

Young People's Guide to Age Assessments

Written by young people
who have been age assessed



Greater Manchester
IMMIGRATION AID UNIT




THE NATION'S REFUGEE CHARITY



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Who are we?



We are a group of young people with experience of age assessments – called the **Youth Support Collective**. We want you to know that there are people who can help you with this and that you are not alone.

We are from all over the world: Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and more. We have written this guide together.

We have been in your situation: we have been confused like you, we have felt lost like you, we have been scared like you. But we have found help, and now we want to provide support for young people like us.

What is an age assessment?

When you arrive in the UK, the Government has to decide how old you are. Your age - whether you are older or younger than 18 - decides who should be helping you and what kind of accommodation you need.

Sometimes this process is easy. However, often people arrive in the UK without any papers showing their age. Sometimes they have papers but professionals think they are not real.

If there are questions around someone's age often there will be an age assessment. The purpose is to give someone a "date of birth" that will be used while they are in the UK.

There are lots of different kinds of age assessments. Some are very short, some are longer. Some happen in adult accommodation (like hotels), some happen from children's accommodation. Keep reading to find out more.



Why is it important?

An age assessment will decide if you are treated as an adult (over 18) or child (under 18) in the UK. If you are a child, you will be supported by social workers, if you are an adult, you will be given accommodation by the Home Office instead and you will get less support.

What about my asylum claim?

It is normal to be worried about whether your age assessment will affect your asylum claim. Although they are separate processes, the age assessment can affect your asylum claim - it can sometimes make the asylum claim take longer for example. Everyone's circumstances are different so it's really important that you speak to a solicitor and/or a charity about this so they can tell you how it might impact your case.

“If you are having an age assessment it is not your fault. You didn't do anything wrong”

Key Words

There are many confusing words in the area of age assessments! Please come back to these pages if there is a word you don't understand in this guide.

Section 1: The Law

Appeal - If you think the decision about your age is wrong, you can ask for it to be checked again. This is called an appeal, and a lawyer can help with this.

Judge - The person who makes the decisions in a court – they will make the decision if you appeal your age assessment.

Home Office - A part of the UK Government that makes decisions about who can stay in the UK. Lots of people work for the Home Office – like guards at the UK Border, or the people who interview you for your asylum claim.

Solicitor - a lawyer. You might meet an Asylum solicitor, who helps you with your asylum claim, or a Community care solicitor, who can help with your age assessment. Not all solicitors do the same things.

Section 2: Assessment

Brief Enquiry - Also called a “short form assessment”, this is when social workers come to see you and make a quick decision on your age OR decide whether they need to do a longer age assessment. Most brief enquiries happen in adult accommodation, like hotels.

“Full” or “Merton” age assessment - This is a longer age assessment which has to follow rules like giving access to an interpreter, and others. Ask your lawyer or charity worker for more information about this.

Interpreter - A person who translates your words to English and other people's words from English to your language so you can understand them.



Key Words

Section 3: Social services

Children's accommodation – this is where young people live if they are looked after by Children's services. It might be a shared house, or living with a family (foster care), or something else.

Children's Services - A team in the Local Authority who work to keep children safe – including social workers.

Keyworker – Someone who supports you if you are living in Children's accommodation.

Local Authority – This is the Local Government or Council that employs social workers and is responsible for one area. For example, if you are living in a hotel in Rotherham, your Local Authority is Rotherham Council.

Social Worker - A person who works for the Local Government (sometimes called "Council") and makes sure that children are taken care of. E.g. "Jane is a social worker for Camden Council".



Who is who in the age assessment?

Age assessing social workers

There should be two social workers in the age assessment. They might be different to the social worker who looks after you (if you have one).

They are there to ask questions in the age assessment and decide if they think you are a child (under 18 years old).



Interpreter

The interpreter is there to tell you what the social worker has asked in English and then translate what you have said in your language. They should not add anything that you have not said.

They should explain things clearly and in simple words.

If you do not understand the interpreter, it is important to say something. You could say in English “we need to stop”.



Appropriate Adult

The Appropriate Adult should be independent from the social workers.

Not every age assessment will have an Appropriate Adult but you can always ask for one.

They are there to explain things and speak up if you need anything – a break, water, to go to the toilet or if they feel you are not being treated properly.



Who else might you meet?

There can be lots of different people involved in your case - it can be confusing! Here are some of them...

Charity worker

In the UK there are some charities that help young people with age assessments. They are independent, this means separate from the Home Office or Local Authorities.

They might be able to help you find a solicitor, if you don't have one.

Go to Page 19-20 to find a Charity to help you!



Immigration solicitor (legal representative)

This person will help you with your application to stay in the UK.

They usually cannot help you with an age assessment, for this you need a different kind of solicitor, one that works in Public Law/Community Care. However, you can ask them and see what they say.

They will ask you questions about your life and reasons for leaving your country so they can explain this to the Home Office. You should have an interpreter in these appointments if you need one and can have an adult you trust with you.

If you are feeling worried or don't understand everything about your case you should ask them.

Public Law/Community Care solicitor

As well as your immigration solicitor, you might have another solicitor who can help you if your age is not accepted - this guide will explain more about what happens in this situation.



If you are in Children's accommodation...

Your social worker

This is the person from the local authority who supports you in the UK (if you are under 18). They should ask you what you need and meet with you regularly to make sure everything is okay.

You should contact your social worker if you have any problems or worries.

Your social worker might ask for an age assessment if they think you are older or younger than you say you are. They should speak with you about this and explain what this means

Foster carer or accommodation staff (key workers)

You may be looked after in a family or in accommodation shared with other young people and staff who either stay there or visit.

You should feel safe and happy where you are living. These people are there to look after you, or help you look after yourself. If you need help with learning how to cook, clean or shop you should ask them.

If you are in Adult accommodation

Accommodation staff - Hotel Manager - Hotel reception staff

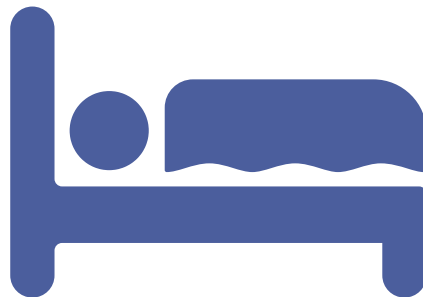
There are people working in the hotel - they have a responsibility to report that you are a child living in adult accommodation if you tell them.

You can also ask if you can be moved to a single room, away from adults.

You should tell the hotel staff as soon as possible that you are a child, and ask them what they will do next.

Charity workers

Sometimes charities visit adult accommodation like hotels. They might organise activities in the hotel, or help people register with a GP for example.



What happens in an age assessment?



Every age assessment will be different, but there should be two social workers, an interpreter (if needed) and an Appropriate Adult. The social workers will meet with you, in person, and ask you questions about your life and your family to decide if they accept your age or not.

Our experiences...

“Some people came to the hotel and asked all about my age. I didn’t know what was happening, I thought it was my asylum interview.”

“I met someone in a police station, for about one hour with a telephone interpreter. They told me I was an adult. I went to live in adult accommodation. After this I spoke with a solicitor and then we had three more meetings in a hotel about my age.. they still don’t believe me.”

“I had three meetings in the social workers office, for about 2-3 hours each. They asked if I needed breaks. The last one was short, when they told me they believed my age.”

“I had one meeting in Liverpool, it lasted more than 4 hours with 1 break. They did not believe my age.”



Your experience...



If you like, you can use this space to write about what happened to you. Remember, when things go wrong it is not your fault.

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How am I looking after myself in the UK

If I know anyone in the UK

About my family and childhood

About my village and my religion

What questions did they ask us?

Education and work in my country

My journey to the UK and how long it took

If I ever had any documents

How do I know I am the age that I say?



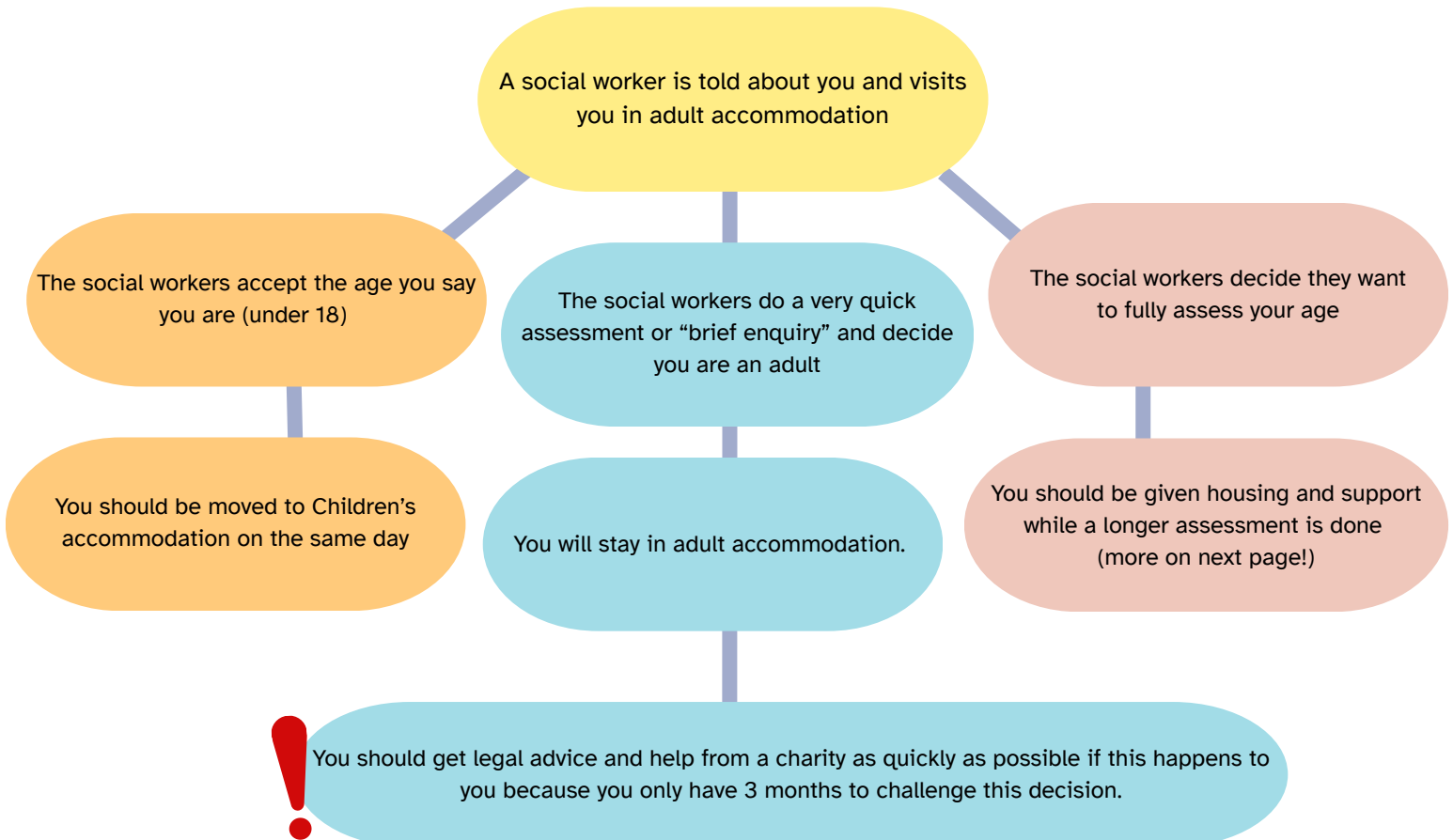
The Home Office age assessment process

When you get to the **UK Border** and tell the Home Office that you are a child (under 18), one of three things can happen:

1. The Home Office believe that you are a child, this means you go straight to Children's Services and (usually) there are no more questions about your age.
2. The Home Office think that you might be a child, but they are not sure. This means you go straight to Children's Services but there will be an age assessment some time later (look at the next page!).
3. The Home Office think that you are definitely not a child (that you are older than 18). This means that you will go straight to adult accommodation, like a hotel, with adults.

If you are in Group 3, living in adult accommodation, and you want to have your correct age recognised then you should **ask to see a social worker for an age assessment**.

» Remember to go to **“How to get help”** on Page 19 if you are in this situation right now «



Local Authority age assessment process

This is what should happen when you are in Local Authority care (not a hotel) but the Local Authority want to do an age assessment. A Local Authority age assessment is often a lot longer than ones done in a hotel, and they can last several days.

Is an age assessment needed?

There should be a reason to doubt your age, not every young person should be age assessed. You can ask your social worker why they are assessing your age. It is good to keep a note of what they say!

Local Authority decide to do an age assessment

Your age is accepted - you continue to be looked after as a child

Your age is not accepted.

You may be moved into adult accommodation but you should not be made homeless

You should get legal advice and help from a charity as quickly as possible if this happens to you because you **only have 3 months to challenge this decision.** !

National Age Assessment Board (NAAB)

Sometimes the social workers who meet you to talk about your age won't work with your social worker, they will work for the **Home Office** in somewhere called the NAAB.

You have the same rights with these social workers and should be treated kindly and fairly.

They are not there to decide your asylum claim. It is their job to talk to you about your age.

They will be able to talk to other people in the Home Office about your age, for example the border force people you met when you first arrived in the UK. They might be able to look at documents or other applications you made to the Home Office or to other countries.

Your Rights

Age Assessments can be scary, but **you have rights!**
Rights are things that the law says should happen - they are there to protect YOU

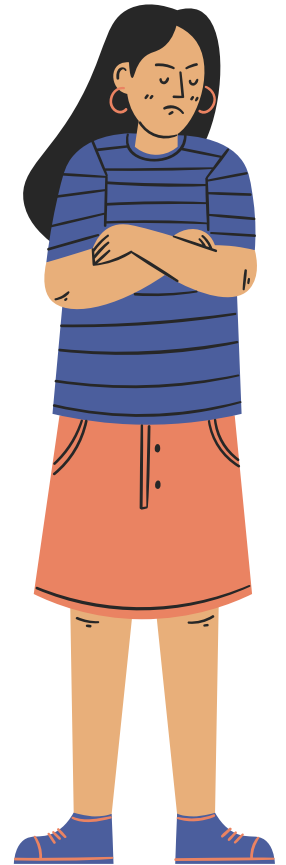
- You can say if you find something hard to talk about. You can ask to move on to a different question if you are upset or it is making you stressed.
- You have the right to regular breaks and you can ask for these.
- You have the right to ask for an Appropriate Adult – if you are told you cannot have one then you can ask why and keep a note of the response.
- If you don't understand the question, it's ok to ask them to explain it again or differently.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, it's ok to say I don't know. It's important not to guess an answer.
- You have the right to an interpreter that you understand. If you don't understand your interpreter, or you have not been given one, you should say something as soon as possible.
- People working with you will be asked what they think about your age. You have the right to know what they have said. You can ask people who support you to write you a letter if you want them to.
- The social workers might ask to look at your phone. You do not have to give it to them and you can ask why they want to see it. However, they might think you are hiding something or lying about something if you don't agree. You have the right to privacy.



If you don't know the answer to a question you can say "I don't know"

Your Rights continued

- The social workers might ask to look at your social media to see what you have posted. They might ask you for your passwords, you have a right to privacy and can say no, but they might think you are hiding something from them.
- The social workers might ask to take a photograph of you. Age assessments should not only be about how you look. If you feel uncomfortable having your photo taken you can say this and that you don't want it.
- You have the right for the sessions to be held somewhere private, where you feel comfortable.



Challenging an age assessment - the legal process

You need to **find a solicitor** if the social workers don't accept your age - often finding a charity to help you find one is the best plan.

The solicitor will:

- Check if the assessment has been carried out properly
- Check if you can challenge the decision
- Ask if there is any evidence you could get to help support your case e.g. a letter from college, your foster carer or organisation supporting you

Solicitor sends a "letter before action" to the local authority challenging their decision about your age

The social workers accept your age.
They will look after you as a child

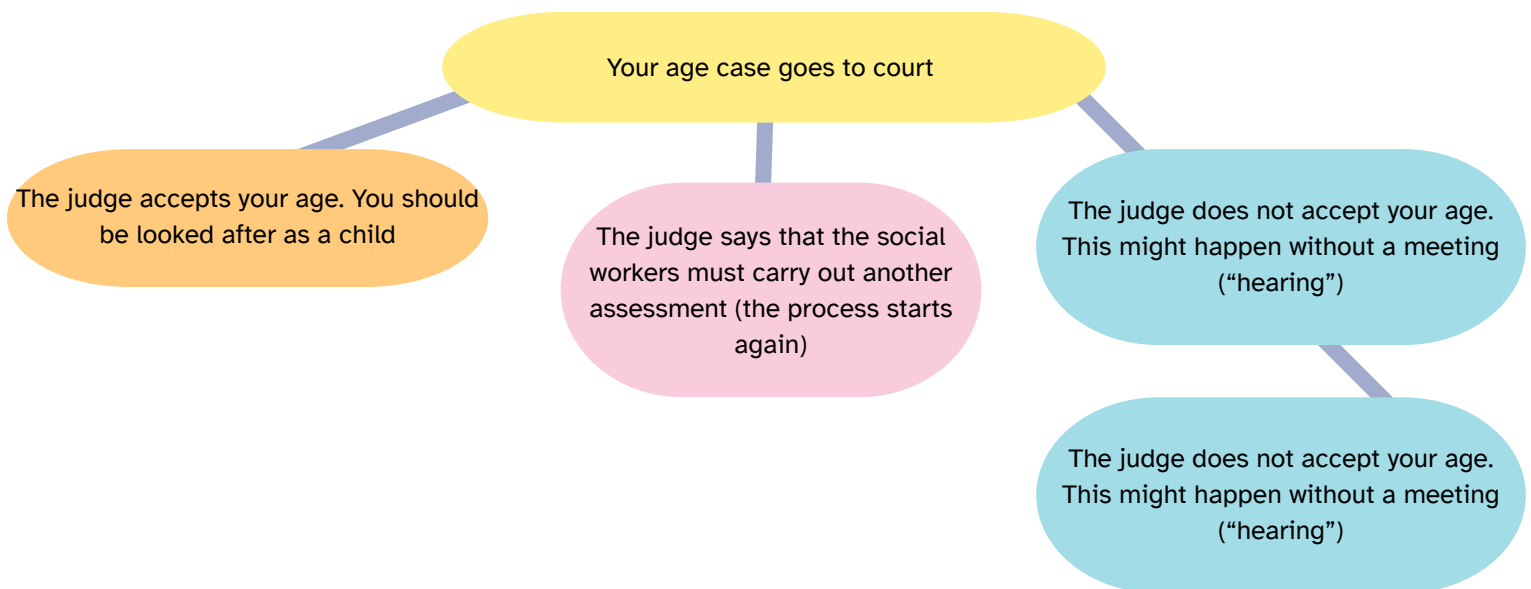
The social workers carry out
another assessment

Social workers refuse to accept your age - your solicitor will explain what happens next

Challenging an age assessment - in court

Your solicitor will advise you whether you should take your case to court, and you can see below what the outcomes can be. There are a few important things to know about going to court:

- It can take a very long time to get a decision from the court
- You will need to prepare a written statement with your solicitor
- You may need to speak to the judge to give evidence in court



If your age wasn't accepted...

Try not to worry too much even though you may feel scared. The most important this is to speak to someone as soon as possible so that you can try to get your age accepted.

- Tell your immigration solicitor, they might be able to help you.
- Contact a Public law/Community care solicitor
- Speak to your housing manager if you are in adult accommodation
- Try to find a charity that can help you

Go to **“How to get Help” on page 19** if you don't already have support!

Our advice to you..

Believe in yourself, even if you are put under pressure.

Make sure you know who everyone is in the room and what their role is.

Don't feel rushed to answer questions. Sometimes you will be asked questions many times and it is confusing, but try not to get too frustrated.

It can feel awful at the time and sometimes like you are being treated like a criminal, but other people have been through this, felt like this and survived it.

You may get asked questions you're not expecting, if you don't know the answer just say "I don't know" - it can cause problems later if you guess.

Sometimes people might give you advice about what to say or what not to say, but it is really important to answer honestly about your situation. Social workers will check the information you share and if you say something wrong it can cause a problem.

Speak with adults you can trust, especially if you're feeling stressed.

If you don't understand the interpreter don't be too scared to say something. It is better to say something, or it may cause problems later.



Taking care of yourself

Going through an age assessment can be very stressful. It can go on for a long time so it's very important that you find ways to look after your health if you can.

These are some of the things that helped us:

“Playing football with people I met at a charity where I learn English”



“Doing sport and being outside”



“Speaking with a friend who was going through the same thing”

“Finding information about the age assessment and meeting people in my community”

“You feel relieved and good when you learn English which helps understanding”



“Going to college and meeting new friends - it makes you feel relaxed when you meet people from your country”

How to get help

Remember you only have 3 months to challenge an age assessment - so try to act quickly!

Solicitors

Can legally challenge your age assessment and get your correct age recognised
Independent of the Home Office
Free help (need to show information to qualify)

Charities

Free help (don't need to show anything)
May be able to:
Find a doctor for you
Find a solicitor to help with your age assessment
Help you learn English
Help you meet other young people
Independent of the Home Office

Finding a solicitor

Go to this website: <https://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/> - You will need to search for "Community care" solicitors.

What should I say when I write to them?

You can keep it simple: "I need help with an age assessment" - but also include your name, your age, where you are staying, when and where the assessment happened, and the languages you speak.

Emailing or using WhatsApp might be better if you are still learning English - if you don't have a phone or a way to use email, ask your accommodation if you can use a computer/phone.

Important information about working with solicitors

- It is important to keep any papers that social workers give you and to share them with your solicitor.
- You should not have to pay for a solicitor. They will need to see things to be able to help you for free, such as the letter from the Home Office to say that you are getting accommodation and support from them (sometimes called the section 98 or section 95 letter). They will also need information about money, which they will ask you about.
- If the solicitor can help you to try and change the decision of the age assessment, they will meet with you to explain what will happen.
- Solicitors and charities are very busy, you can contact more than one person at once to try and get help. However, you should only start working with one solicitor AND one charity - not lots of different ones.
- Unfortunately it can take a very long time to change the decision on age. It is important to be honest about how you are feeling in your accommodation so that the solicitor can try to help you, but it will probably take some time to get you to a safer place.

Numbers for emergencies

If you feel very unsafe, or like you might hurt yourself or somebody else, please let your accommodation staff know as soon as possible and consider contacting:

NHS - UK health service.

Call **111** and choose option 2 if you need urgent mental health help

Call **999** if you think your life or someone else's life is in danger

Papyrus (interpreters available) Call: **0800 068 4141** / Text: **88247** / pat@papyrus-uk.org



Charity contact list

In **bold** you will see countries in the UK and cities - look for where you are at the moment and contact the charities that work in your area:

National services (anywhere in UK)

Care for Calais: WhatsApp - message only - +44 7519 773268

Humans For Rights Network: Info@humansforrightsnetwork.com / WhatsApp +447506663089

You can also try the British Red Cross search tool: [Find a refugee service near you](#) | [British Red Cross](#)

Wales

TGP Cymru: 029 2039 6974 / admin@tgpcymru.org.uk

Scotland

British Red Cross - Glasgow: [+447590 445367](tel:+447590445367) (Call or WhatsApp) / refugeesupportglasgow@redcross.org.uk

London

Refugee Council: age.disputes@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Young Roots: london@youngroots.org.uk 020 8684 9140

Refugee Youth Service: referrals@refugeeyouthservice.org

British Red Cross Young Refugee Service: LondonYRS@redcross.org.uk

Oxford

Asylum Welcome: welcome@asylum-welcome.org

Together with Migrant Children: casework@togethermigrantchildren.org.uk / 01865 528 658

Bristol

Bristol Refugee Rights: advice@bristolrefugeerights.org Call / Text / WhatsApp +447526 352 353

Brighton

Hummingbird Collective: mel@hummingbirdproject.org.uk / enquiries@hummingbirdproject.org.uk

Kent

Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN): 01227 634320 / FAWZIA@KRAN.ORG.UK Referral form: [Casework Referral Form](#)

Leeds

PAFRAS: info@pafra.org.uk

Sheffield

Chilypep: [Youth Welfare Project - Referral form - Chilypep](#) +447564583572

Manchester and Stockport

Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit: 0161 740 7722 / info@gmiau.org

Stockport Race Equality Partnership: email@srep.co.uk +447383 014565 or +447383 014553

Liverpool

British Red Cross (Liverpool): ramp@redcross.org.uk

Birmingham

Birch: [Contact](#) | BIRCH_joy@birchnetwork.org

Brushstrokes Sandwell: info@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk / 0121 565 2234

Nottingham

Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum: info@nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk or call 01159601230 Monday to Thursday (10am and 3pm)

Derby

Derby Refugee Advice Centre: drac2@hotmail.co.uk / 01332 347497

Leicester

British Red Cross (Leicester): RSLeicester@redcross.org.uk

[Leicester City of Sanctuary](#)