

Housing and Migrant Health



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Definitions

Asylum seeker

- *Person who has departed their country of origin and officially applied for asylum in another country but is awaiting a decision on their request for refugee status*

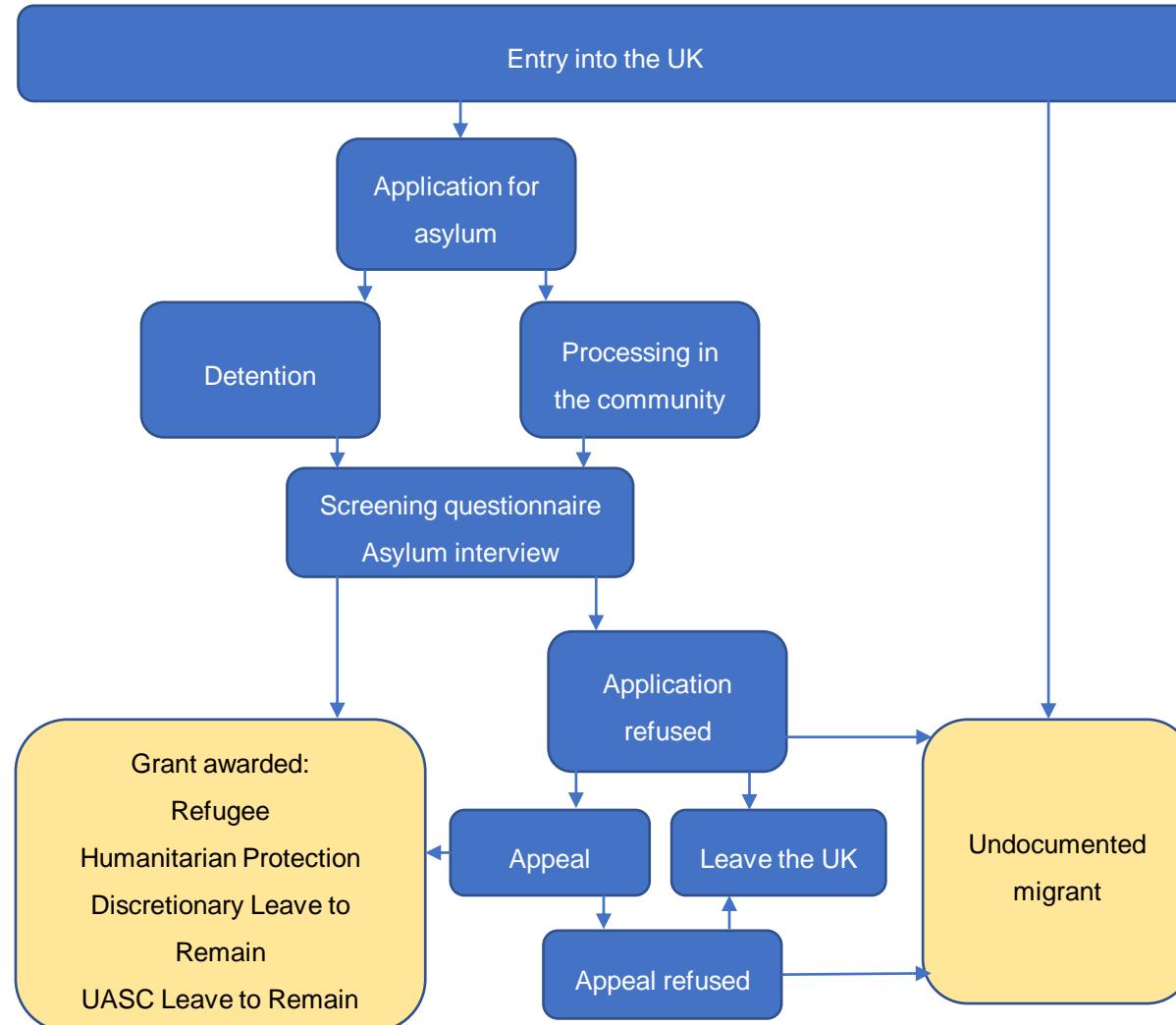
Refugee

- *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 to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country’*

Undocumented migrant

- *Foreign born nationals who do not have the right to remain in the UK*

The asylum-process



Stranded at the crossroads of differing policy agendas

Treaties ratified by the UK

- The Refugee Convention
- The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The European Convention on Human Rights and Human Rights Act 1998
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

National legislation and policy

- The Children Act (1989)
- The Children Act (2004)
- The government's 'hostile environment' policies

Examples of 'hostile environment' policies in England



ID checks and upfront charging of undocumented migrants for hospital treatment and NHS-funded community health services



No recourse to public funds for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants



Banks and building societies prohibited from opening accounts for undocumented migrants



Criminalisation of letting to undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers awaiting a decision on their case as they are disqualified from renting



Criminalisation of employing undocumented migrants for whom it is illegal to work



Data sharing for immigration enforcement purposes between the Home Office and public services



Asylum Seekers

- No recourse to public funds
- Not allowed to work
- £39.63 pp/pw
- Initial Accommodation Centres
- Contingency accommodation
 - Barracks
 - Hotels
- Dispersal accommodation
 - “substandard, poorly maintained and, at times, unsafe”

"We were given multiple examples of unclean accommodation infested with mice, rats, and bedbugs, which was particularly worrying for respondents living with their children" – SEREDA report

"Our room in the first hostel in Birmingham was really small and not suitable for a child with disability.... We asked them to take one bed out, so my daughter could move around... But, they didn't believe us. They said the child doesn't look like she has Downs syndrome as we told them." - Palestine, female, 30s, asylum seeker

"It's just because the room is very small and there's no space to put a baby cot. Yeah. So there's just one double bed, so three of them sleep there." - Eritrea, female, Asylum seeker



"Why aren't there locks?! Why aren't there separate toilets for men and others for women?!" - Egypt, female, 30s, asylum seeker

"Home Office housing is quite often really inappropriate, so they would be housed in houses [...] where there are men and women together, where there are groups of men hanging around on the stairs, you're talking about a young lady who has been exploited by a group of men, you know it is just inappropriate"- Manager/practitioner, regional NGO.

Do you know there are women who are afraid to leave their rooms?! The other day I found out there are a mother and four teenager girls in the room near ours... She told me 'the mother' she had to protect her daughters, especially with all these men around the hostel." - Palestine, female, 30s, asylum seeker



Refugees

- Asylum support axed after 28 days
- Need NI number to claim welfare benefits – can take 28 weeks!
- Home Office delay in issuing identity documents
- Employers, banks etc not recognising Biometric Residence Permits as form of ID
- 28 days to move out of state provided housing
- Unable to pay rent deposits – homelessness and destitution
- Emergency accommodation unsuitable and unsafe



Undocumented migrants

- Not automatically entitled to support
- Crime for landlords to knowingly let a property to disqualified persons
- Over crowding, frequent moves

“I was prevented to make a new life in a sense where I feel so vulnerable you know. I was a victim of torture then a victim of that you’re not being believed, homelessness and everything.”

Zimbabwe, female refugee

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2020/forced-migrants-from-sub-saharan-africa-in-the-uk.pdf>

Resources

- <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2021/sereda-full-report.pdf>
(Recommendations related to housing p23)
- <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/migrants-and-housing-in-the-uk-experiences-and-impacts/>
- <https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/userfiles/attachments/pages/625/h-7-migrantsandhousing-iun-june2015.pdf>