

**The Asylum Journey – An Overview**

**Definition**

* UNHCR definition of a refugee according to the 1951 refugee convention is:

*“A person who owing to* ***a well-founded fear*** *of being persecuted for reasons of* ***race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion****, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country….*

*or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is* ***unable or****, owing to such fear,* ***is unwilling to return to it****."*

**Journey to the UK**

* Before arriving in the UK, people who claim asylum (hoping to be granted refugee status) have often experienced significant trauma in country and during the journey, such as:
* War and conflict
* Mandatory national service or enforced conscription to militia groups
* Imprisonment and in some cases torture
* Genocide
* Physical and/or sexual violence and witnessed violence to others
* Traumatic bereavement
* Trafficking

**Claiming Asylum & Asylum Support**

* Arriving in the UK – an individual needs to claim asylum ‘as soon as reasonable’ by presenting themselves to the authorities at the port of entry or at a local police station
* Asylum claims then need to be made in person in Croydon
* Once a claim has been made a person seeking asylum has the right to remain in the UK whilst they wait for their decision, but they do *not* usually have the right to work. They can support themselves if they have assets but this is very rare, even if wealthy/middle class before fleeing, due to the nature of fleeing persecution
* Most claimants will need to state they are ‘destitute’ when presenting to the Home Office
* They will then be taken to Initial Accommodation – the IA centre in Yorkshire and Humber is in Wakefield (Urban House)
* 200-300 individuals accommodated at Urban House at any one time (single adults, women with children and families) – basic needs met, accommodation/food/healthcare on site – known as ‘s98’ support.
* Usually stay here up to 1 month, whilst asylum support application is processed
* Migrant Help is contracted by Home Office at Urban House to provide briefings & support clients to submit asylum support applications

**Dispersal**

* Once accommodation has been secured, the housing provider (currently G4S in Y&H, Mears under new contract from 1st September) takes clients to ‘no choice’ dispersal accommodation
* This is when clients may be ‘dispersed’ to Leeds
* Single adults are housed in single-sex shared accommodation (HMOs), there are also mother and baby houses & families are accommodated in flats/houses.
* All dispersal accommodation and locations are provided on a no-choice basis. Single accommodation can be made available in exceptional circumstances, where medical/mental health needs have been evidenced.
* Accommodation is procured/managed by the Asylum Housing Provider and is funded by the Home Office – not managed/funded by LA, although there should be dialogue with the LA when looking at procuring new properties to ensure locations/addresses suitable for dispersing vulnerable asylum seekers e.g. risk of hate crime, walking distance to town/local buses etc
* Asylum support rate for an adult is £37.75 per week (approx £5 per day) – known as ‘s95’ support
* After initial S95 support some clients who have been refused asylum but are:
* making further submissions,
* applying for voluntary return,
* unable to return to their country due to no safe route of return
* willing to return but have medical grounds preventing them from returning to their country of origin at present

or

* applying for a judicial review

may be eligible to apply for Section 4 support (s4) – £35 per week - this is no-choice accommodation as before, but is cashless/card only support

**Waiting for a Decision**

* Home Office asylum claim decisions are made on a case by case basis, based on the UNHCR criteria (above) and evidence submitted by each individual
* Until recently, the Home Office aimed to process ‘straightforward’ claims within 6 months, but this has now been scrapped as a target
* In reality individuals can be in the asylum system for much longer, especially if appealing decisions/lodging further submissions, with some clients in the system as long as 12-14 years
* voluntary sector drop-ins , conversation classes, befriending and activities can be a real life-line for those in the asylum system during this ‘waiting period’ in limbo – important for those dispersed to Leeds to be linked in with the range of voluntary sector organisations in the city to reduce isolation and promote wellbeing

**Positive Decision and Move On**

* Once a decision has been made by the Home Office, if positive the person has 28 days to ‘move-on’ from asylum support to mainstream benefits/housing
* Individuals can often become destitute at this stage, despite having a ‘positive’ decision due to factors such as:
* delays in receiving decision letter/in understanding what action is needed
* time frames of longer than 28 days for processing Universal Credit payments
* nationwide shortages of social housing – priority criteria,

so it’s very important individuals are supported to start the ‘move on’ process asap on receiving a positive decision letter

* To help improve the move-on phase, the Home Office has recently funded a number of ‘LAASLO’ workers in 3 Local Authorities across Y&H, including Leeds. These ‘LAASLO’ move-on workers are supporting those with positive decisions to provide advice/ signposting during the 28 day move period and beyond
* The Home Office has also built in a ‘move on’ telephone advice element to the new asylum support advice contract with Migrant Help, which will start on 1st September 2019 – this will involve contacting and signposting those with positive decisions to help them move-on to mainstream benefits within the 28 day period
* Migration Yorkshire is currently facilitating discussions with the Local Authorities and Migrant Help across the region to ensure the new Migrant Help move-on service is linked in with the existing LAASLO and AMIF move-on workers across our region, so new refugees can be supported to ‘move-on’ as seamlessly as possible.

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**(Leeds Place-Based Approach Event – 12th July 2019)**