

Refugee Women Digital Empowerment and Connect Project

Guide to accompany
Integration Films



Essential information for family
members arriving in the UK

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Essential information for family members arriving in the UK

This document has information to help you if you have recently arrived or are due to arrive in the UK on a refugee family reunion visa to join a family member who is a refugee. It may help you understand some things about what to expect and help you and your family to find essential support.

Your Visa, your BRP and your choices.

Your refugee family reunion visa means that you are here because of your relationship with your partner or a family member who has refugee status. They are called your sponsor. This visa has conditions that you are expected to keep such as your intent to continue to live with your sponsor and, if they are your partner, keep your relationship with them.

Your refugee family reunion visa will last for as long as your sponsor has refugee status, and when they apply to “settle” in the UK, you will have to apply with them at the same time.

You do not have refugee status yourself, so you may be able to visit your country, while your sponsor (who is a refugee) cannot. It is important to contact an immigration advisor who can give you information on how to travel outside the UK without impacting your or your sponsor’s immigration status or any future visa applications you might make to stay in the UK. You may find an immigration advisor locally or from one of these places:

OISC

www.home.oisc.gov.uk

Law Society Northern Ireland

www.lawsoc-ni.org/solicitors

Immigration Law Practitioners Association

www.ilpa.org.uk

You must collect your Biometric Residence Permit (BRP), as soon as possible after arriving to the UK. Your decision letter will inform you where you can collect your BRP. This will be at your family member’s local post office. You must take your visa with you to collect your BRP. You can report problems with collecting your BRP online at www.gov.uk/biometric-residence-permits/collect

As an adult it is always your choice to live in the UK. If someone is forcing you to travel, or to stay here, you can phone the 24hr **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** or the **Police** on 101 for help. If it is an emergency, you should call the emergency services on 999. They can find an interpreter if you tell them the language you speak.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

0808 2000 247

If someone is forcing you to travel, or to stay here, and are forcing you to do something bad against your will, for their profit, you can call the Modern Slavery Helpline or the Police.

Modern Slavery Helpline

08000 121 700

Universal Credit

You can work in the UK on a refugee family reunion visa. You can also receive “Public Funds”, also called benefits or welfare support. This means that if you are unable to work, looking for work but have not yet found a job, or are not paid enough to get by, the state will give you a basic monthly payment. This is called **Universal Credit**.

Universal Credit It's paid monthly into a bank account, and you need to apply for Universal Credit online. There are conditions for receiving it. You must sign an agreement and can face penalties if you do not follow its terms.

Universal Credit can be used to pay for your living expenses such as food, clothing, transport, household bills and anything you want to buy.

The amount of Universal Credit you get depends on your situation, like whether you have children, a disability or a health condition which means you cannot work, or you need help paying your rent, and how much income your partner has..

Universal Credit, and other benefits can be complicated to understand. If you have questions about how Universal Credit works you can call:

Universal Credit helpline

 0800 328 5644

Citizens Advice Bureau Adviceline (England)

 0800 144 8 444

Citizens Advice Bureau Help to Claim (Scotland)

 0800 023 2581

Citizens Advice Bureau Advicelink (Wales)

 0800 702 2020 / 08000 241 220

Advice NI (Northern Ireland)

 0800 915 4604

How do I start a Universal Credit application?

If your partner already gets universal credit, you **must** make a joint claim. If you do that, your partner's universal credit payments will stop temporarily, for around 5 weeks, while the Job Centre combines your claims. You may need to apply for help during this time to cover food, rent and bills. You may want to speak to the Job Centre to find out if you can get an advance payment, a loan or any other support payments during this time.

Universal Credit is overseen by the Job Centre whose role is to help people to find work. When you go to the Job Centre, you will meet a 'work coach'. They will help you apply for a National Insurance Number (NINO), if you do not have one. This is a unique and personal number that

people have in the UK and is needed to apply for work, pay tax and receive benefits. Do not give it out to people without questioning why as it can be used in identity fraud. It takes about 2-6 weeks for a NINO to come. It will be sent to you in the post.

More information on starting a **universal credit claim** can be found here: www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit

What do I ask for at the Job Centre?

You can ask for an interpreter for Job Centre appointments if you need one. If your English is not particularly good or you do not know how to use a computer, you can ask your work coach for a 'non-digital relationship' at your first meeting. This means they will contact you by phone instead of using the computer.

What are the rules?

When you meet your work coach, they will talk to you about the rules around getting universal credit, called your 'Claimant Commitment'. These are actions that you agree to do, to show that you are looking for work. It may be that you are asked to apply for a certain number of jobs or improve your English. If you do not keep to the agreement, you can be penalised, which can include some or all the benefit being paid to you stopping. This is called a sanction. It's important you understand your agreement, what you must do, and when. When you meet your work coach, you can ask for clear and written instructions. You can also see your claimant commitments by looking at your online journal.

If your partner is working, you may still be able to get extra help by applying for Universal Credit, but your partner's income will affect how much money you will receive.

If you have children

There is a difference between Universal Credit and Child Benefit:

Child Benefit is money paid to parents or other people who are responsible for bringing up a child. You can apply for Child Benefit for children under 16, and sometimes for older children (aged 16-20) if they are in approved full-time education.

You can download a **Child Benefit form** from this website:

www.gov.uk/child-benefit/how-to-claim.

Should I open a bank account?

Universal Credit is paid into one bank account, and often this is the bank account of the already existing claimant. You can ask to change this, but it is not possible to "split" between two bank accounts.

To receive benefits like child benefit yourself, you need to open a bank account. To open a bank account, you need documents that prove your **identity, immigration status and address**. Banks often have different processes for getting an account. The best way to find out is to go into a bank and ask how to open an account with them.

Housing

How do I find a home?

Housing in the UK is complicated, and your options can depend on where in the UK you live in and your family's situation. You will likely need advice if you don't have a suitable home to move into already. Shelter, a national charity, provide advice on your rights and entitlements in England, Scotland and Wales. Housing Advice NI provide advice specifically to residents in Northern Ireland.

Shelter (England)

0808 800 4444 www.shelter.org.uk

Shelter (Scotland)

0808 800 4444 www.shelter.org.uk

Shelter (Wales)

08000 495 495 www.sheltercymru.org.uk

Housing Advice NI

028 9024 5640 www.housingadviceni.org

What is social housing or council housing?

"Social Housing" is accommodation provided by the government for people who are facing homelessness, but many people in the UK rent privately from a landlord or own their houses.

The government can help to house families in some situations, for example if accommodation is overcrowded, or in a very poor condition, if you are at risk of violence or if you are at risk of homelessness.

If you are homeless or think you may be homeless in the next 56 days, you can ask for help to find a home for your whole family by contacting your Local Authority housing office (they can also be called the **Local Council**), or if you are in Northern Ireland, you can contact the **Housing Executive**.

Find your local authority www.gov.uk/homelessness-help-from-council

Northern Ireland Housing Executive www.nihe.gov.uk

The Council oversee who can get a social house. They do a "homelessness assessment" and look at what they can offer. It may be a long wait to get long term housing. You may be put in a bed and breakfast or a hostel.

When looking at whether they can help you the Local Authority will ask for evidence to assess your needs such as:

- **Evidence of your immigration status.** This means they will want to know you have a visa or the right to be in the UK and under what conditions.
- **Evidence of a 'priority need.** This means asking personal questions like whether anyone in the family is pregnant, has a disability, health condition or are at risk of violence, or are any of the family under 18 years old.

- **Evidence that you are not homeless through any fault of your own.** This could mean that you can show you didn't choose to leave a home, or that you didn't reject an offer of help that was made.
- **Evidence of a 'local connection'.** This means that they want to know that they have responsibility for you. A local connection usually means having lived there for a period of time, working there, or having family who live there. Usually, on refugee family reunion, the area where families have a local connection is the area where the sponsor was living when they were granted refugee status. If you move to an area where you don't have a local connection the local authority may not be able to help.

What types of housing will I be offered?

You won't have lots of choice on the housing you are offered, as the housing supply is very low. It may not be in the place, or even the city, you want, and the quality of this housing may not be what you expect.

It can take many months, or even years, to get to more permanent social housing, and it is your responsibility to look for and bid on houses.

What if I do not want the accommodation I am offered?

You can bid on what social houses you do want to apply to rent, but sometimes if you need to be housed straight away, you may be offered somewhere to stay temporarily. You should get independent advice before refusing any social accommodation offered to you by the Council, because saying no can have consequences. In some circumstances the council could find that you have chosen to be homeless, and they may refuse to help you further.

Paying for rent

If you are receiving Universal Credit, it will include money, towards paying for your housing. If you move address, you will need to tell the Job Centre.

If you have a large family, you will likely need a bigger house to avoid overcrowding. Be aware that there are limits on the amount of government help you can get towards paying rent from universal credit. This means you may have to pay rent using other income you have, to avoid getting into debt with your landlord, called rent arrears. Limitations on the help you can get vary depending on the size of your house and where you live.

You may be able to ask the Local Authority for financial help (e.g., a Discretionary Housing Payment) if you need temporary support while you look for cheaper accommodation or are waiting on money to be paid to you. Not every local authority will be able to provide financial help with this and it depends on your family's individual circumstances.

Can I rent private housing?

It might be easier to find private rented housing, rather than social housing, which involves taking a fixed term contract with a landlord. Private housing can be found through local lettings agents and on property listings websites. The types of privately rented housing available will differ across the country.

Once you have somewhere to rent, you will need to put down a deposit which is a sum of money that has to be paid in advance to cover potential damage. This is normally at least one month's rent.

You will also need to sign a 'tenancy agreement'. This is a legal contract between you (the tenant) and the landlord who owns the housing (this might be the local authority, a housing association, or a private individual). Your tenancy agreement sets out the rights and responsibilities of the tenant and the landlord. It will also give the date you can move in, how long the contract is for, how much the rent is and when you must pay it.

Healthcare

The National Health Service (NHS) provides health services to people living in the UK. Most of these services are free.

How do I register with a doctor?

In the UK, family doctors are called General Practitioners "GPs". A GP is the first doctor you will see when accessing healthcare. They work at GP surgeries. The NHS Choices website has a list of all GP surgeries in the UK:

www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/GP/LocationSearch/4

To receive medical treatment, you and your children must **register with a GP as soon as possible, even if you are not ill**. In the UK, all parents must register their children with a GP. To register the GP surgery may ask you for some identification documents and something to prove your UK address. However, you can register without them. You should not be asked about your immigration status. If you have problems registering with your GP, you can contact:

Doctors of the World 📞 0808 1647 686 Email clinic@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk.

Doctor appointments

Once you are registered, if you need to see your GP you must telephone the surgery to make an appointment first. The GP will not see you without an appointment.

You can ask for an interpreter for medical appointments and request their gender. You can also request the gender of the medical professional you want to see. If you want, you can also ask for someone (called a chaperone) to come to appointments with you. This can be someone you know, or another professional.

If your GP cannot give you an appointment and you need urgent help, you can try to go to a walk-in centre. This is for a problem that needs medical attention but isn't life threatening such as minor burns, cuts, bites and ear infections.

How do I register with a dentist?

Some but not all dentists offer NHS treatment. Most also offer private (fee paying) treatment. You should register with a dentist as an NHS patient and let them know if you are receiving benefits, in which case your check-ups and necessary treatment will be free. Dentists advise that you get regular check-ups on your teeth usually every 6 months.

Note that **getting dental treatment before receiving Universal Credit can result in charges.**

Can I get extra financial support with a health condition?

You might get additional money from Universal Credit if you have a health condition that means you are unable to work or prepare for work.

Children under 16 can get free prescriptions. Otherwise, whether you must pay for a prescription can depend on your income, where you live in the UK, your age and what the prescription is for. If you are on a low income, you may be eligible to apply to the NHS low-income scheme for help with health costs such as prescriptions, dental care and eyesight tests. **Ask your GP, the Job Centre or Migrant Help.**

Migrant Help 📞 0808 800 630 🌐 www.migranthelpuk.org

What do I do in a health emergency?

For a life-threatening emergency or serious injury, you should go to the nearest hospital that has an accident and emergency department (A&E) or emergency department (ED). Public hospitals are open 24 hours a day.

If you cannot get to hospital, you can call the emergency services for an ambulance on 999. **You will need to give your address and explain what has happened. The 999 operators will advise you what to do and will tell you how long an ambulance will take.**

If it is not an emergency but you need medical advice or treatment urgently, you can call 111. You can tell them your language on the phone, and they will find an interpreter

Is there support for my emotional wellbeing or mental health?

It is normal that there are a mix of happy but also difficult emotions when you reunite with your family. It takes time to adapt to a new country, a new language and living in a new place. For some, it can be very hard to adjust, and you may feel sad, angry, lonely, depressed or anxious.

Emotional wellbeing is important. In the UK people use the term mental health to describe the way they think, feel or react to things in their lives. Mental health problems could be the worries we all experience as part of everyday life, or more serious, long term problems. 1 in 6 adults in the UK have experienced troubles with their mental health and it is common for people to get help and nothing to be embarrassed about. GPs can give advice and treatment for emotional and mental health for free, but there can be a wait for therapy.

For further support:

Mind 📞 0300 123 3393 Text 86463 🌐 www.mind.org.uk
Samaritans 📞 116 123 Email: jo@samaritans.org

Is there support for my sexual health?

You have the right to access free services that help you get information and help about your sexual health. All medical advice and history is confidential and stays between you and your doctor.

It is common for people to use contraception to help plan pregnancies and have choice over the size of their family. You can go to your GP or a sexual health clinic to talk about this and get a method of contraception that suits you, free of charge.

Condoms can help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You can ask your doctor or sexual health clinic for free condoms and they can test and treat you for sexually transmitted infections as well.

If you are a woman who is pregnant and you don't know whether to continue with the pregnancy, you have options. In the UK, abortion is legal and free up to a certain time, but there are regional differences in how to access services. Women can find out more, by contacting:

British Pregnancy Advisory Service 📞 03457 30 40 320.

Or if you are in Northern Ireland, you can contact **Informing Choices NI** 028 9031 6100

Female Genital Mutilation or cutting is illegal in the UK and considered child abuse if done to a child. This includes organising for women or girl to travel to another country to have the procedure. Victims of FGM who need support can ask their GP to arrange for them to speak to a specialist doctor or a support group. Some charities also provide advice and support.

If you have concerns that a child or young woman is at risk you can call the NSPCC helpline, or if you're at risk you can contact the police

Staying Safe

Emergency Services

If you or someone else are in an emergency call 📞 999 for all emergency services. These include the Police, the Fire Service, or the Ambulance Service

If you feel unsafe or want to report a crime you should contact the police.

Thieves and scammers exist, and with more of life conducted online, they can try to obtain your data and personal information to take money from you or conduct identity theft. If you receive a text or email from your bank asking for your bank details, do not reply. The government or your bank will never ask for your details by text or email. More information on digital safety and protecting yourself from online crime can be found at the **National Cyber Security Centre** here: www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/advice-guidance/all-topics

It is illegal to smoke in public enclosed places such as bars, markets and workplaces in the UK. It is also illegal to sell tobacco, or alcohol to anyone under 18 years old.

Dropping litter is illegal in the UK, so, all rubbish (including cigarette butts) should be put in a litter or cigarette bin. If caught you will get a fixed penalty fine from the Council.

Learning English

'ESOL' (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes are often offered in colleges, community centres, local charities and even libraries across the country. You can find classes that run during the day and in the evenings. There is no one provider of ESOL across the UK. You can find the provider that is nearest to you by searching for "ESOL + your area" in a search engine.

Children's schooling

Under UK law, both boys and girls **must** attend school. It is important that you make sure that your child goes to school. If you do not you could face legal action or a fine. Education for 4–11-year-olds is called primary school and 12 – 16 is secondary school. Both are free.

You need to register your child with a school from age 4 or 5 depending on their birthday.

How do I register my children for school?

Before your child can start school, you must meet with the school and fill out forms. Each Local Authority has different procedures for applying for school places. If you are not sure how to register, ask at your local school who can give you information. No child is guaranteed a place at a school, even if it is close to your home or siblings attend there.

When meeting about school places you are entitled to an interpreter. You need to bring proof of address, any identification that you and your child have (BRP, passports, visas) and the child's birth certificate, if they have one.

The process of getting into school can take weeks, and your children may not be offered a place at the school you prefer or at the one nearest to you.

You can find information on applying for primary school places here: www.gov.uk/apply-for-primary-school-place.

You can find information on applying for secondary school places here: www.gov.uk/apply-for-secondary-school-place.

Even if it is possible that you may move to a new house, or if your housing situation is unclear, you should apply for your child to attend school. If you do move to a new house, your child may have to move school.

Is there financial help for travel, school uniforms, and school meals?

Free school transport may be available if you live a certain distance away from your children's school, and this depends on the area where you live. It is not enough to say that you live too far away as a reason for children to miss school. Schools may offer help if children have to travel a distance.

Extra financial help such as School Uniform Grants and Free School Meals might be available if you are on a low income or receiving certain benefits. You will need to **ask your Local Authority about grants** and financial support. The available help is different between Local Authorities.

Leaving school

The age children can leave education depends on where in the UK you live, but secondary school ends after 16 years old. Children can continue their education in some form from 16-18 years old. This could be in training in a job, an apprenticeship or further education elsewhere like a college or a sixth form.

If you receive child benefit, payments will stop once children leave education, and they won't usually be able to claim Universal Credit until they are 18.

There is support for children who need extra help, with special needs or English Language. Special needs in the context of school means any particular education requirements because of learning difficulties, physical disability or emotional and behavioural difficulties. If a child has special needs or English Language needs, parents can speak to their local authority and school and make sure they get the support they need.

Keeping children safe

In the UK you are legally responsible for the protection, care, development, and wellbeing of your children. It is your job to keep them safe from harm and danger. It is an offence to leave children on their own if it puts them at risk. Babies, toddlers and young children should never be left alone. Generally, children under 16 should not be asked to look after younger children, and children who are 16 or older should not look after other children for long periods or overnight.

Can I smack my child?

Attitudes to physically disciplining children are changing quickly in the UK. It is illegal to smack or hit children in Scotland and Wales. In other parts of the UK it is illegal to smack or hit a child if you cause an injury or leave a mark on them. You could get in legal trouble for punishing your child through hitting or smacking either with your hand or with an object, as this could be seen as abuse.

Information about parenting using different ways to change children's behaviour, rather than physical discipline or smacking can be found here:

learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/leaflets/positive-parenting

What is child abuse?

Child abuse is when a child is intentionally harmed by an adult or another child – it can be over a period of time but can also be a one-off action. It can be physical, sexual or emotional and it can happen in person or online. It can also be a lack of love, care and attention, or not meeting a child's basic needs for food, shelter, warmth and cleanliness etc – this is called 'neglect'.

The government and its agencies have a legal duty to ask lots of questions about family life and to intervene if they think a child has been abused or might be at risk of being abused or have questions or concerns about a child.

Schools, doctors, other professionals, and organisations (like the British Red Cross) have a legal duty to report any welfare concerns they have about someone's children. This is called

safeguarding. Safeguarding includes asking questions if a child is injured, has bruises or burns, is unfed, unwashed, if their clothes are torn, or if they are not attending school. They are checking whether that child is being abused or neglected.

What are social services?

Child social services can legally intervene if there is a real concern about the safety of a child. In severe cases, courts may allow them to take a child away from their family to a foster home to make sure they are safe from harm. Their decisions always put the child first.

If I am worried about my child or another child, I can contact the NSPCC or Childline.

NSPCC 0808 800 5000

Childline 0800 1111

Child Social Services work to try and help families and never set out wanting to remove children – this only happens in extreme cases. They try to find ways to support families to stay together in a way that keeps the children safe and free from abuse. They are most often involved in giving practical advice and support to help parents or families who may be struggling financially or emotionally or who are finding it hard to manage their children's behaviour.

This support is called different things and may vary from place to place but their priority is to try and help families. You can find out what is available in your local area by speaking to your local authority.

Domestic abuse

'Domestic abuse' is a term used in the UK to describe any violence or action used to exercise or gain control and power over a partner or family member. It is a crime in the UK. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, emotional and financial abuse. For example, it is against the law to hit your partner or children, but it is also illegal to control your partner's movements, who they talk to, their access to money or their freedom to visit friends.

What if I am experiencing domestic abuse?

You are entitled to protection and can access a safe place to live – this is called a refuge. If you experience **domestic violence or abuse** in your relationship and want to leave your relationship, there are places you can go to for help.

Emergency Services Always call _999 if you or someone else is in immediate danger.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk **0808 2000 247** provide advice and help any time, day or night, confidentially. They can refer you to accommodation and specialist services.

Personal Relationships in the UK

Men and women are treated the same under the law in the UK. That means that husband and wives both get to make decisions in their relationship. Your partner is not allowed to make decisions that affect you, without you knowing and agreeing.

UK law requires consent for sex. Consent is when someone has the freedom and confidence to make a choice. That means that both people say **YES** to sex, every time they have sex. If you change your mind and say **NO** your partner must listen. Even if you are married, consent is still needed.

Having sex with a woman or man, even your spouse, without their informed consent is illegal and considered rape in the UK. It is a crime, and you can report it to the police.

The age of consent for sexual activity in the UK is 16. It is illegal for people under 16 to engage in a sexual activity, even if both people are under the age of 16.

In the UK families and relationships are diverse. There are families with lone-parents, step-parents or same-sex parents and their children. Legally, women can marry other women, and men can marry men too.

Marriage is a legal agreement with legal consequences. While people can have religious weddings only those marriages which are registered at a civil office (i.e., in possession of a civil marriage licence) are officially recognised. It is not possible to be married to more than one person at a time, this is called bigamy and it is illegal. Divorce is also a legal process which both men and women can start. Separation is always a sad time, but divorce in the UK doesn't leave either party destitute.

Family separation:

Reuniting with your family can be a time of great joy. At the same time, there can be challenges and difficult emotions, which can be stressful.

If your relationship breaks down, **it is important to seek legal advice as soon as possible**, even if you suspect your relationship may break down.

It is important to remember that your specific rights and entitlements are linked to the immigration status of your 'Sponsor'. If your Sponsor's leave expires, or if your relationship with that person breaks down, you can lose your visa and entitlements. However, there could be options for you to stay in the UK if your relationship with your sponsor breaks down and you should get legal immigration advice quickly.

Your sponsor cannot have you "deported" or "removed" from the UK if your relationship breaks down, but they may notify the Home Office that their relationship with you has changed. The Home Office may then choose to shorten your visa or ask you to leave unless you change your visa type.

If your relationship breaks down and you wish to leave the UK, you can do so. If you do not have money or documents to travel to your country of origin you should seek advice from a legal advisor or solicitor on whether you can or should apply for help from the Home Office to return home.

There are some national organisations that can provide some free immigration advice, but you may need to engage a solicitor for more help.

Rights of Women (England and Wales only)

☎ 020 7490 7689 Monday and Thursday 10am – 4pm www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

Just Right Scotland (Scotland only)

☎ 0141 406 5350 www.justrightscotland.org.uk/

Migrant Help (advice on the asylum process)

☎ 0808 800 630 www.migranthehelpuk.org

