

*This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in the European Human Rights Law Review following peer review. The definitive published version (M Simpson, "'Designed to reduce people... to complete destitution': human dignity in the active welfare state' (2015) 1 EHRLR 66 is available online on [Westlaw UK](#) or from [Thomson Reuters DocDel service](#).*

## **“Designed to reduce people... to complete destitution”: human dignity in the active welfare state**

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*This paper discusses the implications for the right to a life in dignity of the “activation turn” (Kenworthy) in the welfare state, characterised by the requirement that social security claimants be available for and undertake compulsory activities intended to result in finding employment. Failure to comply may result in loss of benefit for up to three years. This paper argues that while activation of claimants is compatible with human rights law, the UK’s sanctions regime may be vulnerable to challenge. The main focus is on whether a regime Webster claims is designed to result in “complete destitution” can be compatible with human dignity. The key focus is on article 3, article 8 and P1-1 ECHR and their relationship to three elements of the protection of human dignity identified by McCrudden: prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment, individual autonomy and satisfaction of essential needs.*

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## Introduction

Social security<sup>1</sup> claimants in the UK have long been subject to an obligation to “fit themselves or to keep themselves fit for service.”<sup>2</sup> If “the balance between active and passive policies<sup>3</sup> has ebbed and flowed” over time,<sup>4</sup> the post-1997 “activation turn” in the welfare state<sup>5</sup> has seen renewed emphasis on jobseeking requirements,<sup>6</sup> for a wider range of claimant groups and backed by an escalating sanctions regime.<sup>7</sup> The extent to and means by which conditionality is enforced have generated

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<sup>1</sup> Social security in the UK refers to cash benefits collectively, including those means tested benefits that would in some countries be classed as social assistance – see Committee of Independent Experts, ‘Conclusions XIII-4’ (Council of Europe, 1996)

<sup>2</sup> W Beveridge, ‘Social insurance and allied services’ (Cmd 6494, HMSO, 1942)

<sup>3</sup> ‘Active’ benefits are those which require the claimant to be available for employment, to seek employment and increasingly to take part in other activities designed to increase employability; ‘passive’ or ‘inactive’ benefits are paid to categories of claimant who are not required to actively seek employment

<sup>4</sup> D Freud, ‘Reducing dependency, increasing opportunity: options for the future of welfare to work’ (DWP, 2007)

<sup>5</sup> L Kenworthy, ‘Labour market activation’ in FG Castles, S Leibfried, J Lewis, H Obinger and C Pierson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of the welfare state* (Oxford University Press, 2010)

<sup>6</sup> See Department for Social Security, ‘Opportunity for all: tackling poverty and social exclusion’ (Cm 4445, DSS, 1999); T Blair, ‘Beveridge revisited: a welfare state for the 21<sup>st</sup> century’ in R Walker (ed), *Ending child poverty: popular welfare for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?* (Policy Press, 1999); Department for Work and Pensions, ‘Universal credit: welfare that works’ (Cm 7957, 2010)

<sup>7</sup> This trend is international – see see F Dubet and A Véréout, ‘Une « réduction » de la rationalité de l'acteur. Pourquoi sortir du RMI ?’ (2001) 42(3) *Revue française de sociologie* 407; K Mohr, *Soziale Exklusion im Wohlfahrtsstaat: Arbeitslosensicherung und Sozialhilfe in Großbritannien und Deutschland* (VS Verlag für

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considerable controversy<sup>8</sup> and one unsuccessful challenge under human rights law.<sup>9</sup> This paper considers the compatibility of the sanctions regime which underpins activation policies with the UK's human rights obligations, specifically those regarded by McCrudden as key to the protection of human dignity.<sup>10</sup>

A definition of 'human dignity' and its application in the sphere of socio-economic rights is absent from the human rights instruments and the range of interpretations in scholarship and case law has reached a "challenging level of complexity."<sup>11</sup> The paper therefore first seeks to establish a "clear statement of principle" as opposed to the tool for "judicial manipulation" the concept represents in the eyes of McCrudden.<sup>12</sup> The focus then falls upon human dignity in the active welfare state.

Section 2 outlines increasing conditionality in the UK since 1997, reflecting rejection of unconditional

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Sozialwissenschaften, 2007); M Kautto, 'The Nordic countries' in FG Castles, S Leibfried, J Lewis, H Obinger and C Pierson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of the welfare state* (Oxford University Press, 2010)

<sup>8</sup> T Montgomerie, 'The return of the nasty party? The end of compassionate conservatism? Or the beginning of an honest approach to fighting poverty?' (Conservative Home, 25 June 2012)

<<http://www.conservativehome.com/thetorydiary/2012/06/the-return-of-the-nasty-party-the-end-of-compassionate-conservatism-or-the-beginning-of-an-honest-ap.html>> accessed 19 May 2014; N Sturgeon, 'Foreword from the Deputy First Minister' in Scottish Government, 'Child poverty strategy for Scotland: our approach 2014-2017' (Scottish Government, 2014)

<sup>9</sup> *R (on the application of Reilly and another) v SSWP* [2013] UKSC 68 – although the challenge on the basis of article 4 ECHR failed, the Supreme Court found for the applicant on other grounds

<sup>10</sup> Article 4(1) ESC; article 7(a) and 11 ICESCR; article 3 and 8 ECHR; ILO R202

<sup>11</sup> C Dupre, 'Unlocking human dignity: towards a theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (2009) 2 EHRL Rev 190

<sup>12</sup> C McCrudden, 'Human dignity and judicial interpretation of human rights' (2008) 19(4) *European Journal of International Law* 655

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social rights and the embrace of paid employment as the “key to citizenship.”<sup>13</sup> Section 3 interrogates the extent to which sanctions respect human dignity. The severity and duration of sanctions available in the UK post-2012 is concluded to raises questions about compliance that demand consideration by the courts.

## 1. Dignity in human rights law

Human dignity is a core concept in human rights law, variously “the foundation of freedom, justice and peace”<sup>14</sup> and “the very essence” of ECHR.<sup>15</sup> However, a precise definition is elusive. McCrudden views the concept as at best context-dependent, at worst a basis for “judicial manipulation” with greater potential to muddy than to clarify legal positions.<sup>16</sup> While Carozza argues that the inviolability of human dignity underpins a clearly identifiable “‘minimum’, but hard, core” of protection from certain severe rights violations, he acknowledges that beyond this McCrudden’s claim has some foundation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> R Lister, *Citizenship: feminist perspectives* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

<sup>14</sup> Preamble to Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by General Assembly Resolution 217A (III) of 10 December 1948

<sup>15</sup> *Pretty v United Kingdom* (app 2346/02) [2002] 35 EHRR 1 H18; Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Rome, 4 November 1950, entry into force of current text 1 June 2010, ETS005)

<sup>16</sup> C McCrudden, n12

<sup>17</sup> PG Carozza, ‘Human dignity and judicial interpretation of human rights: a reply’ (2008) 19(5) EJIL 931

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Some debate exists as to whether human dignity represents a right in itself, as suggested by article 1 CFR,<sup>18</sup> or an overarching concept that serves as the foundation of *all* human rights.<sup>19</sup> This paper adopts McCrudden's perspective of dignity as an overarching concept protected by four "substantive areas" of human rights law: prohibition of inhuman treatment, assurance of individual autonomy, protection of group identity or culture and creation of the conditions for satisfaction of essential needs.<sup>20</sup> The welfare state has an obvious role to play in upholding rights under all but the third of these headings. Other authors broadly support McCrudden's analysis. Riley stresses the fundamentality of the link between dignity and freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment, Dupre its potential to act as a "bridge" between the civil right to autonomy and the socio-economic right to satisfaction of essential needs.<sup>21</sup>

International instruments are clear that socio-economic rights are crucial to the protection of human dignity; articles 22 and 23 UDHR protect rights to social security and "realisation... of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for... dignity" and to remuneration capable of ensuring "an existence worthy of human dignity," supplemented by social protection if necessary. References to

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<sup>18</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2007/C 303/01) (CFR); for a critical view of human dignity as a "right-in-itself," see M Neal, 'Respect for human dignity as "substantive basic norm"' (2014) 10(1) IJLC 26

<sup>19</sup> D Mamberti, 'Statement by Msgr Dominique Mamberti, secretary for relations with states and head of the Holy See delegation' (High level meeting of the 67<sup>th</sup> General Assembly on the rule of law at the national and international levels, New York, September 2012)  
<[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/2012/documents/rc\\_seg-st\\_20120924\\_rule-of-law\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2012/documents/rc_seg-st_20120924_rule-of-law_en.html)> accessed 19 May 2014; see also C Dupre, n19

<sup>20</sup> C McCrudden, n12

<sup>21</sup> C Dupre, n19; S Riley, 'Human dignity: comparative and conceptual debates' (2010) 6(2) IJLC 117

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dignity also appear in ICCPR,<sup>22</sup> ICESCR,<sup>23</sup> UNCRC<sup>24</sup> and the revised ESC,<sup>25</sup> as well as in discussion of the incorporation of socio-economic rights into ECHR.<sup>26</sup> A connection can also be drawn between dignity and an “adequate” or “decent [standard of] living” (articles 7(a) and 11 ICESCR, article 4(1) ESC<sup>27</sup>). The context-dependence of the concept highlighted by McCrudden need not be fatal to its use in this context: the state’s socio-economic obligations to its citizens are acknowledged to depend on “the standards prevailing” in society,<sup>28</sup> “maximum available resources,”<sup>29</sup> median income<sup>30</sup> or the goods deemed necessary to a normal lifestyle.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 23 March 1976, UNTS vol 999 p171

<sup>23</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted by General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI), 16 December 1966, entry into force 3 January 1976, UNTS vol 993 p3

<sup>24</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990 UNTS vol 1577 p3

<sup>25</sup> European Social Charter (revised) (Strasbourg, 3 May 1996, entry into force 1 July 1999, CETS 163) – the UK is not a signatory to the revised Charter

<sup>26</sup> Working Group on Social Rights, ‘Steering committee for human rights: working group on social rights report’ (GT-DH-SOC(2005)007, Council of Europe, 2005)

<sup>27</sup> European Social Charter (Turin, 18 October 1961, entry into force 26 February 1965, CETS 035)

<sup>28</sup> TH Marshall, ‘Citizenship and social class’ in TH Marshall and T Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Pluto, 1992)

<sup>29</sup> Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘General comment no 3 (1990)’ in Economic and Social Council, ‘Official records 1991, supplement no 3’ (E/1991/23, United Nations, 1991)

<sup>30</sup> Child Poverty Act 2010 c9 s3

<sup>31</sup> S McKay and S Collard, ‘Developing deprivation questions for the Family Resources Survey’ (Working paper no 13, University of Bristol, 2003); S McKay, ‘Review of the child material deprivation items in the Family Resources Survey’ (Research report no 746, DWP, 2011)

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Although human dignity is relevant to all human rights agreements, the primary focus here is on ECHR. As the only such instrument to be incorporated into the domestic law of the UK,<sup>32</sup> it is on it that any legal challenge to sanctions in the welfare state would have to rely. While ratification of others signals intention that “domestic law and practice” should be “consistent with them”<sup>33</sup> and requires Ministers to comply with their provisions,<sup>34</sup> infringement cannot be challenged in the courts.<sup>35</sup> However, the use by ECtHR of other instruments as aids to interpretation of the Convention rights<sup>36</sup> means these will be drawn on in discussion. The ECHR provisions of most relevance are article 3 (prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment), article 8 (respect for private and family life) and P1-1 (protection of property).

Although not unanimous as to the level of resources required, the various instruments are broadly in agreement that human dignity demands the resources necessary for a minimum standard of living. An approach grounded in freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment confers only a very basic level of protection, while the application of self-determination to socio-economic rights has thus far been limited in the active welfare state. Provisions relevant to the satisfaction of essential needs

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<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Act 1998 c42

<sup>33</sup> United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, ‘Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: fifth periodic reports submitted by states parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant’ (E/C.12/GBR/5, United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2008)

<sup>34</sup> HM Government, ‘Ministerial code’ (Cabinet Office, 2010) para 1.2

<sup>35</sup> *Salomon v Commissioners of Customs and Excise* [1967] 2 QB 116, 143 (Diplock LJ); *In the matter of an application by Caoimhin Mac Giolla Cathain for judicial review* [2009] NIQB 66

<sup>36</sup> *Sidabras v Lithuania* application 55480/00, 59330/00 [2006] 42 EHRR 6; *Demir v Turkey* (app 34503/97) [2009] 48 EHRR54 para 85

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indicate that no member of a society should have an income or access to goods and services too far removed from the norm. Whether this standard of living is within reach of benefit claimants in general can be questioned;<sup>37</sup> claimants subject to sanctions will inevitably find it more difficult to achieve.

## 2. The active welfare state

The extent to which a welfare state should provide for citizens' decommodification – the ability to meet one's essential needs without recourse to the labour market<sup>38</sup> – has long been a matter for academic debate.<sup>39</sup> Marshall's view of financial support when required as a citizen's "moral right"<sup>40</sup> has been interpreted as an endorsement of "unconditional entitlement to welfare,"<sup>41</sup> but by no means universally. Powell sees Marshall as comfortable with Beveridge's focus on the worker-

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<sup>37</sup> D Hirsch, 'A minimum income standard for the UK in 2013' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2013)

<sup>38</sup> JD Stephens, 'The social rights of citizenship' in FG Castles, S Leibfried, J Lewis, H Obinger and C Pierson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of the welfare state* (Oxford University Press, 2010)

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, R Plant, 'Supply side citizenship?' (1999) 6(3) *Journal of Social Security Law* 124; J Maskivker, 'He who shall not work shall eat: a case for the right to opt out of employment' (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2009)

<sup>40</sup> TH Marshall, 'The right to welfare' in *The right to welfare and other essays* (Heinemann, 1981)

<sup>41</sup> P Dwyer, 'Creeping conditionality in the UK: from welfare rights to conditional entitlements?' (2004) 29(2) *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 265

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citizen, with the full benefits of the welfare state aimed at "insured persons,"<sup>42</sup> while Lister stresses Marshall's adherence to a "duty to work."<sup>43</sup>

In practice, the UK welfare state has sought to *avoid* decommodification and maximise labour market participation.<sup>44</sup> Recent increases in emphasis on the activation of social security claimants<sup>45</sup> – policies designed to move claimants from benefits to employment – can be linked with concerns about the sustainability of 20<sup>th</sup> century welfare state models in an era of globalisation, deindustrialisation, ageing and individualism.<sup>46</sup> However, if the United States explicitly rations access to social assistance,<sup>47</sup> European discourses have foregrounded the benefits to both the claimant and society of labour market engagement.<sup>48</sup> From this perspective, paid employment not only serves as

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<sup>42</sup> M Powell, 'The hidden history of social citizenship' (2002) 6(3) *Citizenship Studies* 229; see also R Plant, n47

<sup>43</sup> R Lister, 'Citizenship, exclusion and "the Third Way" in social security reform: reflections on T.H. Marshall' (2000) 7(2) *JSSL* 70

<sup>44</sup> W Beveridge, n2; M Powell, n42; Welfare Reform Act 2012 c5 s16-18

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Department for Work and Pensions, 'A new deal for welfare: empowering people to work' (DWP, 2006); D Freud, n4; Department for Work and Pensions, 'Ready for work: full employment in our generation' (Cm 7290, DWP, 2007); DWP, 2010, n6

<sup>46</sup> See I Culpitt, *Welfare and citizenship: beyond the crisis of the welfare state?* (Sage, 1992); D Béland and R Hansen, 'Reforming the French welfare state: solidarity, social exclusion and the three crises of citizenship' (2000) 23(1) *W Euro Pol* 47; W van Oorschot, 'Solidarity towards immigrants in European welfare states' (2008) 17(3) *IJ Soc Welfare* 3; P Taylor-Gooby, *Reframing social citizenship* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

<sup>47</sup> Support under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programme is largely restricted to a maximum of five years in the lifetime – see Office of Family Assistance, 'Major provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193)' (HHS, 1996)

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Council Recommendation 92/441/EEC on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems; T Blair, n6; DSS, 1999, n6

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the "best route out of poverty,"<sup>49</sup> but supplants military service and political activity as the "key to citizenship,"<sup>50</sup> the individual's main contribution to society and the way in which he or she gains personal fulfilment and social integration.<sup>51</sup>

One consequence of the construction of employment as the primary means of discharging one's responsibilities to society has been the compulsion of a progressively wider group of claimants to actively seek employment or to engage in activities designed to improve employment prospects. Groups once "recognised as making socially valid contributions elsewhere (e.g. women engaged in informal/familial care work)" or considered too ill to be required to seek employment have been increasingly integrated into a conditionality regime that has "become central to the organisation of contemporary public welfare."<sup>52</sup> Claimants of long term sickness benefits and lone parents have been key targets.<sup>53</sup> The replacement of a range of out-of-work benefits with a single universal credit emphasises the erosion of boundaries between claimant groups. A second element of the "activation turn" is the escalation of sanctions applied to claimants who without "good reason"<sup>54</sup> fail

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<sup>49</sup> DWP, 2010 n6 p3

<sup>50</sup> R Lister, 2003 n13

<sup>51</sup> G Delanty, *Citizenship in a global age: society, culture and politics* (Open University Press, 2000); D Béland and R Hansen, n46; N Hibbert, 'Is workfare egalitarian?' (2007) 3(2) *Pol & Ethics Rev* 200

<sup>52</sup> P Dwyer, n41

<sup>53</sup> Welfare Reform Act 2007 c5 s11-16; Welfare Reform Act 2012 c5 s16, 20-21; Universal Credit Regulations 2013 no 276 reg 91A, inserted by Income Support (Work Related Activity) and Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2014 no 1097 reg 16; see also D Freud, n4

<sup>54</sup> See Department for Work and Pensions, 'Sanctions' in *Decision makers' guide: vols 4, 5, 6 and 7: jobseeker's allowance and income support: staff guide* (DWP, 2014)

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/decision-makers-guide-vols-4-5-6-and-7-jobseekers-allowance-and-income-support-staff-guide>> accessed 19 May 2014

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to comply with conditions linked to their benefit. The maximum penalty is 156 weeks' loss of benefit, compared to six weeks before 1986.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, support available to claimants subject to sanctions has become less generous.<sup>56</sup> The table below outlines the most recent escalation of jobseeker's allowance sanctions.

The severity of sanction that can be imposed has led Webster to describe the UK's conditionality regime as "deliberately designed to reduce people without other resources to complete destitution" if they fail to comply with obligations attached to receipt of benefit.<sup>57</sup> In light of this assessment, it is necessary to consider the compatibility of the system with the state's human rights obligations.

Destitution is defined in legislation as lacking "adequate accommodation or any means of obtaining it" or "other essential living needs," including those of a dependent.<sup>58</sup> If Webster is correct, and the sanctions imposed on claimants who fail to fulfil set conditions *do* result in destitution in accordance with this definition, then human dignity as defined by McCrudden might be violated as the penalty imposed by the state would prevent the claimant meeting his or her essential needs.

*Table: Escalation of jobseeker's allowance sanctions from October 2012*<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For current legislation on conditionality and sanctions, see Jobseekers Act 1995 c18 part i; Jobseeker's Allowance (Mandatory Work Activity) Regulations 2011 no 688; Welfare Reform Act 2012 c5 part 1 chapter 2, part 2 chapter 1-2; for information on the sanctions process, see DWP, 2014, n62

<sup>56</sup> D Webster, 'Independent review of jobseeker's allowance (JSA) sanctions for claimants failing to take part in back to work schemes: evidence submitted by Dr David Webster' (CPAG, 2014) <[http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/CPAG-David-Webster-submission-Oakley-review-Jan-14\\_0.pdf](http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/CPAG-David-Webster-submission-Oakley-review-Jan-14_0.pdf)> accessed 19 May 2014

<sup>57</sup> D Webster, n56

<sup>58</sup> Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 c33 s95

<sup>59</sup> The current sanction consists of suspension of jobseeker's allowance payments; following the amalgamation of out-of-work benefits, the sanction will consist of suspension of the standard allowance element of universal

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<b>Sanction level</b>	<b>Lower</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Higher</b>
<b>Failure</b>	Failure to: attend adviser interview; participate in or attend employment or training programme; comply with a jobseeker direction	Not being available for work; not actively seeking work	Leaving a job voluntarily; losing a job through misconduct; failure to apply for/accept a suitable job or participate in mandatory activity
<b>First failure</b>	4 weeks	4 weeks	13 weeks
<b>Second failure</b>	4 weeks	13 weeks	26 weeks
<b>Third failure</b>	13 weeks	13 weeks	156 weeks
<b>Sanction prior to October 2012</b>	1, 2, 4 or 26 weeks	<i>Disallowance while failure continues; no additional sanction</i>	1-26 weeks

### 3. Conditional welfare and human dignity in the UK

It is well established that compulsory measures whose objective is the movement of claimants from social security benefits to employment are compatible with claimants' human rights, even desirable.

The Supreme Court has held that an obligation to accept an offer of employment or undertake a work placement does not violate the prohibition of forced labour in article 4 ECHR.<sup>60</sup> ECtHR

judgements cited emphasise that work-related obligations are a normal feature of unemployment

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credit, or 50% thereof in the case of joint claims, although some exceptions apply – see Universal Credit

Regulations 2013 no 376 reg 111; source – Department for Work and Pensions, 'Important changes to

jobseeker's allowance sanctions from Monday 22 October 2012' (C&S factsheet, DWP, 2012)

<sup>60</sup> *Reilly* [2013] n9

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benefits.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, ECSR considers that states are entitled to make social assistance conditional on compliance with “reasonable” jobseeking or training requirements<sup>62</sup> and to withhold benefit payments in the event of refusal to accept an offer of suitable employment<sup>63</sup> without infringing the right to free choice of occupation in article 1(2) ESC. The question for this paper, therefore, is not whether sanctions in principle violate human dignity, but whether the sanctions regime in the UK does so, given that the maximum sanction today is significantly greater than the maximum that could be imposed in the UK or Germany at the time of the reports cited.<sup>64</sup>

In considering the compatibility of sanctions in the UK with human rights instruments, use will be made of McCrudden’s three “substantive areas” of human rights law. A finding of incompatibility with the first, freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment, would be the most damaging to the sanctions regime due to the impossibility of derogation or exceptions from article 3 ECHR.<sup>65</sup>

However, a very high threshold of destitution would have to be passed for violation to be found. The limited extent to which article 8 ECHR creates positive obligations likewise means rights to individual autonomy may only be breached in limited circumstances. There does appear to be a greater likelihood of sanctions infringing rights to access essential needs, although justiciability in the UK

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<sup>61</sup> *X v Netherlands* (app 7602/76) [1976] 7 DR 161; *Schuitemaker v Netherlands* (app 15906/08) [2010] (unreported) 4 May 2010

<sup>62</sup> *European Roma Rights Centre v Bulgaria* (complaint 48/2008) [2009] 49 EHRR SE12

<sup>63</sup> European Committee of Social Rights, ‘European Social Charter: addendum to conclusions XV-1’ (Council of Europe, 2001); European Committee of Social Rights, ‘Conclusions XVII-1’ (Council of Europe, 2004)

<sup>64</sup> In the UK, loss of jobseeker’s allowance for 26 weeks; in Germany, a 25% reduction of benefit

<sup>65</sup> *Kuznetsov v Russia* (app 22027/08) [2011] 53 EHRR SE22 para 17; see also *Soering v United Kingdom* (A/161) [1989] 11 EHRR 439 para 88; *Chalan v United Kingdom* (app 22414/93) [1996] 23 EHRR 413 para 79;

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would depend on the right being grounded in a relevant ECHR provision and not only in one of the agreements on socio-economic rights.

### 3.1 Freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment

Article 3 ECHR has been described as the embodiment of a “collective undertaking... not to drift back into an era when... ill-treatment [was] considered an inevitable and even a respectable tool of government policy.”<sup>66</sup> Webster claims such a drift is observable in the welfare state, with sanctions “deliberately designed to reduce people without other resources to complete destitution.”<sup>67</sup>

However, destitution does not always indicate inhuman or degrading treatment.<sup>68</sup> To infringe article 3, sanctions would have to place the claimant in the circumstances envisaged in *Limbuella*, that is he or she should through the “deliberate action” of the state be “to a seriously detrimental extent” denied “the most basic needs of any human being,” notably food or shelter, with no prospect of receiving these from another source, for example familial or charitable.<sup>69</sup> Dependence on charitable support is *not* considered degrading.

The first element of the *Limbuella* judgement is the requirement of “deliberate action” by the state.

In *Q*, it was emphasised that the denial of support to asylum seekers *in combination with* the prohibition of paid employment (similar circumstances to those in *Limbuella*) constituted “positive

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<sup>66</sup> N Grief and MK Addo, ‘Is there a policy behind the decisions and judgements relating to article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights?’ (1995) 20(2) European Law Review 183

<sup>67</sup> D Webster, n56

<sup>68</sup> *R on the application of Q v SSHD* [2003] EWCA Civ 364 para 59 (Lord Phillips, MR)

<sup>69</sup> *R (on the application of Limbuella) v SSHD*; *R (on the application of Tesema) v SSHD*; *R (on the application of Adam) v SSHD* [2005] UKHL 66 para 7 (Lord Bingham); see also para 35 (Lord Hope); para 66-69 (Lord Scott)

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action directed against asylum seekers and not... mere inaction."<sup>70</sup> It might on this basis be possible to suggest that the loss of benefits experienced by a claimant who fails to fulfil conditions results from the actions of the claimant rather than the state. However, it is argued here that the interference of the state with a proprietary right protected by P1-1 ECHR and already being enjoyed by the claimant (see section 3.2) represents a "positive action" and may therefore engage article 3.

Second, how should denial of "basic necessities" be understood? In the ordinary meaning of the phrase, it appears possible to draw parallels with McCrudden's reference to "essential needs" (see section 3.2), with the emphasis in *Limbuela* placed on food and shelter. Given the existence of food banks,<sup>71</sup> hardship payments to sanctioned claimants otherwise unable to meet basic needs<sup>72</sup> and the fact that housing benefit is not subject to sanction, the number of cases in which such needs cannot be met might be expected to be small. Nonetheless, Webster argues that the two-week delay before a hardship payment is available, the discretionary nature of such payments and the fact that in practice housing benefit is interrupted when jobseeker's allowance payments stop means there is a genuine possibility that some claimants will experience difficulty in satisfying these needs.<sup>73</sup>

The third, and crucial, point in respect of article 3 is that "basic necessities" must not merely be denied; the denial must be of sufficient severity and duration to have "seriously detrimental" effects

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<sup>70</sup> Q [2003] n77 para 57 (Lord Phillips, MR)

<sup>71</sup> Trussell Trust, 'Latest foodbank figures top 900,000: life has got worse not better for the poorest in 2013/14, and this is just the tip of the iceberg' (Trussell Trust, 2014) <<http://www.trusselltrust.org/foodbank-figures-top-900000>> accessed 19 May 2014

<sup>72</sup> Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996 no 207 reg 145; Universal Credit Regulations 2013 no 376 reg 116-118

<sup>73</sup> D Webster, n56

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or to cause "serious suffering."<sup>74</sup> Case law cited refers to "actual bodily injury or intense physical or mental suffering" and to treatment that shows "a lack of respect for... human dignity or arouses feelings of fear, anguish or inferiority capable of breaking an individual's moral and physical resistance."<sup>75</sup> The factors to be discussed in section 3.2 will be of relevance to determining whether inhuman or degrading treatment takes place and whether it is caused by the actions of the state. However, whereas in the following section the key question will be whether resources necessary for the satisfaction of essential needs are provided, for the purposes of article 3 a negative answer must be followed by consideration *on a case-by-case basis* of whether the impact on an individual claimant of an otherwise lawful policy breaches his or her article 3 right.<sup>76</sup>

### **3.2 Creation of the conditions for the satisfaction of essential needs**

The creation of the conditions for satisfaction of essential needs is a concern of numerous human rights provisions. "Essential needs" are not limited to those things physically necessary for survival: in article 11 ICESCR, an "adequate standard of living," including "adequate food," does not merely imply a minimum of "specific nutrients," but demands holistic consideration of "whether particular foods or diets that are accessible can be considered the most appropriate" according to criteria including social and cultural factors.<sup>77</sup> Housing-related rights tend to be less ambitious, with article

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<sup>74</sup> *Limbuella* [2005] n69 para 7-8 (Lord Bingham)

<sup>75</sup> *V v United Kingdom* (app 24888/94) [2000] 30 EHRR 121 para 71; *Pretty* [2002] n15 para 52

<sup>76</sup> *Price v United Kingdom* (app 33394/96) [2004] 34 EHRR53 para 24; *R (on the application of Limbuella) v SSHD*; *R (on the application of Tesema) v SSHD*; *R (on the application of Adam) v SSHD* [2004] EWCA Civ 540 para 50 (Laws LJ)

<sup>77</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'General comment 12: the right to adequate food (article 11)' (E/C.12/1999/5, United Nations, 1999)

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11 ICESCR and article 8 ECHR requiring protection from unlawful or arbitrary eviction rather than the provision of housing.<sup>78</sup>

In an urbanised society, the realisation of socio-economic rights, such as those to food and housing, depends on access to the necessary financial resources. The socio-economic rights instruments are divided as to what constitutes sufficient income for this purpose, although there is some consensus that a minimum standard, probably at least 50% of median income, exists.<sup>79</sup> Although ECHR confers no explicit right to have essential needs met, article 8 and P1-1 are relevant to its realisation. P1-1 brings entitlement to social protection – payments designed to ensure individuals without other sources of income can satisfy their essential needs<sup>80</sup> – within the scope of protection afforded to

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<sup>78</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'General comment no 7: the right to adequate housing (article 1 paragraph 1 of the Covenant)' in Economic and Social Council, 'Official records, 1998: supplement no 2' (E/1998/22, United Nations, 1998); *Brice and another v LB Southwark* [2001] EWCA Civ 1138 para 21 (Kennedy LJ); *R (on the application of HC) v SSWP, SS Loc Govt and Communities, HMRC v Oldham Met BC* [2013] EWHC 3874 (Admin) para 71 (Supperstone J)

<sup>79</sup> See Committee of Independent Experts, *Conclusions XIV-2 vol 1* (Council of Europe, 1998-2000); International Labour Organisation Convention 102 – Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (Geneva, 28 June 1952, entry into force 27 April 1955); European Committee of Social Rights, 'European Social Charter: conclusions XX-2 (2013) (Great Britain)' (Council of Europe, 2014)

<sup>80</sup> R Lowe, *The welfare state in Britain since 1945* (Macmillan, 1999); RE Goodin, B Headey, R Muffels and H-J Dirven, *The real worlds of welfare capitalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); C Alcock, S Payne and M Sullivan, *Introducing social policy* (Pearson Prentice Hall, 2000)

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property rights,<sup>81</sup> while article 8 may create a positive obligation to provide financial support when the essential needs of children are at stake.<sup>82</sup>

Guidance on what constitute essential needs in the UK can be found in case law on support for asylum seekers. When not provided with full board, such individuals receive furnished accommodation with council tax and utility bills paid, plus a monthly cash (or voucher) allowance.<sup>83</sup> The allowance – £36.54 for a single person – was held in *Refugee Action* to be inadequate as it had not increased between 2011 and 2014 and because of failure to consider the cost of items that might or ought to have been classed as essential needs.<sup>84</sup> In contrast to *Limbuela*, although charitable food aid had potential to alleviate the effects of destitution, it could *not* be considered an adequate means of meeting essential needs.<sup>85</sup> This judgement is instructive when considering the circumstances of claimants subject to sanctions. Evidently, those *without* a hardship payment would be unable to meet their basic needs. For those who *do* receive such payments, it appears questionable whether the £43.44 payable to a single person would be sufficient, given that £36.54 was deemed insufficient for an asylum seeker supplied with furniture and not liable for utility bills.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Stec v UK* (app 65731/01, 65900/01) [2006] 43 EHRR 47; for discussion, see I Leijten, 'From *Stec* to *Valkov*: possessions and margins in the social security case law of the European Court of Human Rights' (2013) 13 European Human Rights Law Review 309

<sup>82</sup> *HC* [2013] n78 para 71 (Supperstone J)

<sup>83</sup> Asylum Support Regulations 2000 no 704 reg 10-11; *R on the application of Refugee Action v SSHD* [2014] EWHC 1033 (Admin) para 11 (Poplewell J)

<sup>84</sup> *Refugee Action* [2014] n83

<sup>85</sup> *Refugee Action* [2014] n83 para 147 (Poplewell J)

<sup>86</sup> The jobseeker's allowance hardship payment is 60% of the normal rate in most circumstances; the normal rate of JSA is £72.40 if aged over 25, so the equivalent hardship payment would be £43.44 – see Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996 no 207 reg 145; Universal Credit Regulations 2013 no 376 reg 116-118;

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The Secretary of State's claim that a benefit intended to be temporary could legitimately be paid at a much lower level than a long-term benefit was rejected on the basis that an average claim duration of 18 months could not be regarded as "temporary" in any meaningful sense; the maximum duration of a sanction could be twice as long.<sup>87</sup>

Unlike article 3 ECHR, the articles in which a right to satisfaction of essential needs might be grounded – article 8 and P1-1 – are not absolute. Justifiable interference with the right based on a claimant's failure to abide by conditions, recognised in case law and by ECSR as a normal feature of out-of-work benefits,<sup>88</sup> need not therefore violate these rights. However, the justifiability in principle of sanctions does not necessarily mean UK policy is in every respect lawful. Interference with the right to protection of property under P1-1 is only permitted in accordance with the law and public interest, while interference with the right to respect for private and family life under article 8 must be in accordance with the law and "necessary in a democratic society."

The public interest test under P1-1 requires that any interference with the right be proportionate and non-arbitrary.<sup>89</sup> Webster argues that there is a "grotesque disproportion" between the extent of

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Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 2013 no 378 reg 49, as amended by Welfare Benefits Up-rating Order 2014 no 147 art 10

<sup>87</sup> *Refugee Action* [2014] n83 para 141-142 (Poplewell J); in Northern Ireland, where social security is a devolved matter, it appears likely that the maximum sanction period under universal credit will be limited to two years – see M Storey, letter to The Church Leaders Group (DSD, 2014) <<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/church-leaders-group-oct14.pdf>> accessed 15 December 2014

<sup>88</sup> X [1976] n61; *ERRC* [2009] n62; *Schuitemaker* [2010] n61; ECSR, 2001, n63

<sup>89</sup> PT Orebech, 'From diplomatic – to human rights protection: the possessions under the 1950 European Human Rights Convention, first additional protocol article 1' (2009) 43(1) *Journal of World Trade* 59

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sanction available and the severity of "offence" on the part of the claimant,<sup>90</sup> some individuals reportedly having been sanctioned for falling marginally short of the amount of jobseeking activity required, others for failure to adhere to conditions that are "literally impossible," such as attendance at two simultaneously scheduled appointments.<sup>91</sup> Proportionality of sanctions was considered in *EUROCEF*, in which suspension of family benefit as a deterrent to truancy was held to infringe article 16 ESC (the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection) because "disproportionate to the aim pursued." The finding of disproportionality was grounded in part in the sanctions' questionable efficacy and likelihood of exacerbating the economic hardship and social vulnerability at the root of inability to "fulfil parental responsibilities."<sup>92</sup> Sanctions imposed on benefit claimants have similarly been claimed to be counterproductive as they may cause or exacerbate mental health

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<sup>90</sup> D Webster, n56

<sup>91</sup> D Webster, n56; see also Broadway and St Mungo's, 'Independent review of jobseeker's allowance sanctions joint response: Broadway and St Mungo's' (St Mungo's, 2014)

<[http://www.mungos.org.uk/homelessness/publications/latest\\_publications\\_and\\_research/1767\\_broadway-and-st-mungo-s-joint-submission-to-independent-review-of-jobseeker-s-allowance-sanctions](http://www.mungos.org.uk/homelessness/publications/latest_publications_and_research/1767_broadway-and-st-mungo-s-joint-submission-to-independent-review-of-jobseeker-s-allowance-sanctions)> accessed 19

May 2014; S Duffy and R McHugh, 'Gipsil Advice Service response to Independent Review of Jobseeker's Allowance Sanctions to be undertaken by Matthew Oakley' (CPAG, 2014)

<<http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Gipsil%20Advice%20Service%20response%20to%20Independent%20Review%20of%20Jobseeker.pdf>> accessed 19 May 2014; G Lewis, 'Wheatley Group response to independent review of JSA sanctions' (CPAG, 2014)

<<http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Wheatley%20Group%20final%20response%20-%20sanctions%20review.pdf>> accessed 19 May 2014

<sup>92</sup> *European Committee for Home-based Priority Action for the Child and the Family v France* (complaint 82/2012) [2013] 57 EHRR SE21 para 38-42

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problems that act as a barrier to employment,<sup>93</sup> or decrease quality of jobseeking as they increase its intensity.<sup>94</sup>

Imposition of sanctions might in some respects be describable as arbitrary. Notably, benefit payments may be suspended *while a sanction is being considered*, but before a decision has actually been taken,<sup>95</sup> potentially in breach of P1-1 which in some circumstances prohibits a decision affecting an individual's enjoyment of his or her property being taken without "adversarial proceedings."<sup>96</sup> This also raises issues of compliance with article 13 ESC, which requires that social assistance be paid *as of right* as long as applicable conditions are met (and, presumably, as long as

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<sup>93</sup> S Wright, 'On "activation workers' perceptions": a reply to Dunn (2)' (2014) *FirstView* article, JSP;

Anonymous, 'Welfare reforms prompt sanctions warning' (2006) March issue, *Mental Health Today* 7;

Manchester CAB Service, 'Punishing Poverty? A review of benefits sanctions and their impacts on clients and claimants' (CPAG, 2014)

<<https://skydrive.live.com/view.aspx?resid=CB5ED957FE0B849F!350&app=WordPdf&wdo=2&authkey=!AJTbB-gzwsSCayQ>> accessed 19 May 2014

<sup>94</sup> J Griggs and M Evans, 'Sanctions within conditional benefit systems: a review of evidence' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010); G Lewis, n91

<sup>95</sup> L Judge, 'Independent review of jobseeker's allowance sanctions: CPAG's response to the call for information' (CPAG, 2014)

<<http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/all/modules/contrib/pubdlnet/pubdlnet.php?file=/sites/default/files/CPAG-response-JSA-sanctions-call-for-information-Jan-14.pdf&nid=1802>> accessed 19 May 2014; West

Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau, 'Unjust and uncaring: a report on conditionality and benefit sanctions and their impact on clients' (Citizens Advice Bureau, 2014)

<<http://www.cas.org.uk/system/files/Unjust%20and%20Uncaring.pdf>> accessed 19 May 2014

<sup>96</sup> *Hentrich v France* (app 13616/88) [1994] 18 EHRR 440 para 2; *R on the application of SRM Global Master Fund LP v Commissioners of HM Treasury* [2009] EWHC 227 (Admin) para 81 (Stanley Burton LJ and Silber J)

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they have not been demonstrated to be breached).<sup>97</sup> Even if a pre-emptive decision to cease payments does not infringe P1-1, a decision might fail the non-arbitrariness test if affected claimants had no access to a meaningful appeal mechanism, essential to the compatibility of sanctions with article 1(2) ESC.<sup>98</sup> Webster argues that this is often the case in practice, given that reasons for the sanction are not routinely offered, that claimants are not always informed of their right to appeal<sup>99</sup> and the removal of entitlement to legal aid for appeals to tribunal.<sup>100</sup> Although the High Court has held it would be “premature” to find that the imposition of a fee for access to an employment tribunal would hinder access to justice, despite evidence of a “deterrent effect,”<sup>101</sup> it does not follow that the same would apply to the appeals process against sanctions.<sup>102</sup> Reports that staff perceive

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<sup>97</sup> *ERRC* [2009] n62; Committee of Independent Experts, *Conclusions I* (Council of Europe, 1969); European Committee of Social Rights, ‘Conclusions XIV-1: general introduction’ (Council of Europe, 1998)

<sup>98</sup> ECSR, 2001, n63

<sup>99</sup> Reconsideration is requested by 25% of sanctioned claimants, with appeals submitted by only 1.7%, despite success rates of 50% and 42% respectively – D Webster, n56; see also N Hodgkinson, Advice Network and Training Partnership, Bradford and District submission to independent review of jobseeker’s allowance (CPAG, 2014)

<<http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/The%20Advice%20Network%20and%20Training%20Partnership%20Bradford.pdf>> accessed 19 May 2014; Manchester CAB Service, n102

<sup>100</sup> D Webster, n56

<sup>101</sup> *R on the application of Unison v Lord Chancellor v Equality and HR Commission* [2014] EWHC 218 (Admin) para 45-46 (Moses LJ)

<sup>102</sup> One objective underlying the introduction of charges for the employment tribunal was the promotion of conciliation, which is less likely to be an option in the case of challenges to social security decisions – see *Unison* [2014] n101 para 43 (Moses LJ)

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that they are subject to targets to impose a certain number of sanctions<sup>103</sup> must raise further concerns about benefits being withdrawn arbitrarily to achieve the supposed target rather than on the basis of clear failings on the part of claimants, although this would apply to individual cases rather than policy.

Article 8 seldom creates any "positive obligation to provide financial assistance to support a person's family life,"<sup>104</sup> but may be engaged in cases involving a decision on an interim payment or suspension of benefit if a claimant has dependent children.<sup>105</sup> Relevant aids to interpretation here include the article 3(1) UNCRC requirement that the "best interests" of the child be a "primary consideration" in decisions affecting him or her (a provision incorporated into domestic law).<sup>106</sup> ECSR has also broadly accepted that the choices or actions of a parent should not result in a child's exposure to "unfit living conditions" or violation of "the most basic rights... such as... the right to human dignity."<sup>107</sup> Hence the impact on a claimant's children should be a (not necessarily *the*) primary consideration in a decision whether to apply a sanction in a given case.<sup>108</sup> Where state

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<sup>103</sup> P Wintour, 'Jobcentre was set targets for benefit sanctions' (Guardian, 21 March 2013)

<<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/mar/21/jobcentre-set-targets-benefit-sanctions>> accessed 19 May 2014; N Couling, 'Conditionality and sanctions: report to the Secretary of State' (DWP, 2013)

<sup>104</sup> HC [2013] n78 para 71 (Supperstone J)

<sup>105</sup> *Ala Anufrijeva v LB Southwark; R on the application of N v SSHD; R on the application of M v SSHD* [2003] EWCA Civ 1406 para 43 (Lord Woolf); *R on the application of Jamil Sanneh v SSWP, Commissioners for HMRC v Birmingham CC* [2013] EWHC 793 (admin) para 44-46 (Hickinbottom J)

<sup>106</sup> Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 no 755 (NI 2); Children Act 2004 c31 s11

<sup>107</sup> *Defence for Children International v Belgium* (complaint 69/2011) [2013] 56 EHRR SE20 para 26, 28

<sup>108</sup> *ZH (Tanzania) v SSHD* [2011] UKSC 4 para 25 (Baroness Hale); *R on the application of SG and others (previously JS and others) v SSWP v Child Poverty Action Group, Shelter Children's Legal Service* [2014] EWCA Civ 156 para 100 (Lord Dyson)

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support is necessary to avoid destitution and enable "family life to continue," *Ala Anufrijeva* suggests there will be a particularly strong case in favour of providing such support.<sup>109</sup>

### 3.3 Protection of individual autonomy

Article 8 ECHR is also of relevance to the protection of individual autonomy.<sup>110</sup> For ECtHR, a private life "includes a person's physical and psychological integrity"<sup>111</sup> (protection of which is required by article 3(1) CFR) and "the development, without outside interference, of the personality of each individual in his relations with other human beings." The contribution of social security to facilitating or restricting economic independence, hence autonomy, is of particular importance to domestic violence victims, whose ability to leave a relationship may depend on access to an independent income.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Ala Anufrijeva* [2003] n114 para 43 (Lord Woolf) – it is emphasised that article 8 *only* creates such a positive obligation "where the welfare of children is at stake" – where only adults are affected, article 3 must be engaged for state support to be required

<sup>110</sup> S Wheatley, 'Human rights and human dignity in the resolution of certain ethical questions in biomedicine' (2001) 3 EHRL Rev 312; A Pedain, 'The human rights dimension of the Diane Pretty case' (2003) 62(1) Cam LJ 181; P De Hert and M Eugenio, 'Specific human rights for older persons?' (2011) 4 EHRL Rev 398

<sup>111</sup> *Botta v Italy* (app 21439/93) [1998] 26 EHRR 241

<sup>112</sup> R Lister, 'White paper on universal credit: written evidence submitted by Ruth Lister' (Parliament, 2010) <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmworpen/743/743we13.htm>> accessed 19 May 2014; Ad-hoc Committee, 'Report on whether the provisions of the Welfare Reform Bill are in conformity with the requirements for equality and observance of human rights' (NIA 92/11-15, NI Assembly, 2013); ICF GHK Consulting, 'Domestic violence: implementation of JSA DV easement and DDV concession – small scale qualitative research' (Research report 843, DWP, 2013); H Siddiqui, 'Ending the stark choice: domestic violence or destitution in the UK' (50.50: inclusive democracy, 3 December 2013)

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Policy on conditionality recognises that victims of domestic violence may be less able to meet conditions and may have a “good reason” for leaving or declining employment.<sup>113</sup> Hence a claimant who has recently left an abusive relationship may be temporarily excused from jobseeking requirements. Although it was suggested during the legislative process that the exemption should be without time limit and should be available to claimants who have *not* left the violent relationship,<sup>114</sup> the provision mitigates the potential for sanctions to pose a threat to “a person's physical and psychological integrity” contrary to article 8 ECHR<sup>115</sup> by perpetuating dependence on another. If some possibility remains, this need not necessarily infringe article 8; the state may interfere with the right “in accordance with the law and [as] necessary in a democratic society.” In this case, the Minister argued that a longer exemption than the maximum possible 24 weeks in 12 months would represent an “unacceptable” erosion of the principle that “JSA [is] a benefit for those able to seek and undertake work.”<sup>116</sup> If aspects of the reformed social security system remain vulnerable to criticism that they risk entrenching an individual’s dependence on an abusive partner,<sup>117</sup> the safeguards put in place in respect of conditionality clearly reduce the likelihood of the sanctions regime being held to contravene article 8 on this basis.

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<<http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/hannana-siddiqui/ending-stark-choice-domestic-violence-or-destitution-in-uk>> accessed 19 May 2014

<sup>113</sup> Jobseeker’s Allowance (Domestic Violence) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 no 0000 (draft) reg 2; DWP, 2014, n54

<sup>114</sup> HL Deb 27 Feb 2012 vol 735 no 271 col GC75

<sup>115</sup> *Botta* [1998] n111

<sup>116</sup> Lord Freud, HL deb 27 Feb 2012 vol 735 no 271 col GC77

<sup>117</sup> R Lister, 2010, n112; Women’s Budget Group, ‘Universal credit: payment to joint claimants’ (Women’s Budget Group, 2011) ; Ad-hoc Committee, n112

## Conclusion and implications

While recent increases in the extent of conditionality in the UK welfare state and the severity of associated sanctions have been politically controversial, the most important legal challenge thus far has resulted in a finding of compliance with article 4 ECHR. This paper demonstrates that questions remain about the conformity of conditionality, and particularly the associated sanctions, with the UK's human rights obligations.

The focus here has been on ECHR rights linked with three of the four elements of human dignity identified by McCrudden: prohibition of inhuman treatment (article 3), creation of the conditions for the satisfaction of essential needs (P1-1 and article 8) and assurance of individual autonomy (article 8). Although conditional benefits are not inherently incompatible with human rights law, potential for sanctions to infringe the rights focused on has been identified. Where this applies in specific cases, it might be possible for a court to find violation of an individual's rights and provide a remedy without finding the policy as a whole incompatible. If the decision-making process or the severity of sanctions available were found incompatible with the state's obligations, there might be a possibility of a declaration of incompatibility.<sup>118</sup> In Northern Ireland, where social security legislation closely follows Great Britain but where separate legislation is passed at devolved level, legislative provisions that contravene the Convention Rights would be invalid.<sup>119</sup>

In summary, in some circumstances the cessation of benefit payments could through the impact on the claimant constitute inhuman and degrading treatment. However, this would depend on the

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<sup>118</sup> Human Rights Act 1998 c42 s4, 10

<sup>119</sup> Northern Ireland Act 1998 c47 s6

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claimant essentially being rendered unable to access food or shelter to such an extent and for such a period as to cause significant suffering. This probably implies individuals not awarded a hardship payment and with no accessible charitable or familial support. Given that this group is likely to be small, it is possible that any finding of violation of article 3 would be on the basis of individual circumstances rather than an unlawful policy. The protections for domestic violence victims discussed in section 3.3 may be sufficient to avoid a finding of breach of article 8 on the grounds of denial of individual autonomy.

The argument that sanctions are incompatible with the satisfaction of essential needs appears better founded. The support available even to sanctioned claimants with a hardship payment is little higher than that deemed inadequate for asylum seekers, who have important expenses (notably utility bills) paid on their behalf. Any interference with the claimant's right to support with meeting his or her essential needs would have to be proportionate and non-arbitrary in order to comply with P1-1, compliance with which can be questioned. Article 8 provides further safeguards in respect of claimants with dependent children, whose welfare must be of equal importance to the encouragement of jobseeking, the main objective of sanctions.

To avoid the risk of an adverse judgement, policymakers should consider changes to the sanctions regime. Ensuring that housing benefit continues uninterrupted while another benefit is subject to sanction and removing discretion from the award of a hardship payment where access to food or shelter is threatened would avoid risk of violation of article 3 ECHR. The adequacy of protection for domestic violence victims might be adequate to comply with article 8, although a clear statement of the priority to be given to the best interests of any child likely to be affected by sanctions, whether in legislation or in guidance to decision makers, is required. Again, removal of discretion from the award of a hardship payment where children are affected would be desirable. To ensure compliance

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with P1-1, the proportionality of the severity and duration of sanctions should be reconsidered with reference to all available evidence on their effectiveness in promoting transition from benefit to work, the suspension of benefits prior to the conclusions of the investigation into the alleged breach should be avoided and identified barriers to the appeals process addressed.

**Word count: 4,708**

**Abbreviations used:**

CESCR – Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

CFR – Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

ECHR – European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

ECtHR – European Court of Human Rights

ECSR – European Committee of Social Rights

ESC – European Social Charter

ICESCR – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

IOL – International Labour Organisation

P1-1 – protocol one, article one (of ECHR)

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNCRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

*This paper is based on research conducted at the Ulster University under the supervision of Gráinne McKeever (School of Law) and Ann Marie Gray (School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy). An earlier version was awarded the best paper prize at the Centre for Criminal Justice and Human Rights conference 'Justice and Dignity Under Challenge', University College Cork, June 2014. The author*

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would like to thank Priyamvada Yarnell (Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University) for her useful comments.

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*Chalan v United Kingdom* (app 22414/93) [1996] 23 EHRR 413

*Botta v Italy* (app 21439/93) [1998] 26 EHRR 241

*V v United Kingdom* (app 24888/94) [2000] 30 EHRR 121 para 71

*Brice and another v London Borough of Southwark* [2001] EWCA Civ 1138

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*R on the application of Q v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2003] EWCA Civ 364 para 59 (Lord Phillips, MR)

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*Sidabras v Lithuania (app 55480/00, 59330/00) [2006] application 42 EHRR 6*

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*R on the application of Jamil Sanneh v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, The Commissioners for HM Revenue and Customs v Birmingham City Council [2013] EWHC 793 (admin)*

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*European Committee for Home-based Priority Action for the Child and the Family v France* (complaint 82/2012) [2013] 57 EHRR SE21

*R on the application of SG and others (previously JS and others) v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions v Child Poverty Action Group, Shelter Children's Legal Service* [2014] EWCA Civ 156

*R on the application of Unison v The Lord Chancellor v The Equality and Human Rights Commission* [2014] EWHC 218

*R on the application of Refugee Action v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2014] EWHC 1033 (Admin)

## **Statutes, statutory instruments and recommendations**

Council Recommendation 92/441/EEC on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems

Jobseekers Act 1995 c18

Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 no 755 (NI 2)

Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996 no 207

Human Rights Act 1998 c42

Northern Ireland Act 1998 c47

Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 c33

Asylum Support Regulations 2000 no 704

Children Act 2004 c31

Welfare Reform Act 2007 c5

Child Poverty Act 2010 c9

European Parliament resolution of 20 October 2010 on the role of minimum income in combating poverty and promoting an inclusive society in Europe (2010/2039(INI))

Jobseeker's Allowance (Mandatory Work Activity) Regulations 2011 no 688

Welfare Reform Act 2012 c5

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Jobseeker's Allowance (Domestic Violence) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 no 0000 (draft)

Universal Credit Regulations 2013 no 376

Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 2013 no 378

Welfare Benefits Up-rating Order 2014 no 147

Income Support (Work Related Activity) and Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2014 no 1097

## **International agreements and declarations**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by General Assembly Resolution 217A (III) of 10 December 1948 (UDHR)

Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Rome, 4 November 1950, entry into force of current text 1 June 2010, ETS005)

International Labour Organisation Convention 102 – Social Security (Minimum Standards)

Convention (Geneva, 28 June 1952, entry into force 27 April 1955)

European Social Charter (Turin, 18 October 1961, entry into force 26 February 1965, CETS 035)

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted by General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI), 16 December 1966, entry into force 3 January 1976, UNTS vol 993 p3

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 23 March 1976, UNTS vol 999 p171

Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990 UNTS vol 1577 p3

European Social Charter (revised) (Strasbourg, 3 May 1996, entry into force 1 July 1999, CETS 163)

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2007/C 303/01) (CFR)