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Women and Families

Frequently Asked Questions



These questions were sent by the volunteers at the Refugee Women's Centre based on frequently asked questions working with women and families in June 2023. The answers were prepared by the Northern France Coordinator for Refugee Legal Support and checked by a volunteer lawyer. All answers are correct to the best of our knowledge June 2023.



What happens at the beach when I reach the UK? Will there be anyone at the beach when I arrive? What can I expect?

It is very unlikely that a small boat leaving from Northern France will arrive on the beach in the UK. That's because if a small boat arrives in the UK waters it will usually be intercepted by a Border Force boat or a volunteer lifeboat and taken to a UK port (probably Dover). If a boat lands on the beach, a Border Force team or team of police will most likely be there and take the people to Dover too.

People can expect to stay in Dover for 1 or maybe 2 days. Following this, they will be taken to the Manston centre where they will likely have their asylum screening interview. This is the first interview for the asylum process.



Is there a number I should call for help when I arrive at the beach?

If you are in distress at sea, call **112** and say '**I am at sea and I need rescue**'.

In the UK people can call **999** and ask to be put through to the police, an ambulance, fire brigade or coastguard.



Is there something I should tell/ not tell to the police when I arrive?

If you arrive in the UK and want to claim asylum you should tell the police or border authorities as soon as you arrive.

In the first days after arriving it is likely you will have a screening interview; the first interview of your asylum claim. You should answer all the questions as best you can. If you cannot remember all of the specific details, for example, which day it was you left your home country, you should explain why you cannot remember the exact day. You should try to give as much information as you can while making sure it's correct.

Refugee Legal Support provides information leaflets about the UK asylum screening interview. These leaflets are available in print at Secours Catholique or available to download on your phone in multiple languages. You can read more about this interview on the Right to Remain Toolkit website:

 <https://righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/screening/>

There are also video summaries.



What are the first steps to ask for asylum?

If you arrive in the UK in a small boat you will be able to register an asylum claim on arrival in the port of Dover. The authorities will take your fingerprints and take a photo of you.

Shortly after this you will have a screening interview. The screening interview is very important. Make sure your answers are as accurate as you can. All the answers you give will be compared with answers you give later in the asylum process. The interviewer will ask you why you came to the UK, how you travelled to the UK, why you left your country and if you have any medical needs.

If you do not know the answer to a question, do not make something up, explain why you do not know. The interviewer might be physically present or on the telephone. If you have children or other dependents they must also be present.

Make sure you ask for an interpreter who can speak your preferred language. If you speak more than one language you can choose. Make sure the interpreter can understand you well, including your dialect. The interpreter might be present via telephone. You have the right to a copy of your screening interview. This will be in English. It is good to check the notes and make sure what you said has been recorded accurately.



Do I get to choose which city in the UK I want to go to?

You cannot choose which place you will live if you ask the Home Office to provide accommodation for you. All asylum seekers in the UK have the right to be housed if they do not have any way to provide housing for themselves. However, **you cannot choose** where you will be located.

In the screening interview you will be asked if you need the UK government to provide you with housing. It is recommended to say yes even if you have a friend or family member that you might be able to live with.

Often initial accommodation will be in a hotel which could be anywhere in the country. Sometimes people can be moved between multiple accommodations. This has nothing to do with the progress of the asylum claim.

If the accommodation you are in is not suitable or not meeting your needs then you can call **Migrant Help 0808 8010 503**. Migrant Help is a charity which aims to help people with issues around accommodation and asylum support; any information you share with Migrant Help may be shared with the Home Office.



How is the situation in the hotel accommodations provided by the UK government?

The situation in the hotels can vary. Sometimes hotels offer family rooms, sometimes families are expected to all sleep in one room. Sometimes single women will be in hotels with only women and families, sometimes in hotels which also house single men. If you feel unsafe in your hotel you should speak to staff or call Migrant Help. If you feel unsafe because of the staff you should speak to **Migrant Help 0808 8010 503** or call **Humans for Rights Network (an independent organisation) +447506663089**.



In the hotels, are there organisations supporting people? (Like the ones here in Calais)

Yes, there are some great organisations who have links with hotels. For example, in Liverpool there is a drop in centre called Refugee Women Connect. However, it really depends on where your hotel is. You should ask the staff at the hotel if they know of any local organisations supporting asylum seekers or migrant women. Otherwise you can search online ***the name of your town*** and the words ***refugee support, charity or migrant solidarity***.





Does the UK government give any money to asylum seekers?

Yes, the UK government gives money to asylum seekers on an ASPEN card, like a debit card, which can be used to pay for things in shops or to withdraw money (it cannot be used to buy things online).

Asylum seekers in hotels where meals are provided will receive £8.86 per week per person in the family. Asylum seekers in housing where meals are not provided will receive £49.18 per week. This is increased by £5.25 per week if a mother is pregnant or if the family has children aged 1-4. A family will receive an extra £9.50 per week if they have a baby under 1 years old.

For example: a family of 4 people living in a house provided by the Home Office (two parents plus two children, one age 6 and one age 2), the family will receive (4 x £49.18+ £5.25 per week = £201.97).

Pregnant mothers can apply for a one off maternity payment of £300 if their baby is due in less than 8 weeks or if the baby is under 6 weeks old.

 <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get>



Do I have the right to work as an asylum seeker?

No, asylum seekers do not have the right to work in the UK. If you have been waiting for an answer on your asylum claim for 12 months or more, you can apply for permission to work. If granted, this will only give you permission to apply for jobs which are on the shortage occupation list.

 <https://righttoremain.org.uk/applying-for-permission-to-work-asylum/>



If I get asylum in the UK, can I go to university?

Yes, people granted refugee status in the UK have the right to apply for university or higher education. You can also apply for university before you receive a decision on your asylum claim but you will not be eligible for a student loan until you have been granted refugee status. Find out more here:

 <https://star-network.org.uk/access-to-university/faqs/>



Additional Information for unaccompanied minors

If you are under 18 and arrive in the UK without a parent or guardian you have special rights to protection because you are a child. Unfortunately the UK authorities do not always believe people when they say how old they are. If you have been given a different age to the one you declared to the authorities, you must seek help. Humans For Rights is an independent organisation that works with children and young people in this situation. You can contact them in any language via Whatsapp or SMS on +447506663089. 89