

Asylum Screening (First) Interview

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The asylum screening interview is the first interview that takes place after you have claimed asylum.

For most people, this interview should be quite short – usually around 30 minutes to two hours. For others, however, it might take longer depending on the complexity of their case.

It used to be the case that people would claim asylum and have their screening interview very soon afterwards. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. Most people are waiting many months, and even over a year, for their screening interview. This is due to delays by the Home Office in making asylum decisions. You can learn more about these delays by reading our blog post [here](#).

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What is the asylum screening interview?

How to get an asylum screening interview

If you have claimed asylum at the port where you entered the UK, you will usually be interviewed there by an immigration officer. If you claim asylum some time after entering the UK, you will usually be interviewed at the Screening Unit in Croydon, south London.

If you are claiming asylum other than at the port of entry or after being picked up by an enforcement team, you generally need to **telephone to make an appointment** at the Screening Unit at Lunar House in Croydon. For contact details and opening times, check [this page of the Home Office website](#).

This is the same for adults and unaccompanied children. In the case of unaccompanied children, however, they should have their welfare interview locally rather than having to travel to Croydon if that is not the nearest Home Office branch. Other vulnerable people – for example, people with medical issues or disabilities – may also be able to have their screening interview nearer to where they are living, but this is up to the Home Office to decide.

The exception to this process for claiming asylum is if you arrive in the UK in Northern Ireland – in this situation you claim asylum at the [Home Office at Drumkeen House](#) in Upper Galwally, Belfast.

It used to be the case that people would claim asylum and have their screening interview very soon afterwards. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. Most people are waiting many months, and even over a year, for their screening interview. This is due to delays by the Home Office in making asylum decisions. You can learn more about these delays by reading our blog post.

[Read more about delays](#)

If you have nowhere to live, you do not need to telephone and book an appointment before going to the Screening Unit. However, the staff at the Screening Unit may dispute this, so you need to be prepared to argue for your right to be seen as a “walk-in”. It may help to take a friend or supporter with you to help you with this. If the Home Office staff continue not to believe you, a friend or supporter can write a letter that you can take to the Home Office to show that you are ‘destitute’.

When you telephone the Screening Unit to make an appointment, you may find it difficult to get through. When you do get through, you will usually have a very short phone call in which you will be asked your full name; your date of birth; your address and phone number; if you currently have any immigration status in the UK; and if any family members will be included on your asylum claim. You will also be asked if you need an interpreter for the interview.

The Home Office will then send you a letter confirming the details of the screening interview, though because of delays this may be after many months.

What will the screening interview be like?

In the interview, you will be asked some basic questions about you and your background and family. The questions in the interview may seem straightforward, but this is an important stage of the legal process. You will be asked about your journey to the UK and, briefly, about why you are claiming asylum. Read more about this below (including information on new asylum rules on “inadmissibility”).

At your screening interview, you can tell the Home Office if you need accommodation and financial assistance. This is called “Asylum Support”. Read more on the [Asylum Support page of this guide](#).

Most people do not have a chance to meet with a lawyer before their screening interview. If you have your screening interview at your port of entry, you almost certainly will not have spoken to a lawyer first. If you are having your interview at Croydon, it is good to try and speak to a lawyer before the interview although not all lawyers do this. If the Home Office asks you to bring [evidence](#) about your asylum claim with you to the interview, try and speak to a lawyer about this, as it is more usual to wait until the substantive interview or just after it, when the lawyer will have a better idea about the basis of your asylum claim.

When you have successfully registered your asylum claim, you will then have a screening interview.

Your **lawyer** will not attend the screening interview with you.

If you are **detained** when you [claim asylum](#), your screening interview will probably be conducted in the detention centre. Many people who are detained when they claim asylum are released after the screening interview. Others may continue to be detained, if their case is put into the “detained asylum casework” category. Read more on the [Detention page of this guide](#).

If there are **family members** who will be part of your asylum claim, they need to attend the screening interview with you. There is a family room at the Screening Unit at Croydon where

children can play, and you may want to think about bringing a friend to look after the children while you have your interview.

If your screening interview is held at **Lunar House**, you will go through airport-like security then sit and wait until you are called for your interview.

The interview is relatively short, compared to the longer substantive interview, and may take one or two hours.

You will also usually have your **photograph and fingerprints** (sometimes called biometric data) taken at this point. This is not because you are in trouble. This is to record your asylum claim on the system, and also to use your photograph for an identity card called an Application Registration card or 'ARC card'.

The screening interview is not audio-recorded, unlike the longer substantive asylum interview.

The Home Office interviewer will take notes on a screening interview form during the interview. **It is very important that you get a copy of this screening interview record.** If you are not given this written record (sometimes called a transcript) after the interview, you must email the Home Office to ask for it to be sent to you. The email address you should contact is this one: asylumcustomercommunicationshub@homeoffice.gov.uk.

There will be an **interpreter** provided if you need one. If there are any problems with the interpreter – for example, if you cannot understand them, they cannot understand you, they speak a different dialect, you don't think they are being professional or you can tell they aren't interpreting things correctly – it is very important to **tell the Home Office interviewer** this and ask them to write it down.

You can also tell your lawyer at a later date if there have been problems, but it is far better to have it recorded at the time of interview. If there are differences between what you said in different interviews, or mistakes in your answers, this is used to refuse your application, and this is because of poor interpretation at the screening interview, it will be much easier to prove if the Home Office interviewer noted that there were problems with the interpretation.

In the screening interview, you will be asked some basic questions, such as:

- your name
- your date of birth
- your nationality
- your race/ethnicity/tribal group
- languages you speak
- your religion
- your occupation (in your home country)
- about your family members.

You may be asked to provide evidence to prove your name, date of birth and/or your nationality.

You will be asked **why you have come to the UK**. Note that this is a different question (and in a different section) to **why you cannot return to your home country**. Your answer to why you cannot return to your home country is about your risk if returned (read more [here](#)); the question about why you came to the UK is why you chose the UK as your destination. Be clear in your answers whether you are explaining why you had to leave, or why you came specifically to the UK. Be aware that the Home Office will often try to use these answers to say you came to the UK for reasons *other* than because you need protection.

You will be asked to say briefly **why you are claiming asylum**. You will be asked about this in much more detail in your (later) substantive interview and the Home Office should not be asking you lots of questions about this at this point.

The courts have ruled that information given in the screening interview about reasons for claiming asylum should not be relied upon too much. This is the information, however, on which the Home Office will decide which category your case should go into. If they need more information to decide this, they should seek further information after the interview, before making a decision.

Although these questions may seem simple, the Home Office will compare any information you give during this interview against what you say in other interviews or statements.

You will be asked if *“there are any particular reasons why you should not be detained while your claim is considered”*. If the interviewer doesn't give any more information or ask particular questions at this point, it may be hard to know what they are asking about. This question is to determine if you fall into any of the “at risk” categories which mean you should generally not be detained. Read more on the [Detention page of this guide](#). Read about the legal process for victims of trafficking on our legal blog [here](#).

You will be asked about your **health** in this interview. Although it is difficult to give personal details to someone you don't know, if you don't feel well during the interview, you should say so.

You may be feeling tired, distressed or ill, especially if you have your screening interview at port just after arrival. It is even harder to remember details of your journey when you are tired or stressed, and if this is causing you a problem you should ask that this is recorded on the interview record. If you later refer to a health problem that wasn't mentioned in your screening interview, this may be used against you.

Disclosing information about any illnesses you have will **not** negatively affect your application for asylum.

From August 2021, if you are a family with children making an asylum claim, you should be asked whether your child/children may have separate reasons from you for needing protection. Read more in our legal blog post [here](#).

You will be asked a series of questions about “criminality and security”. These include if you have committed (or been accused of committing) a criminal offence in any country; if you've been involved with an armed or violent organisation; if you have ever written anything praising

or inciting violence; or if you've been involved in or suspected of involvement in terrorism, war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide.

One of the reasons the Home Office asks these questions is to assess whether they think you should be *excluded* from refugee protection. You can read more about this [here](#).

The Home Office also may use information from these answers at a later time if you apply for further immigration status, settlement (Indefinite Leave to Remain), or British citizenship.

At the screening interview, the Home Office will decide which of the following categories your case falls into:

- general casework
- detained non-suspensive appeal
- unaccompanied minors

Detained non-suspensive appeal

If your asylum claim is categorised as a “**non-suspensive appeal**”, you will have an [asylum substantive interview](#) but you will have **no right to appeal within the UK** if the Home Office refuse your asylum claim after the substantive interview, which they are very likely to do if your claim is in this category.

If it is decided your case is “**detained non-suspensive appeals**”, you will be detained straight after the screening interview. Read more about immigration detention, and your legal options if detained, on the [Detention page of this guide](#).

The term “non-suspensive” refers to the fact that the Home Office does not have to suspend (this means stop) your removal **until you have had the chance to appeal a refusal**, unlike other asylum cases. In order to do this, the Home Office will “**certify**” your asylum claim.

The Home Office makes this decision before the substantive (big) asylum interview, when you give full reasons for why you fled. The decision is usually made on the grounds of your **country of origin**, if you come from a country which is considered by the Home Office to be generally safe. You can find the list of generally safe countries [here](#).

The **timing of your asylum claim** may also be a factor in this decision. The Home Office may decide that an asylum application is opportunistic and certify a claim on that basis. For example, if you have lived in the UK for a long time but only claim asylum when you are picked up by an immigration enforcement team, the Home Office is likely to say that asylum claim is opportunistic.

A decision to certify an asylum claim can be challenged by a judicial review. Read more on the [Judicial Reviews page of this guide](#).

Unaccompanied minors

An unaccompanied minor is a child who is under the age of 18 years old; is applying for asylum

in their own right; and is separated from both parents and is not being cared for in the UK by an adult who - in law or by custom - has responsibility to do so.

If you are an unaccompanied minor and the Home Office accepts this, your case will be dealt with slightly differently by the Home Office than if they say you are an adult.

If you are an unaccompanied minor you will in most cases still have an asylum (substantive) interview, and your lawyer will usually attend the interview with you.

If you are an unaccompanied minor, you may find general information in this guide useful. The legal process explained in this guide, however, is mainly for adults and does not contain child-specific procedure.

If you would like to know more about the procedure for unaccompanied children, see our [Young Asylum Guide](#).

For more information on the asylum process for unaccompanied minors, contact the [Independent Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Support Service \(IUSS\)](#) at the Refugee Council or the [Migrant Children's Project](#) at Coram Children's Legal Centre.

The Home Office may not believe that you are under 18 years old – this is called an “age dispute”. The Home Office may undertake an age assessment, and may also ask local authority social services to assess your age. Read more [here](#).

Your journey to the UK

In your screening interview, you will be asked about your journey to the UK. One of the reasons you are asked questions about this is to determine whether the UK is responsible for considering your asylum claim. There will be questions about whether you have claimed asylum or been granted Refugee Status in any other country; and if you passed through other countries, why you did not apply for asylum there.

If the information you give in this interview is different from the information you give in later interviews, this will be used against you. If you are not sure of something or can't remember a date or detail you can say “I'm not sure of the date” or “I don't remember”. You can always clarify this information if you remember the answer after the interview.

After the screening interview

Once you have had your asylum screening interview, you should be issued with an ID card called Application Registration card or 'ARC card' that shows you have claimed asylum. Read more about the ARC card [here](#).

If you have asked the Home Office for accommodation, and they have decided you meet the criteria for emergency temporary accommodation, you should be moved to that accommodation immediately after the screening interview.

[Read more about Asylum Support](#)

Some time after your asylum screening interview, you will be invited to attend the big interview:

the [asylum substantive interview](#). You should **prepare** as much as possible for this interview – see the action section below.

At the time of writing, some people are waiting for a very long time for their asylum substantive interview. Some people are waiting months, some people have been waiting one or two years. Watch our video on Home Office delays [here](#).

Inadmissibility Rules

In January 2021, the UK government introduced new rules through which they can decide that an asylum claim is “inadmissible” if a person established a connection to a ‘safe third country’ on their way to the UK. This means that the UK will try not to consider that person’s asylum claim in the UK. These rules replace the Dublin Regulations, which no longer operate in the UK after Brexit.

[Learn about the Inadmissibility Rules](#)

If the Home Office finds that it needs to consider whether or not your claim should be deemed ‘inadmissible’, you will receive a [Notice of Intent letter](#) after your screening interview.

Importantly, this is not the same as receiving a [decision of inadmissibility](#). It is simply a notification to let you know that the Third Country Unit of the Home Office is considering whether or not your claim is inadmissible. At this stage, no formal decision on inadmissibility has been made yet.

To see an example of a Notice of Intent letter, have a read of page 30 of the Home Office guidance on inadmissibility [here](#).

While your claim is being considered under these rules, your asylum claim will not move forward in the UK.

To learn more about how the Inadmissibility Rules might affect your asylum support, you can read the guidance for Home Office caseworkers (specifically pages 9-10 of the guidance) [here](#).

ACTION SECTION

Make sure you have a copy of the asylum screening interview form the Home Office interviewer filled out during your interview. If you are not given a copy of this at the interview, you can request a copy of it afterwards. Your lawyer should help you with this. If you don’t have a lawyer, a community group or your MP may be able to help.

If you don’t have one already, try and find a lawyer to represent you in your asylum claim. Read our information about lawyers and legal advice [here](#).

Prepare for the asylum substantive interview. Read our [page on the substantive interview](#) to know what to expect and how to prepare for the interview.