



Home Office

Minimum standards for responding to domestic abuse disclosures from asylum seekers

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Minimum standards for responding to domestic abuse disclosures from asylum seekers

This document aims to outline the minimum role and responsibilities of the Home Office, its subcontractors and any other agency, along with the levels of actions to be taken regarding any disclosure of Domestic Abuse from people seeking asylum by agencies responding. This document sits alongside Home Office guidance and any other guidance.

Minimum standards for responding to disclosures of domestic abuse:

1. Establish whether they are safe to speak
 - a. If in person, ensure that the conversation is happening in a private and secure space
 - b. If speaking on the phone, ask them if they are alone and safe to speak
 - i. Establish a safe word or action to terminate the call
 - ii. If it is not safe for them to speak now, agree a safe time and contact number to organise a return call. Ensure that any return call follows the same pattern outlined above, i.e., does not announce that you are calling them about a domestic abuse incident, in case perpetrator monitoring their devices.
2. Identifying need for interpreter in relevant language to ensure victim/survivor understands the information they are being given and consents to steps taken
 - a. Where operationally possible, offer a female or male interpreter as it may make them feel more comfortable speaking about their experiences. Identify any other need for an interpreter or other communication needs or reasonable adjustments required due to disability or other additional need.
3. Establishing confidentiality and consent
 - a. Reassure the victim/survivor that you are there to help, domestic abuse is never acceptable, and it is not their fault. You recognise the courage it has taken for them to come forward, and you believe them.
 - b. Reassure them that you will not share any information they give you unless they ask you to for the purposes of providing them with assistance they consent to. Migrant Help are contractually obliged to notify the Home Office and Safeguarding teams.
 - c. Explain that the only exception to this is where you believe there is a serious risk of harm to them or to others, or where a child is believed to be at risk of harm, when you may have to share information without their permission
4. Secure basic details including identifying whether children are present (ensure that all personal information and data on the victim/survivor(s) is kept confidential and stored safely and securely, recognising that a data breach would pose a significant safety risk to adult and child victims/survivors). Be aware that victims/survivors might not feel safe to disclose all information on the first call, particularly details around the perpetrator, due to ongoing safety concerns and risks, and this should not impact the process moving forward.

- a. Name
- b. Sex / Gender
- c. Date of birth
- d. Safe contact number
- e. Reference number
- f. Country of origin and languages spoken
- g. Accommodation type and address
- h. Name and date of birth of perpetrator
- i. Date of last contact
- j. Date of last contact
- k. Where is the perpetrator now? (sex/gender of perp)
- l. Are they living in Home Office or private accommodation?
- m. Does perpetrator also live there?
- n. If yes, subsequent action is to notify relevant parties, e.g., accommodation provider and Home Office safeguarding team
- o. Are they living with any children?
- p. Names and DOB of children (sex/gender of children)
 - i. Where are children now?

5. Is there a serious and imminent risk of harm including risk to children? Recognise that if someone is in immediate risk, responding to the immediate safeguarding needs will take priority over collecting detailed information at this stage.

- a. If yes:
 - i. Ask if they have contacted the police: how many times; do they have a crime reference number?
 - ii. If not contacted the police, advise them of how to do so if they wish, and reassure them that you can support them in this process. Explain what contacting the police means and that it will not affect their asylum claim. If in immediate danger, call 999.
 - iii. If there is a safeguarding concern for children, follow actions at 8 below and advise them of the steps you are taking.
- b. If no:
 - i. inform victim/survivor of safety information such as emergency services and the National Domestic Abuse Helpline Tel: 0808 2000 247

ii. Refer to relevant local/national domestic abuse services. The Women's Aid Directory covers a general list as well as specific 'by and for' services contained in an easy search tool: [Women's Aid Directory - Women's Aid](#).

6. Identify any need for safeguarding/child protection referrals. Note that there may not have been an "incident" that has happened but rather a pattern of behaviour (such as emotional abuse, controlling behaviour), and that the victim/survivor may not explicitly state that there is abuse. Any allegation of domestic abuse when children are present should be referred to the Local Authority/Gateway – consent not required.

- a. Provide reassurance that you are there to help them
- b. Ask them if they feel comfortable explaining what has happened so you can ensure they receive the right assistance.
 - i. Allow them to speak at their own pace, understanding that disclosures of domestic abuse are often iterative, and more information may

become apparent over the course of the conversation and on further occasions.

- ii. Thank them for confiding in you about their experiences. Tell them you recognise the courage it has taken to come forward and assure them that domestic abuse is not acceptable and not their fault. Do not use judgmental or victim-blaming language.
- iii. Adopt active listening stance so you can make an appropriate risk assessment and take necessary safeguarding steps and actions to support.

7. Are there safeguarding concerns for the adult?

a. Yes:

- i. Ask them whether they have reported to/are working with any agencies, e.g., a national/local domestic abuse service, adult social care. Reassure them that you can support them through this process, and you can also make a referral to a local service that specialises in supporting DA (Domestic Abuse) victims/survivors (the DA service can also assist with conducting a risk assessment and make necessary onward referrals)

Ask the victim/survivor if they would like you to support them in making a referral to a local DA service

- ii. Discuss your safeguarding concerns with the victim/survivor and explain the role of statutory services and how they can contact them.
- iii. Explain what referral processes for DA services, statutory services, and other specialist support such as LGBTQ+ services or 'by and for' services entail, what steps you are taking and what they can expect to happen
- iv. Escalate disclosure to Home Office Safeguarding hub at AsylumSafeguarding@homeoffice.gov.uk or unless you are from Migrant Help then via the Migrant Help portal through the Migrant Help IT systems

8. Are there safeguarding, or protection concerns for children?

a. Yes:

- i. Discuss your safeguarding concerns with the victim/survivor and explain safeguarding duties. Ask for consent to refer to the local multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). If the victim/survivor does not consent, but there are safeguarding concerns for the children, explain that you have a duty to notify the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) regarding their safeguarding concerns.
- ii. Explain what this process means, what steps you are taking and what they can expect to happen
- iii. Escalate disclosure to Home Office Safeguarding hub at AsylumSafeguarding@homeoffice.gov.uk. It is important to note that the Safeguarding Hub does not operate 24/7 and is not able to pick up urgent referrals out of hours. If incident takes place out of hours, the provider should move either the perpetrator or victim to appropriate accommodation immediately, according to the victim's wishes.

9. Establish if there are any other identifiable support needs that could determine the nature of assistance provided? E.g., substance misuse, LGBTQ+, mental health, victim of trafficking, or a disability that could impact accommodation choice.

10. Providing options for assistance and agreeing what do they want to happen next. Ensure they are aware of all options so they can make an informed decision on what happens next.
 - a. Scenario 1. They are in Home Office accommodation.
 - i. Option 1: the victim/survivor wants to remain in their existing accommodation. This may be because they do not want to leave their support network and should be accommodated where requested and if it is safe to do so.
 1. If the perpetrator is there, establish whether they want the perpetrator to be removed
 2. If yes, take immediate action to facilitate this and notify the Home Office safeguarding hub of steps taken, ensuring that the victim/survivor is safely away from the perpetrator while this takes place. Contact the housing provider who will do an emergency relocation for the perpetrator.
 3. Ensure perpetrator is moved to accommodation at a minimum safe distance from the victim/survivor, e.g., not within the same or neighbouring borough. Ensure Home Office Safeguarding hub is informed of purpose of perpetrator's relocation to assist with monitoring future risk posed to victim/survivor(s). This would be a provider-led relocation.
 4. Advise victim/survivor of steps taken to remove perpetrator.
 5. Seek consent to make a referral to local DA service if not already identified as necessary above
 - ii. Option 2: the victim/survivor wants to move to other Home Office safe accommodation. The victim/survivor may wish to remain in Home Office provided accommodation, but to move to a different area, away from the perpetrator.
 1. Accommodate their support needs and accommodation requests as far as possible. This should always include single-gender accommodation, but may also include other factors (e.g., self-contained, location, proximity to specialist services) whilst ensuring relocation is immediate. In the interim, ensure a safety plan is in place. An NGO (non-governmental organisation) should contact Migrant Help to inform them of this via 0808 8010 503. It is open 24/7. Supporting documents are not required when submitting an asylum support application for a victim of domestic abuse
 2. In accordance with Home Office guidance, AASC (Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts) action and responsibility to organise transportation at a suitable hour (e.g., not late at night), clearly explain the length of journey, destination, time of departure, and ensure that they have enough notice to pack their belongings before departure. The housing provider is also responsible for arranging transportation.
 3. Ensure that the Home Office safeguarding hub is notified of the relocation within one working day and provide them with necessary information so that they can oversee onward

- safeguarding process, referrals to local DA services. The Safeguarding Hub will update Home Office systems with updated contact details.
4. Ensure location of new accommodation is confidential and not shared by you with other residents, including perpetrator.
- iii. Option 3: they want to move to a specialist refuge
1. Explain to them what a refuge is and the nature of support it offers to victim/survivors and their children. E.g., it is often shared with other women, a support worker will be available, it is likely to be in a different area. (The accommodation will be shared with other people of the same sex/gender)
 2. Explain that moving to a refuge is not an immediate process and may take some time. They may have to move to interim safe accommodation whilst a refuge space is found (i.e., repeat steps for option 2 above)
 3. Make referral to AASC / NGO to start a refuge search and/or make a referral to a domestic abuse NGO. Ensure it is clear who is responsible for completing the refuge search. Follow this link for a professionals' link for a refuge search: [Dedicated service for professionals - Women's Aid \(womensaid.org.uk\)](https://www.womensaid.org.uk)
Only if the DA victim/survivor contacts Migrant Help directly would their Outreach team support in looking for a refuge. The phone number to be used is 0808 8010 503. It is open 24/7. If a refuge placement is required, then the type of asylum support the client needs is classed as subs only.
 - a. Once refuge space secured, follow Home Office guidance to organise transportation at a suitable hour (e.g., not late at night), clearly explain the length of journey, destination, time of departure, and ensure that they have enough notice to pack their belongings before departure. The housing provider is also responsible for arranging transportation.
 - b. Ensure that the Home Office safeguarding hub is notified of the relocation within one working day and provide them with necessary information so that they can oversee onward safeguarding process and referrals to local DA services
 - c. Ensure location of refuge is confidential and not shared by you with other residents, including perpetrator.
- b. Scenario 2: the victim/survivor is living in the community
- i. Option 1: they want to remain in the same accommodation.
 1. Make a referral to local domestic abuse service that can provide outreach support
 - ii. Option 2: the victim/survivor wants to move into Home Office accommodation For IA (Initial Accommodation) applications, these can be completed independently by Migrant Help and some voluntary sector agencies may wish to complete their own referrals.
 1. Support the victim/survivor to contact Migrant Help via the phone line (tel: 08088010503 open 24/7) or email: s98@migranthelpuk.org

- Make it clear to Migrant Help that this is a domestic abuse case, and they require immediate assistance and accommodation.
2. Accommodate their support needs and accommodation requests as far as possible. This should always include single-gender accommodation, but may also include other factors (e.g., self-contained, proximity to specialist services) whilst ensuring relocation is immediate. In the interim, ensure a safety plan is in place.
 3. In accordance with Home Office guidance, AASC (asylum accommodation and support contractual providers) action and responsibility to organise transportation at a suitable hour (e.g., not late at night), clearly explain the length of journey, destination, time of departure, and ensure that they have enough notice to pack their belongings before departure. The housing provider is also responsible for arranging transportation.
 4. Ensure that the Home Office safeguarding hub is notified of the relocation within one working day and provide them with necessary information so that they can oversee onward safeguarding process, referrals to local DA services. The Safeguarding Hub will update Home Office systems with updated contact details. Follow this link for a professionals link for a refuge search: [Dedicated service for professionals - Women's Aid \(womensaid.org.uk\)](https://www.womensaid.org.uk)
 5. Ensure location of new accommodation is confidential and not shared by you with other residents, including perpetrator.

Suggested checklist of specific actions for different parties:

Accommodation provider

Proactive work:

- Find out the contact details of your local authority safeguarding adults' team so that you know where to go for advice and to make referrals.
- Link into your Local Adults Safeguarding Board – they offer training and guidance regarding safeguarding adults.
- Get the details of any local support organisations relevant to asylum seekers and domestic abuse, including 'by and for' organisations that have expertise in supporting victims/survivors from specific communities (e.g., Black and minoritised victims/survivors, Deaf and disabled victims/survivors, LGBT+ victims/survivors)
- Outline the roles, responsibilities, and accountability of staff and in particular who takes a lead on safeguarding.
- Make information on local support services available in accommodation (posters, at hotel reception etc.)

On receiving DA disclosure:

- Reassure the victim/survivor that you are there to help them. Listen to their experiences and acknowledge the courage it has taken to come forward. Reassure them that you believe them.
 - Reiterate principles of confidentiality and consent with regards to information-sharing and reassure them that you want to support them to choose the assistance that is right for them so that they play an active and informed role in the process
 - Establish safeguarding risk assessment and make necessary referrals to social care, DA services (including 'by and for' services), police. Inform victim/survivor of what you are doing.
 - Escalate disclosure to Migrant Help via outreach@migranthelpuk.org and Home Office Safeguarding Hub at AsylumSafeguarding@homeoffice.gov.uk
 - Organise immediate safe relocation of victims/survivors and children where appropriate, maintaining confidentiality of new address which may include searching for refuge placements where applicable.
 - Ensure accommodation of support needs where possible e.g., exempting victim/survivors from expectation to share rooms with other residents, providing single sex/self-contained accommodation where available, ensuring disability access
- Ensure that personal information and data on the victim/survivor(s) is kept confidential and stored safely and securely, recognising that a data breach would pose a significant safety risk to adult and child victims/survivors.
- Ensure transport is arranged in a timely and appropriate manner. Please note, this will likely be on the same day and may need a quick turnaround due to safeguarding risks. Clearly explain the length of journey, destination, time of departure and ensure that the victim/survivor has enough notice to pack their belongings before departure.

Migrant Help

- Checking that all relevant steps above have been taken.
- Note the vulnerability on our system and all information disclosed and the process followed.
- Complete the relevant asylum support application.
- Changes of address will be updated via the ASF form/ COC (change of circumstances) if not a Home Office to home move. If Home Office to Home Office, then the ASC provider will notify asylum support. If the move is to a refuge place, then this is likely to be a PO Box address.
- Ensure signposting to legal representative is given to seek evidence regarding their asylum claim and next steps.
- Update Home Office Safeguarding Hub with refuge details.
- Ensure that personal information and data on the victim/survivor(s) is kept confidential and stored safely and securely, recognising that a data breach would pose a significant safety risk to adult and child victims/survivors

Home Office Safeguarding Hub

- Checking that all the above steps have been taken and progressing where necessary (follow relevant SOP/s)
- Set up case conference (where necessary)
- When relocation to refuge is requested, follow internal standard operating procedure to initiate payment of refuge provider via ARTInvoices@homeoffice.gov.uk
- Monitoring and mitigating further risks posed by the perpetrator to victim/survivor(s) after disclosure being made and following any action taken to relocate the victim/survivor(s)/perpetrator
- Adjust any reporting requirements
- Ensure that personal information and data on the victim/survivor(s) is kept confidential and stored safely and securely, recognising that a data breach would pose a significant safety risk to adult and child victims/survivors

List of key contacts:

AASC Housing providers:

Clearsprings: Safeguarding.Referrals@ready-homes.com (Covering London Southeast/Southwest and Wales).

Serco: aasc.safeguarding@serco.com (Covering Northwest of England, Midlands, and East of England).

Mears: aire.sdc@mearshousing.co.uk (Covering Scotland, Northern Ireland, Northeast of England Yorkshire and Humberside).

Home Office Asylum Safeguarding Hub: AsylumSafeguarding@homeoffice.gov.uk

Migrant Help: outreach@migranthehelpuk.org

Routing IA: RoutingIAValidation@homeoffice.gov.uk

Annex A: Refuge Funding Mechanism

The Home Office will fund refuge places for victims of domestic abuse who are eligible for asylum support.

The most straightforward way for the Home Office to pay for refuge provision for victims of domestic abuse who are eligible for support under the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999 is through the standard Home Office supplier payment process. Two Home Office teams are involved in the process:

- The Safeguarding Hub is the unit that will be supervising the cases from the Home Office end. It should also be the first point of contact for refuge providers on welfare matters and when move-on accommodation is needed. Contact details are as above (asylumsafeguarding@homeoffice.gov.uk).
- The Accommodation Reconciliation and Data Team (ARDAT) will administer payments, as it does for other payments surrounding asylum accommodation. ARDAT will also set up refuge providers on the Home Office system to make payments. The Safeguarding Hub will provide ARDAT's details to refuge providers when placements are made.

Process

1. At the start of the placement, the refuge should contact the Safeguarding Hub who will issue a standard letter by e-mail or fax to the refuge provider, confirming the placement, the payment rate, and other relevant information. The letter will provide contact details for ARDAT, to whom invoices should be sent, and advise the refuge provider to contact ARDAT as soon as possible to arrange to be set up as a supplier on the Home Office systems if it isn't already. The Home Office will pay the same as a resident of a refuge would normally get via mainstream benefits, plus a top up of up to a defined amount for any additional expenses the refuge may have with people seeking asylum. A refuge taking an asylum seeker for the first time will then arrange via ARDAT to be set up on the Home Office payment system. This is via artinvoices@homeoffice.gov.uk. This will not need to be repeated for subsequent placements with the same refuge provider.
2. The refuge provider will send invoices to ARDAT, which will be checked against the Home Office system and the original placement confirmation letter before being paid. How often to invoice (fortnightly, monthly etc) will be up to the refuge provider.

Legal position

The terms of the placement confirmation letter will, from the start of the placement, constitute a legally binding contract between the Home Office and the refuge provider, so the refuge provider is assured that payment will be forthcoming. The letter will set out placement start date, the payment rate, and provide for the ending of the placement upon either the household moving out of the refuge or by cancellation by either party.