Journal of Human Rights and Social Work
https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-024-00300-8

The Enforced Destitution of Asylum Seekers in the UK

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Accepted: 23 January 2024
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Abstract
Asylum seekers are often destitute upon their arrival in the UK and, thus, they depend primarily on the UK government to support them. Yet, the UK government has been enforcing the destitution of asylum seekers through socio-political and economic mechanisms. Socio-political mechanisms of destitution relate to repressive asylum policies inhibiting asylum seekers' access to mainstream benefits, employment and their ability to do meaningful activities, while economic mechanisms of destitution relate to an insufficient asylum allowance that leaves asylum seekers destitute. This article uses 50 interviews conducted with asylum seekers, refugees and staff from various organisations to explore asylum seekers' experiences of enforced destitution in Glasgow. Findings indicate that socio-political mechanisms of destitution underpin experiences of destitution and are the precursor to the economic mechanism of destitution. Findings also show that economic mechanisms of destitution challenge asylum seekers' ability to meet their subsistence needs. Furthermore, the UK government's enforced destitution of asylum seekers has caused asylum seekers to depend upon the third sector to fill the gaps in meeting their basic needs.

Keywords Forced migration · Asylum seekers · UK government · Enforced destitution · Hostile immigration environment

Introduction

Asylum seekers are people who have fled their home countries to seek sanctuary in safer, foreign countries. Asylum seekers often cannot provide for themselves upon their arrival in a host country because they have no means to support themselves. Consequently, they rely on the host country's government to provide basic support for their survival while their asylum claims are processed. Yet, in the context of the UK, the Joint Committee on Human Rights (2007, p. 110) reported that the state is 'practising a deliberate policy of destitution'. Scholars maintain that state-enforced destitution is a key UK immigration policy outcome to disincentivize asylum seekers (Crawley et al., 2011). The research presented in this paper explicates how the UK government has been using the asylum system and asylum policies to enforce the destitution of asylum seekers.

The UK government appears to view asylum as a problem and seems determined to control it. Asylum seekers who enter the UK, whether legally or illegally, are illegalised through the UK's immigration policies and practices (Page, 2023; Paterson & Mulvey, 2023; Schweitzer, 2017). Asylum seekers are restricted — and to some extent denied — access to state welfare support due to public and political anti-immigrant rhetoric (Cooper et al., 2021; Parker, 2015). Asylum seekers, in particular, experience uncertainties around their living conditions and their plans for the future due to the prolonged asylum claim process and economic restrictions they face. Since the 1990s, successive UK governments have been implementing harsh socio-legal and economic barriers as key deterrence mechanisms to discourage asylum seekers from entering the country. For example, the 2023 Illegal Migration Act aims to deter people from seeking asylum in the UK through removal to safe third countries and gives fewer rights to asylum seekers who remain in the UK (Walsh & Sumption, 2023). Such an approach has led the UK government to be criticised for its oppressive asylum policies, which serve to marginalise asylum seekers in the UK (Banks, 2008; Mulvey, 2010; Tyler, 2006).

Governments can influence how asylum seekers are perceived in political and public discourse, either positively or negatively, and how they are thus treated (Kirkwood, 2017; Mulvey, 2010; Sales, 2002). In the UK, the government relies heavily on economic aspects such as employment and welfare

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Published online: 06 March 2024

benefits for detention and, control of migration and borders (Mayblin et al., 2020). The UK government deliberately ensures that asylum seekers are politically and publicly cast as economic subjects to create negative discourses about them and to control them (Kirkwood, 2017). The framing of asylum seekers in the UK from an economic perspective often places asylum seekers within the underserving category (Parker, 2015; Croall, 2011). This labelling of asylum seekers as underserving is evident in the rhetoric of right-wing politicians, the public with anti-immigration ideologies and the tabloid media. For example, politicians in the UK have referred to asylum seekers as being people who steal jobs from host country citizens, who are a burden on the system or who abuse public welfare (Lynn & Lea, 2003).

Further evidence of this is how asylum seekers are cast as 'bogus' and, therefore, are considered undeserving of British social support (Parker, 2015; Sales, 2002). Such negative discourse from politicians has made it easier for asylum seekers to be cast as non-right holders, detainable and outsiders (Bhatia, 2015; Lynn & Lea, 2003). Consequent to the negative economic views, asylum seekers have been restricted from accessing mainstream welfare benefits and have been subject to controls preventing them from undertaking employment in the UK (Coddington et al., 2020; Mulvey, 2010). The UK government, it would appear, believes that economic restrictions will deter anyone planning to seek asylum in the UK (Mayblin, 2014, 2016). Therefore, the government creates situations of destitution for asylum seekers who are already in the country and seeking to remain in the UK to foster a climate that deters others from attempting to seek refuge in the UK.

Destitution is embedded in the UK's immigration regimes because migration is often considered politically to be an economic practice (Coddington et al., 2020). In the UK, asylum seekers' eligibility to receive asylum support (housing, cash allowance or both) is determined based on destitution tests (Home Office, 2021a), which legally label asylum seekers as destitute recipients of aid. A destitution test is mandatory for asylum seekers to qualify for support under either Section 98, 95 or 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which in Section 95(3) describes a person as destitute if:

> …they do not have adequate accommodation or any means of obtaining it (whether their other essential living needs are met) or have adequate accommodation or the means of obtaining it but cannot meet their other essential living needs.

While destitution has been used in UK government policy to determine if one will receive state asylum support, in this paper, it is argued that destitution is being forced onto asylum seekers to facilitate state control and to produce the vulnerabilisation, dependency and impoverishment of asylum seekers (Mayblin et al., 2020). Destitution has been widely used in the UK as a tool and technique of political exclusion within migration control regimes (Kirkwood et al., 2016) to categorise or justify exclusion from political membership, employment and social rights. Coddington et al. (2020) emphasise that enforced destitution facilitates governmental control of asylum seekers. The UK government dictates what an asylum seeker can and cannot receive through state support. The primary means of control is the weekly asylum allowance provided for asylum seekers in the UK. Asylum seekers have been provided with lower levels of financial support which is not adequate for their survival. Nevertheless, they must depend on the UK government to receive the basic levels of financial support. Consequently, controlling asylum seekers' financial benefits contributes to overall control of their lives. In this context, destitution has been enforced through forms of welfare support for asylum seekers. Therefore, enforced destitution in the context of migration is an attempt to starve out unwanted migrants within society (Chakrabarti, 2005; Dickson & Rosen, 2021). Having provided some outline of existing scholarship related to the topic of destitution, this paper provides further discussion of asylum seekers' lived experiences of enforced destitution in the context of Glasgow, UK.

The discussion of asylum seekers' lived experiences of enforced destitution in the context of Glasgow is the focus of this paper, using interviews with asylum seekers, refugees and staff from various organisations. Participants interviewed for this research included 30 asylum seekers and refugees who have navigated the UK's asylum system and 20 staff from various organisations. It will be argued that the interview data supports the claim that the UK government is systematically enforcing destitution on asylum seekers. Over three decades have passed since Cholewinski convincingly argued that forced destitution in the UK asylum seekers' situation was a human rights violation (Cholewinski, 1988). This article highlights that 35 years on from Cholewinski's claim forced destitution remains an issue in the UK's asylum system. Hence, either nothing has changed or what changes have occurred are not significant enough to avoid the violation of asylum seekers' human rights. This topic seems pertinent as a reminder to the reader that a serious issue remains after more than a quarter of a century in time. Not enough interventions have been implemented since the 1980s to effectively address asylum seekers' destitution in the UK. The continuous experience of asylum seekers' enforced destitution will be discussed using empirical evidence from the research participants.

Enforced Destitution in the UK

The definition of destitution is key to the research presented here because an argument is being made that the UK government — its immigration policies and practices — contribute to asylum

seekers being destitute. To understand enforced destitution, it is important to look at the framing of destitution. Destitution has been defined as a form/state of poverty; a severe form of poverty that is institutionalised within the state, practice and law (Harriss-White, 2005) and a sharp and fatal form of deprivation (Dasgupta, 1993) that affects an individual's working conditions, housing conditions, health conditions and social networks (Temesvary et al., 2021). Yet, Coddington et al. (2020) highlight that destitution cannot simply mean impoverishment, but it should also include dependence; they write: destitution is 'a poverty so extreme that not only do people lack the means to provide for themselves, but others must provide for them' (Coddington et al., 2020, p. 1427). Destitution, therefore, refers to 'material and discursive configuration that is constituted of extreme impoverishment and dependency on others for the means of survival' (Coddington et al., 2020, p. 1427). Temesvary et al. (2021) also conceptualised destitution as a direct consequence of the vulnerable groups' institutional and structural exclusion of welfare structures do not alleviate vulnerable groups' destitution but also in its exacerbation due to exclusive practices (Temesvary et al., 2021). Hereafter, enforced destitution is considered severe, inflicted impoverishment leading to the enforced dependence of asylum seekers on others for survival.

Accordingly, destitution is a technique of political exclusion, a form of migration control and an enforcement tool in immigration and asylum regimes (Coddington et al., 2020). Dickson and Rosen (2021, p. 555) argue that enforced destitution is a purposely punitive mechanism of immigration control towards 'unremovable migrants whose presence the state was forced to accept'. Dickson and Rosen (2021, p. 560) concluded that 'when ambiguously positioned migrants are neither "desirable" nor deportable, it is necessary to attend to the imposition of enforced destitution and punitive debt as equally violent, and intentional, tactics of bordering.' Consequently, forced destitution has been used as a deliberate and targeted tool or an attempt to starve out migrants — outsiders — in society (Chakrabarti, 2005). Chakrabarti (2005) further emphasises that forced destitution is a greater evil and a deliberate attack on the dignity of asylum seekers. Destitution is, indeed, more psychologically and physically harmful to asylum seekers (Crawley et al., 2011). The UK's asylum support — along with the prolonged asylum process — is a punitive, degrading, and inhuman deterrence mechanism that drives asylum seekers to reconsider their asylum claim and in certain circumstances opt for voluntary return.

In the UK, dispersal, detention, deportation and destitution have been the key systematic deterrence policies used against asylum seekers (Hodkinson et al., 2020). Among them, destitution has been employed effectively to exclude — while at the same time to provide support to — asylum seekers in the UK. Destitution or state-enforced destitution is part of the UK government's wider agenda of creating a hostile environment for migrants in the UK (Waite & Lewis, 2017). Increasingly restrictive (welfare) immigration policies have been introduced aimed specifically at asylum seekers to govern them as poor and unwanted people in the country. Since the 1990s, the UK government has introduced Acts that created destitution of asylum seekers. The 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act restricted asylum seekers' access to welfare support, removed the right to permanent local authority housing and capped asylum seekers' benefit entitlements at 90%. Later, the 1996 Immigration and Asylum Act reduced the benefit entitlement rate to 70% of the standard rate received by a citizen. The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act introduced further restrictions including exclusion from all mainstream welfare benefits and denied employment in the UK. The Joint Committee on Human Rights in 2007 described the immigration policies in the UK as the UK government's enforced destitution approach to deter asylum seekers. Destitution is a form of coercion tied to the UK government's deterrence policies (Kirkwood et al., 2016). Since the late 1990s, destitution has been an important legal category or determinant in the UK's immigration laws, especially in terms of asylum seekers. The UK government and support sectors have recognised destitution to provide support to asylum seekers while excluding them from the mainstream community and social welfare.

The absence of provision of care and comfort 'seek to make everyday life undesirable up to the point of unlivability' (Coddington et al., 2020, p. 1437). Asylum seekers often arrive in a host country destitute as they have fled their countries for safety and sanctuary and do not often have any means to support themselves, and this is often the case when they come to the UK. Nevertheless, according to the previously mentioned legal requirement, asylum seekers must prove that they cannot financially support themselves, have no savings, assets or any family members who can support them. Only then can asylum seekers receive specific asylum support from the UK government, such as asylum housing and weekly asylum allowance. The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act has introduced asylum housing on a no-choice basis and asylum seekers will be dispersed across the country regardless of their individual, family, cultural and social needs. This no-choice asylum accommodation is a privatised service provision. Private companies — functioning for profit making — often use low-cost housing in deprived areas in the UK (Darling, 2016). Contrary to the public service provision, the privatised housing providers do not care about their beneficiaries and do not offer any comfort to them. Therefore, the UK government's poor resource allocation and treatment reflects the undesirable and unliveable conditions of asylum seekers.

A weekly, below-poverty-line asylum allowance has been provided to asylum seekers to fulfil their subsistence needs. Presently, asylum seekers in the UK receive £45 for each person in their household for food, clothing and toiletries. This allowance is loaded onto a debit card (ASPEN card)

each week. The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act removed the right to work and states that a person subject to immigration control shall have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). As a result of NRPF, asylum seekers do not have access to most mainstream benefits, such as Universal Credit, child tax credits and local authority housing assistance. This Act also removed all remaining mainstream welfare benefit entitlement from all asylum applicants, and it led to asylum support being provided at 70% of standard benefit levels. Therefore, asylum seekers must depend on below-poverty-line asylum allowance with NRPF, which vulnerabilises asylum seekers and creates destitution. Restriction on formal employment further creates obstacles to them living a dignified life in the UK while awaiting a decision on their asylum claims. The low levels of financial support and inability to work means that asylum seekers are unable to escape destitution and they are pushed further into destitution. Hence, the policy of enforced destitution has been significantly applied through decreasing levels of financial support for asylum seekers in the UK. Consequently, asylum seekers must depend on others for their survival (Mayblin & James, 2019; Page, 2023).

In addition to the poor asylum allowance, Petch et al. (2015) argue that administrative errors or delays in the system lead to a pause in their financial support. Although asylum seekers are entitled to welfare support, a pause in their welfare benefits could lead to destitution. Furthermore, asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status are given a legal right to remain in the country and are also at risk of destitution due to the 28-day move-on period (Allsopp et al., 2014). Asylum support ceases 28 days after being granted refugee status. In this case, although asylum seekers have gained refugee status, there are always administrative delays in receiving the mainstream welfare benefits which affects their financial and accommodation support. Meanwhile, if an individual's asylum application has been rejected, they will not be eligible to receive asylum support (Allsopp et al., 2014; Dudhia, 2020). Refused asylum seekers will not have the right to remain in the country and so are denied access to any welfare support. While there is existing scholarship concerning these previously mentioned aspects, there is a need to look at asylum seekers and their experiences of destitution, which is the aim of the research presented in this article.

Methodology

This article draws on 50 interviews conducted in 2018 with asylum seekers and refugees and staff from various organisations in Glasgow. Thirty asylum seekers (16 participants) and refugees (14 participants) were interviewed. Of the 30 interviewees who were asylum seekers and refugees, 20 participants were male and 10 were female. The majority were from the Middle East and North African (MENA) region with over half from Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Namibia. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff from third-sector organisations (TSOs), and state agencies (Glasgow City Council, National Health Service and the Department for Work and Pensions) also contributed. TSOs included local faith-based organisations, secular charities, local and national non-government organisations (NGOs). Participants included front-line workers, administrators and managers from various organisations, who were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling. Participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling methods. These sampling methods were useful for identifying and selecting information-rich individuals who have knowledge and experience concerning the subject matter of this research (Patton, 2014). The sampling was aimed at including asylum seekers and refugees from different origins and at various stages of their asylum journey to see how their status as migrants, the degree of formalisation of their asylum status and time spent in the UK factored in the way they experienced their lives. These sampling approaches also assisted in identifying and including members of various organisations in Glasgow. Adopting the constructivist paradigm, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method to examine the complex, socially constructed and contextualised reality around asylum seekers' and refugees' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews facilitated establishing healthy interactions with the interview participants and created a conducive environment to share their views and experiences. A key advantage of semi-structured interviews was that they adopted a conversational format offering a richer experience and thick data which cannot be simply collected through participant observation or focus groups (Fedyuk & Zentai, 2018). Participants were encouraged to freely respond to the questions during the interviews whilst the researcher (the author) actively listened to and observed their responses. Interviews were typically 50–60 minutes in duration. Interviews occurred mainly at public libraries or organisations' premises depending on the participant's preference. Most of the participants preferred a library because it provided a more informal environment, away from their working environment for staff members and provided a comfortable and safe place for them to share their experiences and opinions. Interpreters were used for interviews with individuals who did not speak English. Data was captured using audio recordings and field notes. Interview recordings were transcribed. Data was thematically analysed and coded with the use of NVivo. Participants were assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality. This research received ethical approval from the associated University's Social Sciences Departmental Research Ethics Committee and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the interviews, asylum seekers experience enforced destitution through two means: (a) socio-political mechanisms of destitution — policy-imposed liminality and vulnerabilisation, (b) economic mechanisms of destitution — inhumane financial support (asylum allowance). The UK government's National Asylum Support Service (NASS) process and prolonged asylum decision-making process are key to policy-imposed liminality and vulnerabilisation. This has a direct and indirect impact on asylum seekers' destitution in the UK.

Socio-political Mechanisms of Destitution

Over the past 20 years, the UK's asylum policies have reflected a hostile environment for asylum seekers in the UK (Bloch & Schuster, 2002). Indeed, different immigration policies labelled and restricted asylum seekers from accessing available mainstream services. Asylum seekers have access to NASS services with restrictions on employment and education. Hynes (2009, p. 94) has called this pattern 'policy-imposed liminality', in which an asylum seeker is left in limbo, existing as a marginalised outsider who 'has recently left "there", but who are not yet allowed to be fully "here"' (Lewis, 2007, p. 103), which it is argued here is an act of enforced destitution.

Primarily, participants criticised the label 'asylum seekers' owing to its negative connotations, which were detrimental to them in their everyday lives. The way that some participants were treated since day one of their arrival led them to construct a negative perception of state support. Aliyah (asylum seeker from Sudan), for example, stated:

> I think it is just that the asylum system is made to look difficult to people [asylum seekers] and is making it hard to seek help. I think it is meant to seem very difficult so that you would either just give up, or if you really want it, then you just carry on within that challenging system.

In another example, Babar's (asylum seeker from Pakistan) narrative reflected how destitution was enforced and the way socio-political vulnerability was created for asylum seekers:

> They have some restriction and we are not allowed to work; we don't have any kind of freedom in our life. We cannot have a plan for our future, so these things are negative. A friend told me that most people think asylum life is very easy because they are eating and they are getting given everything, but my opinion was that jail is very easy, you just go into the jail, they give you food, you can watch the TV, you can play games, you can go for the swimming, you change your clothes every day, so it is kind of jail for us because we are handcuffed. We cannot do anything by ourselves and the Home Office has so many restrictions on our life that we cannot [do anything]. So, the jail and the asylum process are the same; they look the same.

These examples reflected some participants' general views about the asylum support system which is controlled by the existing immigration policies. Asylum seekers arrived in the UK with expectations of living a dignified life with safety and security, yet exclusions and restrictions on access to services hindered their ability to attain a positive adjustment experience. In the interviews, participants reflected on the notion that a dignified life and a positive adjustment were contingent upon them being able to participate in the formal structures of their new locality. This indicates the imposition of enforced destitution as a punitive and intentional tactic of othering asylum seekers as they have been considered undesirable and underserving of state support (Dickson & Rosen, 2021).

As mentioned, destitution was caused through waiting and uncertainty related to the prolonged asylum decision-making process in the UK. One participant's language conveyed the sentiment of an asylum seeker's destitute life in limbo, unable to provide for themselves. Muhammed, a refugee from Eritrea, stated: 'Nothing's going to change … to be honest, I am like the moving dead. I cannot work. I cannot do anything … [like] a man without a leg'. Indefinite waiting time has been considered inevitable in the UK asylum process (Cortvriend, 2020; Rotter, 2016). The major criticism of the protracted time spent awaiting a decision was the quantified meaning of time lost during the process, in which participants measured the waiting time in days, months and years. When interviewed, most participants highlighted how long they had been in Glasgow. Most of them did not know when decisions about their applications were going to be made. They apply and eventually get a decision; if they are rejected, they apply again, appeal and get another decision. The time taken for this elongated process manifested a temporal and a socio-political destitution which restricted their ability to provide for themselves. Participants found the uncertainty in time the most difficult part of their asylum experience in the UK (see also (Vathi & King, 2013). It was, indeed, the story of many participants who had been waiting for several years wondering what the outcome of their asylum applications would be.

Consequently, while awaiting a decision on their asylum application, life is/was suspended and asylum seekers are forced into destitution. Many participants expressed frustration at the thought of passing their peak age of productivity without having a proper job. Being inactive for a long time was perceived to be a barrier to finding a job in the future.

Aleea (asylum seeker from Iraq) shared the experience of her friend, a middle-aged woman who used to be a teacher in Syria, who had recently received her refugee status after 5 years and was unable to find a job as a teacher due to the amount of time she had spent unemployed in the UK. This induced Aleea to feel fearful about what would happen to her and her family in the future. This situation reinforces the position of Vanstone (1982, p. 19), who states that frustrations easily arise, 'because one has no alternative to waiting, no personal action or initiative to which one can resort in lieu of that which the system, in its own time, delivers'. Aleea further stated:

> People who are coming to this country have a problem. Like, I spend 35 years of my life back home and now imagine I have to start from the bottom. It was just like levels. I get back to zero, sometimes to minus and imagine, how can I go up in levels.

Comments made by several participants such as 'I don't know what will happen tomorrow and cannot do anything', which reflect 'feelings of having lost time', illustrate asylum seekers' sense of destitution and powerlessness in providing for themselves. Powerlessness concerning destitution relates to two specific experiences that research participants encountered. Firstly, the unpredictable and long-drawn-out nature of the decision-making process — a process to decide the future of an applicant that keeps the asylum seeker in destitution. During the waiting time, participants did not know what would happen in the future, while there was simultaneously a lack of understanding of what was happening to them in the present. Importantly, participants' articulation of powerlessness through the interpretations of 'not knowing' is not only related to the decision-making process but also to understanding what was happening to them during the process.

> They still didn't give me a decision. So, I don't know. We don't have a legal residence [refugee status] here. We cannot work; we are staying at our home. We cannot do anything. We don't know what is going to happen. So, this is the main problem. (Fabunni — asylum seeker from Namibia)

Secondly, the findings particularly emphasised the destitution caused by asylum restrictions and the associated lack of rights. Watts and Bohle (1993, p. 55) emphasise that 'because individuals and groups are powerless, then to the same extent their location in the "political space" of vulnerability is determined by power and institutional relations'. Undeniably, asylum seekers have several (limited) rights within the UK, such as the right to housing, financial support, healthcare and education. However, participants reflected upon numerous rights that they did not have, such as the right to work, the right to full-time study and the right to own property. Although they talked about access to mainstream services, participants' focus was not only on material provisions or entitlements but also on overcoming daily struggles to live a normal life. Hence, they felt extremely vulnerable only possessing basic rights that left them facing destitution. Sadie (Charity — Household support) stated:

> Someone [one of their organisation's beneficiaries] was saying: my life is on hold, you know. I was 22 when I came here, I am 32 now. My youth is gone and I am unable to develop a career and get married. He said I don't have anything to offer anybody because I have no idea about the future. I think that uncertainty is enormous for people.

By making direct reference to the UK asylum system, participants explained that the asylum system restricted them from doing anything meaningful that would help them to become part of society. Adiel (asylum seeker from Namibia) stated: 'You don't have that freedom to go to college or to work or just to keep busy. But only staying in the house sleeping, doing nothing'. Participants considered engaging in employment as a meaningful activity that could provide a strong platform for a meaningful life in the UK. Following up on their perceptions of 'meaningful activity', when asked about what they did during the day, most participants answered 'nothing'.

Most of the male participants had been the breadwinners of their families before their asylum journey. Almost all of them came from societies wherein working for themselves and their family's livelihood was crucial. Therefore, engaging in meaningful activities to support one's livelihood and that of one's family was an important part of their normal life. However, asylum seekers were negotiating dilemmas created by their status as asylum seekers with limited and restricted rights and the responsibilities they have towards their families.

Moreover, participants expressed that doing nothing or being economically inactive was a dilemma arising from their status as asylum seekers and their moral responsibilities. This need was rooted in their cultural and familial practices and their sense of primary social value. Therefore, participants felt that they must look after their families rather than depend on the low levels of support from the UK government. However, the current socio-political environment in the UK restricted them from employment and made them more vulnerable and destitute. The importance of being able to provide for one's family was often evident:

> Since I came here, they gave me a house because I have a family; I am married and have two kids. So, they gave me a flat. I have money [weekly asylum allowance] but the money is not enough. If I get my refugee status, I could work. So, I could change this

> Home Office [asylum] house because I don't like it. If I could work, I could get my own flat, own things and have enough money for living. (Mustafa — asylum seeker from Iraq)

In another example, Amina (refugee from Sudan) stated:

> I am a person who likes to work, and I like to get a salary and pay my taxes. … you can get benefits for a short time, and this is from my point of view, that I can get benefits for a short time, then I can start to work and stop the benefits and pay back.

Participants also talked about moral responsibility to contribute to their locality. They felt that working would give them opportunities to earn money and engage with locals by having a normal daily routine. Moreover, working and paying taxes were considered important to live a normal life and feel included in society. It emerged that these two actions were perceived to be the key characteristics of what would make them good citizens. However, participants indicated that they felt excluded and separated from their local population because of being unable to work and contribute to the local economy. Regarding their experiences of doing nothing most days, economic inactivity resulted in asylum seekers staying home indoors or spending periods in community organisations along with several locals and other asylum seekers and refugees. While dependent on state support to survive, they were unable to give back to the community in ways they would like. Therefore, when considering the economic aspect, participants justified their view that asylum seekers should be able to work because of the many positive benefits. For instance, being economically active entails preventing destitution and fosters greater self-esteem, self-respect, cultural pride and a sense of belonging within the community.

Furthermore, participants implied that being prevented from entering the job market was a way to keep them in destitution. Mustafa, an asylum seeker from Iraq, said that the UK government was 'putting us [asylum seekers] in a narrow corner' by not allowing asylum seekers to engage in income generation activities which eventually pushed them towards destitution. As discussed previously, asylum seekers expressed a willingness to work but the UK government has not been utilising asylum seekers' knowledge, skills, qualifications and experiences in the employment sector due to the deterrence policies (Parker, 2020; Winlow et al., 2017). Page (2023) also highlighted that asylum seekers are often willing to accept less skilled positions to avoid personal poverty. Moreover, the UK government has been increasing asylum seekers' dependency on others (the state and the non-state sector), which is a key characteristic of destitution, by preventing, limiting and unnecessarily delaying asylum seekers' access to employment (Da Lomba, 2010; Mayblin & James, 2019).

Asylum seekers' security in their daily lives became fragile due to restrictions imposed by the UK government. Therefore, within a challenging environment, 'survival or ways of surviving' were portrayed as preferable to expecting a better quality of life in the UK. In other words, participants were aware of the restrictions imposed on them, but they had been forced to accept these restrictions. In this case, their need to ensure their survival in the new locality took precedence over the restrictions placed upon them by asylum policies that restrict their ability to integrate and take part in society in any meaningful way. For example, as Aliyah (asylum seeker from Sudan) stated:

> You just keep moving. You know the places where we stay are not ideal. To be honest, it [the current accommodation and location] is very disgusting to a certain extent, yeah, but for me, it is just like a way of surviving, so I [am] OK with that.

Following on from participants' views about ensuring their survival throughout the interviews, participants stated clearly that their waiting was focused on achieving one outcome: beginning a normal life in Glasgow. As Mustafa (asylum seeker from Iraq) stated, 'I would like to live a normal life', meaning a life that includes refugee status or permanent residency, eligibility to work, taking care of one's family, and eventually obtaining one's own home. However, it was evident from the previous discussion that the conditions of waiting imposed by the asylum bureaucracy placed people's lives on hold, disrupted the normal flow of living their lives and made them destitute. A normal life cannot be achieved under asylum status (Parker, 2015, 2020; Stewart, 2005), and, therefore, the desire to have a normal life has emerged as the main expectation of participants in this research.

Other participants made similar comments and emphasised that once they had received refugee status, they would be able to work, look after their families and contribute to society. Babar (asylum seeker from Pakistan) stated:

> If I get the grant [positive asylum decision] at least, you know, if you can make plans for your life, you know, you can work, you can support your family. […] You can try to achieve your goals for your future.

In another example, Abdo (asylum seeker from Sudan) spoke about receiving his refugee status: 'I can just have a family and continue to live with kids and live a normal life like other people'. Additionally, they would be able to take control of their lives in terms of choosing where to live, whether to partake in further education, buy a property and so on. A positive decision (securing refugee status) would provide the opportunity for them to come out of temporariness without fears and concerns about destitution and deportation. It could also afford them the ability

to plan and determine their future. The refugee status and beginning of a normal life might help to overcome the inactivity and exclusion faced during the waiting period.

In summary, policy-level restrictions imposed on participants created disadvantages, and a protracted asylum process and state-level restrictions on employment left asylum seekers unable to support themselves and their families. The research participants' experiences highlight the extreme impoverishment due to the policies of destitution and dependency on others. As Parker (2020) highlights, the policy restrictions and absence of meaningful activities contribute to a lack of sense of belonging among asylum seekers. From the socio-political mechanisms of destitution, it can be argued that asylum seekers face more risks than other vulnerable and impoverished populations in the UK. Asylum seekers have been denied the ability even to seek and use mainstream benefits available to impoverished people in the UK (Mayblin, 2014; Mayblin et al., 2020). The socio-political mechanism of destitution has created more problems for asylum seekers. Although participants wished to have a 'normal life' this was challenging to achieve because of the time they spent not doing any meaningful activity, not contributing through employment and living in limbo with an uncertain future, which was difficult to manage. It was reflected particularly strongly in asylum seekers' inability to work. Participants talked about and often stated 'we cannot do anything' to express their frustration at the restrictions imposed on them. These results are in line with previous studies showing that having no employment opportunities contributed to further destitution (Allsopp et al., 2014; Coddington et al., 2020; Nessel, 2015). The participants' accounts suggest that they have the willingness and capacity for both low and highly skilled jobs. Participants who possess good employment skills and experience expressed their willingness to engage in low-skilled jobs to provide for themselves. However, the potential benefit they offer to the workforce has not been used because asylum seekers are kept unemployed and forced into destitution until decisions are made about their asylum claims. Therefore, it could be argued that the government has been continuing to use destitution as a policy instrument to control asylum seekers (Da Lomba, 2010; Kirkwood et al., 2016). Social-political mechanisms of destitution are good examples to show how destitution has been used as a tool to exclude asylum seekers from political membership, employment and social rights and keep them within the migration control regime (Kirkwood et al., 2016).

Economic mechanisms of destitution — asylum allowance and destitution

Asylum seekers' everyday survival depends on the Home Office's provision of a weekly allowance. As previously mentioned, under Section 95, asylum seekers are considered destitute, someone who cannot buy anything for themselves or who is without any financial sources to meet their daily needs. At the time this research was conducted, the Home Office provided financial support of £37.75 per week to cover asylum seekers' need for food, clothing and toiletries. While the asylum support for asylum seekers means that they do not need to pay for accommodation or utility bills, they need some money for their everyday requirements. However, the amount of asylum allowance caused frustration and humiliation as participants struggled to address their basic needs; thus, the author considered it to be enforced destitution imposed upon them. Significantly, the weekly allowance (£37.75)[1] paid to asylum seekers was well below the UK government's 50% income support for persons with low income which is equivalent to £74.35 (Home Office, 2021b). Therefore, the participants considered weekly asylum allowance as the UK government's intent to cause destitution, which they criticised:

> I don't call it benefits; I call it an insult. It is like insulting people because if you give me £35 now, it will be spent within five hours. Then how do I survive? (Takudzwa — asylum seeker from Zimbabwe)

When asked if they thought the weekly allowance was enough, often, the immediate response was 'not enough'. Babar (asylum seeker from Pakistan), for example, responded with a question 'Can you manage your life with this £37.75 per week?' Similarly, Aleea (asylum seeker from Iraq) asked, 'What do you think? Does that [sound like] enough for people to live here?'. These reflections illustrate asylum seekers' feelings about the government's culpability in purposively making asylum seekers destitute, which in turn could be seen as neglect. This finding concurs with existing research arguing that the weekly asylum allowance that asylum seekers receive from the government is not enough to survive throughout a week (Kirkwood et al., 2016; Page, 2023). Furthermore, asylum seekers' eligibility for the weekly allowance is decided based on the aforementioned destitution test, which proves their need for significant state support. However, similar to what Temesvary et al. (2021) have stated, the UK government is exacerbating asylum seekers' destitution through its exclusionary policies rather than alleviating destitution.

The Home Office considers the asylum allowance to be adequate to cover food, clothing and toiletries. A key finding of this research is that it became more complicated for someone who adhered to practices involving specific dietary patterns (such as vegan and halal) when they could not afford to purchase specific foods. Samuel (asylum seeker) who followed a gluten-free, vegan diet stated:

> Vegan is a very expensive diet. Because of the amount of money that I get, I have to basically scrap the diet. So, I have my fruits in the morning, have vegetables for lunch and then at night, I will typically have eggs or beans because that is very cheap, or chocolate.

> I was going to food banks and stuff even though I was not getting the regular [vegan-friendly] food, the stuff I regularly eat, but I am still getting some food.

For Samuel, food poverty induced by the lack of financial support contributed to changing his required diet. He identified as vegan but since claiming asylum he felt that he had to consume animal products out of necessity to meet his nutritional needs. While they maintain their position of surviving with the expectation of receiving a positive refugee status outcome, most of the research participants reported making sacrifices to survive under enforced destitution. This shows asylum seekers' inability to look after their subsistence needs and indeed insufficient financial resources affect asylum seekers' ability to have a particular diet (Page, 2023).

Indeed, food consumption emerged as a significant factor since most of the participants followed a halal diet and mentioned the higher price for halal products in Glasgow; Jamshed (refugee from Iran) preferred to eat halal meat as part of his meals, but he was forced to reduce his halal product consumption because he could not afford to spend £10 per week on halal products. This situation was especially challenging for asylum seekers because they fled from their home countries and were then unable to maintain a significant part of their cultural tradition, which involved consuming halal food. Receiving a limited asylum allowance challenged asylum seekers' capacity to consume food items that aligned with cultural or sincerely held beliefs.

As Coddington et al. (2020) have highlighted, destitution cannot simply mean impoverishment, but it also includes dependency on others, a situation of forced welfare dependency (Mayblin, 2014). It has been established that where participants could not afford to buy adequate food items with £37 per week, they primarily used charities as a source for food products and/or to top-up groceries. In Glasgow, many charities and integration networks provide food products weekly that include dry rations (pasta, beans, bread and canned fish) and fresh items (fruits and vegetables). A couple of participants commented on grocery acquisition:

> We couldn't manage on £20 [after using £10–£15 for other expenses]. If we buy from the market or from other supermarkets, we couldn't manage. So, we get everything from a charity. (Mustafa — asylum seeker from Iraq)
>
> We registered our names at Unity11 [a charity in Glasgow]. Every Monday … we used to go there and get a voucher for food. Then we take that voucher to a church and get our food. (Bokamoso — asylum seeker from Namibia)

It emerged that food banks helped participants in two significant ways. Firstly, participants were able — at least partially — to fulfil their daily food intake. Secondly, food banks helped to reduce their food expenses and provided an opportunity to save money for other reasons, such as transportation costs and mobile phone top-ups. Considering the extended role of charities and faith-based organisations, it can be said that TSOs play a supplementary role in filling the gaps left by the limited formal support and informal networks (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Mayblin & James, 2019; Piacentini, 2015).

Nevertheless, a key finding of this study was that dependence on foodbanks also limited participants' choices because they had to choose from the available stock and sometimes all the necessary food items could not be found. When conducting observation for this research, a short casual conversation was had with an asylum seeker who visited the Glasgow City Church during their weekly food bank. During food distribution, an asylum seeker approached me and asked, 'Do you have tuna?' to which the reply was, no. He was disappointed and said, 'I am looking for [canned] tuna. My son likes it. I looked at other charities and they also said no. I got [baked] beans so he can eat beans' (Field note: 14.06.2018). Furthermore, although asylum seekers collected dry rations from food banks, not all of them had the resources to prepare home-cooked meals. Takudzwa (asylum seeker from Zimbabwe), referring to his hotel accommodation, asked, 'How can a person who has not got a house be able to cook food? So, it does not make sense'. This was particularly a challenge for those living in initial asylum accommodations such as hostels, hotels and bed and breakfasts where there were no kitchen facilities for guests to use. Those who preferred to cook and eat at home could not do so, although they managed to collect free food items from charities. In their study on destitution in pregnancy, Ellul et al. (2020) stated that dry rations (e.g. dried pasta or rice) are not appropriate as a donation for those without kitchen facilities, and the same can be said for asylum seekers housed without kitchens in which to cook and prepare food. Participants in this situation had to depend on bread, peanut butter, jam or other ready-made items.

Clothing and toiletries

It also emerged that most asylum seekers did not have adequate and proper clothing and toiletries when they arrived in Glasgow.

> I didn't buy any new clothes because I want to leave the money for food only. I have to spend £5 a day for food. It's not enough [money] at all. (Abdo — asylum seeker from Sudan)

Many participants reported that it was extremely challenging for them to buy expensive items such as winter coats and shoes as their allowance was insufficient. Aleea (asylum seeker from Iraq) stated:

> Upon my arrival, I didn't have any clothes. After five days, I went to Serco and said I don't have clothes. I asked them where I can buy cheap clothes. My housing officer told me to go to Maslows [a charity in Glasgow].

When further asked, Aleea pointed out that she could not afford to buy clothes due to a lack of financial support. At the same time, once she decided to buy clothes, she was forced to consider cheaper places to get clothes, which means often poorer quality clothing. She also emphasised that the majority of the time, asylum seekers have been referred to charities in Glasgow to find cheaper or free clothing.

They had to spend most of their weekly allowance on food, which left them with no capacity to purchase enough clothing. Page (2023) has also found that asylum seekers struggle to afford various clothing (i.e. shoes and winter clothes) due to the lack of financial support from the government. In particular, the majority of the asylum allowance is spent on purchasing food items. After one interview, an interpreter who was themselves a refugee said that female asylum seekers faced difficulties in purchasing sanitary items. Indeed, in a wider context, period poverty is becoming an increasing issue in British society (Briggs, 2021). Gender inequalities, while not the focus of this research, are an issue concerning the asylum allowance provided to asylum seekers in the UK (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017; Page, 2023). Needing to purchase sanitary products with such a limited amount of asylum allowance takes money away from subsistence needs and can lead women who are asylum seekers into further destitution.

Dependency on others to provide for them (asylum seekers) is a key impact of destitution (Coddington et al., 2020). However, asylum seekers' inability to take care of their basic needs due to the enforced destitution caused low self-esteem and humiliation. As Aleea stated: 'So, I went there [to a charity] I was so shy and embarrassed to ask people for clothes and things, but I needed them because I didn't have clothes to change [into].' In many cases, asking others for clothing and toiletries was considered begging, which lowered their self-worth and caused them embarrassment. Some, thus, hesitated to ask for support to get food items and additional clothes. Consequently, being forced to depend on charities for their basic needs due to enforced destitution negatively affected their well-being and has been a degrading experience for many participants.

Asylum seekers with children

As the analysis thus far has shown, asylum seekers on an asylum allowance struggle to afford food, clothes and sanitary items and said they feel degraded asking for handouts. Data further revealed that a lack of financial support drastically affected families with children. For instance, Dalilah (asylum seeker from Egypt) said:

> There are many things my kids need but I cannot get those for them … For example, my son needs to go to the football club. In the football club, he needs a visa [Debit/Credit] card to have an account [for membership registration]. I don't have a bank account except for the [Aspen] one [the Home Office] give. So, I cannot get that for him because you have to pay in every place.

In another example, Babar (asylum seeker from Pakistan) stated:

> We cannot buy some branded stuff, or if my kids want something like Lego or other expensive toys, I wouldn't buy this for them because if I buy it next week, then I am in trouble. I need to manage things.

According to participants, in their countries of origin, they managed to spend more on their children in terms of buying toys and enrolling them in extracurricular activities. However, as asylum seekers in the UK, they could not afford to buy even one toy or spend money on their children's extracurricular activities because it could cut down their ability to afford food and subsistence expenses. These findings support the existing research. For instance, the Children's Society (2013) reported that asylum-seeking families cannot afford to pay for their children's school uniforms, transportation from/to schools, educational resources, school trips, extracurricular activities and often essential clothing (i.e. winter coats and shoes). While existing research found that parents struggle to meet their children's basic needs and required school items (Page, 2023), the research participants reported struggling to support their children's extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, considering the duration of the asylum application process, which can take up to seven years or longer, many children of asylum seekers grow up without many important opportunities for their development.

Travel and transport

In addition to the challenges faced in meeting basic needs, there is a strong correlation between enforced destitution and travel and transport needs. For example, Abdo, an asylum seeker from Sudan, stated:

> If I want to go to the city centre, I cannot take a bus because you have to pay £1.60 [one way]. So, what happens is that I just walk to the city centre and come back walking and I try to leave that [weekly allowance] for food only.

Asylum seekers primarily faced transport issues due to compulsory dispersal and insufficient asylum allowance. The UK government enforced a compulsory dispersal policy as

part of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; consequently, most of the interviewees were dispersed to the outskirts of Glasgow. As people in significant need of support from others, it was important for them to travel to the city centre and other areas to access services from the statutory organisations or TSOs, buy cheaper food products or meet with friends (Page, 2023). Furthermore, even though some service providers allowed individuals to visit in person and book appointments (e.g. GPs), participants could not always manage to go in person due to it being time-consuming and owing to transport costs. Therefore, many participants chose to walk to avoid spending money on public transport. In their case, walking did not mean a short walk (in distance and time), but rather a walk that took more than two hours around the city.

Additionally, access to public transport was important, especially for newcomers who lacked information and knowledge about their locality and surrounding areas. As Abeo stated (asylum seeker from Nigeria): 'If I leave home, I need a bus pass because I don't know my way around and I cannot walk around unknown places'. Therefore, the need to use public transport was significant for many participants. However, should an asylum seeker need to use public transport, a sum of money had to be taken from their weekly allowance to afford transportation costs. Normally, for an adult, a weekly bus pass costs £18,[2] which means an asylum seeker must spend almost 50% of their allowance for a week on transport. It becomes more expensive if an asylum seeker buys bus or train tickets daily. A day bus pass is £4.70, and tickets for five days could cost them around £26. Therefore, using the allowance to buy bus passes added more pressure upon their ability to meet subsistence needs and in the longer term, caused destitution.

Digital technology

During interviews, it emerged that mobile phones had become essential for asylum seekers to navigate their unfamiliar environment. Takudzwa (asylum seeker from Zimbabwe) shared an example of the importance of his mobile phone:

> I could check on meetups and what's going on in Glasgow. If there is an event or something I just turn up. I just go there [social networking]. You also know your network of people; if anything happens to you, you just make one call or a few, you will get some help.

However, they struggle to afford mobile data due to the low level of asylum allowance. This has contributed to data or information poverty. There is limited literature on data poverty and asylum seekers. However, general studies on internet poverty report that people living in poverty lack opportunities to fully engage in the digital world (Lucas et al., 2020). Mobile phones emerged as necessary for asylum seekers to communicate with statutory service providers and the TSOs to ask for support, follow up and book appointments. Many participants reported having used mobile phone internet data to move around Glasgow and for translation purposes, with the help of Google Maps and Google Translate; for example. Functions like Google Translate were useful to translate the contents of a letter written in English especially when they could not find anyone to translate for them. Mobile communication was also the key method they used to stay connected with friends locally and overseas whether family members, friends and or newcomers to their social networks. It should be noted that internet-based applications such as WhatsApp, Viber and Facebook have become popular methods for communication via chat boxes or internet calls. To use these options, participants must have a functioning, suitable model mobile device and a secure internet connection. They could not always depend on free Wi-Fi connections in libraries or other places, which are also often unsafe. However, asylum seekers were not in a position to spend their weekly allowance on mobile phones without placing other subsistence needs in jeopardy.

Leisure, recreation and socialisation

While research often looks at destitution in terms of basic needs, this research found that asylum seekers face destitution concerning recreational activities. Aleea (asylum seeker from Iraq) was interviewed in a coffee shop in Glasgow city centre. I bought cups of tea for us both. Later, when talking about the asylum allowance, she pointed to the teacups and said 'We [asylum seekers] would also like to have a cup of tea or coffee with friends or alone in Cafe Nero, Starbucks, or Costa but we cannot afford to do it'. When probed, Aleea criticised the Home Office saying 'they don't pay £35 for one day, they pay £35 for one week and expect you to live on £35. And don't we like other stuff like having meals with friends or going to the cinema?'. She continued:

> If you buy a cup of tea/coffee outside, it is £2.50 or £3.50. That is more than half of my daily allowance. So, think about the food cost and imagine how people are living with this financial support.

Several participants considered that engaging in entertainment activities could help to relax and relieve anxiety about asylum struggles. Takudzwa (asylum seeker from Zimbabwe) wished to go to the cinema, watch live performances and football matches and attend events with his friends. However, access to entertainment was restricted because participants could not afford to pay for movies or shows or spend money on drinks during social gatherings. For some, limited asylum allowance created a perception

of asylum seekers being freeloaders or depending on others during social meetings with friends or others. Even though there were limited opportunities to socialise or relax, feelings of shame associated with their inability to spend money created negative experiences for the participants.

> Where to go for entertainment? … I also want to get out and do stuff. It makes me uncomfortable when people say 'don't worry, I will pay for this' ... I don't want to live like that. If I go out, I would [like to] be able to buy a glass of Coca-Cola or something like that. (Samuel — asylum seeker)

The participants' narratives have demonstrated the destitute situation that many asylum seekers in Glasgow face. Asylum seekers are not allowed work nor are they eligible for mainstream benefits; thus, they depend solely on weekly asylum allowance. Participants saw themselves scraping by for several weeks or a couple of months but were critical about the weekly allowance for asylum seekers in the long run. This situation has caused frustration due to asylum seekers' inability or lack of capacity to fulfil their basic daily needs. The circumstances around destitution and asylum allowance were seen as something degrading and creating a situation of not being in control and being unable to have a normal life; participants considered their situation as a form of enforced destitution. The research findings reflect the Joint Committee on Human Rights (2007, p. 110) conclusion that the state is 'practising a deliberate policy of destitution'.

In summary, a lack of financial support has contributed to significant levels of destitution of asylum seekers. Fulfilling their food needs was the key challenge for asylum seekers. All the participants reported having insufficient funds to buy necessary food products and often relied on charities to fulfil their needs. Sometimes participants could not get the right kind or adequate amount of food for their specific diets (vegan diets or halal). The cost of such products and the limited availability of these items in food banks led participants to adjust their dietary requirements. Food poverty has also forced some participants to reduce and change their food habits. Furthermore, the findings show that insufficient weekly allowance especially affects women and families with children with sanitary products and fulfilling the needs of their children. They are facing these challenges because the asylum allowance has not considered women asylum seekers and children's specific needs. Although it had not been highlighted much in the literature as a way to survive, interviewees shared their experiences of self-sacrifices, such as walking back and forth to avoid transport costs and sacrificing child-related expenses. Destitution is also not just about basic needs; the enforced poverty had robbed asylum seekers from engaging in recreational or leisure time activities. Participants also experience data or information poverty due to enforced destitution. A lack of financial support from the UK government restricted asylum seekers from accessing even the basic advantages of digital technology due to a lack of financial support meaning they may deprioritise expenditure on devices that are beneficial to them such as smartphones. All these challenges point towards how the economic practice has been included in the UK's asylum system to make them more vulnerable and destitute (Coddington et al., 2020). Consequently, they do not have the means to provide for themselves and must depend on others to provide for them. It must be acknowledged that if the third sector is not providing support to fill gaps in asylum seekers' needs to a certain extent, as Chakrabarti (2005) claimed, the UK government will starve out asylum seekers through the means of insufficient financial support. Hence, the enforced destitution asylum seekers face in the UK is extreme.

Conclusion

This research argues that the UK government has been enforcing the destitution of asylum seekers in the UK. Every participant desired a life away from destitution. When asked, asylum seekers pointed out that having a secure place and living a dignified life were key determinants of a safer and more secure life in Glasgow. However, their expectations were challenged by dilemmas between safety and restrictions, and survival within a hostile support system. The question of enforced destitution of asylum seekers has been placed within wider socio-political mechanisms of destitution and economic mechanisms of destitution. The socio-political mechanism of destitution focuses on the role of restrictive immigration policies in the UK. In particular, the current asylum support system has created destitution of asylum seekers and kept them within uncertainty of their future. The findings acknowledge that the rights of asylum seekers have been embedded within the wider policies of asylum and migration control through welfare provision (Da Lomba, 2006). Asylum seekers are typically destitute when they arrive in the UK and primarily depend on state support for accommodation, food, clothing and healthcare. However, the government has been exacerbating their destitution by controlling and delaying asylum seekers' access to benefits (Da Lomba, 2006). Furthermore, their social rights have been restricted through the existing immigration policies in the UK, such as no access to employment or opportunities to invest in their lives. Consequently, participants felt uncertain and fear of losing their active life without engaging in any meaningful activities. While the socio-political mechanism of destitution excludes many social rights of asylum seekers, this has psychologically impacted their lives in the UK.

The socio-political mechanism of destitution has led asylum seekers to the economic mechanism of destitution. Analysis of

participants' experiences indicated inadequate support for asylum seekers in the UK which previous research has also demonstrated (for example, see Allsopp et al., 2014; Guentner et al., 2016; Mulvey, 2010, 2015). This research expanded on existing knowledge of inadequate formal support and consequent impacts. Significantly, during their asylum process, participants depended on the limited weekly allowance the state provided, which they viewed as humiliating or insulting because they could not have a dignified life with such low financial support. Low levels of financial support forced participants to become destitute and affected their ability to meet and maintain their nutritional requirements and keep up with the transport costs for mobility and access to services, communication capabilities and other individual needs. This research found that forced destitution led participants to take drastic measures, such as adjusting their needs, including reducing food intake, changing food habits and cutting down their children's toys and extracurricular activities. The findings also highlighted the inadequate support from the state and their dependency on the third sector, which reflects a situation of forced welfare dependency (Mayblin, 2014). In general, participants depended on the third sector to fill the gaps in their needs to a certain extent. As Fitzpatrick et al. (2016) reported, people in destitution had positive experiences with the voluntary sector in accessing essentials such as food, clothes and toiletries. The financial situation caused more adverse survival conditions, whereby they had been forced to depend on charities to fulfil their subsistence needs.

This article has explicated how the UK's asylum system was created and affects asylum seekers in their host communities. In conclusion, participants' experiences have shown how the UK government has been enforcing the destitution of asylum seekers in the UK. The government has been purposively making asylum seekers destitute by controlling their social rights and access to benefits and also through providing inhumane amounts of weekly allowance. A need to create a more humane asylum policy for asylum seekers in the UK was evident from participants' experiences. The UK government should introduce strategies to overcome economic and political destitution imposed on asylum seekers by the asylum system. There is a significant need to address the forced destitution. Although the UK government rarely indicates its concerns about asylum seekers' past experiences and living conditions, it should respect individuals' rights and provide better access to social protection.

End Notes

[1]The weekly allowance paid when the data was collected. However, it is now £47.39.
[2]When this research was conducted.

Funding This study was funded by the university's PhD/GTA studentship.

Supporting Data Statement The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Declarations

Ethics Approval Approval was obtained from the University's ethics committee.

Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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