Systematic Review

Can Community-Based Social Protection Interventions Improve the Wellbeing of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the United Kingdom? A Systematic Qualitative Meta-Aggregation Review

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Abstract: The Sustainable Development Goals 2030 call for an end to poverty in all its forms everywhere through the adoption of integrated social protection policies. However, recent literature suggests an implicit and explicit discrimination towards asylum seekers and refugees (ASRs) in United Kingdom social policy, leading to high rates of destitution, poor health and isolation. Due to the limited nature of UK government support, many ASRs become involved with semi-formal and informal social protection. This systematic literature review synthesizes existing qualitative literature that documents the impact of these interventions on the wellbeing of adult ASRs in the United Kingdom. The literature offers useful insights into asylum seeker and refugee perceptions of wellbeing, agency, and support responsibility, and how their interaction with social protection providers constrains or enables the realization of their fundamental human needs. The findings demonstrate that government support is inadequate to meet the needs of many asylum seekers and refugees, leading to disempowerment, lack of agency and exploitation. Positive wellbeing outcomes are linked to semi-formal and informal interventions, summarized into six categories: the positive impact of volunteering; physical space and intentional gathering; practical and material support; training and skills development; solidarity, inclusion and understanding; and peer support and advice.

Keywords: asylum seekers; refugees; social protection; wellbeing; community based; systematic literature review

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals 2030 call for an end to poverty in all its forms everywhere through the adoption of integrated social protection and development policies that foster inclusive societies where no one is left behind (UN 2015a, 2015b). However, recent literature suggests an implicit and explicit discrimination towards asylum seekers and refugees (ASRs) in United Kingdom (UK) social policy, leading to high rates of destitution, poor health and isolation among this group (Refugee Council 2004; Pettitt 2013; Fitzpatrick et al. 2015).

The rhetoric surrounding UK immigration is also overwhelmingly negative (Balaam et al. 2016), with asylum seekers and refugees pilloried by the media and politicians as unwanted invaders, dangerous criminals or vulnerable and powerless (Bhatia 2015; Parker 2015; Cuthill 2017). Deterrent and dispersal government policies attempt to restrict incoming migrant numbers and regulate the lives of those crossing the border. Asylum seekers are generally unable to work, receive minimum economic support (approximately 50% of jobseeker’s allowance—£39.63 per week in 2021) and poor-quality housing through a socially exclusionary housing policy that disperses them to deprived areas, often away from support services (Mayblin and James 2019). Asylum application waiting times have also increased substantially in recent years (Sturge 2019; Walsh 2019), with a 68% increase in the number of initial decisions taking more than six months between March 2019 and March 2020 alone (Refugee Council 2020). These policies could be viewed as structural...
violence (Rylko-Bauer and Farmer 2016), given that housing, employment, and social networks are key determinants of physical and mental health (Carter and El Hassan 2003; Seppala et al. 2013; Dahlgren and Whitehead 2015; Bakker et al. 2016).

Despite the negative political representation of asylum seekers and refugees and the contraction of state social protection for this group (Price 2016; Mayblin and James 2019), there is evidence of migrants being welcomed into UK cities and institutions through initiatives such as the ‘Cities of Sanctuary’ movement (Darling 2010; Flug and Hussein 2019; CoS 2020). The sanctuary movement was set up in 2005 and seeks to engage local councils, organizations and residents in providing a place of safety for those fleeing persecution and violence, working closely with third-sector organizations to provide practical support and to advocate for local and national policies that welcome and respect people in need of safety. The level of support offered by third-sector organizations such as charities and faith communities is also growing in response to the reduction in state-sponsored support (Mayblin and James 2019). Many of these interventions are small scale and community led, and so have been under-represented in the literature. However, recent research suggests that they account for at least £33 million per year of poverty alleviation support for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK (Mayblin and James 2019).

Social protection, defined as ‘policies and actions which enhance the capacity of poor and vulnerable people to escape from poverty and enable them to better manage risks and shocks’ (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2009, p. 12), has historically been viewed as primarily a state responsibility in the UK, delivered by government departments, semi-autonomous agencies, or supplied through employment benefits. However, neo-liberal political discourse and austerity measures have seen a reduction in state welfare provision for citizens and neglect for vulnerable groups such as refugees and those seeking asylum. Asylum seeker employment restrictions also impede access to market-based social protection, leading many to rely on semi-formal, community-based support through third-sector organizations (Mayblin and James 2019), and informal family or peer support (McGregor 2007; Murray 2015).

Current literature has focused mainly on asylum seekers and refugees as vulnerable, passive recipients of care, with particular attention given to the impact of UK formal social protection provision on the wellbeing of unaccompanied minors (McDonald and Billings 2007; Mayblin 2014; Mayblin and James 2019; Mayblin et al. 2020). There is limited research to date, however, on how local, semi-formal and informal interventions impact the wellbeing of adult asylum seekers and refugees, or on forced migrants’ potential position as active pursuers and givers of support through complex local, regional, national, and international social networks (Cuthill 2017). Additionally, there is minimal literature related to the existence and nature of advocacy among asylum seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom with “the voices of destitute asylum seekers [...] rarely heard’ as ‘powerful social groups’ often have the ‘speaking rights’ of refugees, rather than those experiencing the refugee process themselves’ (Cuthill 2017).

2. Research Aims

The aim of this systematic literature review was to locate and synthesize the findings of existing literature that documents the impact of semi-formal and informal social protection interventions on the self-reported wellbeing of adult asylum seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom, both as receivers and givers of support. The literature identified offers useful insights into ASRs’ perceptions of wellbeing, agency, and support responsibility, and how their interactions with semi-formal and informal social protection providers constrains or enables the realization of their fundamental human needs. This study also highlights gaps in the literature which can be pursued in future research projects. The review was guided by the following question:

What impact does participation in semi-formal or informal social protection interventions have on the self-reported wellbeing of adult asylum seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom?
3. Inclusion Criteria

The qualitative systematic review adopted the PICOS tool to define inclusion criteria:

**Population Intervention Comparison Outcome Study Type**

### 3.1. Population

The review considered studies that included resettled refugees and asylum seekers currently resident in the United Kingdom. All asylum seeker categories were considered, including those awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, asylum seekers granted leave to remain and those refused asylum but continuing to reside in the UK. The review focused on adult asylum seekers and refugees (18+) and excluded studies where the focus and respondent demographic were predominantly children and young people below the age of 18. All adult groups were included, with inclusion not affected by race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical/mental disability or infirmity.

Only studies conducted or already translated in English language were considered due to the limited capacity of the researcher to obtain translations in the timescale of the review. In the field of medicine, some studies have found ‘no evidence of a systematic bias from the use of language restrictions in systematic review-based meta-analyses’ (Morrison et al. 2012) and, given the UK focus of this review, the language limitation was not expected to have a significant negative impact on the findings.

The review considered studies undertaken in all parts of the United Kingdom.

### 3.2. Intervention

The review was concerned with the self-reported wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees resident in the UK in response to some form of community-based social protection intervention. As such, studies were excluded where there was no primary data elicited from asylum seekers and refugees directly.

Community-based social protection interventions were defined as:

1. Semi formal—delivered by formally established and legally recognized non-state institutions and organizations. Examples included trade unions; faith- or community-based organizations; local or national non-governmental organizations; bilateral or multilateral donors.
2. Informal—originating from personal relationships such as family, friends, and peers (based on Devereux 2019).

### 3.3. Comparison and Outcome

Wellbeing and human needs are multidimensional constructs (Ryff 1989) and extensive literature has attempted to define their boundaries and measurement (Linton et al. 2016). One of the earliest wellbeing scholars, Maslow (1970), proposed a link between human wellbeing and a hierarchy of human needs starting with subsistence and safety and progressing up through psychological needs and self-fulfilment, in order of priority. More recently, Sen (1985) and Nussbaum (2011) conceptualized wellbeing in relation to capabilities and functionings, where functionings are ‘doings and beings’, that is, various states of human beings and activities that a person can undertake, such as being well-nourished, getting married, being educated, and travelling, while capabilities are the real, or substantive, opportunity that they have to achieve these ‘doings and beings’ (Robeyns and Byskov 2020). In relation to the wellbeing and development of communities, Max-Neef’s (1991) human-scale development theories link the concepts of fundamental human needs with capabilities and functionings by proposing nine core needs—subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity and freedom—that are satisfied or inhibited through person and context-specific capabilities and functionings, articulated by Max-Neef as ‘being, having, doing and interacting’ (see Conceptual Framework for Categorization and Synthesized Findings section for more information).

The purpose of this review was to analyze literature where the wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees was self-reported and to compare the wellbeing outcomes of different
forms of community-based social protection interventions on their participants. Given this focus, there were no designated boundaries set by the researcher on what the participants considered as their human needs or relevant to their wellbeing, or what descriptive terminology they adopted, as wellbeing may be understood, experienced and articulated divergently by respondents. To bring coherence and order to the findings, however, the author chose to adopt Max-Neef’s human needs categorization (Max-Neef 1991).

3.4. Study Type

The review considered qualitative data collected and analyzed using a wide range of theoretical perspectives, methodologies and methods. Purely quantitative studies were excluded as the purpose of this study was to analyze self-reported experiential data and to include qualitative evidence to support findings cited by authors. Studies that included both quantitative and qualitative data were included if they met all other inclusion criteria. However, only the qualitative data were used to formulate findings.

Only studies published from 2000 to the present day were assessed for inclusion to exclude data collected before the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. Prior to 1999, asylum seekers had some access to mainstream welfare benefits. However, following the Act, a separate system of welfare was established including dispersal of asylum seekers to accommodation around the UK, decreasing personal financial support, and cuts in funding to non-profit organizations assisting asylum seekers (Fell and Fell 2013; Mayblin and James 2019).

Any studies that included data collected prior to 2000 but published after 2000 were also excluded.

4. Methods

The qualitative systematic review was conducted using a meta-aggregation approach in accordance with the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology (Lockwood et al. 2015; Navacchi and Lockwood 2020). The purpose of a meta-aggregation is to locate qualitative, evidenced findings from literature that can be sorted into ‘synthesized statements that refer to ‘lines of action’ that inform decision-making’ for practitioners and policy makers (Hannes and Lockwood 2011).

The meta-aggregative approach adopts a rigorous and comprehensive search strategy to find qualitative data that answer the research question. The findings from each record are extracted and aggregated without conducting new analysis or interpretation and, as such, the process mitigates against researcher bias. Details of the protocol for this systematic review were registered on PROSPERO and can be accessed at www.crd.york.ac.uk/prospero/display_record.php?RecordID=226383 (accessed on 1 April 2021).

4.1. Search Strategy

The search strategy was designed to identify both published and unpublished studies. An initial scoping search was conducted on Scopus and Google Scholar to identify relevant articles. Key terms found in the titles, abstracts and keywords were used to develop a full search strategy and list of search words.

The terms below were used to search the title, abstract and keywords of articles on a wide number of academic and grey literature databases. Where no filtering was available, the full text was searched instead.

- (Refugee OR “asylum seek*” OR “forced migra*” OR “forced displa*” OR “without legal status” OR “illegal immigrant” OR “seek* asylum”) AND Qualitative AND
- (Voluntary OR volunteer OR occupation* OR “take part” OR involve*) AND
- (Wellbeing OR well-being OR “well being” OR happiness OR identity OR belong* OR integrat* OR “mental health” OR empower* OR welfare OR resilience OR community OR “community-based” OR “community based” OR drop-in OR “sanctuary network” OR “city of sanctuary” OR church OR local OR informal OR “social protection”) AND
• (Publication year > 1999) AND
• (Affiliate country—United Kingdom) AND
• (Language—English)

Publications on academic search databases were limited to peer reviewed where a
filter option existed to improve the quality of search returns. Grey literature was not limited
to peer reviewed as this is not normal practice for most types of grey material and would
exclude potentially useful articles and reports.

The reference list of all included studies was also checked for additional appropriate
literature not already identified.

4.2. Databases

Both peer-reviewed and grey literature were searched for appropriate literature. Table 1 lists all databases searched.

Table 1. Database Search List.

| Peer-Reviewed Databases                                                                 | Grey Literature Database (Theses, Dissertations, Government and Third-Sector Reports) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Scopus                                                                                 | British Library: Social Welfare                                                      |
| International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)                               | Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion                                           |
| JSTOR                                                                                  | OpenGrey (theses only)                                                                 |
| Web of Science: all databases                                                          | Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University                                             |
| EBSCO Open Dissertations                                                               |                                                                                       |
| ETHOS                                                                                  |                                                                                       |
| APA PsycNET                                                                            |                                                                                       |
| PTSDpubs                                                                               |                                                                                       |
| Ovid—(Social Policy and Practice)                                                      |                                                                                       |
| Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC)                                                    |                                                                                       |
| Campbell Systematic Reviews                                                            |                                                                                       |
| Cochrane Library                                                                       |                                                                                       |
| EPPI-Centre Knowledge Library                                                          |                                                                                       |

4.3. Selection of Studies

Once the search was complete, all identified citations and abstracts were uploaded
on to EndNote X9 and duplicates removed. The researcher then screened the titles and
abstracts against the inclusion criteria and potentially relevant documents were retrieved
in full text.

The full text of each selected citation was evaluated against the inclusion criteria and
the reasons for exclusion are recorded in Figure 1.

4.4. Methodological Quality Appraisal

Critical appraisal of methodological quality and research ethics is an important com-
ponent of the meta-aggregation approach and assists the researcher in their inclusion
decision-making process. To assess the quality of the qualitative data in each study, the
JBI critical appraisal checklist (S1 in the Supplementary Materials) was utilized to test the
congruence between the research, methods, analysis and researcher. Where more than one
checklist question was answered ‘no’, the study was excluded from the literature review.

In total, 31 records were appraised. Eight were excluded and 23 included in the
review. Details of all the records included in the critical appraisal stage, and the reasons for
exclusion, can be found in S2 in the Supplementary Materials.
4.4. Methodological Quality Appraisal

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4.5. Data Extraction and Synthesis

Following quality appraisal, data were synthesized using the three step meta-aggregation process:

1. ‘Extraction of all findings from all studies with an accompanying illustration [. . . ] for each finding.
2. Developing categories for findings with at least two findings per category.
3. Developing one or more synthesized findings of at least two categories’. (Lockwood et al. 2015, p. 184).

Each finding was ‘a verbatim extract of the author’s analytical interpretation of the results or data’ (Lockwood et al. 2015) and was accompanied by a supporting illustration of either a direct participant quotation or fieldnote. Extracted findings were also allocated a level of plausibility based on the JBI guidelines:

1. ‘Unequivocal (findings accompanied by an illustration that is beyond reasonable doubt and; therefore not open to challenge)
2. Equivocal (findings accompanied by an illustration lacking clear association with it and therefore open to challenge)
3. Unsupported (findings are not supported by the data)' (Lockwood et al. 2015)

Unsupported findings were not included in the synthesis process. However, equivocal and unequivocal findings were given equal recognition.

Following the finding extraction phase, thematic categories were developed by identifying two or more findings that were similar in meaning. Each category was given an explanatory statement that conveyed the overarching meaning of the aggregated data.

Finally, synthesized findings were written where two or more categories could be thematically grouped. These were expressed as indicatory statements that could be used as the ‘basis of recommendations for policy or practice crafted by the reviewers as guidance arising from their findings’ (Lockwood et al. 2015).

4.6. Conceptual Framework for Categorization and Synthesized Findings

Categories and synthesized findings were developed using Max-Neef’s (1991) ‘fundamental human needs’ theoretical framework. Max-Neef, a Chilean economist, wrote expansively on an alternative vision of economic order; one that was human-centered and organized to serve people, rather than people organized to serve the economy. He also believed development should be related to people rather than objects and centered his writings on the concept of community-inspired and initiated development (Smith and Max-Neef 2011, pp. 139–45). Max-Neef theorized that all humans throughout time and place have nine overarching needs that need to be met in order to achieve holistic wellbeing (see Table 2), but that these needs are satisfied or inhibited in divergent ways depending on the culture, history, environment, context and personal attributes of each individual. Beyond basic subsistence, Max-Neef deemed all human needs of equal importance and inter-related in nature so that one satisfier may fulfil multiple needs, or one need may require multiple satisfiers.

| Human Need   | Examples                                                                 |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subsistence  | Food, shelter, work, physical health, procreation                        |
| Protection   | Family, work, social protection, health care                             |
| Affection    | Friendships, intimacy, togetherness, family, self-esteem, tolerance      |
| Understanding| Study, communication, curiosity, critical conscience                     |
| Participation| Rights, work, responsibilities, affiliation, interaction                 |
| Idleness     | Imagination, free time, relaxation, peace of mind                        |
| Creation     | Skills, design, passion, determination, autonomy, inventiveness          |
| Identity     | Sense of belonging, language, customs, integration, social rhythms      |
| Freedom      | Equal rights, choice, autonomy, self-esteem, self-determination, tolerance|

Given the human-centered, community-based focus of this literature search, Max-Neef’s interpretation of human needs satisfaction or inhibition was particularly suited as a theoretical framework to organize the positive or negative development of research participants’ self-reported wellbeing based on the impact of semi-formal or informal social protection interventions. The contingent nature of satisfiers and inhibitors, changing over time as societies evolve or as individuals migrate between cultures, religions or environments was hoped to be beneficial when investigating asylum seekers and refugees who had travelled from a diverse range of countries to the UK, with all the potential differences that may occur with regard to how their needs were now met or inhibited (see Max-Neef 1991).

5. Results

The meta-aggregation process extracted 209 findings from 23 papers concerning the impact of participation in semi-formal or informal social protection interventions on the self-reported wellbeing of adult asylum seekers and refugees (ASRs) in the United Kingdom. Of these extractions, 207 findings were deemed plausible (unequivocal or equivocal) and
included in this study. Each finding was illustrated with either a direct quote from an asylum seeker or refugee or a researcher fieldnote. The findings were then aggregated into 21 categories based on similarity of meaning and, following further analysis, the categories informed eight synthesized findings (Figure 2) that were linked to the satisfaction or inhibition of Max-Neef’s fundamental human needs. The asylum seekers and refugees highlighted in the findings came from a wide variety of countries and included both male and female respondents.

5.1. Synthesized Finding One: The Positive Impact of Volunteering

Nine papers included 36 findings related to the positive impact that asylum seekers and refugees believed volunteering activities had on their wellbeing. Though asylum seekers are generally restricted from paid employment (see Note 1) government policy allows the uptake of voluntary positions, with most activities highlighted in the findings accessed through semi-formal social protection providers such as refugee third-sector organizations (RTSO) and churches, and a small number mentioning volunteering via informal social networks. Firstly, volunteering provided an important avenue for ASRs to develop their skills and experience.

‘You lose your skills, we are lucky because we have our Karibu [RTSO], I can use the computer, I can use the email, I can read [documents], so it keeps me a bit up doing this voluntary work. Imagine if I did stay 6 years doing nothing, today I would not even be able to even write a letter . . . ’ (H, Congolese refugee) (Rosenburg 2008, p. 118)

‘I came in 2002, introduced to the organization by (Education Worker). I helped with Albanian classes, volunteered with them. I have done training, worked in the office. I really found my confidence. I’ve been inspired by them, especially (the Project Manager)’. (SU33, Female, age unknown) (Kellow 2010, p. 112)

‘I like to do volunteering well because I need to build my experience. I need to build my skills, so I’m happy to meet people, talk to them, and then after that, I know how, I have this experience if I get job. (Francine 25–29)’ (Yap et al. 2010, p. 162)

Volunteering activities also helped participants build social networks inside and outside the ASR community and have some control and choice in the regulation of their daily activities.

‘It’s easier to talk to somebody who’s been through that process . . . most of my clients tend to move towards me because I’ve got first-hand experience of going through the system’. (Savannah, Sudanese woman working for a voluntary BME organization) (Hunt 2008, p. 287)

Through the development of skills and the building of social networks, volunteering activities positively impacted ASRs’ social and mental wellbeing through positive identity construction.

‘People like me when I said to them my status and I am volunteering eh, support me and happy, because you want to work not to stay at home’. (Mohammed 392–4) (Yap et al. 2010, p. 163)

‘British people, they don’t like lazy. So, if you are lazy, you sit, you eat, they don’t like, you need to do it as well. If you are doing good thing, if you hard worker, you are very confident with them, they like you’. (Francine 627–635) (Yap et al. 2010)
Volunteering was the basis of positive identity construction for ASRs, positioning them as ‘good value citizens’, acceptable to host nationals, and a caring benefactor who is appreciated and of worth and value. Volunteer roles helped ASRs feel skilful, knowledgeable, respectable, trust-worthy and provided links to their former identity/occupation in their home country.

Volunteering activities provided a welcome routine and gave ASRs agency to participate and create in an occupation. This provided a degree of freedom from the work restrictions of the asylum application process and improved their mental wellbeing.

Volunteering helped ASRs feel integrated into their local community through building social networks and a sense of acceptability to host nationals. This contributed towards the satisfaction of the human need for protection, affection, freedom and participation.

Volunteering activities allowed ASRs to increase their understanding through gaining skills and experience that they hoped would prepare them for employment once their asylum application was approved. This created a sense of personal agency in building a better future for themselves, satisfying the human need to protect and provide subsistence for themselves, and to have the freedom to participate in an occupation when their residency was granted.

1. The Positive Impact of Volunteering
Volunteering opportunities offered by semi-formal, social protection providers can provide an important avenue for ‘asylum seekers and refugees (ASRs) to develop their skills and experience, build social networks inside and outside the ASR community, and have some control and choice in the regulation of their daily activities. This positively impacts their social and mental wellbeing through positive identity construction, integration within the local community, and a sense of agency and hope in their ability to work towards a better future in the United Kingdom. In an otherwise highly regulated and controlled existence, volunteering activities contribute towards the satisfaction of the human need for freedom, identity, creation, protection, affection and participation.
Social spaces and communal activities run by semi-formal social protection providers brought together asylum seekers and refugees (ASRs) who had similar asylum experiences and facilitated social network/friendship creation. These networks provided practical and emotional support, a sense of safety, solidarity, community, understanding and equality, and this, in turn, improved ASRs' mental wellbeing, and mood/happiness. Intentional social spaces and communal activities contributed towards the fulfilment of the human need for affection, protection, understanding and participation.

The provision of regular cultural and creative activities and informal social spaces by semi-formal social protection providers provided a weekly routine that took ASRs' minds off their situation and worries. This improved their mental wellbeing by contributing towards the satisfaction of the need for idleness, freedom and protection.

Taking part in creative activities improved mental wellbeing and promoted self-esteem, confidence, sense of achievement and resilience through allowing ASRs to express their emotions non-verbally. This supported the human need for creation, freedom and idleness.

Semi-formal social protection providers facilitated integration into the community through volunteering activities, peer learning and social network creation.

2. Physical Space and Intentional Gathering
Semi-formal social protection providers can play an important role in improving the wellbeing of ASRs through the creation of intentional physical spaces for cultural and creative gatherings. These activities provide a regular routine for ASRs who are unable to fill their time through paid occupation, temporarily diverting their thoughts from their current precarious situation. The informal meeting spaces also facilitate social network creation and community integration resulting in the giving and receiving of practical and emotional support and the development of solidarity, understanding and equality, based on shared experiences of the UK asylum system. Through cultural and creative gatherings and activities the human need for affection, protection, participation, idleness, creation, and identity is satisfied.
| Finding | Category | Synthesized Finding |
|---------|----------|---------------------|
| 18 findings | Semi-formal social protection providers contributed towards the need for subsistence and protection by offering practical support, such as the provision of shelter, food, everyday necessities and confidential advice. This improved physical wellbeing and material assets. | 3. Practical and Material Support  
Semi-formal social protection providers can provide important practical and material support to ASRs such as shelter, food, household necessities and advice which support the satisfaction of the need for subsistence and protection. |
| 10 findings | Semi-formal social protection providers contributed towards the human need to increase understanding and develop identity through the provision of skills development/training/education. ASRs reported that these improved their self-esteem, confidence, sense of achievement and resilience, gave them agency and hope for the future, and aided friendship creation. | 4. Training and Skills Development  
Both formal and informal education, training and skills development offered by semi-formal social protection providers and educational establishments promotes positive identity construction, hope for the future and mental wellbeing through improving self-esteem, confidence, and resilience, and by providing a sense of achievement. They also fill empty time with routine activities and provide physical spaces for social network formation. Through taking part in education/skills development ASRs can satisfy their need for understanding, identity, affection, freedom, and participation. |
| 4 findings | Colleges and educational establishments provided the opportunity for ASRs to develop their skills through taking a variety of courses. ASRs valued educational courses as they promoted positive identity formation, provided routine and developed social networks that improved wellbeing and hope for the future. This links to the fulfilment of the human need for understanding, identity, affection, freedom, and participation. |  |

Figure 2. Cont.
Informal social protection support / collaboration / reciprocity among members of the asylum seeker and refugee community - led to friendship creation, the development of support networks, and feelings of safety, inclusion, community and understanding among people in similar situations in the asylum system.

Informal social protection networks improved ASRs’ mental wellbeing through creating friendship and support networks and providing routine. This facilitated the fulfilment of the need for affection, idleness, protection, and participation.

Informal social protection networks supported the human need for understanding and identity through peer learning and advice about the UK culture and local community resources.

Informal social protection supported the human need for subsistence and protection by providing an important network of people in similar situations who could provide critical support and advice on practical issues such as shelter and food. ASR support networks offered the opportunity for cost efficiency and budgetary burden sharing through the sharing of food, shelter, and cost-saving advice. This gave ASRs the knowledge and agency to improve their situations.

Informal social protection networks offered a practical lifeline to destitute asylum seekers through the provision of food, practical support and shelter which improved ASRs’ physical wellbeing and material assets. Without this support some ASRs faced homelessness. These acts support the fulfilment of the human need for subsistence, protection, and affection.

5. Solidarity, Inclusion and Understanding
Informal social protection provision, mainly by other members of the asylum and refugee community, has a significant positive impact on the mental, social and spiritual wellbeing of ASRs. Friendship creation and the development of informal support networks enhances feelings of safety, inclusion, community, identity and understanding among people in a similar situation in the asylum system and this, in turn, improves mental wellbeing by fulfilling the human need for affection, idleness, protection and participation.

6. Peer Support and Advice
Informal social protection networks offer a practical lifeline to ASRs through the sharing of knowledge, support and advice on the asylum process and on living in the United Kingdom. This enhances ASRs’ agency to subsist and begin to integrate in their host communities, contributing to the satisfaction of the human need for protection, understanding, participation and freedom. Informal ASR networks also play a crucial role in combatting destitution and homelessness among their members through the provision of food, shelter and other physical support, supporting the fulfilment of their human need for subsistence, protection and affection.
Failures in the formal asylum application system or deterrence policies - lengthy application process, over complication, not enough time between decisions and removal of benefits, lack of financial support for refused ASRs, inability to work - were linked to a reliance on informal social protection which led to shame, a lack of agency and reduced emotional wellbeing. This links to the inhibition of the human need for subsistence, protection, identity, and freedom.

A lack of knowledge/understanding or fear of the asylum application system led to ASRs breaking asylum rules or not seeking help, both of which resulted in destitution, asylum refusal or the withdrawal of formal social protection. This, in turn, led to a reliance on semi-formal and informal social protection and a sense of shame. This inhibited the fulfilment of the need for subsistence, identity, and protection.

ASRs felt shame and a lack of agency because of their reliance on semi-formal and informal social protection due to their inability to work as part of the asylum application process. This inhibited their human need to participate, provide protection for themselves and their families, negatively impacted their identity and reduced their ability to fulfil their subsistence needs.

There was evidence of uneven power dynamics between ASR and host nation volunteers at semi-formal social protection providers. ASRs felt less able to exert agency or choice over their roles, acquiescing to the needs/wants of their host nation counterparts. This inhibited the fulfilment of their need for participation, freedom and identity and resulted in social and emotional isolation.

Reliance on informal social protection led to a sense of disempowerment, mental and physical exploitation, lack of agency and transactional relationships among female ASRs who were beholden to those who provided them with subsistence. This inhibited the human need for freedom, protection, and identity.

7. Disempowerment, Lack of Agency and Exploitation
A reliance on semi-formal and informal social protection contributes to a sense of disempowerment, lack of agency and unequal power dynamics between provider and recipient of support. In some cases, destitution can also result in female ASRs entering transactional relationships with informal support providers, leading to mental and physical exploitation. This inhibits the fulfilment of the need for participation, idleness, freedom, identity, and protection and can lead to social and emotional isolation resulting in a lack of affection.

8. Inadequate Formal Support
Inadequacies in the United Kingdom’s deterrence-based asylum application system contribute to destitution and a reliance on semi-formal and informal social protection among ASRs. This, in turn, leads to a lack of agency, a sense of shame and reduced mental and physical wellbeing, which inhibits the satisfaction of the human need for subsistence, protection, identity, freedom and participation.

Figure 2. Meta-Aggregation-Synthesized Findings Flowchart.
Volunteering was also seen as a good way to integrate within the local community and gave a sense of agency and hope in their ability to work towards a better future in the United Kingdom.

‘Mustafa: Through [The Talking Shop] I do some voluntary job, some gardening job and I think that is a small thing to make Sheffield better [. . . ] if you have got a home you like your house to be a good house. Sheffield is like house, places like this make you feel like it is house, everyone we are living in the city and you have to do something to make your city better’. (Mustafa interview 2007 in Darling 2011)

In an otherwise highly regulated and controlled existence, volunteering activities contributed towards the satisfaction of the human need for freedom, identity, creation, protection, affection, and participation.

5.2. Synthesized Finding Two: Physical Space and Intentional Gathering

Fifty-five findings from 17 papers found that semi-formal social protection providers played an important role in improving ASRs’ wellbeing through the creation of intentional physical spaces for social connection and cultural and creative gatherings.

‘I used to come here every day of my life: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday . . . because I don’t have anywhere to go, so I just come here, and I attached myself to the groups, we met, we talk, we . . . then I’ve gone to knit, I’ve gone to do computer, reading, many things I learnt here, so I just like it’. (Unnamed) (Clini et al. 2019, p. 6)

‘Just even to come out of your house and find someone giving you a hug, just loving you, it is really important because you are on your own. These groups help in a way because you meet different people, different cases. A few of them you might access to share your life with them . . . You get that togetherness. You get that hope to say we are many, we are receiving help, we are learning, it’s all about that. You are not alone’. (Participant 9) (Thompson 2017, p. 52)

Cultural and creative activities had a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of those unable to fill their time with paid occupation by providing a regular routine. This temporarily diverted their thoughts from their current precarious situation and gave them a creative outlet for their emotions.

‘[. . . ] One thing you have to bear in mind is that I am not working, and I am not studying, you know, so it was the only thing that I would look forward to because it was something to do, otherwise I would just be at home, doing nothing, you know, feeling very sorry for myself, getting upset all the time [. . . ]’ (Unnamed) (Clini et al. 2019, p. 6)

‘I like this group because when you come here you [do] not think too much (Jessica)’. (Bishop and Purcell 2013, p. 267)

‘It is more of expressing, more of letting go, it’s like getting a spirit out of you, and you don’t have necessarily have to tell someone ‘I’ve done this because of that and that, and this’, you know. Because sometimes you just don’t find the voice to talk about it and, I, as a person am really shy and, you know, I feel easily embarrassed, you know. [. . . ] So . . . that’s why I’m into arts, yes I’m doing arts really’. (Unnamed) (Clini et al. 2019, p. 7)

The informal meeting spaces provided by semi-formal social protection providers also facilitated social network creation and community integration resulting in the giving and receiving of practical and emotional support and the development of solidarity, understanding and equality, based on shared experiences of the UK asylum system.

‘If you’re in a situation where you’ve been completely isolated from people for a while and you just don’t know who to trust, or to be around people, it’s one
of those spaces where you can get to meet people, socialise, and actually make friends. [...] And these friendships do last. A life-time, because you understand what the person has gone through, you don’t have to explain a lot, you know, they just know that you’ve been through something terrible. [...] ‘(Unnamed) (ibid., p. 6)

‘I went for my first time to mix with other refugees and asylum seekers … women especially … it started to draw me out … a bit more confidence, yes, that I had lost’ (Unnamed) (Burchett and Matheson 2010, p. 89)

‘[... ] It’s a distraction from immigration and we know we are all going through it, but we don’t have to talk about it. There are other things going on in life, and we talked about, for example in the art group, the works we produced and what we could do, what we could achieve and get inspired by each other’s work’. (Unnamed) (Clini et al. 2019, p. 6)

[Author’s fieldnote including quotation] ‘Nobody understands you as well as they do’. This was echoed by an interviewee from Afghanistan who said, ‘English people do not know about challenges that refugees face. But the Afghan community can help.’ (Unnamed) (Flug and Hussein 2019, p. 13)

‘[... ] It gives me immense happiness to attend the national celebrations of Afghanistan to be in cultural events which remind me of my youth and the good days in Afghanistan. It makes me happy [... ] (H16) (Atfield et al. 2007, p. 41)

Through cultural and creative gatherings and activities the human need for affection, protection, participation, idleness, creation and identity is satisfied.

5.3. Synthesized Finding Three: Practical and Material Support

Eighteen findings from 11 papers found that semi-formal social protection providers offered important practical and material support to ASRs such as shelter, food, everyday necessities and confidential advice. This support facilitated the satisfaction of the need for subsistence and protection and improved physical wellbeing and their personal circumstances. Practical support was especially beneficial to refused asylum seekers who received no government support.

‘I lived 5 years without support. I depended on these local organisations to survive’. (Zena) (Cuthill et al. 2013, p. 12)

‘If these organisations weren’t there, I may have died because the government doesn’t give you any support and we are not allowed to work in this country and we don’t have a place to stay. [... ]’. (Gibrel) (Cuthill et al. 2013)

‘I’ve got a new flat and got plenty of stuff from here. [... ] I haven’t got enough money to spend for the kitchen stuff and for example more clothing’. (M7) (Spring et al. 2019, p. 40)

5.4. Synthesized Finding Four: Training and Skills Development

Government policy allows lawful asylum seekers whose application or appeal is still pending to undertake formal education2, though financial barriers may limit their options to do so. Nine papers included 14 findings that stated that formal and informal education, training and skills development offered by semi-formal social protection providers and educational establishments promoted positive identity construction, hope for the future and mental wellbeing through improving self-esteem, confidence and resilience, and by providing a sense of achievement.

“When you are in this situation it feels like life has, in a way, stopped. And you can’t do anything to change it. But by doing all this activity you feel, or I felt [... ] it was like, you know, that I was learning something in my life, rather than just waiting. [...] For instance, if I go for a job somewhere, where you have to
write what skills you have, so I could include all of this. I mean I don’t have a certificate or, like, proper qualifications, but I’ve all those skills, so I feel like, it is, in a way, impressive? Because you feel like, you know, rather than just waiting and not doing anything, you have been learning’. (Unnamed) (Clini et al. 2019, pp. 5–6)

[Author fieldnote] ‘One woman proudly told me how she loved learning and sought out hard courses that she didn’t yet understand but wanted to. In fact, she was hoping to study physics next. She had recently completed her GCSEs and remarked how she always made friends wherever she went, even if she was over thirty years older than the rest of the students!’ (Wenning 2018, pp. 113–14)

Training and skills development also had a positive impact on the mental and social dimensions of wellbeing by filling empty time with routine activities and providing physical spaces for social network formation.

‘I learn too many things. For example, if you just sit at home, you get crazy, you know, twenty-four hour a day without nothing. You go college, you just make yourself busy, you know, and you make some friends’. (H8) (Atfield et al. 2007, p. 42)

‘I’m very stressed, I’m always crying as well, I don’t get sleep. But when I start college, I become bigger, better, better. Now, thanks to God, everything’s well and I love my school’. (Unnamed) (Wenning 2018, p. 115)

Through taking part in education/skills development, ASRs satisfied their need for understanding, identity, affection, freedom and participation.

5.5. Synthesized Finding Five: Solidarity, Inclusion and Understanding

Six papers included 18 findings detailing how informal social protection provision, mainly by other members of the asylum and refugee community, had a significant positive impact on the mental, social and spiritual wellbeing of ASRs.

‘I arrived in at Heathrow . . . . . . I didn’t know anybody or anything; I didn’t even know where the UK was on the map. The only person I could talk to was the interpreter at the Home Office, but he wasn’t friendly. After a few days in the hostel I just needed someone to talk to. I found Albert; he had been in the UK for a few months. We talked and talked. I started to realise that I wasn’t alone, he had similar experiences’. (Pascal, Male 25) (Murray 2015, p. 161)

‘My first day in the hostel was upsetting. I stayed in my room and cried. I knew nothing of where my family was and I knew nothing of my new surroundings. I was the only African in my hostel. The second night a Kurd from Iraq took me by the hand and led me to another room. In the room were other Kurds eating a meal. They gave me food and made me feel welcome. I became friends with one of the Kurds who spoke French as he had lived in Lebanon’. (Serge, Male 29) (Murray 2015)

[Author’s fieldnote including quotation] ‘Being a refused asylum seeker effectively made her homeless. Yet she became close with some church members who invited her to stay with them in Newcastle. Because there was no other alternative available at the time, she accepted the offer. She was now a very active member in that church. ‘I thank God for those people,’ she told me, ‘because also they push me to do things that I would not usually do, like standing in front of people, or even like giving an announcement, I would never do that but she [friend she lives with] just pushes me like, ‘Go, do it!’’. (Wenning 2018, p. 78)

Friendship creation and the development of informal support networks enhanced feelings of safety, inclusion, community, identity and understanding among people in a similar situation in the asylum system and this, in turn, improved mental wellbeing by fulfilling the human need for affection, idleness, protection and participation.
5.6. Synthesized Finding Six: Peer Support and Advice

There were 23 findings in eight papers detailing how informal social protection networks had offered a practical lifeline to ASRs through the sharing of knowledge, support and advice on the asylum process and living in the UK. This enhanced ASRs’ agency to subsist through cost-saving advice and budgetary burden sharing. It also supported integration into their host communities, contributing to the satisfaction of the human need for protection, understanding, participation and freedom.

‘I became friends with a Somali man who was much older than me. We communicated in Swahili. He treated me like his younger brother. He took me to the local college to register for English classes. He also took me to his solicitor so that I could get legal help. We spent most of our time together, and I made a lot of friends through him. Life became easier as I now had friends to talk to and I felt more confident living in the hostel’. (Ibis, Male 22) (Murray 2015, p. 162)

‘The community helps me. I get counselling from them I get advices and financial help’. (Congolese woman, 28) (Goodson and Phillimore 2006, p. 8)

‘Serge [asylum seeker] is very busy but I think that it gives him something to do. He is always calling people and arranging when we can meet as a group. If someone has a problem he always knows someone who can help’. (Dada, Female 28) (Murray 2015, p. 178)

Informal ASR networks also played a crucial role in combating destitution and homelessness among their members through the provision of food, shelter and other material provision, supporting the fulfilment of their human need for subsistence.

[Author fieldnote including quotation] ‘His closest friend, and someone he considered as part of his family, was a man around his age who took him into his home and looked after him. This man fed him and even gave him a room of his own. This bond between them has given Yasir new hope. ‘That’s my family. And when you see good people and help you and that, look after you, you feel like there’s good people in this world. It’s not the people [who are bad but] the system’.’ (Wenning 2018, p. 129)

‘Destitution is a culturally sensitive issue. Pride and tradition mean you can’t leave people to sleep on the streets. You’re obliged to help them’. (Representative, Nuba Mountains Welfare Association) (Lewis 2007, p. 25)

‘When I was in Bradford I received notice from the Home Office that my application had been turned down. I didn’t know what to do, I contacted a friend in Ilford. They invited me to stay with them. I was there for nearly two years, staying on people’s floors [ . . . ]’ (Joseph, Male 40) (Murray 2015, p. 233)

5.7. Synthesized Finding Seven: Disempowerment, Lack of Agency and Exploitation

Most findings in the articles included in this meta-aggregation related to the positive impact of semi-formal and informal social protection on wellbeing. However, a small number of respondents also cited negative outcomes to their involvement.

Six findings in three papers described how a reliance on semi-formal and informal social protection had contributed to a sense of disempowerment and unequal power dynamics between providers and recipients of support.

[Author fieldnote] ‘[ . . . ] I go over to the kitchen to get a cup of tea. After a brief chat with Ilya and Sharq I reach the counter to see not Akan, but two elderly ladies stationed there. They ask me politely if I want tea or coffee [ . . . ] I turn to look around the room for Akan and note that he’s sat talking with a few other men at a round table, none of them have a drink (Research diary, 27 April 2007). Following this incident I attended The Talking Shop on Friday, where Akan was back to his usual routine, and his usual place. While he arranged some saucers I
asked him why he was not doing the teas on Wednesday, he told me that the two ladies were there when he arrived, that they were volunteers from the church and that he did not feel that he could say anything about the tea making being his ‘role’. After this Akan stopped making the teas on Wednesday as the two ladies became a regular fixture, and after a while stopped attending on Wednesdays altogether, his role had been taken, his position of brief and fragile ownership had shifted in the face of two volunteers who also wanted to ‘give something back”. (Darling 2011, p. 413)

In some cases, destitution had also resulted in ASRs entering transactional relationships with informal support providers, leading to mental and physical exploitation. This inhibited the fulfilment of the need for participation, freedom, identity and protection and led to social and emotional isolation.

[Fieldnote] ‘Magda lives in NASS accommodation without paying rent, despite her asylum claim being refused, since developing a sexual relationship with the property’s owner. He is an old man, by whom she feels neither threatened nor coerced. She has two other boyfriends, both local residents though not originally from the UK, who provide Magda with her other needs, such as clothing and money. [ . . . ]’ (Crawley et al. 2011, p. 41)

[Fieldnote] ‘Djany faced destitution after her claim was refused and she was told to leave her NASS accommodation, leaving all her belongings behind apart from her toothbrush. She had nowhere to go, so routinely spent evenings in pubs, looking for a man to take her home that night, just so she could have a place to stay. [ . . . ]’ (Crawley et al. 2011)

5.8. Synthesized Finding Eight: Inadequate Formal Support

Though not the focus of the meta-aggregation’s research question, a significant number of findings related to the negative impact of formal social protection on ASRs’ wellbeing. As there is a close relationship between failures in formal social protection and the use of semi-formal and informal interventions, these findings have also been synthesized.

Six papers included 26 findings relating to inadequacies in the UK’s asylum application system and how these had contributed to destitution and a reliance on semi-formal and informal social protection among ASRs.

‘Our culture is to work . . . not to sit back and let someone else to feed you. It has destroyed my life, waiting for others to feed me. I have always worked, since I was a young man, I have worked’. (Osman) (Cuthill et al. 2013, p. 13)

‘I have an ARC card which I take to the Post Office to get my money. A couple of times it hasn’t worked. I called my support officer who said it will take a few days to get it sorted out. I once had to wait three weeks! The support officer has said that there is nothing he can do to help until the money comes through. He told me to ask my friends to help until things were sorted out’. (Claude, Male 26) (Murray 2015, p. 230)

‘Most of them don’t go to find advice because they’re scared, there is no trust. [ . . . ] I went once, to Refugee Action to get help, but when they asked me about my address, I was scared, and gave them the wrong address, and after that I didn’t go back to them’. (Unnamed) (Crawley et al. 2011, p. 31)

[Discussion about a Food Bank] ‘It is a feeling of death [ . . . ] Believe me it felt so awful that my legs were shaking [ . . . ] They were very kind people and smiling all the time but still you feel terrible. We refugees like me and you were not poor people in our countries, we just had to escape from death to survive. But you don’t believe how terrible I felt, standing in the queue in coldness for a bag of food’. (Hossain, Iranian, M) (Mayblin et al. 2020, p. 114)
'I have saved all my mail but I don’t understand what it says. I went to the Refugee Centre once so they could translate the document for me. I waited nearly all morning to see someone. I felt embarrassed and never went back. There were so many letters that I just gave up after a while, I never opened them and put them in a cupboard’. (Dax, Female 30) (Murray 2015, p. 245)

Destitution and the reliance on semi-formal and informal social protection, in turn, led to a lack of agency, a sense of shame and reduced mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing, which inhibited the satisfaction of the human need for subsistence, protection, identity, freedom and participation.

6. Findings

The purpose of this meta-aggregation was to investigate the impact of participation in semi-formal or informal social protection interventions on the self-reported wellbeing of adult asylum seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom.

While there is considerable academic research on ASRs in the UK, peer-reviewed data containing first-person qualitative accounts from adult ASRs on the impact of semi-formal and informal social protection is limited, with several of the papers included in this aggregation being PhD theses that have not been formally published.

The findings of this investigation elucidate the mainly positive impact of semi-formal and informal social protection on all six dimensions of wellbeing (Linton et al. 2016, Table 2)—mental, social, physical, and spiritual wellbeing, activities and functioning and personal circumstance—through the satisfaction of Max-Neef’s (1991) nine fundamental human needs—subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity and freedom.

Max-Neef proposed that satisfiers could be singular—satisfying one particular need, or synergic—satisfying a need while ‘simultaneously stimulating and contributing to the fulfilment of other needs’ (Max-Neef 1991). The findings of this aggregation show that both semi-formal and informal social protection interventions were synergic satisfiers for a significant number of ASRs (see Table 3), either simultaneously satisfying multiple needs at once or catalyzing a causal chain of positive outcomes.

An example of a synergic causal chain found in these data is that of the volunteering opportunities offered by semi-formal social protection providers. ASRs reported that volunteering activities led to improved identity formation, integration in the community, skills development, a weekly routine, and friendship creation, which some respondents then linked to hope in the future and improved mental wellbeing. Volunteering catalyzed a complex causal chain of positive impacts satisfying the multiple human needs of protection, affection, participation, creation, identity, and freedom.

Other aspects of semi-formal social protection were also able to synergically satisfy all nine human needs for some ASRs through the key provision of: volunteering opportunities, physical space and intentional gathering, practical and material support and training and skills development. Figure 3 illustrates the key positive impacts that were reported in the data. However, it should be noted that need satisfaction was often temporal and partial, due to the limited nature of semi-formal provision in scope and longevity. For example, drop-in sessions may only occur once or twice a week, filling a small portion of, otherwise empty, time. Some services, such as training courses, were also only available for a limited period or had caps on attendee numbers due to funding. Longitudinal wellbeing studies would be helpful to better understand the impact of semi-formal support services over time.

Informal social protection was also deemed crucial to the wellbeing of many of the ASRs questioned in the research papers. Friendship creation and the resulting ability to share subsistence burdens was the primary positive outcome cited, which led to improved mental and physical wellbeing and personal circumstances. Figure 4 illustrates the key positive impacts reported in the data.
While semi-formal and informal social protection were found to be synergic satisfiers of human need, Table 4 shows that a number of inhibitors/destroyers were cited in these data that hindered the ability for ASRs to satisfy their fundamental needs. The main inhibitor was inadequate formal social protection support with 26 findings detailing problems associated with government social protection—length of application process, lack of financial support for refused asylum seekers, inability to work, lack of knowledge/understanding of the system, fear—and how these resulted in a reliance on semi-formal and informal social protection support. This reliance led to shame, disempowerment, uneven power dynamics between provider and recipient of support, and, in some cases, culminated in female ASRs entering transactional or exploitative relationships to meet their basis subsistence needs.
Table 3. Semi-Formal and Informal Social Protection (SP)—Human Need Satisfiers.

| Synthesized Findings | Human Needs       |
|----------------------|-------------------|
|                      | Subsistence       | Protection | Affection | Understanding | Participation | Idleness | Creation | Identity | Freedom |
| 1                    | Semi-formal SP: The Positive Impact of Volunteering | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier |
| 2                    | Semi-formal SP: Physical Space and Intentional Gathering | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier |
| 3                    | Semi-formal SP: Practical and Material Support     | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier |
| 4                    | Semi-formal SP: Training and Skills Development    | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier |
| 5                    | Informal SP: Solidarity, Inclusion and Understanding| Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier |
| 6                    | Informal SP: Peer Support and Advice                | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier | Satisfier |

Table 4. Inhibitors/Destroyers of Human Needs for Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

| Synthesized Findings | Human Needs       |
|----------------------|-------------------|
|                      | Subsistence       | Protection | Affection | Understanding | Participation | Idleness | Creation | Identity | Freedom |
| 7                    | Inadequate Formal Social Protection | Inhibitor/Destroyer | Inhibitor/Destroyer | Inhibitor/Destroyer | Inhibitor/Destroyer | Inhibitor/Destroyer |
| 8                    | Disempowerment, Lack of Agency and Exploitation     | Inhibitor/Destroyer | Inhibitor/Destroyer | Inhibitor/Destroyer | Inhibitor/Destroyer | Inhibitor/Destroyer |
7. Implications for Practice, Policy and Future Research

This meta-aggregation has demonstrated that formal social protection provision is inadequate to meet the fundamental human needs of many of the asylum seekers and refugees included in the literature. Asylum seekers expressed a keen desire to work to support themselves, rather than receive government funding, and the support that was given to them was not sufficient, targeted, timely or administered in a clear way, leading to destitution, confusion, fear and a reliance on informal and semi-formal support. Other studies have also highlighted the negative impacts of the UK government’s deterrence-based social protection policies (see Carter and El Hassan 2003; Refugee Council 2004; Pettitt 2013; Fitzpatrick et al. 2015; Mayblin and James 2019; Mayblin et al. 2020) and there is an urgent need for these policies to be reviewed in light of the findings of the aforementioned studies and this meta-aggregation.

The research findings in this systematic review demonstrate the positive impact that semi-formal and informal social protection interventions can have on the satisfaction of all nine human needs. However, government funding for semi-formal ASR organizations continues to decrease\(^3\) (Mayblin and James 2019) and, as such, the synergic nature of the satisfiers found in this meta-aggregation will be important to consider in the design and planning of future practice to allow the maximum number of human needs to be satisfied through the minimum activities. The impact of informal social protection provision should also be noted and supported by semi-formal providers to maximize the ability for ASRs to satisfy each other’s needs and, in turn, satisfy their own. The findings related to disempowerment and uneven power dynamics between service user and provider should also receive further attention in the construction of semi-formal support services.

Though there were references to the satisfaction of all nine categories of need in the articles, there was less evidence that the need for subsistence, understanding, idleness and creation were being sufficiently met. Subsistence and the need to create through access to paid employment was particularly lacking and longed for by respondents. As such, further work should be conducted on the impact of paid occupation restrictions on the satisfaction of needs for ASRs.

This meta-aggregation has highlighted the limited nature of literature that includes first-hand accounts of the impact of participation in semi-formal and informal social protection on the wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. In particularly, research is very limited on the role of ASRs as providers of social protection and the reciprocity that occurs within the ASR community. Though there were a significant number of findings extracted from the data, few studies were specifically focused on this theme and several had not been published in peer-reviewed publications. There is also a lack of literature considering how cultural background, religion, gender and other demographic differences influence the impact of social protection interventions on wellbeing. Findings in this meta-aggregation refer to the culturally sensitive nature of destitution and reciprocity (Cuthill et al. 2013, p. 13; Lewis 2007, p. 25). However, there were no studies that specifically compared wellbeing outcomes based on individuals’ demographics.

Given the negative effects of the government’s ASR deterrence social protection policies, further academic research is needed into the role of semi-formal and informal social protection provision in the satisfaction of the fundamental human needs of ASRs and specifically on the role of ASRs as providers of mutual support. Research into the channels through which ASRs in the UK would like their human needs to be met, especially their desire for empowerment and paid occupation, would also be valuable.

**Supplementary Materials:** The following are available online at [https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/socsci10060194/s1](https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/socsci10060194/s1).

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Notes
1. Asylum seekers can apply to work if they have been waiting over 12 months for an initial decision, through no fault of their own, and only if the applicant can take up a skilled position listed in the UK’s shortage occupation list. Voluntary work is also permitted. There are no statistics available on numbers of asylum seekers working at this time.
2. ‘[A]dult asylum seekers who are ‘appeal rights exhausted’ and people categorized by the Home Office as ‘immigration offenders’ are banned from undertaking formal study (Right to Remain 2018). For higher education purposes, asylum seekers are classed as international students.
3. Accurate funding cut figures for asylum and refugee voluntary service providers are not available at this time. However, research has suggested an annual reduction figure of 7.7% for all voluntary and community sector income from central and local government in the period 2015–2016.

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