



4 February 2020

Dear Mdm / Sir:

I am writing on behalf of Human Rights Watch to seek your help in understanding the challenges that claimants face in claiming and managing Universal Credit (UC) and legacy benefits.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an independent, non-profit human rights organisation established in 1978, now with over 400 staff members around the globe. We combine research and fact-finding with targeted advocacy, often in partnership with local civil society groups. Every year, we publish more than 100 reports and other briefings, [many of which help](#) trigger legal challenges, high-level investigations, legislative and policy reforms and changes in company behaviour and policy.

In May 2019, we published a report, [“Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, Welfare Cuts and the Right to Food.”](#) documenting the lives of UK families living on the breadline, the work of voluntary organisations stepping in to help, and the areas where the UK government is falling short in ensuring people’s right to food.

Our report, published in the same week that the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights released his findings on his UK visit, helped generate extensive media coverage about the state of UK poverty and hunger. We brought these findings to the United Nations, raising the profile of UK food poverty as a human rights issue. We also support UK partners to increase pressure on the government to reform its welfare policies, and recently joined the [All Kids Count campaign](#) to remove the two-child benefits limit.

Our reporting and advocacy would not have been possible without the contribution of local partners, such as staff of Law Centres and food banks. Speaking with people directly affected by food poverty helped us foreground the experiences of those hardest hit by benefits cuts.

This project researches the UK government’s use of automated decision-making and other data-driven technologies to manage and police access to UC and legacy benefits. We are studying how DWP and local authorities are relying on these technologies to make decisions about whether claimants are eligible for UC and other benefits and how much they are awarded.

We are also studying how these technologies are used to investigate claimants for benefits fraud and error. We look to document and analyse the human impact of the problems these create for claimants and use this for potential legal challenges, for campaigns and to advocate with government for evidence-based changes to welfare policy.

We need your help with finding cases that illustrate how claimants are affected by automated benefits decision making. These would be:

- 1) cases where **claimants have experienced significant and unpredictable reductions and fluctuations on their payments** as a result of income calculations based on the monthly assessment period or errors in the Real Time Information feed; and
- 2) cases where **claimants have been called for an Interview Under Caution or otherwise investigated for benefit fraud or error.**

We attach a couple of real-life case examples that show why we are interested in them and how they help shed light on systemic problems with benefits automation.

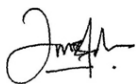
To get involved, please get in touch with me and we can have an initial chat about the case/s you have on the phone or in person. If you have a written summary of your case, please share it with us. If not, we would be happy to summarise our chat in writing for your approval, to make sure we accurately reflect them. It goes without saying that this will be done while protecting the privacy of your clients and our reporting about them would be anonymised.

We would also appreciate access to copies of correspondence, appeal documents or other case material, redacted or anonymised as appropriate. If you prefer not to share them by email, we are able to come to your office as convenient to you. All material shared will be handled in accordance with all applicable laws in the UK, the EU and the US, and we have strict internal security protocols for protecting confidentiality and personal data.

Lastly, we would also like to **interview claimants themselves**, to help us document the human impact of tech-enabled changes to the UK welfare system. Policy discussions often obscure the day-to-day challenges that claimants face. We think it is important that our reporting challenge that and focus on claimant experiences. Please consider introducing us to claimants, so they can tell us in their own words how significant benefits reductions or fluctuations or fraud and error investigations and claw-backs have affected their lives. Here, too, we will fully protect their identities.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions about this project. My contact information is below. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yours faithfully,



Amos Toh

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