

## Briefing

# Inquiry into asylum support for children and young people

### Introduction

The inquiry into asylum support<sup>1</sup> will be conducted by a panel of MPs, peers and other experts, supported by The Children's Society, to examine whether the current support system provided by the Home Office for those seeking protection in the UK meets the needs of children, young people and families.

The panel will engage with relevant stakeholders to build a clearer picture of what support is provided for children, whether this system promotes their welfare and best interests, and where there are gaps to propose solutions and effective interventions. The panel will be led by Sarah Teather MP and made up of eight members consisting of MPs, peers and a children's rights expert.

The inquiry will explore and assess whether the current support system meets the needs of children, by looking at a range of issues at both the national and local level.

Issues that will be explored in more detail include:

1. Income poverty and its effects on children's development, well-being and life chances
2. Living on asylum support and how this affects children, young people and families
3. Special needs, disability, early years, health and education
4. The process itself: delays, dispersal and the Azure payment card

Given that most families fleeing persecution, war and violence arrive in the UK destitute, are not allowed to work or claim mainstream benefits, the support system is their only means of survival. Many children will grow up in this way while they are in the asylum process.

### Why is this inquiry necessary?

Since the implementation of the statutory duty on the Home Secretary in 2009 to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within its immigration, asylum and nationality functions, there has been no formal review of the

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<sup>1</sup> This generally refers to the subsistence and accommodation provided to those seeking asylum in the UK, or those who have been refused asylum, who are destitute – previously known as 'NASS' – National Asylum Support Service. The legal framework for asylum support is set out in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/support>

current asylum support system or assessment of whether the current approach meets this duty with respect to children.<sup>2</sup>

Recently parliamentary questions<sup>3</sup> and research on cuts to asylum support rates<sup>4</sup> have drawn attention to the fact that asylum support has fallen below intended levels. The Children's Society's analysis<sup>5</sup> earlier this year showed that children in asylum seeking families, where parents are not allowed to work, receive significantly less than children on mainstream benefits and in some cases children and families receive half of what those on income support get.

This inquiry will examine the impact on children of growing up in the asylum support system, looking at children's health, education and development, and will do so through children's eyes, exploring a range of perspectives and emerging evidence.

The panel will explore these issues, to assess whether the current levels are adequate to ensure that children's welfare is promoted in line with the government's obligations under domestic and international legislation as well as maintaining a fair, just, effective asylum system.

### **What would the inquiry aim to achieve?**

The inquiry will collate evidence received through an open call for written submissions inviting views from a range of perspectives as well as oral evidence, in order to develop a clear set of practical recommendations for policy makers to address any issues for children and families uncovered by the inquiry. The panel will look to publish and launch a report in early 2013 to present the findings and recommendations to ministers responsible for immigration and child poverty.

### **Who is on the panel?**

- Sarah Teather MP (Chair)
- Caroline Dinenage MP
- Neil Carmichael MP
- Virendra Sharma MP
- Nic Dakin MP
- Baroness Ruth Lister
- Lord Eric Avebury
- Bishop John Packer of Ripon and Leeds
- Nadine Finch, Children's Rights Barrister, Garden Court Chambers
- Matthew Reed, Chief Executive, The Children's Society

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<sup>2</sup> See the Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 statutory guidance: Every Child Matters - Change for Children (November 2009): <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/legislation/bci-act1/change-forchildren.pdf?view=Binary>

<sup>3</sup> Oral questions on asylum seekers and children, House of Lords. 23 May 2012 : Column 785:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldhansrd/text/120523-0001.htm#12052370000484>

<sup>4</sup> Refugee Action (2010) Briefing: Asylum Support Cuts [http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/campaigns/asylum-support/documents/AsylumSupport\\_RefugeeActionFeb2010.pdf](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/campaigns/asylum-support/documents/AsylumSupport_RefugeeActionFeb2010.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The Children's Society (April 2012) Briefing - Highlighting the gap between asylum support and mainstream benefits

[http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/a\\_briefing\\_from\\_the\\_childrens\\_society\\_on\\_asylum\\_support.pdf](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/a_briefing_from_the_childrens_society_on_asylum_support.pdf)

## Who would the panel hear from?

As part of this inquiry we have launched an open call for written evidence and will be holding oral evidence sessions to hear from government, academics, expert witnesses, local authorities' children's services, voluntary organisations working with children on asylum support, other interested organisations and young people and families who have direct experience of living on asylum support.

## Inquiry timelines

Date	Activity
30 October 2012	Inquiry opens with call for evidence
20 and 27 November 2012	Oral evidence sessions
7 December 2012	Deadline for written evidence
End of January 2013	Report published

## Call for Evidence

The Inquiry into Asylum Support for Children and Young People will consider written evidence and oversee the oral evidence sessions. Written and oral evidence will inform the final report. The final report and its recommendations will be submitted to the ministers responsible for immigration and child poverty, for their consideration and response.

## For young people and families

The panel would like to hear from young people and families who have direct experience of living on asylum support.

1. How do you feel about your life in the UK? How do you feel about the support you get from the Home Office?
2. Do you get cash support from the Home Office or the Azure payment card?
3. How long have you lived on this support? How easy was it to access it?
4. Have you had any period without any financial support?
5. How do you feel about the amount of support you receive from the Home Office? Please tell us if you can buy enough healthy food, clothes and toiletries for you and your children. Please tell us if there are ever things you can't buy that you need.
6. Is the support from the Home Office enough for you to eat? How many times per day do you eat? Do you or your children ever go hungry?
7. Where do you live? Have you lived in more than one place? If so, how did it feel to be moved?
8. Is it clean, warm and safe for you and your children?
9. Do you think your children have the things they want and need or are there items that you are unable to buy for them?
10. *For families with small children* - Are there any extra difficulties you find providing for your family if you have small children? E.g. buying prams, baby formula, nappies and bottles.
11. *For single parents* - Are there any difficulties providing for your children being a single parent, e.g. when going to report, taking children to school?

12. Do you feel the support helps your children do well in education? Does it allow you to buy the things you need for your children's education? E.g. books, stationary, uniforms, school lunch, school trips etc.
13. Are your children able to save any money each week or month in a bank or at home?
14. Can you and your children go out and play, have a social life, see friends and family, integrate into the community?
15. Can you do cultural activities like visit museums, the cinema or concerts?
16. Can you go to the mosque, church, temple etc?
17. Do you or your children have any disabilities? Does your current situation impact on your ability to cope with these disabilities? Are there any things you need that you can't afford to buy?
18. Has your physical or mental health got worse since you came to the UK? If so, why do you think this is?
19. For families using the Azure card What do you think about the Azure card? How does using the Azure card make you feel? Have you or your children experienced any problems because of the Azure card? Are there any things you or your children need that you can't buy because you have an Azure card instead of cash?
20. Do you receive any money or help from anywhere else to help you E.g. borrow from friends, your church, mosque, a charity?
21. Is there anything else that you would like to tell the panel?

### **For organisations and practitioners**

Please provide evidence on the following topics from the perspective of your organisation. Or if you are an individual please provide details of the type of professional you are. In addition, the panel would welcome details of any relevant research or information from your organisation that you would be willing to share with the Inquiry.

1. Is there any evidence of the effects of income poverty on children's development, well-being and their life chances? If so, what are the effects?
2. The government's stated objective for the asylum support system is that it provides for the 'essential living needs' of those who would otherwise be destitute. In your view is this currently the case and please explain your reasoning with references to any evidence or examples.
3. Are the current levels of support provided to asylum seeking children and families adequate in meeting the needs of children and young people? Please explain your reasoning.
4. Is the accommodation provided to asylum-seeking families effective in keeping children safe and promoting their welfare?
5. Does the current asylum support system enable children in asylum-seeking families to have a standard of living adequate for a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development? Please explain your reasoning.
6. Does the current system have any impact on children's long term outcomes and opportunities in the future?

7. How does the current support system affect families where there is a child or parent with a disability?
8. Are there any other circumstances where children may be particularly adversely affected by the levels of asylum support?
9. What is the impact on children and parents of the fact that parents are not allowed to work?
10. Are there any concerns about the current administration of the asylum support system with relation to children?
11. How often do you see families with no financial support whatsoever?
12. Are there any concerns about the use of the Azure payment card in relation to children?
13. Do you think there are any adverse effects of increasing asylum support levels for children and families? Would greater levels of support attract greater numbers of asylum seekers or migrants?

### **Written evidence**

The deadline for submitting evidence is **7 December 2012**. There is no maximum word count, and previously published evidence may be submitted. Submissions from persons and organisations will be published unless specifically requested. Where a person or organisation has stated that they wish for their written evidence to be considered anonymously, it will be published under the title anonymous.

### **Email**

You can email your evidence to [Nadine.Ibbetson@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:Nadine.Ibbetson@childrenssociety.org.uk)

### **Post**

You can send a hard copy of your evidence to: Nadine Ibbetson, Policy Team, The Children's Society, Edward Rudolf House, Margery Street, WC1X 0JL

### **Oral evidence**

The panel is planning to hold oral sessions on **20 and 27 November 2012** at the House of Commons. Please contact Nadine Ibbetson on 020 7841 4400 or [Nadine.Ibbetson@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:Nadine.Ibbetson@childrenssociety.org.uk) as soon as possible if you or a representative from your organisation would like to give oral evidence to the inquiry.

### **Any questions?**

This inquiry is supported by The Children's Society, who provides administrative and organisational support. For updates on the progress of the inquiry please visit <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work>.

For questions or to add your name to the mailing list please contact Nadine Ibbetson at [Nadine.Ibbetson@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:Nadine.Ibbetson@childrenssociety.org.uk) or on 0207 841 4000 (ext 3016).