



Press release for immediate release:

New online tool to help advise destitute families

Web tool to support advisers working with destitute migrant families

A new online tool to help local authority practitioners and voluntary sector advisers' work out support options for destitute families with no recourse to public funds has been launched this week.

This new web tool – <http://migrantfamilies.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/> - aims to help local authorities to make best use of reduced and scarce resources in order to adhere to statutory child safeguarding duties, by:

- acting as an aid to enable local authority staff to conduct assessments more efficiently by explaining key elements of the complex law that governs eligibility for social services support
- providing information to help plan how a case might be resolved

Many families living in the UK face exclusion from critical welfare benefits and social housing on account of their immigration status and the condition of 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). When a family's ability to support themselves breaks down, children are at risk of being homeless. Local authorities may need to step in to provide safety net support due to child safeguarding and welfare responsibilities under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Therefore, in many urgent cases, local authorities will have a duty to provide housing and financial support in order to alleviate destitution.

Voluntary sector advisers and families can use the tool to find out:

- if and when a family may be eligible to get help from social services (including emergency support options)
- what the implications of any exclusions to support might be
- what information may be required by social services
- further information to help the family resolve their housing and financial difficulties before statutory support is required.

The tool was designed following a major study by the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford completed in July 2015 - [Safeguarding children from destitution: Local authority responses to families with 'no recourse to public funds'](#) – which found that assessing eligibility under section 17 is a complicated and challenging experience for local authorities and advisers in voluntary services.

The report noted that Local Authority staff have reported concerns about a lack of training and guidance in being able to correctly interpret this complex legal area. This can result in inconsistent approaches and decisions being made, some of which

may not be consistent with the law. The report concluded that the system was 'dysfunctional'.

The Legal Education Foundation provided funding to develop an online tool to enable users to more easily navigate a family's likely outcomes based on the parent's immigration status, and understand eligibility for section 17 support.

The tool has been developed by a team at COMPAS, the Department of Social Sciences at University of Roehampton, the No Recourse to Public Funds Network at Islington Council, web company Soapbox and benefited from specialist legal input from Platt Halpern Solicitors. Practitioners have already received the tool positively:

[Rose Haines, Refugee Support Operations Manager, South East England, British Red Cross]: *"The content we've read through seems clear and easy to navigate. The tool is going to be incredibly useful for our casework and I think it will really help clients to understand their options and entitlements better and increase their confidence to seek help; whether from statutory, legal or voluntary services."*

[Ranganathan Gajendran, Social Work Team Manager, London Borough of Lambeth]: *"The Tool looks impressive. Language is simple, browsing is smooth"*

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To find out more about COMPAS and to access the research brief visit

<http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/online-tool-to-improve-the-assessment-of-destitute-families-eligibility-for-support/>

To view the web tool - <http://migrantfamilies.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/>