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**INQUIRY INTO ASYLUM SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SESSION 1**

**Held in**

**Committee Room Fifteen in the House of Commons**

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

**10.00-12.00**

**Panellists**

Sarah Teather, MP, Chair

Neil Carmichael, MP

Virendra Sharma, MP

Baroness Ruth Lister

Lord Eric Avebury

Rt. Reverend John Packer, Lord Bishop of Ripon and Leeds

Nadine Finch, Children's Rights Barrister, Garden Court Chambers

Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society

**(From the Shorthand Notes of**

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**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Good morning everybody. First of all, a huge thank you to Mike Kaye and Professor Heaven Crawley for making time to talk to us today. We have a number of questions we would be grateful if we can ask you to help us understand better the asylum support system, where it works and where it does not work. I wondered whether either of you, or one of you, could briefly explain the purpose of the asylum support system, and how it works, particularly for children and families. We are interested in understanding particularly how Section 4 support works and how it is different from Section 95. Perhaps you could just set the framework for us?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** The asylum support system is designed to provide for the essential living needs of everyone on that system. I think it is important we are clear on what we mean by what essential living needs are. I would define essential living needs as food, clothing, toiletries and the minimum amount to see through your application, which would include bus fares and telephone calls.

Section 95 support for families was originally set at 90% of income support on the basis that people would not be on it for very long. I think that is a highly debatable premise, that you should lower the support to 90% because people would not be on it for very long, because many asylum seekers come with very little personal possessions, therefore this premise that you would not have to replace goods is not valid. It is certainly not valid for children, I cannot see that children's needs are going to be less over three weeks than they would be over three months, but we will park that issue, and we will go on to the reduction to 70% of income support, and that was on the basis that utility bills would be paid for alongside housing. I think that is a reasonable deduction. I do not know how they came to the figure of 20%, but as long as the deduction for utility bills is done in a transparent and fair way, I do not think it is unreasonable to reduce the figure to take account of that.

However, in recent years, it has been further reduced in a haphazard way. For example, a couple of years ago single adults had their asylum support reduced to 52%, and lone parents had their asylum support reduced to 62% of income support, and in the last year all asylum seekers, including families, have had in real terms a reduction, because the annual increments given to those on income support was not given to asylum seekers. The system was designed against income support, I think that is a reasonable way to do it, but the system no longer works in any clear transparent way, and you have asylum seekers on varying degrees of support.

Is that level adequate to meet their essential living needs? I would say anyone who is under 70% of income support cannot meet their essential living needs. What is the basis for saying that? Well the clear one is it was calculated from income support. Income support is generally set to be at the lowest level you need to meet a dignified standard of living. You can reduce it 20% for utility bills, but then you should be on 80% of income support if you are a family with children. Could you survive on 70% of income support? I think you can survive. We did a calculation, we used the Joseph Rowntree Foundation research on minimum income standards - that is enough to support your needs not your wants - then we stripped out every single item on that basic goods list that would not generally be considered what you need to avoid absolute poverty, and that takes you down to roughly 70%. Single adults over 25 are at the moment on 52%, so a single adult is surviving on just

over £5 a day. You can survive, there is no question you can find food to support you for that period of time, but what you find is that over weeks and months it will have an impact on your physical and mental well-being. What evidence do we have to show that is the case?

In 2009 there was a survey done by Refugee Action on their clients on Section 95. They found 50% were suffering from hunger, 65% could not meet their travel needs, 70% could not buy toiletries and 90% could not buy clothing. There were six lone parents in that group, and 50% did not have enough to meet food requirements for their family, and 100% could not buy clothes for their children. That is an overview of how we got to this situation. In terms of Section 4 support, the situation is even worse, because on Section 4 if you are an adult you will be getting £1.23 less a week than you would if you are on Section 95, and if you are a four to fifteen year old child you will be getting around £13 less than you would if you were on Section 95. So it is a very serious drop in income, and far below what you would think is enough to meet essential living needs. About 20% of those people on Section 4 are children. There is no justification for the lower level of support on Section 4. Obviously your living needs are the same on Section 4 as they are on Section 95, but the amount you receive is less, and worse still it is not provided in cash, it is provided through a plastic payment card, so you cannot get best value for money by going to discount stores or markets. You do not have cash for travel, you do not have cash for telephone calls, it makes life extremely difficult. The justification for reduced payments on Section 4 is that people are at the end of a process and therefore we need to send a message to them that they need to go home. I do not think this is a fair justification for reduced levels, because these are a group that the Government accepts would otherwise be destitute, and cannot return through no fault of their own, so penalising them through reduced payments I don't think is justifiable.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** That is an extremely helpful overview. I can already see people wanting to ask some supplementary questions, but is there anything you want to add to that?

**Professor Heaven Crawley, Swansea University:** My work is primarily with people at the end of the process. The only point I would make in relation to Section 4 is the work we have done has been in relation to how people cope at the end of the process if they find themselves in the position of destitution in the way Mike describes. The findings of my research, because we used a very innovative methodology which allowed us to access people and information that we would not typically find through other forms of research, suggests people are not accessing Section 4 because they are very anxious about being part of a system that potentially might remove them from the UK. So even people with children might avoid Section 4 even if it potentially were available to them, because they see there is a risk engaging in that support process because of the potential of being returned. Many of the families who were talking about this in relation to their children, it was clear from the evidence they were providing to us it was not limited to Section 4 support, it included any other kind of support mechanism that might be available. So when we look at people who are effectively destitute, they sometimes may engage with other institutions, charities or NGOs that provide support, but some people are unwilling to engage with those organisations for the same reasons, but perhaps more worryingly they are also not prepared

to engage with social support that might be available, that is not financial, but is part of the welfare system. They do not send their children to schools. They do not register their children with GPs. In one case we came across a young woman had given birth, and had not gone to a GP or even informed a hospital, and had an older woman to come and help with the birth, and although that young woman did come back later and put a fresh claim in, there was certainly a period when that child was effectively not even registered. It is slightly going off the point in terms of the overall system of support, but there are gaps between what is supposed to happen in practice in the support system, and what happens in reality.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** We will certainly want to come back to some of those points later.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** You described the system as haphazard. Do you see any justification at all, or any reasoning behind the way in which the rates have been set, or do you stick to your term haphazard and say you have no idea how they have been set or why they have been set like that?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** I have a clear idea of how it has come to this, which I was just outlining. Basically it was set at a percentage of income support. What has happened is that consequent governments - you all know how many pieces of asylum immigration legislation we have been through in the last twenty years. It is a system which has been built on and amended and then different imperatives have influenced governments. Recently cost savings have been an imperative, and governments have moved between RPI and different formats for the calculation, whether there should be an increase in rate of inflation or not. Sometimes there has been a political imperative, based on the ill founded belief if you make the system really hostile you will discourage asylum seekers from coming here, or you will encourage them to return home. There is ample evidence to show that is ineffective as a policy tool as well as inhumane. More recently there has been an imperative to save money, and therefore we have been swapping between different calculations, and that is where we are at the moment. I think the solution is you go back to a system which is clear and transparent which is linked to income support rather than try and calculate it in a different way.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** I would like to come back to the factors you have indicated at the end.

**Lord Avebury:** My question is whether it would have been possible to base the system on the actual cost to the individual of the things they have to spend money on, you mentioned food, clothing, toiletries, bus fares and so on. Would it have been possible, instead of basing it on a percentage, to calculate what the normal costs to a normal family at that time would be and to base it on an actual amount rather than on a percentage? My second question to Heaven is do people on Section 4 get free school meals?

**Professor Heaven Crawley, Swansea University:** I cannot answer the question about free school meals, Mike would be better placed. The research we have done is about people who are not on Section 4, the people who are not sending their children to school. I suspect, although we do not have too much evidence on this, they are the ones who are

disengaging from all forms of support - not just the education system - as they are so anxious about the system full stop. They would choose not to take up Section 4 if it were available to them because they have anxieties about being in the system. I am not sure whether when you are on Section 4 you get access to free school meals.

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** I am not sure about that either. To answer your other question, you can calculate it on a basic basket of goods and what you need, that is exactly what we did, and we found it does come to 70% of income support. I think it is much better to link it to a pre-existing level which is described as the minimum income standards, otherwise you would have to keep redoing that basket of goods each year. I think that is where the problem is. If we kept it linked at 70% of income support and we provided the same increments annually that we designated to income support we would not be in this mess, and it would be depoliticised as an issue because we would not each year have to justify what we are giving to asylum seekers because it would be linked to what we give British subjects in terms of what their needs are. If British subjects get a freeze in rates then asylum seekers would get a freeze in rates. If your calculation is that the cost of living has gone up by 5.2% then everyone gets that. It is inherently fair and it saves time and money because you do not have to provide different calculations for different groups when it is obvious that the needs will be the same.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Ruth, I know you had a question on whether or not it met essential living needs, do you feel that question has been answered?

**Baroness Lister:** Your very full first answer answered the question I was going to ask on essential living needs, thank you for that, but I am also interested, particularly from a human rights perspective, what they get is very important, but also how they get it is important. Is there any evidence you both have on how people feel they are treated when they claim asylum support, and also when they use the Azure card, is there any evidence of stigma and people feeling they are treated badly when they go to shops?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** I would like to emphasise that those calculations around 70% do not take into account any kind of social contact, it is about the minimum required to survive, to avoid absolute poverty. It is quite interesting because there has just been a case in Germany where they have said you need to have some form of social interaction and that is not costed there, and I think that does have a serious impact on people's mental and physical health over a period of time.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Was that a court case?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** Yes, it is a constitutional court case in Germany. Prior to this court case a single adult in Germany still received more than a single adult in the UK, and they have just said that is not enough to meet a minimum standard for a dignified existence. In terms of human rights that is an element we should be considering, a right to cultural and social life. In terms of Section 4 there is ample evidence that it is discriminatory that people are humiliated in supermarkets because they are told they are not allowed to buy a pen, or people have been accused of not having enough money to meet the amount they want to spend. Having the plastic payment cards and

before that vouchers, was a very divisive way of delivering support. It is also very problematic in terms of some areas where you cannot access cash, and there are some areas that work very badly, for example, you can only carry over £5. If you get sick at the end of the week before you can shop, you would lose money on the plastic payment card. On top of that it is completely cost ineffective. I think it is an important point to raise, people do not get the minimum they need to meet their essential living needs, and there are cost savings to be made in the system. On Section 4 you have around 2,300 people on a completely parallel support system which costs over £350,000 a year to administer. On top of that, if you were accommodated by friends and family under Section 95, and if you were allowed to go onto Section 4 you would have to leave accommodation that was not paid for, and go into accommodation that was paid for by UKBA.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Do you have any estimation of how much could be saved if a more sensible rational system was run?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** On that particular point on accommodation, on Section 95 15% are housed with family and friends and just get top up cash support, and if the same was true of Section 4 you would save £2 million.

**Nadine Finch, Children's Rights Barrister, Garden Court Chambers:** Mike, you talked about how the rates were set. When the rates were set in 1999, and when they have been changed since then, has any account been taken of the particular needs and rights of children within that?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** The reductions are very haphazard. As you will see in the Children's Society paper, the amounts vary by group by age. I do not know how they have come to those different calculations, it has not been done in an open or transparent way, and it no longer links to income support, so I think it is a question for Ministers to answer how they have calculated it.

**Nadine Finch, Children's Rights Barrister, Garden Court Chambers:** In your view you talked about the essential living needs being a basic minimum. Is there anything that affects children by being on that level?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** It is worth stressing we are trying to distinguish between two forms of destitution, the legal definition of destitution, which is not having enough to meet your essential living needs - and we believe that many of those on Section 95 and all of those on Section 4 would not meet those essential living needs and therefore would be destitute under the legal definition - and then there is a separate group which is what most people would understand by this definition which means they have no form of statutory support whatsoever.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Have there ever been any test cases on that, or are you aware of any possibility of a test case testing that legal definition?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** No.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Do you think it would be possible to bring a test case?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** I think so, that is exactly what the German case is, it is bringing a test case under the constitution saying this is not enough to meet your minimum standards. It is difficult to provide the evidence. It is difficult to say support levels have caused a deterioration in mental and physical health. We can show there is a very high percentage of asylum seekers, including families, who suffer from physical and mental health problems, and I can evidence that for you, but what you cannot do is say are those health problems completely down to the support system or would they have occurred for other reasons? The problem is the asylum system as a whole. The Royal College of Psychiatrists says the mental health of asylum seekers deteriorate on impact with the asylum system, and that is not surprising because the asylum system basically disempowers people who have already been through traumatic circumstances. You cannot work, you cannot stay with family and friends because you are dispersed on a no choice basis to somewhere else in the UK. The levels of support mean you have no money for social interaction, and you are very unlikely to meet your essential living needs. The longer that goes on, the more it will have an effect on your mental and physical well-being. I will give you some examples in relation to that. A survey in Scotland this year of 148 destitute people - people at the end of the process, not on support anymore - found that 23% had mental health issues, and of that group 18% were either children or pregnant women. That is an interesting study, because what it is showing is that the average scores should be around 51, for asylum seekers they are 30, which is lower than the qualitative study for women's domestic violence, so the impact on mental health is very high. If you look at people on Section 4, a survey found 206 individuals who were on section 4 in 2011 were identified as having physical or mental health problems. There are only 2,300 people on it, so 10% had those kinds of problems, and again around 20% of those will be children.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Virendra would like to ask a question which is really about pull factors.

**Virendra Sharma, MP:** If it happens in the future, would greater levels of support attract greater number of asylum seekers or migrants?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** We probably both have a lot to say on this one, I will let Heaven start.

**Professor Heaven Crawley, Swansea University:** There is a body of research that has really developed over the last ten or fifteen years looking at what you might describe as pull factors in relation to asylum policies and procedures in Europe. Essentially over the last ten or fifteen years there has been a growing anxiety among governments, particularly in Europe but not exclusively, that the policies that are in place for asylum seekers in general are the reasons why there has been an increase in numbers particularly from 2000 onwards. The underlying belief is should you reduce or keep welfare support levels low, then numbers of the asylum seekers will either be reduced or as Mike alluded to earlier, people will choose to return home or go elsewhere because they do not get the level of support or assistance they think they might otherwise have got. So the studies have tried to look at the range of different variables that go into the pot, if you like, when asylum seekers make decisions, if

they do indeed, about where they might try and claim asylum. What is clear from all of that evidence - it is pretty overwhelming in its overall message - is that asylum seekers rarely, if ever, make a decision about where to claim asylum on the basis of welfare support. Now I am going to break that down. The first point is asylum seekers rarely make a decision about where to go at all, partly because they are being pushed from a situation so they tend to be opportunistic about where they end up going. They may have a visa from somewhere else, or an opportunity may arise for them to travel, but because agents are responsible for the destination choices that asylum seekers are making, it really comes down to where the agent thinks they can get them in order to be able to claim asylum, or where the individual considers there to be a benefit, perhaps, for example, if they have family or friends in a particular country or a colonial relationship between the countries which means there is a similar linguistic similarity. So at the very beginning people are not making choices about where to end up. Then you start to look at the factors that go into the pot in terms of the asylum policies themselves, and what becomes clear is that asylum seekers have little or no information about the substantive detail of what an asylum policy looks like in any particular country they may end up in. They may be given information by an agent about various aspects of policies in different places if they are fortunate to have the resources to make a choice about where they go. That is not the case with the majority, and therefore for most people welfare would not be the principal thing they are concerned about, it would be whether there was a system which could provide them with some protection, whether there is a good human rights record. So if you talk to asylum seekers as to how they end up in the UK, it is those sorts of variables, that the UK has a good track record in terms of human rights, democracy and an asylum support system, which might make the difference in terms of them arriving.

When you look at the actual policies themselves, the only policy that appears to have any impact at all on where people end up are what you might call pre-entry controls, those policies that actually physically prevent people from claiming asylum in certain places or reaching those places to claim asylum in the first place. Not only do asylum seekers do not in a sense have this knowledge to be able to make this sort of comparative analysis of asylum policy in Europe or elsewhere, but most of us working in the sector struggle to keep up with the detailed changes we have heard about, so you can hardly expect someone who is in a conflict zone without access to the internet to be able to do so. But even if they did have some information, in the end it will come down to where they are able to get access, where the agent can provide them with a route in and/or where they might have some other opportunist connection to take advantage of. The problem with a lot of the debate around welfare and asylum as to whether it is or is not a pull factor, is that it suffers from this fundamental error of conflating correlation with causation. So what has happened is that people over the last ten years have looked at asylum applications across Europe and they have seen there has been a decline, a quite substantial decline in the UK, and they have looked at various policy measures that have been brought in, including quite dramatic cuts to welfare support, and they have therefore assumed that because these two things have happened in parallel, the reduction in asylum support has led to a fall in asylum numbers. We know from all the research that is out there, that reduction in asylum numbers is down primarily to changes of circumstances in the country of origin combined with pre-entry controls which makes it virtually impossible for people to arrive.

Finally on this point, something that is worth mentioning is what people tell you themselves when they get here, and the first thing they say is they were not expecting to get any support at all, because most people come from countries where there is no welfare support available to them, so they do make any presumptions at all about welfare support, and are quite surprised when they do get support, but then find it quite difficult to survive on it. Most people we have spoken to in our research primarily want to support themselves and their family through work. They do not come here to work, but once they are here, they want to be able to support themselves and their family and have a decent quality of life, and in many cases they have come from pretty prosperous backgrounds, with good education systems and good professional qualifications, and want to rebuild their lives accordingly, and they have no desire to be put on this reduced rate, which does not even enable them to do the social things that are important not just for them as human beings, but also to regain their skills, maintain their language abilities and essentially rebuild the lives they had previously.

To answer your question, if we were to increase the asylum support levels, no one would know what the comparative rates were in Germany or France or anywhere else where they might in theory make these choices, and even if they did know, they would have to somehow negotiate a way into a context where the opportunities for entry and gaining asylum are limited and shaped by others, primarily agents. The process by which that would be able to have an impact is really disconnected.

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** Can I follow up on that. So some of that research is also Home Office research, it is not just NGO research.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** The Home Office research has been published?

**Professor Heaven Crawley, Swansea University:** I was previously head of Asylum Research at the Home Office in 2001-2002 and we managed a study called "Understanding the decision-making of Asylum Seekers". That study was published in 2002-2003, not straightforwardly as it turned out, but it is publicly available now. The follow up study I am referring to is called "Chance or choice" published in 2010, which essentially looked at similar factors, found some differences, but essentially found the underlying factors to be the same.

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** OECD did a piece of research in 2011 covering nineteen developed countries, and found exactly the same. We do not have to rely on research, we can look at UK policy and it will show us exactly what we are talking about. In 1999 the then government said we want to send a message that we are not a soft touch for asylum, we are going to reduce support payments and we are going to put people on vouchers. They did that in 1999. If it was true that welfare was a draw you would expect numbers to go down. They did not go down. They increased, and they peaked in 2002 at over 80,000 applications. Then the government changed its policy, because there was a lot of pressure on vouchers, and they reintroduced cash. You would expect if cash was a draw, the numbers would go up, the opposite happened, the numbers went down, and the numbers went down steadily for years afterwards. The Netherlands have a more generous system than we do, but they get less applicants than we do. Eleven other European

countries grant permission to work after six months. None of them apart from Sweden get the same number of applicants that we do. France gets twice as many asylum applications as we do, but they have a less generous system. It is nonsense to say there is a parallel between levels of support and the number of asylum applications a country receives.

**Lord Avebury:** Just for the record, wouldn't you agree we have heard from the Select Committee on the European Union which is considering European migration policy at the moment, that the vast majority of asylum seekers entering Europe come through the poorest borders of southern Europe, in particular Greece, Italy and Spain. Secondly, could I ask you, on the supposed incentives, these obviously cannot apply to people at the end of the process who the Home Office acknowledge they cannot send them back to their country of origin, either because they do not have an origin or the countries of origin refuse to recognise them. Is this not illogical to continue paying them less on Section 4 when there is no way they can avoid the situation they are confronting?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** I could not agree with you more. Let us take the example of Zimbabwe. Between 2002 and 2011 we had refused thousands of Zimbabweans any form of protection, but we did not forcibly remove a single one because it was not safe to do so. So those people who were too scared to sign up for Section 4, because you have to say you are prepared to go home voluntarily, and why would you if the courts are saying it is not safe to do so, and they got nothing. Those people who did sign up to Section 4 were left with inadequate support for literally years, when they could have been given some form of status, and working, and contributing to this country as many of them had significant skills to offer. It was a complete waste of public resources and individuals capacity. Many of them are eventually given status, but over a ten year period they de-skill, and they will have more mental and physical health problems than they otherwise would have had.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** I am going to stop you there partly because we are short of time, and Neil's question really follows on from that.

**Neil Carmichael, MP:** Thank you. Earlier you mentioned Section 4 and Section 95, and what was going through my mind when you were talking about costs was do you think the issue of costs is rather more to do with the desire to control the asylum seeker?

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** I think it is to do with public opinion. Both decision makers and members of the public have a vastly incorrect view of asylum seekers. If you went on the street 70% of people would tell you we get 100,000 asylum seekers a year. For the last three years we have had less than 20,000. That is the lowest number we have had since 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down. The numbers that are coming are very small. France gets twice as many as we do, and Europe does not get its fair share. Last year, during the Cote d'Ivoire crisis, Liberia was looking after 135,000 refugees in a matter of weeks, we have not had that number of applicants in five years. That disconnection between people thinking there is a huge number, that we take more than our fair share, and those kind of ideas I think has really influenced policy makers in that they do not want to correct those misconceptions and talk about reality. It is much easier then to push the issue to the side and not deal with that. There is an indirect cost in leaving people

below essential living needs. Many of these people will be given status, and the possibilities of them integrating quickly are reduced if we leave them for long periods on a support which is inadequate. Roughly 3,000 asylum seekers now have waited more than six months for an initial decision, and that is a cost we should be looking at.

**Professor Heaven Crawley, Swansea University:** There are some ironies in this, because we have talked about numbers in terms of people's perceptions of the number of the asylum seekers in the system, for example, but actually people have a vastly over inflated estimate of what those people are getting anyway. In a sense it is purposeless to reduce the level, when in fact people assume asylum seekers are getting far more than they are. They probably have no knowledge or understanding of the vastly reduced rates, and certainly those anomalies we have been talking about. It is as if public opinion takes into account some aspects, and not others, and for me it is not just about the numbers it is about the kind of society we want to be in. It is about treating people as human beings as opposed to numbers, as opposed to categories. It is okay to keep that person as this because it is Section 4 or Section 95, and I find that the labelling of people in that way, as if they somehow have less needs, particularly when it is children and families - not exclusively so, people all have similar kind of needs ultimately - it is almost as if that kind of labelling has enabled people to detach themselves from the reality of what it is like to be in this situation.

When you do research with refugees and asylum seekers, or you talk to them through the work you do on the frontline when you are trying to provide a service, the reality of what this means to them on a day-to-day level trying to live a life, often being in some situation of limbo, not knowing either if there is going to be a policy decision or if they are still in the process, or indeed what might happen to them at the end of the process, whether they would be expected to return or whether they can return. That lack of a sense of a future, and the hopelessness that goes with that, it is really important people understand, that but it is very hard to get across. It is not about the numbers - I don't know if this is what your question is alluding to - but it is about what a level of social control does to a group of people in terms of making them so dependent for every single aspect of their lives. They lose their autonomy almost. Ironically these are people who often were in their country of origin highly professional, very skilled, and the ones sufficiently able to get the resources to get here in the first place. Yet they become utterly dehumanised through a process that reduces them to a number, a label.

**Neil Carmichael, MP:** Can I make one point. I think that Mike's point is absolutely right about numbers, and I think this report should have a clear expression of numbers and trends, comparative and absolute, so we can get the point across.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** The very last question from us is what recommendations you would like this inquiry to raise with governments or other agencies. We only have a couple of minutes, so quick and concise please, and perhaps any others you have you can send on to us?

**Professor Heaven Crawley, Swansea University:** I think the straightforward thing to do is have some reconciliation between the level of support provided to asylum seekers and others. Access to work needs to be considered because actually it is not generally a function

of the welfare system to keep people permanently on some sort of benefit. It is not generally what we seek to do. So why we would choose to do that with that particular group is something of a mystery, but I think it stems from this political association that has been made between welfare support and work. If you are able to disconnect those, which I think we can do very clearly with the evidence we have, then the rationale for decisions about welfare and employment becomes irrational, and you can simplify things considerably by linking things back into other forms of support.

**Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager, Still Human Still Here:** I think we need to abolish Section 4 completely as it is cost ineffective and inhumane in terms of people who we accept cannot go home - through no fault of their own - and transfer them onto Section 95. The level of support for Section 95 should be raised immediately so that no one is below 70% of income support. I think you also need to look at where the gaps are. There are families with children who are not getting support, either because there are delays or mistakes, or they are refused support which they are entitled to, and at the asylum support tribunal appeals you are getting cases overturned, and appeals allowed at the 50% rate, and if they are represented it goes up to 66%. That is a huge waste of money as well. If those people were given the support they were needed at the first decision you would be saving a huge amount of money in that respect. There is a very high cost for leaving families with children without any support. Look at a pregnant woman, for example, they are 0.3% of population but 12% of deaths are from asylum seekers. They are much more vulnerable, and we are heightening their vulnerabilities by either providing them with inadequate support or no support at all. If you have a child after you have received a refusal you will not be entitled to support.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Thank you very much both of you, we are extremely grateful to you for making time.

Thank you for coming to talk to us today, we have Dr Jenny Phillimore and Hugo Tristram.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** I should just like your views as distinct in a way from those we have heard already, simply whether the current asylum support system meets the essential living needs of children and families in particular?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** Our view at the Red Cross is that it does not, but it varies depending on what stage of the system you are at. I think the Children's Society produced a breakdown of the different levels in a report at different stages which illustrates that point quite clearly. In terms of the people we see, we have £500,000 a year which we spend supporting asylum seekers, mainly at the end of the process. The people we are helping in terms of families are specifically cases who have had their claim for asylum refused, their appeal refused, then after that they have had children. So within the asylum support system, if you have children at the beginning of the process and your appeal is refused, you continue to receive support right up until removal, but that does not apply in those cases where children are born after the appeal is refused. At that point we are seeing a lot of very severe cases of destitution. Earlier Mike mentioned the different kinds of destitution. You have the legal definition, not meeting the essential living needs, then you have the absolute destitution where you have nothing, no access to

support at all. Of those 10,000 people we see every year, we estimate about 20% of those are families that we are helping who are in that position of absolute poverty. So that is one of our big concerns. It certainly seems to us the asylum support system is not meeting the needs of those families whose child is born after they have been refused leave in a very clear way.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** Those will be people on Section 4?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services – British Red Cross:** In some cases there are reasons why families with children do not access Section 4, because they do fear removal, and that is the dilemma, but when they do go on Section 4 the level of Section 4 support is significantly lower than Section 95 support, and it is in the form of the Azure card. It was not really designed for children in families. The whole purpose was that families should not be left destitute, that was the original rationale for it, but it did not cater for the situation where people were not removed and then went on to start families.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** In theory, all those families could be eligible for Section 4 if their child was born after their claim was refused?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** They could be eligible subject to the conditions of Section 4, and subject to them not being able to be removed or having exceptional compelling reasons, but there are difficulties in accessing it and administrative delays.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Do you want say a little about that, that would be quite helpful?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** It can take a considerable period of time before support comes through.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Typically how long?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** Anything from two weeks to a month is our experience. It is not as quick as it should be. There are other problems as well in terms of Section 4 provision, because often the families that we see have emerged after considerable periods of destitution. They may have been staying with friends or relatives. Quite often the birth of the child is the point at which they are no longer able to stay with their friends, because it is one thing to give a sofa to someone who does not have a small baby, and when the baby is born they become homeless at that point, but they have set up connections and networks with their community which makes it difficult for them to move away.

**Lord Avebury:** Have you said to the Government, to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), that it is not the job of the British Red Cross to look after destitute asylum seekers?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** That is alluding to another issue in terms of the transitional arrangements. Yes we do feel it is not our job, but we see it as a humanitarian need that we try and meet. We tried to say to the UKBA it is

not our job to look after families, but in the case of DWP we do experience problems with people who have been granted refugee status because there is another period people encounter, after receiving refugee status where their asylum support is cut off and there is a significant delay in transitioning to DWP support.

**Virendra Sharma, MP:** I was going to say, although my question is partly answered, I do want elaboration on that. When you see those families, you said 10,000 of them, who have no financial support whatsoever, how long are the families typically without any support, look at the timescale?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** Very considerably. We estimate we see 10,000 asylum claimants, of those about 20% are families so it is more like 2,000 families. We do not have precise figures on that, although I can get those later to put in evidence. I would say it varies, when people come to us it is a point of particular crisis, where the arrangements they have had previously, maybe staying with friends, have broken down and then they come to us. They may have been in those positions for considerable periods of time, in some cases years, in some cases months. After they see us, after the point of crisis, we hope they get to resolve that in four to eight weeks, but that is not always the case.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Of that group, 20% who are families, typically what age are the children?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** In many cases new born. Again I do not have the exact figures to hand, but because the children are born after the appeal has been refused, they are extremely small children, under one or two years old.

**Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society:** If I focus now on the accommodation which is available to families seeking asylum. I would like your opinion on whether that accommodation is effectively keeping children safe and whether it protects their welfare?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** The research I have undertaken most recently has been around migrant maternity and has highlighted pretty extreme things going on among asylum seeking women, particularly those who are on Section 4 and those who are destitute, identifying high levels of malnutrition. In Birmingham, for example, in a key dispersal area, infant mortality rates in Birmingham City Centre hospital are 12% compared to an England and Wales average of 7.6%, and there is clear evidence that 45.6% of stillbirths and deaths in the first year are due to low birth weight. Malnourishment is key, I just wanted to stress there. Accommodation, of course.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Has there been any reaction to that research from the Department of Health?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** We are currently doing the rounds with the research trying to get it out there. There is a big issue with dispersal of pregnant women. We were finding women who were being dispersed at 38 and 39 weeks of pregnancy into accommodation, sometimes hostel accommodation. They were given no connections to maternity services. One woman started to go into labour, did not have a midwife, did not know where the hospital was, and it was only the kindness of strangers in the street that got her to hospital. The accommodation is also said to be dirty, damp, unhealthy, cold, and women are often ill. We have done a review around the issues that exacerbate infant mortality, and a big one is the lack of maternal monitoring before the birth. That is how you identify problems. Dispersal breaks the continuity of care. The type of accommodation they are in are not close to the hospitals, and those on Section 4 have no cash. They cannot take the bus to the hospital. If they can get there they can claim the money back but they do not have the cash to do it. They have not got the cash to ring up the doctor. They are not attending any of their antenatal appointments.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Those rates of infant mortality. You said they are significantly higher than the rest of the UK. Are there any other comparables? Were there any other countries where you would expect to see something as high as that?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** The City Hospital area of Birmingham has the highest infant mortality rate in Europe, not just in the UK, and that relates to one particular area. The infant mortality rates are on the decline generally but that is not what we are observing in dispersal areas, and there are clear links with malnourishment, poor accommodation and lack of cash. Women cannot get the basics for their children. They cannot get a steriliser, they do not have a push chair. I have heard repeatedly of women who have not got a push chair and therefore not being able to get to the doctor's even if they can walk instead of going on the bus. So the issue of accommodation, lack of cash, inability to access services, dispersal, all of these things come together for pregnant women to lead to fairly extreme situations.

**Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society:** Have you any data about children's safety in accommodation?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** I cannot give you any statistics, a lot of our research is qualitative and we are hearing about dirt and damp causing children to be ill all the time, babies having rashes, babies having chest infections.

**Baroness Lister:** Do either of you have any evidence of the impact of the current asylum support system where either the parent or the child has a disability?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** There are some cases where we have families with disabilities. There is no additional provision within the system, so I think it would be fair to say that an acutely difficult situation is made more acutely difficult, because there is no additional provision available. We have approached local authorities with varying degrees of success, and the local authorities can provide

additional support for situations where there is a family with a disabled child, but that is not guaranteed.

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** We haven't specifically looked at it, although we have done twenty different pieces of research over the last ten years and it comes up from time to time. It impacts on mobility issues, children being able to access schooling. Dispersal is generally very disruptive, but once you have a child who has some kind of disability, particularly if there is a learning disability alongside a child with English as a second language, there does not appear to be any additional support for those children. I do not know if you would like to include HIV under that category, there is a lack of additional support for women who are HIV positive, who really should not be breastfeeding for the safety of their baby. They are not getting help even on Section 4, even if they are destitute, to pay for formula milk. We have also picked up on a couple of cases of people who have been detained whilst pregnant and HIV positive and been denied access to maternity care whilst in detention, which also increases the likelihood that the baby will be HIV positive. I was talking with midwives last week and there is a suggestion that babies that are born HIV positive cost a million pounds over their lifetime. So it seems to me another of these situations where we are not making any savings.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** This point about formula milk. How many cases is this?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** We picked up on three or four in a sample of about eighty people.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Has anyone else picked up on similar issues?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** There has been no widespread research on this issue. We are planning to do something more survey orientated and across the UK. Our cases were not selected on the basis of the worst case scenario. We went out and looked at different people from different backgrounds, different communities, listened to their experiences, and over and over again it was the asylum seekers who came back with the dreadful experiences with the stillbirths and the problems I discussed.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** So your research was wider, it was to cover the population around Birmingham?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** Yes.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** The other question I wanted to ask, if that is okay, whether you can really disentangle the infant mortality deaths that are occurring at that hospital with the local area, other deprivation factors, the quality of maternity services at that hospital, with those who are asylum seekers.

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** It is difficult to do it. However, there is a correlation between infant mortality rates and

dispersal areas generally, that is something the Perinatal Institute looked at, and the data is there that Mike mentioned, 12% of maternal deaths are asylum seekers, although they are only 0.3 of the population.

**Lord Avebury:** Surely the national organisations that deal with these disabilities, particularly the learning disabilities you mentioned, and HIV, would campaign for better facilities for the asylum seekers. Have you collaborated with them at all to see if they have a role to play putting these issues before the public?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** I personally have not collaborated with them. We are doing our best to get our research to as many people as possible. There are so many problems facing this organisation, and asylum seekers are a very small number in relation to the overall population, so it is not a priority.

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** I think it is a very good idea, but it has not been done to my knowledge in any systematic way.

**Nadine Finch, Children's Rights Barrister, Garden Court Chambers:** In your work have you come to any conclusion on the impact on children of parents who have not been able to work?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** Previously we did a project for Joseph Rowntree Foundation on asylum seekers and mental health, and we found not being able to work impacts on people's level of hopelessness and we found clear a connection between depressed and mentally ill parents and the ability to parent their own children.

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** Similarly, lots of parents have told us they feel bad not being able to work. It can create tensions within a family, particularly if it is a traditional arrangement where the husband is expected to provide and cannot. It can create tension.

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** It is worth also stressing that levels of domestic violence have increased in families seeking asylum. The levels of divorce are very high once people get their asylum through, and stresses put on them during the asylum process must impact on that.

**Nadine Finch, Children's Rights Barrister, Garden Court Chambers:** Any figures on how many families end up in the family courts?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** No.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** The notes we have of your research talk about social networking and civil society. If you could just talk a little about the whole way the asylum seekers and their families relate to or fail to relate to the civil society of which they are or are not a part?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Services, University of Birmingham:** Civil society plays a really important role, it picks up the pieces really. I can give you lots of examples in Birmingham where civil society helps those who do not have baby clothes, do not have a push chair. There are organisations which literally surround women with volunteers, accompanies them to hospital, because many are by themselves. They do not have endless capacity, and we find through our research we do find people who are completely isolated. They have no friends, they have no family. They are not connected to an ethnic or faith community or any civil society organisation. Those women are particularly prone to mental health problems and post natal depression, having a baby and having nobody to support them.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Is there evidence of high levels of post natal depression?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** Yes. Again statistics are not fantastic. There is a high proportion, there is no comparison.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** Any comments to make about the role of schools? Particularly in relation to families and children? In the first session there was a bit of a reference to schools. We have said very little indeed about schools and the effect on the needs of the families?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** I think they are a critical source of support, that is what we have heard from families that have come to us, certainly for the children and the parents. There is an opportunity for improving social interaction, for example, collecting children from school. One of the issues that was not raised earlier and could have been is in relation to the accommodation provision. Asylum seekers in the system are very vulnerable to frequent moving when accommodation contracts change or are removed or accommodation needs to be refurbished and they have to be moved to different areas. There is very little understanding of the impact that may have on asylum seekers. I think there is an understanding by the UKBA not to relocate people and children in the exam year, that is only in exam years and it can be very disruptive at any stage.

**Lord Avebury:** Can you answer the question we put to previous witnesses whether children on Section 9 and Section 45 are eligible for free school meals?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services – British Red Cross:** I cannot, but I imagine it would depend on showing you are on some form of income support, and I presume if you show you are on some form of asylum support the school would be sympathetic.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** The answer is you are eligible if you are on Section 95, and Section 4 is discretionary. If you are destitute it would technically be up to the discretion of the school.

**Baroness Lister:** Do you have any evidence on how asylum seekers feel they are treated by the asylum support system itself, and also their experience of using the Azure card?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** This is something that has come up repeatedly over the years. It comes up as a key factor in research around mental health. The way it is portrayed in the media, anything that draws attention to the fact they are asylum seekers is problematic, is worrying, and the Azure card is one of those areas, and it is a problem.

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** Similarly we do have a report that they feel stigmatised when they are using the Azure card, normally when using it at the check out in the store. Initially it is not very flexible, it can only be used in certain stores, I don't think it can be used in LIDL, for example, or in markets, and it cannot be used on buses or on transport.

**Baroness Lister:** In terms of the actual asylum support system, the administration of Section 95 and Section 4, does that seem to be treating people with dignity and respect?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** The impression I have is most people would like to work, and also find in terms of the general asylum system the uncertainty and the clarity of what their options are is the most frustrating and long term has the most negative impact on them.

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** The experience can be very patchy. It really depends who you deal with. Some people have a huge amount of support from their accommodation provider, and others get absolutely nothing.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** So there are some good reports.

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** Some women have an extremely positive birthing experience in the UK even though they are destitute.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** It would be really helpful if you could send us some of your positive experiences as well, because the best way you can demonstrate that change is possible is to demonstrate it has been done well somewhere else. My slight fear is that all we are going to hear is a litany of misery, and in fact to demonstrate that it is possible to treat people well would be very helpful, and if you could send us details of good practice we would be very pleased to receive them.

**Nadine Finch, Children's Rights Barrister, Garden Court Chambers:** Could I take you back to the point about civil society. There are lots of organisations trying to provide short term accommodation and support, does that have any negative impact on the asylum seekers then being able to claim Section 4 support?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** Not to my knowledge.

**Nadine Finch, Children's Rights Barrister, Garden Court Chambers:** How sustainable do you think the civil society support is now in times of economic crisis?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** Some of it is very short term. There is an organisation called Hope Project in Birmingham, and they are linked up to another organisation, and essentially what they do is when they come across a destitute asylum seeker they will look at that person's case, and if there is any chance they can have a judicial review, they will put them on to short term housing, link them up, and we will provide them with the legal support they need, and often within a matter of weeks those individuals are off that support. It cannot be long term support, the most is nine months and after that they are asked to leave.

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** There is a sense in which the charitable support asylum seekers are able to access does make it harder for them to access Section 4, and actually the Red Cross has been frequently put into a position where we have had to spell out that we cannot help them any longer, in some cases people have had to be quite explicit they cannot stay there anymore, because they need to show they have nowhere to go before they can access Section 4.

**Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society:** I was going to ask you about this gap. How do you analyse the size of that gap?

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** The size of the gap between what they need and what we offer?

**Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society:** Yes.

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services – British Red Cross:** I think it would be fair to say we are not able to fill it. We provide respite, but we do not fill it. The provision of support is £500,000 divided by 10,000 places, so that is not even £50 per person, because that includes families, over a year. The provision is quite minimal. We aim to provide it for a period of four weeks, and that amounts to about £15 per person for a maximum of four people. It is very patchy. It does not meet the gaps. We have had to be very clear about that, particularly in light of a recent judicial review about charity provision. We use other things to fill in those gaps, things like donated pushchairs, donated toiletries, donated food, which can increase our level of provision. I think our feeling is that there is a gap and we do our best in some way to alleviate the suffering for a short period, but we do not come anywhere near filling it.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** I wonder whether you could finish this session by telling us what recommendations you would like us as an inquiry to raise with the government or other agencies.

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:**

There are quite a lot of things we can suggest. I agree with Mike about abolishing Section 4 altogether, it is a ridiculous system, and ensuring that people have cash, not plastic, so that they can buy second hand goods and so on. I would like to see more cash for pregnant women and an increased level of assistance in the first year of a child's life. I would like to see dispersal minimised for pregnant women.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** How much more of a level do you think is required for the child's first year of life?

**Dr Jenny Phillimore, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham:** I think you would be looking at least another 25%. Most of us who have a baby start with something. These are women who have nothing, not a single babygro or anything. I would say a minimum of 25%. I would also say don't detain pregnant women, and give more grants to civil society organisations to help destitute asylum seekers. Organisations like the British Red Cross are doing a huge amount of work. If they had a bit more money they could do an awful lot more.

**Hugo Tristram, Development Officer, Refugee Services - British Red Cross:** Yes, I would reiterate the points made. I think we would say the amount needed to meet essential living needs is the same for an asylum seeker or asylum seeker's family as it is for a British Citizen. I do not see why there is any difference between those two. I can see some reasonable differences in the terms of the utility bills, but if there is going to be a difference, it should be clear, rationalised and explained. Apart from those differences, like the utility bill element, there should be complete parity between an asylum seeker and a British national. I do not see any need for there to be a difference. That is what we would argue for. If that is 70% of income support because utility bills takes 30% then fair enough, but it needs to be clear, and it also needs to be sensitive to inflation. The right to work, which would help a lot of people - it would not help all the people because they would not necessarily be able to find work - but it would help. The support should be available until people arrive or are removed or given leave to remain, but there should be an opportunity for people to regularise their status after long periods of time. Also a very practical one is the point I mentioned earlier, there is no sense behind this two tiered system Section 4 and Section 95, especially with families. They should be able to access it all the way through because of the children. That applies equally when the children are born after the termination.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** They are hardly different children. Does anyone have any further supplementary questions? Thank you both very much for your time, we are extremely grateful.

Thank you very much to both of you for coming to talk to us. Jane, you have had experience of Section 95 and Cha you have experience of living on Section 4. It would be helpful if you could start us off by telling us a little about the support you have received and what it was like for you.

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** I arrived in the UK in 2010, I have been placed in two different places for temporary reasons and I didn't have any financial support at that time for about a month or so. Then I was placed in Sunderland as a

permanent placement and this was where I started to receive my weekly cash allowance. I had my card which I had to use at a local post office to collect my weekly cash allowance. According to the standards of UKBA the cash allowance for single mothers and a child should be 96 point something. However, I received less. I received 90.31, because when I arrived in the UK I claimed I had some cash with me and it was £500. This was when the UKBA started to count it out of my weekly allowance. This is what they practised. So my weekly allowance was less than it should be. After the Sunderland placement they moved me four times into different towns.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Where do you live now?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** I live close to Middlesbrough. Every time a move occurs they stopped weekly allowance for about three or four weeks. At that time they provided me with a temporary card for the period of time when I didn't have any support, and they delivered this card to my address. However, this card usually arrives late, a week, a week and a half after, so it means that for this period of time I am actually left with no support, no finances at all, which is really difficult sometimes because I have a child who is six years old. I had to provide everything for him, food, everything that is necessary.

**Baroness Lister:** How do you manage, what do you do when you are left with nothing?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** I just try and use less money, to pay less, to buy less, to go to places where I can get offers, discount.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** During those weeks when you have no money coming in, is there anybody who helps you with that?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** No.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** There are no services, no churches?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** No.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Cha, tell us about Section 4.

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** I claimed asylum in 2009, but I have been in the United Kingdom since 2001. I think I was about seven months pregnant when I went to the British Red Cross, because the people who were supporting me until I got pregnant could not support me any longer because of overcrowding in the house when I had Claire. I finally got a place to stay two weeks before I gave birth to Claire. I used to live in Milton Keynes and I caught a bus which was about seven hours to get to Middlesbrough, before I gave birth, and when I got there I was put in a hostel with about 30 women and about 32 children, and I gave birth to Claire. Immediately when I got there I was given vouchers which lasted me for two weeks which was about £140. Then I had to fill out my maternity grant, and my support came through, but it comes through in vouchers. The shops which I am supposed to buy from are Mothercare, Boots, Sainsbury's, Asda and

Tesco's, which are awfully expensive to start off with, and they are not easily accessible to me. It is really far to get there, and sometimes you have to trade in your tokens to get money so you can catch a bus to get to these places, or catch a taxi back if you have a lot of shopping to do. Fortunately, there are a couple of second hand shops around us. If you don't have cash you can't buy, but that is how I managed to buy a cheap push chair for Claire rather than buying it from Mothercare. The cheapest is £250 going upwards, and obviously I didn't have that kind of money to be able to buy those kind of things for Claire. It is demeaning, it is really hard, because we are in a hostel, at least you get support from the other women, I can change some of my money at the shops that they go to, but it is really hard. Sorry.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Take your time, we will ask another question, we can come back and you can tell us when you are ready to tell us.

**Lord Avebury:** Can I ask as a preliminary question have either of you received explanations as to why it has taken so long to reach a decision on your claims?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** I am from Zimbabwe. My claim failed, but because there is nothing they can do with us, we are in the system, we are on Section 4. I have had to put in a fresh claim, still pending a decision.

**Lord Avebury:** Jane, why is it taking so long to reach a decision on your claim?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** I have been refused by the Home Office and I appealed against their decision in the first tribunal, I have been refused by them. I tried to go higher, and asked permission to go for a higher court. I didn't get that permission. This is where my case stands. Basically, I have been refused but the Home Office cannot make a decision about me and my son, because my son is not a national of any country in the world. The issue of deportation has been raised, I don't know what they are going to do. I claimed asylum against Russia and Israel because I am originally from Russia and have been living in Israel a long time. I got married to a man who was an Israeli national, and I moved to live in Israel and my son was born there but we faced a lot of discrimination and persecution there, that is why I had to leave. I came from Israel arriving in the UK and seeking asylum actually for my son, who cannot obtain any citizenship in this world.

**Lord Avebury:** Do you feel the amount of support you both receive, you and your child, is it enough to cover everything you need in terms of food, education and the chance to play, and in the case of your six year old does he receive free school meals?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** NASS (National Asylum Support Service) support children with free school meals. I know about that but not many people know about that, they are just not provided with this information. The lady I knew, she was an asylum seeker, and she was taking meals for her child to school every day, and I say why are you doing that, ask the school for a form to fill, and she did and she was happy. The trouble is asylum seekers are not provided with guidance and support, where to get information from, where to place the child, where the nearest school is, where the library is,

where the hospital is. In my situation, when they moved me to so many places, I had to observe the environment, find a way how to get to places, what is going on in the new environment, where the post office is, where the library is, where the shops are, and it is quite stressful at times.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** That is quite an important point. So when you are moved by NASS, what information if any do you get, do you literally just get an address?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** My last move, we were quite settled there, for more than a year, my child was in primary school, he was doing about national average, I was happy with that. I gained myself an education at the local college, I am doing GCSE biology there. Suddenly Jomast - who is the housing provider for UKBA - I received a letter from Jomast saying within seven day's time, without any explanation or reason, you must be packed because we are moving you to a new address. It was far from where I lived. I had to change my school, I had to change everything. It was really stressful. I was crying.

**Lord Avebury:** Have either of you tried to access the advice of the Citizen Advice Bureau, who may not always be able to answer questions that you put but normally refer you to other agencies who can.

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** The local authorities do not work with asylum seekers.

**Lord Avebury:** No the Citizen Advice Bureau.

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** They don't work with asylum seekers. They say there is an Immigration officer, your caseworker.

**Lord Avebury:** I do not mean immigration problems, I meant on the other ancillary questions such as finding out where the local post office is, or what agencies to apply to if you want help with problems to do with your child, for example.

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** I don't really know.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** I don't know if you want to answer the question that was asked about the level of support and the impact that has on your ability to buy things for Claire?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** Before Claire was one, we got £80 on the Azure card, and when she turned one, it dropped down to £75. I don't understand what changes when your child turns one, because I think they need even more when they turn one. If anything the finances that we are given, we buy enough food, for food we are okay, but the rest of the things. I like to keep myself busy, I want to empower my child. I want to go to school, but unfortunately I can't go to school because child care costs, I can't afford it. It has to come out of my own pocket. Even if I tried to suggest an arrangement I don't get money to do that. So I am always constantly with Claire. There is nowhere I go I can leave Claire. Because of living in the hostel, at least you get the women

to help you out, but it is stressful too because they also have children. The money is good for food, but Claire is growing up, winter has come, I need a coat for her, I need warm clothing for her. You can't, you are basically juggling balls. One minute you buy the coat, the next minute you are saving up to buy the next thing. It is difficult but you just have to manage. Thank God for some of the second hand shops, thank God for those friends that go to Church, because I go to Church, sometimes they empathise with you, but then again they also have their own commitments, you can't always burden them and ask them to help you.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Nadine, do you want to ask a question about accommodation?

**Nadine Finch, Children's Rights Barrister, Garden Court Chambers:** Yes, you talked a bit about accommodation, but I am not sure that some of the Panel are quite aware. You talked about living in a hostel, how much room do you get in the hostel and what do you do if you have any complaints about the hostel?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** The hostel is hard to live with. We have a single room for a mother and a child, and it is enough to fit a cot and a single bed. There is a microwave, fridge, a drawer, an inbuilt cupboard, and there is a sink inside with a mirror. It is very restrictive. Claire can play for a bit when she wakes up, but by the time ten o'clock comes she will be running along the corridor with the other children. There is a common room that is downstairs but there are thirty of us, so it is small. We share the bathrooms. We share the toilets. I live on a Muslim floor but I am Christian. Basically there is a lot of inter cultures mixing. We cook downstairs. There is a kitchen downstairs. Basically, if you don't have a friend, you are carrying pots through three doors, and you have to carry your child, so it is a health risk at its highest. I have a friend on my floor, so I tend to leave Claire with my friend, so we rotate as and when we cook. We have a washing machine which we share with thirty women and a dryer, so there is always a queue.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** There is one washing machine?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** There are three washing machines and two dryers, still there is always a queue for using the washing machines. We are kept up most of the time because different children sleep at different times and there is a lot of crying within the hostel.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** What do you do for toys?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** I buy toys from the charity shop which is good. If they are not there they are not there.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Presumably you have to trade your vouchers with someone else in the hostel in order to be able to do that?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** To be able to do that. Sometimes I don't buy the toys. Sometimes she goes without, and we go and play at Sure

Start which is once every week, with practitioners and health visitors and midwives just to speak to them.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** Can I just follow that up. Who runs the hostel, and are the thirty people there all asylum seekers?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** Everybody in the hostel is an asylum seeker. The hostel is run by Jomast but they are contracted by G4S who have just been awarded the contract.

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** May I speak about my experiences? My first accommodation was in Sunderland, I didn't share, it was a small tiny flat. There was a little kitchen and a bathroom. I didn't share with anyone. Me and my child had one small room to share. It was everything for us, it was a living room, a dining room, a study room, it was everything, and it was really, really uncomfortable and stressful. I tried to raise issues with Jomast, because I really believe that is wrong, it should not be so stressful to live in the accommodation, but Jomast explained there are standards from the UKBA which say that a single parent and a child under ten years old can share one bedroom flat, so they refused for me to move to another accommodation.

I raised the issue before my health services, and my health visitor brought a letter from Jomast saying she had concerns about a mother and child sharing one room, and after that letter I have been moved from Sunderland to Middlesbrough. No one asked if I wanted to be moved. The decision has been done and I had to follow the decision. Again the flat I am living now is a one bedroom flat. We have a living room, but I share one small bedroom with my child. I am a female and he is a male, a boy, and we have to share one bedroom. I don't think these are the standards that should be applied. At least two different bedrooms should be given. We don't expect any palaces, nothing like that, but I don't think that is human. I decided to go to the local council and ask them if there is a single mother and a child under ten, would you place them in a one bedroom flat accommodation, they were sure about that, and they said no, two bedrooms, it doesn't matter if one person is a child, and at that particular time I felt so miserable really, because inhuman treatment was being applied by UKBA standards, I don't think they are human.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** Just talk a bit about the things you would like to provide for your children, but simply can't because you simply haven't got enough money?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** To start off with, I would rather not be in a hostel, that is my main issue. Sometimes we get sick, and there is not much we can do. Our General Practitioner is really far to get to. I tend not to go to the hospital, I tend to use my common sense. Even when we do tend to go to the GP, they tell me whatever you are doing, continue to do it. It is not really helpful when you are feeling a bit distressed about your child. Sometimes you hope someone will stand up for you and advocate and say something for you, because I can give you so many situations on our floor that are really not nice. The lady my door faces, she is pregnant, and she has an eleven month old baby, and her social worker is telling her that "we don't know where we are going to move you but it may be after you give birth, so prepare that when you have a one

week old baby you may be coming out of the hostel". There are no definite dates for anyone. There is no hard and fast rule. You can complain about something, and the provider will tell you "no we can't do this for you", then you go downstairs the next day, and complain about the same thing, and then you are given it.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** You are pushed around.

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** You are pushed around, at least if you keep quiet, it is okay. It is not fair, it is just not fair. There are so many things you don't get to know. You asked about the CAB, can the CAB help us. They don't know. So when you go there it is hopeless, when you are frustrated about something, and you are hoping they have that information, and can advise the appropriate agencies, but they don't know. The hostel has been there for two years, and it is okay. Nothing has been done, because there is no voice, no one is complaining in the hostel, it is okay to leave the women there until they get their papers, that is when they will be moved out. But it is not fair. It is not fair that we have no voice, that we have no one that stands up for us. I think maybe they put people in Middlesbrough hoping we can interact with each other, and tell each other this is what is available. But sometimes people come from Pakistan, who can't speak English, sometimes Chinese people, because we live with Chinese people, sometimes they can't speak English so they are not aware of the options available to them.

Sometimes because of the stigma that has been put on asylum seekers, it is so hard to say I have a problem and I need help, because it is wrong. You should be grateful that you have a roof over your head, you should be grateful you are being given £75 to get by, but it is not fair. It is honestly not fair. Because I have lived on the other spectrum where I have been able to go to work, I feel I want to go to work, I feel I need to provide more for my daughter if I go to work, allow me to work, and not be in this asylum process for three years. For three years, it is difficult. I am ashamed to be the mother of my child and not be able to choose where my child can go to for education, because I think they should be able to go to nursery school, I think we should be able to say, I am going to work, bye, there are capable people to take care of you, and I am making a living. I want to contribute to society, I want to pay my taxes. I want to change my world. We are in that room, and it is stifling. Sometimes I get depressed and from the culture I come from, I can't be depressed. It is embarrassing for me to be depressed, to say I can't do this, I am suffering. It is degrading, it is inhuman, it is horrible.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** Thank you and apologies for the way in which you are being treated, and we are looking to see if we can change some of that. Jane, you mentioned relationships with schools. How is your son, and how have you found the schools have treated him?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** It is not easy for him to change schools all the time, meeting new friends.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** How many schools has he had?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** Four.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** So he has had four schools in two years?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** There is another issue. When we are moved, I have to place my child in another school, sometimes it takes time.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** So how much time has he spent out of school?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** If there is a place in the school they will take him quickly, but if there is no place. For example when I moved from Sunderland to Middlesbrough, it was right at the beginning of September, everything was okay in Sunderland, we were about to start a school in Sunderland, but then we were moved to Middlesbrough, it was the beginning of the school year, all the schools were booked. So I was waiting about two months to get a placement, and I couldn't get a placement at the nearest school, I got a placement at the far school, and we had to travel, to walk 25/30 minutes just to get to the school, and back. So every day I spent about two hours walking to cover my son's educational needs.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Presumably you had to apply to get your son into school? Did anyone do anything for you to help with that process?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** There was help in Sunderland, there was help in Middlesbrough, however, there wasn't help in other places. Just my recent move about two weeks ago. Silence. No one is in touch with me. I know nothing about what is going on with the money, what is going on with the education, just silence. It is really my initiative to study to find out what is the name of the new school, to go there to speak to the Head Teacher. No one would give me information.

**John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds:** Has your son got into a new school now? Was the Head Teacher helpful?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** He is at the new school now. His Head Teacher was helpful. When we moved there, there was a school trip, all the children were going somewhere, and I had to contribute £7, and I approached the Head teacher and said I am an asylum seeker I don't have money. She said that is fine. I said I don't want my child to be different, if I can't provide, he will stay off school that particular day. At the previous place where I lived he was actually bullied at school. We had some issues there. Maybe he looked different, dressed differently, had an accent when he speaks. He was bullied there. I was shocked, he was five. I couldn't imagine I would face this issue when my child was five years old, and I had to raise the issue before the Head Teacher.

**Baroness Lister :** You have both talked about how stressful your situations have been, and Cha you have said you have felt depressed at times, and that is hardly surprising. Could you both say a bit how you feel your experiences have affected your health, and how, both your mental and physical health?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** You do feel depressed but thank God I have Claire. I can't be depressed, I can't be sad because she looks up to me. That is what motivates me. When I wake up in the morning I have to be pleasant. I am forced to try and do better for her. It doesn't help sometimes we go to shops. Sorry I am deviating, but I need to show you. We have the Azure card. Sometimes the shop assistants do not know what to do with the card, so you are standing there in embarrassment, thinking oh my God maybe there is not enough money on the card, oh my God they are going to turn me away and I need this. It is depressing. It is embarrassing. Each time you say this is the asylum seekers card, you need to swipe it, then I can sign. It is degrading. I tend to try and travel so I am not in the hostel, but you are not allowed to be away from your accommodation for more than fourteen days in six months. I have been to court because they want to evict me from the property because I have been travelling so much. I am a first time mum, sometimes I don't think I am doing the best for my daughter, so maybe I go around people with children, so they can support me and show me the right way because I am so far away from my own family which is down south. Because I have been removed and taken six hours away, no one comes to see me. I have to travel down to see them. You are told you cannot be away for so long. Because they can't come and see you they put money in your account. Asylum seekers are not allowed to have an account. I have an account because I was an asylum seeker before - but when I get that money put in my account, my money is deducted. If £20 is put in, £20 is taken out, so I am getting £55 on my support. So how does that work? What do we do? It is depressing, it is hard, it is difficult.

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** There is not much support. In my first winter in the UK I was quite poorly, stress and everything, and the school was far and I had to travel far every day. That is why I struggled, physically and emotionally I struggled, but I had to do it because I had a child. Asylum seeker is a label. We are labelled. We don't speak proper English, we are taking money from the Government. There is not much support, it is really stressful. I would like to raise an issue, Jomast, the housing provider. I have raised an issue about the size of accommodation which I think is inappropriate, also how they treat the people living in the accommodation. They are real people living in houses. They obviously have to do some repairs, but their practice is that they can come at any time of the day without even knocking at the door. They have got their keys. They just enter the property just like that. I had a situation, I was having a shower in the bathroom, and a male came into my property. I was scared. I ran quickly to my bedroom and locked myself in and I was shaking. There was another situation when my child was downstairs drawing at the table and I was upstairs changing my clothes, and my child quickly ran upstairs calling me Mummy, Mummy, I thought something had happened to my child. I came downstairs and there was a male person standing in my living room. He didn't have any uniform. I asked who are you and what are you doing here. He said I am from Jomast and I forgot my ladder in the backyard. Without any notice he went to get the ladder. I said I didn't hear you knock. He just left. They don't even speak to us properly. They just want to do what they have to do in that accommodation but they absolutely ignore the people who live there. I myself faced it so many times. I can speak for other people as well and especially it is about females.

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** Generally there are two women who staff the hostel. I have had many occasions when males have had a peek, they

have looked at me in the bathroom. Wherever we live in, you knock, you write a letter to inform the person you are coming to do something in their room. They barge in. There is no respect. When you raise the issue how can you do this, they get upset, they walk out, they tell you they are no longer doing the work and they leave, but who does that?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support;** I submitted an official report complaining about that situation, but what they said is we can't send letters to all our clients, we do not have the facilities, we don't have time for that, but we will ring you before we come. They did not fulfil that promise, and that is absolutely disgusting practice from Jomast.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Matthew wants to ask you a question about recommendations, it sounds as if that might be one of them. Do you want to finish off with our last question?

**Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society:** Thank you both very much for coming and having the courage and openness in doing so. You have told us some things not just about your own dignity but also human rights as well, very brave of you. We are going to make some recommendations, and are there some things you would like us to make in our recommendations to the Government?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** There are some women who can't speak English. Let there be a manual. Obviously people come from different places, but let there be a manual, where it is not one thing for one person, and different for the other person, and can it just be fair. Obviously when you are facing persecution it is not easy. It is not easy for me. I kept quiet for a long time about what was going on with my own asylum claim, I only had the courage in 2009 to claim because of the stigma, because of all of this, and there are so many people out there who are too scared to access the things that are available to them, because there is a stigma around asylum seekers. We are thought to be the immigrants who want to come and take from people. Most of us want to work, most of us want to provide for ourselves. Many people come from a work ethic family, where what you have is what you have worked for. Even if we are not allowed to work, at least give us avenues where we can contribute or volunteer. So many aspects we want to give. I personally want to give. I am grateful for being here. I am grateful for the things I have been given, but I also want to give back. Can there be something put in place for us to be able to give?

**Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society:** So your clear recommendation would be you should be able to work if you want to?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** Yes please.

**Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society:** And some very clear information so people can understand the system?

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** Yes.

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** My big issue is with the housing provider, the accommodation, their attitudes and their treatment of the service users. It should not be as it is now. It should be reviewed, and reconsidered, the size of the accommodation, how they provide their accommodation, which areas. Families with children should not be constantly moved around different places, cities and towns. It shouldn't happen. It extremely affects the education process, and mental health really. Housing issues: provide clear information where to get support, where are the nearest facilities, where the schools are, how to fill in forms. Some people don't speak English and they don't know.

**Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society:** Stability, and the right to have a stable education for your child?

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** Yes. The child experiences everything that I experience. What I go through, he goes through. If I am sad, if I am happy, he sees that, he understands something is going wrong. So housing provider, clear information to the service users where to get information. Amount of money is an issue too because we are really struggling. We cannot support our children with activities and stuff like that. It is only the basics which we can provide to our children. We feel really deprived.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Cha, you are nodding at that, I just wanted to make sure the Reporter picked that up.

**Cha, a mother with experience of living on Section 4 support:** Yes, in the summertime it was hot, I couldn't manage to go the baths to take Claire swimming, the recreational facilities are not accessible for us because we cannot afford to pay for many things. Sure Start have activities but sometime you have to pay for the odd popcorn, the candyfloss, the little things that put a smile on a child's face, the balloons.

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** Every penny has a value, it's the truth.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** I just want to say a huge thank you to both of you. It was very powerful, very useful. We are really grateful to you. It is a tough thing to come and tell your story, and expect you to go through that in front of everyone, but it certainly has made an impact on all of us and we are grateful to you for taking the time.

**Jane, a mother with experience of living on Section 95 support:** I have also prepared a written report which I will submit to The Children's Society, and I have highlighted all the problems and tried to put all the information into the text.

**Sarah Teather, MP, Chair:** Excellent, thank you. Thank you everybody. The next session is next week.

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