

COVID-19 Briefing: Asylum Seekers and the Right to Food



asylum matters



sustain
the alliance for better food and farming

This briefing on people seeking asylum and COVID-19 aims to lay out some of the experiences of food access for this group during the pandemic. We will highlight some of the key barriers that people seeking asylum face in accessing their right to food, as well as the policy responses that would prevent household food insecurity.

It is unconscionable that many people who have experienced food insecurity in the countries they were forced to flee continue to face hunger in their country of refuge, particularly one such as the UK, one of the world's richest countries.

Definition of an asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is someone who has left their own country to escape war or persecution and who has sought protection in another country.

A person's asylum claim is one that seeks protection, namely a grant of leave to prevent a breach of the Refugee Convention.

If an asylum claim is successful then a person will be granted asylum, recognised as a refugee, and granted refugee status. The terms asylum seeker and refugee are sometimes used interchangeably.

The term asylum seeker can sometimes carry negative connotations and the term refugee sometimes can carry more positive connotations.

A person may choose to self-identify as a refugee, having fled persecution, prior to a decision being made on their refugee status. For the purposes of this document, we will use the term asylum seeker with its legal definition, (whilst recognising this may not be how some of those seeking asylum wish to be defined).

Asylum Support

When someone has claimed asylum in the UK they are eligible to claim asylum support. This is a form of basic support designed to provide accommodation and cover basic living expenses.

Asylum seekers are not entitled to mainstream welfare benefits (e.g. Universal Credit), and in most cases are precluded from work. Asylum Support is only available when the applicant is able to show that they, (and any dependents), are destitute or they will become destitute imminently.

There are two main types of asylum support: Section 95 (s95) and Section 4(2) (s4(2)) support for adult claimants and their dependents. Unaccom-

panied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are supported by the local authority. While an s95 asylum support application is being processed, an asylum seeker may be housed temporarily in Initial Accommodation (IA) under Section 98 (s98) if their need is immediate. This is normally a full board hostel although sometimes is self-catered with cash support provided.



s95 Asylum Support

This is available to those who have an ongoing asylum claim, i.e. they are waiting for a decision on their asylum application or appeal. S95 is available for asylum seekers who are in need of support and/or accommodation. They need to demonstrate that they are destitute and/or homeless. An application for s95 support can be for either subsistence support or accommodation, or both. Accommodation is given on a no-choice basis.

Support rates for s95 temporarily increased from £37.75 to £39.60 per week in June 2020 in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was increased to £39.63 when the Home Office completed their review of the rates in October 2020. Payment is made for the person claiming asylum and their dependents living in the same household. This payment is provided via a pre-paid debit card called ASPEN. The ASPEN card can be used in all stores that accept a Mastercard¹ debit card. It can also be

¹ Older iterations of the ASPEN card could be used where a visa debit card was accepted.

used to withdraw cash from a cash machine if the recipient is in receipt of s95 support. ASPEN cards cannot be used for online shopping, or for contactless payments.

s4(2) Asylum Support

S4(2) support is available in limited circumstances to those who have been refused asylum and are appeal rights exhausted, are destitute, or will become destitute imminently, and who can also satisfy other strict criteria.

In summary, this includes: taking steps to leave the UK and return to country of origin, or where the Home Office has determined there is no viable route to return, or a person is unable to leave the UK for exceptional medical reasons; or where asylum support is necessary to avoid a breach of human rights. This includes having a pending fresh claim that raises a protection or human rights element, or, where a public law challenge in the form of a Judicial Review is pursued against the legality of an immigration decision and permission has been granted on this application to proceed. As such entitlement to s4(2) support is extremely limited and can be difficult to prove. It does not cover all those who need support.

The current support rates for s4(2) are £39.63 per week, (having been increased from £35.39 in light of Covid-19 pandemic to £39.60, and to £39.63 following Home Office October 2020 review) and payment is also made via an ASPEN card. However, for those on s4(2) support this can only be used in the stores that accept Mastercard debit cards. There is no option to withdraw cash.

Additional payments

Limited additional support is available to both s4(2) and s95 recipients in certain restricted circumstances. These mostly concern pregnancy and young children.

For both s4(2) and s95, additional support is available for children under 3 years of age: parents can claim an additional £5 a week for a child under 1 year and an additional £3 a week for a child aged between 1 and 3 years. A one-off maternity grant is available for a pregnant mother, £300 for those on s95 and £250 on s4(2) support. A pregnant

mother can claim an additional £3 a week for the duration of her pregnancy.

These additional payments are not all made automatically and obtaining these additional payments is not straightforward, and often requires the help of a third party – such as a representative or support agency.

There are a number of targeted schemes in the UK that aim to prevent household food insecurity, some that asylum seekers are eligible to receive, some that they are not. Children who are asylum seekers are able to get free school meals if they or their parents or carers receive support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, i.e., s95 support. During the pandemic, free school meal provision has been temporarily expanded to families on s4(2) support as well. However, pregnant women and young children are not able to receive Healthy Start vouchers, which are available to other low-income UK resident pregnant women and young children as a welfare entitlement, to be exchanged for milk, fruits, vegetables and/or pulses, as well as vitamins, with an aim to improving early-years nutrition.

How are support levels set?

When it was introduced, the level of support provided under section 95 was set at 70% of Income Support levels for adults and 100% for children, to reflect the fact that utilities are included as part of the accommodation arrangements for people seeking asylum.

However, in 2008 the Government decided to break the link to Income Support payments which has led to a growing disparity between asylum-related and mainstream social security benefits. After the Home Office lost a High Court case that stated the Home Secretary actions were “irrational”², ‘in failing to take into account the extent of the decrease in asylum support rates in real terms since 2007 and the freezing of rates in absolute terms since 2011,’ they ‘developed a ‘pick-and-mix’ methodology based on data collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) about expenditure by the lowest 10% income group among the UK population, and the Home Office’s own market research.’³

² R (On the Application Of) Refugee Action v The Secretary of State for the Home Department [2014] EWHC 1033 (Admin) (09 April 2014).

³ Locked into poverty: life on asylum support; Asylum Matters November 2020.

The Home Office then carried out an assessment of the level of financial support provided to families, which concluded that families received “significantly more cash than is necessary to meet their essential living needs”⁴. As a result, a flat rate for all asylum seekers and their dependents was introduced, thereby reducing support rates for children under 16 by 30% or £16 per week from £52.96 to £36.95 per week. The penultimate Home Office full financial review of asylum support rates in 2017 resulted in a 2018 increase of 80p.

How has the level of Section 4 been set?

In June 2020, the Home Office implemented an exceptional increase to £39.60 for both s95 and s4 as a temporary measure while the 2020 review was ongoing. This was increased to £39.63 when the Home Office completed their review of the rates in October 2020. In reality, there has been very little change in support rates since 2015, when, following a minor rise, these were significantly reduced. Yet, inflation has averaged 1.59% (2015 - 2019).

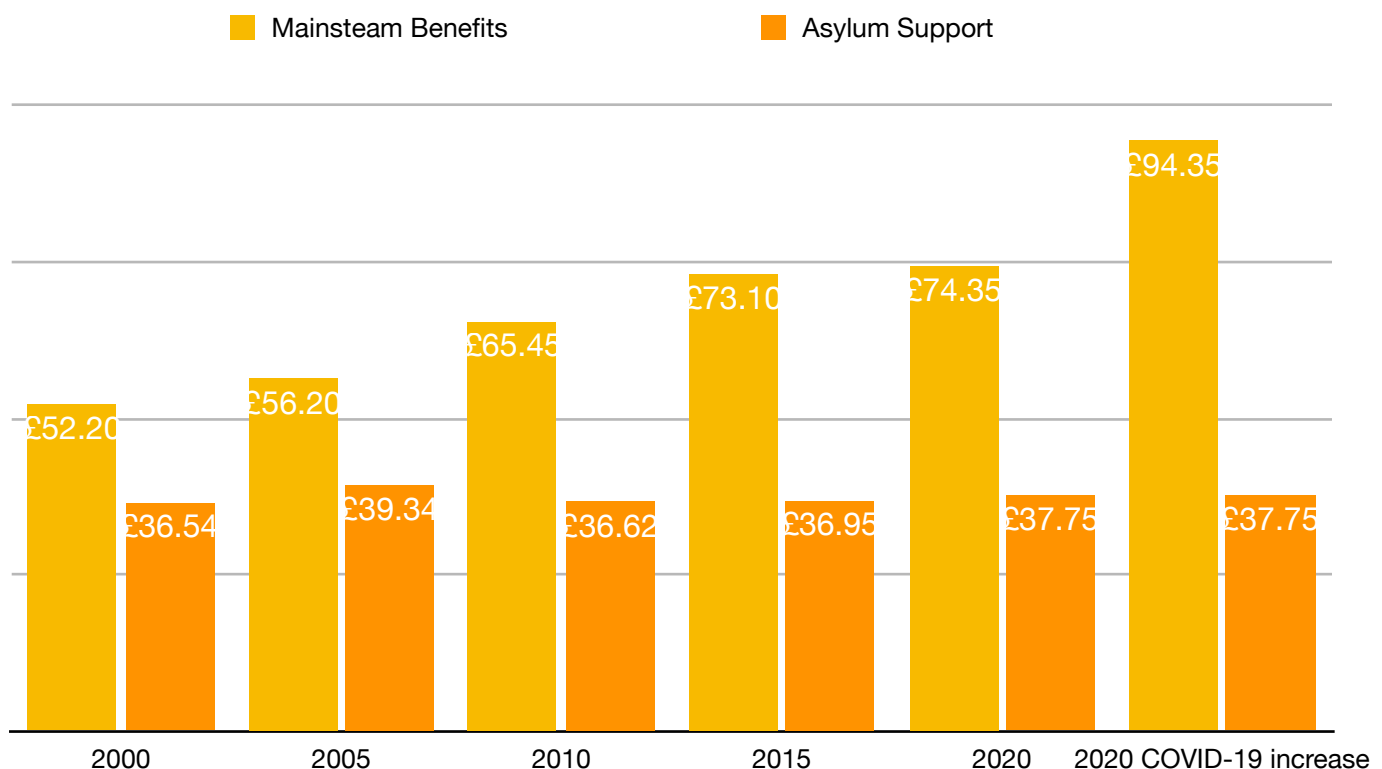
Pre-COVID-19 issues of food insecurity faced by asylum seekers

Asylum Support was a meagre amount to live on even before the pandemic. Income Support is understood to be the minimum a person needs to live on.

The current Income Support rate for a single person over 25 is £74.75. Universal Credit is £94.96; therefore, Asylum Support is little over half this minimum⁵.

The graphic below illustrates how rates have changed over the past 20 years in comparison with mainstream welfare benefits, and the striking lack of increase support rates have seen; asylum support is currently less than it was in 2005.

People seeking asylum generally do not have the right to work. If a claim has been pending for over a year (i.e. without decision) then they are able to apply for permission to work but this is limited to the jobs on the shortage occupation list with stringent requirements that few are able to meet. In



⁴ Explanatory Memorandum to the Asylum Support Amendment No 3 Regulations (2015); Locked into poverty: life on asylum support; Asylum Matters November 2020.

⁵ It is acknowledged that in comparing Asylum Support and Income Support we are not comparing like for like, e.g., given that for those in Asylum Support accommodation, bills are covered. However, notwithstanding this, Income Support is the nearest comparator and Asylum Support is little over half this minimum.

reality, this means that very few people seeking asylum are able to work.

With such restricted financial support, food insecurity is almost an inevitability.

Length of time on support

A defence against raising the minimum payment that the Government often uses is that a person is only meant to be on Asylum Support for a short period of time, implying that this financial hardship is short-term. In reality, the majority of people wait for over 6 months for an initial decision; of the 64,895 main applicants waiting for an initial decision on their asylum application at the end of December 2020, 46,796 had been [waiting over 6 months](#) (72% of all those waiting)⁶. Should a person appeal, then this will take even longer. It is not uncommon for asylum seekers to have a case pending for many months and even well over a year and more.

Issues with asylum support system

In addition, issues with payments are not uncommon and people seeking asylum can be left with less support than they are entitled to, and sometimes without any support.

Many asylum seekers and their advocates have concerns that the Home Office monitor spending on ASPEN Cards, the location and what shop they are used in. Privacy International have carried out research on the monitoring of the ASPEN card and [outline the need for reform](#)⁷.

Issues with accommodation and dispersal

Asylum support accommodation is provided on a no-choice basis, and many are dispersed to areas far from their existing connections.

Access to food is not given consideration in provision of accommodation. This often means that accommodation is provided far from affordable food stores and that public transport is needed to access a supermarket. Transport costs in the UK are frequently prohibitive for those on low income. Therefore, even those in receipt of s95 support cannot easily afford to travel to larger, more affordable shops or those that stock items from

which they would be able to construct a nutritious and culturally appropriate diet.

Dispersal can be to areas or locales that are not multicultural, and in addition to multiple language and integration barriers that this can bring, it can also have implications for the type of food that is available, potentially exacerbating disconnection, and dislocation already experienced by asylum seekers who have fled their home because of persecution. Being able to eat food that is meaningful, whatever that may be, is culturally and emotionally significant and impacts on our overall wellbeing.

Poor housing stock dominates asylum support accommodation and cooking facilities are often small, limited, and inadequate. Accommodation is often provided on a shared basis with multiple single asylum seekers sharing one property, with usually only one room to themselves and a shared cooking area. Single mothers with young children are often accommodated in mother and baby houses of multiple occupation with limited storage and shared facilities. This inevitably impacts on items that can be purchased and means people are often unable to benefit from the cost-saving of bulk buying and batch cooking. This creates further barriers to cooking and eating well. Pest infestation and problems with pest control are an often-reported issue and asylum seekers in supported accommodation do not benefit from the same rights and protection as others who are tenants.

This culminates in many asylum seekers in receipt of asylum support facing household food insecurity and falling into severe difficulties meaning that they have to seek help with this and other financial problems.

John and his family have been on support for 2 years. He told Asylum Matters that he has lost 10 kilos in the last two years, both him and his wife are suffering with depression and she is taking sleeping pills. He stated he was mentally worn down: " Never before in my life have I struggled for food and to feed my family, every week you have to calculate everything, I can't work, I'm always in fear of detention, my life is a trap."

⁶ Asylum and Resettlement Data Sets, Home Office, 27 May 2021([accessed https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets)).

⁷What is an Aspen Card and why does it need reform? Privacy International, 23 February 2021 ([accessed https://www.privacyinternational.org/explainer/4425/what-aspen-card-and-why-does-it-need-reform](https://www.privacyinternational.org/explainer/4425/what-aspen-card-and-why-does-it-need-reform)).



Precluded from work and other mainstream sources of support, such as Healthy Start vouchers, the only way to obtain further support is from charities, friends, and family. Many practitioners will signpost their clients to organisations that are able to assist providing additional food, including food banks. How has COVID-19 exacerbated household food insecurity for asylum seekers?

How has COVID-19 exacerbated household food insecurity for asylum seekers?

The current pandemic has had a devastating effect on those in the asylum system as well as anyone else trying to survive on very little money.

In July and August 2020, Asylum Matters ran a two-week snapshot online survey to hear from people seeking asylum about their experience of living on asylum support. The survey had 184 respondents: 108 had children with them here in the UK; 76 did not. The questions were designed to speak to essential living needs identified in the Home Office's methodology that is used to set asylum support rates: food, medicines, communications, travel, cleaning products, clothing, and toiletries. The sur-

vey asked for answers to be about life in general not just through the lockdown.

Responses to this survey demonstrated that people on asylum support remain routinely unable to meet their essential living needs. Whether it was buying enough food for themselves and their families, affording mobile phone credit to be able to stay in contact with essential services, or buy enough clothes for their children; people seeking asylum were experiencing a permanent state of financial precarity, whereby they had to constantly trade off one essential living need against another.

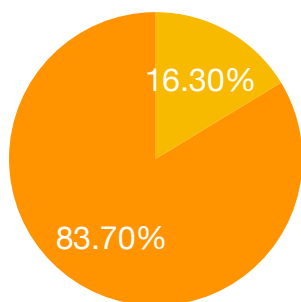
Ability to afford food

Food insecurity is a serious issue for those seeking asylum in the UK.

In their survey, Asylum Matters asked the following question specifically about purchasing food 'Are you able to buy enough food?' 184 people responded.

● Yes

● No



Of the 84% who said they did not have enough money to buy food, or could only sometimes afford the food they need, 50% said they sometimes had enough money; and the remaining 34% said they never had enough money.

What did people say?

The main comments from families were that they found food too expensive and would have to sacrifice other essentials to afford to buy what they needed. Families had difficulties in being able to bulk buy and many needed to travel long distances by public transport to the cheaper stores which was an extra and unaffordable expense. Families stated they were unable to use certain supermarkets as they were too expensive and had concerns about not being able to buy healthy food affordably for their families.

'It's really hard to buy a decent amount of food and cleaning and personal hygiene products we need to choose between one or other and for the amount we received we can't have a healthy diet at all.'

'I need to do shopping every day as I can do it only in the shops that sell the cheapest food. So for example, one day I get eggs in Iceland, second day Lidl, etc. Then I can't use the bus as it's expensive, so I can't get more than 2 or 3 bags. So I have to do shopping every day.'



The current pandemic has had a devastating effect on those in the asylum system as well as anyone else trying to survive on very little money.

John and his family have been on support for 2 years told us he has lost 10 kilos in the last two years, both him and his wife are suffering with depression and she is taking sleeping pills. He stated he was mentally worn down, "never before in my life have I struggled for food and to feed my family, every week you have to calculate everything, I can't work, I'm always in fear of detention, my life is a trap.

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions

The national lockdowns and other COVID-19 restrictions meant that travel to larger shops was more difficult. Food and essential items like medicines and toiletries could be far more expensive in smaller shops that are also often limited in the stock they offer. Many asylum seekers are housed in areas where they cannot buy halal or kosher food and travelling to find this food became impossible during lockdown.



Many support services such as lunch clubs have been closed during lockdowns and other COVID-19 restrictions, leaving those living on asylum support without a safety net. Organisations are desperately trying to meet the shortfall with one-off payments.

Asylum Matters asked: **‘Are there any extra problems you have had because of the coronavirus lockdown? (For example, could you buy everything you needed like food, medicine, soap, cleaning and hygiene things?)’**

Both groups of respondents stated that as essential items increased in price, they were unable to afford them. Families stated not being able to bulk buy had a huge impact as well as having to shop at local, more expensive shops due to public transport being suspended. Single adults commented on the impact of having to stay at home without support agencies was difficult, with both groups commenting that it had a negative impact on their mental health of both adults and children.

What did people say?

‘made shopping more stressful and run out of money at the end of the week to provide food for family as want to prepare healthy meals for child but cannot afford ingredients’

‘I have never been in a difficult situation like this before. People were buying food stuff in bulk but we couldn't. Even a common bag of rice, we can't afford. The coronavirus has really made our lives difficult...’

‘Not being able to be safe and buy food, groceries, cleaning products, etc. online (this is due to the fact that asylum seekers aren't allowed bank accounts) for it to be delivered to my house. I have had to risk my life and that of my family who have been at home this entire pandemic as I leave the house weekly in order to get food for my family.’

‘It's difficult to stay on a budget and avoid going to the biggest and cheapest shops because local stores are much more expensive, also my mental health is being affected by the pandemic.’

‘Two adults with a child. It's so hard to live with £118 per week. We are trying to avoid a lot of things such as public transport. Only 1 of us can go to town for shopping because we can't afford to pay for 2. We also avoid shops like Sainsbury, Tesco, Cooperative and Asda where things are quite expensive for us. The lockdown has worsened everything but for the past 2 months, we've been receiving some food and baby's milk from the charity where we used to go. Life is so hard.’

Baby milk formula

Many mothers struggle to fund formula milk for their babies, even though there is an extra £5 per week for babies under the age of 1 and £3 for those aged 1-3 years.

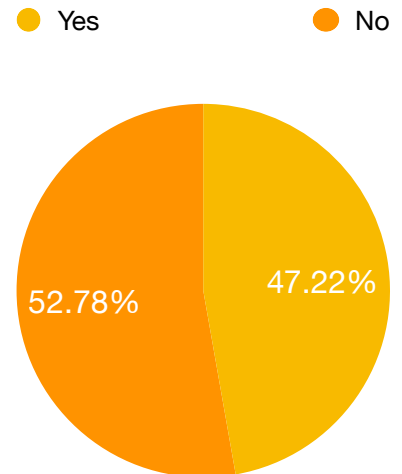
Refugee Women Connect, a charity based in Liverpool, spoke with one woman who said: *“I used to spend £11 per every two weeks on formula and that was the cheapest I could find, but eventually I had to stop because I couldn’t afford it. I now give him [her baby] cheap £1 milk from the supermarket.”*

In their survey Asylum Matters asked: **“Do you have a baby? Can you get the things you need for your baby?”**

37 respondents had a baby and over half said that they either did not have enough money to get the things they needed for their baby or could only sometimes afford it.

What did people say?

Most of the respondents stated that they often did not have enough money to buy items for their baby and therefore would sacrifice other essential items to do so. Some noted they received some items from charities.



‘Yes it is very difficult especially being single mother of two little ones. One formula milk costs £11 which takes most of the weekly NASS support.⁸ Moreover it is vvv hard to bulk buy as I need to wait for every Monday to have money’

During the COVID-19 lockdown due to restrictions on travel this formula milk could only be bought in local shops, where it was more expensive and sometimes out of stock.

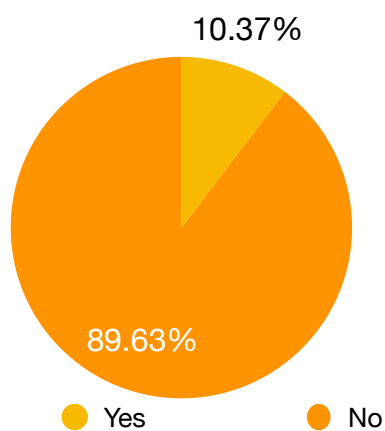
⁸ Asylum Support was previously called National Asylum Support Service (NASS) support. Many still refer to Asylum Support as NASS/ NASS support.

Digital exclusion

The lack of access to the internet had a significant impact on those seeking asylum, and this was exacerbated by the lockdown and other Covid-19 restrictions. Wi-Fi is not provided in asylum accommodation, and many people do not have bank accounts needed to set up internet contracts.

Many would have relied pre-pandemic on having access to free Wi-Fi in public buildings and spaces or at local drop-ins or charities, which have been closed during the Covid-19 crisis. This has left more people struggling to afford to top up their phone credit, which is their only means of checking availability, eligibility and opening times of food banks and charities during lockdown.

Recent research from the [University of Loughborough with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) has found that the general public now believe that a decent internet connection and basic digital equipment are fundamental requirements for a minimum acceptable standard of life in the UK⁹.



In their survey Asylum Matters asked: **'Can you afford to buy the data and phone credit you/your family need? This could be for calls or to use the internet'**

164 people responded to this question with the vast majority stating that they could not afford this data either all the time or some of the time.

What did people say?

Respondents stated they accessed Wi-Fi via mobile phones, although many use free Wi-Fi in public places. More families than single adults used a mixture of both.

Both groups commented on how they often could not afford the amount of data they required and would sacrifice other essentials to pay for it. The issues this caused were difficulty in keeping in contact with families and friends as well as accessing information and services. Families highlighted it had an educational impact on their children.

'I have to prioritise food and other essentials, it is hard to contact people and is hard to find out information with limited internet.'

'Unable to even call the school when my child is not feeling well. Unable to keep in contact with friends, services, and people. Unable to help my child access the internet to do school work/homework on.'



⁹ A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom in 2020, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.



Provisions for the right to food of asylum seekers in international human rights law

The United Kingdom has voluntarily signed and ratified a number of international human rights treaties that provide for the right to food.

The most comprehensive of these is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by the UK in 1976. Article 11, Paragraph 1 of ICESCR provides that:

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food [...].”

This right is to be afforded to all people regardless of their immigration status, gender, age, or any other characteristic, and calls on governments to ensure that all people have a dignified and secure access to food at all times.

The right to food is also recognised in other international human rights standards such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ratified by the UK in 1991, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The right to food can be considered to have been achieved when ‘Every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times... to adequate food or means for its procurement’ (CESCR General Comment no 12, Right to Food).

This requires States to ensure:

- (a) The availability of food in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, free from adverse substances, and acceptable within a given culture.
- (b) The accessibility of such food in ways that are sustainable and that do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights. Accessibility includes both physical and economic accessibility.

It is important to note that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has also asserted that States parties to ICESCR have ‘minimum core obligations’ under the Covenant. This means that they have to ensure a basic level of enjoyment of each right. For example, essential food items, primary health care and basic housing. As the Committee has stated, if ICESCR were to be read in such a way as not to establish a minimum core, it would be largely deprived of its *raison d’être*.

When it comes to particular rights – for instance, the right to political participation – States enjoy a margin of discretion in assessing whether and to what extent these rights apply to persons with different legal statuses, for example as nationals versus non-nationals.

However, it is fundamental to understand that no such margin of discretion exists in respect of the obligation to fulfil minimum core obligations including in respect of the right to food. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has been explicit in this regard: freedom from hunger is part of the minimum core of the right to food and therefore must not be limited on the basis of any status including legal or immigration status. With regards specifically to children the United Nations Committee on Economic and Social Rights states that “all children within a State, including those with an undocumented status, have a right to receive education and access to adequate food and affordable health care”.

Furthermore, a number of UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG), adopted by all UN Member States, including the UK in 2015, are relevant when considering the right to food for asylum seekers. These include notably SDG 2 ‘Zero Hunger’: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; but also, SDG 1 ‘No Poverty’: End poverty in all its forms everywhere; SDG 3 ‘Good Health & Wellbeing’: Healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; and SDG 10 ‘Reduced Inequalities’: Reduce inequality within and among countries. It is arguable that current provision of asylum support does not meet these SDG aims.

At the World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996, states including the UK adopted the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action.

This “reaffirm[ed] the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger.”

The development of Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food by the Food & Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) followed the 2002 WFS and were adopted in 2004. This is guidance to support WFS member states, of which the UK is one, to realise the right to food for their populations.

Amongst these is included a suggestion for national food security to be included as a mandate for national human rights institutions (Guideline 18), ‘anti-hunger and food security funding (Guideline 12), support for vulnerable groups (Guideline 13),

stipulations re ‘food safety net’” (Guideline 14).

Guideline 16.5 details: ‘States should make every effort to ensure that refugees and internally displaced persons have access at all times to adequate food...’

Whilst these Guidelines are explicitly voluntary, they do outline a rights-based approach to ensuring food security and are a relevant standard which should be considered when addressing the food security of asylum seekers.

To further protect the right to food under Article 11 ICESCR and promote its realisation a mandate for UN Special Rapporteur was established in 2000. The former UN Special Rapporteur Hilal Elvers 2020 Report on the right to food highlighted a number of ongoing issues:

- The right to food is not recognised within domestic legislation. This includes the UK. The report states, ‘States are duty bearers and all persons are rights holders, not passive recipients of charity. There exists a fundamental difference between a legal entitlement and a generalized affirmation of charity or moral responsibility.’

- Whilst the right to food is accepted by ICESCR party members as indivisible from other human rights this has not been enacted, the report urges, ‘States to focus on the most marginalized, excluded or discriminated-against segments of the population and to account for power imbalances that undermine governance. The Covenant insists that States should exercise rights “without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” and calls on States to take account of the needs of the poor and vulnerable.’

- It contains a recommendation for economic reform to address ‘the poverty and inequality of marginalized populations detailing, ‘... poverty, inequality and the inequitable distribution of food and productive resources remain a significant barrier to the right to food, particularly for populations that have faced historic and pervasive discrimination.’



Conclusion

To conclude, a number of international instruments reinforce the right to food for all populations, a right recognised by the UK in ratifying ICESCR and other international treaties.

The level of household food insecurity experienced as standard by people on asylum support in the UK and worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic makes it clear that their right to food is not respected and therefore there needs to be urgent and concerted effort to remedy this situation by the UK Government.

We therefore recommend that the UK Government, in cooperation with the devolved administrations:

- Increase asylum support to put it back in line with mainstream welfare benefits.
- Allow all asylum seekers the right to work and remove the existing restrictions on the right to work, (which require permission to be sought on an asylum claim that has been pending for at least a year and limits jobs to the shortage occupation list).
- Provide better information on support such as Free School Meals (and make permanent the extension of FSM to people on S4).
- Expand eligibility for Healthy Start vouchers for pregnant women and young children to include asylum seekers
- Reassess the methodology that support rates are assessed to ensure it takes into account the costs of living.
- Provide cash to those on Section 4(2) support.
- Make contactless payments available with the ASPEN card; and remove minimum spend.
- Ensure that pregnant mothers get the additional support they are eligible for as soon as possible.
- Incorporate the right to food into domestic legislation in order to provide a framework, resource allocation and accountability mechanisms for the realisation of this right for all people, including people seeking asylum.

September 2021

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asylum matters

Asylum Matters is a charity that works in partnership locally and nationally to improve the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum through social and political change. By mobilising and coordinating local, regional and national advocacy work, we aim to increase the impact of campaigns to secure improvements to asylum policy and practice.

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sustain
the alliance for better food and farming

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, tackle climate change and restore nature, improve the living and working environment, enrich society and culture, and promote greater equality. It represents around 100 national public interest organisations, and cultivates the movement for change, working with many others at local, regional, national and international level.

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