

For Immediate Release

Migrants' rights organisations launch campaign to end NRPF for international students at risk of destitution and suspension

Students and migrants' rights organisations launch campaign for an end to no recourse to public funds conditions, and demand a tuition amnesty for Tier 4 international students,

Over 500 university students, lecturers, trade union, and migrant rights organisations in calling for an end to no recourse to public funds for Tier 4 students

Unis Resist Border Controls (URBC), a national campaign seeking to end the hostile environment and border controls inside UK higher education has launched with the Migrants' Rights Network (MRN) two campaigns to end no recourse to public fund (NRPF) and to demand a tuition fee amnesty for Tier 4 international students.

In a letter addressed to Home Secretary Priti Patel, gaining 560 signatures, URBC and MRN are demanding an end to NRPF for Tier 4 international students.

URBC and the Migrants' Rights Network carried out a [preliminary study](#) finding that, out of 124 Tier 4 international student respondents, 56% indicated that, as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown, they are either destitute or at risk of being destitute. URBC and MRN have found Tier 4 international students are disproportionately vulnerable to destitution and have been left stranded in the UK during the pandemic; with many starving, trying to survive on one meal a day during lockdown.

This vulnerability is a result of the UK government's no recourse to public funds (NRPF) policy which forbids access to universal credit, housing support and a myriad of other funds that act as a life-line to prevent destitution during these difficult circumstances.

In response to the URBC and MRN letter, Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham comments:

"I am deeply concerned about the plight of International students in the UK. Many who are supporting themselves through work have lost their jobs through the pandemic. Many have also lost family support due to the pandemic in their home country.

I applaud community efforts to help but Britain mustn't just abandon these students to their fate."

Nadia Whittome, MP for Nottingham East also comments:

“I want to express my solidarity for the affected Tier 4 students who are being unfairly punished due to their immigration status. At no time should this be happening, but it is particularly cruel during a global pandemic. I hope that the entire policy of No Recourse to Public Funds is reassessed in light of COVID-19”.

In a second letter addressed to Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities and the Universities UK, URBC and MRN are demanding a tuition fee amnesty for Tier 4 students affected because of COVID-19 pandemic. The letter has gathered 530 signatures from Rhodes Must Fall Oxford and from UCU representatives.

Tier 4 students whom URBC are supporting have been told by their respective universities that if they do not pay the remainder of their tuition fees, they could be suspended from their studies. These students cannot pay the remainder of their university tuition fees for the same reason they cannot afford food: because their families have been in lockdown in their respective countries, unable to work and send them money. Since their universities are also their visa sponsors, being suspended would undoubtedly put Tier 4 students in jeopardy of becoming undocumented.

Sanaz Raji, founder and member of URBC comments:

“Since May, URBC has given over £6,000 of financial support through our [COVID mutual aid fundraiser](#). We have come into contact with Tier 4 international students who are affected by NRPF and who are under threat of suspension from their universities for not being able to pay the remainder of their tuition fees.

The problems that Tier 4 international students are experiencing has to do with the particular manner that marketised higher education policy exploits students for the tuition fees that they bring to the UK. Additionally, the hostile environment policy makes it extremely difficult for Tier 4 students to be able to challenge unjust and discriminatory treatment within the institutions they are enrolled at. COVID-19 has shown us more starkly than before the precarity that Tier 4 international students have while studying in the UK.”

Mahlea Babjak, London Project Coordinator at MRN further states:

"At the Migrants' Rights Network, we have routinely witnessed the Home Office co-opt institutions intended to enrich our communities and the UK as a whole, often with a disproportionate impact on BAME individuals. This is no different for international students, as seen in the impact of NRPF throughout COVID-19 and beyond. Universities are key actors in the dismantling of structural inequality and their present and future

contribution cannot be fully realised whilst students continue to face the prejudices of the UK's hostile environment policy."

Ends

Contact

Sanaz Raji, Unis Resist Border Controls (URBC), mobile: 0778 3826 904

Email: unisresistbordercontrols@gmail.com

Mahlea Babjak, Migrants' Rights Network (MRN), mobile: 07534 488 696

Email: m.babjak@migrantsrights.org.uk

Notes for Editors

1. [Unis Resist Border Controls](#) is a national campaign started in 2016 made up of migrant lecturers, students and activists demanding an end to the hostile environment policy and border controls within UK higher education.

URBC provides educational outreach, casework support to international student and university staff affected by the hostile environment policy, and conduct research on the use of the hostile environment policy and various forms of border controls inside UK higher education.

2. The [Migrants' Rights Network](#) (MRN) is a campaigning organisation that works alongside migrants in their fight for rights and justice.

MRN builds alliances with individuals and organisations so that migrants are properly represented at all levels of society. It works with and for migrant communities to influence stakeholders and effect structural change to achieve justice and equality for migrants. MRN recognises that achieving justice for all migrants strengthens society as a whole.

3. The hostile environment policy in UK higher education is done through intensive surveillance through the recording of attendance monitoring of international students on Tier 4 visas and international academic staff on Tier 2 and Tier 5 visas. The current policy goes back to the implementation of Labour's points based immigration system between the years of 2008-2010. This in turn forced universities to open their institutions to Home Office monitoring in order to sponsor non-EU international students and

academic staff. The coalition and now Conservative governments have strengthened through the hostile environment policy, monitoring of non-EU international students and academic staff. In 2012, the coalition government instituted the Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS) certificate that educational institutions had to pass before they could sponsor Tier 4 international students. In August 2012, London Metropolitan University [lost its HTS certificate](#) and 2,700 Tier 4 international students had 60 days to find another institution to enrol at or face administrative removal. It would take over seven months, in April 2013, for London Metropolitan University to be allowed to sponsor Tier 4 international students again.

HTS ended in 2015 and its place, installed the Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA). BCA is reviewed every 12 months, and a higher education institution must demonstrate the following:

- (a) a refusal rate of less than 10%
- (b) an enrolment rate of at least 90%, and
- (c) a course completion rate of at least 85%

If an educational institution loses its BCA license, UK Visa and Immigration can prevent them from sponsoring non-EU international students for up to 24 months.

4. Tier 4 international students and university staff on Tier 2 and Tier 5 visas are sponsored by the university they study and/or employed at. Tier 4 international students like those on Tier 2 and 5 visas are those hailing from countries outside the EEA.
5. In 2019, URBC published a study in [The Guardian](#) on the effects of the Hostile Environment policy within UK higher education. In particular, URBC found numerous cases of university lecturers and research staff indicating the particular exploitation that Tier 4 students experience within UK higher education. "Cash cow" was the phrase used by many university lecturers and staff to describe how Tier 4 students were treated by their respective universities.
6. No recourse to public funds (NRPF) became law with the passing of [Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999](#). NRPF stipulates that anyone with limited leave to remain in the UK has no right to claim public funds. Migrants are prevented from accessing the following public funds:
 - attendance allowance
 - carers allowance
 - child benefit
 - child tax credit
 - council tax benefit
 - council tax reduction

- disability living allowance
- (from 6 April 2016) discretionary support payments by local authorities or devolved administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland which replace the discretionary social fund
- housing and homelessness assistance
- housing benefit
- income-based jobseeker's allowance
- income related employment & support allowance – ESA (IR)
- income support
- personal independence payment
- severe disablement allowance
- social fund payment
- state pension credit
- universal credit