

Citizens Advice Scotland

Submission to the APPGs on Migration and on Poverty – Impact of Recent Immigration and Asylum Rule Changes on Poverty (May 2026)

The Scottish Citizens Advice network is one of the largest providers of immigration advice in Scotland, playing a key role in empowering people to access and realise their rights and enabling communities to thrive.

We believe that our diverse communities are stronger, mutually interlinked and well-integrated when everyone's human rights, including the rights of migrants, people seeking international protection, and their families, are respected, protected and fulfilled and their dignity is upheld.

Our evidence broadly aligns with the findings in your recent joint report on the effects of UK Immigration, Asylum and Refugee Policy on poverty in the UK. We note that the changes recently proposed by the Home Office to the settlement framework and refugee protection, overall, run counter to key recommendations your report has made.

We have significant concerns that the far-reaching Home Office proposals to drastically restrict access to settlement and implement major rights regressions for people wanting to build a life in the UK will increase and further entrench insecurity, poverty and exploitation within our communities.

We therefore welcome this opportunity to provide evidence to this joint Call for Evidence by the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Migration and on Poverty and Inequality.

Our evidence

The Scottish Citizens Advice network is one of the largest providers of immigration advice in Scotland. All advisers in our network, both paid and volunteers, have successfully completed an accredited adviser training which includes Immigration Advice Authority (IAA) level 1 as an essential component. Additionally, in 2024/25, around a third (31%) of CAB in Scotland had a paid specialist immigration adviser. Due to the embedded nature of immigration advice as part of our free and holistic advice service, we see a wide spectrum of immigration and asylum system-related issues and hold in-depth insight into issues faced by people across Scotland who are subject to immigration and asylum rules.

Government announcements of the Immigration White Paper proposals and related media coverage are driving up demand for advice. In 2025, our network supported more than 7,200 individuals¹ across Scotland with around 21,700 pieces of immigration advice, up 30% compared to the

¹ 5,000 were new clients.

previous year. Advisers in our network report an influx of advice requests on (proposed) rule changes, with many people we support finding these changes and the speed at which they are/could be introduced highly alarming.

We wholly oppose the “earned settlement” model and urge the government to abandon the proposed changes to the settlement framework.

Advisers in our network highlight that settlement (Indefinite Leave to Remain/ILR) is the foundation of security and stability for people wanting to build their lives in the UK and a precondition for well-integrated, strong communities. From the migrant’s point of view, ILR is rarely the quasi-automatic result of their five year’s residence in the UK as the Home Office consultation paper suggests.

Under existing rules, ILR requires individuals to fulfil several conditions alongside completing a qualifying period of usually 5 years, including meeting suitability requirements, passing the Life in the UK test and an English language test, and the payment of a £3,226 fee. To reach this stage, most people on pathways to settlement are required to pay high visa fees when they first apply and when they renew their visa, in addition to an annual Immigration Health Surcharge which effectively double-charges migrants for access to the NHS. Cumulatively, these fees can run into ten thousands of pounds – money families have to set aside on top of the usual household costs. CAB advisers highlight that these high direct immigration costs make it harder for migrant families to save money to build security for themselves (for ‘rainy days’, a mortgage deposit, further education etc.) and risk pushing lower-income households into poverty.

People on long, expensive and complicated journeys to settlement often face financial hardship, housing and employment insecurity while being regularly barred from accessing their right to social security due to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition. This can result in negative impacts on their family relationships, mental health and sense of belonging. Anaane’s experience² illustrates this:

Anaane is being supported by his East of Scotland CAB. He has been in the UK on a skilled worker visa, but his latest employer cancelled his visa. He has now been waiting for 21 months for a decision on his application for further leave to remain. His passport is with the Home Office, and he cannot access statutory support. Anaane is reliant on food bank referrals and lives in temporary homeless accommodation. He has taken this up with his MP and has raised a complaint with the Home Office but feels like nothing is being done. Feeling like nobody was helping him, Anaane attempted to take his own life.

We understand **integration to be a complex and multi-faceted process**. It is not one-way and cannot be achieved by an individual’s efforts alone but requires structures and systems that enable and support migrants and communities to thrive. Immigration advisers across our network highlight that restrictions placed upon migrants by immigration and asylum rules, the insecurity of short-term

² Not his real name. These Citizens Alerts are based on a real-time case reporting system operated by the Citizens Advice network in Scotland. These qualitative cases are shared with us from individual Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), which provide CAS with unique and unparalleled insight into the lived experiences, situations, and detriment which individuals seeking our support are facing. While Citizens Alerts represent individual client experience, they can also highlight patterns and structural issues which need to be addressed. We anonymise this data and compile and analyse it to effect change in policy, law, and practice.

visas, and repeatedly changing goalposts in immigration and asylum policies can hinder people's ability to access employment, especially well-paid employment, and fully participate in their communities and society.

- Refugees, often after prolonged periods of waiting in the UK asylum system for a decision on their application while mostly barred from the right to work, can experience various barriers such as trauma and health issues, language barriers, difficulties getting overseas qualifications recognised, career breaks enforced by asylum rules or their displacement, lack of information and support etc.
- Migrants might also be prevented from accessing (well-paid) employment for other reasons outwith their control. Our advisers regularly see failures/long delays in processing visa and asylum applications, in systems issuing identity documents, eVisa, or national insurance numbers; or employers losing their sponsorship licence and a short window for migrants to secure a new sponsor for a work visa.

We strongly disagree with the reductive premise of 'earned settlement' that some occupations and those with high incomes are more worthy than others and should be fast-tracked while others put on a lengthy route to settlement. The 'earned settlement' model disregards structural inequalities shaping gender, racial and disability pay gaps, gaps in employment rates, and varying abilities to work full- or part-time, which makes it harder for some to work and generate earnings³ in line with new income thresholds. This includes women with caring responsibilities;⁴ survivors of domestic abuse;⁵ racialised minorities in Scotland;⁶ disabled people and elderly people; young people in education or low-paid work; parents especially with young children.

No one should be penalised for working in a role considered "low-skilled" by the government, including many essential roles that keep our public services running and our economy functioning despite being poorly paid - such as health and care workers, third sector employees and other frontline staff, as the Covid-19 pandemic clearly showed.

We also know that NRPF increases vulnerability to poverty and precarity among migrants and their families, negatively impacting on children and women. Yolanda's experience illustrates this:

An East of Scotland CAB is supporting Yolanda who is pregnant with her first child. Both her husband and Yolanda came to the UK on work visas to work in the health and care sector. They are subject to NRPF restrictions. Yolanda used to work for the local council as a care worker. She had to leave her job a couple of months earlier due to an accident but has kept her registration and intends to return to work when the baby is a bit older. Now that her husband provides the only household income of approximately £1900-2000 per month, Yolanda is worried about the family's finances, as due to NRPF the only thing she can access is the Baby Box scheme and perhaps Best Start.

³ See [CAS Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (Jan 2025), pp. 6-8.

⁴ [Carers Census, Scotland, 2023-24 - gov.scot. Close the Gap | Blog | From data to action: Why Scotland needs mandatory gender pay gap action plans](#)

⁵ Surviving [Economic Abuse. Statistics-on-economic-abuse_March-2020.pdf](#). For 2023/24, Police Scotland reported 83% of victims were female and four in five incidents had a female victim and a male suspected perpetrator.

⁶ Scotland's estimated ethnicity pay gap was 10.3% in 2019 (Scottish Government [Analysis of Labour Market Outcomes of Scotland's Minority Ethnic Population](#)). MECOPP (2025) [Unpaid, Unseen and Unheard. Addressing the needs of BME Carers in Scotland.](#)

Advisers in our network emphasise that it would be hugely unfair to extend the qualifying period for people, often female-led single-parent families,⁷ who had their NRPF condition lifted by the Home Office in recognition of their vulnerability. Some families we support are already too afraid to submit a 'change of conditions' application or claim/accept support, even though they are experiencing hardship.

The proposals to push the security that ILR brings out of reach for 10, 15, 20 and even 30 years for many migrants and their families and to completely strip settled people of their right to social security will drive and further entrench insecurity and inequalities. These changes seem designed to force people into hardship in the hope that it will deter others from moving to the UK and make people already here leave despite little evidence to support this. However, these changes will likely hinder, not enable integration. They risk harming the UK government's stated aim to reduce child poverty in this parliament⁸ and run counter to the government's international human rights obligations⁹ which we support.

We take no comfort in the proposal to potentially 'reward' migrants volunteering by reducing their qualifying period by a few years. Alongside colleagues in our network sponsored to work on a work visa, many of our volunteers who give their time, knowledge and skills to the Citizens Advice Network in Scotland are migrants. Their enormous contributions are the lifeblood of CAB throughout Scotland, rooted in local communities and an integral part of anti-poverty infrastructure. We have significant concerns that this proposal could increase migrants' exploitation and risks undermining the spirit of volunteering. By definition, volunteering must be and remain voluntary, entered into and given freely. It should not be connected to immigration control.

The proposal to apply these fundamental changes retroactively to people already in the UK appears unprecedented and incompatible with the rule of law and the principle of legal certainty. Should the government push ahead with these changes, transitional arrangements for this cohort must be enacted to safeguard their rights.

Under the proposals, people will need to make repeated visa applications for longer to become eligible for ILR and will have to meet harsher criteria for settlement, requiring advice at every stage. There is a chronic shortage of immigration advice in Scotland which means many will struggle to access advice and support at the required level. In many communities across Scotland, the Citizens Advice Bureau is the only port of call for people with immigration and asylum system-related problems. Should these proposals enter into force we expect increased demand for our services. Without additional resources this will only hamper the anti-poverty efforts of the Citizens Advice network in Scotland.

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⁷ See [CAS Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (Jan 2025), p. 13; [NRPF Connect Data Report 2023/24](#).

⁸ [Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty - GOV.UK](#).

⁹ See especially paragraphs 25c, 27a, 27b, 27c, 31c, 33, 35c, 35d, 45a, 47a, 53a of the [UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' Concluding observations on the 7th periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#).