



28 May 2026

## **PPR’s response to the Home Office consultation “Family Returns: Reforming Asylum Support and Enforcing Family Returns”**

PPR is deeply concerned that these Home Office [proposals](#) fundamentally change the balance between the respective weights given to **child welfare** and to immigration control in the UK, to the detriment of both. PPR believes that any ‘gain’ to the Home Office from these proposals, in terms of savings on asylum support or (hypothetical) increase in voluntary return decisions, would be far outweighed by the harm caused – to the families and young people affected, to our wider society and to the credibility of UK institutions.

It is important to note at the outset that **no Equality Impact Assessments or Children’s Impact Assessments** were published alongside the proposals. The impression is that the Home Office is forging ahead recklessly, either not considering the impact of its proposals or, even worse, deliberately concealing its awareness of those impacts from the public.

### **The proposals: reducing Home Office and local authority support**

Part 1 of the Home Office proposals curtails access to support for families without immigration status, including those who have been refused asylum, as well as some young people leaving care.

Its section A proposes reductions to **Home Office support**. In PPR’s experience the current system of supports to asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers is already inadequate and too often fails to protect them from harm; these new proposals weaken it further.

PPR began working with asylum seekers facing housing challenges, discrimination and enforced destitution in 2015; the Housing4All group’s [survey findings](#) published the next year showed that more than three out of every five asylum seekers interviewed had been made homeless and destitute more than once, and half on more than three occasions. The group concluded,

we have found out that the levels of destitution and health implications are vast and are not reflective of a civil and welcoming society where people can safely seek refuge and sanctuary (p. 3)

They cited international standards like [General Comment 20](#) of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (which states that Covenant rights like the right to an adequate standard of living --including adequate housing -- apply to everyone including non-nationals regardless of legal status and documentation (para. 30)), pointing out that “a person’s immigration status should not determine whether they can access shelter or are forced to sleep outside in the full wrath of the elements” (p. 3).

The group recommended policy changes, but when these were ignored it developed a practical proposal to house destitute women asylum seekers in unoccupied social housing zoned for redevelopment (and thereby unavailable for allocation to people on the social housing waiting list) for their safety. The resulting pilot project provided safe shelter and support for four women. Further Housing4All survey work in 2018 [highlighted](#) the ongoing harm caused to families and their children by the enforced poverty and the work ban; over time it developed into the [#LiftTheBan](#) and [#KindEconomy](#) campaigns.

Home Office data indicates that historically, while most asylum claims were initially refused, many were later accepted upon appeal. These Home Office proposals would do away with the existing minimal safeguards for refused asylum seekers, via measures like a new time limit on support (paras. 11, 16); a higher bar (proof of ‘genuine obstacle’ to leaving the UK (para. 12) – excluding for instance the medical inadvisability of leaving (para. 21)); and removal of families’ right of appeal in case of refusal (para. 13), in violation of due process. All of this would, if implemented, result in even greater levels of child poverty, homelessness and destitution amongst those affected – again in contravention of international law, including the core tenet set out in Article 3 of the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#):

in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the **best interests of the child** shall be a primary consideration.

The Home Office is not exempt from this obligation. Its duty is to safeguard the best interests of children in carrying out all of its functions – not to use the threat or experience of repeat destitution and the harm it causes children to try to force their families to leave the UK. Enforced destitution is more likely to drive families underground or into exploitative situations than it is to make them choose to return to the unsafe country-of-origin conditions they fled in the first place.

Section B details the Home Office’s proposed restrictions on **local authority support** to failed asylum seekers, including children. The text lists conditions that must be met for

local support to be offered and gives the Home Office an advisory role rather than leaving decision making in the hands of local authorities. It leaves some local authority duties in place while removing others:

local authorities will still be required to provide services to children in need and their families under existing laws to meet needs arising for reasons other than destitution e.g. disability (para. 26)

PPR is deeply concerned that the proposals tie the hands of local authorities and undermine their ability to make their own choices. They also potentially create a two-tiered approach to child suffering, where the effects of enforced destitution are apparently acceptable but suffering due to other causes is not. This is perverse; it will clearly cause harm to the most vulnerable and put local authorities in an untenable position.

The proposed changes would limit the support that **children leaving care** could receive from local authorities. Again, the Home Office should not be able to prevent local authorities from assessing people themselves and according the support they deem required.

NI [law](#) mandates that NI authorities work together to ensure the wellbeing of children. The Home Office consultation document says that these proposed changes “do not apply to local authorities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland” (para. 25); regardless, this precedent, once set in England, would risk **undermining child protection** throughout the UK.

Part 2 of the Home Office proposals involve changes to the existing rules around enforced removals, **to permit the use of physical force against children**, whether unaccompanied or with family members.

Currently, Home Office policy allows physical force to be used in the event that it is necessary to avoid harm to a child or someone else, but it does not permit physical intervention to make a child comply with removal. The Home Office apparently feels constrained by this; it wants wider scope to use force against children, for instance in the event of ‘non-compliance’ such as a child ‘holding on’ to a family member (para. 40).

Expanding the permitted use of state force against children for the purposes of immigration enforcement is a wholly unacceptable rebalancing of priorities. Child welfare is paramount; if senior Home Office officials feel its officers need scope to handcuff, physically handle or use violence against children in order to achieve its aims, something is seriously wrong. These proposals, if enacted, would cause personal suffering and harm amongst children and their adult family members. They would cause wider societal harm, affecting all families, by undermining the principle of and mechanisms for safeguarding the best interest of the child. The proposals – particularly

those permitting the use of force against children – even risk causing moral injury to state employees charged with implementing them.

We suggest that the Home Office test these proposals against its duties and obligations under international law, especially but not limited to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the General Comments elaborated by the Treaty Body.

The government should

- Maintain the current section 95 protection, including statutory right to appeal, for refused asylum seeker families
- Maintain existing protections for people who cannot leave the UK due to medical needs, ongoing legal proceedings, barriers related to travel documents or in the absence of a safe and viable route of return
- Desist from trying to undermine local authorities' duties towards children by making core welfare protections contingent on their or their parents' immigration status.
- Retain existing protections for young people leaving care
- Refrain from trying to expand the parameters of lawful use of force during enforced removals
- Publish full Equality Impact Assessments and Children's Impact Assessments for public review and input
- Work to restore public trust in its own professionalism and integrity in the wake of these proposals.