

RESPOND

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Reception Policies, Practices and Responses

UK Country Report

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AIA 1996	Asylum and Immigration Act 1996
ASR 2000	Asylum Support Regulations 2000
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
HAC	Home Affairs Committee
IAA 1999	Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
ICIBI	Independent Chief Inspector for Borders and Immigration
NASS	National Asylum Support System
NAO	National Audit Office

About the project

RESPOND is a Horizon 2020 project which aims at studying the multilevel governance of migration in Europe and beyond. The consortium is formed of **14 partners from 11 source, transit and destination countries and is coordinated by Uppsala University in Sweden.** The main aim of this Europe-wide project is to provide an **in-depth understanding of the governance of recent mass migration** at macro, meso and micro levels through cross-country comparative research and to critically analyse governance practices with the aim of enhancing the migration governance capacity and policy coherence of the EU, its member states and third countries.

RESPOND will study migration governance through a narrative which is constructed along five thematic fields: (1) Border management and security, (2) Refugee protection regimes, (3) Reception policies, (4) Integration policies, and (5) Conflicting Europeanization. Each thematic field is reflecting a juncture in the migration journey of refugees and designed to provide a holistic view of policies, their impacts and responses given by affected actors within.

In order to better focus on these themes, we divided our research question into work packages (WPs). The present report is concerned with the findings related to WP4, which focuses specifically on **reception policies, practices and humanitarian responses to the current refugee crisis**. Despite efforts to achieve harmonization (especially promoted by the 2016 CEAS and by the ENP), relevant differences exist in this field in the countries that are the object of research (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Sweden, UK, Turkey and Lebanon). WP4 will map the policies and practices of reception and humanitarian responses of the afore-mentioned countries and migrants' perceptions, actions and reactions to policies and practices. The main objectives of WP4 are as follows:

- to develop a mapping of policies and practices of reception in the countries being researched;
- to develop a typology of these policies, practices and responses
- to assess the coherence of these policies and practices with respect to international and EU standard
- to study migrants' perceptions, actions and reactions to policies and practices
- to provide basic information in the area of reception for the development of all subsequent WPs.

The last point will be achieved through an additional comparative report that will be based on the data from individual country reports.

Executive summary

The current report provides an overview of the UK legal and policy frameworks and policies on reception. Further, it maps related to the implementation of reception policies, as well as the actors involved and relations among them. Since the early 1990s, asylum seekers have been increasingly separated from mainstream systems of welfare provision and excluded from the labour market. The 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act, the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act, the **1999 Immigration and Asylum Act** and the **2002 Immigration and Asylum Act** were crucial milestones in this process. The UK has transposed only the first generation reception directive 2003/9/EC laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, but not 2013/33/EU *of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection*.

The report draws on interviews with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants with no legal status such as refused asylum seekers who all had experience of the UK reception system, and stakeholders from NGOs and local authorities who are involved in the implementation of policies. Based on their experiences and perspectives, supplemented by the analysis of legal and policy documents, reports by official institutions and NGOs and academic research, the key findings of the report are:

- Reception arrangements in the UK are highly complex in terms of legal responsibilities and the actors involved in delivering them. Some aspects of reception – income support, accommodation, access to the labour market- are reserved, i.e. the responsibility of the central government, while others – education, social care and healthcare – are devolved i.e. the responsibility of regional authorities.
- The implementation of reception policies in the UK is also characterised by a high level of control by central government, the privatisation of reception services such as housing and the provision of information and support and the erosion of the implementing and supervisory roles of local authorities.
- Housing provision by for-profit actors through the Compass contracts has been characterised by significant failures in terms of the provision and quality standards of accommodation. It has also created significant tension between the different actors involved in and affected by the implementation of accommodation policies. In contrast, housing provision through local authorities for resettled refugees, while not devoid of problems, appears to have resulted in better cooperation between the Home Office and local authorities
- The bar on the employment of asylum seekers as well as of people with no legal status, in tandem with the low level of income benefits, result in widespread destitution. The impact on people is acute: depression, re-traumatisation, and social isolation were mentioned by both interviewed migrants and key stakeholders.
- The devolution of policy areas results in significant differences in the entitlements of asylum seekers and access to key services across the UK. Hence access to ESOL classes, healthcare and destitution support provided by local authorities can vary significantly depending on the area of dispersal. This accentuates the stratification of rights and entitlements which has characterised the asylum system in the UK.

- Given the erosion of reception services and support for asylum seekers as a result of strategies of deterrence, exclusion and marketization, third sector organisations 'fill in the gaps' and customarily provide reception and support services in the failure of the state to do so.
- The UK reception system is more oriented towards migration control rather than providing for the needs of asylum seekers and ensuring that they enjoy essential rights in line with domestic, international and European law.

1. Introduction

For the purposes of this report, the starting point of conceptualising ‘reception’ is Directive 2013/33/EU, which refers to *material conditions* of reception including “*housing, food and clothing* provided in kind, or as *financial allowances* or in vouchers, or a combination of the three, and a daily expenses allowance” (Art. 2 (g)), in addition to access to education, healthcare and employment. In the UK context, the provision of housing and income support is referred to as ‘asylum support’ (Home Office 2019a). Asylum support is provided in a parallel system outside the mainstream welfare state, while access to healthcare and education asylum seekers and migrants with no legal status is largely provided within mainstream systems, but is subject to several restrictions based on legal status. Similar restrictions operate in relation to access to the labour market. It should be noted that the UK has transposed reception directive 2003/9/EC but not directive 2013/33/EU.

The structure of the current reception system is rooted in political and policy developments in the 1990s. Successive Conservative and Labour governments responded to the increase of people seeking asylum in the UK and perceived threats to social cohesion rooted in the racial legacies of the empire by attempting to restrict entry to the UK (Bloch and Schuster 2005; Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Mayblin and James 2019). While labour migration was seen, especially by Labour administrations, as desirable, unauthorised arrivals and asylum seeking in particular became the focus of increasingly restrictive and illiberal policies (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Costello 2019). In parallel, the restructuring of the welfare state under processes of globalisation, engendering greater labour mobility, and neoliberal governance, privileging the market as the main mechanism for providing services, had implications for the access of non-citizens to welfare (Darling 2016a; Morris 2010; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2019). Welfare provision was privatised, while entitlement was increasingly associated with narratives of individual responsibility and fulfilling social obligations, excluding both citizens and non-citizens who were deemed as not contributing to the welfare state (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Morris 2010). In public debates, citizenship and belonging were constructed as the crucial criteria for being entitled to welfare (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Mayblin 2016a). While welfare entitlement was extended to certain categories of migrants such as those with settled status and EU citizens, asylum seekers and people with no legal status were designated as ‘undeserving’, constructed as a ‘burden’, maintaining and reinforcing the highly stratified access to social and welfare rights (Morris 2010; Sales 2002).

In this context, the provision of welfare to asylum seekers became interlinked with processes of bordering and migration control (Mayblin 2016a; Morris 2010). Access to welfare benefits was constructed as a ‘pull’ factor even though this has been repeatedly refuted by research, and limiting such benefits was seen as a policy of deterrence. Surrounding discourses of abuse of the welfare state by ‘bogus’ asylum seekers legitimated and normalised the exclusion of asylum seekers and those with no legal status from mainstream welfare provision (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Sales 2002). Further, the welfare state and asylum support systems became themselves an instrument for controlling the presence and movement of asylum seekers in the UK (Morris 2010), reflecting an emergent trend of processes of de-territorialisation and rebordering (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2019). The stratification of entitlement remains a prominent feature of the UK reception system,

whereby different statuses – asylum seekers, those with no legal status and more recently those arriving through resettlement programs – are entitled to very different levels of support. At the same time, asylum seekers have also been excluded from the labour market, since the possibility of employment was seen as another ‘pull’ factor (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Mayblin 2014; 2016b). The official explanation for not adopting Directive 2013/33/EU was its provisions regarding access to the labour market (Mayblin 2014).

In terms of legal developments, four acts were crucial for shaping the architecture of the UK reception system. The **1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act [AIAA 1993]** removed the obligation of local authorities to provide housing to asylum seekers and reduced Income support for asylum seekers from 90% of mainstream benefits to 70% (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Morris 2010; Sales 2002). The **1996 Asylum and Immigration Act [AIA 1996]** excluded asylum seekers from the mainstream welfare system and removed support from those applying in country rather than a port of entry - although this measure was abolished in 2002 by the Labour government- replacing it with in-kind support in the form of vouchers provided by local authorities (Morris 2010; AIA 1996; Sales 2002). Following a high court ruling, local authorities became responsible for supporting destitute asylum seekers under the National Assistance Act (1948) (Hynes and Sales 2010; Morris 2010). As local authorities were also responsible for providing healthcare and education under the NHS and Community Care Act (2000) and the Children’s Act (1989), these developments engendered significant economic pressures for them. It also removed the right of asylum seekers to work on arrival (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Mayblin 2014).

The **1999 Immigration and Asylum Act [IAA 1999]** established a centralised system of support, the National Asylum Support System (NASS) and expanded the voucher system (later abolished) to all asylum seekers (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013). This legislation introduced a number of important principles that have defined subsequent housing issues, including the systems of Section 4, Section 95 and Section 98 support (see section 3.1). Just as notably, it introduced the policy of *dispersal*, to remove the “burden” of concentration of asylum seekers in London and the South East, instead transplanting them “in areas where there is a greater supply of suitable and cheaper accommodation” (Home Affairs Committee [HAC] 2018; also Bloch and Schuster 2005). Under dispersal, asylum seekers have no choice in deciding where they are to live (Bloch and Schuster 2005; Hynes and Sales 2010). These legal and policy changes established a reception system based on the one hand on a highly stratified system of rights and one the other on ‘the construction of subsidiary systems of support with built-in surveillance and control’ (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Morris 2010:39). In addition, the asylum support system became highly centralised whereby local authorities do not have direct responsibility, although they are involved in the implementation of asylum support policies (Darling 2016a; 2016b; Sales 2002). The **2002 Immigration and Asylum Act** further withdrew employment rights for asylum seekers, although it left some discretion to caseworkers to grant permission in exceptional circumstances which, however, were not defined in law or policy (Mayblin 2014).

Another element of neoliberal governmentality in the UK reception system is the outsourcing and privatisation of asylum support (Darling 2016a). The most prominent manifestation of this trend concerns housing. With the reform of asylum support in the 1990s, it was outsourced to consortia of local authorities, third sector organisations and for-profit actors, with the local authorities being the main implementing actor (Darling 2016b; Sales 2002). Since 2012, housing is provided through the so-called COMPASS contracts with for

profit actors such as SERCO and G4S having a more prominent role in organising provision (Darling 2016b). Privatising processes have been linked to the *depoliticisation* of asylum, characterised by the spreading of responsibility away from central and local government (Darling, 2016b). Other support services within the scope of reception – such as access to English language tuition, information and legal assistance – are also provided by combination of local authorities, NGOs and private providers (Mayblin and James 2019; Mayblin 2014; Sales 2002).

2. Methodology and Sources

The report draws on a range of sources to provide a comprehensive overview and insights on the laws, policies, practices and experiences of reception in the UK. The section on the legal framework and policies of reception draws on legal texts, policy documents, policy guidance issued by the Home Office. It also draws on reports by NGOs and human rights organisations and relevant academic research and literature.

The section on the implementation of reception policies draws primarily on semi-structured interviews with migrants and key stakeholders. In order to explore how the reception system in the UK is experienced, we draw on 15 interviews conducted by the RESPOND UK teams with migrants – including recognised refugees, asylum seekers and those with no legal status such as refused asylum seekers. The interviews were conducted between November 2018 and May 2019. Most of the participants have been through the formal reception system in the UK, tied to asylum support, and therefore had direct experience of policies and their effects.

In addition, we draw on 16 interviews with meso-level stakeholders, conducted between September and December 2018 most of whom are representatives of various NGOs. Many have been directly involved in the domain of reception policies and asylum support and were therefore able to comment in depth on reception. Further, we drew on secondary sources such as research by NGOs and academics, as well as official reports by government bodies tasked with overseeing the implementation of reception policies. The combination of these sources was useful in overcoming some of the limitations of the primary data, such as the low number of female participants due to issues with access.

The interviews were analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach which combined both deductive and inductive coding. We used coding schemes developed by the WP4 leading team which were then supplemented with themes emerging from the data. The themes added inductively aimed at reflecting the specificities of the UK context, which only partially conforms to EU legal frameworks on reception, as well as the specific arrangements that exist due to the devolution of powers to the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish authorities in certain areas that touch on reception. A further concern was to capture the relations between different state actors (central governed, devolved administrations, local authorities and public bodies) and non-state, third sector organisations which play a key role in the delivery of support services in the context of the roll-back of the state in the domain of welfare and asylum services.

3. Policies and Legal Regulations of Reception: A Multi-level Perspective

Reception arrangements in the UK have a wider scope than that envisaged in Directives 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 – which has been transposed into British legislation - and 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection – which has not. The key legislative Acts are the Immigration Act 1999 and the Asylum Support Regulations [ASR] 2000, but the entitlements of asylum seekers to reception conditions are laid out in several legal acts as well as in the UK immigration rules.

Similar to the directive, asylum support provisions concern those who have a current application for international protection status, including at appeal stage and subsequent applications (AIDA 2019). However, asylum support in the UK is extended to refused asylum seekers who have exhausted legal challenges but cannot be deported, who are entitled to some reception material conditions if they are destitute (AIDA 2019).

Further, the UK operates two domestic resettlement schemes – the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Childre’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) – and participates in the Gateway and Mandate UNHCR programmes (Home Office 2018a). Through these schemes, UNHCR- recognised refugees arrive directly to the UK from third countries – mainly Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (Home Office 2018a). While the experiences and needs of the resettled group upon arrival are comparable to those of asylum seekers, their access to social welfare is governed by the legal framework concerning recognised refugees. However, some entitlements differ depending on whether they have received refugee leave (after July 2017) or humanitarian protection (before July 2017).

Thus, the discussion of legal and policy frameworks concerning reception takes into account three groups: a) asylum seekers on their first or subsequent applications b) resettled refugees in what concerns the provision of services upon arrival and c) refused asylum seekers, who may or may not be entitled to Section 4 support. Therefore, we extend the analysis of reception provisions to this group, as it offers insights into differential arrangements depending on legal status, which are very characteristic of the UK context.

3.1 National Policies and Regulations

Section 95 of the IAA 1999 stipulates that destitute asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers are entitled to accommodation and/or financial support. It should be noted that asylum seekers have access to material conditions support and other social provisions on an exceptional basis, as IAA 1999 introduced the condition of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) to any ‘person subject to immigration control’ (s 115). On the basis of this provision, asylum seekers are entitled to asylum support only if they can prove they are destitute and are excluded from most mainstream benefits such as housing allowance, jobseekers income

support, child benefits or disability allowance (AIDA 2019; NRPF Network 2019a). There are three types of support:

- Section 98 support, which is short term and provided upon arrival
- Section 95 support which is provided to asylum seekers with an ongoing application
- Section 4 support, which is provided to refused asylum seekers who cannot be deported

However, entitlement to any of these forms of support is not automatic. Asylum seekers must apply for asylum support and undergo an assessment to determine whether they are destitute or not. The process of this assessment and criteria for determining destitution are explained in the following section.

3.1.1 Assessment of destitution and support applications

Applicants must fill in a 32-page long application (ASF1) in order to access asylum support and have the destitution assessment (AIDA 2019; Home Office 2019b). A person is deemed destitute if

‘(a) he [sic] does not have adequate accommodation or any means of obtaining it (whether or not his other essential living needs are met); or

(b) he [sic] has adequate accommodation or the means of obtaining it, but cannot meet his other essential living needs.’ (IAA 1999 s. 95(3))

The concept of destitution is further elaborated in the ASR 2000. The above conditions apply within 14 days from the application of the destitution test (House of Commons 2015, s.7). ‘Adequate accommodation’ is elaborated through a number of criteria such as being affordable, that the applicant can access and continue to use the accommodation, that it is sufficient for the applicant and their dependants in a manner that it will not ‘lead to domestic violence against him [sic] or any of his dependants’ (ASR 2000, s 8).

The destitution assessment considers a range of assets applicants may possess or have access to, such as money in cash or bank accounts, investments, land, vehicles or other goods owned for the purpose of business either in the UK or abroad (AIDA 2019; ASR 2000, s 6). Failure to disclose such assets can lead to the application being refused, while applicant must also notify the Home Office of any changes in their circumstances (AIDA 2019; ASR 2000 s 15). Applications may also be refused on the basis of section 55 of NIAA which stipulates that support can be rejected if an application was not ‘as soon as reasonably practical’ after arrival, unless doing so would be a violation of human rights. This was interpreted by the House of Lords as rendering a person homeless (AIDA 2019).

If the applicant is deemed a destitute asylum seeker, they are eligible for Section 95 support, which entails the provision of housing and income support, unless they have applied for only one of the two forms of support. This support continues for 28 days if international protection is granted (AIDA 2019; Home Office 2019b).

Persons who have exhausted their appeal rights are eligible for the so-called Section 4 support under certain circumstances (Home Office 2018b; AIDA 2019). These include:

- ‘taking all reasonable steps to leave the UK’
- being ‘unable to leave the UK by reason of a physical impediment to travel or for some other medical reason’
- being ‘unable to leave the UK because in the opinion of the Secretary of State there is currently no viable route of return available’
- ‘the provision of accommodation is necessary for avoiding a breach of a person’s Convention rights’
- There is an ongoing judicial review of a person’s application for protection (Home Office 2018b)

Persons who are not eligible for Section 4 support, or their applications for section 95 support are rejected are not entitled to neither housing or income support, and therefore likely to become destitute. Asylum support can be withdrawn on a number of grounds, including breaching accommodation rules, violent behaviour, breaching rules relating to asylum support, not declaring financial resources, leaving their assigned accommodation without informing the Home Office, failing to provide requested information relating to their asylum application or breaching reporting obligations (AIDA 2019; ASR 2000, reg 20).

Resettled refugees are not subject to destitution assessment and are entitled to benefits under the mainstream welfare system.

3.1.2 Housing and dispersal

IAA 1999 obliges UK authorities to provide accommodation to asylum seekers (IA 1999; National Audit Office [NAO] 2014). While the application under Section 95 is considered, asylum seekers are entitled to emergency support, known as ‘Section 98’ (IAA 1999, s 98; AIDA 2019; Home Office 2019a). Section 98 support involves the provision of initial accommodation (IA) on a temporary basis (AIDA 2019; Home Office 2019a). Asylum seekers can stay in initial accommodation for up to 7 days if Section 95 support is refused; if granted for up to 28 days. Initial accommodation is normally provided in hostels, hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation (AIDA 2019). Recipients of section 4 support are also entitled to housing (Home Office 2018b). In exceptional cases, social services may provide additional support with housing if asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers have physical and mental health needs that can only be met if housing is also provided (AIDA 2019; Care Act 2014, s 9; NRPF Network 2019b).

Housing is provided through the dispersal policy set out in Immigration Act 1999. The Home Office designates the applicants’ place of residence with no option to refuse the provided accommodation (IAA 1999, s 95; ASR 2000, reg 13; AIDA 2019). Accommodation is provided by for-profit companies through procurement contracts. While the legal framework for reception changed little in the period of concern, the introduction of the so-called COMPASS (Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services) contracts in 2012 radically altered the provision of dispersed accommodation. The scheme was conceived in 2009 in order to replace the previous mechanism of awarding contracts (known as Target) by the time it expired in 2012 (NAO 2014). The main consideration was to reduce the costs of accommodation provision and increase the efficiency of managing

dispersed accommodation (Meer *et al* 2019; NAO 2014). Under the COMPASS contracts, the home office procures the supply and management of accommodation directly from private, for-profit providers, which in turn subcontract housing companies in the designated local authority areas (Darling 2016b; NAO 2014; Meer *et al* 2019). Local authorities, which previously had responsibility over housing provision within the asylum support system, have no say in the process of awarding these contracts.

A further significant development in relation to housing concerns the introduction of the VPRS scheme in 2015. Unlike the COMPASS contracts, the Home Office designated local authorities as the actor responsible for the provision of accommodation for resettled refugees (Meer *et al* 2019). Resettled refugees are entitled to accommodation upon arrival, which must be suitable for their needs (Home Office 2018a). Resettled refugees have entitlement to housing in accordance with the Qualifications Directive and relevant national law, since they are recipients of international protection at the point of arrival.

3.1.3 Benefits and Income support

Each member of a household under s 95 support is entitled to a benefit of £37.75 per week, which is paid into a so-called ASPEN card and can be withdrawn at cash points. (AIDA 2019; Home Office 2019c). Under s 4 support, the benefit is reduced to 35.39 per week per person (AIDA 2019; Home Office 2019c). It is paid into a debit-only ASPEN card cannot be withdrawn as cash (AIDA 2019). The levels of benefits for asylum seekers are considerable lower than for citizens, since they are calculated differently from national welfare benefits in 2008 (Mayblin and James 2019).

Pregnant women receive an extra £3 per week, an £5 per week for each child under one year old and an extra £3 for each child between the ages of one and three. In addition, they can apply for a once-off payment of £300 if they are due in less than 8 weeks or if a baby is younger than six months. Similarly, recipients of section 4 support are entitled to the same additional benefits for children and an additional clothing allowance (AIDA 2019). Those with no legal status outside the scope of section 4 support are not entitled to income support.

Resettled refugees are entitled to benefits under the mainstream welfare system upon arrival in the UK. However, they are excluded from certain benefits such as Carer's allowance or personal independent payments as these are given on the basis of residence (NAO 2014).

3.1.4 Access to Education

Schooling is compulsory for all children aged between 5 and 16 in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and 18 in England (Gov.UK 2020). There are no exceptions for asylum seekers or children without legal status (AIDA 2019). However, Children under section 4 support or without legal status are not entitled to free school meals (AIDA 2019).

There is no statutory prohibition for asylum seekers to access the education system, including further and higher education. However, they may be barred on a case by case basis through bail conditions (AIDA 2019). They cannot access education if they are refused, a condition that applies to people with no legal status.

Other arrangements pertaining to university fees and financial support depend on the area of dispersal since education is a devolved area of policy. Young asylum seekers and the children of asylum seekers can be classed as home students for the purposes of university fees in Scotland, if they fulfil the criterion of three years' residence.

There is no such statutory obligation in the rest of the UK, although universities can class asylum seeking students as home students. Asylum seekers have access to financial support when classed as home students if resident for three years in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but not in England (AIDA 2019). According to a court decision, asylum seeking children leaving care are entitled to support from local authorities for covering education-related expenses (AIDA 2019). Unaccompanied minors given leave to remain after their 18th birthday are however classed as overseas students (AIDA 2019).

Different conditions apply for those accessing further education, normally aged 16-19. They are classed as home students in England if they have been waiting for an asylum decision for more than 6 months or receive Section 4 support (AIDA 2019). In Wales and Scotland, they are classed as home students (AIDA 2019). Eligibility for financial support for this age group also varies across the UK. In Scotland, there is a three year residency requirement for accessing an Education Maintenance (Scottish Government 2020). In Wales and Northern Ireland, asylum seekers do not have access to EMA (nidirect 2020; Student Finance Wales 2019).

Resettled refugees are considered home students, are eligible for loans to support their studies and entitled to other forms of financial support, while those with humanitarian protection are entitled to home fees status and support after three years (Home Office 2018a).

3.1.5 Access to employment

Asylum seekers are barred from employment and self-employment (AIDA 2019; IAA 2002). As part of the UK's opt-in to the EU's directive on asylum reception, those who waited for a decision on their asylum claim longer than twelve months through no fault of their own were given the right to work (Mayblin, 2016b). Prior to this, asylum seekers had the right to work if they had been waiting for six months or more for a decision on their application (Mayblin 2014). They are however restricted to a limited number of occupations listed on the Home Office's "shortage occupation list", which appears as an appendix to the Immigration Rules and includes highly skilled occupations (AIDA 2019; Home Office, 2019a; Mayblin 2016b).

Since 2010, those who have waited for 12 months or more, or have been refused asylum but cannot be deported, can be employed only in jobs in the 'shortage occupation list' specified in the Immigration Rules (Mayblin 2016b). Those with no legal status have no access to employment and illegal working is a criminal offence in the UK (Karamanidou 2019). Resettled refugees have the right to work in line with provisions for recognised refugees.

3.1.6 Access to healthcare

Entitlement to healthcare varies across the four UK countries, as it is a devolved policy area. Asylum seekers in England, including those receiving Section 4 support, are entitled to free primary health care¹ in the UK's National Health Service (NHS) (AIDA 2019; NRPF 2019c). Asylum seekers can also register with GPs. Those who do not receive asylum support are not eligible for free healthcare at hospitals and may be charged unless the hospital decides to waive any expenses incurred (AIDA 2019). Some secondary healthcare² provision such as accident and emergency services, treatment for communicable and sexually transmitted diseases, and treatment for physical or mental conditions resulting from torture, female genital mutilation, domestic or sexual violence, is also free for current and refused asylum seekers and those with no legal status (AIDA 2019; NRPF 2019c). However, care following emergency treatment is not free, and those with NRPF condition are as a rule, with some exceptions, charged for NHS services. GPs have the discretion to register refused asylum seekers. The same provisions apply in Northern Ireland, with the exception that refused asylum seekers are also entitled to healthcare (AIDA 2019). In contrast, asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers in Scotland and Wales are entitled to full free health care (AIDA 2019).

3.2 Regional and municipal policies and regulations

The UK reception system is highly centralised. Migration is a reserved policy domain, meaning that the devolved governments of Scotland and Wales cannot legislate on immigration policy, including areas of asylum support such as housing and benefits (Meer *et al* 2019). Policy decisions concerning reception, and in particular asylum support, are the remit of the Home Office, which has responsibility over all migration-related policy domains. However, certain policy domains that intersect with entitlements under reception policy such as the provision of education, healthcare and social services are devolved (Scottish Government 2018). This underpins the differences in provision of education and healthcare between England and the devolved regions. Scottish integration policy, for example, perceives integration as starting earlier in the asylum process than in England, and therefore has invested more heavily in measures such as ESOL access to further and higher education and schemes for accessing the labour market (Scottish Government 2018).

These arrangements leave very little scope for the development of distinct legal and policy frameworks at the regional or municipal levels in the field of migration. Local authorities have some statutory responsibilities under UK law falling under the scope of social care, such as providing housing on the basis of need in cases of homelessness and destitution. These however, arise from obligations outside the legal framework on migration policy, mainly pertaining to social care and welfare. The result is often grey areas of responsibility, which will be explored further in the report. Actors other than the central government are therefore more

¹ Including GP practices, NHS walk-in centres, dental treatment, pharmacists and optometrists (NRPF 2019b)

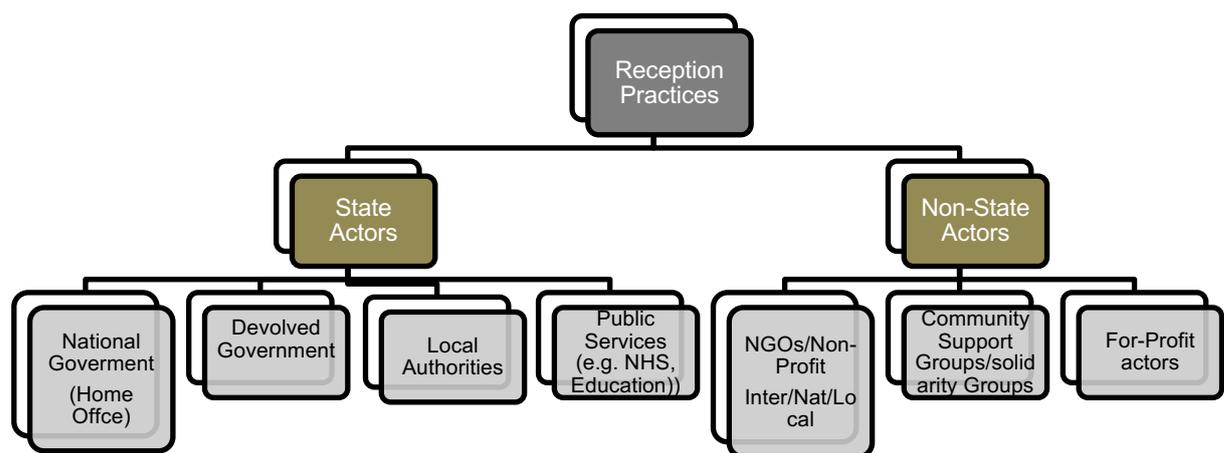
² Secondary healthcare 'refers to services provided by health professionals who generally do not have the first contact with a patient' (NHS 2018). Entitlement is dependent on residence (NRPF 2019b).

significant in the domain of implementation rather than in decision making, and their role will be discussed further in the relevant section.

4. Practices of Reception

The implementation of reception policies in the UK presents a high degree of complexity. This is partly due to the architecture of the legislative framework and the combination of centralised control by the UK government with the diffusions of some responsibilities to devolved governments. In terms of implementation, the reception landscape is even more complex due to the processes of marketisation and the transfer of responsibilities for providing reception services to non-state as well as local authority actors. Therefore, the implementation of reception services involves three key sets of actors: a) state actors including the Home Office, local government and public services b) non-state for-profit actors c) not-for-profit non-state actors, including NGOs and community groups. Figure 1 provides an overview of the key actors involved in reception.

Figure 1: Key actors in the implementation of reception policies



In addition, the implementation of reception measures involves different policy domains: The first concerns arrangements under the asylum support legislation, mainly housing and income support, over which the Home Office has responsibility and oversight but are delivered also by for-profit actors. The second comprises the delivery of services to meet human rights obligations and obligations under EU and national law, for example in education and healthcare, whereby the responsibility for implementation is diffused among state and non-state actors.

Table 1 provides an overview of asylum seekers who are recipients of asylum support under the relevant legislation.

Table 1: Asylum seekers receiving support 2011- 2018

*Main applicants only

** Main applicants and dependants

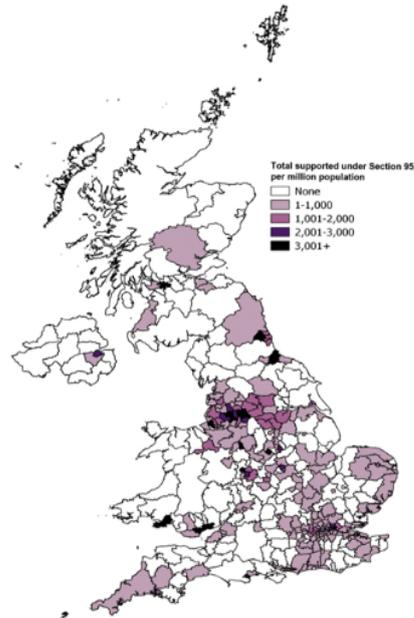
Source: Home Office 2019d

4.1 Accommodation

	Asylum support (section 95)	Subsistence only	In dispersed accommodation	Section 4
2011	20894	2786	18,108	2310*
2012	20,182	2,588	17,594	2,757*
2013	23,459	2,772	20,687	4,831**
2014	29,753	3,403	26,350	4,994**
2015	34,363	2,931	31,432	3,821**
2016	39,389	2,763	36,626	3,773**
2017	40,736	3,020	37,716	4,114**
2018	44,258	2,949	41,309	4,026**

Under the provisions of Immigration Act 1999, asylum seekers are displaced to specific local authorities outside London and the south East (AIDA 2019; House of Commons 2015). Local authorities accept dispersed asylum seekers on a voluntary basis, through agreements – the so-called COMPASS contracts - with the central government and receive funding to this end (AIDA 2019; HAC 2018; NAO 2014). The central government and local authorities designate dispersal areas on the basis of certain criteria such as the ratio of asylum seeker population per resident population, the capacity of public services such as healthcare and education, available housing stock and ‘the level of risk of social tension if the number of asylum seekers increases within a given area’ (HAC 2017; NAO 2014 p. 11) Currently, dispersal authorities are located in six regions: Scotland, Wales, North England, North West, the Midlands and South West (NAO 2014). Exceptions from the dispersal requirement apply only if an asylum seeker has specific health needs that cannot be satisfied outside London (NAO 2014). As Figure 2 illustrates, most asylum seekers are dispersed in areas outside London.

Figure 2: Asylum seekers supported under Section 95(1), by local authority, as at end of June 2019



Source: Home Office 2019d

While local authorities must agree to accept asylum seekers, they do not provide housing themselves. Housing is provided through contracts with for-profit companies (AIDA 2018; Darling 2016b). These contracts are awarded directly from the Home Office to private contractors through procurement. Devolved governments and local authorities have no involvement in the award process (Meer *et al* 2019). The 2012 contracts were awarded to three private providers – Serco (Scotland and Northern Ireland and North West); G4S (North East and Midlands) and Clearel (Wales and Southwest, London and South East). These in turn subcontract properties from other housing providers, both social housing associations and other for-profit providers (Meer *et al* 2019). As the key principle of the privatised housing provision system has been cost-cutting, the providers - large companies for which profit is a significant consideration - the have adopted strategies to reduce costs such as contracting and sub-contracting cheap accommodation of frequently poor standards in deprived, often isolated areas (Meer *et al* 2019). According to the *Guardian's* analysis of Home Office data, more than half of all asylum seekers (57%) are housed in the poorest third of the UK (Lyons and Duncan, 2017). A further contributory factor to these practices was the dependency of provision on the number of asylum applications (HAC 2017).

When asylum seekers submit an application for Section 98 support, they are allocated Initial Accommodation (IA) while their application for Section 95 support is being examined (HAC 2017; Home Office 2019e). Initial Accommodation is typically hostel-like, with shared rooms and facilities. Providers are obliged to supply three meals a day, essential items such as toiletries and bedding, and offer transportation to appointments with authorities (HAC 2017; Home Office 2019f). IA facilities are located in the South East as well as areas of dispersal such as Glasgow, Northern Ireland and Manchester (AIDA 2019; HAC 2017; ICIBI 2018). While the Home Office aims to examine Section 95 applications within 19 days, its own guide states that asylum seekers might stay in IA for three to four weeks (AIDA 2019; HAC 2017; Home Office 2019e). In practice, longer stays are common (AIDA 2019; HAC 2017). Yet, the provision of accommodation depends on Home Office decisions on destitution and the

provision of Section 98 and Section 95 support, which are often delayed (Refugee Action 2018).

If the application for Section 95 support is successful, asylum seekers are moved to longer term 'dispersed' accommodation which is normally furnished flats or houses with self-catering facilities. Providers, however, can first place asylum seekers in temporary dispersed accommodation – normally hotels and hostels - if housing stock is in short supply (HAC 2017). As with IA, stays in temporary dispersed accommodation can be protracted, although the facilities used are often unsuitable for longer term stay (HAC 2017). Thus, moves between different types of accommodation are a feature of the system:

people are placed in interim accommodation or Section 98 accommodation when they first arrive. And, then once they make their application are often moved and I think that is a difficult process, you are kind of bopped about, and then if you get refugee status you will get moved again so you are moving at least three times. (Interview 17)

Longer term accommodation must adhere to standards prescribed in the COMPASS contracts, such as being safe, not having severe defects and being fit for purpose (HAC 2017). Providers are also obliged to supply residents with essential household items and furniture (HAC 2018).

COMPASS contracts were due to expire in 2017, and the new awards to be made in the same year. However, the Government decided to extend the contracts until 2019, while beginning procurement procedures in the same year (HAC 2018). While the first invitation for tender was cancelled as there were no appropriate bids, the second resulted in the award of contracts to two of the previous providers (Serco and Clearspings) and one new (Mears group) (HAC 2018). At the same time, the Home Affairs Committee of the House of Commons issued two reports on the COMPASS contracts in 2017 and 2018, and the Independent Chief Inspector of borders and Migration (ICIBI) a further report in 2018. In addition, housing provision was also the object of extensive public scrutiny and media coverage due to the shortcomings in terms of the quality of accommodation provided. While these developments had little impact in terms of changing the architecture of housing provision – Serco lost its contract in Glasgow but maintained it in other areas -, they brought to light the extensive problems of housing provision, which we discuss further in the section on implementation. In 2019, the new contracts were awarded with few changes to their remit.

In contrast to dispersal accommodation arrangements, the Home Office opted to contract accommodation directly from local authorities. Further, local authorities have expanded responsibilities under the resettlement schemes. Refugees under the VPRS and VCRS and Gateway schemes are resettled in partnership with local authorities, which participate on a voluntary basis and receive funding from the government (Home Office 2017a). Local authorities offer resettlement places on the basis of availability of key services (Home Office 2018a), and they are responsible for providing housing and other reception arrangements, including ESOL (Home Office 2018a). Unlike arrangements regarding dispersed accommodation, resettled refugees can only be accommodated in long term housing:

The Home Office won't allow VPRS refugees to be put in to temporary accommodation (e.g. a bed and breakfast), so the need is to source non-temporary accommodation first of all. If there is a delay in finding housing, the council must contact the Home

Office to say accommodation isn't ready, and they will delay the family's arrival (Interview 2).

In contrast to key stakeholders insights on the dispersal system, views on relations between the Home Office and local authorities in the context of resettlement were much more positive (Interviews 30, 31; HAC 2018; Meer *et al* 2019).

It should also be noted that housing provision extends beyond what is provided by formal arrangements between the Home Office and other stakeholders. Given that many asylum seekers are rendered homeless and destitute at different stages of the asylum process, third sector organisations are heavily involved in providing accommodation for them. On the one hand, they provide a range of accommodation facilities, such as flats, hostels, night shelters and accommodation with residents in the UK (Mayblin and James 2017; Meer *et al* 2019). On the other, they provide support and advice to migrants facing housing problems (Mayblin and James 2019; Meer *et al* 2019).

4.1.1 Experiences of asylum support accommodation

Respondents with experience of the UK asylum system reported a range of situations related to housing and accommodation. Some corresponded to the main pathway of asylum support: a stay in initial accommodation, followed by the provision of dispersed accommodation (Interviews 1,2,12). Another woman interviewed for this research spent a year living in a friend's house before being moving to a hostel and then a house (Interview 11). Others stayed with family (Interviews 14,15) or members of the public who participated in hosting schemes (Interview 12), while some experienced homelessness at different stages of being in the UK asylum system. One Syrian man who was a student at the time he applied for asylum managed to stay on his campus thanks to the intervention of his university:

I still recall that I was lucky enough that I had the international officer that used to work at the university helped me a lot that they had managed to keep me in one of the room of the campus. Because she felt that, you know, I am going very tough time. She was checking up on me all the time, what's the progress of my case because it was something new for the university and they had to deal with it somehow.(Interview 4)

Some respondents reported positive experiences with their housing provision and conditions of their accommodation:

I live in my current house since I applied for asylum. ... It is a house with a garden; we are a big family. We have 4 bedrooms. ... Yes I am happy with it. But if I am free I can do better when I can choose it. Yes, from the first day we said it is our home. My wife, the kids and I cleaned the house as our house and still until now, it is like our own house. ... First couple of months, the landlords come to the house and saw that this house changed; I took care of garden, cut grass, trees. He said, really, did you do it. I said I did everything with small scissors and small knife. Because I have kids and it should be safe place for my kids. I care also about them. He said I can give you a

machine and since then he did not come to the house because he trusts me. ...
(Interview 13)

Yet, the majority of respondents, both asylum seekers and key stakeholders raised significant issues regarding housing arrangements under the COMPASS system. We focus on three aspects raised by interviewed micro-level participants as well as stakeholders: quality of accommodation, being provided with unsuitable housing, and homelessness.

4.1.1.1 Quality of housing

One of the most commented aspects by interviewees during the asylum stage was the conditions they faced in the accommodation provided. Some respondents commented on their accommodation being old and dirty (Interviews 1, 5), verging on conditions of extreme squalor:

The accommodation was not good enough, because we were maybe like three persons in this old building. Now I think the building is no longer there, people in this building, I think the building demolished or break down (Interview 5)

They gave me a house in [area], which was not nice. The sofa was full of scratches; my daughter was quite scared. Her toilet going behaviour had changed and reduced. The bathroom was very dirty. My daughter won't use the toilet easily since then, she would go with lots of difficulty [...] I arrived here in 2016 and in the beginning an organisation called Serco helped me, gave me a house as an asylum-seeker. I had a case-worker there who was very nice, I wasn't feeling well at all, the house was very dirty, she helped me with the house quite a bit, got the carpets washed and the walls painted. That was the same house that my daughter wouldn't use its toilet seat even after I cleaned it very well with Dettol and all. She would prefer to soil herself but not sit there. I have this issue for 2 years now with my daughter. (Interview 1)

While the second respondent was moved to better accommodation after a month, the family of the second respondent were eventually moved but to accommodation that was also 'very dirty, people would toilet on the corridor stairs'. Similar issues were highlighted in the stakeholder interviews. One described the housing as "absolutely bottom of the market" with "disgusting conditions" (Interview 25). Unhealthy, low quality housing stock was mentioned:

It was smelly, there was an old sofa at the bottom of the close which was just a fire hazard and it smelled (Interview 24).

Recently there's been a family who I know very well who were housed in a building out near Pollok Park which was incredibly damp. It's a very old tenement and it's the ground floor and there was mould on all the walls. One of the children developed asthma and eventually the husband landed up in the [hospital] for 18 days with what I think was more or less pneumonia and, of course, because it was so damp and because it was old and with high ceilings, they spent an absolute fortune on heating (Interview 18).

These experiences of poor quality housing are not exceptional. The standards of accommodation in the properties provided through the COMPASS contracts were found to be extremely poor by public bodies (HAC 2017; 2018; 2018; ICIBI 2018); research (Klein and Williams 2012; Meer *et al* 2019) and media accounts (Goodwin *et al* 2016;). Both initial and dispersal accommodation was found to be dirty, infested with vermin, structurally unsafe, with damp and mould present in a considerable number of properties (HAC 2017; ICIBI 2018; Klein and Williams 2012). In addition, while the provision of household goods is the responsibility of contracted for-profit actors, reports have highlighted failures to provide such items as well as the low quality of items provided (HAC 2017; 2018; ICIBI 2018). One respondent also raised issues regarding the maintenance of the properties:

The previous house was dirty too and council wouldn't clean it, I used to clean the whole building myself regularly there. (Interview 1).

While the interviewee refers to the council as responsible for the maintenance of common areas of the property, it is in fact the private providers who are responsible for this task (ICIBI 2018). The contracted providers are also responsible for inspecting properties, responding to complaints by residents and making repairs when faults are either observed during inspections or reported by tenants (HAC 2017; 2018; ICIBI 2018). Yet, failures in these regimes are frequent. One meso-level respondent, for example, referred to failure to fix the central heating of a property for a protracted period (Interview 24), while the same failure was found by the HAC and ICIBI investigations. The staff employed by housing providers for conducting inspection is often under-trained, and serious delays have been observed in carrying out essential maintenance and urgent repairs (ICIBI 2018). The impact of such conditions on the wellbeing of asylum seekers is considerable, both in terms of health effects as suggested by one of the meso level participants above, but also for their psychological wellbeing (HAC 2017)

The shortcomings of housing provision in terms of quality are rooted in the management model of the COMPASS contracts, have rendered economic considerations central to the delivery of the contracted services. In the words of one meso-level interviewee:

I think the fact the housing is being delivered by private company means that the prime motivation is profit rather than quality of housing, so that inevitably means that they are looking for cheapest accommodation available rather than the most suitable. I think it is the base, fundamental issue with the way housing is delivered. That it is driven by profit (Interview 17)

The respondent expressed the view that the primary consideration of accommodation providers is profit rather than concerns over accommodation standards. This highlights the contradictions of the UK arrangements for the provision of asylum accommodation. Providers have an obligation to provide adequate accommodation standards and have been fined on occasions they have failed to do so (HAC 2018; Perraudin 2019). Yet, as the COMPASS accommodation provision model is driven by the logics of profitability and cost effectiveness (Darling 2016b), providers resort in sourcing low-cost accommodation that does not meet quality standards.

4.1.1.2 Housing allocation and social conditions

Another issue that was raised by micro level respondents was being housed in accommodation or areas that were inappropriate for their needs and circumstances. Some micro level respondents expressed dissatisfaction with being housed in shared accommodation where conflicts occurred because of cultural differences:

They were kind and gave us a home, together with a Kurdish-Iraqi person. We couldn't choose who to stay with. I preferred to stay with an Iranian, from the same culture. (Interview 2)

They moved me to a house to be shared with others in ... [small town near Birmingham]. ... no, I could not choose where to stay. My [Yazidi] friend was attacked by Muslims in Manchester. So, even in the house where I stayed, they asked me why I am not praying why you are in the wrong religion and living the wrong way. ... Yes, they knew I was Yazidi. They noticed because the accent is different from theirs, both in Arabic and in Kurdish. So, they always try to convert you. ... I just tried to keep distance and stay in my room a lot of the time. ... (Interview 12)

As the first quote above states, asylum seekers have no choice in the accommodation they are allocated (AIDA 2019; HAC 2017). In the case of the second respondent, the effect of the 'no-choice' rule was a co-habitation characterised by legacies of conflict and tension in countries of origin due to cultural and ethnic differences. A meso-level stakeholder raised the issue of placing people in accommodation not suitable for their needs:

There's things around when it comes to accommodation and how people are accommodated if someone has a disability, in my experience that is often not accommodated so you might get somebody who is has crutches and is housed three floors up and it is very difficult to them get them moved. And also, people with mental health issues who would be much better off being accommodated on their own are accommodated with other people. (Interview 17)

We do place people in shared accommodations with individuals that might increase their vulnerability. So, whether that's because they come from different cultural or faith or even kind of gender backgrounds (Interview 22)

'Insensitive allocation' of accommodation is one of issues relating to allocating asylum seekers in unsuitable accommodation highlighted by key stakeholders and relevant reports (HAC 2017). Reports and submissions by NGOs have highlighted several problematic practices, which do not take into account the needs and vulnerabilities of asylum seekers. Survivors of torture, for example, have been forced to share bedrooms contrary to Home Office guidance; the same practice was observed in relation to other vulnerable groups such as victims of trafficking and those with mental health conditions (HAC 2017; Home Office 2017b; ICIBI 2018). While some local authorities have banned the use of shared rooms, this is not UK-wide practice (HAC 2017). Pregnant women and new mothers have been frequently placed in

unsuitable accommodation, for example in houses with steep staircases or without children safeguarding equipment (HAC 2017; ICIBI 2018). While the Home Office is required by law to consider the best interests of the child, families with children have been placed in shared accommodation contrary to safeguarding practices (Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009; HAC 2017; Home Office 2017b). Particular concerns have also been raised in relation to providing accommodation for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers (ICIBI 2018; Meer *et al* 2019). LGBTQI+ asylum seekers have identified being accommodated with homophobic people as a matter of concern (HAC 2017; Meer *et al* 2019), while a HAC (2017) report referred to a transgender woman being accommodated in a shared room. While the Home Office has adopted policy guidelines which stipulate that care should be taking when allocating accommodation to LGBTQI+ applicants, a report by ICIBI (2018) found that it was not fully implemented. Such practices have significant effects on asylum seekers, such as causing distress and interrupting access to essential services and support networks (HAC 2017).

The 2017 HAC report found evidence of forcing survivors of torture, families with young children, women near their deliver date and new movers being moved at short notice, despite these practices being against Home Office policies (Home Office 2017b; Home Office 2016; ICIBI 2018). Allocating accommodation suitable to the needs and specific characteristics of asylum seekers is therefore left to providers, who follow their safeguarding policies or rely on informal practices, such as taking ethnicity into account when availability permits (HAC 2017). However, private providers are contractually obliged to take notice of vulnerability issues although there is only cursory enforcement of this by the Home Office (ICIBI 2018). Housing providers, on their part, have claimed that the Home Office does not always communicate information on specific needs and vulnerabilities of asylum seekers which would the allocation of suitable accommodation (ICIBI 2018).

Another issue that was raised by both micro and meso level participants were the social conditions in the provided accommodation and the areas where asylum seekers were housed:

Then they moved us to [urban, deprived] area, which all my neighbours were drug sellers and so there were police in our building every day. I was told that that area was one of the most dangerous ones in [city] and we were very scared. [...] I remember one night a neighbour who was drunk and at 12 at night was banging at this door. I went and asked him to be quiet since my daughter was asleep and said that I would call the police otherwise. Then he came to our door and started banging at our door for an hour or so. So I just sat behind the door scared all night, my English wasn't good enough to call the police. (Interview 1)

We have the experience of a single parent who was living on the top floor of a tenement... There were people actually sitting on the stairs shooting up drugs. This was a primary school child that was having to walk past this. [...] The housing officer 9 months before had told the woman that he couldn't do anything about the front door being left open which was letting people use the close as a hangout because the factor wasn't there, there wasn't a factor. So they said that they couldn't do anything (Interview 24).

The above quotations reflects the wider issues of housing provision to asylum seekers. asylum seekers and their families. As a rule, they are moved to areas with a high surplus of low cost housing stock, which tended to be areas of severe urban deprivation, with few public facilities

or established immigrant networks (Darling 2016b; Meer *et al* 2019). Further, such dispersal locations are often located in the outskirts of cities and have poor transport services, which impedes access to support networks and essential services (Hynes 2013; Meer *et al* 2019). Research shows that women asylum seekers are more likely to experience problems with their accommodation. For instance, a study for the Scottish Refugee Council has shown that refugee women are considerably more likely to have negative impressions of their neighbourhoods, especially on the question of safety (Mulvey, 2013).

4.1.1.3 Homelessness

The discussion of accommodation conditions in the two previous sections presupposes that asylum seekers had in fact received housing as stipulated by the legal framework. Yet, this was not always the case. Three interviewees had experienced homelessness at different stages of the process and for different reasons (Interviews 8, 9, 12).

I don't have a status, legally I'm a destitute asylum seeker, I don't get anything from the government, I'm street homeless. I was on the streets for almost three and a half years, I didn't have a place to go to during the day. There was a place I was able to sleep overnight, then I had to leave in the morning (Int 9). Serco, yes, because if you have fresh claim, they will give you accommodation. If your case is refused, they say to you, "Okay, go out". How? Example. Go out - where do people go out, the street? If you no give insurance number, the people go to the street (Interview 8)

All three respondents were made homeless after their asylum applications were refused and consequently they had no right to asylum accommodation. Unless asylum seekers can secure section 4 support, they have to leave their accommodation within 21 days. After this point, refused asylum seekers are likely to be homeless, as in the case of the first respondent quoted above, unless they can secure Section 4 support which is given for very narrow grounds (see section 3.1.2; also Refugee Action 2017). If not, the NRPF designation accompanying the asylum status means that they are not legally entitled to housing:

If you are NRPF, then you will be with no housing or reliant on charities that are stretched to the limit. So I feel that housing is a very basic right that is not being met (Interview 19)

The NRPF designation also creates a grey area around entitlement to housing support. On the one hand, local authorities could address homelessness on the basis of legislation on child protection and social care (NRPF 2019b). This differs across the four counties as these are areas of devolved policy (NRPF 2019b) but broadly stipulates that local authorities can assist people with NRPF to prevent homelessness. On the other, the NRPF status can exclude refused asylum seekers from sources of support that are designated as public funds or as publicly funded (Meer *et al* 2019). Thus, it renders local authorities (and devolved governments) reluctant to provide support, often citing the responsibility of the Home Office and cost considerations (Asylum Seeker Housing Project [ASHP] 2017; Meer *et al* 2019). An interviewee working for an organisation specialising on housing support also expressed the

view that while there is confusion around NPRF, the real impediment for local authorities is lacking the funds for housing refused asylum seekers:

What I think is really happening is that maybe local authorities are confused about what NPRF means. So as you know, it is permitted to provide accommodation to families, or individuals when there is a social work obligation to do so. My understanding of the barrier is not that the formal accommodation is prohibited, the social work, or housing is prohibited. I think it's more likely to be the case that the housing authorities or the housing accommodation that local authorities have is normally tied to payment of housing benefit. So it's not so much they are being unlawful for them to put someone there if they paid separately, it's maybe something more about they don't want to do it, because there is no way of funding that (Interview 21).

Yet, exclusions also occur due to the practices of social workers who act as gatekeepers to accessing local authority support. A submission of Glasgow based ASHP to the Scottish government highlighted inadequate support as well as degrading treatment by council social workers (ASHP 2017).

Another respondent referred to the risk of homelessness he faced during the moving -on period – when someone gets status and they have to leave their accommodation:

Serco came to forcefully throw me out of my place. I said, I couldn't walk, I was ill. They said no, it would be illegal now to stay there. So I left, in that unwell condition to Hamish Allen centre [homelessness support charity]. [...] Then a friend of mine took me to Hotel [name], I got a small room, only a bed would fit in it, and there were 20 steps to get to it. I had a letter from my doctor saying I couldn't go upstairs and also when I open my door there were junkies and murderers all around my room there and downstairs was full of criminal who police would house them there for a while. There were people who were asking for their next injection, some had injecting needles hanging from them, very dirty bathrooms... So my friend [name] came, a Kurdish person, and said this place is not good for you, you should go back to your Serco house. So I went back there and said I am really ill, I can't go there and they would say no it is illegal now, you can't stay here and I said if you come back here again I am not going to open the door to you and you would need to break the door with the police. So after I stayed in that place for a week all still ill, they phoned and said they had found me a new place (Interview 2).

As with the end of asylum status, the granting of status means the end of entitlement to housing under COMPASS. The COMPASS contracts only funds providers to provide accommodation up until the 28 days after a positive asylum decision. Local authorities at this stage become responsible for transferring people to accommodation provided by local councils. Yet again, there are several impediments that might lead to homelessness or insecure accommodation. First, the transition between types of accommodation, as illustrated by the second quotation, can be delayed by miscommunications between the Home Office and the DWP, which is responsible for the provision of welfare to refugees, and the local authorities that need to implement these provisions (Meer *et al* 2019). Secondly, local authorities are not always able to provide long term accommodation suitable for the needs of

newly recognised refugees, as in the case of the responded quoted above. In such cases, short term accommodation may be provided in hostels or hotels. Thus homelessness during the moving on period is a widespread occurrence (British Red Cross 2018a; Refugee Action 2017).

It should be noted, however, that homelessness does not occur only after status is granted or refused. Homelessness can occur from the beginning of the process of applying for asylum support as applications for asylum support are regularly rejected (Refugee Action 2017). Research by the NGO Refugee Action illustrated that this is due to a range of reasons such as incorrect refusals of section 98 support and incorrect application of the destitution test (see section 3.1.1). Similarly, detention during the asylum process or with view to deportation can lead to loss of accommodation (Klein and Williams 2012). Regardless of which stage homelessness occurs, the third sector becomes the only actor that can fill in the gaps created by the lack of state provision. NGOs and charities have become instrumental in addressing homelessness created by the asylum support system through different types of provision such as hostels, night shelters, NGO-owned accommodation and programs that house migrants with local residents (Mayblin and James 2017; Meer *et al* 2019).

4.2 Access to work, benefits and destitution

The second essential element of asylum support in the UK is the provision of income support which as outlined in section 3.1.3, is very low. While the government has argued that this amount is sufficient for covering the needs of asylum seekers, our findings suggest the opposite. In conjunction with the ban on employment, it meant that most respondents did not have sufficient financial resources.

They give 35 pounds per week, so 5 pounds a day. You have to be really careful, if you have to travel somewhere, you have to really safe money. I don't know how you can save money. (interview 12)

Home office supports with 36 pounds per week per person. ... But nobody can live with this. In my area, I have to take the bus to take kids to school. I have to pay for this. If you have kids at home you need internet and TV; you have to have this one. You have to pay for all of this. ... and you are not allowed to work. That is a big problem. You just have to wait doing nothing. (interview 13)

Although some interviewees came from relatively affluent backgrounds in their country of origin and were able to fend off destitution because of the support of family networks, the majority were reliant on asylum support, and several raised insights similar to those of the respondents above. As the above quotations illustrate, income support is far from sufficient. This reflects existing academic and NGO research which had consistently found over since the 2000s that the levels of income support are insufficient and the source, in tandem with the prohibition of employment, of considerable hardship (Amnesty International 2006; British Red Cross 2018b; Klein and Williams 2012; Mayblin 2014). Asylum seekers have had to subsist at levels of support considerably lower to those for citizens. Yet, a review of cash support

conducted by the Home Office in 2018 found the level of support broadly sufficient and increased the weekly allowance by £0.80 (Home Office 2018c).

Hardship is even more pronounced for people on Section 4 support, who do not receive cash but an allowance in a debit card. As a stakeholder noted, this creates additional issues such as not being able to pay for transport:

For people who are on cashless support once they are at the end of the line and they are on Section 4 support, they just don't have access, they can't get out because you can't use your Aspen card on buses so you are relying on having cash and you don't have cash unless you can find a way to maybe exchange it with friends. (Interview 17)

The lack of cash has been repeatedly found to impede ordinary activities, forcing asylum seekers to adopt several strategies to survive. One of the refugee respondents in fact did what the stakeholder quoted above suggests:

What I did, probably is not a good solution, but this is the only way to survive, asking friends to come with me to the shop, and I bought stuff for them, and they gave me back the cash, otherwise I would not have any cash. (Int 6)

In the absence of sufficient income, respondents adopted various strategies to obtain support, both in cash but also crucially 'in kind' support in the form of food and other essential items. One respondent relied initially on friends (interview 5); another, a university student when he was forced to claim asylum drew on support provided by this university:

Then again the International Officer, you know, she started privately collecting food tins, shampoos from actual colleagues at the university, saying ohh we are helping a student of course without disclosing my name or how I am. So people were really kind. So I would say the system was not kind but the people were kind. (Interview 4)

Another respondent drew on support from third sector organisations, such as food banks, NGOs and smaller charities:

So I had to depend on the food banks, local communities, free food, accessing...At that time, there was a lot of places to get free clothes. I've kept a few of them. Food banks, you know, free food, there's some other place I was there as well, at certain times, I can get free food. [...] When I was doing voluntary [work], I was getting a free lunch every day, when I was doing the IT workshop for people. They had washing facilities...So, there is stuff. But they cannot support you, it is not enough, and it's not accessible, it's not available always. (Interview 6)

The above experience, shared by several interviewees reflects the reliance on on third sector organisations, which was also brought up by interviewd stakeholders:

They seem to get some sort of pack from Refuweege. They get vouchers to go to the 2nd hand shop on Shaw street. Proper clothing, suitable for bad weather. (Interview 24)

Asylum support that maybe only pays about £35 a week, so Maslow's in [city] which is a charity you can go to get clothes and the Night Shelter will give out some clothes. And stuff for kids, I think, like around children's clothes and cots. Immediate things to be able to take care of children. (Interview 26)

These perspectives on third sector organisations are consistent with research that has highlighted their role in mitigating some of the worst effects of destitution (Mayblin and James 2019; 2017; O'Neill 2010). The provision of income support is dependent on an application, and its examination is often delayed by the Home Office (Refugee Action 2017; NACCOM and Refugee Action 2019). During this period, asylum seekers might not have access to money for essential items. Third sector organisations are therefore often called to provide clothes, food, hygiene items and monetary support while asylum support applications are being examined. In the knowledge of one of the authors, the Home Office and Migrant Help have referred asylum seekers to a grassroots organisation – on one occasion by calling directly and asking them directly to assist a newly arrived asylum seeker.

4.3 Early access to Education

This section addresses the experiences of interviewees regarding two key aspects of reception arrangements on education: access to mainstream education provision, including higher education and the provision of English classes for asylum seekers whose first language is not English.

4.3.1 Primary to higher education

Only a minority of our interviewees had families with children. Some reported good experiences for their children at school, or at least some of the schools they attended (Int 1).

I have one daughter. She is in year 8. She is very happy and doing very well in school and socially with her friends (Interview 13)

However, one respondent raised issues both with language help and bullying:

Even for my children, it took 8-9 months for them to be assigned to an English class, so what they should do during these 8-9 months. It was quite hard, if there was an English class then it would have been much better. (Interview 1)

My son was being bullied at school, they beat him up, throw pens or bottles at him, the children [...] even the school knew about my son's bullying. [...] My son's school had even put a request saying his school is best to be changed since they couldn't control the situation, even outside of the school they would beat my son. (interview 1)

These experiences are not unusual in the UK context. For example, there is no funding specifically for additional English provision in the education system since 2011 (AIDA 2019;

Manzoni and Rolfe 2018). Local authorities and individual schools decide on the allocation of funds for English tuition, and they can further apply through partnerships for additional funding from the unfortunately named Controlling Migration Fund (Manzoni and Rolfe 2018). Reports found barriers at the systemic level, i.e. as a result of policy, which include unsuitable placements or the absence of ESOL; at the level of individual schools/colleges, such as bullying, lack of professional expertise or weak provision for special education needs and dealing with trauma; and barriers linked to the broader social context of claiming asylum, including trauma, poverty and housing issues. Issues of access are more serious at the level of secondary and further education (Manzoni and Rolfe 2018; UNICEF 2018). It also noted that resettled Syrian children were offered school places faster than children in the asylum system (UNICEF 2018). Participants also reported mixed experiences of further and higher education:

When applying for the college, no, it's fine, because I have to wait two weeks, and after that I got a place, and the teacher there, the teachers are very helpful. They know that your English is not good but they all the time support you and encourage you. They don't want you to feel disappointed, and they say, Is it okay if we are the same as your situation, we are learning Arabic and this will take time. So I didn't place any problem when I get a place in the college. (interview 7)

I wanted to go to college but they told me you cannot go to college. They told me you can go to an English course. I participated in a course but it was not my level [too low]. I said I want to go to the college, I registered my name this month and they said you can come in January. (Interview 11)

The experience of the first respondent quoted above suggests that status – being a resettled refugee - contributed to easier access and a more positive experience. In contrast the second participant's experienced more significant barriers, excluding him from further education... Another participant also relayed the experience of his son:

My older son was not allowed to start university; we are not able to support him and the government is not supporting him also...to start university you need permission from the Home Office. The education in this country is free and compulsory until the age of 18. After that you pay yourself or you take a loan from the government. But we are no allowed to apply for a loan [...] He is at home now...only kids under-18 are going to school... Since last year, he is using each day a tablet in order get to sleep. It is hard for him as teenager to stay at home and his friends go to university. (Interview 13)

As quotation illustrates, young asylum seekers face both structural and financial barriers in accessing higher education. While having insecure status does not automatically exclude them from higher education, it often excludes them from being able to take loans available to home students from paying university fees (AIDA 2019).

4.3.2 Access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) varies depending on the area of the UK as it is a devolved policy area (AIDA 2019; All Parliamentary Group on Refugees [APPGR] 2017). Places in ESOL provision carry fees, which are waived for certain groups such as asylum seekers and resettled refugees (House of Commons 2019). In England, ESOL provision is part of further education provision, geared towards non-EEA adult learners and is organised and funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (EFSA). Asylum seekers are eligible after six months' of residence and have an ongoing claim (House of Commons 2017). In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland since 2016³, asylum seekers can access free ESOL with no temporal limitations (House of Commons 2019). Scottish and Welsh parliaments have tended to adopt a (formally) softer division between reception and integration, and have therefore promoted free language classes at an earlier stage of the asylum process (Scottish Government 2018; Welsh Government 2019).

Most participants interviewed were able to access English classes. The interviews also pointed to the wide range of providers, such as further education colleges, churches and libraries (Interviews 1, 3, 12). A participant who came to the UK through the voluntary resettlement scheme reported a good experience

After I came here I had a little bit of English. But after about fifteen days, I applied for college and fortunately I got a place, and I started ESOL for three years. (interview 7)

Yet, several participants (interviews 1,2,3) in the mainstream asylum system reported difficulties in accessing ESOL, relating mainly to availability of courses and childcare:

Yes, I went [to language classes] for about a year but then children arrived and because of my son I can't go any more, shifts don't work out, since if I go to a college it is till 1 pm but I need to be at home at 12 to take my son to nursery and go and get him at 4pm and so it is quite difficult to manage it. [my wife] has to leave at 12 to get to her own class (Interview 3)

Several stakeholders also referred to the lack of childcare facilities (Interviews 17, 27, 29). One highlighted the impact of the lack of childcare facilities on learning outcomes, while the one with experience of both asylum system and provision for resettled refugees highlighted the inequities in childcare support:

For me I can't attend any class because my son is full-time at school, and [the] Government doesn't help me with childcare. [...] it is available for people who are coming through [the Government] project [VPRS] childcare, but for us we don't have childcare. (Interview 29)

The lack of childcare has also been identified as a significant impediment in reports (APPGR 2017; Refugee Action 2016; 2019). Although an earlier quotation is from a male refugee,

³ Prior to 2016 ESOL classes were not free (House of Commons 2017)

illustrating that the lack of childcare can affect all existing research demonstrates that women asylum seekers and refugees face particular barriers (Refugee Action, 2016; 2019)

Several referred to the availability of ESOL courses describing them as 'phenomenally oversubscribed' and 'completely overwhelmed' (Interview 19, 27,28), while an England-based stakeholder mentioned that the exclusion from ESOL classes for 6 months in the UK means that asylum seekers can only access classes organised informally (Interview 31).

The same stakeholder, an asylum seeker herself, touched on the inequalities of provision for those on asylum support and those on resettlement programmes:

People who are coming in Government project [the VPRS] they have an extra class, as [an] asylum seeker I don't have [an] extra class (interview 29).

These perspectives illustrate the uneven access to ESOL across the UK. While in England access is limited by policy provisions, availability of formal ESOL classes delivered by further education colleges is inadequate because it has been affected by budget cuts (APPG 2017; Refugee Action 2019). The overall budget for ESOL in England, for example, 'fell by 55 percent from 2008/09 to 2014-15' leading to longer waiting lists (APPGR, 2017). In contrast, resettled refugees have access to ESOL classes immediately on arrival, and provision is funded by the government (Home Office 2018a; 2017a) The shortcomings in provision are to an extent addressed by third sector organisations such as NGOs and community groups that provide English classes (House of Commons 2019; 2017; Refugee Action 2019)

The lack of funding and resources was also identified as a key factor for the barriers to access identified by both asylum seekers and stakeholders:

It is a shortage of resources. I don't know about teaching availability but I think there is just less resources to do it [...] Yea, I think just availability of resources and the amount of money that is allocated to ESOL as well is probably the biggest issue.' (Interview 17)

I got more funding for ESOL last year in the council budget which I was very chuffed about. But, so for example, the East Integration Network had to cancel one of their classes and then their other one they are able to still kind of do just ad-hoc but there's no money for a crèche (Interview 19).

One also criticised the organisation of access to the courses in Scotland which operates via a central online register:

Staff here feel that it's not an equitable way to treat college applications from people who are in the asylum system because all migrants go onto that register. So, basically there's competition for college places and migrants who are just better able to register and better skilled and more resilient might actually turn up at colleges and just say, I've been in the register for a while. That's the kind of thing that would get someone a place. [...] So, ESOL is a massive problem for us. It's such a massive problem and because we're focused on the most vulnerable (Interview 26)

On the whole, as with other types of support available to asylum seekers, vulnerabilities – including health conditions, experienced trauma, age and caring responsibilities have been

found to affect their ability to access ESOL classes (Hynes 2013; Refugee Action 2019; 2016; Salvo and Williams 2017). Given the conditions of destitution many asylum seekers face and the remoteness of some dispersal locations, transport has also been identified as a significant issue (Refugee Action 2019; Scottish Government 2018).

Two asylum seekers respondents raised doubts regarding the sufficiency of English classes. One participant reported that the level was too low (Interview 11), while another also questioned whether the tuition was sufficient for learning English to a level that facilitated ordinary activities such as reading newspapers (Interview 3). These perspectives reflect issues raised in relevant report, which suggest that the provision of ESOL often doesn't meet the learners' needs (Refugee Action 2019; 2016). In the case of VPRS, local authorities and refugees reported that the amount of provision – around four hours a week – was inadequate for learning English quickly (NAO 2014).

In the absence of mainstream employment and the shortcomings of ESOL provision, the Home Office encourages asylum seekers to volunteer to gain language skills and prepare for accessing the labour market (Home Office, 2019b). Several interviewees did voluntary work (Interviews 6, 7, 11, 12)

When we go to the community all the time, they ask us to do voluntary job, because they said that will help you to learn English and you will have good communications with the people, you will find very lovely people then and you will know more about this country, and so we did. I did volunteering with Maryhill Integration Network, with the Royal Voluntary Service, and also I worked at a charity foundation. I am still working in catering. Also, I am doing teaching, Arabic teaching, for some kids. I enjoy my life here, because now your English is improved a little bit, and now you can enjoy your job, enjoy your volunteering. (Interview 7)

However, other interviewees found they were excluded even from volunteering:

We went to look for some voluntary work here and they didn't even accept us for free, voluntary work here. We thought we would go and do some free work and that would help our mood my husband and mine and be part of the society (Interview 1).

I haven't even been told that I can volunteer. Know because of my work I know a lot of these things. But, in the past, I did not know anything. I did not know any networks...I also went to the Red Cross but they said we do not need any people; if we need we will call you. ... (interview 11)

The difference between the experience of these respondents and the one quoted above might be partly due to their status; the first arrived as a resettled refugee, while the others were in the mainstream asylum system. Given the organisation of the resettlement scheme, access to volunteering is more streamlined, and information about it more easily available, unlike in the case of other respondents. The respondent who came through a resettlement scheme was also able to secure some employment through volunteering, while other interviewees were excluded from this option because of their status.

4.4 Health Care

Several respondents related that they were able to access healthcare provision (interviews 1,3, 4,10), and reported positive experiences in their interactions with medical staff (Interviews 1,3, 7): One theme that emerged from the interviewees' responses was that healthcare, and especially mental health support was often provided by third sector organisations.

There was a male nurse who helped me a lot with my emotional / mental health difficulties and some help from the Red Cross (interview 1)

When my doctors, my GP, he diagnosed me with the depression, you know, then they refer me to the Govan Community Centre [...], and they ask me to come over for the counselling sessions, and I've been taking 24 sessions. I'm still wanting to go back again on these sessions, because I still know I haven't been...I still have same fears, same depression, same anxieties, same dreaming, seeing things, I keep forgetting things. (interview 10)

I went to the GP and they support me and gave me medicine for that. They asked me to look after myself, keep warm all the time, having vitamin D and something like this. Also, the psychology problems, we have in the community centre or Maryhill Integration Network, sometimes people come and speak about, if you have psychology problems there is an advisor who can give you advice about this and how you can get rid of this problem. We got help for that. (Interview 7)

Although in the context of healthcare third sector organisations are seen as sources of advice and information (Nellums *et al* 2018), for several of our respondents they were providers of formal or informal psychological support (AIDA 2017; British Psychological society 2017; Solutions for Sanctuary 2016). Mental health issues and psychosomatic problems were reported by many respondents (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12), and were linked to both experiences before migration, but also to experiences of the UK asylum system.

My physical issues are all from Iran but my emotional state has become worse here (Interview 3)

Anxiety and depression, that is something you are likely to trigger if you go through the system of claiming asylum, because your integrity gets challenged, your honesty is at stake, people tell you they don't believe your credibility. When that happens, no matter how strong an individual you are, you will start questioning yourself. You'll start questioning what sort of person you are... (Interview 9)

The wider circumstances of claiming asylum, which include poverty, inadequate housing and destitution, and long periods of isolation, are likely to have a detrimental impact on the mental health of asylum seekers (Morgan, Melluish, and Welham 2017; Nellums *et al.*, 2018). Yet, as one of the respondents highlighted, mental health provision has serious shortcomings:

One of the things I would say that we're not brilliant at is mental health provision. However, you know, mental health provision isn't brilliant in the UK full stop. But, the

specialist services that exist tend to centre on major urban areas, and with the best... in the world we just don't have major urban areas in the East of England. And we are close enough to London that people assume that, 'oh well, you could just get to London'. But if you've got people in crisis and people experiencing trauma, it's very difficult to just go 'okay well just get on the train for a couple of hours', and you know you need people who can support them going down to those services. (Interview 31)

This reflects the lack of specialised mental health support in the UK, despite the acute need for them given the prevalence of trauma and anxiety among asylum seekers, (AIDA 2019; Morgan, Melluish, and Welham 2017; Interview 20). Another reported experience was that medical services showed a misunderstanding of the nature of the problems, with some taking a dismissive attitude to the reporting of trauma:

No, I do not get professional help to help about the difficulties. In the past the GP said: try not think about that past. (Interview 12)

I asked to my GP that I am feeling, facing all this stress, because of the Home Office, because of this detention, because of the treatment. But again and again, I keep asking them, but, one day, one of the doctors, she figured out that you should take these counselling sessions, because of your health, I can see that you need this. But, before this, the NHS didn't bother. They say, "It's okay: paracetamol, cocadamol, paracetamol, cocadamol, this or that..."(Interview 2)

Attitudes of doctors and healthcare professionals towards asylum seekers and their experiences is one of the barriers affecting experiences of healthcare in the UK (Kang 2019). However, there are many other reported barriers to healthcare. One respondent reported problems accessing healthcare first because of being destitute, then because of relying on asylum support and being unable to pay for treatment outside the healthcare entitlement for asylum seekers:

When I was HC2 form, I had to do a little bit repair, teeth repair, tooth repair. They stop my support, and my HC2 form expired, and I couldn't renew it, and I went back to the dentist and they refused to treat me, to give me the treatment. They say, you have £20 invoice, you have to pay it. But I don't have cash. After a while, I got the Azure card, I thought, this is a bank account. So, I say, "Last few months, I wasn't able to pay you because I didn't have the bank card, but now I have the Azure card." But, what's that? It's not bank account? I say, "Okay, but there is money in this card, you can take it". They say, no, we cannot take it. I say, "Yeah but when I go to the stop, there is money, they can take it, in Tesco..." They say, it doesn't work for us. I say, "I have only this, this is my only income, I cannot work, I cannot get cash, this is my money". They say, no. If you don't pay, we won't treat you, or give you the treatment, and you cannot come back here again, because you have not paid the £20 invoice. They say, it's not our problem. (interview 6)

This experience reflects legal and policy arrangements which exclude asylum seekers, and in particular refused asylum seekers from healthcare provision (Kang, Tomkow and Farrington 2019). As the quotation above illustrates, status insecurity, lack of information – the

respondent would not have been entitled to treatment even if he had cash - and exclusions from certain aspects of healthcare provision have an adverse effect on access (AIDA 2019; Kang, Tomkow and Farrington 2019). Other structural barriers highlighted in research have included language, cultural and gender barriers, access to interpretation and racist attitudes as well as the frequent moves of asylum seekers because of the organisation of accommodation provision (AIDA 2019; Kang, Tomkow and Farrington 2019; Nellums et al 2018; Interviews 17, 22). Vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and those with acute health conditions are particularly affected, as frequent moves create disruption in the provision of medical care (AIDA 2019; HAC 2017; Kang, Tomkow and Farrington 2019; Nellums *et al* 2018). Further, GP practices sometimes refuse to register asylum seekers due to discriminatory attitudes but also concerns over costs and uncertainty over legal provisions on entitlement to healthcare (Levy Gale 2017; Nellums *et al* 2018) Access can also differ across the four countries: :

In terms of healthcare the position in Scotland is slightly better than in England but not so much. So our provisions are broader in terms of allowing people access who have previously claimed asylum even if they are 'ARE' (asylum rights exhausted). In Scotland we would continue to let them access to primary care on that basis, whereas in England and Wales you would not...however you do also have the issue for people who are on unlimited leave to remain, permission types that are charging for NHS services, can be an issue in Scotland, potentially is, it is an issue in England and Wales.(Interview 21)

The quotation illustrates the discrepancies in the provision of healthcare to asylum seekers in the UK. Since healthcare is a devolved policy area, legal arrangements regarding the entitlements of asylum seekers and those with no legal status vary considerably. In essence, dispersal decisions, which asylum seekers cannot challenge dictate their access to healthcare, both during and after the asylum application if it is refused.

4.5 Provision of information

Asylum seekers in the mainstream asylum support system receive information from various organisations. Official provision of information has been outsourced to the NGO Migrant Help, which has been contracted by the Home Office since 2014 to provide information on a range of issues, including applying for asylum support, accommodation and healthcare (Hutton, Simic and Blitz 2018; Migrant Help 2019). It also provides interpretation services. The other main source of information are housing providers. Migrant Help –and sometimes other NGOs – also provide information services within Initial accommodation centres (Hutton, Simic and Blitz 2018). When asylum seekers move into dispersed accommodation, they receive a 'welcome pack' – in essence a booklet - provided by the Home Office and housing providers act as portals for the provision of information on issues such as accessing healthcare. While information provided within Initial accommodation have been found to work rather efficiently (Hutton, Simic and Blitz 2018), after dispersal access to information appears to be problematic:

Well they did us a favour and gave us a place in [city], but gave very little information to us, well, I am a refugee. They should arrange some classes over here for us to learn

about the culture in here, some programmes also, but nothing, nothing at all. (interview 2)

I didn't know anything about any food banks or any help that I can access.[...] I did not know that I can get vouchers or I did not know anything about these things. Nor the legal advisor said anything about this. I did not find anything online because I did not know that this was possible. (Interview 4)

As these quotations suggest, both practical information on sources of support and essential services and information on broader aspects of political and cultural life do not seem to be adequate, an issue raised in relevant research (Hutton, Simic and Blitz 2018). According to NGO stakeholders, these arrangements seem to be localised and ad-hoc:

So people don't know where they are, they don't have clothes, they don't know the system, it would be good to know people that spoke your language that could support you. I think they do get some quite good support from Migrant Help at the beginning, I've just heard they get classes of some kind that help them to learn something about the systems in the UK, but its not orientation. [...] Orientation for their neighbourhood, which doesn't happen at the moment. Serco might tell you that it does. It might happen occasionally if you have a good housing officer but it doesn't as standard. I have experience of someone transported from Govan to Bailleston with a child, nowhere near a shop, didn't know where she was, not even given a handbook, nothing... Absolutely shocking (Interview 24).

They give them a handbook and in the handbook at the back there are some leaflets and stuff but they are not in their language. The handbook might be in their language if they're lucky but the leaflets are not. The housing officer could give them support about that but they don't. The Red Cross used to do an orientation thing, I don't think they do that now. I remember someone who went to the Red Cross and were given a wee map (Interview 24).

While the handbook the respondent refers to seems to be now available in several languages, language barriers prevent asylum seekers from accessing information and support, especially in the absence of interpretation.

[Asylum seekers] don't get the interpreting support that they need. So the housing officer will come and expect to take a repair but it can't be explained properly if you don't speak English. They very rarely speak the language themselves... the ESOL classes are about learning English, whereas at the moment when somebody arrives they need support in their own language to understand what's happening. I've heard of a whole handbook being read to somebody through a telephone interpreter, I don't know if that's actually true but I know they've said that they would do that, Serco did say that. That's such a hard thing for people (interview 24).

NGOs and community groups are again crucial in providing information in the absence of efficient state-contracted services despite less funding being available (Mayblin and James 2019). This extends to information akin to orientation classes:

[name of organisation], we used to go there, and there is like police officers and speakers and the staff there all the time, all the time they help us. Because we don't know what we have to do or what we can't do. So, all the time, the staff in Maryhill Integration Network told us about, You can do that, don't do that (Interview 7)

In the case of resettled refugees, information is provided by a wide range of actors both before and after arrival. Before arrival, 'cultural orientation' information is supposed to be provided by IOM or Home Office resettlement staff (Home Office 2018a). In contrast to the diffusion of service provision among NGOs and for profit stakeholders, the reception arrangements for resettled refugees are the responsibility of local authorities, coordinated by regional Strategic migration partnerships (Home Office 2017a). Caseworkers assigned to resettled families are tasked with providing information and assisting refugees with accessing services such as healthcare and ESOL (Home Office 2018a). The Home Office guidance on resettlement often refers to the support provided as being a 'package' which contrasts the outsource and privatised model of the organisation of asylum support. Local authorities are responsible for the provision of information and interpretation services which are often subcontracted from third sector organisations (NAO 2016). One interviewee who was resettled described these arrangements in a positive manner:

After we arrived here for about three days, we had a support worker who comes regularly to our house, twice a week, to help us to register for the GP, the optician, dentist, to have insurance number, job centre. They are very helpful people, they come twice a week. Also they told us there are some communities you can go to know your rights and obligations. (Interview 7)

Yet, the provision of information was identified as a problematic area for resettled refugees both pre-and post- arrival in the UK, especially in what concerned information about the place of arrival, access to benefits and legal status past the initial 5 year leave (NAO 2016). Most services that relate to information provided to asylum seekers during the reception period are subcontracted and that local authorities were relying on volunteers and other refugees to provide interpretation (NAO 2016).

4.6 Encounters with officials, civil society and the receiving society

This section discusses the experiences of interviewees in what concerns encounters with officials – in the context of reception mainly state-contracted providers of accommodation and information as well as with third sector organisations. In addition it explores interactions between interviewees and local populations of the areas they are dispersed to or settle in.

4.6.1 Officials

Despite the Home Office being the state authority in charge of reception policy, our interviewees had little direct contact with them in the terms of reception services. In the interviews with contacted, most interactions respondents referred to concerned matters around housing and support, which have been outsourced to housing providers and the NGO Migrant Help. As these organisations are contracted by the Home Office to perform reception functions that are the responsibility of the state, we consider them here to be ‘officials’ rather than third sector organisations. Experiences of interactions with these organisations vary. Some interviewees commented positively on Serco staff, describing for example their case worker as ‘very nice’ (Interview 1, also Interview 3). Another commented that ‘Serco looked after us well. It was a very good organisation, would pay us some money too. I am satisfied with Serco’ (Interview 2). However, the same participant also reported negative experiences.

I mean the worst organisation is Migrant Help, it’s called Migrant Help but it is actually Migrant No Help really. I had lots of problems then, serious mood / mental issues, had no money, no food and he threw bread in front of me, one of these dry long Baggett. Well I didn’t have any money, the £5 a day that I am entitled to, give me that much. ‘No’, he would say, ‘you lost your card, it’s your problem not ours’. What does that mean that I don’t have any money and I should die of hunger? Throwing bread in front of me, it was an insult. (Interview 2)

One of our respondents stated that when she requested to change her accommodation, she was dismissed by an employee of the housing provider:

I asked the person visiting our house to please change my house and my interpreter who was from Serco, said, “Lady your life was in danger before, now you arrived here and finding faults?” I really didn’t expect that from a fellow country person under those conditions. (Interview 1)

This experience exemplifies issues around the problematic engagement between asylum seekers and service providers, who tend to dismiss the complaints and issues of asylum seekers, while often adopting intimidating behaviour towards them (HAC 2018; ICIBI 2019). Both in relation to accommodation standards and the wider housing allocation, asylum seekers lack the power to challenge the conditions they live in. This is, at one level, manifested in their interactions with housing providers and their staff. Similarly, one stakeholder recounted a case whereby an asylum seeker was not believed when they reported a broken boiler or, as the stakeholder stated the housing officer ‘was just victimizing the person’ (Interview 24). Such interactions can be particularly difficult for women because of gendered and cultural dynamics (Meer *et al* 2019). Language barriers (Interview 19; HAC 2018) and lack of information were also identified as factors affecting the ability of asylum seekers to challenge accommodation conditions:

The other thing that we deal with is the issues that people have. If they are in inappropriate accommodation for whatever reason, the housing officer is meant to deal with getting the person relocated. Sometimes the housing officer doesn’t advise the person on exactly how to do that. If someone’s on a top floor and they’ve got bad legs and can’t get out, they must provide some kind of official medical information to back up a request to move to a lower down house. Sometimes people don’t know that, they haven’t provided the evidence they need. (Interview 24).

In a similar manner, stakeholders brought up the effect of status insecurity:

If there is access to housing depending on your status, the housing can be really poor quality, people have real barriers in terms of reporting any concerns with their housing or any problems with their housing because they are scared it will affect their claim, or their case. (Interview 19)

Fears of asylum seekers that complaints about accommodation could have an adverse effect on their application for international protection or could lead to loss of asylum support have been mentioned in several reports. While complaints regarding accommodation do not have a bearing on protection claims, interactions with service providers and within the provided accommodation can lead to loss of asylum support. Under contractual obligations, housing providers must inform the Home Office on breaches of accommodation rules and on 'any reasonable suspicions that the that a Service User may be obtaining support from the Authority by fraudulent means' (Home Office 2019f). One of the authors is aware of a case where the Home Office was informed of a laptop, donated by a local support group, found in an asylum seeker's room during an inspection by the housing provider. This was communicated to the Home Office, which interpreted this information as evidence that the asylum seeker was not destitute. Regimes of inspection include unannounced visits, since asylum seekers are designated as 'service users' by COMPASS contracts and therefore do not have the rights of tenants (ICIBI 2018). Housing providers also perform functions of migration control: for example, they inform the Home Office if a resident has breached the conditions of their immigration bail, such as a curfew (Klein and Williams 2012). Hence, interactions with organisations representing the state in the context of reception should take into account power differentials between state authorities and migrants and that reception policies operate within a regime of migration control.

4.6.2 Civil society

In contrast to the complex dynamics governing interactions between asylum seekers and actors contracted by the Home Office, many respondents had positive experiences of civil actors – range from established NGOs to smaller community groups:

There was an officer from Red Cross, specially in London, the airport, because we don't have very good English at this time. So there is officer there, he has a big paper, we are Red Cross to help you. So there is no problem, everything is fine. (Interview 7)

In addition to the role of third sector organisations as sources of support and advice, explored in previous sections, respondents see them as part of building community networks:

And they have community meetings every week with other refugees, so we didn't feel lonely, because we used to go there every week, we meet with other refugees, we have their stories, they listened to our stories. [...] They provided us with a lot of help. (Interview 7)

Well, I was lucky, because at that time, there was a couple of community groups worked there. There was the Refugee Council, they support people a bit, and there was a community. I was always trying to find out, I was watching, looking, every corner in the wall, trying to find out how to get contact with the community. I found some numbers, Kurdish community, that community, but no answer, no answer forever. But I was lucky because I found so many good people in Red Road camp. [...] At that time, in some ways it was not very easy, not very good, but having lots of people, organisations around you, people from same situation around you, we were just making a group, cooking, everything, in our house. So I connected with a community, with a local community but also with a refugee community quite quick. (Interview 6)

While the interview suggests that his experience resulted from a combination of being proactive and good fortune, it also points to the importance of third sector organisations in building community support. Yet, as the same respondent suggests, it is not always easy for asylum seekers to know of or to be able to locate these networks of support:

I think at that the moment it is worse, because the place, the accomodation, and the communities, people feel very isolated. There is no help, to be connected. [...] if I'm being honest and fair, day by day gets worse for supporting the community, because of spending cuts. Well, my experience is different with others. When I see others, they are feeling lonely and isolated and confused, they don't know what to do. All they know, go to somewhere, a park or somewhere in the city, say. I know there is lots of community work, but maybe is not a good link, how to contact these people, because [inaudible] it's very divided, you don't know anyone. But I'm sure there is a lot community. But that's really important, how to connect, how to find them. But it's not only about how many communities are there to support you, it's about confidence, language...I'm sure most of them, all of them, are welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, but as I say, you don't know. You need induction, you need help, from third person, to introduce you to the community. (Interview 6)

Reflecting existing research (Darling 2016a; Mayblin and James 2019), the respondent identifies the reduction of funding as a reason for third sector organisations facing difficulties in providing services to people in the reception period. However, he also presents a more complex picture of the relations between third sector organisations and asylum seekers, whereby asylum seekers find it difficult to locate these networks of support, both because of their isolation and language barriers. In essence, his analysis points to the necessity for support organisation to reach out to the people they purport to support. A stakeholder also raised the issue of access to third sector support:

People are physically removed from services. There is not equity of services across the city and then like, Govan Community Project which is absolutely brilliant and so I've referred people to there because, because they can help people, but you know, that still means effectively my constituents have to go to Govan, rather than actually having anything local for them (Interview 19)

The stakeholder raised the issue of accessing support organisations which, as previously discussed in the report, is partly due to the provision of housing in remote localities with poor access to transport. As there is little provision for transport costs in the official asylum support

system, these have to be covered by asylum seekers or third sector organisation. In addition, the stakeholder alludes to the localised pattern of provision, whereby specialised services are offered by small, local third sector organisations based in a specific area of a dispersal city. The same services might not be offered, or offered as effectively by other organisations in other city locations, which increases the costs of access for their users.

4.6.2 Experienced 'welcome culture'

Beyond experiences with third sector organisations which in the absence of official schemes engage in reception practices akin to a 'welcoming culture', respondents recounted interactions with local societies. Some reported positive experiences:

... I can't speak for all of the UK, but where I live [in Kent] there are not a lot of racist people and hate people for their beliefs. ... Most of them would not care where I would be from. Most of them when they know that I am from Syria, they show their sympathy and ask if they can help in any way. You will find also the person who says you are taking our job but you will find them in any country. ... My colleague at work always ask how my family in Syria is, whether they need help. And this comforts me. (interview 14)

The people in the UK they are the nicest people ever; everywhere, in college, in the church, on the street, in the buses, everywhere. Even the police was nice (interview 12)

Others, in contrast, experienced negative reactions from the local population. One respondent faced considerable hostility from neighbours, often addressed at her children:

Situation was that my house was quite bad. Even one Christmas night we went out with my son and people even threw egg on his head, not sure who it was children probably. [...] We had a very bad neighbour too. Whenever my children went into the house yard to play they would not allow them and say to them to go back to their own country. [...] Her son was the same age as my daughter, they were white Scottish too. Because of my son's situation we applied to move from [deprived area], the situation with the neighbour even went to the police We had to raise a complaint about them, we were quite scared at nights me and my two children there... (Interview 1)

Another interviewee perceived the responses of the local population as racist:

Well one would feel a bit of racism here from them. Yes, I have felt they are a bit racist. [...], it is obvious from the way they treat us and look at us it is very apparent that they are racist and don't like refugees in their country. (Interview 3)

These perspectives – in addition to the bullying of the first participant's child at school – exemplify some of the widely reported issues of facing discrimination and hostile behaviour in dispersal areas, which are often characterised by crime and deprivation as well as a lack of ethnic and racial diversity (Meer *et al* 2019). Nevertheless, one of the aims of dispersal policies

was to prevent 'inter-ethnic tensions by avoiding too many asylum-seekers in any one area' (Bloch and Schuster 2005, p. 506). The policy of housing asylum seekers in low cost areas of housing surplus exposes them to a range of risks and vulnerabilities, from inadequate services to crime and isolation. The practices of accommodation providers have on occasion played a role in increasing the vulnerability of asylum seekers: in a case that attracted media outcry, housing contractors painted the doors of houses occupied by asylum seekers red, thus making them identifiable and exposing them to racist abuse (Gani and Pidd 2016; Grayson 2016). Although not raised by our respondents, the use of pre-paid cards for asylum support, especially under section 4 has had an equally stigmatising effect as it identifies users as asylum seekers, often drawing the hostility of shop staff and local residents (Klein and Williams 2012). Researchers have also noted placing asylum seekers in areas of little economic opportunity, with little investment to support their transition, can reinforce social exclusion both in the host communities and among the asylum seekers (Phillimore and Goodson, 2006; Hynes 2011; Meer *et al* 2019). This ambivalence is reflected in the stakeholder interviews:

I think one of the problems though that mounts up is inevitably because housing is cheapest in deprived areas a lot of refugees are put into places like Sunderland and Rotherham and so on, already rather poor communities, and that I think has problems. It means that when they get status it's hard to get work there without moving away. It means there's more likely to be resentment from the community, which is deprived anyway, so that type of thing is difficult. Certainly, when I visited one group of Syrian families in a very dismal block of flats in Clydebank, I wondered whether that would be a problem, but I don't think it has been. Apparently, both Clydebank and Paisley on the whole have been very welcoming which is really nice (Interview 18).

5. Notes on multilevel model of reception

This section discusses, first, some of the key issues in the implementation of reception policies in the UK, focusing on the effects of privatisation of provision, relations between key stakeholders, and the role of the third sector. The second part focuses on the effects of the UK reception system on asylum seekers and migrants, taking into account its place within asylum and migration policies that privilege control.

5.1 The implementation of reception policies: privatisation, depoliticisation and the failures of multi-actor delivery

Similar to policy making, the implementation of reception policies in the UK is highly centralised, in the sense that it is tightly controlled by the Home Office. The Home Office has retained authority over most matters which, in combination with a drive towards privatisation, erosion of local authority powers and funding and increasingly hostile migration policies, it has created considerable tensions and conflicts among actors in the implementation of reception policies. At the same time, it created a very complex, multi-actor system which impacted negatively on implementation.

First, while the privatisation of services was supposed to increase the efficiency of provision and reduce costs (Darling 2016a; NAO 2016; Meer *et al* 2019), this has not been the case. In the domain of housing, of the three companies awarded contracts in 2012, only one, Clearsprings, had previous experience in providing asylum accommodation. Thus, the transition stage was characterised by problems in ensuring an adequate supply of housing (HAC 2018). Investigations by the NAO and the HAC and ICIBI have raised severe concerns about the performance of asylum accommodation providers (HAC 2018, 2017; NAO, 2014). Reflecting on the theme of privatisation, one stakeholder contrasted the performance of local councils, who delivered accommodation before 2006, with the subsequent experience under the mixture of Home Office and private control:

When I first got involved with refugees the council was managing the housing and although it was very basic and some of it was in buildings like the Red Road flats which were going to be demolished. At least if you needed repairs done they would get done and there was a casework officer for each family who monitored those sort of things, but since [city] failed to win the tender for housing for asylum seekers and refugees and it was all farmed out to various suppliers, in [city]'s case via Serco, the standard of housing has deteriorated horribly and we do get people coming to us with terrible complaints and people like [name removed] do great work in trying to ameliorate those problems and trying to support people (Interview 18).

Similar concerns were raised by a stakeholder on the outsourcing of information services contracts.

Unfortunately, the major change happened just prior to 2015 and that was the change to the asylum support contracts which moved Asylum Support Advice from a solely, or

almost entirely in-person provision, to a helpline model and removed advocacy. And also just put people in less compassionate call centres where the staff are under pressure to get through calls very, very quickly. They're asked to make unfair... We've had clients go into Red Cross shops, having fled domestic abuse and tried to access support via that helpline, and they've just been unable to access the support. (Interview 26)

The privatisation of the provision of information services also highlights the degree of power of the Home Office over the implementation of reception policies. Before 2014, information services were provided by Refugee Councils, which according to one stakeholder made for

A more joined-up approach to signposting. So when you were a new asylum seeker, whether individual or a family, there would be more thorough assessment of your particular needs and closer working with social work, so on. That all fell away, and I think the other thing asylum seekers need is more information and better at the start (interview 21)

Secondly, the current system of provision has engendered significant conflict between the Home Office on the one hand, and devolved and local authorities of the other. While local authorities (and devolved governments) have to provide services to those made destitute by Home Office policies, they are side-lined from key arrangements regarding the implementation of reception services. Although they are involved with the process of dispersal, since they have to agree to receive dispersed asylum seekers, they have no input in the awarding of contracts or any monitoring and oversight powers over the quality of accommodation provided or the efficiency of provision (HAC 2018; Meer *et al* 2019). The reluctance of the government to involve local authorities in inspection and compliance procedures in the 2019 COMPASS contracts procurement, despite their request to do so, has been strongly criticised in the Home Affairs (2017; 2018) and ICIBI (2018) reports. Disagreements and mistrust between local authorities and the Home Office led the former to threaten to withdraw from dispersal arrangements (HAC 2018). Thus, the perception among local authorities has been that the Home office prioritised cost-cutting over considering the impact of asylum support and dispersal arrangements (HAC 2018; ICIBI 2018).

Further, local authorities have to act as 'shock absorbers' of the effects of the dispersal system and the destitution and homelessness created by the asylum support system, which create pressures on local public services, such as education, housing (Meer *et al* 2019).

So the fact the immigration is not devolved is a huge issue and then the issue of people who are given no recourse to public funds that's a huge issue. So, statutory services in [city] would be very reluctant to support people with no recourse to public funds and for me that makes no sense, never mind on a kind of moral or ethical way but just in terms of we now have the integration of health and social care so it is literally affecting [city]'s budget if you wait for people to get to the point of trauma or the point of crisis to then go and have health care. (Interview 19)

Several stakeholders expressed the view that the Home Office passes on the effects of its policies to local authorities and their public services, without providing the funds to address them:

The Home Office make a decision and think that we should pick up the flack. The debate from an HSCP perspective across [city] as, no you made the decision, you made them vulnerable, you have control over that. They don't then become the responsibility of the local authority or the health board because of your decision. (Interview 22)

We get stuck in situations like that all the time [...] It's financially draining us. We do not get a penny from the government. We don't get...I mean, the Scottish government, their attitude is we should be supporting [...] I had to give evidence in the Scottish Parliament in one of their committees and it was all about, we're not doing enough to support. Well we've got less and less and less money. We've got absolutely nothing to do with this. Your expectations...and we do support them. UK government want us to make it more difficult. Who's helping us do what we're doing? (Interview 20)

While the first respondent above designates the Home Office as responsible, the second respondent points to the contradictory aims of central and devolved governments – in this case the Scottish one. However, local authorities can be as unwilling as the Home Office to provide necessary services. The case of the Serco evictions in Glasgow (Box 1) is an example of how conflict between the local council and the Home Office can have extremely negative effects for the people in need of reception services. Rather than seeking solutions to prevent homelessness – in a city with already high levels of it – and prioritising the welfare of migrants, the key actors remain entrenched in their positions: the Home Office to a policy that renders migrants destitute, the housing providers to the arrangements of the Compass Contracts, and the local authority to avoiding costs and shifting the blame to the Home Office and the housing providers. In contrast, stakeholders view the cooperation between central government and local authorities in the context of resettlement, where housing and other services are their responsibility, as a much better arrangement:

I think actually it would be better if there was more communication and more input from the local authority because I think with Syrian resettlement that's what's made it so much better. I mean, it is a two tiered system, obviously it isn't it, but in my experience of people going through Syrian is an absolute gold standard of integration by comparison and I think that is very much because of the involvement of the local authority (Interview 17).

Box 1: The evictions of asylum seekers from Serco-provided accommodation in Glasgow

In July 2018, Serco announced it would issue eviction notices to up to 300 tenants in Glasgow whose asylum applications had been refused by the Home Office (Brooks 2018). They planned to give one-day notices that locks in the accommodation of the asylum seekers would be changed (Hill 2018; Leask 2018). According to the COMPASS arrangements, accommodation providers are not funded to provide accommodation to refused asylum seekers after a decision has been made (AIDA 2019; Hill 2018). While Serco previously tolerated the longer stay of asylum seekers locally, in 2018 it decided to follow the terms of the contract, avoiding losses for the company (Hill 2018; Meer *et al* 2019). Reflecting this, a stakeholder highlighted the impact of Serco's actions:

this was basically I think announced on the Thursday night to start on the Monday morning or some bullshit so all of the statutory services then were completely alarmed, that they would apparently have

no warning of this and then all of the third sector and grassroots were saying we don't have the capacity to suddenly deal with 300 hundred people who are evicted with no notice (Int 19).

These events were followed by protests by activists and third sector organisations (Wylie 2019; Brooks 2019a) and a legal challenge to the Court of Sessions – the highest Scottish Court – to stop the evictions. This was defeated in April 2019, and Serco, which meanwhile had lost the Scotland COMPASS contract to the Mears Group, announced it was re-starting lock-change evictions in July 2019 (BBC 2019). These developments were followed again by a city-wide campaign (No Evictions) and legal challenges to prevent the lock changes and homelessness (Brooks 2019b; Wylie 2019). However, the court ruled again that the evictions were legal (Brooks 2019b).

The Serco evictions showcased the problematic dynamics of the governance of reception accommodation in the UK. Serco, as the private contractor, stated that its actions were in line with the law and pointed to the responsibility of the Home Office and welcomed legal challenges clarifying the interpretation of Scottish law on tenancies (Brooks 2018; Serco 2018). The courts' decisions essentially favoured Serco's positions, deciding that it could not be considered a public authority and therefore breaching asylum seekers rights to housing, despite acting on behalf of the home office (Lynch 2018). A participant expressed a similar view:

I mean, I think Serco gets a lot of flak and they absolutely should. But, at the end of the day, Serco are Serco. The root [cause]...are the Home Office. Serco are the contracted organisation (Interview 17).

The Home Office showed no intention to intervene at the local level or change its policies. Glasgow City Council stated repeatedly that the legal framework prevented it from taking any action to address the situation of asylum seekers to be made homeless, and the devolved government adopted the same stance (Brooks 2018; SNP 2018). This stance was challenged by campaigners and activists who argued that Glasgow City Council, as a local authority had obligations to act under social care and social work duties (PAIH 2019; Scottish Housing News 2019)

Despite the better experiences of reception in the context of resettlement programmes, failures in the implementation of asylum support have transferred responsibilities to the third sector.

NGOs and volunteers filling an increasingly important, almost a core role in some cases in refugee reception, but that's only because the inadequacy of the reception conditions provided by the central government, and I actually think that the narrative in Britain is, the central government is receding from providing these core services, and pushing responsibility to national government and to the third sector [...] I think that tension unhelpfully allows different organisations, sort of pass the box. Charities for example will step in if there is a funding there, but also might be mindful or reluctant to step in, because they don't want statutory authorities to rely on, the service they providing, and there is a terrible tension when you see charities eventually refusing to provide services because they are pushing statutory authorities to do what they requires to do, but actually nobody steps up, if you see individual suffering...so I think that is the political context that kind of resource-driven that actually constrains what people can do. (Interview 24)

The transfer of responsibilities to the third sector has been a long standing process in the UK context, that emerged in parallel to the exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream welfare provision (Cohen *et al* 1999; Zetter *et al* 2005). Research by Mayblin and James

(2017;2019) confirms the insights of the interviewed stakeholder and suggests that third sector organisations across the UK 'fill in the gaps' in asylum support created by Home Office policies (Solutions for Sanctuary 2016). At the same time the services provided by third sector organisations are also dependent on funding, both by the Home Office and other funders, which can affect delivery (Mayblin and James 2017; 2019).

5.2 The effects of reception policies and their implementation on asylum seekers and migrants: destitution and dehumanisation

Responses by the interviewees offer ample evidence that the asylum support system both renders them destitute and dehumanises them. The destitution created by the exclusion from the labour market and inadequate financial support for survival is experienced by our respondents as humiliation and loss of dignity:

Not being able to work, go to college, not being able to buy a drink, a coffee. It's a sense of humiliation. In my country, I was doing well, a lot of money, this company, I was working here. My dignity, at least in my city, or at least around me, was da da da...You have, not everything. [In country of origin] I have a lot of things. You come here, you don't have anything. You lose everything. Sometimes, you lose your hope. Even if you come with lots of hope, the system crush you. Always trying to make you vulnerable, humiliating you. Because you cannot work... (interview 6)

And my kids ask questions: why my friend is going there and I cannot? ... Sometimes my daughter asks me: when are we going to the restaurant? I tell her one day we will go. ... Why does the father of my friend work and why don't you work? Why do they have a car and we don't? You have to always explain these questions. It is very difficult. ... (interview 13)

Similar insights were offered by a stakeholder:

So, an example would be a man I spoke to who said he didn't take his child to anything in the summer because he was, so even though there is some free provision but he was really scared because if she saw other kids eating sweets and he had no money to give her sweeties and that would just feel worse. So, it was actually better for her to be inside, which is just horrific, it is totally heart-breaking. And even things like so there is free swimming over the summer but if you don't have a swimming costume and or maybe you have got scares, or maybe you've got, if you want to cover up your body for example all of these things. Just cause there's free things, there's still barriers if money is removed, money is a big deal and transport costs even as well so because asylum seekers are allowed to work they have no income to dispose of so then they can't actually spend it on any normal things like taking your family to the cinema, or ice-skating or you know, normal things. (Interview 19)

Not being able to work and support themselves and their families is a situation felt deeply in particular by male respondents, pointing also to the effect of tropes of masculinity (Griffiths *et al* 2015). As the first respondent suggests, for some it is a considerable change in circumstances – several of the respondents were from middle class, professional backgrounds. In practical terms, the lack of financial resources creates isolation: forced to spend hours in doors, with no employment and no financial means to engage in society, asylum seekers experienced uncertainty exacerbating their alienation and trauma.

Because the Home Office or the system prefers not giving you cash, because you don't deserve to be a normal person, having cash, buying a coffee, being in college. For a few years, for some time, I didn't have 45p for a coffee, I had to hide from my colleague, because I'm there, I have to pay for my coffee, or to buy them coffee, because sometimes they bought me coffee, so I had to hide during the coffee break. Not just me, other people are in the same situation. (Int 6)

Every week we get 35 pounds. I can't go out. And I am always alone. No family, no one. ...(interview 12)

People being forbidden to work is such a stupid, stupid policy because it means that people don't meet anyone and they are stuck inside, they don't have any money to do anything. (Interview 19)

These effects are compounded by the insecurities and anxiety created by the asylum system, and the long process of waiting for a decision. In the RESPOND interviews, by far the most common health problems were related to mental health, sometimes with psychosomatic symptoms, and trauma linked to experiences in the country of origin.

I need to find a job and carry on with my life. Because mentally I was so challenged in that period because you are sitting, you are doing nothing. You are just waiting. (interview 4)

My physical issues are all from Iran but my emotional state has become worse here [...] the situation for refugees here is bad, when they don't give a decision about their application they get depressed, they should be given some advice, also they don't have work permits, they can't work. If they can get work permit and can get some advice, it would be very helpful for them (Interview 3)

One politically active interviewee aptly linked the effects of reception practices to a lack of freedom:

I wish I was back in the Jungle, so I don't have to do that, do that, do that...So many people say that. I've seen families say, "I wish I was in the Jungle, because there was a little bit of freedom", if I interpret this way. There was a little bit of freedom. You have a little house. And you socialise, and you know people, and every day, you were starving, you had to beg to people to give you bread or whatever things, some charity organisation. But lots of people, and myself, we have said it so many times, we wish

we were there. But when you come here, and you're in the system, because in the Jungle there was not any system, that was it, there was not any system to control you. You have a freedom, even if a small freedom, but that's all you want. But now there's a system, trying to systemise you (Int 8).

The interviewee referred to the policy context as a 'system' which is an apt way to highlight the links between reception policies and control. While reception policy may be interpreted as 'taking care' of the essential needs of asylum seekers and ensuring the realisation of human rights such as to housing, UK reception policy is equally a policy of border management and migration control. Control practices are embedded in the implementation of reception policies. Housing providers, for example, are contractually obliged to inform the Home Office if asylum seekers violate any rules of their residence, or of anything that might suggest they are not destitute (see section 4.6.1). Even in the case of resettled refugees, who are often housed in accommodation of better standards, if they leave accommodation deemed suitable by the local authorities that provided it, they are deemed voluntarily withdrawn from the scheme (Home Office 2018a). Similarly, the provision of benefits through ASPEN (and before 2017 Azure) cards is used for tracking the movements and expenditure of asylum seekers (Klein and Williams 2012; Right to Remain 2018; Karamanidou 2019).

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This report provided an overview of legal framework on the reception in the UK, the experiences of asylum seekers, and the perspectives of stakeholders involved in the implementation of reception policies.

The legal framework, while conforming with the provisions of the 2003 reception directive, is highly restrictive in terms of rights and provisions it affords to asylum seekers. Asylum seekers are excluded from the labour market, as successive governments have taken the view that employment rights would act as a “pull” factor encouraging migration towards the UK (Neal, Bloch and Solomos 2013; Mayblin, 2016a). At the same time, they are afforded a very low level of income support since destitution is used both as a deterrent – seen by political authorities as discouraging people from seeking asylum in the UK. Access to asylum support is itself dependent on an application with strict criteria. While this is not contrary to the provisions of the Receptions directive, it both excludes asylum seekers who cannot meet the criteria and creates delays in providing them with support.

At the same time, entitlement is highly dependent on status on the one hand, and the area of dispersal on the other. For refused asylum seekers, entitlement to housing, benefits and healthcare can be minimal, while resettled refugees, often in the same temporal space as asylum seekers, are entitled to material conditions that are closer to those of recognised refugees. In this respect, the UK asylum support system remains highly stratified in terms of the rights it affords to migrants in reception depending on their status (Mayblin 2016; Morris 2010). However, one somewhat under-researched dimension appears to be the differential access to education and healthcare depending on the region asylum seekers are dispersed to. Due to the devolution of their political powers, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different arrangements in areas of devolved policy. Further, the compulsory system of dispersal means that asylum seekers have no choice regarding the area they live.

In the field of implementation, the adoption of a marketised system of provision of accommodation has created a direct line of responsibility of for-profit providers to the Home Office, while local authorities are excluded from any oversight and compliance arrangements, as well as from any input to the development of COMPASS contracts (HAC 2018). This arrangement reflects a high level of control by the central government, as well as a process of depoliticisation (Darling 2016b), whereby responsibilities over providing reception has moved away both from the central state but also from the regional and municipal levels. Further, the provision of housing through the COMPASS contracts, driven by an emphasis on cost cutting, in conjunction with the policy of dispersal, has created negative effects ranging from the social and health effects of poor accommodation for asylum seekers, homelessness at the end of COMPASS provision, and social tensions in already deprived dispersal locations (HAC 2017; 2018; Meer *et al* 2019). In this context, local authorities, while having little involvement or control on either policy making or decisions about the organisation of the implementation of key reception policies, have to address the effects of centralised reception policies. As their funding for reception-related areas such as education, social policy and healthcare has been cut, implementation arrangements have created considerable tensions between the central, regional and municipal levels. In contrast, the greater involvement and funding of local authorities in resettlement schemes seems to have led to better relations and better

implementation (HAC 2018; Meer *et al* 2019). In both cases, however, third sector organisations have a crucial role in providing services in the absence of state

The overall conclusion is that the reception system in the UK fails to safeguard and realise the human rights of asylum seekers, a perspective shared by both asylum seekers and third sector stakeholders. This is, in essence a planned failure, as the aim of the policy is exclusion and deterrence (Morris 2002; Bloch and Schuster 2003; Mayblin 2014; 2016). It is also an internal migration control system (Karamanidou and Kasperek 2018; Karamanidou 2019) which pushes people towards destitution in order to leave the UK. The most important effect of these complex and unsuccessful arrangements has been on asylum seekers themselves. The analysis reinforces the findings of existing research that asylum seekers are conscious of their marginalisation from society and exclusion by the state. Many of them reported feeling stigmatised and shamed by their condition and some developed mental health problems post-migration. During the reception period, their restriction from the labour market, the absence of language skills and training opportunities, and the poverty they experience act to effectively restrict them from mainstream social life.

Reception policies and practices also have implications for the integration of refugees after they receive status, as they move from (government-supervised) destitution and marginalisation to the sudden expectation of rapid, often unsupported integration into a competitive labour market and mainstream society (Bales 2013; Lindsay *et al.*, 2010; Parker 2017). Thus, while politicians of all parties stress the need for refugees to “integrate”, the functions of integration have been increasingly withdrawn for the period of the asylum claim: this has been called the “asylum-integration paradox” (Bakker *et al.*, 2016; Bales 2013). Some devolved authorities, in particular Scotland, have adopted policy approaches that see integration as a process that starts earlier, with seeking asylum rather than being granted status, which is the approach embedded in UK-wide policies (Interviews 16, 19; Parker 2017; Scottish Government 2018). This is reflected in the higher level of provision and entitlements for both current and refused asylum seekers. Yet, such localised approaches cannot fully mitigate the effect of national level policies prioritising migration control and guided by the ‘hostile environment’ approach adopted since 2012 (Karamanidou 2019). It is also unknown how Brexit will affect reception arrangements in the UK, but it is unlikely that current policies will become less hostile.

Policy Recommendations

- The UK reception system should ensure that the needs and rights of asylum seekers and migrants are safeguarded, in accordance to domestic law and international human rights standards.
- The centralised approach to the governance of reception has resulted in conflict among the stakeholders responsible for the provision of services. Given the experiences of the resettlement programme, a greater and meaningful involvement of devolved governments and local authorities could improve the quality of provision.

- Approaches to the provision of housing should be less geared towards cost and profit making, and prioritise the provision of accommodation of good quality standards
- Contrary to government assessments, our research suggests that income support under sections 95/98 and 4 is inadequate and should be increased.
- Asylum seekers should be allowed to work as early as possible in the asylum process and provided with appropriate support and training for accessing the labour market.

Appendix 1: European and National legislation

Directive 2003/9/EC laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers

1996 Asylum and Immigration Act

1999 Immigration and Asylum Act

2000 Asylum support Regulations

2002 Immigration and Asylum Act

2009 Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act

2014 Care Act

Appendix 2: List of Interviews

1. Iranian female, Scotland
2. Iranian male, Scotland
3. Iranian male, Scotland
4. Syrian male, Scotland
5. Syrian male, Scotland
6. Iraqi Kurdish male, Scotland
7. Syrian Female, Scotland
8. Afghan male, Scotland
9. Pakistani male, Scotland
10. Pakistani Male, Scotland
11. Yazidi Female, England
12. Yazidi male, England
13. Yazidi male, England
14. Yazidi male, England
15. Yazidi male, England
16. Scottish Government, Scotland
17. Former Employee, Red Cross, Scotland
18. Member, Maryhill integration centre, Scotland
19. Councillor, Scottish Green Party, Scotland
20. Social worker, Local Authority, Scotland
21. Partner, Just Right Scotland
22. Doctor, NHS/Voluntary Sector
23. Police Scotland
24. The Asylum Seeker housing Project (ASH), Scotland
25. Asylum Welcome, England
26. Voluntary Sector Organisation, England
27. Manager, voluntary Sector, Scotland
28. Govan Community Centre, Scotland
29. Syrian Sisters, England
30. Organisation in Cambridge, England
31. Organisation working in the East of England

Appendix 3: Coding Scheme

Meso level

Themes

- EU and International Law (e.g. EU Directive on reception; Geneva Convention)
- National law (e.g. Asylum Seekers Benefit Act; Residence Act)
- National law not compliant with EU or international law
- Dispersal
- Evaluation of asylum system
- Policy change
- Regional differences

Actors involved in Reception Policy Making

- European Union
- International Organizations (e.g. UNHCR, IO, UNESCO)
- National government
- Devolved government
- Home Office
- Public services
- Local authorities
- NGOs (e.g. Refugee Councils)
- Community/grassroots groups, solidarity movements
- For-profit actors

Relations between Actors

- Cooperation
- Tension/lack of cooperation/coordination

Dominant narratives in Reception Policy Making

- Destitution
- Differential treatment
- Exclusion from support

- Inhumane policies
- Racism/discrimination
- Respect for human and protection rights
- Solidarity
- ‘welcoming’ culture

Implementation, Practices and Experiences of Reception

- Provision of accommodation Centers (size, occupancy, catering, security)
- Accommodation standards
- Access to language classes
- Accesses to orientation classes (e.g. political and legal system as well as code of conduct in the country of arrival)
- Access to higher education
- Access to childcare
- Access to labour market
- Access to vocational training/preparatory measures
- Regular monetary allowance (frequency, amount, conditions)
- Benefits in kind (e.g. clothing, furniture, books)
- Access to information
- Access to interpretation
- Language barriers
- Access to legal assistance
- Provision of primary healthcare
- Provision of psychotherapeutic treatment
- Delays in accessing reception/asylum support
- Lack of funding
- Problems with service delivery
- Law and policy not implemented/not implemented properly
- Not conforming to human rights standards
- Effects of system on asylum seekers/migrants

Gender

Vulnerability

- Support for vulnerable groups
- Lack of support for vulnerable groups

Micro-level

Accommodation centres

- Which kind of: size, occupancy, catering, security, closed/open?
- Spatial separation of vulnerable groups (e.g. Women, unaccompanied minors, religious or ethnic minorities)
- Protection guidelines/standards/procedures: yes/no, what kind of, how implemented

Housing (outside accommodation centre)

- Difficulty to move from central to decentral housing
- Decentral housing (e.g. Private apartments)
- Informal settlement (staying with friends, in squats, make shift camps)
- Transaction costs (charges for accommodation or housing agent)
- Experiences (problems,)
- Lack of privacy
- Isolation
- Protection/safety/insecurity
- Hygienic situation
-

Early access to Education (prior to asylum decision)

- Access to elementary language classes
- Access to orientation classes
- Counselling on the recognition of educational qualifications
- Access to schooling, to university (preparatory or regular classes)
- Good practices
- Other practices

Early access to Labour Market (prior to asylum decision)

- Preparatory measures for labour market inclusion (e.g. specific language classes, internships, apprenticeship etc.)
- Access to day-care for small children
- Employment/Apprenticeship/training/entrepreneurship (work of asylum seekers during procedure)

- Legal status: work permit? Formal vs. informal employment?
- The way how the job was found (own initiative, employment promotion measures, brokerage by other actors)
- Work conditions (also exploitation)
- Discrimination at work place (low wages, long hours, lack of safety, not getting salaries)
- Good practices
- Other practices

Services and Allowances

- Regular monetary allowance (frequency, amount, conditions)
- Benefits in kind (e.g. clothing, furniture, books)
- Counselling (e.g. legal counselling, social/gender counselling)

Medical care

- Health problems: mental, somatic problems, diagnosed PTSD
- In need of medical treatment: Granted? Difficult to get? Withheld
- Initial health check
- Psychotherapeutic treatment: Granted? Difficult to get? Withheld
-

Encounter with state-, non-state-actors and the receiving society

- Administrators (state, welfare organizations, NGOs etc. perceived to be supportive/repressive)
- Civil society actors
- Security personnel

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