



How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

A response to the *Tackling Child Poverty and Improving Life Chances* consultation

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Introduction

1. This response supplements CPAG's response to the consultation – which can be downloaded from <http://www.cpag.org.uk> - but it focuses in particular on the needs of families in migrant communities.
2. It draws upon a roundtable discussion on child poverty in migrant communities, and upon a themed issue of CPAG's policy journal, *Poverty 138* – in particular the contributions of Jill Rutter - which is also being submitted as part of our submission. This response sets out the actions we believe are necessary to enable the strategy to reflect the particular needs of a group of children who are particularly vulnerable to poverty.
3. It is supported by CPAG's *Benefits for Migrants Handbook* – funded by the Trust for London.

Child poverty – the context

4. The Labour Government put in place measures of child poverty and set targets for its eradication: relative to poverty levels in 1996/97, child poverty would be reduced by one-quarter by 2004/05, by half by 2010, and eradicated by 2020. Relative poverty was defined as living below 60 per cent of median income.
5. The annual Households Below Average Income (HBAI) is used to monitor progress on child poverty. Other indicators of poverty and social exclusion were published annually in *Opportunity for All*.¹

What happened to child poverty over the last 10 years?

6. Direct tax and benefit reforms reduced child poverty from 3.4 million in 1998/99 to 2.7 million (before housing costs) in 2004/05. There was a significant slowdown in progress between 2004/05 and 2007/08 – with different trends for different groups of children.

What happened to child poverty over the last 10 years?

7. Child poverty – e.g. those living in a household below 60 percent of median equivalised income before housing costs - fell in the last decade, from 3.4 million, or 26 percent of all children in 1998/99, to 2.8 million, 21.8 percent, in 2008/09 (the latest available figures).² Using after housing costs (which more accurately indicates available family income), poverty fell from 4.4 million, 34 percent, to 3.9 million, 30 percent, over the same time period.³ This represents considerable progress, following the significant rises in child poverty in previous decades, with child poverty more than doubling (on an after housing costs basis) between 1979 and 1998.⁴
8. Although the target to halve child poverty by 2010/11 looks almost certain to be missed, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that while child poverty will fall to 18.8 percent, or 2.5 million children by 2011, by 2013 it will have risen again to 20.5 percent, or 2.7 million children (BHC). After housing costs, child poverty is predicted to rise from 26.6 percent, or 3.5 million children, to 27.8 percent 3.6 million children.⁵ A fall of 1.3 percent in the proportion of children who were poor in the five years between 2008 and 2013 (BHC) clearly represents slower progress than that which will be needed if the ambitious but necessary aim of ending child poverty by 2020 is to be achieved.

Poverty in groups who face the greatest risk of poverty

9. In 2005, CPAG published a report which focused on groups of children who faced the greatest risk of poverty.⁶ This identified a 'shocking paucity of statistical information about many of the families and children under discussion' and pointed out that, despite a plethora of statistical information, it neither identified the real incidence of poverty within such groups, let alone captured the degree to which children span some, or all, of the 'at risk groups'.
10. However, the information that is available shows that certain groups of children experience a significantly higher risk of poverty than others. For example:
 - 50 percent of children living with a single parent are below the poverty line.⁷
 - 78 percent of children in families where nobody is working are in poverty (compared to 13 percent where all adults in the family are in work, and 40 percent where some adults are working but not all).⁸ However, many more poor children live in families where someone is working than do in families where no-one is: in 2008/09 there were 2.1 million children in working families who were poor, compared to 1.6m in families without work.⁹
 - Children living in larger families with three or more children have a 40 percent risk of poverty.¹⁰
 - Family disability increases the risk of poverty: 35 percent of families with a disabled child are poor, as are 40 percent where there is a disabled adult, and 42 percent where there is a disabled adult and a disabled child.¹¹ Statistics show that access to disability benefits significantly reduces poverty in households with a disabled adult or child.¹²
 - All families headed by someone who is not White have a significantly increased risk of poverty, particularly Bangladeshi and Pakistani families. Families headed by someone of Indian origin have a poverty rate of 36 percent, those by someone of Bangladeshi or Pakistani origin a rate of 66 percent, those by someone of Black Caribbean origin a rate of 36 percent, those by someone of Black non Caribbean origin a rate of 56 percent and those by someone of Chinese or another ethnic origin a rate of 36 percent.¹³
 - Families living in London are disproportionately likely to live in poverty, 16 percent of all children in poverty in the UK reside in London. This means that 44 percent of children living in inner London, for example, live below the poverty line compared to 26 percent of children living in the South West of England.¹⁴
 - Migrant children are especially vulnerable to poverty; incomes for migrant families are often significantly lower than average for a range of reasons and they can lack access to basic support from the welfare state.¹⁵
 - Ethnicity is also an issue. The risk of a child living in poverty ranges from 27 per cent in White households, to 50 per cent in Black or Black British households, and up to 66 per cent in Pakistani or Bangladeshi households.

The Child Poverty Act

11. The Child Poverty Act places a duty on the Secretary of State to meet four child poverty targets: less than 10 per cent of children in relatively low-income households; less than 5 per cent of children in combined low-income and materially-deprived households; less than 5 per cent in absolute low-income households; reduce the number of children in persistent poverty (target to be decided by 2015). An additional requirement for children, as far as possible, not to experience 'socio-economic disadvantage' was included to ensure that governments take into account children not covered by household income surveys. Given that the target could be met without lifting some of the most vulnerable groups of children out of poverty, it is important to ensure that policies – particularly those of local authorities - address the needs of these children.

'Building Blocks'

12. The Child Poverty Act requires the Government to publish a strategy setting out the action it will take to meet the statutory target to end child poverty by 2020, within 12 months of the Act's passage, that is, by the 25th of March 2011. The publication of the first child poverty strategy represents a vital opportunity to set out the policies for both the short and long term that will ensure that no child in Britain is condemned to a life in poverty.
13. When preparing a child poverty strategy, the Secretary of State must consider whether measures should be taken in certain areas. These 'building blocks' include:
- Financial support for children and parents
 - Housing, the built and natural environment, and the promotion of social inclusion
 - Physical and mental health, education and social services
 - Access to public services
 - Information, advice and assistance to parents, and the promotion of parenting skills
 - Parental employment and skills
14. The need to monitor and include measurements of poverty for vulnerable children currently excluded from statistical surveys – including children from asylum-seeking and refugee communities – was debated while the Child Poverty Bill progressed through parliament.
15. Lord McKenzie of Luton (Labour Minister for Welfare Reform) recognised that 'these children may be among the most vulnerable and that any strategy to tackle child poverty must address their needs', stressed that 'the strategy required by Clause 8 will outline whether specific action to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups of children and families' and concluded that 'The duty in Clause 8(2)(b) therefore extends the application of the strategy to all children in the UK.'

The Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances

16. More recently, the Coalition government has published a Report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances in the wake of a consultation conducted by Frank Field MP which focused on reviewing the effectiveness of the previous government's child poverty strategy and incorporating an 'Index of Life Chances' into existing child poverty measures as outlined in the Child Poverty Act. Although it did not move away from the income target outlined in the Child Poverty Act, The Poverty and Life Chances Review identified five key areas for action:
- Early years
 - Foundation years – young people
 - Poverty and skills
 - Data sharing
 - Index on poverty and life chances
17. It also identified additional factors such as:
- Parental income;
 - Parenting behaviours;
 - The home learning environment;
 - Environmental factors - including nursery education, and later, schools.
 - Factors at the level of the individual child.
18. CPAG broadly welcomes the Review's focus on reviewing the effectiveness of the previous government's child poverty strategy, and believe that incorporating an 'Index of Life Chances' into existing child poverty measures as outlined in the Child Poverty Act will facilitate the formulation of more effective policies to tackle multi-dimensional problems associated with child poverty.
19. We argued that getting the balance right between policies that *prevent* child poverty, policies that *reduce* child poverty, and policies that *ameliorate* its symptoms is the most cost effective way of tackling child poverty. Abandoning costly policies that actively contribute to child poverty is essential.¹⁶
20. We highlighted evidence that low levels of poverty and economic inequality create socially cohesive and inclusive societies, so reducing inequality must remain a priority.¹⁷
21. However, viewing poverty in terms of poor outcomes – educational, job prospects, health, and behaviour – ignores children's rights to appropriate and fulfilling childhoods. We believe that there is room for a more genuinely child-centred perspective on poverty – what it means for childhood itself.
22. We concluded that a strategy to improve life chances for children must include substantial action to ensure that families have sufficient resources to provide

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their children with a stable, stimulating, environment free from damaging stresses, and this perspective lies at the heart of this submission.

Migrant communities

The following sections of the submission draw on Jill Rutter, 'Migration, migrants and child poverty' in *Poverty*, Issue 138 (CPAG, spring 2011).

Definitions

23. There are many different definitions which include asylum-seeking communities, refugees, new migrants and settled communities but the UN definition of migrants are people who are resident outside their country of birth. In the UK, many migrants have British citizenship and have been resident in the UK for many years and are more usually described as members of minority ethnic communities. Entitlement to benefits, health and education, and the right to work vary significantly within and between all these groups. This is confusing for families and service providers alike.
24. The issues and needs of established migrant communities and new migrant communities are different. The term 'foreign-born' is sometimes used to describe those born outside their country of birth, and the term 'new migrants' to describe those new to the UK.

Facts and Figures

25. Today an estimated 11.3 per cent of the total population is foreign-born, a figure that rises to one in three in Greater London¹⁸. Migrants from EU states comprise the largest foreign-born population resident in the UK. They include migrants from pre-2004 EU states such as Ireland, France and Portugal, as well as those from the new accession states of whom the largest number are from Poland. EU law gives them freedom of movement within Europe and the right of residence as European Economic Area (EEA) workers. EU migrants who have secured EEA worker status also qualify for social housing and in-work benefits in the UK.
26. In the last five years, too, there has also been a significant onward migration of migrant communities from other EU countries to the UK. One of the largest of this type of migratory movement is that of Somalis from the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia to the UK. Other large intra-EU onward migratory movements include Nigerians and Ghanaians from Germany and Austria to UK, Sri Lankan Tamils from France and Germany to the UK and Latin American from Spain and Portugal to the UK. While many of these onward migrants have secured EU citizenship or refugee status elsewhere in the EU, some are irregular migrants. Most will have received their education outside the EU and may have different qualifications and prior employment profiles to other EU-born groups who have moved to the UK.
27. Labour migrants also come from outside the EU. In 2009, some 99,590 **work visas** were granted from outside the EU¹⁹. The work visa system has seen considerable change over the last five years and routes in to the UK for unskilled or semi-skilled workers have all but ended. Prospective migrants are now subject the new cap on immigrants and those wish to bring their dependents have to show savings of at least £533 per child.

28. Some 49,065 dependent spouses, **spouses, children and civil partners** were admitted to the UK in 2009²⁰. **Asylum-seekers** comprise another migratory movement. Although the numbers of asylum applications has decreased since a peak in 2002, some 24,485 asylum applications were lodged in the UK in 2009, with Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and Iran being the top three countries of origin of asylum-seekers²¹. Of those who received an initial decision on their asylum applications in 2009, some 17 per cent were granted refugee status and another 11 per cent were discretionary leave to remain in the UK or humanitarian protection and allowed to remain in the UK. In 2009 some 73 per cent of asylum applicants were refused after an initial decision. While some of those refused asylum leave the UK are successful in their asylum appeals or are removed from the UK, the vast majority of those refused asylum are neither successful appellants or are removed. Instead they remain and comprise a significant component of the UK's irregular migrant population.
29. The numbers of **overseas students** from outside the EU has gradually increased in the last 15 years, with some 311,111 admitted to the UK in 2009²². While most overseas students are young and do not have dependent children, a small proportion do.
30. A further group of international migrants comprise **British nationals 'returning' to the UK**²³. Research suggests that in 2007 there were 5.4 million British nationals living abroad. British nationals who live abroad are a diverse population and returnees are equally diverse. They include those returning to the UK after short periods working abroad, and long-term migrants who have maintained their British passports and are now faced with changed circumstances necessitating a 'return' to a country with which they may have few connections. The rights of British nationals moving back to the UK after a period of time abroad depends on their National Insurance contributions. Some British nations faced extremely straitened circumstances on arrival in the UK and see their rights to support limited.
31. There are also an unknown number of **irregular migrants** in the UK and in many of the UK's cities undocumented children are a sizable proportion of children living in poverty. The irregular migrant population mostly comprises visa and asylum overstayers but also includes smaller number of clandestine entrants. Recent population estimates put the irregular migrant population in the UK at between 373,000 – 719,000 at the end of 2007, with a central estimate of 533,000 people²⁴. Using the same methodology, a new study suggested that at the end of 2007 there were 104,000 – 216,000 children who have no permission to remain in the UK whose numbers include overstayers, but also the UK-born children of irregular migrants. This research gives a middle estimate of 155,000 undocumented children.

Household poverty in migrant communities

32. Although – as discussed above – statistics on poverty in migrant communities are sparse, and there is considerable diversity in poverty levels in different migrant communities and significant differences in income *within* different groups, income inequalities caused by employment patterns, high levels of unemployment among refugee communities and some longer settled migrants, a lower uptake of benefits, asylum support systems that cause destitution and large numbers of irregular migrants are all factors that mean that migrant children are over-represented among those living in poverty.

Employment

- While newly-arrived EU migrants and work visa holders, who have essentially come to the UK to work, have high levels of employment those populations who have come to the UK as refugees tend to have much lower levels of employment. Just 29 per cent of Somalia-born adults and 36 per cent of Afghanistan-born adults of working age were employed in 2007²⁵.
- Migrants from the EU's new member states are over-represented in elementary occupations and in sectors such as agriculture and hospitality, where **wage rates are low**;
- Research on **barriers to labour market participation** among refugees show that that poor levels of fluency in English, employer prejudice, the absence of qualifications, the absence of UK work experience and references, childcare obligations and the fear of loss of benefits and social housing are major barriers to work.
- Longer-settled populations from Bangladesh and Pakistan also experience low levels of employment: just over 46 per cent of the Bangladesh-born population were in work in 2007.

Many migrants have an additional demand on their income.

- For example, estimates suggest that £1.5 billion was sent from the UK as remittance payments in 2005. Research with low paid migrant workers in London indicated that they were sending home between 20-30 per cent of their net income and engaged in many different money- saving strategies to do this – such as having more than one job and eating the cheapest food - strategies that impact on children's well-being.

Restrictions on access to benefits and tax credits

- Immigration and social security law creates additional poverty for some people who have recently arrived in the UK, or who are joined from overseas by a family member.

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“You came home from school, you had to get home by 3.30 or four o'clock at the latest and eat supper very quickly. When I was in Year Six, I really wanted to play football after school, you know in a club, but I couldn't because I had to go cleaning with parents. If you got held back for a detention, dad would be very angry.....We often didn't get back till late, nine o'clock sometimes. When we got home, I was hungry and very tired, I just ate and went to sleep.” Son of Portuguese migrant worker, aged 12.

- The causes of child poverty in poor migrant families are often the same as in the larger population, as are solutions which include enabling parents to move into and stay in work, affordable childcare, ensuring that benefits levels do not punish children and supporting low income families in work. But migrant families also face some specific issues in relation to child poverty. Many are starting again, without the accumulated possessions of others. Support networks that enable other low income families to cope can be severed by migration. Language barriers can impact on migrants' employment prospects

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and lead to a lower uptake of benefits. Remittance payments and support for destitute irregular migrants also impacts on family welfare.

- The University of Oxford calculates there are between 104,000 – 216,000 children in migrant communities, 87,000 of whom are UK-born. Absolute poverty is likely to be much higher number than suggested at a local level, with families needing to access support via soup kitchens and food parcels.
- Five groups of migrant children seem particularly at risk of poverty:
- Children of low paid migrant workers. This is a numerically large group. One study of low paid migrant workers showed that nearly 40 per cent did not have enough money always to pay for food for their children and over a third could not pay for children's clothes²⁶.
- Children who are irregular migrants, or are undocumented because they are the UK-born children of parents who are irregular migrants. Again they are a large group of children, disproportionately settled in London. Research that has examined the survival strategies of irregular migrants in the UK highlights shocking levels of household poverty and reliance on the informal sector for employment. Irregular migrants who are in work may be working at levels near to or below the National Minimum Wage and fear of officialdom makes it difficult for them to seek redress for this. Those without work are reliant on charities such as the Red Cross. Informal sector working and the hidden nature of irregular migration may mean that data that are meant to capture patterns of poverty may be distorted because it does not account for irregular migrants.
- Asylum-seeking children in receipt of support from the UK Border Agency. This group of children presently numbers about 6,000 children and is dispersed around the UK.
- Children of refugees and some other migrants who are unemployed. As discussed above, this is a significant group. Welfare-to-work initiatives have had limited success – and may have an adverse impact on families without necessarily increasing employment levels. The Refugee Council fears 'an increased use of sanctions may unfairly penalise refugees', and this is particularly worrying given that research suggest shows that benefit sanctions damages the health and wellbeing of children.²⁷
- Children in low income households supporting destitute co-nationals, where generosity to others impacts on family income and children's welfare. There is little research on this group, but they are likely to be a sizable community in London. Some migrant households also take in destitute co-nationals, who are often irregular migrants. Both remittance payments and generosity to co-nationals impact on migrant children in the UK.
- **The size of these five groups – particularly the in-work poor and irregular migrants – makes the target of eradicating child poverty by 2020 difficult to achieve without substantially reducing poverty in these five categories of children.**

2. Policy response: the Building Blocks: supporting children from migrant communities?

The following section draws on a roundtable seminar on migration and child poverty hosted by the Child Poverty Unit and CPAG, and a number of articles published in CPAG's policy magazine – *Poverty* – which focused on the experiences of children in migrant communities. *Poverty* is also submitted as part of this submission. The order of the building blocks has been changed to reflect the appropriate sequencing of policy initiatives to maximise their impact. An additional section on localism has been included to reflect discussions of this issue at the roundtable seminar.

1. Financial support for children and parents

Political Context

33. Since the mid-1980s, migrants have seen their entitlement to social security benefits removed. Further restrictions on support are being introduced and an increasing proportions of migrants have seen this welfare safety-net removed.
34. For migrants who cannot find work, the welfare state is meant to prevent a family falling into destitution. However, for people seeking asylum 'welfare' is being used as a form of immigration control rather than support.
35. Wider cuts to benefits and tax credits are likely to put those administering the system under greater pressure to make negative decisions about access to welfare benefits, housing and social services.
36. Since 2003, new asylum-seekers have been unable to work legally in the UK and are reliant on a system that condemns many to on-going poverty. Often families are forced to live on incomes that are well below the poverty line and do not meet their basic needs.
37. Take up of entitlement is low, and this has an impact in poverty levels in some migrant communities. Failure by migrants to register for benefits such as free school meals also distorts measures of child poverty.
38. Inadequate support drives families to seek out costly loans – or provide support to each other out of inadequate incomes - and this sucks them into ever deeper and damaging cycles of debt.
39. Current government policies are likely to make a bad situation much worse for migrant children and their families. The cap on housing benefit will generate 'internal migration' that will shatter both communities and render it harder for local authorities or community organisations to address ever changing local needs.
40. Many families from migrant communities face the double whammy of rampant discrimination against immigrants and against benefit claimants. Unhelpful and stigmatising language in the press is compounded by a political tendency to pander to prejudice in order to inculcate support for wider cuts to benefits and tax credits – particularly disability benefits.²⁸

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41. Loss of funding to services that are struggling to plug gaps in provision is generating a costly tendency for problems to snowball. Advice agencies are losing funding and the government has announced plans to cut £350 million from civil legal aid. The government proposes removing funding from immigration (not asylum) and housing cases, and from all welfare benefits and education advice. Meanwhile, the freezing of hourly rates for legal aid and the introduction of fixed fees have led to some firms ending the legal aid provision. Further cuts – including reducing hourly rates by 10 per cent – are likely to make a bad situation worse.²⁹
42. This will significantly erode the use of judicial review to challenge unlawful official decisions, a time when the volume of incorrect and unlawful official decisions is likely to rise.
43. Access to social security is increasingly restricted for many groups, and support provided is inadequate to safeguard the health and wellbeing of children and families in some migrant communities. This undermines the government's desire to focus on 'Increasing responsibilities', 'Improving life chances' and 'Improving parental opportunities' – and increases the demands upon and costs of other services. It is a false economy.
44. And the damage done is likely to be long-lasting. In 2008, the Equality and Human Rights Commission identified 'a large body of academic literature showing there is substantial 'intergenerational persistence', that is, life chances of individuals are closely related to the socio-economic characteristics of their families, such as parental income, socio-economic status (SES) and parental education.'³⁰

What are the problems?

Access to 'subsistence only' support

- Many migrants have no entitlement to claim benefits. At present only those who have secured British citizenship, or possess EEA worker status, settled status (indefinite leave to remain) and those who receive positive decisions on an asylum case can access the UK benefit system.
- Most asylum seekers arrive in the UK asylum-seekers without savings and apply to the UK Border Agency for a 'subsistence only' package, or for subsistence and accommodation. Subsistence comprises a cash allowance which for adults is set at a level equivalent to 70 per cent of income support. This amounts to about £6.50 per day.

Low take-up

- Take-up of entitlement is lower than for the UK-born population due to lack of awareness of entitlements among migrant communities, an inability to understand the application process – often due to difficulties with English language fluency - and an inability to produce appropriate documentation to support a benefit claim.
- Other problems that contribute to low-take up include:
- *Lack of advice* – given the complexity of the system, with entitlement changing as people progress through the system at different stages of the process, access to high quality advice is absolutely essential. However, too

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many families fail to get the advice they need to access their entitlement to support due to:

- *Poor administration* – as with many claimants in the UK, poor decision-making and gaps in provision generates gaps in provision and this plunges families into endless cycles of costly debt.
- *The provision of wrong advice* – Ignorance on the part of central and local government officials, compounded by budgetary constraints, leave migrants and their families vulnerable to being unlawfully refused access to welfare benefits, housing and social services.³¹ There is evidence of significant misinterpretation of benefit entitlement by staff administering the system, in particular those processing employment-related or housing benefit, with EU migrants suffering most as a result of such mistakes. This is driving a culture in which decisions tend to focus on what people are *not* entitled to rather than flagging up what they are entitled to. Problems in system are already used to deter people from claiming entitlements and tighter public sector budgets are likely to increase pressure on officials to make negative decisions.
- *Take-up of disability benefits is particularly low* – and is being increasingly restricted for all groups. Given that many groups seeking asylum or refugee status in the UK have health problems, access to disability benefits is essential. The introduction of employment and support allowance and reform of disability living allowance are both likely to increase child poverty in groups who face the highest risk of poverty – including families in migrant communities.
- *Language barriers* - prevent families accessing the support to which they are entitled and need to protect their children. Wider problems with medical assessments are compounded because practitioners may not be sympathetic to cultural issues. A reliance on providing advice by telephone excludes foreigners and people with disabilities from accessing information.
- *Access to tribunals* is a problem: often there is no representation at tribunals, and although interpreters are provided they are often of very poor quality and quality is unlikely to improve while the pay is very low.
- *Referrals to legal aid may take up to eight or nine months* – even for pregnant women, many of whom may end up in court.
- *Lack of information*. The number of agencies to which refugees have to provide the same information leads to frustration, confusion and concern. Many advice organisations are losing funding. Cut backs to legal aid are a particular source of concern. ‘Right to reside’ is a significant problem, but the DWP has no record of people they refuse ‘right to reside’, so it is hard to see how they can address effectively the needs of these groups.

Policy recommendations for the Child Poverty Strategy

Role of national government

- Recognise that access to social security improves health and review exclusion of some groups.

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- *Put in place joined-up policies that protect children and families:* The duty of care of the state – which is based on the principles of what is best for the child – should apply to all areas. It is unacceptable that children are condemned to live in poverty and destitution as a result of their parent's nationality or status. *All* children should have access to an income that safeguards their health and wellbeing. A government that believes in families should promote family unity – for example by allowing foreign spouses full rights on entry to the UK joining a spouse already settled in the UK – or who is British
- *Introduce an amnesty* – with everybody being allowed either to work or to apply for benefit. This would protect all workers regardless of nationality, status or residence, because it would reduce employers' ability to undercut wages with exploitative practices.
- *Review adequacy and access to social security to protect the most vulnerable groups and:*
 - *Maximise adequacy and take-up of benefits* - ensuring that families have access to the information they need to access their full (if inadequate) entitlement is essential. The Government should review whether the right to reside test is a proportionate and lawful measure: The test is probably, unlawful, the way in which it is administered is discriminatory, and the interpretation of the test by the DWP is often wrong.
 - *Improve information and delivery* – the delivery of accurate information and advice is vital (particularly at a time of considerable reform of the system). Put in place more joined-up approach between benefit advice agencies, early years' services, schools, jobcentres and housing. Provide accessible information for migrant groups and organisations, and practitioners working with them
 - *Put in place effective partnership* - working requires staff across a range of departments and organisations to be informed about the issues that affect people from migrant communities, but recognise to access specialised support where necessary. This not only needs such support to be adequately funded, but ensure that those administering the system flag it up where necessary.
 - *Improve the administration and delivery of benefits and tax credits* - ensuring that DWP staff are well trained, and understand the need for respectful communication is vital to establish bench-marks of good practice. While it is not possible for everybody in the DWP to know everything, it is vital that they have the skills and knowledge needed to make referrals to those providing specialist support and advice when needed – and this highlights need for partnership working. Ensure that the DWP is adequately resourced to determine claims which raise issues of European law (often the case with migrants) as quickly and accurately as those that do not to avoid administering benefits in a discriminatory manner. Ensure that where this is not possible interim payments are made.
 - *Focus on and finance a partnership approach* – which includes using family support workers, those working in Children Centres, schools and

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surgeries to flag up entitlement. Maximising the Jobcentre Plus ability to undertake outreach and engaging with communities and place Jobcentre Plus advisers and benefit and tax credit experts in Children Centres. The provision of high quality and training to non-specialists is essential to ensure that the right information is provided and to maximise take-up. The provision of information at a local level in places where it is accessible to all families – for example in schools, GPs surgeries and A&E departments is important.

- *Ensure that anti-discriminatory law* protects people from migrant communities, and challenge misleading, stigmatising press coverage of the issues.

Role of local government

- Although most forms of financial support via the benefit and tax credit systems are administered by central government, there are a number of ways local authorities can tackle income poverty make a real difference, for example:
 - Provide adequate funding to support take-up (for example, local DLA take-up campaigns have been very successful in maximising family income).
 - Provide information and services where parents live/work/visit, including children's centres, schools and health premises.
- *Establish and support benefit take-up campaigns*, drawing on good practice outlined in the Quids for Kids campaign, to ensuring that people in migrant groups access support such as free school meals will attract greater funding from central government. Increasing take-up in one area (for example Free School Meals) often maximises support attract greater funding elsewhere in the system and should be used effectively.

2. Housing, the built and natural environment, and the promotion of social inclusion

Political context

45. Access to appropriate housing not only dictates access to other services, but it is vital to safeguard family health and support communities. The provision of health and safe accommodation is vital to enable families to feel secure and stable, to rebuild their lives and safeguard the welfare of their children. It also dictates access to the educational and health services on which children and families rely.
46. Although wide ranging reform of housing benefit and cuts in support for housing is not just an issue for migrants, they will have significantly and potentially devastating impact on families in migrant communities – particularly in London.

What the problems?

47. Living in poor accommodation in poor physical environments compounds problems associated with poverty and problems accessing services and employment.

48. Living in overcrowded housing damages the health and wellbeing of parents and children. It also reduces opportunities for mothers to socialise with others, and may make it more difficult to access informal networks of support
49. Evidence shows that people from Black and some other minority ethnic groups disproportionately face other housing problems. Research also suggests that minority ethnic groups are more likely to be over-represented among people who are homeless.
50. For new migrants, particularly asylum seekers and refugees, there is evidence that private landlords provide worryingly poor standards of accommodation.
51. The Mayor of London's strategy for the integration of refugees³² reveals that:
- 'information on housing and other needs of refugees is in short supply'
 - official datasets do not identify refugees and limited research has been carried out in this area
52. The reform of housing benefit will have a significant and damaging impact on all migrants groups because:
- People will lose support networks, access to schools etc, if they are forced to move into 'cheaper' areas as a result of benefit caps
 - Further, caps on accessing housing benefit in private sector is a problem, particularly during fixed-term tenancies. Families are often evicted and lose deposits – but where do they go next?
 - Like many other groups people in some migrant communities are likely to move out of central London – possibly to more disadvantaged areas. This will distort and increase the cost of services in other areas making it hard for local authorities to plan service-delivery appropriately or effectively.
 - Although local authorities are often aware of housing problems at a local level, those administering the system are often unaware of the value and importance of liaising both within departments, and with other departments. Although housing and social services should work closely together, all too often they fail to do so. A lack of understanding of housing provision and how it interacts with social services is a problem.
 - The private rented sector is unregulated and whilst the provision for direct payments for housing benefits may encourage more landlords to rent to claimants, increase demand over time may see people in receipt of housing benefit competed out of the rental market. The demand for rented accommodation will only increase as the housing market increases, as even young people on middle incomes, will not be able to step onto the housing ladder.
 - As resources become more and more scarce local authorities will be more and more controlling of their allocations. At present people are moving from their dispersal region where they are often experiencing isolation and or discrimination and then are unable to access accommodation where they move to.

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

- Increasing housing supply by social landlords may not have the desired effect if they are able to charge 85% of the local market rent. This means that new properties will be unaffordable in many urban areas.
- Security of tenure is vital. The proposals to give short tenancies for social housing will mean that there is no route out of temporary accommodation which has such a damaging impact on children.

53. *Dispersal.* Those requiring accommodation are housed by the UK Border Agency outside Greater London and the South East, often far from support networks. Unsurprisingly, about 20 per cent of asylum-seekers opt for subsistence only support and choose to live with friends and family and near support networks. Providing accommodation to co-nationals impacts on the host, with more mouths to feed and less space.

Policy recommendations for the Child Poverty Strategy

Role of national government

- Recognise that tackling housing needs improves health and supports access to education and employment.
- Tackle issues around detention and temporary housing to protect children.
- Ensure that migrant groups can access housing benefit – and are not adversely affected by reform of housing benefit.
- Increase social housing.
- Prevent homelessness and improve access to settled housing.
- Improve community cohesion and reduce segregation.
- Tackle prejudice.
- Review implications of cuts to housing benefit and their impact on BME communities.

Role of local government

- Ensure that new migrants are able to establish a local connection for eligibility for housing.
- Monitor evictions from multiple occupations with a view to tackling this problem.
- Work with housing associations to improve the housing situation³³.
- Compile better information on housing and other needs of refugees at a local level.
- Tackle the over-representation of BME and migrant communities in temporary and overcrowded accommodation.

3. Physical and mental health, education and social services

Political context

54. *Reducing inequalities: Realising the talents of all* reports that 'the local neighbourhood and the socio-economic context have such profound impacts that parents can find it hard to mitigate them.'³⁴ Parents' ability to protect their children from wider environmental damage is affected by their own health and wellbeing, which is itself affected by factors such as financial stress, debt, poor housing – all of which are major issues for families from migrant communities.
55. The Marmot Report argues that reducing health inequalities (that are largely driven by income poverty) would secure economic benefits of between £51 and £65 billion a year in increased productivity and taxes.
56. Research published by the British Medical Journal also points out, spending on social protection narrows costly and wasteful health inequalities, and that ring-fencing spending on the National Health Service while cutting support in ways that will damage health is not the most effective way to target limited resources.³⁵

Health

What are the problems?³⁶

57. Many different groups of migrant children are at risk of poor health and limited access to healthcare, particularly unaccompanied asylum seeker (who have applied in their own right) and children who are dependants of asylum-seeking adults who may also experience significant health problems.
58. Additionally, there are also significant health inequalities by country of birth, although epidemiological data is under-analysed from the perspective of migration.
59. There are particular concerns about the provision of and access to healthcare services for asylum-seeking and refugee women and their children. Reports by Maternity Alliance highlight the particular problems experienced by asylum-seekers who are pregnant or have had a baby in England.³⁷
60. Asylum seekers and refugees are not a homogeneous group and may have very different experiences and expectations of health and of healthcare.³⁸ Some health problems are specific to certain communities, but particular needs are not recognised in the delivery of services and benefits.
61. The health and healthcare needs of asylum seekers in detention is a longstanding issue. Although the detention of children is an issue that the government is trying to resolve, the problems remain.
62. Poverty and absence of contact with health professionals are factors that may contribute to increased mortality³⁹.
63. Stillbirth at term and infant mortality is significantly higher among Africa, Asia and Caribbean-born populations than it is for those born in the UK. A child born to a mother born in the Caribbean twice as likely to die before the age of five than a child born to a UK-born mother.

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

64. The provision of services designed to meet the health and emotional needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is variable, and often inadequate due to a combination of limited resources and increasing need.
65. While sick and disabled asylum seekers and refugees share the same sort of problems and issues experienced by the UK's existing minority ethnic groups, there are some additional 'refugee-specific' problems – for example:
- Research indicates that many asylum seekers arrive in the UK have very limited knowledge of the UK healthcare and welfare systems.⁴⁰
 - Racial discrimination can compound health inequalities⁴¹ and generate unhelpful attitudes amongst some service providers, including GPs.
 - Increasing restrictive systems of rights and entitlements generates significant health issues for some migrant groups.
 - The disadvantages asylum seekers and their children experiencing in accessing primary and secondary healthcare are well documented and include difficulty registering with a GP, lack of knowledge of services, and problems with interpreting services, lack of a key workers and a lack of culturally appropriate services.
 - There are a number of additional barriers to accessing services in London which transcend organisational boundaries. The Refugee Council identified:
 - Confusion and ignorance about entitlements at every level
 - Absent or inconsistent data based largely on estimates, rendering it difficult to assess the needs of these groups, and to target services and generate funding
 - An over-reliance on refugee community organisations to support London's disabled asylum seekers and refugees
 - Significant gaps between the specialist refugee sector and the mainstream disability sector

Policy recommendations for Child Poverty Strategy

The role of national government

- Recognise that access to social security plays a significant role in protecting the health and wellbeing of parents and children from all groups – including those in migrant communities.
- Recognise that policies in and around education, housing, neighbourhood and employment have a direct impact on the improving the health and wellbeing of families and children – many of whom will remain the UK.
- Ensure that wide-ranging reform and cuts in the health services do not have a negative impact on families and children in migrant communities.
- Prioritise the provision of well resourced and accessible mental health services in some migrant groups.

The role of local authorities

- Map information on refugee health needs, barriers to accessing services and health outcomes with information about the specific needs of certain BME groups.
- Work with NHS and primary care trusts to ensure staff awareness of refugee health needs.
- Maximise take-up of financial support via the social security system.

Education

Political context

66. The need for co-ordinated, joined-up policies during the early years is widely recognised. While a raft of legislation has been put in place in place which defines child wellbeing and places it at the forefront of the delivery of children's services, a lack of 'joined-up' service delivery reduces its impact.
67. Research demonstrates the importance of getting it right during the early years.⁴² A review of international research on the impact of early years provision upon young children.⁴³ Research increasingly emphasises the 'importance of the interaction between home and out of home experience. High quality childcare has been associated with benefits for children's development, with the strongest effects for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.'⁴⁴
68. The Government has protected the free entitlement to early education for three and four years at 15 hours a week for 38 weeks and has extended the 15 hours free early years entitlement to the most disadvantaged two year olds (the poorest 20% of families).
69. There are stark differences in educational performance and attainment levels in different groups. CPAG's report - *Chicken and Egg* illustrates the way in which the educational gap widens as children move through the system, reaching an unbridgeable chasm by the time they reach higher education.⁴⁵
70. Although various factors contribute to educational inequalities, the impact of 'family background association strengthens'⁴⁶ as children move through the system, *Starting Strong* 'confirms the correlation between socio-economic status and educational achievement' – but '*unequal access and unequal treatment of children in the school system is not a destiny.*'⁴⁷
71. **School costs continue to pose barriers to educational opportunities for low income families**, and some schools are unaware of (or may simply flout) policies around charging policies. Some of the better 'good schools' have admissions policies that discriminate in favour of better-off children.⁴⁸

What are the problems?

The early years

- Access to high quality childcare and early years' support is essential. However, some migrant groups face significant barriers to support – including problems with housing and dispersal.

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

- While families in some BME groups do access children's centres more than indigenous groups, this is not always the case.
- Although take up of the free early years entitlement is generally high than formal childcare, it is lower in some disadvantaged groups – including some families in migrant communities.
- In 2007, a literature review suggested that BME families' experience of Sure Start was mixed.⁴⁹
- The Daycare Trust has identified problems with the delivery of childcare to BME families, parents with disabled children, and lone parents, including: access to information; costs; location of services; workforce communication; language and cultural considerations.
- Some families within recently arrived communities are concerned about entrusting the care of their children to strangers.
- Reducing financial support via the childcare element of working tax credit from 80% of costs to 70% of costs will further strain on family budgets – while cuts to local authority budgets is likely to have a significant impact on their ability to deliver high quality, affordable and accessible childcare in their area – and are likely to result in 250 children's centres being closed.⁵⁰

Policy recommendations for Child Poverty Strategy

Recommendations for national government

- Ensure that the delivery of all forms of early support is co-ordinated, consistent and responsive to the needs of children from different migrant communities.
- Place children's needs – rather than their parent's status – at the forefront of the design and delivery of early years' services.
- Consult with families and children to ensure vulnerable children in migrant communities can access appropriate, high quality early years' support.
- Recognise that the provision of universal support in children's centres maximises the wellbeing and life chances of all children – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – and safeguard provision.
- Recognise that children's centres provide valuable opportunities for parents to chat and socialise and generates the dissemination of valuable information – and utilise it to ensure parents understand what services are available.
- Monitor the numbers of refugees and migrant families who are accessing children's services to identify – and integrate – groups that may be excluded.
- Assess the impact of early years support to families from migrant communities – and disabled children – in order to tackle barriers to support and maximise take-up of early years support amongst low income groups and migrant communities.
- Increase take up of formal provision and free entitlement – by putting in place sustained outreach work to migrant communities.

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

- Focus on the provision of universal services needed to remove stigma.
- Safeguard and extend holistic support to families – for example by combining the provision of advice from Jobcentre Plus staff, childcare, family support and health workers.

Recommendations for local government

- Safeguard children's centres and prioritise the delivery of early years' support for vulnerable children from different migrant communities.
- Ensure schools implement fair charging policies, and keep families informed about educational entitlement and rights.
- Maximise take-up of free school meals; ensure they take into account dietary needs and that this is advertised to parents.

The school years

What are the problems?

72. Although lack of data renders it difficult to monitor the educational attainment levels of migrant children, there is an extensive body of research on the educational underachievement of children from migrant and minority ethnic communities.⁵¹
73. Children from migrant families are likely to face the double whammy of educational disadvantage driven by both poverty and by ethnicity. Although the causes of educational underachievement are common to all ethnic groups – of which living in poverty is a significant factor – some are specific to migrant communities.⁵²
74. Migrant children in some areas face long delays in securing school places – possibly because the school is full, but sometimes schools fear that taking migrant children will have an adverse impact on league tables.
75. Some teachers are insensitive to the home circumstances of migrant children.
76. Families are not well placed to challenge the failure of the local authority to secure places.
77. Parents who don't speak English may experience difficulties supporting their children's education and communicating with teachers.
78. Gender expectations create problems for girls in some communities.

Policy recommendations for the Child Poverty Strategy

Role of national government

- Recognise link between poverty and educational engagement and attainment levels, and ensure families have the resources they need to support their children's education and tackle admissions and charging policies in schools
- Recognise that maximising family income and reducing schools costs for poorer parents is important.

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

- Improve teachers understanding of the impact of poverty on children's lives, and the particular issues that affect migrant children.
- Ensure that additional resources provided to schools are used effectively to prioritise the needs of migrant children.
- Recognise that schools dealing with the children of new immigrants experience high costs, as well as additional demands on teachers and other resources – and provide appropriate support.
- Recognise the real costs of delivering English as an Additional Language and ensure that support matches demand. Ensure that sustained funding is provided for older children.
- Monitor the impact of the introduction pupil premium and cuts to other areas of education including the now cancelled plans to extend Free Schools Meals to primary school children from working families living in poverty.
- Ensure that spending priorities should recognise that factors outside school are as important as those in schools, 'with the family being of fundamental importance and financial and material resources playing a key role.'⁵³
- Monitor the introduction of the pupil premium to ensure that appropriate support is targeted on children from migrant communities.
- Recognise that cutting employment and support allowance (EMA) is at odds with the Government's wider agenda, and risks damaging educational opportunities for poorer students. Review this decision.
- Prioritise policies– and funding – needed maximise educational support for children for whom English is a second language. Ensure that their parents can access the interpreters they need to communicate with teachers. Support (including access to childcare) is also needed to enable parents to engage in conversational ESOL so that they can communicate with teachers – and other service providers.

Role of local government

- Improve early years' support for vulnerable children from different migrant communities.
- Ensure schools implement fair charging policies, and keep families informed about educational entitlement and rights.
- Monitor the numbers of children facing long delays in finding school places.
- Maximise take-up of free school meals to trigger entitlements elsewhere in the system.
- Ensure that schools become powerful partners in local programmes designed to tackle child poverty.
- Ensure that school costs are kept to a minimum, by ensuring that adequate uniform grants are available to low income families.

Access to public services

Political context

*'Universal public services are essential, and the Government is currently arguing that high quality services are an integral part of its strategy to end child poverty – and support families. But all too often people in poverty who need the best services receive a worse service than others (the so-called 'inverse care' law). Understanding and tackling this inequitable situation is the responsibility of all public services. It is vital that they play their part in supporting the child poverty target.'*⁵⁴ (Ending Child Poverty: Making it Happen, 2010)

79. Although it has long been recognised that the delivery of high quality public services are an essential part of the child poverty strategy, services that provide valuable support to vulnerable parents are being cut, and this will damage the most vulnerable groups who need the greatest support.
80. Ignorance of the law amongst parents (and service providers) is also putting migrant families at risk. Wider problems emanating from fragmented provision and lack of joined-up services is being compounded for children in some migrant communities because they are actively treated as being separate and different and excluded from mainstream provision.
81. Resources and service quality may be better in more affluent neighbourhoods; typically these areas also attract the most experienced staff. Discrimination, stigma and erratic funding streams have resulted in an 'inverse case' law, in which people living in the most disadvantaged areas who need the most support get lower quality services and keeps take-up of vital services low.

What are the problems?

82. For families from some migrant communities, access to information about entitlement is often unclear. Language can be a barrier to use of services particularly where these rely on contact by telephone.
83. Lack of money generates barriers to good schools and good housing as well as social and cultural opportunities that the rest of us take for granted. People living on a low income confront deep and entrenched structural inequalities that compound the day-to-day difficulties associated with living in poverty.
84. Furthermore, better educated and more affluent people are better at using systems, or can pay to increase access (for instance, by moving to the catchment areas of better performing schools, or topping up childcare tax credits).
85. And while more affluent parents have access to support from a range of services that are, for them at least, effective, affordable and accessible, parents from poorer backgrounds feel unsupported and often criticised, which has and this has a huge impact on their children.⁵⁵

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

86. And while the Refugee Council supports local organisations to enable families from migrant communities to access support, proposed cuts in support mean it is facing significant reductions to its budgets for frontline services as a result of Home Office spending cuts.⁵⁶

Policy recommendations for CPS

The role of national government

- Ensure that people arriving in the UK receive sign-posting and advising from the moment they arrive in the country.
- Put in place effective and well resourced, joined up national policies such as ensuring late entrants get a place in school, effective housing policies and ring-fenced funding.
- Put in place effective partnership strategies and focus on the provision of services to which everyone is entitled.
- Prioritise integration by providing the resources needed to maximise flexibility and choice at a local levels.
- Target and fund public services in disadvantaged areas and tackle the 'inverse care law'.
- Tackle stigma and discrimination among service providers.
- Safeguard funding for small voluntary groups with links to local community.
- Develop a 'best practice guide', including the provision of an independent interpreting service.
- Cross government strategies are essential.
- Resources and service quality may be better in more affluent neighbourhoods; typically these areas also attract the most experienced staff.
- *Provide support for refugee integration* and recognise and support the contributions of the voluntary sector,⁵⁷ in particular the Refugee Council and others, to help refugee community organisations by:
 - Taking the lead in partnership/collaborative working and build community resilience by avoiding duplication of services where possible.
 - Campaigning and garnering popular support at grassroots level to influence decision makers.
 - Setting standards and monitoring performances, making improvements where necessary and measuring the impact on the wellbeing of refugee communities.

The role of local authorities

*'Local authorities and their partners know the challenges their residents face better than anyone else - including central government. This knowledge allows them to shape their services to make them as effective as possible and to fit the needs of their residents.'*⁵⁸ (Every Child Matters)

- Focus on drawing up and delivering effective partnership strategies
- Facilitate the contributions of key partners and stakeholders, and effectively draw on national initiatives
- Focus on universal services that everyone is entitled to
- Involve refugee community organisations in consultations and decision making that affects the groups they represent
- Ensure that individuals get the services they need and participate in their communities by:
 - Working with and supporting London boroughs and local services
 - Supporting voluntary and community organisations

4. Information, advice and assistance to parents, and promotion of parenting skills

*'International research...shows that early intervention contributes significantly to putting children from low-income families on the path to development and success in school...[international findings confirm that] well-funded, integrated, socio-economic programmes improve the cognitive and social functioning of children at risk. If properly linked to labour, health and social services, early childhood services can be expected to deliver additional outcomes, such as enhanced maternal employment, less family poverty, better parenting skills and greater family and community cohesion.'*⁵⁹
(Starting Strong)

Political context

87. The Government is committed to eradicating child poverty, and is also keen to focus on 'Increasing responsibilities', 'Improving life chances' and 'Improving parental opportunities'. However, some of the policies being put in place increase income poverty and this undermines these wider aspirations, and are at odds with the Government's desire to put in place family-friendly policies and create a 'Big Society'.
88. Divisive, stigmatising and blaming language is undermining community cohesion and actively damages children and families in migrant communities. Parents may be prevented from seeking paid employment, not have the necessary skills to access support or employment and need protection, or face significant structural barriers to progress due to a lack of community cohesion.

89. While better-off parents may well have access to the sort of social and psychological support that makes parenting a bit easier (they are better at accessing public services, may have a nanny, pay for private support – or plug into local support groups run by other mothers) such support for mothers on low incomes is less readily and reliably available, and may be perceived as stigmatising and judgemental.

What are the problems?

- Family and the home environments are important factors in a child's life. Although increasingly viewed as a private matter, the state has a crucial role to play in making low income parents' jobs either easier – or much harder. Policies in and around education, housing, neighbourhood and employment clearly have a vital role to play in either maximising – or restricting – opportunities for the most disadvantaged children and their families.
- For mothers on low incomes, difficulties associated with lack of money, depression, poor health, and housing problems are compounded by lack of sensitive, and accessible support, and this will have an impact on them and their baby's earliest experiences. Living in overcrowded housing damages the health and wellbeing of parents and children. It also reduces opportunities for mothers to socialise with others, and may make it more difficult to access informal networks of support.
- Researchers also point out that 'to understand women's poverty and its impact on health, it is necessary to adopt an intra-households and life course perspective. Intra-household analysis reveals that resources are not always shared fairly within families to the detriment of women and children...this can result in hidden poverty and deprivation.' They report that 'domestic violence looms large in the lives of low income women, with adverse affects on their health.'⁶⁰
- And the damage done is likely to be long-lasting. In 2008, the Equality and Human Rights Commission identified 'a large body of academic literature showing there is substantial 'intergenerational persistence', that is, life chances of individuals are closely related to the socio-economic characteristics of their families, such as parental income, socio-economic status (SES) and parental education.'⁶¹
- A balance is needed between policies that address practical issues that generate stress and instability on a daily basis (for example ensuring that families are accessing the full benefit and tax credit entitlement, resolving issues around debt, housing and schools) and services designed to help improve parenting skills or support into work. Simply focusing on the latter without resolving the former is likely to be less effective.
- Overall, a more coherent approach is needed to supporting parents. The current approach – which focuses on cuts to financial support (which will damage the mental wellbeing of parents and children) – damages vulnerable children and undermines family cohesion.

What are the problems?

- Poverty and factors associated with it (financial stress, debt, poor housing) damage parental health and child wellbeing, and this generates significant problems for parents in migrant families. Current restrictions on support and access to employment put families under significant stress, and damage the wellbeing of children.⁶²
- Lack of money affects the physical and mental wellbeing of both mothers and children, and makes parenting significantly harder to do well.
- For all mothers on low incomes difficulties associated with lack of money, depression, poor health, and housing problems are compounded by lack of sensitive, and accessible support, and this will have an impact on them and their baby's earliest experiences. However, mothers in some migrant communities face additional problems.
- Lack of accessible and non-stigmatising support services leave some of the most vulnerable parents stressed and isolated.
- Instability associated with housing problems and lack of accessible and non-stigmatising support services leave some of the most vulnerable parents stressed and isolated.

The role of national government

- Ensure that *all* parents have access to the material resources – and the services - they need to be 'good' parents.
- Ensure that parents struggling with a raft of problems – including debt, housing, schooling, health – receive the advice and access the support they need to negotiate the system.
- Prioritise the delivery of mainstream services to address the needs of *all* children in poverty, regardless of where they are from or where they will reside as adults.
- Provide families with access to financial resources, housing, and services they need to safeguard mother's and babies'/children's health
- Ensure families have access to the support and advice they need to care for their children.

The role of local authorities

- Map out and monitor access to support services for parents
- Ensure information is disseminated in an accessible format to all parents

5. Parental employment and skills

Political context

90. The current government has focused on paid employment as the main route out of poverty. However, although moving into work is presented as the ideal way to ensure that people exercise personal responsibility, the current system treats people in different groups different – with some groups actively prevented from seeking work and others facing a disproportionate risk of being in poverty-paid jobs.
91. The publication of the white paper on welfare reform is also relevant to families in migrant communities. Although policies that enable people to access employment – and reduce in-work poverty – are welcome, there are a number of elements to the proposals that we believe are likely to have an adverse impact on those families who face the greatest risk of poverty (for example larger families and those affected by disability).

What are the problems?

- Paid employment is viewed as an important way of exercising responsibilities and citizenship – but many groups are prevented from seeking work, and left in limbo for months and sometimes years without being able to look for work.
- The issue of migrant poverty and employment is complex and migrants' experiences in the UK differ enormously – partly due to different individual experience and partly because a migrant's particular immigration status and her/his associated right to reside in the UK and to access work. The groups – which include people who qualify under the points-based system, EU citizens, students, refugees and undocumented workers - are not mutually exclusive.⁶³
- Many newly arrived migrants face the prospect of irregular work – often in poor, exploitative situations working long hours on pay below the minimum wage. The application of the National Minimum Wage, accommodation offsets and the exploitation of workers by bad employers agencies have had a severe effect on workers well being and on poverty levels.
- Unemployment is also an issue for newly arrive migrants. Refugees experience higher levels of unemployment compared with many other groups and the lack of a UK work biography can count against them.
- People from BME groups and those affected by disability face particular barriers to employment. Discrimination among employers and inadequate childcare provision generate barriers to work for many vulnerable groups, including recent migrants and BME communities. Moving into work and its interaction with housing benefit can make refugees feel vulnerable.
- High levels of in-work poverty affect some disadvantaged groups – including those from some BME communities – and this renders paid employment an unreliable route out of poverty. In-work poverty is particularly high for workers in migrant communities. Research on low-paid employment in London found that 90 per cent of the workers were migrants irrespective of their level of skills, which was often high.
- Other workers come to the UK via regular routes and then are forced into informal economy. Workers under Tier 2 of the points-based system need a sponsoring employer, to whom they are effectively tied. They are vulnerable if

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

they lose their job. They may therefore find themselves putting up with an abusive employer, returning home or slipping into the irregular economy.

- The position of workers from the new member states of the European Union, of which the largest group are Polish nationals, is also problematic. In 2004, the UK was one of only three existing EU countries that did not apply to apply transitional measures to these new EU citizens and limit the right of those from new member states to access the UK labour market. Although registration was a political device to reassure certain sections of the public that the government was 'in control', it has made life difficult for some migrants from the EU's new member states.
- Recent research by the London School of Economics for the London Mayor estimated that two-thirds of irregular migrants came to Britain as asylum seekers have managed to find work, although denied access to the labour market. However, for non-EU undocumented workers the levels of unemployment are twice as high for those of documented workers, and they effectively have no employment rights. They live in 'a twilight world of poverty'.
- The influx of A8 workers had contributed to a growth in areas of the economy that rely on low-skill, low-paid jobs.
- Although the Gangmaster Licensing Authority regulates the actions of labour agencies, its remit is limited and many migrants work in terrible conditions.
- Increasing unemployment is also a problem. As the recession bites, many European workers will lose their jobs and end up living on the streets.⁶⁴
- Under UK law, if a worker does not have a right to work s/he cannot enforce her/his employment rights through the UK courts. The Worker Registration Scheme and transitional measures have therefore created a situation in which fellow EU citizens may not be able to enforce their employment rights.⁶⁵
- However, under EU law, the Worker Registration Scheme must be abolished by April this year, together with all other transitional measures relating to nationals who joined the EU in 2004. Transitional arrangements for Bulgarian and Romanian nationals have to end by 2014.

Welfare to work – punishing families?

- High quality, affordable childcare is an essential part of an effective welfare to work strategy, especially as new regulations will compel lone parents with children as young as five to seek employment or have their benefits sanctioned. Reducing child care subsidies from 80 percent to 70 percent will sap family incomes.
- Further, it is not clear how the childcare element of working tax credit (or free school meals) will be administered within the new universal credit.
- Sanctions punish children unfairly. Punishing parents who are unable to move into paid employment (by reducing out of work benefits and/or imposing benefit sanctions) damages their children. Sanctions reduce financial support for parents at a time when they are incurring the costs of looking for work (such as child care) and this will compound barriers to employment.

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

- Extensive research on the efficacy of sanctions both internationally and in the UK suggests that they are likely to be ineffective and have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable claimants. ⁶⁶
- Workfare programmes are expensive to run, and the drop in the number of claimants is driven more by people dropping out of the system completely, than moving into work. ⁶⁷
- Research also suggests that the imposition of sanctions on families with children can have a profoundly negative impact on the health and wellbeing of children. ⁶⁸
- Extensive comparative research on welfare to work programmes flags up many issues, which should be a source of concern in the UK. ⁶⁹ For example, evaluations of the contracted out Pathways to Work Programmes conducted for the DWP suggest that there were no significant improvement in the work, earnings and self-reported health outcomes of claimants. International evidence also raises important issues. *Lessons from Australia, Denmark, Germany* suggest that there is 'limited evidence to suggest that contracting out employment services creates efficiency gains or cost savings.'
- The wider welfare to work agenda is generating stigmatising language about benefit claimants that may damage attitudes towards and perception of poorer parents and their children in schools. A tendency to 'blame' parents not only damages their perception of themselves, but it damages their children. The constant stigmatisation of 'benefit claimants' has an impact on public attitudes, and on the attitudes of service providers. Families in some migrant communities face additional problems around stigma and discrimination.

Policy recommendations for CPS

The role of national government

- Recognise that poverty, disability and ill-health generate additional barriers to educational, social and cultural opportunities and to employment.
- Recognise that extensive cuts to public services is reducing opportunities for employment (particularly amongst women – including those from migrant communities - who are more likely to be employed in the public services) and compounding geographical inequalities. For example, the Office for National Statistics suggests that while nobody has a job in 19% of homes in the UK as a whole, but that figure soars to 23% in Wales and to 32% in Liverpool. ⁷⁰
- Introduce more flexible immigration policies that enable people to work and train to strengthen long-term employment opportunities – and provide asylum seekers with the right to work.
- Tackle in-work poverty – by increasing the minimum wage and monitoring employment practices to avoid exploitative practice.
- Enable families to access work experience - either through work-focused volunteering, work and training placements or paid employment - is vital to strengthening a refugee's employability.

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

- Tackle the issues which generate barriers to employment for many families, but particularly those from some migrant and BME communities, including:
 - Childcare
 - Access to training
 - Flexible job opportunities
 - Stigma in support services and among employers
 - Employment discrimination
- Adopt an evidence-based approach to its welfare to work policies – and review welfare to work policies to ensure that the most vulnerable families are not affected by benefit sanctions.

The role of local government

'It would also help if local authorities as employers tried to make sure that they enabled their employees who are parents to have breakfast with their children. Employing more people at school friendly hours, including term time only, could be cheaper than employing them nine to five.' (Professor Danny Dorling)⁷¹

- Prioritise the delivery of high quality childcare to disadvantaged groups seeking – or being compelled to seek – employment.
- Ensure that employment practices support the needs of vulnerable parents.

Localism – the way forward?

Political context:

92. The Localism Bill published in November 2010 aims to “to devolve more powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities greater control over local decisions like housing and planning.”
93. The Bill aims to establish a "community right to challenge" to help different groups run local services if they want to. Voluntary groups, social enterprises, parish councils and others will be able to express an interest in taking over council-run services - the local authority will have to consider it. It could prompt a bidding exercise in which the group could then compete. Services could include running children's centres, social care services or improving transport links.
94. The Government argues that local decision-making creates potential because it supports and draws upon the development of needs' assessment strategies.
95. It argues that local governments are better-placed than central government to identify pockets of deprivation.
96. A focus on localism is intended to support the delivery of 'the Big Society' - summarised as 'Empowering Communities'; 'Opening up Public Services'; and 'Building a stronger Civic Society'.

What are the problems?

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

97. There are tensions between a greater focus on greater localism and specific policy focused on measurable goals were identified. For example, a localism agenda is devolving greater power and responsibility to local areas while reducing resources – and this could produce a rationalising tendency to exclude hard to reach groups from services, including immigrants.
98. The localism agenda is being undermined by national policies and restrictions on resources. Cuts being put in place by national government are having a negative impact on the delivery of public services at a local level.
99. Cuts to local authority budgets are also reducing support for local organisations who may be well placed to plug gaps in provision. This is putting ever greater burden on a small number of larger organisations at a national level.
100. Lack of evidence and statistical data at a local level has a negative impact on the impact on allocation of resources. Data protection means that local authorities may not have the data needed to identify vulnerable groups – a lot of which comes from HMRC.
101. Lack of local stats will have impact on allocation of resources and policies around dispersal make it much more complicated to track and address migrant families' needs, and this problem will be compounded when radical changes to housing and the labour market generate considerable internal migration within the UK.
102. A reliance on localism ignores factors which are outside the local agenda – for example housing and community care – which have a major impact on people's lives.
103. Devolving responsibilities to local areas is particularly problematic when resolving issues in and around social security (an important factor when tackling child poverty) – which is, and should remain, the responsibility of the DWP.
104. Not all councils are responsive when lobbied. Some feel that migration actually *causes* child poverty.
105. Local groups do not necessarily work together, and this results in duplication. A multi-agency approach is needed.

Policy recommendations for the Child Poverty Strategy

Role of national government

- Recognise that national policies and funding priorities have a significant impact on the delivery of local services. Devolving responsibility without providing adequate funding is simply 'passing the buck', and this approach is likely to have a particularly negative impact on families from migrant communities.
- Prioritise and extend national services at a local level, and ensure that they are more responsive to local need. For example, encourage Jobcentre Plus to undertake more outreach work and engage with communities.
- Maximise community budgets and ensure that services provided by different local organisations are more joined up and coherent.

Role of local government

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

- Use greater decision-making powers to identify problems and ensure deliver services that meet local need.
- Identify pockets of deprivation, map out the availability of public services and grass roots provision and identify gaps in provision.
- Identify which services are best placed to help address needs at a local level and orchestrate the delivery of more coherent support services.
- Engage proactively with voluntary sector communities – and the organisations that represent them.
- Recognise the places migrant groups go and congregate varies from area to area. Understanding social and cultural issues will ensure the provision of accessible information and support.

6. Conclusion

106. *At Greatest Risk* points out that, although some children benefited from the previous government's strategy, not all children benefited equally. It suggests that 'Government asylum policy directly conflicts with policies on child welfare, social inclusion and anti-discrimination' – and points out that 'very little thought has been given to the long-term effect of these policies.' The report shows that, even when granted leave to remain or becoming British citizens, children from asylum and migrant communities may well find themselves represented in groups who face a disproportionate risk of poverty (e.g., being Black, in care or disabled). The consequences of policy failure with regard to the financial, housing, health and (sometimes) educational needs of these vulnerable children is likely to generate additional barriers to employment should they stay in the UK.
107. Unfortunately, the problems identified in *At Greatest Risk* have not been adequately addressed and, for some families, the situation has got significantly worse. A more coherent, robust and humane approach is needed to protect some of the most vulnerable children in the UK.
108. The need for co-ordinated, joined-up policies during the early years is widely recognised. A raft of legislation has been put in place which defines child wellbeing and places it at the forefront of the delivery of children's services, but a lack of 'joined-up' service delivery reduces its impact. Ensuring that the delivery of all forms of early support is co-ordinated, consistent and responsive is absolutely essential. Placing children's needs – rather than their parent's nationality or employment status – at the forefront of the design and delivery of early years' services may engender a more co-ordinated approach.
109. Although many of the barriers to accessing support are the similar to those which confront different vulnerable in the UK, families in migrant communities experience additional problems and barriers to financial support, and these generate high levels of poverty and destitution. Given that many of the children living in such families are likely to remain in the UK, an approach that seeks to define and divide children into 'special groups' with the intention of restricting entitlement rather than maximising support is wholly at odds with the Government's desire to improve life chances for *all* children and opportunities for *all* parents.

Policy recommendations for the Child Poverty Strategy

Role of national government

- *Put in place joined-up policies that protect children and families:* The duty of care of the state – which is based on the principles of what is best for the child – should apply to all areas. It is unacceptably that children are condemned to live in poverty and destitution as a result of their parent’s nationality or employment status. Ensuring that *all* children have access to an adequate income that safeguards their health and wellbeing would be in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the UK Government is a signatory.
- Recognise that policies in and around education, housing, neighbourhood and employment clearly have a vital role to play in either maximising – or restricting - opportunities for the most disadvantaged children and their families. Recognise that access to social security improves health and review exclusion of some groups.⁷²
- Adopt a human rights culture in all agencies – for migrant families in particular and poverty in general and:
 - Focus on the needs of people rather than on specific groups/definitions.
 - Put children first
 - Maximise financial capabilities
 - Maximise social capital, partnership and outreach
 - Ensure housing policies support successful integration
- Make sure that local and national data picks up on patterns of child poverty in different migrant communities.
- Recognise that cross government strategies are essential.
- Avoid using discriminatory or divisive language to justify cuts for political or fiscal reasons.
- Recognise that wider are cuts are likely to have a disproportionate impact on children from migrant communities. Put in place policies that identify need and support such families.
- Ensure that welfare is used as a tool of inclusion – not exclusion. The Government should recognise that maximising take-up of entitlement not only safeguards the health and wellbeing of children and families but it reduces a heavy reliance on other support services (for example in the NHS) that are costly in the short-term, but reduces health, educational and employment inequalities in the long-run.

Role of local government

- Ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable groups of children are addressed in child poverty strategies.

How should the child poverty strategy reduce poverty in migrant communities?

- Consult with families, young people and children from all groups when drawing up child poverty strategies.
- *Facilitate the sharing of effective strategies* - being put in place with other local authorities.
- Put in place policies that tackle poverty in migrant communities rather than focus on policies designed to keep such families at bay.
- Focus on the delivery of services that everyone is entitled to – such as children’s services - as well as specialist support where needed.

Role of voluntary sector

- Ensure that migrant groups lobby alongside other groups affected by poverty – to avoid a divide and rule approach.

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- 13 Department for Work and Pensions (2010) Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95 -2008/09 Department for Work and Pensions.
- 14 Department for Work and Pensions (2010) Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95 -2008/09 Department for Work and Pensions
- 15 Jill Rutter (2011) 'Migration, migrants and child poverty' in Poverty 138, pp. 6-10
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Paul Johnson and Yulia Kosykh, Equality and Human Rights Commission 2008

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