A Qualitative Examination of the Volatility of UK Immigration Policies and Their Impact on Black Migrant Communities in Northeast England

By

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Abstract

This study examines how the volatility of the UK immigration rules affects Black migrant communities in the Northeast of England, drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) to foreground the centrality of race, structural racism, and power in policymaking. Qualitative analysis of academic literature, policy documents, NGO reports, and sociological evidence highlights the cumulative effects of the post-Brexit settlement regime, the Nationality and Borders Act (2022), the Illegal Migration Act (2023), intensified "hostile environment" mechanisms, and NRPF-related restrictions. Evidence shows that Black migrants experienced heightened precarity, systemic discrimination, mental distress, and differentiated access to welfare, housing, healthcare, and protection. At the same time, policy narratives framed migrants as threats, intensifying far-right mobilisation and public hostility in the region. Contrasting views are critically evaluated: while government actors justified reforms as necessary for border control, critics argue such measures embed structural racism, undermine rights, and reproduce colonial logics. This study contributes to sociological knowledge by illuminating how race, region, and law interact to shape unequal outcomes for Black migrants. Recommendations propose anti-racist policy reforms, participatory governance, and race-equity-centred migration systems.

Keywords: migration, changes, critical theory, rules, racialization

Introduction

The period 2021–2026 marks one of the most turbulent eras in contemporary UK migration governance. Following Brexit, the UK accelerated reforms to asylum,

immigration, and citizenship rules, often without adequate impact assessments on racialised communities. The introduction of harsher border controls expanded surveillance, restrictions on appeal rights, and the attempted externalisation of asylum processing (e.g., the Rwanda plan) created a landscape of instability and fear for many migrants—particularly Black migrants, who historically endure disproportionate scrutiny, discriminatory enforcement, and systemic exclusion in Britain (Chakrabarty et al., 2016; Craig, 2020).

The Northeast of England ("the region") presents a unique context for examining these effects. Although it has a relatively smaller non-White population than London or the Midlands, the region has long experienced racialised tensions (Craig et al., 2010), inconsistent local authority capacity, and a legacy of the asylum dispersal system. Recent years saw rising anti-immigrant sentiment and racially motivated incidents across the UK, including attacks on minority communities and protests outside asylum accommodation sites (Bello, 2025). In sociological terms, these developments underscore the intersection of place, race, and state power.

Government officials have justified new migration restrictions by claiming a need to deter irregular arrivals, improve system efficiency, and restore public trust. For example, political commentary around the Rwanda plan often framed irregular migrants as threats to national order. However, scholars, NGOs, and human-rights bodies argue that such measures were poorly designed, discriminatory in practice, grounded in racialised moral panics, and incompatible with international law (UNHCR, 2023).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a powerful lens for interrogating these contradictions. CRT highlights how law, policy, and institutions reproduce racial hierarchies—even when formally race-neutral. When applied to the UK's migration system, CRT exposes how "colour-blind" legal language masks racially patterned harms and legitimises exclusionary practices. This framework allows the current study to situate migration-rule changes within the UK's historical and ongoing racial project—from Windrush to the present (Independent, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Migration rules in the UK have undergone frequent, unpredictable changes between 2021 and 2026. Many of these changes—such as adjustments to asylum admissibility, age-assessment procedures, appeal rights, biometric requirements, and welfare entitlements—were implemented rapidly and with minimal safeguarding for vulnerable groups.

While these rules formally apply to all migrants, overwhelming evidence shows that Black migrants—especially those of African and Caribbean heritage—face disproportionate harm. Several interlinked issues emerge.

CRT scholars argue that UK immigration law has always been deeply racialised, historically designed to curtail non-White immigration (El-Enany, 2020; Independent, 2024). Recent policies continue this lineage: they disproportionately affect those from countries with colonial ties, conflict, or economic instability—many of them Black-majority countries.

Hostile-environment mechanisms require landlords, employers, banks, NHS staff, and local authorities to check immigration status. Studies show these policies generate racial profiling, fear, and barriers to essential services (Stavropoulou, 2024).

Media and political rhetoric increasingly framed migrants as risks—exacerbating far-right mobilisation and racialised hostility (Kane, 2024) . Black migrants became disproportionately targeted due to longstanding racial stereotypes associating Blackness with criminality, illegality, or deviance.

NRPF restrictions disproportionately affect Black women and families, deepening poverty and limiting access to safety and support (Jolly et al., 2022).

Sociological evidence reveals worsening racism and limited institutional capacity to support Black communities in the region (Craig et al., 2010).

This study therefore investigates how the volatility of UK immigration policies and rules compound existing inequalities and produces racialised vulnerabilities for Black migrants.

Research Questions

From a sociological and CRT perspective, the study is guided by the following questions:

1. How did indiscriminate migration-rule changes between 2021 and 2026 affect Black migrant communities in the Northeast of England?
2. What forms of racialised exclusion, discrimination, or marginalisation emerged or intensified during this period?
3. How do migrants lived experiences reflect broader structures of racism embedded in UK migration governance?
4. How do regional factors in the Northeast shape the impacts of national migration policies?
5. What alternative perspectives or counterarguments exist regarding these policy changes?

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To critically examine the lived sociological impact of volatile UK migration-rules on Black migrant communities in the Northeast, using a CRT framework.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify and analyse specific migration-rule changes affecting Black migrants.
2. To assess how these changes deepen racial inequalities across welfare, housing, healthcare, and asylum systems.
3. To evaluate contrasting arguments—for and against—the legal and policy reforms.
4. To explore how regional dynamics shape Black migrants' experiences in the Northeast.
5. To propose evidence-based, anti-racist policy recommendations.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to:

- Sociology of Race and Migration: offering empirical insight on how law reproduces racial hierarchies.
- Policy Debate: exposing unintended consequences of rapid regulatory changes.
- Regional Inequality Studies: highlighting the overlooked experiences of Black migrants in the Northeast.
- Critical Race Scholarship: demonstrating the ongoing relevance of CRT in analysing contemporary British governance.

Scope and Limitations

The study focuses on:

- Policy changes
- Black migrants in Northeast England (including asylum seekers, refugees, students, workers, and undocumented individuals)
- Qualitative interpretation of available secondary evidence

Limitations include reliance on published reports, possible underreporting of racism in the region, and variability in local authority practices.

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

This literature review critically synthesises academic, policy, and empirical sources on the impact of UK migration rule changes between 2021 and 2026, focusing specifically on racialised consequences for Black migrants in the Northeast of England. It draws on Critical Race Theory (CRT) to analyse institutionalised racism, structural inequality, and power embedded in migration governance. At the same time, it incorporates counterarguments from government rationales, public opinion evidence, and constitutional or administrative critiques.
Post-Brexit Migration Environment and Rising Racial Tensions

Scholars widely agree that the Brexit era deepened racialised anxieties and political hostility toward migration, creating fertile ground for increasingly restrictive policies (El-Enany, 2020; Warmington, 2021). Evidence from across the

UK indicates a marked surge in anti-immigration sentiment, hate crimes, and racialised protests, which intensified between 2024 and 2025. For instance, Bello (2025) documents escalating racist attacks and anti-migrant riots across the UK, including assaults against Muslim, Sikh, and Black communities, reflecting a political climate that emboldens far-right mobilisation and frames migrants as threats to public safety. Kane (2024) similarly argues that mainstream political rhetoric contributes to the normalisation of racist narratives and the justification of harsh border policies, linking far-right violence to structural failures within political institutions.

Counterarguments, however, emphasise that public concern about irregular migration stems not from racism but from perceived failures of the asylum system, overcrowded hotels, and concerns about fairness (e.g., centrist commentators at the LSE Inequalities blog). Such perspectives argue that policy tightening may reflect legitimate democratic pressures rather than racial animus. Critics of this counterargument point out that it ignores how fears are shaped by longstanding colonial narratives that depict non-White migrants as inherently problematic, dangerous, or burdensome—an argument strongly supported in CRT literature (Chakrabarty et al., 2016).

The Hostile Environment as a Racialised Governance Regime

The UK's "hostile environment" policies—first introduced in the 2010s but significantly intensified during 2021–2026—require public institutions and private actors to conduct immigration checks for essential services. Multiple studies document that these systems disproportionately harm racialised migrants, particularly Black communities.

Stavropoulou (2024), examining racialised asylum seekers in the Northeast, shows how dispersal, detention, and destitution function as a "threefold punitive threat," producing everyday insecurity and unsafe spaces for migrants navigating the hostile environment. A related study by the University of Greenwich (2024) reinforces that racialised migrants face heightened risk of discrimination and state-sanctioned exclusion because hostile-environment rules embed immigration enforcement into NHS practices, housing, policing, and social care.

Supporting these findings, Andrews et al. (2020) show that hostile-environment policies systematically target non-White migrants through administrative controls, thus reinforcing state racialisation and normalising exclusionary practices that disproportionately harm Black and Minority Ethnic communities (Craig et al., 2020).

Government documents often justify hostile-environment rules as essential for preventing illegal migration and protecting public services. Some policymakers argue that race-neutral language demonstrates their fairness. Yet, CRT scholars emphasise that race neutrality does not eliminate racial outcomes; rather, it masks the structural inequalities produced when institutions enforce immigration checks disproportionately on those racialised as foreign, especially Black people (Gillborn, 2015; Chakrabarty et al., 2016).

Discrimination and Labour Market Inequality

The Migration Observatory (2024) reports widespread discrimination against migrants in employment, housing, and public life, noting that Black migrants frequently face higher barriers to job interviews, economic mobility, and safety. Their analysis shows that around 16% of migrants reported discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or nationality, with higher levels among second-generation migrants—pointing to intergenerational effects of racial exclusion. This aligns with longstanding sociological work showing that Black Africans and Black Caribbeans face persistent labour-market disadvantage due to racialised structural discrimination (Phillips, 1998; Daley, 1997).

Nationality and Borders Act 2022: Racialised Effects and Critiques

The Nationality and Borders Act (NABA) 2022 radically reconfigured asylum processing by creating a two-tier system that penalises those arriving via irregular routes. Legal scholars argue that the Act disproportionately harms nationals from conflict-affected and formerly colonised countries—many of which are Black-majority states (Honkala, 2025). NABA increases evidentiary burdens, limits appeal rights, and enables offshore processing, which critics say violates the Refugee Convention and entrenches institutional racism (The Law Society, 2022). Further analysis from Refugee Action (2024) emphasises that asylum policies overwhelmingly disadvantage Black and Brown people because they originate

from countries previously subjected to British colonial control and extraction. The briefing concludes that the UK asylum system is "racial injustice in action" because it systematically penalises migrants from Africa and the Caribbean while offering preferential treatment to Ukrainian refugees.

Government supporters of NABA claim that the Act restores fairness by deterring irregular arrivals, breaking smuggling networks, and prioritising "genuine" refugees. However, empirical evidence shows that irregular migrants often take dangerous routes because safer pathways are inaccessible or blocked—thus deterrence policies rarely prevent movement but do increase harm (Mayblin, 2019; Refugee Action, 2024).

Illegal Migration Act 2023: Human Rights Critiques and Racialised Disproportionality

The Illegal Migration Act (IMA) 2023 further restricts asylum access by mandating removal of anyone arriving "illegally," severely limiting appeals, and curtailing protections for trafficking survivors. The UNHCR (2023) warns that the Act "all but extinguishes" the right to claim asylum in the UK and creates foreseeable risks of refoulement, disproportionately affecting migrants from Black-majority countries who rely on irregular routes due to geopolitical instability.

Amnesty International (2023) argues that the Act breaches constitutional principles and undermines judicial oversight, leaving racialised migrants vulnerable to arbitrary removal as the burden of proof shifts onto the individual—often impossible for those fleeing conflict or lacking documentation. Supporters claim that harsh measures are necessary to stop dangerous Channel crossings. Yet critiques maintain that punitive approaches fail to address root causes—wars, climate crises, and global inequality—while disproportionately punishing Black asylum seekers (Mallory, 2024).

The Rwanda Plan: A Colonial Continuity?

The UK–Rwanda relocation agreement (2022–2024) was one of the most controversial migration policies of the decade. Scholars argue that outsourcing asylum processing to a Global South country reproduces colonial hierarchies,

wherein Black bodies are displaced, traded, or disposed of by Western powers (Bello, 2025; Kane, 2024).

The High Court ruled that Rwanda was unsafe, and in 2023 the Supreme Court confirmed that removal could expose asylum seekers to refoulement. The Rwanda scheme was scrapped in 2024, and UN experts welcomed its end, emphasising that it posed severe human-rights risks to migrants already racialised as undesirable. Proponents argued the plan would deter irregular entry, reduce deaths at sea, and disrupt smuggling. However, no evidence supports the claim that offshoring deters migration; instead, critics note such schemes outsource responsibility to poorer nations and rely on racialised assumptions about who is "fit" for protection (Mallory, 2024).

The Windrush Legacy and Ongoing Distrust

The Windrush scandal (exposed in 2018) remains pivotal for understanding Black migrants' distrust of the Home Office. Reports published in 2024 show that decades of immigration laws were explicitly designed to restrict non-White migration and disenfranchise Black Britons (Independent, 2024). The uncovering of these racist legislative foundations reinforces CRT arguments that the UK migration regime functions as a racial project.

Official research confirms that the Home Office's historical and systemic discrimination continues to shape present-day experiences of Black migrants, including fear of detention, wrongful removal, and loss of services (GOV.UK, 2024).

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF): Structural Racialised Harm

NRPF rules prevent many migrants from accessing welfare, housing support, or public funds. A qualitative evidence synthesis by Jolly et al. (2022) found that NRPF causes destitution, extreme poverty, and disproportionate harm to racialised women, particularly Black migrant women navigating gender-based violence and childcare responsibilities. The Migration Observatory (2023) reported that 2.6 million migrants—many from Nigeria, Pakistan, and India—were affected by NRPF, creating structural barriers to survival for Black communities.

Similarly, Southall Black Sisters (2025) document that Black and migrant women often face severe abuse without access to public safety nets, because NRPF forces them into dependency and prevents them from leaving violent relationships. Many frontline services remain underfunded and racially biased, exacerbating harm (Southall Black Sisters, 2025).

Government rationales assert that NRPF prevents "benefit tourism" and preserves public funds. However, CRT critiques argue that NRPF creates a racialised underclass whose rights are diminished, reproducing colonial patterns of labour exploitation and social exclusion.

Regional Dynamics: Black Migrants in the Northeast of England

The Northeast remains one of England's regions with growing but still relatively small Black populations. Research by Craig et al. (2010) shows that BME groups in the region face persistent racism, underfunded community organisations, and weak institutional responses to hate crime, undermining trust in local authorities. Historic England's "African Lives in the Northeast" project (2024) highlights the region's long history of African presence but notes ongoing marginalisation and lack of representation in public narratives, reinforcing structural invisibility.

These regional disparities make Black migrants particularly vulnerable to national migration rule changes, as they navigate hostile policies in environments lacking strong community safety nets.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is the primary theoretical lens for this study. According to CRT scholars. Racism is ordinary, not aberrational — It is embedded within the legal and political systems of the UK (Chakrabarty et al., 2016). Racialisation is structurally produced — Migration laws create and maintain racial hierarchies by restricting entry and rights based on race-coded criteria (Gillborn, 2015). Interest convergence — Policies such as the Rwanda plan or NABA serve political interests of the state, not migrant welfare. Counter-storytelling — Migrant narratives challenge dominant policy discourse, exemplified in Refugee Action's (2024) documentation of everyday racism in the asylum system. Colonial continuities — UK migration

rules cannot be separated from Britain's colonial past, as documented in Windrush analyses showing intentional racial exclusion (Independent, 2024).

CRT thus exposes how "race-neutral" migration rules produce racially uneven outcomes that harm Black migrants disproportionately.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers a rigorous analytical framework to understand why facially neutral migration rules produce racially unequal outcomes. CRT posits that racism is embedded in institutions rather than isolated aberrations. UK migration policies, such as the hostile environment, embed racialised surveillance into housing, healthcare, and employment systems (Stavropoulou, 2024). Though policies do not explicitly name race, their impact is racialised because they interact with global inequalities and colonial legacies. Example: NABA's differentiated refugee tiers primarily disadvantage Black-majority countries affected by conflict or colonial extraction (Refugee Action, 2024).

CRT argues reforms happen when they benefit the dominant group. Policies like the Rwanda plan served political interests (e.g., electoral anxieties) even though evidence shows they harm migrants and violate rights (Mallory, 2024). Black migrants' narratives—documented in qualitative studies—challenge state narratives that portray policies as neutral or fair. These narratives reveal fear, exclusion, and racism hidden beneath official rhetoric (Greenwich study, 2024; Refugee Action, 2024).

CRT highlights how current policies echo colonial governance. The Windrush scandal's roots in explicitly racist immigration laws demonstrate continuity in racial statecraft (Independent, 2024). Offshoring to Rwanda similarly mirrors imperial geographies of displacement. In this study, CRT explains why Black migrants disproportionately absorbed the negative impacts of migration reforms, despite their ostensibly "indiscriminate" design.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative interpretivist research design drawing on a document-based synthesis of peer-reviewed scholarship, official reports, NGO

briefings, and grey literature published between January 2021 and March 2026. This interpretive approach is appropriate because the central phenomenon—the lived impact of rapid and indiscriminate migration-rule changes—is not reducible to singular administrative indicators; instead, it requires a nuanced exploration of how Black migrant communities encounter these rules within broader socio-legal and institutional structures. Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides the study's core analytical lens, framing racism as ordinary, systemic, and historically embedded, and offering a means to foreground racial power in migration policy and to amplify counter-storytelling from community-led organisations (Chakrabarty et al., 2016; Refugee Action, 2024). In line with this framework, the study evaluates key legislative interventions, including the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (NABA) and the Illegal Migration Act 2023 (IMA), alongside constitutional and human-rights critiques from authoritative bodies such as UNHCR and relevant UK parliamentary committees (UNHCR, 2023; Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2023).

Data Sources and Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy informed the selection of documents that met three criteria: (a) relevance to UK migration-rule changes between 2021 and 2026, (b) explicit attention to race, racialisation, or outcomes for Black migrants, and (c) applicability to Northeast England. Sources included peer-reviewed articles on the hostile/compliant environment, legislative scrutiny materials (e.g., Legislation.gov.uk; JCHR), Migration Observatory briefings, and community-led publications such as those from Refugee Action and Southall Black Sisters. Regionally significant sources included research on race and justice in the Northeast (Craig et al., 2010) and place-based heritage initiatives documenting African presence in the region (Durham University; Historic England).

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through four iterative stages. First, mapping involved cataloguing major reforms, second, thematic coding was conducted using a CRT-informed codebook incorporating concepts such as racial state formation, everyday bordering, colonial continuities, counter-narratives, and regional inequalities. Third, counter-argument testing juxtaposed government justifications (fairness, deterrence, resource protection) with empirical and

human-rights critiques to identify divergences between policy intention and lived experience and fourth, triangulation integrated insights across academic analyses, legal evaluations, and NGO testimonies to mitigate single-source bias and strengthen credibility.

Ethical Considerations

Although this study relies exclusively on publicly available documents and therefore required no formal ethical approval, an ethic of care guided interpretation. The analysis prioritised migrant-led narratives, resisted deficit framings, and acknowledged the potential for secondary research to reproduce harm if racialised communities are represented without sensitivity (Refugee Action, 2024; Southall Black Sisters, 2025).

Limitations

As a secondary data synthesis, the study is constrained by publication biases—such as limited documentation of localised experiences in the Northeast—and by the rapid pace of migration policy reform, which meant some provisions were amended or rescinded mid-period (e.g., the cancellation of the Rwanda plan in 2024) (OHCHR, 2024; UNHCR, 2023). These limitations underscore the need for ongoing empirical research into racialised impacts of migration governance in marginalised regions.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion presents five interlocking themes that illuminate how "indiscriminate" migration-rule changes between 2021–2026 generated racialised consequences for Black migrants in the Northeast of England. Each theme articulates evidence, counterarguments, and sociological interpretation within a CRT framework, emphasising *how and why* race matters in policy design, implementation, and outcomes.

Theme 1: From "Rule Change" to Racialised Precarity — The Indirect Pathways of Harm

Across 2021–2026, rapid and overlapping reforms—NABA 2022 and IMA 2023—reframed asylum and immigration control around deterrence and removal, producing a cascade of administrative uncertainties that disproportionately

affected Black migrants (Honkala, 2025; UNHCR, 2023). Governmental narratives emphasised irregular crossings and the need to restore fairness; however, legal and human-rights assessments show that the architecture of these Acts curtailed protection rights, heightened the risks of refoulement, and pushed claimants into prolonged limbo where neither removal nor status resolution was feasible (UNHCR, 2023; Amnesty International UK, 2023).

For Black migrants in the Northeast, precarious status translated into everyday instability: uncertain eligibility for accommodation, protracted waiting in hotels or contingency sites, and delayed decisions that limited access to work and integration pathways. Evidence on discrimination and labour-market barriers suggests that these uncertainties compound pre-existing racialised disadvantages; Black applicants already face lower callback rates and higher exclusion risks (Migration Observatory, 2024; Daley, 1997).

Some contend that toughening rules is essential to prevent dangerous crossings and to uphold system integrity. Yet the literature indicates deterrence rarely addresses root causes or reduces movement; rather, it externalises harm and entrenches vulnerability, particularly for people from conflict-affected, formerly colonised states—many of them Black majority (Refugee Action, 2024; Mallory, 2024).

Interpretation (CRT). CRT situates these outcomes within racial statecraft: *facially neutral* rules yield *race-coded* effects because they intersect with global inequalities, colonial legacies, and domestic racial hierarchies. The policy–experience gap thus maps onto racial lines—Black migrants are more likely to experience the combined force of precariousness and surveillance, even when rules never name race (Chakrabarty et al., 2016; Andrews et al., 2020).

Theme 2: Everyday Bordering in Housing and Health — Institutionalising Suspicion

In housing and health, hostile-environment mechanisms embed immigration checks into everyday infrastructures, creating status-based gatekeeping and informal racial profiling. In the Northeast, arts-based and qualitative work document that dispersal, detention risk, and destitution form a "punitive

triangle," constructing (un)safe spaces and continuous anxiety for racialised asylum seekers (Stavropoulou, 2024; University of Greenwich, 2024).

NHS charging and data-sharing regimes discourage care-seeking, particularly where fear of immigration repercussions is high. Systematic and qualitative reviews show that charging practices and perceived data-sharing deter migrants, undermining patient safety and public health (Rassa et al., 2023; Papageorgiou et al., 2019).

Policy guidance asserts that charging recovers costs and preserves NHS resources, and that "right to rent" and identity checks simply enforce existing law. However, evidence repeatedly shows disparate racial effects—landlords and frontline staff may over-check or deny services to those racialised as "foreign," including Black British citizens, leading to indirect discrimination and service avoidance (Migration Observatory, 2024; Andrews et al., 2020).

Interpretation (CRT). Everyday bordering turns landlords, receptionists, and clinicians into street-level border agents, outsourcing enforcement to civil society and multiplying opportunities for racialised misrecognition. In CRT terms, it is a technique of structural racialisation: the law does not have to mention race for institutions to produce racialised exclusion (Chakrabarty et al., 2016; Stavropoulou, 2024).

Theme 3: NRPF as a Racialised Poverty Machine

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is consistently identified as a driver of racialised destitution, particularly among Black women experiencing gender-based violence. A qualitative evidence synthesis shows NRPF generates acute poverty, fear of authorities, and reliance on informal networks that may be unsafe; it also documents under-resourced, inconsistent local support (Jolly et al., 2022; Southall Black Sisters, 2025).

Population-level analyses estimate millions in visa categories with NRPF conditions, with a high share from Nigeria and other non-EU states; this structural restriction is correlated with economic vulnerability among recently arrived families (Migration Observatory, 2023; Commons Library, 2025).

Proponents argue NRPF protects the public purse and encourages self-sufficiency. Yet evidence indicates that denying safety-nets increases costs elsewhere, such as emergency accommodation, safeguarding, and health crises, while reproducing gendered and racialised harms (Unity Project, 2019; Jolly et al., 2022).

Interpretation (CRT). NRPF functions as a legal technology of racial capitalism, extracting labour while withholding social reproduction supports. For Black migrants in the Northeast, this intersects with thin local infrastructures and low-wage labour markets, creating a structurally coerced dependency cycle that is racialised in both cause and effect (Craig et al., 2010; Migration Observatory, 2023).
Theme 4: The Rwanda Plan, Externalisation, and Colonial Continuities

The UK–Rwanda offshoring scheme epitomised a symbolic politics of deterrence. While government advocates argued it would stop small boats, international and domestic legal analyses warned of refoulement risks, lack of procedural safeguards, and incompatibility with refugee law; the plan was ultimately cancelled in 2024 and publicly criticised by UN experts (OHCHR, 2024; UNHCR, 2023).

Racialised readings of the scheme foreground how outsourcing asylum processing to a Global South state reproduces colonial spatialities—Black bodies as exportable problems, and Black-majority countries as expendable sites for European border work (Kane, 2024; Bello, 2025).

Supporters insisted offshoring would protect lives and dismantle smuggling networks. However, empirical assessments note no credible deterrent effect, while the scheme incurred significant costs and eroded trust among migrants—particularly Black communities who read the policy through the lens of historical racial governance (Mallory, 2024; Independent cost and oversight analyses reported subsequently).

Interpretation (CRT). Externalisation reflects interest convergence: the performative politics of "control" offers electoral dividends, even when the policy fails substantively. The racial state leverages colonial geographies to spatially distance accountability for rights violations—effects disproportionately borne by

Black migrants, including those dispersed to regions like the North East with limited advocacy capacity (Chakrabarty et al., 2016; Refugee Action, 2024).

Theme 5: Windrush, Trust, and the Long Memory of the Racial State

The Windrush scandal continues to shape Black communities' institutional distrust. Newly published analyses in 2024 argue that immigration laws from the 1960s onwards were explicitly designed to reduce the non-White population, providing historical context for contemporary racialised outcomes (Independent, 2024; GOV.UK research report, 2024).

CRT underscores how past racial governance informs present-day experiences: bureaucratic harms (e.g., wrongful detention; denial of services) reverberate through families and communities, producing scepticism toward documentation demands, status checks, and compensation schemes. In the Northeast, where community organisations report longstanding under-resourcing, such distrust can deter engagement with local services and legal remedies (Craig et al., 2010; Historic England case work suggests parallel invisibility dynamics).

Government reforms and compensation efforts since 2019 are cited as evidence of change. Yet assessments repeatedly highlight slow redress and the persistence of racial inequities; the scandal's historical lessons require not only compensation but structural reform of migration governance to centre racial justice (Independent, 2024; GOV.UK report, 2024).

Synthesis: How "Indiscriminate" Rule Changes Become Racialised in Practice

The findings collectively indicate that, although the 2021–2026 reforms often deploy race-neutral language and universal rationales (deterrence, efficiency, fairness), their *effects* are not evenly distributed. In housing and health, status checks translate into racial profiling; in asylum, restrictive rules convert uncertainty into prolonged limbo; under NRPF, the denial of safety-nets drives racialised destitution; and in symbolic policies like the Rwanda plan, geopolitical outsourcing tracks colonial hierarchies that position Black lives as movable and expendable. The North East context magnifies these harms through limited local infrastructures and a history of under-resourced race-equality work (Craig et al., 2010; Migration Observatory, 2024).

Policies that appear indiscriminate in text become racialised in implementation through intersecting structures—global inequalities, domestic racial hierarchies, and everyday bordering—that produce predictable patterns of unequal harm for Black migrants (Chakrabarty et al., 2016; Refugee Action, 2024).

Given documented regional racism and organisational fragility in the Northeast, anti-racist migration reform must be paired with place-based investment: bolstering Black-led organisations; improving legal advice capacity; and creating trust-first access routes to health, housing, and welfare for people with precarious status. Without this, national reforms risk reproducing structural neglect outside metropolitan centres (Craig et al., 2010; Historic England, 2025 case study).

Conclusion

This study shows that indiscriminate migration-rule changes between 2021 and 2026 exacerbated racialised inequalities for Black migrant communities in the North East of England. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, the findings illuminate how facially neutral laws—hostile-environment measures, NRPF, NABA, IMA, and offshoring policies—operate through structural racism and colonial continuities to produce predictable racial harms.

The North East's limited support infrastructure, history of institutional racism, and rising public hostility intensified these effects. Although government arguments emphasised deterrence, efficiency, and sovereignty, the evidence instead demonstrates deep systemic injustices.

Achieving meaningful racial justice requires abolishing racially harmful policies, investing in Black-led community structures, and re-centring human rights within migration governance. Without deliberate structural reform, the UK risks perpetuating the same racialised exclusions that produced the Windrush scandal—now distributed across a new generation of Black migrants.

Recommendations

Below are evidence-based, CRT-informed recommendations for improving justice outcomes for Black migrants in the Northeast of England.

National-level reforms should focus on dismantling legislative and policy structures that produce racially uneven consequences within the UK's asylum and immigration system. Evidence from UNHCR demonstrates that core provisions of the Illegal Migration Act (2023) severely limit access to asylum procedures, risk refoulement, and leave many individuals in indefinite legal limbo, necessitating substantial legislative revision (UNHCR, 2023). Likewise, analyses of hostile-environment measures—such as NHS charging, Right to Rent, and immigration-status checks across public services—show that these mechanisms intensify racial profiling and deter access to essential services, underscoring the need to suspend or fundamentally reform them (British Medical Association, 2021; The Guardian, 2023). Parallel to this, international human-rights experts have called for the termination of offshoring and externalisation arrangements, including the Rwanda transfer scheme, on the basis that such policies contravene international protection obligations and reproduce historical patterns of unequal responsibility-sharing (OHCHR, 2024).

At the regional level, particularly in the North East, policy interventions should prioritise strengthening Black-led and other minoritised community organisations, which continue to face funding precarity despite their central role in responding to racialised harms and supporting migrant communities. Research on race, crime, and justice in the region highlights the need for sustained investment to ensure these organisations can address racism, provide advocacy, and support social cohesion (Craig et al., 2010). In addition, local authorities and service providers should implement race-equity capacity-building measures—including mandatory anti-racism training and critical policy review frameworks—to counter institutional bias and improve service responsiveness. Given the complexity of post-2021 immigration regulations and increased legal vulnerability among migrants, expanding access to free, community-embedded immigration legal advice is also essential for enabling meaningful engagement with the legal system (UNHCR, 2023).

Cross-cutting reforms should embed racial-equity safeguards throughout all stages of migration governance. Mandatory racial-equity impact assessments must accompany all new migration-related policy proposals to prevent the reproduction of discriminatory outcomes. In addition, creating safe-reporting

mechanisms—explicitly separating essential services such as healthcare, housing, and education from immigration enforcement—would help mitigate the documented deterrent effects generated by hostile-environment data-sharing practices (British Medical Association, 2021). Finally, improvements in the collection and analysis of race-disaggregated migration data are necessary to uncover hidden disparities and strengthen accountability; parliamentary monitoring has shown substantial gaps in the state's ability to measure the racial impacts of current immigration policies (House of Lords Library, 2018). Collectively, these reforms would advance a more equitable, rights-respecting, and evidence-based migration system.

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