

# Children and families' experiences of employment restrictions and financial support provided under Asylum Support and implications for integration

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June 2022

## Introduction

Children and young people make up a significant proportion of the asylum-seeking population to the UK, and most of these are young people who claim asylum with their families. Between 2010 and 2020, 86,533 children (under 18s) claimed asylum in the UK, making up almost a quarter (23%) of UK asylum applicants and dependents during that time. Most of these children (62,321) claimed asylum with their families, making up 17% of asylum seekers overall<sup>1</sup>. Increasingly families face several challenges as they claim asylum in the UK including exclusion from employment and limited financial support provided under the Asylum Support regime, as well as limited practical support to help navigate their new context. Most families spend several years receiving Asylum Support before their claim is decided and many are then granted refugee status or another form of protection which allows them access to employment and mainstream benefits. However, the prolonged absences from the labour market have implications for employment integration<sup>2</sup> as well as other factors like poor mental health and lack of access to language learning.

This paper focuses on the financial support and employment restrictions that children and families face while they claim asylum and considers the lived experiences, needs and outcomes of children and young people in this context.

## Policy background

When they arrive in the UK, children and families who claim asylum have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF) which means they no access to most mainstream benefits or homelessness assistance. They are also generally not permitted to work. To avoid destitution, they may be able to access limited subsistence support and housing via a parallel system of support provided by the Home Office called 'Asylum Support' which is intended to meet 'essential living needs' like food, clothing, toiletries and transport costs. The current rate of support is £40.85 per person per week and no additional support is provided for children or those with additional care or mobility needs resulting from illness or disability. Children are eligible for compulsory education, Free School Meals and nursery places, but there has been no research about take-up among eligible families.

Given that there is generally no opportunity to work, families are solely reliant on this limited support for their every day needs, and families are subject to such conditions increasingly for many years.

## Research gap

Experiences of destitution and poverty among adult asylum-seekers in the UK have been widely researched<sup>3</sup>. Scholars have described the inadequacy and inconsistency of financial

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<sup>1</sup> Pinter, I. (2021). *Children and Families Seeking Asylum in the UK*: <https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cb/casebrief41.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Hainmueller, J., Hangartner, D., & Lawrence, D. (2016). When lives are put on hold: Lengthy asylum processes decrease employment among refugees. *Science advances*, 2(8), e1600432.

<sup>3</sup> Asylum Matters. (2020). *Locked into poverty: life on asylum support*: <https://asylummatters.org/2020/11/02/locked-into-poverty-new-report-shows-reality-of-life-on-asylum-support/> Bakker, L., Cheung, S. Y., & Phillimore, J. (2016). The Asylum-Integration Paradox: Comparing Asylum Support Systems and Refugee Integration in The Netherlands and the UK. *International Migration*, 54, 118-132: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/imig.12251>; Crawley, H., Hemmings, J., & Price, N. (2011). *Coping with Destitution: Survival and livelihood strategies of refused asylum-seekers living in the UK*: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Heaven\\_Crawley2/publication/318909189\\_Coping\\_with\\_Destitution\\_Survival\\_and\\_li](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Heaven_Crawley2/publication/318909189_Coping_with_Destitution_Survival_and_li)

support coupled with labour market restrictions as a form of 'slow violence'<sup>4</sup> resulting in 'State-induced poverty'<sup>5</sup>. But children's own experiences are missing from this knowledge base. Within wider child poverty research, the particular vulnerabilities of refugee and asylum-seeking children are too often overlooked<sup>6</sup>. There is very limited research which engages directly with refugees and asylum-seeking children or looks at how poverty affects their lives in unique or different ways<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, despite strong evidence of the causal effects of income on a range of children's outcomes<sup>8</sup> academic research has not yet considered the effects of such policies which severely restrict access to an adequate level of household income, affect children's outcomes including their ability to integrate into UK life.

## Methods

By focusing on children's experiences, needs and outcomes, this study looks at how the financial support and employment restrictions affect children within families living in the UK's Asylum Support system.

Based on longitudinal qualitative interviews with 26 families over the course of one year (2021-2022) across three waves with a total of 55 interviews with young people and parents separately, this paper uses thematic analysis to present new empirical evidence on young people's experiences of living on asylum support.

## Findings

The findings suggest that young people face many of the same challenges as peers in low-income families such as deep poverty, material deprivation, extreme social exclusion and isolation, often going without access to essentials like clothes, missing out on social, learning and extracurricular activities. Their circumstances also pose additional challenges for their ability to develop, play, learn, socialise, access opportunities and progress with their career, and affecting their ability to make and sustain friendships. The study points to the fact that employment restrictions affect children and young people in two ways: indirectly through their parents inability to work as well as directly by limiting their own ability to seek employment. So as young people approach adulthood they are unable to progress to employment or contribute to household income like other children on low income might, missing out on learning opportunities, increasing their isolation and sense of exclusion. These factors also hinder their ability to make and sustain friendships, with implications for how they are able to integrate into their new communities.

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<sup>4</sup> Mayblin, L. (2019). *Impoverishment and asylum: Social Policy as Slow Violence*. London: Routledge

<sup>5</sup> Bales, K. (2013). Universal Credit: not so universal? Deconstructing the impact of the asylum support system. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 35(4), 427-443. doi:10.1080/09649069.2013.851168

<sup>6</sup> Lister, R. (2021). *Poverty* (Second ed.): Polity Press.

<sup>7</sup> Ridge, T. (2009). *Living with poverty: a review of the literature on children's and families' experiences of poverty*.

<sup>8</sup> Cooper, K., & Stewart, K. (2013). *Does Money Affect Children's Outcomes? A systematic review*. Retrieved from <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/money-children-outcomes-full.pdf>

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