Senior Policy & Advocacy Officer
National Children's Bureau – Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive
Newington Green Action Group - Cllr Jenny Kay, Secretary
Parents and Communities Together – Layla Meerlo, Community Organiser
Praxis – Bethan Lant, Casework, Training and Advocacy Manager

Project 17 - Abi Brunswick, Director
Refugee Council - Dr Lisa Doyle, Director of Advocacy
Refugee and Asylum Participatory Action Research – Dr Rhetta Moran, Chair of Trustees
Refugee Support Devon - Nelida Montes de Oca, Casework coordinator
School Food Matters – Stephanie Wood, Founder and CEO
Southall Black Sisters - Pragna Patel, Director
Step Up Migrant Women Campaign - Elizabeth Jiménez-Yáñez, Coordinator
the3million - Nicolas Hatton, CEO
Tees Valley of Sanctuary
The Children’s Society – Sam Royston, Director of Policy`
The Food Foundation - Anna Taylor, Executive Director
The Unity Project - Caz Hattam, Project Coordinator
Together Southwark - Rt Revd Dr W. Karowei Dorgu, Chair & Bishop of Woolwich
UNISON – Leigh Powell, National Officer for Education and Children’s Services
University of Liverpool Law Clinic - Judith Carter, Lecturer and in-house Solicitor
Voices in Exile - Mel Steel, Director
West London Welcome Centre for Refugees and Migrants – Joanne MacInnes, Director