



Home Office

Standard Operating Procedure: Age concern referrals

Version 2.0

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About this guidance

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to clearly define the information-sharing process to be followed by Accommodation Providers, Migrant Help, local authorities (and voluntary sector organisations) when they encounter an individual placed in Home Office asylum accommodation who claims to be a child for a range of potential scenarios.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the SOP or you think that the SOP has factual errors then email the Age Dispute Resolution Team.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance Rules and Forms team.

Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version **2.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **19 June 2026**

Changes from last version of this guidance

The SOP has been reformatted and updated to incorporate feedback from local authorities, accommodation providers, non-governmental organisations and interested stakeholders.

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Background

The Home Office holds responsibility for asylum and protection within the United Kingdom, ensuring that all processes comply with the country's legal commitments. As part of this duty, the Home Office provides accommodation and / or financial support to individuals seeking asylum who are destitute while their claim is under consideration.

When an asylum claim is registered, the Home Office will seek to establish the age of the individual where there is no credible and clear documentary evidence, and where there is reason to doubt their claimed age. If an individual states they are a child, but an initial age decision concludes they are significantly over 18, they will be treated as an adult. Where such individuals are destitute, they will be placed in Home Office asylum accommodation as an adult.

It is recognised that not all individuals assessed as significantly over 18 will agree with this determination. There may be various reasons for providing an incorrect date of birth, including perceived benefits or other motivations. In some cases, individuals may initially confirm they are adults at the point of claim, which is accepted, but later declare they are a child after registration.

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to clearly define the information-sharing process to be followed by Accommodation Providers, Migrant Help, local authorities (and voluntary sector organisations) when they encounter an individual placed in adult accommodation who claims to be a child for a range of potential scenarios.

A consistent approach to age dispute information sharing ensures that appropriate enquiries are made with the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team to confirm whether an initial decision on age or a formal age assessment has been undertaken and its outcome. This process seeks to enhance safeguards to prevent children from being treated as adults and enables local authorities to discharge their statutory duties effectively through strengthening partnership working between all stakeholders, ensuring coordinated and effective interventions.

The Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team is the designated point of contact for concerns and will aim to respond to enquiries or referrals within 24 hours (excluding weekends). This ensures that cases of potential inappropriate placement are identified promptly, safeguarding measures are implemented, and referrals to local authorities are made where necessary. It also ensures that individuals who maintain their assertion of being a child, following an initial decision on age or where no decision has been made, are signposted appropriately to a local authority and / or legal advice.

This SOP and the associated process do not preclude service providers or any other agencies from making immediate safeguarding referrals where there is an urgent concern.

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Recording age disclosure concerns

This page provides guidance on importance of maintaining detailed records when concerns are raised about age.

Disclosures regarding age may occur in several ways, including self-declaration, during inductions and observations. When a disclosure or concern arises, the relevant organisation must record as much detail as possible to support enquiries and any potential referrals. It is essential that all relevant records and systems are updated promptly. Engaging with the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team ensures that asylum claims are processed correctly by appropriately trained decision makers.

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Responding to concerns regarding age

This page provides guidance for accommodation providers, Migrant Help and third parties on responding to concerns regarding age.

Concerns regarding age when in asylum accommodation

Accommodation providers are required to identify and assess any safeguarding risks in line with their internal safeguarding policy. This includes situations where an individual claims to be a child but continues to share accommodation with adults. Providers should follow established safeguarding procedures and seek guidance from their safeguarding lead. Where further information is required, a referral should be made to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team – a referral must be made to the Age Dispute Resolution Team where an individual claims to be a child in order to ascertain what decisions on age have previously been made by the Home Office. See: [Making referrals to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team to request age-related information](#).

Important: Where an accommodation provider is required to refer an individual to the local authority or the Home Office Age Disputes Team in accordance with this SOP, accommodation providers **must not** signpost the individual to Migrant Help for age assessment disputes as Migrant Help is **not responsible** for referring cases to the local authority or the Home Office Age Disputes Team on behalf of accommodation providers.

Concerns regarding age reported to Migrant Help

If an individual contacts Migrant Help for advice at any time or to process an asylum support application (ASF1 Form) and an existing or new concern is raised about the individual's age, Migrant Help should first contact the Accommodation Provider to confirm whether any actions or enquiries have already been taken with the Home Office.

Once Migrant Help confirms actions have been taken by the accommodation provider, consideration should be given if a referral to the local authority and Home Office Age Disputes Team is required. Establishing what actions have already taken place first with the accommodation provider will help reduce duplication and ensure the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team is able to respond to the most urgent queries.

Where further information is required, a referral can be made to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team. See: [Making referrals to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team to request age-related information](#).

Concerns from other sector organisations

The Home Office, accommodation providers, and Migrant Help may not always be aware of age-related issues or disclosures. For example, an individual might disclose information to a charity or another voluntary organisation.

If an individual self-declares a new age or raises ongoing concerns directly with a third party, such as a voluntary sector organisation, the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team should be contacted as soon as possible. This contact **must** include a letter of authority providing consent from the individual to share the details the Home Office holds relating to age. Where further information is required, a referral should be made to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team. See: [Making referrals to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team to request age-related information.](#)

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Making referrals to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team to request age-related information

This page provides guidance on making referrals to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team to request age-related information.

When making a referral to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team, local authorities, accommodation providers and Migrant Help should use the [Age Assessment Information Form](#).

All referrals when made to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team must be sent to: Home Office Age Disputes.

Once the referral form is completed, it should be titled '**Age Assessment Information Request**', followed by the individual's full name and any Home Office references, for example the Unique Application Number, and should clearly set out information about their disclosure or ongoing claim to be a child.

If there are any risks of harm or vulnerability concerns, these should be directed to the Asylum Safeguarding Hub.

The Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team will check Home Office records to verify whether an initial decision on age or a Merton-compliant age assessment has taken place, then respond formally confirming whether the individual has had an initial decision on age and / or age assessment. The Home Office Age Disputes Team will respond on the [Age Dispute Progress Form](#).

Information of age shared with Accommodation Providers or Migrant Help could be either relevant summaries of an age assessment completed by a local authority (this could be Merton compliant but may not be) or an initial age decision by 2 members of Home Office staff, who have independently assessed, that the individual's physical appearance and demeanour very strongly suggest that they are 'significantly over 18' years of age.

The Home Office Age Disputes Team will also give the date of the assessment if one has taken place. Typically, a response will be made within 24 hours (excluding weekends).

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Scenario-based examples

This page contains a range of potential scenario examples in which accommodation providers, Migrant Help and Local Authorities may encounter an individual placed in adult accommodation who claims to be a child.

Scenario 1 - Age-disputed person with initial age decision but ongoing concerns

Where the Home Office Age Disputes Team confirms that an initial age decision has been made, but further representations have been received, **or** the Accommodation Provider continues to have concerns, based on daily interactions, that the individual may be a child, the following steps should be taken:

The accommodation provider should send the previously completed Age Assessment Information Form **simultaneously** to:

- the local authority
- the Home Office Age Disputes Team

The Age Dispute Resolution Team will update Home Office systems to raise an age concern.

The Home Office Age Disputes Team will work collaboratively with the provider to ensure the referral to the local authority contains any necessary information for further consideration of the individual's age. Any referral to the local authority should be expected within 24 hours where possible.

Scenario 2 – Age-disputed person with no initial age decision

Where the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team confirms that **no initial age decision** has been made by Immigration Officers, the following steps should be taken:

The accommodation provider **must** refer the individual to the relevant **local authority**, copying the **Home Office Age Disputes Team** when making an onward referral, clearly stating:

- that the issue of age has **not** previously been raised and request the local authority should consider undertaking an age assessment
- the Age Dispute Resolution Team will update Home Office systems to raise an ongoing concern
- the local authority must update the Age Dispute Resolution Team of the outcome of their assessment

The Home Office Age Disputes Team will work with the service provider to ensure the referral contains any necessary information for consideration. Any referral to the local authority should be expected within 24 hours were possible.

Scenario 3 – Person with initial age decision, no further representations, and no accommodation provider concerns

Where an initial age decision has been made, **no further representations have been received**, and the service provider has **no concerns**, the following steps apply:

- if the service user maintains that they are a child, the provider should:
 - signpost the individual to their legal representative
 - if the individual does not have legal representation, the provider should signpost them to obtain one
- Alternatively, the individual may request an age assessment directly from the local authority – where this is the case, accommodation providers should provide contact details for the local social services team.

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Age Assessment Information Form

This page contains a copy of the Age Assessment Information Form which is used by local authorities, accommodation providers and Migrant Help when making a referral to the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team.

Home Office Reference	Last Name	First Name	Gender	Language	Nationality
Date					
Address details					
Recorded date of Birth (DD – MM – YYYY)					
Claimed date of birth (DD – MM – YYYY)					
Has an age assessment been conducted? (Y / N / Unknown)					
Details of age assessment					
Is there an IS.97M?					
Has evidence been submitted supporting claimed date of birth?					
Observations		Please detail what you have observed to support your concerns			
Behaviour					
Appearance					
Understanding					
Vulnerability					
Details of person submitting pro forma					
Full name					
Contact email					
Office address					
Postcode					

Reminder: Include a letter of authority providing consent from the individual to share the details the Home Office holds relating to age (where necessary).

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Home Office Age Dispute Progress Form

This page contains a copy of the Age Dispute Progress Form which the Home Office Age Dispute Resolution Team will use to confirm to local authorities, accommodation providers and Migrant Help whether the individual has had an initial decision on age and / or age assessment.

Home Office Age Dispute Progress Form		
Date of asylum claim		
Home Office recorded date of birth		
Initial decision on age been made	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Type of assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Merton Compliant	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Merton Compliant
If age assessed - confirm date		
If age assessed - confirm by whom	<input type="checkbox"/> Chief Immigration Officer	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority
Additional information		
(Why an initial decision on age was not carried out – for example, ‘did not claim to be a child on arrival / on arrival stated they were an adult’. If a Merton Compliant decision has been made, please state this in the notes section)		

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Process overview

A flowchart containing an overview of the information-sharing process to be followed by Accommodation Providers, Migrant Help, local authorities (and voluntary sector organisations) when they encounter an individual placed in adult accommodation who claims to be a child, see: Overview of age concern referrals process.

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Version control

Official – sensitive: start of section

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The information on this page has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: end of section

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