



Home Office

Item 6(c)

20th February 2025

Dame Angela Eagle DBE MP
Minister for Border Security & Asylum

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Cllr Susan Aitken

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15 January 2025

Dear Cllr Aitken,

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 December to the Home Secretary and 11 December to the Prime Minister about permission to work for asylum seekers, asylum support and free bus travel. Your correspondence has been passed to the Home Office and I am replying as the Minister for Border Security & Asylum.

Asylum Seeker Permission to Work

Asylum seekers are not eligible to apply for permission to work unless their asylum claim has been outstanding for 12 months or more, through no fault of their own. Where an asylum seeker acquires permission to work, their employment will be limited to occupations on the Immigration Salary List (ISL).

The ISL is based on expert advice from the independent Migration Advisory Committee of occupations where employers face a shortage of suitable labour and where they judge that migration is a sensible response to that shortage. It allows employers to recruit migrants on a salary below the general threshold – with the discount being a maximum of 20%.

Whilst we keep all policies under review, there are no immediate plans to change the existing policy on permission to work for asylum seekers.

It is important that our policy approach distinguishes between those who need protection and those seeking to work here who can apply for a work visa under the Immigration Rules. Individuals do not need to make perilous journeys in order to seek employment in the UK. Those in need of protection should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach – that is the fastest route to safety.

We encourage asylum seekers who are waiting on the outcome of their claim to undertake volunteering activities. This should not amount to unpaid work or job substitution.

We may also consider applications for permission to work on an exceptional basis where the applicant does not meet the requirements of the Immigration Rules.

Asylum Support

As you will be aware, the Home Office has an obligation to meet the essential living needs of destitute asylum seekers. That support is usually provided in the form of accommodation and a weekly allowance to cover other essential living needs.

The level of the allowance given to individuals on asylum support is reviewed each year to ensure it covers essential living needs. Following the 2023 review, weekly cash allowances have increased for many supported individuals including pregnant women and

young children. We continue to provide support and accommodation for asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute.

Main rates

The standard weekly level of allowance for individuals in self-catered accommodation will be increased from £47.39 to **£49.18**. For individuals in catered accommodation, the standard weekly allowance level will be reduced from £9.58 to **£8.86**.

In setting the rates, we have utilised an alternative methodology, which uses a 'disaggregated CPI'. The methodology has been designed to offer a more accurate measure of changes in the price of items to cover essential living needs.

Baseline food costs have been determined using Office for National Statistics (ONS)'s Living Costs and Food survey, and a subcategory of CPI (food and non-alcoholic drinks) has been used to uplift this base rate to September 2023 prices. For non-food categories of need, the base rate is taken from the 2020 review, and subcategories of CPI or bespoke categories using item-level data from the ONS are used to identify price changes over the past three years. In addition to this, we reviewed the 2020 base rates to ensure that any assumptions made in calculating those rates still held. This resulted in small adjustments to the rates.

As previous rate increases have been made using CPI rates, this has led to an overestimate of the cost of essential needs for an individual in catered accommodation; therefore, using the methodology set out above, the catered rates will be slightly reduced.

The full methodology can be found in the 2023 report which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-on-review-of-cash-allowance-paid-to-asylum-seekers>.

The breakdown of the payments is as below:

Essential Need	Self-Catered	Catered
Food and non-alcoholic drink	£34.86	n/a
Toiletries and Laundry	£1.46	n/a
Non-prescription medicines	£0.47	£0.47
Clothing and footwear	£3.43	£3.43
Travel	£4.96	£4.96
Comms	£4.00	n/a
TOTAL	£49.18	£8.86

Free Bus Travel

The Asylum Support rates detailed above are calculated to include an element of transport cost.

Like all people, asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers need to budget appropriately and plan their expenditure according to the income available to them.

Currently, the UK Government has no plans to introduce free bus travel for asylum seekers. However, we remain committed to restoring order to the asylum system, including by clearing the backlog of asylum claims. Individuals who are granted refugee status will have recourse to public funds and permission to work.

Refugee Integration

The Government is committed to ensuring that people can take positive steps towards integration as they rebuild their lives in the UK. All those granted protection status in the UK should be able to fully integrate into life here and become self-sufficient, providing for themselves and their families, and contributing to the economy.

Those granted refugee status or humanitarian protection, including those who are resettled to the UK, have immediate access to the labour market and to mainstream services that support their integration. This includes benefits and healthcare, and we work across Government to ensure these services meet the needs of all refugees.

The Government funds mainstream services which refugees can access, and which support their integration. For instance: The Department for Education funds English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) through the Adult Education Budget (AEB).

Not all of those who seek asylum are found to need international protection. Rather than invest in integration for those who may not qualify for international protection, this Government's priority is to focus our efforts and resources to support those who most need it.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write on this important topic.

Yours sincerely,

Dame Angela Eagle DBE MP
Minister for Border Security & Asylum