



English

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## Applying for asylum support

Most asylum seekers are not allowed to work. Under exceptional circumstances you may be entitled to work but you would need to seek advice about this.

As the asylum process can be long, you may need to think about how you will support yourself. You may be eligible to apply for support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). NASS is the government department responsible for supporting destitute asylum seekers. NASS can provide both accommodation and cash support for food and clothing. If you have accommodation, for example with friends or relatives, you can apply for cash support only. Cash support is also called 'subsistence support'.

If you are unable to support yourself, you can apply for NASS support at any time during the asylum process. If you are under 18, and are applying for asylum on your own, you will get support from your local authority, not NASS.

### Who is eligible for support from NASS?

You may need both accommodation and cash support, or you may only need cash support. In either case, you will have to prove to NASS several things:

- that you have applied for asylum;
- that you are destitute (meaning you have very little or no money);
- that you have applied for asylum 'as soon as reasonably practicable' after arriving in the UK.

### What does the 'as soon as reasonably practicable' test mean?

This test applies to people who apply for cash support only. When considering your application for cash support (even if you previously were receiving accommodation and cash support and now wish to change to cash support only) NASS will consider the following:

- whether you have applied for asylum within three days of arrival;
- whether the account given by you about your arrival is credible.

Normally NASS will use information which you give them when you applied for asylum to determine whether you did apply 'as soon as reasonably practicable'. If NASS is unable to make a decision whether to grant you support, or if they think that you did not apply for asylum early enough then they will invite you to an interview in Croydon. If you inform NASS that you cannot afford to travel to Croydon then they may arrange the interview to happen in the regional office where you live. **It is essential that you attend this interview if you want to prove that you need support and that you applied for asylum 'as soon as reasonably practicable'.**

NASS should not refuse you support if the following circumstances apply:

- if you are part of a family with children under 18;
- if you have special needs, for example, a mental or physical disability; if you have special needs, you are entitled to an assessment of need from your local authority under community care legislation. Some asylum seekers with special needs can be provided with accommodation and extra support by NASS;
- if you can show that you will suffer inhuman and degrading treatment, as set out in the European Convention on Human Rights, if the Government does not grant you support. You may need legal advice to see if this applies to you.

If you were already legally in the UK, and then applied for asylum due to changed conditions in your home country, NASS will examine whether you applied for asylum at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **How do I apply for NASS support?**

The refugee organisations listed at the end of this leaflet will help you to apply to NASS for support. Other organisations such as the local Citizens Advice Bureau, local advice or refugee group may be able to help with this as well. If you are at Oakington Reception Centre, Refugee Council staff there will help you to apply for NASS support. If you are detained in a removal centre, and you are successful with your bail application, one of the refugee organisations may help you apply to NASS.

### **I need accommodation and cash support**

You can apply for accommodation and cash support at the same time. If you have nowhere to live whilst you are waiting for a decision on whether you are eligible for NASS support, one of the refugee organisations will place you in an induction centre or in initial accommodation. Both are places where asylum seekers are accommodated and provided with food on a short term basis.

### **NASS agrees to accommodate me**

If NASS decides that you are eligible for support, they will arrange to move you to accommodation, usually outside London and the South East of England. You cannot choose where NASS will send you, but they should take into account your physical needs and personal circumstances. Before you move to your NASS accommodation, you will receive information about where you will be living, how you will travel there, how you can obtain cash support, and who to contact in your new location if you have problems.

### **What type of accommodation will I get?**

NASS will usually move you to a room in a hotel, bed & breakfast, a hostel, a shared house or a flat. People who run these places are called landlords. They will provide you with bedding, crockery, and are responsible for helping you to contact and use services in your area. They will ensure that you can access a local doctor, schools and/or colleges. Your landlord is responsible for ensuring that your accommodation is in a good state of repair. If you have any concerns about your accommodation or access to local services raise this with your landlord or your local One Stop Service.

### **How long can I stay in NASS accommodation?**

NASS expects you to remain in the accommodation they provide you with unless they give you permission to move. If you leave your accommodation without permission, NASS can stop providing support and accommodation for you altogether. If you wish to move out of NASS accommodation and stay with someone else, you must tell NASS about such changes. You can stay in NASS accommodation until the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) decides your asylum application. If IND grants you refugee status, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave, your NASS support will end after 28 days. This means that you will have to move out within 28 days.

### **Will NASS support me if I pursue an asylum appeal?**

If IND refuses your application but you have appealed within the Home Office's time limits, you can continue staying in your accommodation and you will continue to receive support. If you are at the end of the asylum process and have no further rights of appeal, NASS will stop your support 21 days after your asylum claim was finally refused. However, you may be able to apply for Section 4 support – this is also known as 'hard case' support. Please see Refugee Council leaflet 'Are you destitute and at the end of the asylum process?' Your legal adviser or your nearest refugee organisation may be able to help you with this application.

If you have dependent children under the age of 18, your support should continue even if your asylum case has been refused.

## **I need cash support only**

If you have somewhere to stay, for example with friends or relatives, you can apply to NASS for cash support only. It usually takes a few weeks before they consider your application. If NASS agrees to give you cash support, the following should happen:

1. NASS will send you a letter confirming that you are entitled to cash support.
2. They will give you temporary vouchers called interim support tokens. They are only valid for a short time. You can exchange them for cash at any post office.
3. If you have your Application Registration Card (ARC) you should be able to collect your regular payments by presenting the card at a designated post office. Sodexho, the company which provides the payments, will send you a letter confirming which post office you should go to.

If you have any questions about your cash support or are experiencing any problems you should call the NASS helpline on **0845 602 1739**.

### **What happens if I lose my tokens or the ARC?**

If you have lost your tokens or your ARC, or someone has stolen it, you need to report the loss or theft to the police to get new tokens or a new ARC. You need to get a written proof of the police report with crime reference number, name of the police officer and name of the police station. You need to fax the police report to NASS on 020 8633 0653 or contact your local One Stop Service.

If you want to change the post office from which you are receiving your payments or if you have difficulties accessing your payments with ARC, you should call Sodexho telephone helpline on **01276 687 099**. If you don't speak English, you may need to ask an interpreter or a friend to help you call NASS or Sodexho helplines.

### **My circumstances have changed**

If you have been receiving cash support and your circumstances change and you need

accommodation as well, you can apply for accommodation at a later stage. You should contact the nearest refugee organisation that can help you with this.

### What other help can NASS give me?

#### **Maternity payment**

You can apply to NASS for a maternity grant for a newly born child. This is a one-off payment of £300 in tokens. Applications must be made in writing up to one month before the expected day of delivery, or no longer than two weeks after the baby is born. You must include evidence of the date of expected birth, or the child's full birth certificate. Children born three months before arrival in the UK or less, are also entitled to the maternity payment. Please note that this payment is not available to those who are receiving Section 4 support.

#### **Payments for pregnant women and children**

Pregnant women and families with children between one and three years who are receiving support from NASS are entitled to an additional £3 on top of their basic NASS payments. An additional £5 a week is available for babies under the age of one year. These payments are not available to those who are receiving Section 4 support.

#### **Travel to asylum and appeal interviews**

If you receive support, NASS will pay your travel expenses to your asylum and appeal interviews. You can apply for this in advance or seek a refund after the interview.

#### **Travel to report**

If you have to travel more than three miles to report to your local reporting centre you can apply for assistance to pay for your travel. Your local One Stop Service can help you with this request.

### Other information

#### **What if NASS refuses to support me?**

If NASS refuses to support you, you may have a right to appeal to a support adjudicator, but you will not be able to get any support from NASS while you are waiting for your appeal to be decided.

#### **Can I travel?**

You are free to travel within the United Kingdom (UK) but, if you are staying in NASS accommodation, you are only allowed to be away for no more than seven days and nights in a row, or 14 days and nights during a six-month period. If you intend to be away from your accommodation you should inform your landlord. If you travel outside the UK, the Home Office will withdraw your asylum application.

#### **Can I work while I am waiting for a decision on my asylum claim?**

As an asylum seeker you are not usually allowed to work. However, if you have been waiting for over a year for an initial decision on your asylum application you can apply for permission to work. The refugee organisations listed below may be able to help you with this. Everyone can undertake voluntary work which is a good way to learn new skills. This work has to be genuinely voluntary and unpaid. Travel and lunch expenses are usually paid if you do voluntary work.

**Important note:**

If your circumstances change, for example, you are joined by a family member, or change address or wish to apply for a maternity payment, you should tell NASS if possible before these events take place. You should write to NASS informing them how your circumstances have changed to: **Post Allocation Casework, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, Block B, Whitgift Centre, Croydon CR9 1AT**. Please keep a copy of your letter. Your nearest refugee organisation listed below should be able to help you.

**Support when you have exhausted asylum appeal rights**

If your asylum application has been fully determined including appeal and the Home Office has informed you that you have exhausted your appeal rights, you may be eligible for NASS support, called Section 4 or hard case support. For more information how you can claim this support please see Refugee Council leaflet 'Are you destitute and at the end of the asylum process?' at <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk> or ask at your local One Stop Service.

**Sources of help and advice**

Refugee agencies such as the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Refugee Arrivals Project, Migrant Helpline, Scottish Refugee Council and the Welsh Refugee Council are the main organisations providing help and advice to asylum seekers. They believe that asylum seekers and refugees should be treated with understanding and respect. These organisations provide advice and information on accommodation, cash support, asylum, health and other issues through their One Stop Services in different UK regions. They are independent and separate from the Government. Staff in these organisations will advise you in your best interest. But please note that they are usually unable to change decisions made on your case by government departments. Other organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, local advice or refugee groups can also offer free advice and information.

**Refugee Council (London, West Midlands, East of England, Yorkshire and Humberside)** <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

London	020 7346 6777
Birmingham	0121 622 1515
Ipswich	01473 297 900
Leeds	0113 386 2210

**Refugee Action (East Midlands, North West, South Central, South West)**  
[www.refugee-action.org.uk](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk)

Bristol	0117 941 5960
Leicester	0116 261 6200
Liverpool	0151 702 6300
Manchester	0800 917 2719
Nottingham	0115 941 8552
Plymouth	01725 235 030
Portsmouth	02392 297 407

**Refugee Arrivals Project (airports in the South East)**  
[www.refugee-arrivals.org.uk](http://www.refugee-arrivals.org.uk)

Other leaflets for asylum seekers are on the Refugee Council website:  
<http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>

Hounslow 020 8607 6888

**Migrant Helpline (Kent, West and East Sussex)** [www.migranthepline.org.uk](http://www.migranthepline.org.uk)

Dover	01304 218 723
Gravesend	07976 450 324
Chatham	07971 868 424
Hastings	01424 717 011
Margate	07970 603 814
Brighton	01273 723 223

**Scottish Refugee Council (Scotland)** [www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk)

Edinburgh/Glasgow 0800 085 6087

**Welsh Refugee Council (Wales)** [www.welshrefugeecouncil.org](http://www.welshrefugeecouncil.org)

Cardiff	029 2048 9800
Swansea	01792 301 729
Newport	01633 266 420
Wrexham	01978 363 240

**North of England Refugee Service (Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Durham, Cleveland)** [www.refugee.org.uk](http://www.refugee.org.uk)

Newcastle	0191 222 0406
Middlesbrough	01642 217 447
Sunderland	0191 510 8685

**Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (Northern Ireland)**  
[www.nicem.org.uk](http://www.nicem.org.uk)

Belfast 028 9023 8645

To find your nearest Citizens Advice Bureau, go to:  
[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/getadvice.htm](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/getadvice.htm)