



Home Office

Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office

Members of NASF Support Sub-Group
(by email only)

8 July 2022

Dear NASF Member,

REVIEW OF ASYLUM SUPPORT PROVIDED TO ASYLUM SEEKERS AND FAILED ASYLUM SEEKERS BY THE HOME OFFICE.

The Home Office is due to commence the annual review of the level of the weekly allowance provided to asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers who are supported under section 95 and section 4(2) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

The purpose of the allowance is to provide asylum seekers and any dependants in their household with sufficient funds to cover their essential living needs. The Home Office's approach is to identify all needs that are considered "essential" for average, able-bodied asylum seekers and their dependants and which are not covered through other arrangements. It then assesses the cost of meeting each of these essential needs.

In the 2021 review, it was decided that the allowance should be uprated by applying the September 2021 rate of Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 3.1%. CPI reports are produced by the Office for National Statistics and use recognised economic principles to measure increases in the cost of living. The use of the CPI rate for September of the relevant year is a common public sector method used to adjust mainstream benefits and other social entitlements to take account of rises in costs of living. Applying the rate of CPI of 3.1% resulted in the weekly allowance rising from £39.63 to £40.85. The £8 rate for those in full board initial accommodation was also raised in line with the 3.1% CPI rate for September 2021, resulting in an increase to £8.24.

The annual reviews, including those methodologies that have been applied in the previous years, can be found at the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-on-review-of-cash-allowance-paid-to-asylum-seekers>

Share your views

We would like to invite the NASF Sub-Group to submit their views on the weekly cash allowance. Responses will be taken into consideration in the review.

Please provide a response to questions 1-6 below.

Q1. What is your overall view of the review conducted last year?

We regard the [Report on review of weekly allowances paid to asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) that was conducted last year as wholly inadequate in itself as well as in sorry comparison to the gravity of need suffered by the women, men and children seeking safety in the UK. Despite the review being conducted in an unprecedented public health Covid-19 emergency¹, the review merely re-applied an ethically moribund and tired methodology that we suspect, may frustrate the civil servants tasked by UK Ministers to apply it, given its limits.

That 2021 Report was a dispiriting read, stemming from the even more depressing albeit substantive [Report on the allowances paid to asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers: 2020 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#). Most upsetting in the 2020 review is the Home office's "market research", itself already out of date as conducted in 2019. It is UK ministers that lackadaisically require their officials to do. Rather than just give dignified support. The granular detail on the comparative costs of adult and children's clothing and non-prescription medicines etc., are a jarring read². And, for us reflect a ministerial mindset gone ethically awry. There are billions in the asylum support system, and there has been consistent evidence of inadequate inspection and performance management of its contractors, involving huge public monies: [An inspection of the Home Office's management of asylum accommodation provision - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and [Inspection Report Published: An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). We need granular-level scrutiny on performance management of these billions and these companies' performance, and not on those women, men and children with nothing to start with in the first place.

We emphasize that here to make this point: we want to jolt or shame (or both) UK ministers that this is the grim place that they have taken the asylum support system and those stuck in it to. They should not think this is ok. It is not. It is just dreadful and as a country we can and must do better than this. *We must stop the penny-pinching, on the back of some of the most socially and legally vulnerable people in the country.* People seeking refugee protection should have the core socio-economic rights to work³ and to genuine social security. However, in so far as these rights are denied by UK ministers, and that this separate asylum support exists, it should at least be adequate in the financial support it provides. Sadly, it is frequently to be anything but; for example please read: ['Locked into poverty' – new report shows reality of life on asylum support | Asylum Matters](#).

Our criticisms here are not at all directed at officials but rather the political framework set down by UK ministers for years. Essentially, the asylum support system is no such thing. *It does not support; it traumatizes*⁴, as the severest forms of poverty by nature exert on all those groups under its grip. Those in poverty via the asylum system are in solidarity to those left behind through other systems.

¹ For evidence on the adverse impacts of the pandemic on already marginalised groups in severe poverty, including those on asylum support, please read: [Study: Scotland in lockdown - Scottish Refugee Council; 9CA31F73-22E2-4362-B45B-1EC82308EA7E.pdf \(ncl.ac.uk\)](#); and [Full article: Refugees, political bounding and the pandemic: material effects and experiences of categorisations amongst refugees in Scotland \(tandfonline.com\)](#).

² Please read Annexes A & B as grim illustrations of our point.

³ Please read [Lift-the-Ban-report.pdf \(refugee-action.org.uk\)](#).

⁴ For instance, please read [iris-wp-1-2014.pdf \(birmingham.ac.uk\)](#).

The asylum support system is a site of grim ***social insecurity*** in Britain. It is very far from the core right to social security that, at its best, provides its recipients with dignity, stability and hope. For us, the blunt truth is that UK ministers have established and perpetuated a “support” regime that is, actually, UK state-sanctioned severe poverty. We offer this as a factual not pejorative description. It reflects that the financial support to asylum seekers is far below the UK “welfare” system floor.

UK ministers persist with an inadequate asylum support rate, whilst presiding over a chronically slow asylum decisions system - [Thousands failed by UK's broken asylum system - Scottish Refugee Council](#) and [New FOIs reveals chronic slowness of the UK's asylum system - Scottish Refugee Council](#). In our view and experience this chronic slowness, is compounded by an accelerating institutionalization⁵ of asylum accommodation; where Home office private contractor company revenues, profits and dividends boom⁶; whilst those on asylum support struggle.

We ask here that, therefore, *this is not just another review*, which ultimately adds a mere few pence⁷ to asylum support rates and does not recognize how inadequate and, indeed, insulting that is to those who seek safety here. This is particularly with the “*cost of living social emergency*” ripping through the country with again, its sharpest edges falling on the poorest in our society.

Another blunt truth is that neither UK ministers, nor the civil servants conducting it, or the charity workers inputting into consultations such as this, would or should tolerate themselves being asked to survive on such a pitifully low amount of financial support. So, why is it even contemplated by those in positions of political power and privilege that it is fine for our fellow human beings to be left in such grim poverty? To make matters worse, this is a group, many of whom have often endured significant trauma to complex psychological levels; [Complex post-traumatic stress amongst asylum seekers and trafficking victims \(helenbamber.org\)](#). [UK Ministers know this trauma but yet persist.](#)

And to compound that trauma and poverty, women, men and children seeking safety here are denied the ability to work, which is one of the most important ways of mitigating or even escaping grinding poverty. The present and escalating “cost-of-living social emergency”, as always, hits the poorest hardest, those who have least means to ride out the storm. We recognize of course that the women, men and children on asylum support do not have to pay energy or council tax costs. That is welcome and important, especially now. We urge UK ministers to put adequate immediate and longer term social security and fiscal measures to protect the many millions directly affected.

However, even after accounting for that, another blunt truth is that people seeking refugee protection in the UK are being consigned very far below what we would regard as a decent minimum standard of living or even the UK government’s social security floor of the Universal credit standard allowance; [Universal Credit: What you'll get - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). We note with severe concern that for most categories of the asylum seeker population viz. single asylum seekers, and children, that their distance from the mainstream social security floor has widened since the 2013/14 rates (subject to [legal challenge](#) as only ostensibly) pegged to 70% of Income support. In other words, the real-world value of asylum support has dwindled, in substance and in not keeping pace with inflation. We say a bit more about that below in responses to later questions.

⁵ Please read, for example, [Use of UK hotels for asylum seekers trebles despite Home Office promise | Home Office | The Guardian](#) and the report itself, [Lives-on-hold-research-report.-July-2022.pdf \(refugeecouncil.org.uk\)](#).

⁶ Please read, respectively, [Home Office housing provider to make urgent repairs to asylum seeker flats | Immigration and asylum | The Guardian](#); [Covid contracts push Serco to upgrade full-year profit outlook | Financial Times \(ft.com\)](#); and [Mears Launches Annual Report and Accounts for 2021 | Mears Group PLC](#).

⁷ For example, please read [Asylum-seekers' 3p-a-week increase is an insult, say campaigners | Immigration and asylum | The Guardian](#).

Our overarching conclusion on last year's review – and indeed all recent reviews – is actually to make the plea: *please no more of this ethically moribund approach*. Whilst ideally, we would prefer restoration of socio-economic rights to those seeking asylum in the UK, so the right to work and to have genuine social security. We are realistic that such is unlikely with the current UK Ministers.

Given that realism, we propose what is a feasible and pragmatic alternative in the rest of this response. We urge it to be taken seriously by the Home office and, in particular, UK ministers, as the stakes are grave for those barely surviving on the current wholly inadequate £40.85. We stress that left without the radical surgery needed, the asylum support system will render the most vulnerable in acute mental distress and contribute to loss of life through more “deaths in despair”⁸.

As we say, the stakes are high, so we urge not another review that tweaks rates. But rather, as a minimum, we urge acceptance of our feasible and practical alternative, or something along these lines. We have sought in recommending the increase as we do below, to be pragmatic and exercise real politic. That is *solely* for the purpose of helping the immediate and adequate rise in support rates necessary and, indeed overdue. The “cost-of-living social emergency” makes such an increase an imperative. We will be very disappointed if our pragmatic approach is not met constructively by UK ministers, and result in a rate that whilst not an ideal for us, but at the very least it would be a far better rate than the chronic inadequateness of asylum support to date.

Of course, if similar radical surgery were also done to the chronically slow asylum decisions process, including through swifter grants of refugee leave for those who ultimately are recognized as refugees, then any concerns of increased costs from our recommended asylum support rates, would be mitigated. Furthermore, if the right to work were granted to those seeking asylum and awaiting a final determination of their protection application, then costs could be reduced further. These related and wider issues can all be resolved if the will is there. It is in the gift of UK ministers.

Regardless of all this the final blunt truth is that people need an adequate standard of living, no matter where they are from or why they are here, and that is what we propose here in respect of the asylum support system. In summary we recommend new asylum support flat rates per person/week of (a) for those in dispersal, not £40.85 but £76.90, uprated to £84.12 (CPI 9.4% {June 2022}) and (b) for those in full board asylum accommodation, not £8, but £40.30, uprated to £44.08 (CPI 9.4% {June 2022}). We explain how we arrived at these more adequate rates, below.

Q2. Do you consider the methodology used last year should be retained, adjusted or replaced with some alternative?

In light of the above, it will not surprise readers that we think the current approach and methodology should end. Our ideal would actually be the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's [A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom in 2021 | JRF](#).

However, as said, for the purpose of the immediate interests of the women, men and children in the asylum support system, we are trying to be realistic; solely in the sense of calling for increases that practically should be seriously considered, even by UK ministers who have maintained this inadequate asylum support level for years.

That said, we draw a line at a “race to the bottom” logic, as being “pragmatic” or “realistic” must itself have limits. So, in summary the basis of our proposition is:

⁸ For example, please read [Dozens of at-risk asylum seekers died during pandemic amid alleged safeguarding failings - Liberty Investigates](#).

(a) a broader definition of what are “essential living needs” consistent with the imperative of dignity and social security, as well as with ...

(i) the changing patterns in asylum accommodation with far more people in institutional (mainly “hotel” or “ex-MoD”) not community-based (“dispersal”) asylum accommodation, and for on average at least three months at a time and often longer; and

(ii) relatedly, as the Home office officials probably know, that the current asylum support rates, especially but not only if you are in institutional accommodation, *is not at all sufficient* to meet one of the objectives cited by Justice Poppelwell as underscoring provision of “essential living needs”, namely to ensure supported persons have the “opportunity to maintain interpersonal relationships and a minimum level of participation in social, cultural and religious life”⁹;

(b) greater use of the mainstream ONS measures of expenditure in the UK at [Family spending in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/family-spending-in-the-uk); and

(c) a commitment to uprate the recommended new flat rates of asylum support, as described above, with the prevailing CPI rate (so, currently it is 9.4%) but whatever it is at the time of introducing what – we hope – are much higher support rates.

Q3. Do you consider the methodology used last year captures all “essential living needs” of individuals in the support system? If not, in your opinion what needs were not captured adequately?

No. We know you will have lots of material to assess, so for brevity we suggest the following.

First, that the [Family spending in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/family-spending-in-the-uk). In particular, its table A6 (using lowest 10% gross income decile). This ONS resource should be used far more extensively than Home office “market research” (dated anyway as it is from 2019). At the moment, this ONS resource, in terms of application to the asylum support review and rates, is confined to the Food and non-alcoholic drinks category. The ONS measures are a more professional, objective definition of the following “services or commodities” as “essential living needs”. The latest amounts are provided below, for ease, after each “essential living need”/“service or commodities” and are for *per week*. That latest figure is then followed in brackets by the current asylum support allocation for that need - where applicable - just to ease comparison. We think all the elements selected below are “essential living needs” and are reasonable. Taken together, they move the system closer to one that may be able to ensure people have some dignity. The monies in each are not large, but combined they do appropriately and rightly, increase the support rates.

Second, for those in dispersal accommodation, the recommended “needs”¹⁰ from this ONS resource, to be included in an adequate asylum support rate are: (a) Food and non-alcoholic drinks = £36.60 (not £26.89); (b) Clothing and footwear = £3.20 (not £3.01); (c) Household cleaning materials = £1.60 (not £1.52); (d) Health = £2.10 (not £0.35); (e) Communication = £4.60 (not £3.56); (f) Personal care = £3.60 (people should have access to funds for such basic care); (g) Recreation and culture = £8.80 (to cover admissions to leisure centres, museums etc., books, recreational items); (h) Restaurants etc., = £3.80 (why shouldn’t refugees be able to make an occasional trip to a café, enjoy a takeaway meal, even have a short holiday in the UK?); and finally, in respect of Transport, we regard this as an “essential living need”. As is, in our experience, Communication, so we reject the Home office assertion that neither are “essential”. However, neither the

⁹ [Refugee Action Judgment Summary FINAL 2.pdf \(refugee-action.org.uk\)](https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/Refugee_Action_Judgment_Summary_FINAL_2.pdf)

¹⁰ Please find the categories that we regard as “essential living needs”, and are not covered elsewhere in the Home office asylum support and accommodation system, at these rows in table A6: 1; 3; 5.6.1; 6; 8.1 to 8.4; 9.4.1 to 9.4.3; 9.5; 11.1.1 to 11.1.4; 11.2.1; and 12.1. For the reasons explained in the main text, we also consider Transport as an “essential living need”. As also stressed in the main text, whilst this range of “needs” is not as wide as ideally it could be, we are trying – solely in the immediate interests of refugees getting a fair and adequate rate of asylum support – to be pragmatic here. We hope this approach, as we have further said in the main text, is met constructively and reasonably.

ONS nor the Home office figures on (non-personal car) transport costs (£2.10 and £4.50, respectively) are adequate to this need. With that in mind we suggest doubling the Home office provision of £4.70 pw in the asylum support rates, to around £10 pw. That reflects that local transport costs and the importance of people being able to get around their area. Why should people have to be so socially isolated, it is neither fair nor healthy or aid integration. Access to transport is a social justice issue. The current support rate is more about social isolation than integration. It is especially important for those people stuck, in out –of –town institutional-type “contingency” accommodation, or in dispersal areas with little amenities. In this vein of access to the need of transport, we further urge the Home office to not try and block local authorities or devolved governments in the UK that decide to include those on asylum support in their concessionary travel schemes. If such a clear undertaking could be given by the Home office that may enable a reasonable discussion on how much monies should be provided in an adequate asylum support rate, to meet this “essential living need” of transport. It may be that local or devolved government concessionary travel suffices. If or until such an unambiguous guarantee were given by UK ministers, we suggest at least £10pw for transport.

Third, for those in institutional-type so-called “contingency” accommodation, in so far as it is provided on a full board basis, we regard the current £8 pw as dreadfully inadequate. So, applying the relevant elements of the suggested “essential living needs” scheme described above, to those in full board accommodation, we arrived at a total of £40.30 pw, and applying the present CPI rate at 9.4%, this rose to £44.08 pw. This suggested, more adequate level of asylum support for those in full board accommodation comprises the amounts for the following “essential living needs” above: (a) Clothing and footwear; (b) Household cleaning materials (so folk can have the dignity of keeping their room clean as they wish); (c) Communication; (d) Transport; and (e) Recreation and culture. We add a £10 food allowance as problems with food in such places is persistent¹¹, and people should have some degree of choice, again to reflect the need for dignity and agency. Again, we stress that it is not ok to leave anyone, least of all often traumatized people, to survive and exist on £8 pw; typically for months at a time. It is wholly indecent. We reiterate that the unedifying juxtaposition of refugees being left with this pittance whilst huge private companies accommodating them are drawing in huge revenues and healthy (for them) profits and dividends. There needs to be a fairer distribution of public funds in the asylum support system, starting with an adequate asylum support rate urged here. That should be the start in a radical new package comprising swifter, quality decisions and people being housed in flats in communities’ not institutional accommodation.

Q4. Last year as part of the methodology, the 2020 £39.63 rate was used as a baseline which then was uprated by Sept 2020 3.1% CPI rate to £40.85. Do you consider there are better ways of assessing the appropriate amounts?

Please see responses to Qs1-3, esp., to Q3. We stress we are in an escalating “cost-of-living social emergency”. As such, the UK government must prioritize those in gravest need and the most vulnerable socio-economic predicaments. Amongst many others, that includes those in the current asylum support system. There is no justification for not including the women, men and children who seek refugee protection, in any measures to protect people from the harms of this “cost-of-living social emergency”. For the avoidance of doubt, if this review merely tweaks the current flawed approach and methodology, then UK ministers are – in our view – failing in their ethical responsibilities to protect this group, one of the most vulnerable in British society. To illustrate how severe the poverty suffered here is, consider the respective per week monies provided via, respectively the JRF Minimum income standard (for genuinely dignified living), the Universal credit standard allowance (the UK government’s already low “welfare” floor), and then Asylum support ...

- (a) A single asylum seeker over 25 gets £40.85 pw, which is a mere 13% of the JRF standard of £325.26 pw, and most notably only 47% of the Universal credit floor of £86.42 pw;

¹¹ Please find 9.6 to 9.24 at [An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk).

- (b) An asylum seeking couple over 25 get £81.70 pw, which is a mere 17% of the JRF standard of £485.73 pw, and most notably only 60% of the Universal credit floor of £135.66 pw;
- (c) A single parent asylum seeker over 25 with two children (one primary + one secondary, school) gets £122.55 pw, which is a mere 19% of the JRF standard of £648.91 pw, and most notably only 58% of the Universal credit floor of £212.65 pw; and
- (d) Two parent asylum seekers over 25 with two children (one primary + one secondary) get £163.40 pw, which is a mere 22% of the JRF standard of £749.60 pw, and most notably only 62% of the Universal credit floor of £261.89 pw.

In summary, what we are calling for is broad parity between those in the asylum support system, with at the very least those on the Universal credit standard allowance. We advocate that it is not only fair, but also practical and feasible, to lift the women, men and children seeking refugee protection to a level that is similar to that provided to those on the mainstream social security floor; which we note is rightly is a gateway to a range of other vital supports in terms of housing, energy and other utility costs. We realize that people in the asylum support system do not have to pay for energy bills, and that is important, but it does not account for the long-term and widening distance between them and those on an already low Universal credit standard allowance. We urge that this review is different from what has come before. That means at the very least, it recommends to Ministers that the new asylum support rate lifts those in the system to broad parity to recipients of Universal credit. That is vital given the escalating “cost-of-living” social emergency so many are in.

Q5. Please set out any views on other payments provided to asylum seekers. For example, the additional payments provided to those who are pregnant or who have recently given birth and those with young children (£5/£3 rates), the maternity payments (£300/£250) and the £8.24 offered to those housed in full-board accommodation.

Please read responses to Qs1-4, especially Q3. In terms of maternity payments, it should be retained. Expert advice should be sought from health expert practitioners and women with lived experiences of being pregnant and new mothers in the asylum system, as to its adequacy, with an undertaking to follow their advices, and increase the value of this maternity grant, if they so advise.

Q6. Is there anything else you wish to tell us about the asylum support rates?

No.

About you

Please use this section to tell us about yourself.

Full name	Graham O'Neill
Job title or capacity in which you are responding to this consultation exercise.	Policy Manager
Date	8 August 2022
Organisation name/ (if applicable)	Scottish Refugee Council