

Asylum Support Partnership



Rt Hon **Alan Johnson MP**
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Dear Alan,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Asylum Support Partnership to raise our concerns about the UK Border Agency's recently announced changes to support rates for asylum seekers in 2009/10. We seek your intervention to revise this announcement and adjust all asylum support rates in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as a matter of urgency.

The Asylum Support Partnership ('the Partnership') consists of five agencies: North of England Refugee Service, Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Scottish Refugee Council and Welsh Refugee Council. These agencies are funded by the UK Border Agency to provide advice and support services to asylum seekers across the UK. The primary function of these services is enabling asylum seekers to apply to the UKBA for asylum support payments and accommodation, and resolve any issues arising in respect of their support.

On 6 July 2009, the UKBA wrote to the National Asylum Stakeholder Forum advising of changes to the asylum support rates. These include the intention to freeze support rates for single adults over 25, lone parents and people who are appeal rights exhausted including children, and the introduction of a unified single adult rate which will cease to be linked to the CPI from October 2009. We are extremely concerned about these changes which reduce the essential support provided to some of the most vulnerable members of UK society.

People seeking asylum in the UK have fled persecution to seek safety and protection. While in the UK they are forced to depend on State support as the vast majority are not permitted to work to support themselves. Asylum seekers who are destitute currently receive only 70% of income support (which your government sets at the rate deemed to be the minimum someone needs to live on) and we are disappointed that the Government is now proposing to cut this even further.

Asylum seekers, many of whom are torture and trauma survivors, require support so that they can engage with the asylum system. Asylum support is currently provided at subsistence levels as it is intended as a short term measure while people wait for their case to be resolved. Cutting it will

only harm asylum seekers and will limit their ability to participate in the asylum process as they struggle to meet their daily needs.

We are very concerned about the likely impact that the proposed support rate changes will have upon single parents, children and single adults. The Asylum Support Partnership agencies see the impact every day of the UK asylum support regime as asylum seekers present at our offices struggling to meet their essential needs and rely on charity to supplement already inadequate subsistence payments.

The proposed changes will result in:

- A single parent with one child awaiting the outcome of their application receiving only £92.97 per week. This is £2.19 less than they would receive if the rate followed the CPI increase.
- A single parent asylum seeking family whose claim has been refused but who is unable to leave the UK through no fault of their own will continue to receive only £70 per week in supermarket vouchers, a support rate which has not increased since this support regime, known as Section 4, was implemented five years ago.
- A single adult asylum seeker will receive £35.13 per week, regardless of age as opposed to £33.39 for a single person aged at least 18 but under 25 and £42.16 for a single person aged 25 or over.

Due to inflationary increases in the cost of food and essential items, asylum seekers now face an even greater struggle to feed themselves and their children. Adults and children on Section 4 support and single adults on Section 95 support will effectively be living on £5 per day. This will buy little more than a loaf of bread, a carton of milk and some pieces of fresh fruit, with barely enough left over to pay for a bus fare from the supermarket, a phone call to a legal representative or a bar of soap. This will undermine asylum seekers' ability to focus on their asylum claim as they struggle to feed, clothe and care for themselves and their family.

These changes have been implemented without external consultation or due consideration for the impact they will have upon asylum seekers, local communities or charities and faith groups. Members of the National Asylum Stakeholder Forum raised many of these concerns with the UKBA when we met on 22 July. However, we are concerned that the UKBA continues to view the decision to cut support rates as an administrative process with little regard for the consequences for individuals, the UK community and the asylum system as whole.

We urge you to reconsider these proposed cuts as a matter of urgency, and we offer our assistance in developing an asylum support system that is humane, effective and focused on the needs of those it supports. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and look forward to your response to our concerns.

Yours sincerely

Donna Covey
Chief Executive Refugee Council
Chair of the Asylum Support Partnership

CC: Sandy Buchan, Mike Lewis, John Wilkes, Daoud Zaaroura