

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE UK ASYLUM PROCESS

What does 'Asylum Seeker' mean?



An Asylum Seeker is someone who had to leave their own country and has submitted an asylum claim asking the UK government for protection.

Why does the UK government provide protection?

The UK provides protection to people in this situation because it signed the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention. People are able to claim



asylum when they have had to leave their country because of "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

What is a Refugee?

A Refugee is someone who has been granted 'Refugee Status' by the UK Government, which has decided that the person's application meets all the criteria set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention. This is usually decided through the process of claiming asylum.



What is it like to claim asylum in the UK?

People who arrive in the UK often face overwhelming and complicated barriers to making a new life here. Many policies are designed to make life unbearably difficult. They create fear for people and can make them feel less deserving of dignity than British citizens. These policies are part of what is called a 'hostile environment'.



Can asylum seekers work?

Not usually. In most cases, people are not allowed to work until they have been granted Refugee Status.

Can asylum seekers access benefits like Universal Credit?

Asylum seekers and many other people who have moved here from another country have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). This means they cannot access most welfare benefits, such as Universal Credit, or the support/ services that are conditional on these benefits.

People with 'no recourse to public funds' include:

- Most people with a visitor or student visa
- Most people whose visa is through their spouse
- People who have stayed in the UK after their visa expires
- People who came to the UK for protection because they are unsafe in their own country (an 'asylum seeker')
- People who are appealing the decision about their asylum application.



What support do asylum seekers receive?

People who do not have anywhere to live and/or money to support themselves while they are waiting for the UK government to decide about their application are considered “destitute”. In these situations, the person is entitled to Asylum Support*, which includes accommodation and basic living expenses.



Accommodation

Asylum seekers have no choice over where they live or who they live with, and can be moved many times during their asylum journey. Most asylum seekers are ‘dispersed’ to local authorities where accommodation is cheaper like Glasgow and Birmingham. The Home Office will often house asylum seekers in initial accommodation centres, barracks, or budget hotels. Residents in HO accommodation are entitled to a basic pack consisting of bedding, cooking utensils, furniture, etc. A freezer or microwave is usually not provided.



Basic living expenses

Asylum Support is administered by the Home Office and consists of **£45* per person, per week**. If asylum seekers are found to have other sources of income they don’t qualify for Asylum Support.

Types of Asylum Support

Section 98

Hotel accommodation provided. Considered full board (i.e. food provided) therefore **no financial support provided**. No cooking facilities available.

Section 95 (hotels)

Hotel accommodation until dispersal accommodation is available (see below).

Weekly allowance of £9.10 and hotel meals provided.

Section 95 (dispersed)

Once dispersed to Section 95 accommodation, there is a weekly allowance of **£45 per person** in the household, provided on ASPEN card (cash withdrawals and contactless).

Section 4

Provided when an asylum seeker is appeal rights exhausted (ARE), and includes accommodation and weekly allowance of **£45 per person**. However, **money cannot be withdrawn** from the ASPEN card.

Pregnancy/children allowance

Extra money for children/pregnancy provided per week:
Pregnant mother: £3, Baby under 1 year old: £5, Child aged 1-3 years: £3.

*Amounts given in this section were accurate in January 2023 and may change.

How long does the asylum process take?

The asylum system is long and complicated. The majority of people wait between 1-3 years for an initial decision on their asylum claim, but in reality the asylum process can take much longer than this. Many people’s asylum claim is initially refused by the Home Office, only for that decision to be overturned at appeal and Refugee Status later granted.

