WELCOME TO YORK

A User-Friendly Toolkit for Refugees & People Seeking Asylum

October 2026

You are welcome here.

This short guide explains the first things to do when you arrive, and where to find help. Keep it with you. Everything listed here is **free**. If anything is unclear, ask a support worker, an interpreter, or one of the friendly organisations at the back of this booklet.

What's inside

Use the numbers below to find what you need. Each section has its own colour to help you find your way.

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1 Emergency Contacts & Staying Safe

In an emergency, call 999

Call **999** if you or someone with you is in immediate danger — this reaches the **police, ambulance or fire service**.

Other important numbers

- Non-emergency police: **101**
- NHS health advice (not an emergency): **111**
- If you feel unsafe where you are staying, tell a member of staff or call **Migrant Help: 0808 801 0503**. You do not have to stay somewhere you feel unsafe.

Reporting to the police

- Call **101** (or text 18001 101) to reach North Yorkshire Police, or report online: northyorkshire.police.uk
- Report online through the national True Vision service: report-it.org.uk
- City of York Council hate crime page: york.gov.uk/hate-crime

Free, independent support

- Supporting Victims — **01609 643100** (Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm) for local independent help.
- Stop Hate UK — 24/7 helpline **0800 138 1625**, or text **07717 989 025**. Confidential and independent.
- Start Safe, Stay Safe app — a free phone tool (Apple Store / Google Play) to record and report incidents to the police or council anonymously.

2 The Right to Remain Toolkit

The **Right to Remain Toolkit** is a clear, practical guide to the UK asylum and immigration system. It explains the asylum process step by step, describes your rights, and tells you what actions you may need to take while your claim is being considered.

Read it here: righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit

Migrant Help — free advice for asylum seekers

If you are an adult asylum seeker (or the dependent of one), you can call Migrant Help UK.

Phone: **0808 801 0503**

Mon–Fri, 8am–8pm • 24-hour line for emergencies • Calls are **free**.

They can help with:

- Housing problems
- Questions about financial support
- Finding English language classes
- Getting legal representation

More information: migranthelpuk.org

3 Your First Days in York

When you arrive in York as asylum seeker, you will meet the **Mears Asylum Accommodation Team**, who look after housing support. If you have any questions or worries about your accommodation, speak to the Mears team at the hotel.

Register with a doctor (GP)

Speak to the medical team at the hotel to register with a local GP (doctor). If you are **pregnant**, tell the medical team as soon as possible so they can arrange a midwife and any care you need, including at York Hospital.

School for your children

Your child has the right to go to school while you wait for a decision on your asylum claim. You do **not** need to wait for your asylum decision before applying for a school place. The Mears team will help you with enrolment.

Free school bus pass

Whether your child gets a free bus pass depends on their age and your household income:

- Primary age (4–11): must live at least **2 miles** from school.
- Secondary age: must live at least **3 miles** from school.

More: york.gov.uk/TransportToSchoolOrCollege

Free school meals

Your child may also qualify for free school meals — a free hot lunch during the school day. Ask the school or the Mears team.

4 Refugee Action York (RAY)

RAY supports people who have recently arrived in York and are seeking asylum, settled refugees and migrants. Website: refugeeactionyork.org

Visit the RAY team to:

- **Register with RAY** so you hear about services, activities and support for people seeking asylum in York.
- **Get advice and information** from RAY staff and volunteers at a friendly drop-in session (see below).
- **Get practical help** if you are newly arrived — a free foodbank voucher for the Vineyard Church foodbank, plus donated clothes, toiletries and other essentials when available.
- **Bring your children** to RAY activities while they wait for a nursery or school place. Volunteers can help watch the children so you can join classes or activities.
- **Explore volunteering** with RAY or other local groups — a great way to practise English, build confidence, meet people and learn about life in York.

Weekly drop-in sessions

Mondays, 10am–12pm — Melbourne Terrace Methodist Church, Cemetery Road, YO10 5AS. Advice and information; tea, coffee and a chat; crafts and board games.

Tuesdays, 10am–12pm — York Vineyard Church, Fawcett Street, YO10 4AH. Free food (when available), plus toys, toiletries and other items; tea and coffee.

Wednesday, 10am-12pm — St. John University, Chapple room. Practice your English and get the needed support from RAY trained project workers.

Thursdays, 10am–12pm — St Lawrence's Church Community Hall, Lawrence Street, YO10 3WP. Tea, coffee and a chat; English conversation groups; health and wellbeing information.

RAY also offers activities such as a community hub, coffee mornings, befriending, a

youth club, sports, mentoring and language classes. Ask the team what is running now.

5 Your eVisa & Important Documents

Keep every document safe

Keep all documents from the Home Office in a safe place. You may need them for benefits, housing, work, healthcare and other services.

When you get a positive decision

If your asylum claim is successful, you (or your solicitor) will get a **letter from the Home Office**. It is written in formal language, so here is what it usually means for you in plain words:

- **Your asylum support is ending.** Your weekly payments and your Home Office housing will stop on a date given in the letter (called the "end of grant" date). This is because you now have the right to use public services instead.
- **Your ASPEN card.** Payments continue until your support ends. After that you can still use money already on the card for **28 days**, then the card is cancelled. Use any balance before then.
- **Your accommodation.** You can stay until the date in the letter, then you must leave. Start looking for a new home straight away — see Section 6.
- **Dependants.** Any dependants not yet granted leave may be able to keep their support. They should call Migrant Help on **0808 801 0503**.

Your eVisa (online proof of status)

An **eVisa** is an online record of your immigration status. The Home Office creates a UKVI account for you. To sign in and see your eVisa you will need:

- Your **UKVI customer number**
- Your **date of birth**
- Access to the **phone number or email** the Home Office holds for you.

When signing in, if asked which identity document you used, select "Passport", then enter your UKVI customer number.

- Update your details (name, phone, email, photo): gov.uk/update-uk-visas-

immigration-account-details

- Report an error with your eVisa: report-error-evisa.homeoffice.gov.uk
- Recover your account if you are locked out: update-your-details.homeoffice.gov.uk
- Need help with your eVisa? gov.uk/guidance/online-immigration-status-evisa

Your eVisa is usually issued **within two weeks** of your positive decision. Dependants can access their own eVisa the same way.

National Insurance number

You need a National Insurance (NI) number for work and benefits. You can find it on your UKVI account using the "View and Prove" service: gov.uk/view-prove-immigration-status. Keep it private — only share it with the DWP (for benefits) or an employer.

If your eVisa does not include an NI number, apply here: gov.uk/apply-national-insurance-number

Travelling abroad

If you are issued a **Home Office Travel Document**, it links to your UKVI account automatically. You must carry it whenever you travel outside the UK.

★ Act now — your checklist

Once you have leave to remain, you can start using public services. Do these things as soon as you can:

1. **Access your eVisa** — follow the steps above if you haven't already.
2. **Find somewhere to live** — contact your local council for housing advice (see Section 6). Find your council: gov.uk/find-local-council
3. **Open a bank account** — free to open, and needed for wages or benefits.
4. **Apply for Universal Credit** — money from the government if you have a low or no income. RAY can help. gov.uk/universal-credit

5. **Apply for Child Benefit** if you have children — RAY can help. Claims take about 3 days to 12 weeks and can be backdated up to 3 months. gov.uk/child-benefit
6. **Check your NI number** is on your eVisa — if not, apply (see above).
7. **Tell your council's Housing Options team** about your positive decision so they can assess your needs before you receive an eviction notice.

Migrant Help and the RAY team will also be in touch to help you move on from asylum support. If you don't hear from them, contact Migrant Help: **0808 801 0503**

- migranthelpuk.org.

6 Housing & Somewhere to Live

The most important thing to know

When you get refugee status, **no authority in the UK is obliged to give you a house**. Becoming a refugee brings you more rights — but also more responsibility. The best thing you can do is **take action early** and ask for advice. You will not be left alone: help and guidance are available.

Common questions

Q Will the government automatically give me a house after a positive decision?

A No. Your circumstances will be assessed, and you will be expected to take responsibility for finding your own home.

Q Is City of York Council obliged to house me?

A No.

Q Is the UK government obliged to house me as a refugee?

A No. The Home Office houses people while they are asylum seekers, but once you become a refugee no authority obliged to provide housing.

Q So what can I do?

A Take responsibility and act early. Nobody will hand you a ready-made home, but you can get good advice. When you get your positive decision, contact the City of York Council Housing Options team.

Q When should I contact Housing Options?

A As soon as you get your positive decision — even before your eviction letter arrives.

Q What happens when I contact them?

A They arrange an interview about you and your family and assess your needs. This does not guarantee a flat or house, but they will advise you on how to find one.

Q If council housing team say I must look for private rent, should I?

A Yes. Everyone is expected to take responsibility to avoid becoming homeless,

so follow their advice in regard to the next step.

Q Is it easy to find housing in York?

A Sadly no — there is a real shortage of Council and private housing across the UK, and York is expensive. It can be sensible to also look in cheaper nearby areas such as Selby or Leeds.

City of York Council — Housing Options

Call **01904 554500** — 9:30am–12:00pm & 2:00–5:00pm, Mon–Fri (except bank holidays).

An interpreter can be requested. After a short first call, a worker will contact you within 3 days to arrange a full assessment (usually by phone). Send any documents they need without delay.

Online: york.gov.uk/homelessness/housing-options

After you receive your eviction notice

If you are eligible and meet the council's criteria, they will arrange **temporary accommodation** for you and your family while they finish their assessment. If you qualify for long-term support, you can then bid for social housing through the council's allocation scheme.

- A new home is usually **unfurnished** — start saving for furniture and household items early. RAY, BESOM, Bundles of Joy and other local charities may help with furniture and essentials when available.
- Apply for **Housing Benefit** (or the housing part of Universal Credit) with your Housing Officer, and update your address everywhere.
- Set up your **utilities** (water, gas, electricity, broadband) in your name and give meter readings.
- Apply for **Council Tax Reduction** if eligible — it can lower your council tax a lot. Your Housing Officer or RAY can help.

7 Healthcare & the Dentist

Registering with a doctor is free for everyone

Registering with a GP (doctor) in England is **free and open to everyone** — whatever your ID, immigration status or address.

How to register with a GP

1. **Find a surgery** near you by postcode: nhs.uk — how to register with a GP
2. **Apply online** on the surgery's website, in the NHS App, or via register-with-a-gp-surgery service
3. **Or apply in person** — visit the surgery and ask for a paper GMS1 form.
4. **Confirmation** usually comes within 5 working days.

You may be asked for ID or proof of address (like a bill or passport) if you have it, but these are **not required by law** to register.

If you are not confident in English, ask the surgery to arrange an **interpreter** for your appointments, so you fully understand your care.

Dental care

You can register with a dentist, but there is currently a shortage of NHS places. If you need urgent care, you can register as a **temporary patient**.

- Find an NHS dentist by postcode: nhs.uk — find a dentist
- Can't find one online? Call **NHS 111**.
- You can use **any** practice with space — you don't have to choose the closest one.
- Ask clearly for an **NHS appointment** (many clinics offer both NHS and private), and ask if they are taking new patients or have a waiting list.

8 Learning English & Education

Learning English opens doors — to friends, work and confidence. Many free classes (called **ESOL** — English for Speakers of Other Languages) are available. Check regularly with local colleges, universities and language centres.

York Learning

Register online, by phone or in person. Create an account on the York Learning Learner Hub, call **01904 554277**, or visit the Customer Centre at West Offices, Station Rise. Website: yorklearning.org.uk

York College & University Centre

Submit an online course application, wait for your offer, then complete your enrolment appointment. yorkcollege.ac.uk • english-in-york.co.uk

Migrant English Support Hub (MESH)

A charity supporting adult migrant language learners across Yorkshire & Humber: yhmesh.org.uk

University — Sanctuary Scholarships

The University of York and York St John University both offer **Sanctuary Scholarships**, along with many other sanctuary universities across the UK, supporting asylum seekers and refugees into higher education.

- york.ac.uk
- yorksj.ac.uk

Qualifications from your home country

If you studied abroad and want to continue in the UK, apply for a **Statement of Comparability** from UK ENIC: enic.org.uk. It shows how your qualifications compare to UK ones, which helps with university and scholarship applications.

9 Work & Employment

Once you are settled, or waiting for your asylum case to be processed start building your **CV** and think about **volunteering**. Volunteering helps you gain UK experience, learn new skills, improve your English and grow your confidence.

Apply for jobs that match your skills, qualifications and experience. Several organisations offer training, CV help, job applications and interview preparation — for example the Refugee Council and North Yorkshire Business and Education Partnership (**NYBEP)**.

You have the right to feel safe at work and everywhere

If you experience or witness **hate crime, discrimination, racism or abuse** because of your identity, background, religion, ethnicity, nationality or any protected characteristic, please report it to the police or a support group.

- North Yorkshire Police: northyorkshire.police.uk/hatecrime
- Supporting Victims: supportingvictims.org
- Stop Hate UK: stophateuk.org

10 Learning to Drive

To get a UK driving licence from the start: check you are eligible to apply. While waiting for a decision on your asylum application in the UK, you may be not eligible to obtain a UK driving licence, depending on your immigration status and circumstances. However, you can use this waiting period to prepare for the driving theory test by studying and practising theory test questions. This will help you get a head start if you become eligible to apply for a driving licence once your immigration status is confirmed. You initially apply for a **provisional licence**, then pass both the **theory** and **practical** driving tests. Clear guidance: gov.uk/learn-to-drive-a-car

Two rules that keep everyone safe

- **Driving without insurance is illegal.** You need at least third-party insurance to drive on a road or public place. gov.uk/vehicle-insurance
- **Driving without a valid licence is illegal.** gov.uk — penalty points

11 Citizens Advice York

Citizens Advice York offers **free, impartial advice** — friendly, confidential and independent — on:

- Benefits
- Debt
- Housing
- Employment
- ...and much more

Website: citizensadviceyork.org.uk

You are not alone.

Welcome to York. We're glad you're here.

Settling into a new home takes time, and it is normal to feel unsure. Take one step at a time, keep this booklet close, and reach out to the organisations listed in this toolkit such as RAY, City of Sanctuary, Besom, your housing option officer, —they are here to help, and everything they offer is free.

For further information contact email: ISJ@yorksj.ac.uk