

Advanced Immigration Glossary of Key Terms (April 2026)

The **Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility Contract (AIRE)** is a legally binding agreement between the UK Home Office and Migrant Help that establishes a single, national, and independent point of contact for people seeking asylum to receive information, advice, and assistance navigating the asylum support system, and to report issues or complaints about accommodation, support payments, or other services.

Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE) is the status attributed to a person seeking asylum who has had their claim refused by the Home Office and has no further appeals available (e.g., because an appeal was dismissed, missed a deadline, or no right of appeal was given).

An **Application Registration Card (ARC)** is a credit card-sized plastic card issued by the Home Office to individuals who have claimed asylum (and their dependants) while their application is pending. The ARC certifies that the holder is an asylum claimant and can remain in the UK while the claim is being decided. It contains details of nationality, name, age (including whether age is disputed), and right to work.

The **Asylum Accommodation and Support Contracts (AASC)** are a set of legally binding agreements between the UK Home Office and three private companies (Serco, Mears, and Clearsprings Ready Homes) that govern the provision of accommodation, transport, and support services to people seeking asylum in the UK.

Asylum dispersal is the UK government process by which destitute asylum seekers are moved from initial accommodation (e.g., hostels or hotels) to longer-term housing in local authority areas across the UK, typically in flats or houses in the private rented sector procured by Home Office contractors. Mears is contracted in the North East of Scotland to provide this service.

An **Asylum Seeker** (we prefer the term '*person seeking asylum*') is a person who has made a claim for international protection (asylum) under the UN Refugee Convention 1951 and is waiting for a final decision from the Home Office or courts. Not every asylum seeker is ultimately recognised as a refugee.

Asylum Support is the system of accommodation and financial assistance provided by the UK Home Office to people seeking asylum who would otherwise be destitute while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. It also includes access to free healthcare, education for children, and other essential provisions.

Destitution is a state of extreme poverty where a person cannot afford essentials such as food, shelter, heating, and sanitation. Under UK asylum law (Immigration and Asylum Act 1999), a person is legally destitute if they do not have adequate accommodation or any means of obtaining it (whether or not other essential living needs are met) or have accommodation but cannot meet other essential living needs.

An **Electronic Visa (e-Visa)** is a digital online record of a person's identity, immigration status (e.g., visa type or indefinite leave to remain), and any conditions attached (e.g., permission to work or study). An eVisa is accessed via a free UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) online account and can be used to generate share codes to prove immigration status to employers, landlords, and other organisations. As of 2025, e-visas have replaced physical immigration documents such as biometric residence permits/cards.

Entry clearance is the official term for a visa (or an entry certificate for non-visa nationals) granted to a person applying from outside the UK. Entry clearance is mandatory for visa nationals and for anyone seeking to enter for more than six months or for purposes such as work, study, family reunion, or settlement. Non-visa nationals visiting for six months or less generally do not need entry clearance, though most will require an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA). Entry clearance does not guarantee entry; the ultimate authority to admit rests with the Immigration Officer at the port of entry.

The **EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)** is a free post-Brexit scheme for EU, Swiss, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Liechtenstein nationals and their family members to remain in the UK. The scheme grants successful applicants either:

- Settled status (after 5 years' continuous residence), which is permanent residence with no time limit, access to benefits, healthcare, education, and employment.
- Pre-settled status (after less than 5 years, with residence by 31 December 2020) which is 5-year limited leave, convertible to settled status automatically or by application once 5 years' residence is reached.

The **European Convention on Human Rights** is an international human rights treaty drafted in 1950 by the Council of Europe (a 46-member organisation separate from the EU) to protect fundamental rights and freedoms. It guarantees rights including the right to life (Article 2), prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3), and the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8). The UK incorporated the ECHR into domestic law through the Human Rights Act 1998, allowing rights to be enforced in UK courts. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) enforces the Convention.

The **Home Office (HO)** is the lead government department responsible for securing the UK border and controlling immigration, as well as crime, counter-terrorism, and passports. Its immigration functions are delivered through three directorates: UK Visas and Immigration (handles visa and asylum applications), Border Force (secures ports and borders), and Immigration Enforcement (enforces immigration laws within the UK, including investigating non-compliance and removals).

A **Human Rights Assessment (HRA)** is an assessment local authorities must undertake under Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 for certain individuals who are appeal rights exhausted, have no recourse to public funds, and are destitute, at risk of homelessness, or have care needs (including care leavers). It determines whether discontinuing social services support would breach the person's human rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (particularly Article 3)

Humanitarian protection (HP) is a form of international protection granted to an asylum seeker who does not meet the criteria for refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention but faces a real risk of serious harm if returned to their country of origin. Serious harm includes the death penalty or execution, unlawful killing, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, or a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life due to indiscriminate violence in armed conflict.

Immigration bail is a legal status that allows a person who is detained, or at risk of detention, by the Home Office on immigration grounds to be released into the community while their immigration case is ongoing. Breach of bail conditions is a criminal offence and can lead to prosecution, fines, imprisonment, a return to detention, or negative consequences for future immigration applications.

The **Immigration Advice Authority (IAA)** is the government body responsible for regulating immigration advisers, enforcing standards, and investigating complaints in the UK. It prosecutes unregulated advisers who provide illegal immigration advice

Immigration control is the UK's legal framework that determines who requires permission (leave) to enter or remain in the UK. A person is subject to immigration control if they require leave to enter or remain and do not have an automatic right of abode. A person who requires leave but does not have it is an illegal entrant or overstayer.

The **Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)** is a mandatory fee that most applicants for temporary leave to remain in the UK (including work, study, and family visas) must pay as part of their immigration application. The IHS allows the holder to access state-provided NHS healthcare free of charge from the date their visa starts.

Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) (also known as *settled status*) is a type of open-ended immigration permission granted to someone already in the UK, allowing them to stay for an unlimited duration, with no time limit on their stay, and with no conditions attached, meaning they may work and access public funds (unless granted as an adult dependent relative with less than five years' residence). ILR is typically granted after periods of limited leave totaling five or ten years. It can be revoked if the person commits a serious crime or is lost if they leave the UK and remain outside for 2 years or more.

Irregular migration is the movement of people outside the laws or international agreements governing entry and exit from a state. The term is preferred over "illegal migration" and is used by the Home Office and the EU. A person can become an irregular migrant in the UK by entering without authorisation, overstaying a visa or remaining after exhausting asylum appeals, Irregular migrants are not permitted to

work, claim benefits, rent accommodation, or access most public services. Irregular migration does not relieve states of their obligation to provide protection.

Leave outside the rules (LOTR) is a discretionary grant of permission to stay in the UK for a person who does not meet the requirements of the Immigration Rules. LOTR is granted only in exceptional, compelling, compassionate grounds where refusal would result in unjustifiably harsh consequences for the applicant or their family, but where refusal would not necessarily breach the European Convention on Human Rights.

Legal aid is financial help towards legal costs for those who cannot afford to pay for a solicitor themselves. In Scotland, legal aid is administered by the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) and can only be applied for through a solicitor who does legal aid work, and it covers only certain services. Applicants must usually demonstrate that they cannot afford legal costs and that their case is serious. Legal aid is not restricted by nationality or residence status; anyone can apply if the case falls under Scottish law. Depending on financial circumstances and case type, applicants may pay nothing, make a contribution, or repay costs later.

Limited Leave to Remain (LLR) is a temporary, time-limited immigration permission to stay in the UK for a specified period. LLR is subject to conditions that vary depending on the purpose of the application (e.g., work, study, or joining a partner). These conditions may include restrictions on employment and typically a 'no recourse public funds' condition barring access to certain social benefits. The length of leave and specific conditions depend on the visa category.

The **National Referral Mechanism (NRM)** is the UK's framework for identifying and supporting potential victims of modern slavery (including human trafficking, slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour). First responder organisations (such as police, local authorities, the Salvation Army, Migrant Help, and Barnardo's) submit online referrals. Adults must give informed consent to enter the NRM. Children cannot consent to being trafficked and do not need to consent to referral; they must receive safeguarding support from local authorities. Positive decisions result in access to specialist support including accommodation, legal advice, and practical help.

No recourse to public funds (NRPF) is an immigration condition, meaning the affected person cannot access 'public funds', including most welfare benefits (e.g., Universal Credit), local authority housing, and homelessness assistance. It applies to those who are "subject to immigration control" under section 115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Public funds are a [defined list](#) of welfare benefits, local authority homelessness assistance, and social housing allocations that people with a No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition cannot access. The term has a specific meaning in immigration law and does not include all services funded by public money.

A Refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. Under the 1951 Convention, a refugee is defined as any 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 their country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail themselves of its protection.

The **Right of Abode** is a status that means a person is entirely free of immigration control, allowing them to live and work in the UK without restrictions or a visa. There is no limit on how long they can stay in the country. All British citizens automatically have the right of abode.

The **Right to Reside** is the permission to live and work in the UK without any immigration restrictions (no visa or time limit required). Individuals obtain the right to reside through different immigration permissions; for example, indefinite leave to remain (ILR) or settled status through the EU settlement scheme (EUSS).

The **right to Work** is legal permission to take up employment in the UK. Non-British/Irish citizens can prove their right to work either by obtaining a share code online through a UKVI account. Employers must check the right to work before employment begins. Share codes are valid for 90 days. Asylum seekers generally do not have the right to work unless their ARC states "work permitted." Those applying to extend their leave before it expires retain the right to work while the application is pending via a certificate of application.

A **Safe third country** is a country in which an asylum seeker could have had, or has, access to an effective asylum regime, or where they previously made an application for international protection that has not yet been determined. The concept is typically applied when the individual has some connection to that country, such as having stayed there before arriving in the country where they are applying for asylum. In the UK, an asylum claim may not be considered if the applicant travelled through or has a connection to a safe third country where they could have claimed asylum.

Section 3C leave is an extension of a person's existing immigration leave under section 3C of the Immigration Act 1971, which prevents them from becoming an overstayer while awaiting a decision on an in-time application to extend or vary their leave. It applies when a person applies to extend their leave before their previous leave expires, that leave expires, and they are waiting for a decision. If the application is refused, section 3C leave continues while any in-time appeal or administrative review is pending. The same conditions attached to the previous leave (e.g., permission to work, access to public funds) continue during section 3C leave, except where the application has been refused, and the person is appealing, in which case they become subject to immigration control and lose recourse to public funds.

Sponsorship is a role in which a person or organisation supports a visa applicant's immigration application to enter the UK. Employers and universities sponsor workers and students, respectively, holding a sponsor license and issuing certificates of sponsorship. Family members (e.g., British citizens or settled persons) sponsor relatives seeking to join them in the UK, typically partners, children under 18, or,

in limited cases, adult dependent relatives. Sponsors must meet financial requirements (e.g., minimum income threshold) and provide accommodation.

An **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC)** is a person under 18 years old who is applying for asylum in their own right and is separated from both parents and not being cared for by an adult who has the responsibility to do so.

The **Voluntary Returns Service (VRS)** is a Home Office scheme that provides funded assistance to people in the UK who do not have permission to remain and wish to return voluntarily to their home country. Assistance can include help obtaining travel documents, paying for travel tickets, and, in some cases, additional financial support of up to £3,000 to help with reintegration (e.g., finding housing, employment, or starting a business). Eligibility includes those with no immigration permission, those who have been refused asylum, and those with a pending application they intend to withdraw. A person who undertakes a voluntary return will usually be subject to a re-entry ban.

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) is the Home Office division responsible for deciding who has the right to visit, study, work, and stay in the UK. It manages applications for visas, asylum, British citizenship, sponsor licenses for employers and educational institutions, and appeals from unsuccessful applicants.

A **Zambrano carer** is a person from a non-EEA country whose residence in the UK is required to enable a British citizen child or dependent adult to continue living in the UK (or elsewhere in the EEA). To qualify, the carer must be the primary carer of a British citizen residing in the UK, and the British citizen would be unable to reside in the UK, EEA, or Switzerland if the carer left. Those with pre-settled or settled status under EUSS may have access to housing, benefits, and the right to work. The Zambrano route to EUSS closed to new applications on 8 August 2023.