Your Rights in the UK Asylum System

A practical guide to support, housing, healthcare, education and legal help

Last updated: 1 September 2026

Claiming Asylum

You can claim asylum in the UK if you are unable to return to your home country because you fear persecution.

You must claim as soon as reasonably possible after arriving in the UK, either at the border or in person once you are here.

After you claim, you will attend a screening interview where the Home Office records your basic details and takes your fingerprints and a photograph.

You will later have a longer substantive interview where you explain in detail why you need protection. This is the most important part of your claim, so it is worth getting legal advice beforehand if you can.

- Claim as soon as possible after arrival

- Attend your screening interview and provide biometric details

- Prepare carefully for your substantive interview, ideally with legal support

Asylum Support While Your Claim Is Decided

If you would otherwise be destitute, you can apply for support from the Home Office under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

This can include a weekly cash allowance loaded onto a payment card, and accommodation if you need it.

The exact weekly rate is reviewed periodically by the Home Office, so always check the current figure at gov.uk rather than relying on an old number.

If you need emergency support immediately, you may be placed in initial accommodation under Section 98 while your Section 95 application is assessed.

Support is conditional. You must comply with reporting requirements, or your support may be suspended.

- Apply for Section 95 support if you have no other means of support

- Emergency Section 98 accommodation is available if you need help immediately

- Keep any appointments and reporting requirements the Home Office gives you

Housing

Housing under the asylum support system is provided on a no-choice basis, meaning you cannot pick where you live.

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You may be required to move to a different part of the UK under the dispersal system. This is not a punishment; it reflects where accommodation is available.

Accommodation may be shared housing, a hostel, or another designated property.

If you have particular needs, such as a medical condition or a family circumstance that affects where you can live, tell the Home Office or your accommodation provider as early as possible.

- You cannot choose your accommodation or area

- Report any special housing needs early so they can be considered

- Keep your accommodation provider informed of any problems with your housing

Healthcare

If you have an asylum claim, whether pending, granted, or even refused, you can generally access NHS healthcare in the same way as anyone else living in the UK.

You should register with a local GP as soon as possible after you arrive.

You should never be turned away from urgent or immediately necessary treatment, including at accident and emergency, regardless of your immigration status.

If a surgery or hospital refuses to register or treat you, ask for the reason in writing and seek advice, as this may not be correct.

- Register with a GP as soon as you can

- You are entitled to urgent and immediately necessary treatment regardless of status

- Seek advice if you are refused registration or treatment

Education

Every child in the UK has the right to a school education, regardless of immigration status.

Children roughly aged 5 to 16 are entitled to a place at a state school, and in most cases to free school meals if your family receives asylum support.

Local authorities have a duty to help your children access a school place, so contact them if you are having difficulty.

Adults may be able to access English language (ESOL) classes, and in some circumstances further or higher education, though funding rules for college and university can be complex and worth checking with the institution directly.

- Children have a right to a state school place regardless of status

- Ask your local authority for help if your child cannot get a school place

- ESOL classes are often available to help you learn English

The Right to Work

While your asylum claim is being decided, you are generally not permitted to work.

If your claim has been waiting for a decision for more than 12 months, and the delay is not your fault, you can apply for permission to work.

If permission is granted, it is currently restricted to jobs on the Home Office's Immigration Salary List, not any job you choose.

Working without permission can seriously harm your asylum claim and any future application, so always get advice before taking paid work.

- You cannot normally work while your claim is being decided

- You may apply for permission to work after a 12-month delay that is not your fault

- Get legal advice before doing any paid work

Your Asylum Decision

If your claim is successful, for claims made on or after 2 March 2026 you will normally be granted 30 months' permission to stay, followed by a review, rather than the 5 years previously granted.

Unaccompanied children remain an exception and currently continue to receive 5 years' permission to stay.

After a successful decision, your asylum support usually continues for a further 42 days to give you time to move onto mainstream benefits and find your own accommodation. This is called the move-on period.

If your claim is refused, you have the right to appeal in most cases. Appeal deadlines are short, so get legal advice immediately if you are refused.

- Adults granted asylum from March 2026 onward typically receive 30 months' leave, reviewed afterwards

- Unaccompanied children currently keep the longer 5-year grant

- If refused, get legal advice immediately as appeal deadlines are short

Getting Legal Help

You have the right to legal advice and representation for your asylum claim.

Legal aid may be available to help cover the cost of a solicitor, depending on your circumstances.

Only use an adviser who is properly accredited and regulated. Unregulated so-called advisers can

give you dangerous, incorrect advice that damages your claim.

ASeekers can help point you toward accredited legal advisers and local support organisations. See our Find Local Support page for more information.

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- Legal aid may be available depending on your circumstances

- Only use properly accredited, regulated advisers

This guide is provided for general information only and does not replace individual legal advice. Rules and rates referenced here can change — always confirm current details at gov.uk or with an accredited legal adviser.