**Evidence gathering on the effects of low asylum support rates**

A number of agencies are gathering evidence to challenge the Home Office’s assessment of adequate asylum support rates and demonstrate the impact of living on asylum support. This evidence will be used in briefings for MPs and Lords in order to raise the profile of the issue in Parliament, and to feed into a submission to the 2018 review of support levels where we will call for an increase in rates.

**Overview**

In February 2018 the Government increased the level of asylum support (Section 95) to £37.75. This was first time it was raised since 2015. The Home Office uses a methodology which was developed in 2014 to determine what level of support is required to adequately cover the essential living needs of ‘average able bodied asylum seekers.’ The 2017 report on the review states ‘Our assessment of meeting some needs (those related to clothes, travel and communication) is based on our own market research… Our assessment of meeting needs related to food, toiletries, non-prescription medicines and household cleaning items is also in part based on our own research, but, as was the case in previous years we have used as a primary source data collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) about expenditure by the lowest 10% income group among the UK population on these items.’[[1]](#footnote-1)

Using this methodology this is the breakdown of the weekly support currently offered.

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| **Categories of “need”** | **Amount per week** |
| Food and non-alcoholic drinks | £23.75 |
| Toiletries | £1.00 |
| Healthcare | £0.92 |
| Household cleaning items | £0.92 |
| Clothing | £2.80 |
| Travel | £4.30 |
| Communications | £3.00 |
| **Total** | **£37.75** |

In this current report there are a number of assumptions regarding supplementary support asylum seekers can obtain from other sources such as children’s schools, local authorities and the NHS which we would like to challenge in terms of the availability and accessibility of this support. There are other assumptions made about the current dispersal system that we believe are not reflective of the realities faced by most asylum-seekers, such as that ‘asylum-seekers are invariably accommodated in urban centres.’

More generally, we are also looking for evidence of the general impact of living on low levels of support on an individual’s health and wellbeing.

**Please note** this is Section 95 support not Section 4. Section 4 support is reviewed on a more ad hoc basis as it is considered to be a more temporary type of support.

**What evidence are we looking for?**

Below is a table of some of the statements from the review which we would like to gather evidence on to ascertain whether they accurately reflect the lives of those living on asylum support. While these are categories that we are keen to explore, please note that any general case studies you have of individuals living on asylum support will be valuable and can likely provide evidence to refute a number of Home Office assumptions. So please do share whatever information you can.

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| **What the Home Office states…** | **Evidence we want to gather…** |
| **Travel**  ‘Asylum seekers are invariably accommodated in urban areas’ | Examples of individuals on asylum support who do not live in urban areas?  If so how far away are essential services such as large supermarkets and GPs from them (more than 3 miles)?  What religious establishments are there in the vicinity?  Do they struggle to afford to pay for travel? |
| **Travel**  ‘We now assess that the sum of £4.30 is generally needed to pay for the cost of a return bus journey’  All travel to essential appointments are covered so only £4.30 is required per week. | How much is a return bus fare in your area?  Examples of individuals who need to travel on public transport more than one day per week, where travel costs are not provided. |
| **Travel**  ‘If a child is entitled to free school meals…they will generally be able to get free schools transport’ | Examples of where children cannot access free school transport. Where children can, do family members need to accompany them? How much does that cost? |
| **Food**  ‘We assess that around £23.75 per week is sufficient to cover the average weekly dietary needs of and adult asylum seekers….is also sufficient to cover the needs of a dependent child’  ‘’school meals are available to children of asylum seekers’ | Examples of how this may not be adequate to cover dietary needs.  Challenges in bulk buying food as expected by the HO: i.e. can weekly food supplies be carried home in one trip, is there room to store food supplies in shared houses, space in freezers, etc?  Are all families aware they can claim free school meals?  Do families feel there is an impact on their expenditure in school holidays? |
| **What the Home Office states…** | **Evidence we want to gather…** |
| **Communication**  There are three options for mobile phone deals:   * 2 year contracts * SIM only 1 month deals   These cost between £5 - £7 per month   * Or pay as you go | Can individuals access phone contracts?  What types of phone deals do individuals use?  Do they exceed the £3 per week allowance?  Can they afford to communicate with family at home? |
| **Medicines**  ‘many medicines for minor ailments can be obtained without prescription from a wide range of participating chemists…under the “NHS Minor Ailments Scheme”’ | Is there a minor ailments scheme in your area?  If so how well is it promoted? Do individuals use it? |
| **Clothing**  ‘A basic wardrobe of three sets of clothing is sufficient… for the maintenance of health, decency and cleanliness… we consider that £2.30 per week is sufficient to cover the clothing and footwear needs of a single asylum seeker’ | Challenges in ensuring seasonally appropriate clothing given only three sets of clothing allowed for the whole year.  Examples of how individuals bought clothes when they first arrived in the country and had little or no clothes.  Examples of how long individuals must put aside money to be able to buy more expensive items like coats or shoes |
| **School Uniforms**  **‘**On most cases if a child is entitled to free school meals… it is likely that the child will be entitled to apply for these grants’  Basic school uniforms can be bought in Tesco, Asda, Matalan or Primark | Examples of families applying for this grant. Are these grants available in your area?  Examples of issues faced by families buying the appropriate school uniforms for their children and clothing them in general. |
| **Writing materials for education of children**  ‘A 300 sheet A4 refill pad, and six ball point pens, can be bought for £2’  It seems reasonable for all children who can write to make use of such pads and pens, with larger families able to split and share the resource. The very young may prefer the slate and chalk option available at £2.’ | Examples of education needs of children that require more than what is outlined here |
| **What the Home Office states…** | **Evidence we want to gather…** |
| **Nappies and Formula milk**  Own brand nappies cost between £4.20 per week for 0-2 week olds to £3.08 for 18-24 month olds  Formula milk £5.80 per week for 0-2 week old, up to 11.27 per week for a 5-6 moth old then reduced to £6.77 up to 18-24 month old | Are parents able to provide these essentials at this price? Some mothers such as those living with HIV cannot breast feed so will be fully reliant of formula milk.  Breast feeding mothers need to eat a balanced and healthy diet to produce milk, is this possible on these support levels?  Please note parents can apply for extra payments of £5 for babies under 1 and £3 for children aged 1-3 years from the Home Office, so these must be taken into consideration |

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| **Other evidence**   * We are also looking for evidence/ case studies of the impact of living on low support rates on **physical and mental health** of asylum-seekers - where possible making explicit the link between deterioration in health and subsisting on low support rates. * The impact on **pregnant women.** They can apply for extra weekly payments of £3 but is this an adequate level of support to cater for the specific their needs. * The impact on **child development**, this can be either nutritionally, socially or educationally. E.g. integration into school life and the activities involved in this. * Evidence of how individuals **supplement their support**. E.g. accessing food banks and charities providing clothing. * **Exceptional payments** - for any extra essential need which is not covered by the weekly allowance an application can be made to the Home Office for exceptional payments under **Section 96 (2)**. Therefore we want to gather evidence of applications you have made and whether they were refused or accepted. |

1. [Report on the Review of cash allowance paid to asylum seekers: 2017](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673545/Report_on_review_of_cash_allowance_paid_to_asylum_seekers_-_2017_-_final.._.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)