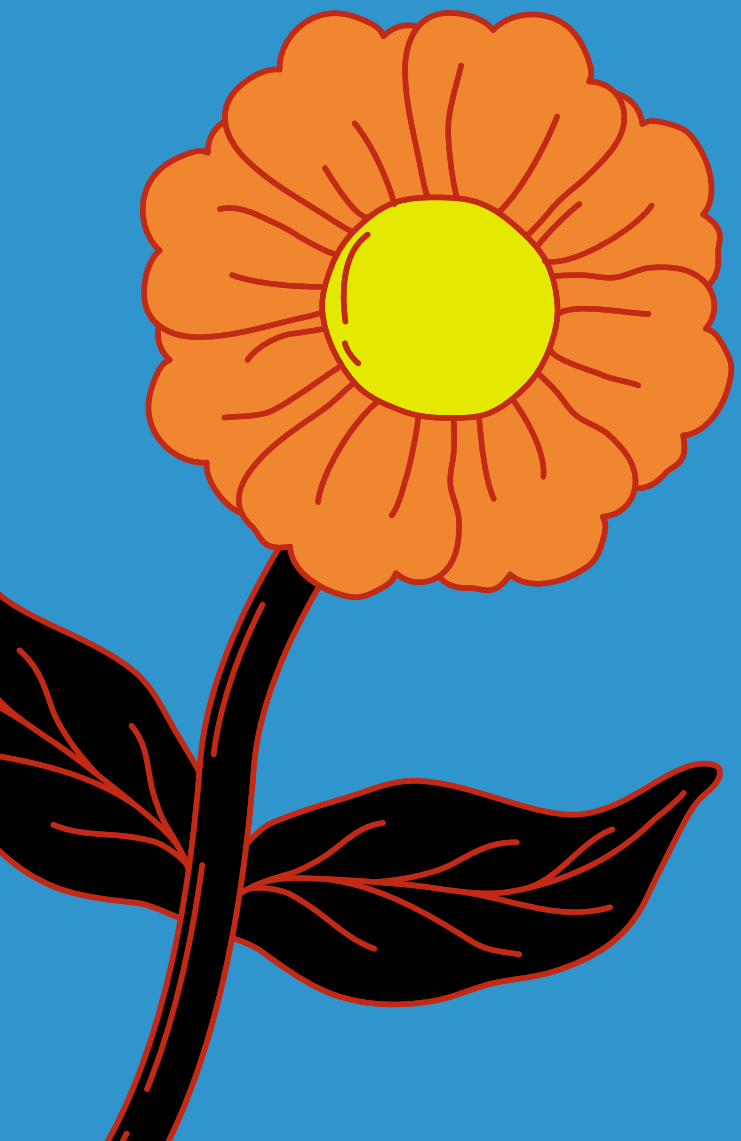
A GUIDE TO LIVING IN THE UK UNDOCUMENTED



Knowledge
+ Information
= Power

HMSC
HARINGEY MIGRANT SUPPORT CENTRE

Introduction

Living in the UK without immigration status can be stressful and difficult, but you are not alone.

This guide offers practical information to help keep you safe, understand your rights, and find the right support.

It will help you to:

1. Know what services you can safely access, and where you need to be more careful.
2. Understand your basic rights and protections.
3. Prepare for the future, including immigration applications.
4. Connect with organisations that can support you.

You don't need to read everything at once; see the **contents page** to find the information most relevant to you.

Please feel free to share this guide with trusted friends, helpers or advisers.

This guide is primarily for people living undocumented in the UK. For example, one of the following situations might apply to you:

- **Refused asylum seeker:** Your asylum application has been refused, and no other immigration application is pending with the Home Office.

- **Overstayer:** You have remained in the UK beyond the period you were legally permitted to.
- **Irregular entrant:** You entered the UK without going through normal immigration processes, and you have never had any contact with the Home Office or immigration authorities.

However, information in this guide may also be useful to people in other situations.

Please remember: This is a general guide. Immigration rules and policies change, and everyone's situation is different. Always seek reliable, expert advice from a trusted advisor or organisation to best understand your personal circumstances.

For a list of other organisations and tools, see the **Resources Directory** at the end of this guide. There are also more specific resources provided in each section. Please note that not all external advice will be relevant to undocumented people.

Research your options carefully and don't share personal information with organisations you do not trust.

About HMSC

What we do

We offer advice on immigration, welfare and housing, and have information about organisations that specialise in debt, family law, health services, domestic violence and other support.

Who we can help

We welcome people from all migrant groups regardless of their specific immigration status and we do not discriminate against any visitor on the basis of gender, sexual or gender identity, age, disability, ethnic origin, nationality or religion. Our services are aimed at those in most need and we can only help those who are on a very low income or destitute. We can only support people who live in London.

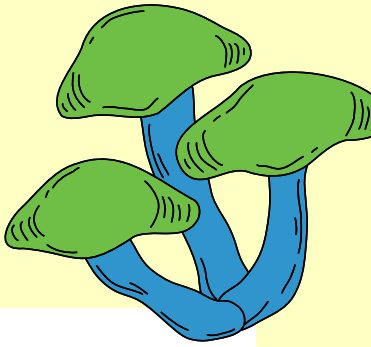
Contact details

New enquiries line: 020 4566 7412

For new visitors to HMSC. opens every Thursday at 10am and operates on a first-come, first-served basis.

We also run a community space twice a month where visitors can drop in to socialise, relax and eat a hot meal. We organise workshops with information for migrant communities, as well as creative and wellbeing activities.

Key terms



LTR (Leave to Remain)

Temporary permission to stay in the UK with certain conditions.

ILR (Indefinite Leave to Remain)

Also known as '**settlement**' or **'permanent residence'**. This allows people to live, work, and study in the UK for as long as they like. They can also apply for benefits and in due course British citizenship.

NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds)

Most undocumented people have No Recourse to Public Funds. They cannot apply for benefits and may have to pay for some healthcare. They can still access: free school meals, primary healthcare, food banks, amongst other things.

HO (Home Office)

The department of the UK government that deals with immigration.

Reporting

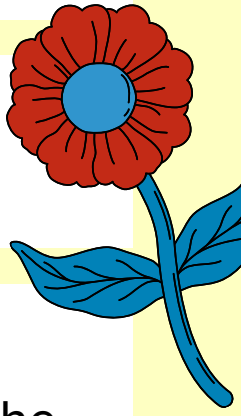
The requirement to go to regular appointments with the Home Office.

Detention

When the Home Office holds someone in an immigration removal centre (IRC).

IRC (Immigration removal centre)

Places where people are detained.



Removal

When the Home Office forces someone to leave the UK.

Deportation

When someone is removed from the UK after a criminal sentence.

NHS (National Health Service)

The public health care organisation that provides medical services to people in the UK.

GP (General Practitioner)

NHS primary care doctor. They are the first person to talk to about any non-urgent health issues.

NRM (National Referral Mechanism)

The system that identifies and supports victims of modern slavery.

Destitution

Not being able to afford basic necessities like food or shelter.

Homelessness

You don't have to be sleeping on the streets to be homeless. You are considered homeless if:

- You're rough sleeping
- You can only stay where you are on a very temporary basis
- You live with friends or family because you have nowhere else to go
- You don't have permission to live where you are



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Resources Directory

Navigating life in the UK

Even without immigration status, you still have rights and protections. This section explains what services you can access, where it's safe to go for help, and where you need to be more careful.

1.1 Accessing Healthcare

Where to go for advice	Health problem
GPs	Illnesses Managing chronic conditions
111 telephone line	Healthcare advice
Pharmacies	Common cold Flu symptoms Minor issues
URGENT A&E (Accident and Emergency)	Major emergencies
URGENT 999 telephone line	Major emergencies when you are not able to go to A&E or need an ambulance

Everyone living in the UK **can register with a GP.** You don't need proof of address or immigration status to register.

Registering with a GP **does not affect your immigration status.** NHS services are generally confidential and information is not routinely shared with the Home Office.

It is also possible to register with a GP if you are homeless (unless they are not accepting referrals). Go to a GP in the area nearest to where you've been staying recently.



It's a good idea to register with a GP even if you don't need treatment right now. It will help to protect your health and create useful evidence of your time in the UK for potential future immigration applications (see **section 3** for more information). Once you're registered, keep up with routine healthcare check-ups.



All patients are entitled to translation services at NHS appointments – ask for an interpreter if you need one. You may also bring along a friend or family member for support.

Need help registering?

- Call **Doctors of the World**: 0808 164 7686 (Tuesday – Thursday, 10am-12 midday).
- If you encounter problems registering with a GP, you can also take an 'Access Card' (link below) to assert your rights: **doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/gp-access-cards**
- NHS guide to registering with a GP: **assets.nhs.uk/prod/documents/how-to-register-with-a-gp-asylum-seekers-and-refugees.pdf**

Will I have to pay?

Type of treatment	Can I access it?	Cost
GPs	Yes, immediately	Free
A&E (Accident and Emergency)	Yes, immediately	Free
Urgent treatment (e.g. maternity care, chemotherapy, lifesaving surgery)	Yes, even if you cannot pay before treatment starts	You may be charged later
Non-urgent treatment	Yes, but you may have to pay before treatment starts	You may have to pay before

You generally don't pay for NHS treatment if you are:

1. An **asylum seeker** receiving support from the Home Office.
2. A survivor of **trafficking** or **domestic violence** (in some cases).
3. A person who needs treatment for **some infectious diseases** (e.g. TB, STIs).

This is a non-exhaustive list. There are other exemptions, and you may only be invoiced or billed for treatment if none of these apply to you.

If you do receive an invoice or bill, find out if exemptions apply before beginning repayments. Even if repayments have begun, your NHS trust might not realise you are exempt.

Know Your Rights

The NHS must **never refuse anyone urgent treatment** because of their immigration status. Urgent means treatment that:

- saves a life
- stops a condition from becoming life-threatening
- stops serious, permanent damage

It is illegal for the NHS to deny you emergency care.

NHS Debt

Don't avoid medical care because you are worried about NHS debt. It is something that can be dealt with and is not something that should stop you seeking necessary treatment.

However, unpaid NHS debt may be flagged by the NHS Trust / hospital and **could appear in future Home Office checks.** This may affect future immigration applications.

Do:

- Open all letters you receive from the NHS.
- Keep track of NHS debts and bills, even if you can't pay them now. Many people find this stressful and difficult, but keeping records can make it easier to get advice and resolve problems later on.
- Contact Citizens Advice (**citizensadvice.org.uk**) for free help to navigate and explain your situation to the NHS.

Will NHS debts affect immigration applications?

NHS debt does not automatically prevent someone from getting leave to remain in the UK in the future. If you do have NHS debt, it's important to keep all letters and communications you receive about it.

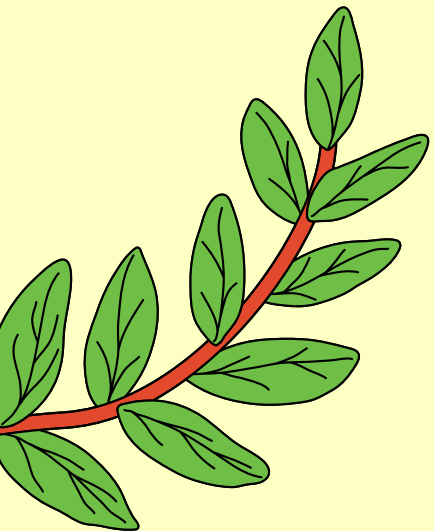
You should also discuss it with your immigration advisor if you plan to make an application to the Home Office so they can help you to understand how it might impact on your case. They may also be able to advise you on repayment plans or steps to get the debt written off.

See **section 3.4** below for more information on debt.

Prescriptions

Prescriptions are free (whatever your status) if you are:

1. Under 16, or under 19 in full-time education (college, university)
2. Over 60
3. Pregnant or recently had a baby (with a valid maternity exemption certificate. Speak to your GP or midwife)
4. Have certain medical conditions (with a valid medical exemption certificate. Speak to your GP or doctor)



NHS Low Income Scheme

If you are living on a low income, you could be able to access support through the NHS Low Income Scheme and receive an HC2 (full help) or HC3 (partial help) certificate. You may be able to get support with the cost of:

- prescriptions
- dental treatment
- glasses and sight tests
- travel to NHS appointments

To apply, you will need to fill out an HC1 form. See the link below for more information and to apply.

nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme

Maternity Care

If you are pregnant, the NHS usually expects that you will self-refer by 10 weeks. You can do this online (link below). However, **undocumented migrants may be charged for maternity care**. Even if you are charged, maternity care should never be denied.

nhs.uk/nhs-services/refer-yourself-for-nhs-pregnancy-care

All pregnant women are entitled to free prescriptions and dental care throughout their pregnancy and for 12 months after, regardless of their immigration status. Speak to your midwife or doctor about getting a **Maternity Exemption Certificate.**

Community Health Services

You can also access community services like the following:

- Midwives
- Physiotherapy
- Occupational Healthcare
- Health visitor support for babies and young kids

These services are for **everyone**, regardless of your status.



Ask your GP how to access these services — you do not need to share immigration details.

Doctors of the World	Medical advice and help with GP registration	0808 164 7686 (Tue–Thu 10AM – 12 midday) **doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/contact-us**
Patients Not Passports	A helpful toolkit to navigate NHS charges	**patientsnotpassports.co.uk/nhs-charging-toolkit**
Migrants Rights Network	Know Your Rights guide – health	**migrantsrights.org.uk/resources/know-your-rights/health/**

1.2 Education

Education is a **right** for all children in the UK – even if they don't have immigration status.

Children aged 5–16

In England, education is **compulsory** for all children between 5 and 16. Your council has a legal duty to make sure every child can go to school, even if they are undocumented.



When applying for a school place, you do not have to show immigration documents. If a school does ask for these, get advice from HMSC or Citizens Advice.

Young people aged 16–18

If you or your children are between 16 and 18, you can access further education (FE) courses like:

- A-levels
- NVQs
- Apprenticeships

You can normally study at a publicly funded college if you have lived in the UK for at least 3 years. However, eligibility for further education can depend on other factors – if you are unsure, speak to the college directly or seek advice.

University

Access to university and student finance can be complicated for undocumented students. Requirements vary, and you normally need leave to remain in the UK to enrol at university.

However, some universities offer scholarships or alternative routes to support undocumented students and asylum seekers.



Search for the '**Article 26 Project'** or '**Refugee Education UK'** for more information. Many student unions also have support officers for migrants and asylum seekers.

Refugee Education UK	Support for refugee and asylum-seeking young people to access education	**reuk.org/advice**

Adult Learners

Search in your local area for charities or schools offering ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes or other subjects. Check if they are available to you if you are undocumented. Here's one possibility:

conversationoverborders.org

1.3 Housing and Homelessness

Renting Accommodation Privately

You cannot legally rent a privately rented accommodation if you lack the right to rent (which will be the case if you are undocumented).

Landlords can be fined if they rent to someone without immigration status in the UK. If a landlord thinks you might not have the right to rent, they have to:

1. Tell you and give you **7 days** to show documents showing that you have the right to rent
2. Then contact the Home Office after the 7 days (if you can't provide proof)

Sometimes landlords may threaten to report tenants to the Home Office. If this happens, contact a support charity or **Citizens Advice.**

Homelessness and Council / Local Authority Support

With NRPF and without leave to remain, you can't usually access council housing support.

- Mainstream homelessness support / housing allocation - parts 6 and 7 of the Housing Act 1996 are unavailable to undocumented people.
- Support under the Care Act is available in only very limited circumstances (and usually only if an immigration application has been submitted).
- Section 17 Children Act support is available in limited circumstances (and there should be some barrier to removal, such as a pending immigration application).

You might be able to access this help if:

- It's very cold or dangerous weather and you are homeless (SWEP – Severe Weather Emergency Protocols)
- You have a serious health condition or disability
- You have children under 18 years who are at risk

This help may include temporary accommodation or basic financial support.

However, information provided when you access this support **may be shared with the Home Office,** so if possible, it is advisable to seek immigration advice before you apply.

If you are facing the risk of homelessness, seek advice as early as possible. Waiting until you have nowhere to stay can make it more challenging to explore possible options. Some charities may be able to help you find safe temporary accommodation. Check the resources below for more details.

Section 17 Support (Families with Children)

If your child's health or development is at risk, the council may be able to support you under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. However, this is only available in limited circumstances.

You could receive:

- Help with accommodation
- Support with food, clothing and childcare
- Access to healthcare and education

Information will probably be shared with the Home Office – it is essential to get immigration advice before making this decision. This should be a last resort, as accommodation is often far from London and of poor quality.

Chartered Institute of Housing	A helpful resource with detailed information about housing rights	**housing-rights.info/index.php** **housing-rights.info/people-who-are-destitute.php**
Right to Remain	Information on destitution and housing for migrants in the UK	**righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/destitution-and-housing/**
No Accommodation Network (NACCOM)	National network of organisations working to prevent destitution amongst migrants.	**naccom.org.uk/projects/** (list of members who may be able to provide temporary accommodation)
Homeless Link	Database of homelessness services in England (some of these will not be available to you if you are undocumented)	**homeless.org.uk/homeless-england/**
The Pavement	List of services for homeless people (some of these will not be available to you if you are undocumented)	**thepavement.org.uk/services**

1.4 Your Rights at Work

If you don't have permission to work in the UK, you will not have the same employment rights as someone with permission. However, even if you don't have leave to remain, you still have some protections at work.

Health and Safety

Every employer has a legal duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their workers – including undocumented workers.

You can discuss and report dangerous conditions anonymously through Citizens Advice. Any conversations you have with them are confidential, and they won't share information with the Home Office.

Exploitation and Modern Slavery

If you are undocumented, this makes you more vulnerable to being exploited at work.

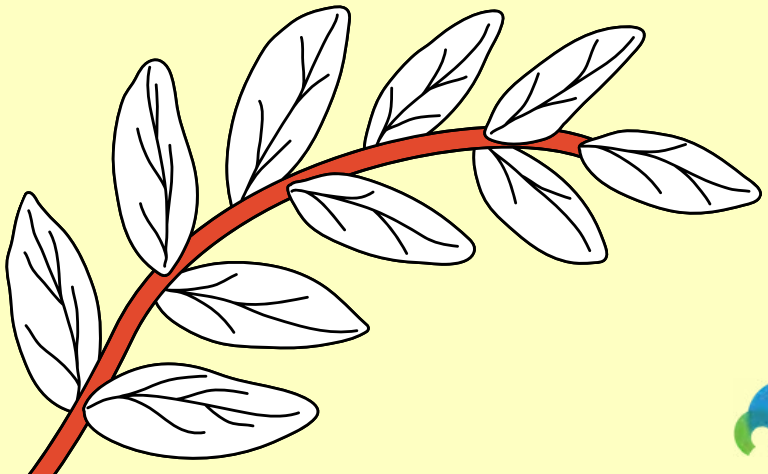
Work exploitation can include:

- Not being given your pay
- Not being given breaks
- Unsafe working conditions
- Being threatened or abused at work
- Your employer keeping your documents and refusing to give them back

If you are being forced to work or live in unsafe conditions, this could also be modern slavery - sometimes referred to as **trafficking**. You have the right to protection and support.

See **section 2.4** on Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking for more details.

Work Rights Centre	A charity that works to help migrants and access employment justice	**workrightscentre.org/get-help**
Kalayaan	A charity that supports and advises migrant workers	**kalayaan.org.uk/for-workers** 02072432942
Right to Remain Toolkit	Detailed information on exploitation at work and migrant workers' rights	**righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/work-exploitation-and-migrant-workers-rights**



SUMMARY: Navigating life in the UK

You can access essential healthcare and register with a GP.

Your child has the right to education.

Some housing and support may be available if you or your children are in danger.

Always get advice before sharing information with local authorities or landlords.

Level of risk	Services
More safe – these organisations will generally not share information without your permission.	- Charities (e.g. HMSC) - Citizens Advice - Immigration advisors - GPs, community health services - Schools
Less safe – these services may share your information with the Home Office	- Local council - Social Services - Police - Landlords - MPs

If you are concerned about confidentiality, you can also ask an organisation directly what information they collect, how they store it, and whom they may share it with.

Protecting Yourself

Living in the UK without immigration status can feel risky. This section explains how you can understand and reduce those risks, prepare yourself, and what to do if you do come into contact with the Home Office. Knowing what to expect and where to get support can make a big difference.

2.1 Reporting

What is reporting?

If the Home Office finds that you are in the UK without LTR, you may be placed on **immigration bail.** They may make you **report** or **sign** at regular appointments at an immigration reporting centre. The Home Office uses these appointments to monitor people without immigration status. You may also be asked to report over the phone, or by Immigration Bail Digital Reporting (IBDR).

When you report in person, you'll have to bring ID and paperwork (often a **Bail 201 form** with your photo in the top corner).

Be aware: There is always some risk involved when reporting, and it's possible that you will be detained. Immigration officers will keep records of what is said at reporting appointments.

Missing a reporting appointment without permission is referred to by the Home Office as 'absconding'. This may affect you negatively when the Home Office are assessing any future immigration applications. If you do miss an appointment, it is important that you clearly explain the reasons why (see 'If You Miss an Appointment' below).

On the other hand, meeting your reporting conditions can help with future immigration applications in some cases, as it shows cooperation and provides an official record of your life in the UK.

Where and how to report

There are 13 main reporting centres in the UK.
You may have to go:

- Weekly, monthly, or every few months
- In person, or sometimes you can report by telephone or online

It is important to read the Bail 201 document carefully to understand your individual requirements. Remember to bring along your Bail 201 form and the message confirming your appointment when you report.

Reporting events can be short or long – sometimes you might have to stay longer for an interview. Leave yourself plenty of time.

Reporting can be frightening, anxiety-inducing and intimidating. It is completely normal to feel this way. Speak with friends, family or community members about your experience – it can be helpful to know you are not facing this alone.

Making safety plans with trusted people can also help to give you a greater sense of control (see the sections on 'Preparing for the possibility of detention' and 'Preparing for anything').

If you miss an appointment
Contact the reporting centre as soon as possible. Their details will be on the Bail 201 form.

Provide your:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Home Office reference number
- Why you've missed the appointment (e.g. illness, bereavement, doctor's appointment, travel disruption, childcare commitments)
- Proof, if possible (e.g. a doctor's note, train ticket, screenshots). Keep a copy for yourself.

If you are reporting by telephone or online and you lose or break your phone, contact the centre as soon as you can to let them know.

If you miss an appointment without explanation, this is considered a breach of conditions, which can negatively affect you in the future.

If you miss an appointment, the best thing you can do is to contact the centre immediately and explain the reasons why you couldn't attend.

Telephone and digital reporting

If you are reporting by telephone, they will usually call on this number: 0300 1050321. Make sure to save this on your phone so you know to answer it. No one else can answer on your behalf.

Since you might have to share sensitive information or access private documents, it is best to answer the call in a private, secure place with good signal. Make sure your phone is charged and not on silent mode, and consider setting a phone alarm so you don't miss the call. Missing phone reporting sessions can mean you have to report in person instead.

If you're reporting via IBDR, it's important to use the same device and email address. You may also be asked to share your location. The Home Office uses cookies to work out who's reporting from what device, so it is recommended to always follow the same procedure.

Preparing for the possibility of detention

If you are unsure what detention is, take a look at **section 2.2** below.

There is always a risk of being detained when you are reporting (or generally when you are in the UK without leave).

Let a trusted friend, family member or someone in the community know if and when you are reporting in person. Make a plan with them of what you will both do if you are detained. If you know someone you can trust with this responsibility, give them consent to speak to a lawyer on your behalf.

The Home Office must complete a mitigating circumstances interview before detaining you. They will ask you if there are things that could affect this decision. It is important to tell them about caring responsibilities, physical or mental health issues, or anything else that would make detention particularly harmful to you.

Right to Remain have detailed advice on both of these topics, along with lots of other helpful information about reporting and detention at the link below:

righttoremain.org.uk/enforcement

Changing Your Reporting Conditions

It might be possible to change your reporting conditions if you have:

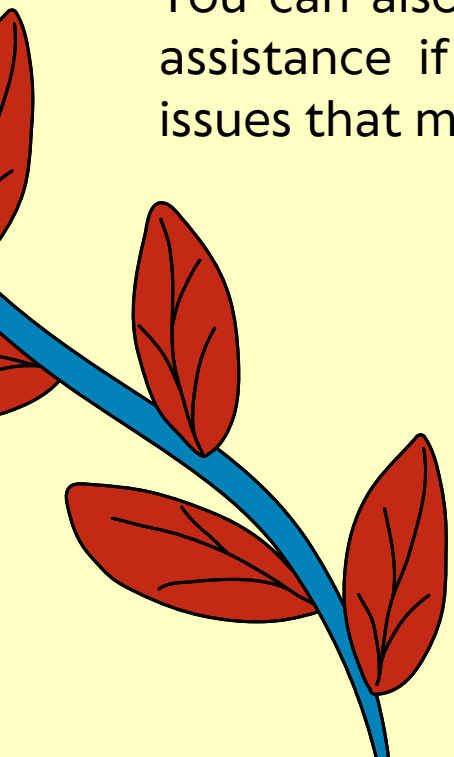
- Physical or mental health difficulties
- Caring responsibilities
- Financial hardship
- Long/expensive travel to the centre

Send evidence to support your request, such as a GP letter, care worker letter, or proof of travel costs. You might be able to switch to phone reporting or less frequent visits (although this is less likely if you have missed reporting events in the past).

Template requests are available from Migrants Organise. It is a good idea to look through this with a legal advisor first to make sure all information sent to the Home Office is accurate:

migrantsorganise.org/updated-guidance-and-flyers-to-challenge-reporting-conditions

You can also apply to your reporting centre for travel assistance if you live far away or if you have health issues that make travel difficult.



2.2 Raids, Detention, and Removal

If you are undocumented, you are at risk of a Home Office raid and detention. **Being prepared and knowing your rights** can make a big difference.

Immigration Raids

You might be targeted:

- At home
- At work (they often focus on construction workers and food delivery cyclists)
- In public during a stop-and-search
- When reporting



The Home Office usually focuses on a few different nationalities at a time. Being aware of who is being targeted can help reduce your risk.

1. **Know your rights** (see next page)
2. Have all your documents organised, complete and in a safe place, including digital copies on your phone. Email them to yourself as well so you can access them there.
3. Get immigration advice to fully understand your immigration status and level of risk.



Know Your Rights! – Immigration Raids

If you are targeted by an immigration raid, remember the following:

- They must clearly explain who they are and why they are speaking to you, including why they decided to approach you.
- They are not allowed to use your race, accent, language, clothing or skin colour as a reason to question you or check your immigration status.
- You **can leave** unless you are formally under arrest. If you are under arrest, they must tell you why.
- Refusing to speak to them is, on its own, not a lawful reason to search or arrest you.
- You **do not** have to answer their questions unless you are formally examined or detained.
- You **do not** have to let them in without a warrant or an Assistant Director's letter.
- They can only force entry if they have a valid warrant or AD letter. (Only the occupier can give consent for them to enter the property, not the landlord. If the house is shared, all occupiers need to give consent, not only the person at the door. That person must be over 18, they must understand what they are agreeing to, and they cannot be intimidated into agreeing.)
- Always check that they have an ID card. Any officer is required to show you this. If they produce a warrant or AD letter, check that it is in date and that all the information is correct. If not, you do not have to let them in.

Tip:
If a raid happens, try to stay calm and review the **Anti-Raids Network flyer** (have a screenshot ready in advance):

SEE AN IMMIGRATION RAID?

DON'T WALK BY! WE CAN RESIST IT TOGETHER!

Make sure people know they don't have to answer any questions and can leave. If they want to leave, walk away with them.





Film immigration officers and police. Don't film anyone else without their permission.

Challenge the officers — why are they questioning specific people?





Tell people around you what's happening. Call your friends. Tweet @Antiraids to get the word out.

If someone is detained, give them these numbers:

020 7456 9750
BID is a legal charity that helps people to get out of detention.

07438 407 570
SDS is a visitors group that visits people in detention.

IMMIGRATION RAIDS

IF IMMIGRATION OFFICERS COME TO YOUR HOME OR WORK...

You do not have to answer any questions.



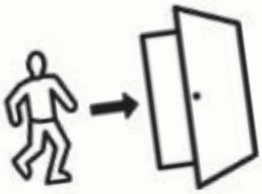
You do not have to let them in.

Don't let them in! If they don't have a warrant, they need your consent to enter.* If they have a warrant, they can use force to enter. If you can't read the documents they show, ask for a translated copy.

*They can enter a business selling alcohol or hot food without consent or a warrant. You still don't have to answer any questions unless you're under arrest.



Try to leave if you are not under arrest.



DON'T STOP AND TALK — JUST GO

antiraids.net antiraids@riseup.net @antiraids

Anti-Raids Network: Advice on opposing and challenging raids (in different languages)

antiraids.net/english

Anti-Raid Groups: These are groups that work together to support people's rights and stop raids in their local community. Get in touch with your local group – there are people out there who want to help.

migrantsrights.org.uk/anti-raids-resources

Detention

Detention is where someone is held in a removal centre by the Home Office because of their immigration status. You don't have to have committed a crime to be detained by immigration authorities.

Preparing for Anything

Be prepared for the possibility of detention. Have a plan in place with members of your community. Tell them if you're concerned about detention, ask people if they would support your bail if you were detained.

Have a copy of important documents and email them to yourself. If possible, give copies to a trusted person. Give a key to someone as well in case they need to collect anything from your home.

You cannot have a smartphone in detention. Keep a paper copy of important numbers somewhere safe (in your wallet, for example). Write down the numbers of close friends, family, a lawyer, a charity worker, etc.

If detained, you will have limited internet access, but can access email and legal information sites. Make sure you have your email password memorised! All internet use will be monitored / is not secure, and some websites (like social media) are blocked in detention.

You are not legally required to unlock your phone, even if officers ask you to. If they insist, tell them you wish to get legal advice first.

Review this checklist from Right to Remain to make sure you're as prepared as possible in case you are detained:
righttoremain.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Preparing-in-case-of-detention-2025-.pdf

If you are detained

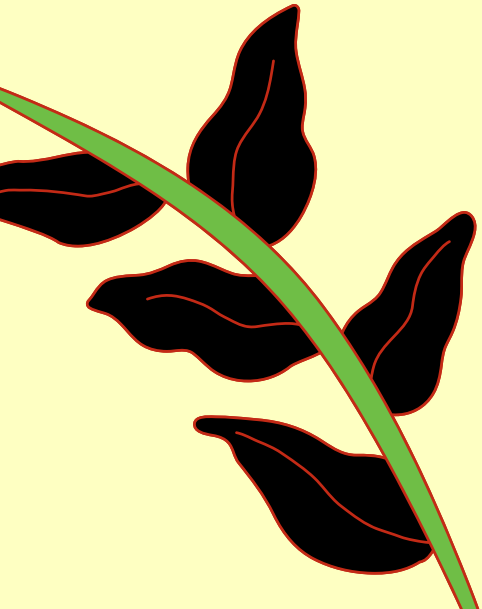
- If you're detained, you may feel frightened, overwhelmed or confused. This is a normal reaction. Bear in mind that, on average, 42% of people leave immigration detention in less than a week.
- The Home Office must tell you why you've been detained.
- Rules in each detention centre are different. Staff may not always be clear when they explain your rights and their procedures, so it´s a good idea to contact a charity or visitor group for advice (see 'Detention Support' below).
- You are entitled to translation services to understand information given to you by the staff.

Ask the detention centre for a list of **free legal aid lawyers** and book an appointment quickly.

- You have the right to see a **medical team within 24 hours (Rule 34)** – tell them everything about your physical and mental health, including the effect detention is having on you. If you are considered at risk because of your health or circumstances, you are less likely to be kept in detention.
- If you are not offered a medical assessment, your detention could be unlawful and you should seek legal advice.
- Ask for a **Rule 35 report** if you have injuries, trauma, or other health issues that are becoming or will become worse because you've been detained.

Mention any health issues or vulnerabilities you have – medical notes from detention periods can be very important later on as they provide a written record.

Medical Justice – an organisation that helps people in detention get medical evidence and reports to support Rule 35 reports. **medicaljustice.org.uk**



DDAS Detained Duty Advice Scheme

You are entitled to a free 30 minute meeting with a legal aid solicitor in the detention centre. Speak to the welfare team to book this. Keep trying to book an appointment if you don't immediately get one – there are long waiting lists. Be persistent and contact BID (Bail for Immigration Detainees) if you do not receive any help.

Prepare well in advance, including any questions you may have, as the meeting is short. Ask questions if anything is unclear to ensure you understand everything that is said to you. Ask for a written copy of the advice and the lawyer's name and contact details after the appointment. Also keep your own record of the session and who you spoke to.

Removal

If the Home Office plans to remove you from the country, they must give you at least 5 days notice. During those days:

1. Contact a lawyer immediately (every Immigration Removal Centre has duty solicitors – act quickly and book an appointment).

2. Contact any of the following organisations for support (see below for contact details):

- BID (Bail for Immigration Detainees).
- SOAS Detainee Support
- Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group
- Detention Action

3. You may be able to:
   - Apply for immigration bail
   - Appeal the removal (e.g. for asylum, human rights, or trafficking reasons)
   - Seek a court injunction

4. Contact your MP — some may help stop removals.



Be proactive. Seek legal advice and keep all paperwork you receive.

If You Are Arrested for a Criminal Offence (instead of being detained)

If you're arrested for a criminal offence and don't have leave to remain, it is essential to get expert immigration advice as soon as possible. You may be assigned a duty solicitor for free in relation to the criminal arrest, but not all solicitors also understand immigration law.



Ask your criminal lawyer to speak with an immigration specialist about your case.

If you were forced to commit a crime because of exploitation, abuse or modern slavery, it is very important to tell your lawyer. This could change how the court treats your case.

If you don't understand something, ask for an interpreter – you always have the right to one.

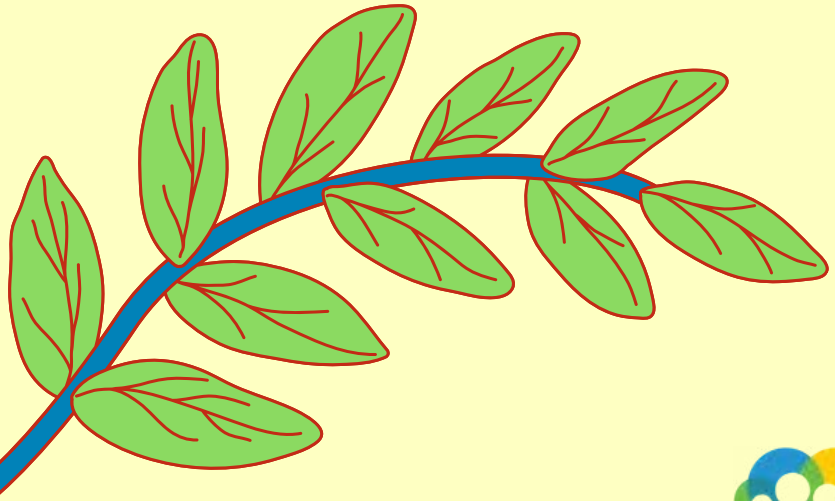
BiD (Bail for Immigration Detainees)	Information for immigration detainees held in prison (January 2020)	hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/biduk/redactor2_assets/files/1143/2020-02-11_-_Prison_Information_for_Detainees_Held_in_Prisons_English.pdf
Prisoners' Advice Service	Advice for prisoners who are foreign nationals	prisonersadvice.org.uk/wordpress/prisoners-who-are-foreign-nationals

Detention Support

You do not have to go through detention alone. There are organisations and volunteer visitor groups across the UK that can offer practical help, emotional support, and information about your rights.

Right to Remain Toolkit - Detention	Helpful and detailed information about detention	righttoremain.org.uk/detention A rough guide to immigration detention: righttoremain.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/detention-zine.pdf
BiD	How to get out of immigration detention: A self-help guide for detainees	hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/biduk/redactor2_assets/files/622/BID_s_self_help_guide_to_bail_-_How_to_get_out_of_detention.pdf

Immigration Centre	Support Organisation	Contact
Any	BID (Bail for Immigration Detainees)	020 7456 9750 (Monday – Thursday, 10AM – midday) **biduk.org**
Brook House or Tinsley IRC	Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group	01293 657070 **gdwg.org.uk**
Heathrow IRC	Detention Action	0800 5872096 **detentionaction.org.uk/people-in-detention**
Yarl's Wood IRC	Beyond Detention	8003101992
Harmondsworth Colnbrook or Yarl's Wood IRC	SOAS Detainee Support	07438 407 570 **solidaritydetaineesupport.wordpress.com**
Map of detention centres and support groups	AVID	**aviddetention.org.uk/map** avid Handbook: **aviddetention.org.uk/article/the-avid-handbook**



2.3 Domestic Abuse

If you are experiencing domestic abuse as an undocumented person in the UK, there are organisations that can support you.

Recognising Abusive Behaviour



Source: www.bridgefromviolence.com/p-c-wheel.html

Abuse can also include threats about immigration status, withholding important documents, and threats of reporting someone to the Home Office.

It is important to understand your immigration status when seeking help, and ideally you should seek immigration advice first. If you are experiencing domestic violence, it is very important to get help, and concerns about your status should not prevent you from seeking support. You are not alone.

If you are in immediate danger and there is a serious emergency, you can call the police on 999. If it is not an emergency, you can also call the police for advice on 101. There is a significant risk that police will check the immigration status of anyone who is arrested, the victim(s) and any witnesses. Here are some other resources in case you do not wish to be in contact with the police:

Important note:
If you are concerned about someone seeing that you've been looking at websites about support, Women's Aid provides helpful information on covering your tracks online: **womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/cover-your-tracks-online**

The most important things are to:

- Use a private browser / Incognito window
- Delete all search history

However, there is still the possibility that someone may be able to track your usage. It's therefore safest to use a separate device, either at work, at a library or a trusted friend's device to best ensure your safety and confidentiality.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline (Refuge)	Refuge provide information, advice and support, and conversations are confidential and non-judgmental. There are also translation options.	0808 2000 247 (available 24/7, free) Live webchat service
Men's Advice Line (Respect)	A charity and helpline dedicated to supporting men affected by domestic abuse. Open to trans and non-binary people.	0808 8010 327 (Monday to Friday, 10am – 5pm) Live webchat service
NHS	Helpful advice on domestic violence, including resources and how to support someone else experiencing domestic violence. Your GP is also someone you could speak to about domestic violence.	**nhs.uk/live-well/getting-help-for-domestic-violence**
Women's Aid	A useful handbook in multiple languages providing practical guidance for women experiencing domestic abuse.	**womensaid.org.uk/information-support/the-survivors-handbook**

Rights of Women	A charity which provides frontline legal advice to women experiencing violence. They offer immigration advice through their helpline.	020 7490 7689 (Mondays: 10am – 12pm, 2pm – 4pm Thursdays: 10am – 12pm, 2pm – 4pm)
Solace	Free and confidential advice and support for women in London affected by abuse.	0808 802 5565 (Monday to Friday, 10am – 4pm. Tuesday, 6am – 8pm)
Southall Black Sisters	Confidential, non-judgmental helpline in multiple languages. You can also email them at the link provided.	0208 571 0800 (Monday to Friday, 10am – 4pm) **southallblacksisters.org.uk/email-our-domestic-abuse-hotline**
Karma Nirvana	Helpline offered by a charity specialised in supporting those affected by Honour Based Abuse.	0800 5999 247 (Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)
Galop	A helpline for LGBT+ people experiencing abuse or violence.	0800 999 5428 (Monday & Tuesday, 9:15am – 8pm. Wednesday – Friday, 9:15am – 4:30pm) help@galop.org.uk

If you have concerns about your information being shared, ask organisations directly about confidentiality and what information they will store or share about you.

2.4 Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking

If you've been forced, threatened, tricked or coerced into working or moving locations, you might be a victim of modern slavery.

Help and protection are available – even if you are undocumented.

Examples of modern slavery include:

- Forced labour or unpaid work.
- Being moved or trafficked against your will.
- Being made to live in poor conditions with threats or violence.
- Sexual and/or bodily exploitation.
- Having your documents confiscated.
- Debt bondage.

If you're unsure whether what you've experienced is exploitation, contact the following organisations to discuss your circumstances:

- ATLEU (Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit)
- Migrant Help

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

To be recognised as a victim of modern slavery, someone must refer you to the NRM. Only certain organisations (called First Responders) can make a referral – for example, the Salvation Army, Refugee Council, or Migrant Help.

If you are undocumented, talk to an immigration advisor before being referred to understand the pros and cons in your situation.

You must be able to show that there are 'conclusive grounds' (that it is more likely than not) that what you have experienced is trafficking or modern slavery to be accepted onto the NRM.

+ Benefits

If you are recognised as a possible victim of modern slavery, you could receive:

- Safe accommodation
- Financial support
- Access to medical and psychological care
- Access to work, training or education

Depending on your circumstances, you also might be able to get leave to remain. A successful referral can support future immigration applications.

- Risks

If you're referred to the NRM, **your details will be shared with the Home Office and Police.** They should not detain you, but there are possible risks if you are identified by the Home Office.

The Process

The process can take much longer than official time frames suggest.

1. Speak with a qualified immigration advisor about your situation

2. You or your advisor finds a **First Responder Organisation** to refer you to the NRM. You can't refer yourself

3. You receive an initial Reasonable Grounds decision. The NRM aims to make a decision within 5 days, but most people have to wait longer
    - If *positive*, they believe you may be a victim of modern slavery. You will get support while they investigate further.
    - If *negative*, they don't believe you are a victim of modern slavery. You can challenge or try to reapply with new evidence (return to step 1)

4. You will then get a conclusive Grounds decision confirming whether or not you're recognised as a victim of modern slavery. This should arrive within 45 days of the Reasonable Grounds decision, but some people wait for up to 6 months because of NRM delays.

+ Positive decision

They recognise you as a victim. You will have an assessment and continue to get support.

You can apply for temporary permission to stay in the UK if you can show you need:

- Support to recover physically or mentally – permission for up to 30 months; or
- To cooperate with the authorities in an investigation or prosecution (of your traffickers, for example) – permission for up to 30 months; or
- To get compensation though the UK courts (from your traffickers, for example) – permission for up to 12 months

- Negative decision

They don't recognise you as a victim. You can challenge this decision. Your support worker or responder may be able to give new evidence, or you could apply for a judicial review (get legal advice first).

First Responder Organisations (these are organisations that can make referrals to the NRM):

- Salvation Army
- Migrant Help
- Medaille Trust
- Kalayaan
- Barnardo's
- Unseen
- NSPCC (Child Trafficking Advice Centre)
- BAWSO
- New Pathways
- Refugee Council

Unseen	Modern Slavery Helpline: **modernslaveryhelpline.org**
ATLEU (Anti-Trafficking and Labour Exploitation Unit)	**atleu.org.uk** Trafficking information resource hub: **athub.org.uk** Advice on NRM Decisions and Challenges: **athub.org.uk/knowledge-base/nrm-decisions-and-challenges/#remedies-for-negative-reasonable-and-conclusive-grounds-decisions**
Right to Remain Toolkit: Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking	**righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking**
Migrants Organise	Guide to the NRM: **migrantsorganise.org/app/uploads/2023/10/NRM-Guide-October-2023.pdf**

Long-term planning

Planning ahead can make future immigration applications easier. Immigration rules and policies change regularly, so it is important to stay informed and seek advice when necessary.

Criminal convictions, civil penalty notices and unpaid fines can create difficulties when making immigration applications. Any debt to the government, NHS or local authority can also cause problems if it is ignored.

If any of these apply to you, keep all letters and documents relating to what happened. In general, it is best to discuss these issues openly with your advisor so they can help you explain them clearly as part of your application.

See the **section on debt (3.4)** for more information on managing debt.

3.1 Routes to Leave to Remain (LTR)

It is also important to know exactly what your immigration status is. Speak to a qualified immigration advisor to discuss this in detail before applying, and possible applications also need to be discussed carefully.

Make sure you understand:

- your own immigration status
- your possible options in the future (keep reviewing these – the law changes often!)
- what possible immigration applications you are working towards in the future
- what evidence you will need for any possible future application

The requirements for immigration routes change over time, and eligibility depends on individual circumstances. The examples below are not a complete list. All these applications are complex – speak to an immigration lawyer before you submit anything to the Home Office.

Children and Families

- Children may qualify for leave after 7 years of continuous residence in the UK
- Parents of British or settled children may also qualify for leave.

Marriage, Civil Partnerships and Cohabitation

You can get married or register a civil partnership without LTR, but the registry office will likely share your details with the Home Office. This could place you at risk of detention.

Protection Claims

If you fear harm in your home country, you may be able to claim asylum or human rights protection (Article 3 or 8 ECHR). If the situation in your country changes while you are in the UK, this may impact your protection claim. Stay aware of changes in your country, consider how they might impact your situation, and how difficult it would be for you if you did return.

Long Residence (20-Year Rule)

If you've lived in the UK for 20 continuous years, you may be able to apply for LTR. You will need to provide **evidence of residence for each year,** for example:

- GP or hospital letters
- School or college records
- Bills
- Letters from community or faith groups

Keep both paper and digital copies in a safe place. For more guidance, see **section 3.3.**

JCWI (the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants) have a helpful summary of possible application routes available here: **jcwi.org.uk/routes-to-regular-immigration-status-for-people-who-are-undocumented**

3.2 Accessing Reliable Immigration Advice

It is crucial to get reliable, good-quality immigration advice. You should also remain alert to the possibility and risks of poor advice.

Immigration lawyers	Immigration advisors
• hold a law degree and have done professional legal training. • can represent clients in courts, tribunals and appeals. • handle complex cases.	• have completed specialised training and exams to be able to provide expert advice. • are not necessarily lawyers. • can assist with procedures like visa extensions, ILR applications and documentation.

Looking for an immigration advisor or lawyer

- Carefully review and research any recommendations from friends, family or community members, even if you trust that person. Check online reviews and do as much background research as you can. Use the search tools provided below to make sure the professional is accredited.
- No one should ever guarantee a successful outcome!
- A lawyer or advisor should always provide written confirmation of what services will be provided, and their fees (in advance).
- Make sure you are clear on costs before you start to work together.
- You should not be asked to pay cash. If you do choose to pay cash, make sure you get a receipt. It must only be paid in the professional´s office.

Immigration Advice Authority (IAA)	The IAA offers an adviser finder, as well as a tool to check if someone is registered with the IAA. They make sure advisors will act in your best interest. **portal.immigrationadviceauthority.gov.uk/s/**
Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA)	You can use the SRA register to check if a solicitor or firm is regulated. **sra.org.uk/consumers/register**
The Law Society	The Law Society also offer a tool to find a solicitor (you can select 'Immigration' under 'Area of practice'). **lawsociety.org.uk**

Working with an immigration advisor or lawyer

- Ask for a written copy of any advice you receive, as well as confirmation of what they will do with your case and when.
- Ask questions when getting advice – there are no silly questions. Try to be as precise as possible when you explain what you need. Make your own notes and prepare any questions in advance.
- Ask them to repeat themselves if you don't understand anything. It is their job to make sure you understand their advice.
- Remember to bring all your documents with you.
- It might be helpful to organise language interpretation in advance if you don't feel confident communicating in English. It's also worth checking if you and your advisor share any common languages.

Legal Aid

Legal Aid is government-funded assistance to help people pay for legal advice if they don't have the means to do so. Even though the government pays for this, a legal aid lawyer works independently of the government and the Home Office.

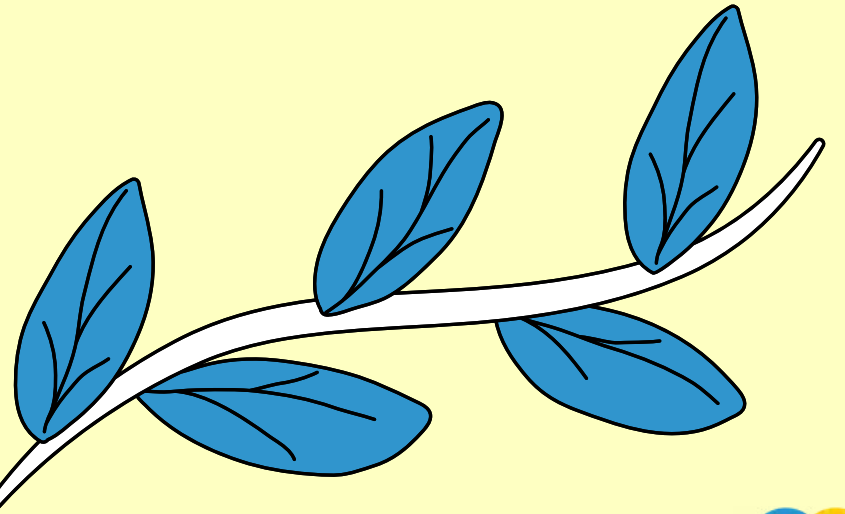
However, there is currently a Legal Aid crisis in the UK and it is very difficult to obtain legal aid representation at the moment. It can take quite a long time to find a legal aid lawyer with capacity to take on your case. You can still check if you're eligible for Legal Aid here:

www.gov.uk/legal-aid/check-legal-aid

You can then use this tool to find a legal aid advisor in the UK: **find-legal-advice.justice.gov.uk**

Problems?

Immigration law is complex and regularly changes. Poor quality immigration advice is a serious problem. If you have had a bad experience, make a complaint or report your concerns to the SRA or the IAA.



3.3 Documents and Evidence

Begin collecting evidence of your residence in the UK as soon as possible. These documents can be significant in providing evidence as part of future immigration applications.

- Make sure your documents are organised, dated and secure.
- Keep a record of important contacts.
- Keep digital and paper copies.

If you are sharing documents for any reason, make sure to only send copies. Never give away the original documents.

Documents to collect:

- All communications and letters from the Home Office or your council.
- Medical records, vaccination cards and letters from your GP (if you change GP, request a copy of your medical records before switching).
- Household bills.
- Contracts or invoices (even if you don't have permission to work).
- Travel tickets to the UK.
- Passport stamps.
- School reports for your children.
- Letters from charities, employers, or neighbours confirming how long you've lived in the area.
- Proof of volunteering, involvement in community activities or in faith groups.

Anything with dates and addresses that prove your presence in the UK are helpful to keep.

It is also a good idea to keep a record of where you have lived and the dates you lived there.

If you have lost documents, do not panic. There may be other ways to obtain evidence of your residence and activities in the UK, or you may be able to request that things be sent to you again.

Digital Safety

Always make sure your documents are kept safe. Here are some tips:

- Use strong passwords.
- Remember to log out of anything private if using a shared computer.
- Consider who might be able to access shared devices, email accounts and cloud storage.
- Don't post personal details on social media.
- Be vigilant when scanning documents in public and store them securely.

It can be helpful to email important documents to yourself and keep a USB stick with copies so you have backups. Just make sure your password is secure.

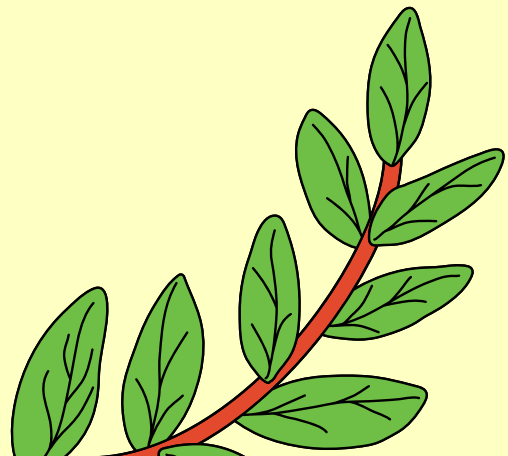
3.4 Debt

Debt can be stressful and difficult to manage, especially when dealing with other challenges. If possible, keep records of the money you owe, reply to letters, and seek advice at an early stage, even if you can't pay the debts right now. This can make issues easier to resolve further down the line, whereas ignoring the problem can cause more complications.

The Home Office may consider debt when deciding an immigration application for LTR. With the help of an immigration advisor, it is important to explain why you ended up in debt and that you took steps to deal with it (even if you were not able to repay the debt).

For free, confidential advice on debt, speak to:

Citizens Advice	citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money
Mary Ward Legal Centre	marywardlegal.org.uk/legal-advice/debt-advice 020 7269 0292 (Monday – Friday, 10am – 5pm)



Building Resilience

Living without status can be exhausting and extremely challenging. At HMSC, we work with visitors preparing applications based on 20 years living in the UK without status. Here are some suggestions for you from both us and them:

4.1 Taking Care of Your Health

- Eat well and rest when you can
- Try to move your body and get outdoors – even short walks help
- Register with a GP and get regular check-ups

Coping with Stress and Anxiety

- Build small, daily routines
- Practice or find activities that you enjoy
- Share worries with someone you trust
- Focus on what you can control in the present, not only the future

Mental Health

If you're struggling with your mental health, ask for help – talk to a trusted friend, family, a charity worker, or a faith leader. You can also speak to your GP.

If you are feeling extremely low or suicidal, call 111 or 999, visit your closest A&E department, or contact:

Mind	0300 102 1234 (support line) 0300 123 3393 (Infoline) **mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help**
Samaritans	116 123 (available 24 hours)
Shout	Text 'Shout' to 85258 for support via text. Available 24/7 for anyone experiencing a crisis.
SOS Silence of Suicide	0808 115 1505. Available 8pm – midnight (weekdays) and 4pm – midnight (weekends)
Papyrus (available for people under 35)	0300 102 2470, or text 'HOPE' to 88247. A live webchat is also available at **papyrus-uk.org/help-me/hopeline-24-7**

Many charities offer mental health support in multiple languages.

You can also search Hub of Hope, which is the UK's largest mental health support directory. Adjust the search functions to find support most relevant to you:
hubofhope.co.uk

4.2 Building Community & Avoiding Isolation

Finding people who share, understand or empathise with your experiences can make life easier. Take steps to avoid isolation – asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Look for:

- Charities, migrant centres or community spaces
- Volunteering or creative activities
- ESOL or language classes
- Faith groups



Ask your local library for suggestions of local community organisations.

Meetup also has lots of local activities and groups which you can get involved in: **meetup.com**

Lots of charities offer community spaces, activities, events and clubs – Google organisations in your local area to see what might be on offer. Don't be afraid to try something new!

HMSC runs a community space twice a month where visitors can drop in to socialise, relax and eat a hot meal. We organise workshops with information for migrant communities, as well as creative and wellbeing activities.

Resources Directory

Screenshot or save a copy of this section on your phone and email account. Also write down any key contacts and keep them on your person in case of detention.

The organisations below are a starting point. If you're unsure where to begin, contact HMSC and we can help you find the right support.

More specialised resources relevant to specific issues can be found throughout the guide.

Organisation	What they do	Contact (website/phone)
Right to Remain Toolkit	In-depth, reliable and up-to-date guide to understanding the asylum and immigration system in the UK. An extremely useful resource.	**righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit**

Citizens Advice	Free, confidential, independent advice on a range of issues including debt, work and housing.	citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us 0800 144 8848 citizensadvice.org.uk/immigration
Praxis – A Migrants' Guide	A guide to help migrants access services, build community and take care of themselves before and after securing immigration status in the UK.	praxis.org.uk/migrants-guide
Migrants' Rights Network – Know your rights guide	A handy guide to help migrants understand their rights and how to assert them.	migrantsrights.org.uk/resources/know-your-rights
JCWI	Legal advice helpline for undocumented migrants. Free and confidential	0800 160 1004 (Monday, Tuesday & Thursday, 10am–1pm)

My Resources

A space for you to write down any helpful resources or contacts that you find.

Organisation	What they do	Contact (website/phone)

Organisation	What they do	Contact (website/phone)

HMSC
HARINGEY MIGRANT SUPPORT CENTRE

Created by Haringey Migrant Support Centre
October 2026

With thanks to Philip Morton for his contribution to the research and preparation of this booklet.

HMSC

HARINGEY MIGRANT SUPPORT CENTRE

