

## Windrush and the ongoing struggle for justice

### **What's the issue?**

The 'Windrush generation' refers to people who moved to Britain from Caribbean countries, between **1948 and 1971**. The first large group of people from the Caribbean who came to Britain arrived on 'The Empire Windrush' ship, in June 1948. As the Caribbean was still a part of the British commonwealth after World War Two, those who travelled to Britain were British subjects, allowing them to work and live in Britain permanently. Many of those who arrived filled roles in the recently formed NHS, and other sectors with post-war job shortages.

In late 2017 the 'Windrush Scandal' began to emerge, as stories surfaced showing that Commonwealth citizens had been **wrongly deported and detained**, despite having lived and worked in Britain for decades. Windrush generation children had often arrived on their parents' passports, and as the Home Office had destroyed thousands of records, including landing cards, many did not have documentation to prove they had the 'right to remain' in Britain. Individuals were also forced by the Home Office to prove that they had arrived in Britain before 1973, and to provide at least one official document for every year they had been in Britain, an often-impossible task.

This led to members of the Windrush generation wrongly being deemed as 'undocumented migrants'. As a result of the government's 'Hostile Environment' immigration policy, many black Britons lost jobs or homes, and were denied access to healthcare, benefits and legal rights. In 2018, the Home Office admitted that **at least 850 people** had been wrongly detained from 2012-17. Tragically, **at least 11 people** who were wrongly deported have died.

While the government has now apologised for the appalling injustices suffered by members of the Windrush generation, true justice for Windrush victims has still not been delivered. A compensation scheme was introduced in April 2019, but despite having a potential budget of up to £500m, **only 60 people received compensation** during the scheme's first year of operation and just £360,000 was paid out. By June 2022, compensation had been paid to **less than 7% of Windrush victims**, and 23 people had sadly died before receiving payments they were eligible for. Many of those waiting for compensation lost their jobs as a result of the scandal, and subsequently accrued debts which they are unable to pay off until they receive compensation.

### **Paulette Wilson: the case that drew attention to a scandal**

In 1968, Paulette Wilson, then aged 10, left Jamaica to **join her family** in the UK, where she lived for the rest of her life. She attended primary and secondary school in the UK, and before her retirement worked as a cook. Paulette raised her daughter in the UK, and became a grandmother. Despite having paid national insurance contributions in the UK for **over thirty years**, and being able to prove a long history of paying tax here, Wilson was classified as an illegal immigrant and sent to Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre in October 2017.

Although Wilson had a legal right to remain in the UK as she had arrived as a British subject under the **1948 British Nationality Act**, she had no papers proving this and had never previously applied for a passport. Only a last minute intervention from her MP and a local charity prevented her deportation to Jamaica, a country she had not visited since she moved to the UK. Very sadly, Paulette Wilson **died aged 64** in July 2020, just a month after delivering a petition to Downing Street calling for justice for Windrush victims.

## **The history of the ‘Hostile Environment’**

Although the ‘Hostile Environment’ policy was only recently introduced in 2012 by the then Home Secretary Theresa May, such approaches are not a new phenomenon in Britain. Immigration controls were introduced in Britain for the first time over a century ago, through the 1905 Aliens Act. Under the provisions of this act, more than 1,300 Jews, many of whom had lived here for years, were deported from Britain. The introduction of this policy had followed anti-immigrant and antisemitic [rhetoric in the British press](#) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This hostility continued in the 1930’s as Jewish refugees sought sanctuary in Britain, with a Sunday Express editorial from June 1938 declaring that “*Just now there is a big influx of foreign Jews into Britain. They are over-running the country.*”

More recently, Jewish refugees from Aden (a former British protectorate, now in Yemen), who have lived in Britain since the 1960s were made to feel like they didn’t belong here when they struggled to get their [passports renewed](#) in 2019.

### **Questions to consider**

*Victims of the Windrush scandal were suddenly told that they were ‘undocumented migrants’, and lost their jobs, access to healthcare and other benefits. How do you think you would feel if this happened to you?*

*Why is it important for the Jewish community to campaign for justice for Windrush victims?*

*Is it fair that people without the right papers are unable to access essential services like healthcare?*

*What connections can you see between the Windrush scandal and wider racism in our society?*

*Under the ‘Hostile Environment’, doctors and other medical professionals are required to [check the ID of patients](#) to see if they are legally eligible for free healthcare. Do you think this is fair?*

*What connections, similarities and differences do you see between black and Jewish experiences?*

### **Get involved and take action**

Write to your MP and campaign for the Windrush compensation scheme to be made far more accessible, and lobby the government to honour its promise to [fully implement](#) the full set of recommendations from an independent report that examined the scandal, the *Windrush Lessons Learned Review*.

You can visit the Runnymede Trust’s website to read [ten urgent Windrush recommendations](#) the government should implement.

### **Further resources**

**Watch** *Sitting in Limbo*, a BBC drama written by Stephen S. Thompson, based on his brother Anthony Bryan’s real life Windrush scandal story.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p08g29ff/sitting-in-limbo>

**Watch** *Windrush Betrayal*, a half-hour film featuring 50 ‘mini-biographies’ of people whose lives were shattered by the Windrush scandal.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/jul/08/windrush-betrayal-film-made-in-lockdown-black-actors-victims-words>