

Asylum seekers and refugees' mental health

And signposts for other help and advice

This factsheet looks at help for refugee and asylum seekers mental health. It also provides general signposting for further help and advice. This information is for adults who are 18 or over and are refugees or asylum seekers in England. It is also for their loved ones and carers, and anyone interested in this subject.

Key points:

- If you are a refugee or asylum seeker you might experience poor mental health. A lot of different things can cause this.
- You are more likely to experience mental illness than the rest of the population.
- If you are a refugee or an asylum seeker with an active application or appeal, you are fully entitled to free NHS care.
- You might be a refused asylum seeker, without an active appeal. You can get free care and treatment from your GP and A&E. But the situation with other NHS mental health services is more complicated.
- You might be able to get support for your mental health outside of the NHS, including self-help.
- You can get advice and information about immigration.
- You can get a translated version of this information on our website, using the Recite function.

This factsheet covers:

1. [Who are asylum seekers and refugees?](#)
2. [How can the mental health of asylum seekers and refugees be affected?](#)
3. [I am asylum seeker or refugee. What mental health support can I get on the NHS?](#)
4. [I am a refused asylum seeker. What mental health support can I get on the NHS?](#)
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1. Who are asylum seekers and refugees?

Who is an asylum seeker?¹

If you are an asylum seeker you are a person who has left your home country because you fear for your safety. This is often due to war or persecution. You go to another country and ask for protection. But they have not yet been approved you to stay there.

Persecution means when you are treated badly or hurt because of who you are, what you believe, or where you come from. This could include being bullied, threatened, or punished by others or the government.

As an asylum seeker you must apply to the country you are in to stay there.

Who is a refugee?²

If you are a refugee, you are someone who was an asylum seeker. You were successful with your application to stay in your adopted country. As a refugee, you now have a right to international protection.

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2. How can the mental health of asylum seekers and refugees be affected?

If you are a refugee or asylum seeker you might experience poor mental health. This can be because of things like:

- not knowing what will happen to you in the future,³
- a stressful journey from your home country,⁴
- trauma,⁵
- language barriers,
- feeling isolated,⁶
- separation from family,⁷
- finding it hard to get support,
- discrimination,⁸ and
- issues with money⁹ or accommodation.¹⁰

You can find more information about: Social inclusion and mental illness - How can I become more connected? at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Are refugees and asylum seekers more likely to experience mental illness?

If you are a refugee or asylum seeker you are more likely to experience mental illness than the rest of the population. Especially, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety disorders, and suicidal thoughts.¹¹

Around the world around 3 in 10 refugees and asylum seeker experience PTSD. The figure is the same for those experiencing depression.¹²

You can find more information about:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Suicidal thoughts – How to cope

at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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3. I am asylum seeker or refugee. What mental health support can I get on the NHS?¹³

If you are a refugee or an asylum seeker with an active application or appeal, you are fully entitled to free NHS care.

This means for mental health support you can:

- Register and get help from a GP,
- Refer yourself to your local NHS talking therapies service,
- get help from NHS specialist mental health teams,
- get urgent mental health support from the NHS, and
- use other local NHS mental health services.

It's free to register with a GP. You do not need proof of address, immigration status or ID.¹⁴

Some NHS trusts have specialist mental health teams for asylum seekers and refugees. To see if there is one in your area, you can search the Internet or call NHS 111.

You can find more things above in our information on:

- GPs and your mental health
- Talking therapies
- NHS mental health teams

at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy of our factsheet.

If you are a refused asylum seeker, your rights are slightly different. See [section 4](#) for more information.

This video from the UK Health Security Agency explains Entitlements to NHS services for migrants in England: <https://bit.ly/4caQ4gT>

How can I get urgent help for my mental health?

If you need urgent mental health help you can:

- Contact NHS 111 for urgent mental health support: You can call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk/triage/check-your-mental-health-symptoms. You will need to answer some questions. They will refer you to an appropriate service or tell you what to do next.

You can find more information about getting urgent help for your mental health at Get help now at www.rethink.org.

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4. I am a refused asylum seeker. What mental health support can I get on the NHS?

You might be a refused asylum seeker, without an active appeal.

What NHS mental health support should I get for free?

You can:

- register and get help from a GP,¹⁵
- get help from your local NHS talking therapies service,¹⁶ and
- get urgent mental health help in an accident and emergency department (A&E) at hospital.¹⁷ You can find your local A&E here: <https://bit.ly/4I3vWB9>

You do not have to pay for the services above.

What about other help?

The position about whether you get free help for the following things is more complicated:
¹⁸

- help from NHS specialist mental health teams,
- urgent mental health support from the NHS,
- help from other local NHS mental health services.

You do not just get free care and support for the things above. Medical professionals have to think about certain things first.¹⁹

Medical professionals will think about whether your care is:²⁰

- immediately necessary,
- urgent, or
- non-urgent, and if
- specific exemptions apply.

Medical professionals might think your care is immediately necessary or urgent. You should be treated straight away, but the treatment is not free. You can be asked to pay at the time, if appropriate, or later.²¹

But you can still get free care if you are in one of the groups that are exempt. They include:²²

- refused asylum seekers supported by the Home Office – see below,
- victims or suspected victims of modern slavery,
- people being held in immigration detention centres,
- anyone receiving compulsory treatment under a court order, or
- anyone receiving treatment under the Mental Health Act or Mental Capacity Act.

Refused asylum seekers with no further rights of appeal can still get some support from the Home Office. You can read more about this from Shelter here:

<https://bit.ly/4cfD26E>

NHS services provided to you to treat mental or physical illness caused by torture, female genital mutilation or domestic or sexual violence are free of charge. This applies no matter where the violence took place. As long as you have not travelled to the UK just to get the treatment.²³

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5. What other mental health support can I get?

Our information on Worried about your mental health? How to get treatment and support gives advice on:

- how you can get emotional support,
- how you might get talking therapy through a charity,
- what you can do to help yourself,
- how to access self-help online, and
- how to find support groups.

You can find more information about:

- Worried about your mental health? How to get treatment and support, and
- Ethnic minorities and mental health

at www.rethink.org. Or call us on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Also see Local mental health services in the Useful contacts section, at the end of this factsheet.

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6. Where can I get advice and information about immigration?

The organisations below should be able to give you information and advice about your asylum claim or other immigration matters.

Our Advice and Information service cannot advise you about your asylum application or the immigration process.

Migrant Help

They provide independent advice and guidance to assist asylum seekers in the UK move through and understand the asylum process. They can advise you in your language.

Phone: 0808 8010 503

Online enquiry form: <https://selfserve.migranthelpuk.org/submit-issue>

Website: www.migranthelpuk.org/pages/category/asylum

Refugee Council

Information phone line, online information, and search for local services.

Phone information line: 0808 196 7272

Website – Online information and search for local services:

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-help/?Service+Type=6&query=#filter_form

Citizen's Advice

Advice and information on immigration, and many other things, like housing and debt.

Website – Information on immigration: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/immigration

Website - Search for your local Citizens Advice: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>

Asylum Aid

Asylum Aid give legal representation to some of the most vulnerable people seeking asylum in the UK.

Phone: 020 7354 9631

Email: advice@asylumaid.org.uk

Website: www.asylumaid.org.uk

Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP)

Provide free, legal advice to asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers appealing to tribunal. This is against decisions to refuse or discontinue their housing, financial subsistence, or both.

Phone: 020 3716 0283

Website: www.asaproject.org

You can find out how to search for an immigration adviser on this government web page: www.gov.uk/find-an-immigration-adviser.

The page gives you information on:

- searching for adviser
- what advisers can do
- hiring an adviser
- complaining about an adviser

What am I entitled to as an asylum seeker?

If you are an asylum seeker you might be entitled to housing and cash support. You will be entitled to some healthcare, and your children can get education.

See this government web page for more details: www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get

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7. Can I get a translated version of this and other Rethink advice and information?

There is an accessibility function on our advice and information webpages called Recite.

On the desktop site, click on the icon in the top right-hand corner to the right of 'Donate.'

On the mobile site, scroll right and click on the 'Turn on accessibility' icon.

The Recite function allows you to:

- hear the text read aloud, in over 100 languages,
- translate the text into many different languages,
- change the type and size of font, and the line height and character spacing, and
- change the background colour of the text.

What is language line?

- Our Advice and Information Service helpline includes a translation service called [Language Line](#).
- To use Language Line, you must call our helpline. You can find details of our helpline at: <https://bit.ly/3Q0szQR>
- An advisor will take your name and phone number and ask what language you speak. Someone from Language Line will call you and translate in your chosen language.
- Our Advice and Information Service helpline phone number is 0808 801 0525. It is usually open 9:30am – 4:00pm Monday to Friday except bank holidays.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists have translations of some of their mental health information, which you can find here: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/translations

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Useful Contacts

Red Cross

If you are a refugee or asylum seeker in the UK, they may be able to offer you practical and emotional support.

Website: www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-help-as-a-refugee

Refugee Radio

Online radio station that raises the voice of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

Website: <https://refugeeradio.org.uk>

Refugee Women Connect

A women-only charity set up to support women asylum-seekers, refugees and survivors of trafficking.

Phone: 0151 305 1070

Email: info@refugeewomenconnect.org.uk

Website: www.refugeewomenconnect.org.uk

The Refugee Therapy Centre:

Provides funding for members of refugee communities in the UK. This is to undertake training to become psychoanalytic psychotherapists and psychodynamic therapeutic counsellors.

Phone: 07828049099

Email: officeadmin@refugeetherapy.org.uk

Website: <https://refugeetherapy.org.uk>

Local mental health services

Bristol

Bristol Women's Voice

They have a number of migrant services in Bristol that you can search for here:
www.bristolwomensvoice.org.uk/our-projects/directory-of-womens-services

London

NAFSIYAT Therapy

A therapy centre that provides effective and accessible talking therapy services to London's diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic communities. They do this in over 20 different languages, via referral, to individuals, groups, and couples and families.

Email: admin@nafsiyat.org.uk

Phone: 020 7263 6947

Website: www.nafsiyat.org.uk

Manchester

NHS asylum seeker health support service

A service that helps you understand your unique circumstances, and assist you with the asylum seeker processes. We advise on medication and treatment options.

Address: St James' House, Pendleton Way, Salford, Greater Manchester, M6 5FW

Phone: 0161 358 1044

Website: www.gmmh.nhs.uk/asylum-seeker-mental-health-consultation-service

Help for survivors of modern slavery or human trafficking

The Salvation Army

Helps survivors of modern slavery out of danger and to build a new life.

Phone: 0800 808 3733

Website: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/modern-slavery

Freedom From Torture

Provide advice, therapy and support from centres around the UK.

Phone: 020 7697 7777

Online contact form: www.freedomfromtorture.org/contact-us

Website: www.freedomfromtorture.org/help-for-survivors

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² Amnesty International. *Who is a refugee?* <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants> (accessed 24 March 2025)

³ Mental Health Foundation. *The Mental Health of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK.* 2024. P12, para in left hand column [MHF_Mental-Health-of-Asylum-Seekers_REPORT_A4_SINGLE-PAGES_0.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/MHF_Mental-Health-of-Asylum-Seekers_REPORT_A4_SINGLE-PAGES_0.pdf) ([mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)) https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/MHF_Mental-Health-of-Asylum-Seekers_REPORT_A4_SINGLE-PAGES_0.pdf

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¹⁴ NHS. *How to register with a GP surgery*. See paras 1 & 2 <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery> (accessed 9 June 2023).

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This factsheet is available in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice and Information Service
Phone: 0800 801 0525
Monday to Friday 9:30am – 4pm
excluding bank holidays.

Webchat service available

Did this help?
We'd love to know if this information helped you or if you found any issues with it. Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

Or write to us at:
Rethink Mental Illness,
28 Albert Embankment,
London, SE1 7GR.



We are the charity for people severely affected by mental illness, no matter what they're going through.

For further information on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone: **0121 522 7007**
Email: info@rethink.org



Need more help?
Go to www.rethink.org for information on Mental health conditions and symptoms, treatment and support, physical health and wellbeing, ethnic minorities and mental health, LGBT+ mental health, mental health laws and rights, work, studying, and mental health, police, courts, and prison, and advice for carers.

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