

# Guidance and resource materials<sup>1</sup> for GP practices working with asylum seekers and refugees

## Letter and report requests

### 1. Background

- A series of letter templates to respond to common requests from refugees and asylum seekers has been created to help GPs and their staff respond efficiently to minimise impact on workload.
- Refugees and people seeking asylum can be greatly helped by letters and short reports from their GP practice. They can struggle to represent themselves and are often asked to provide letters from doctors to further their request.
- Sometimes requests are important and reasonable and sometimes they are unrealistic.
- Refugees and asylum seekers often do not have the money to pay for requests. Refusing to provide information because of no capacity to pay fees can be counterproductive and result in multiple attempts to persuade the practice to help, such as booking appointments with different team members and involving advocacy organisations. It can cause conflict in primary care settings as the patient can start to perceive the refusal of a letter as the problem, rather than the actual problem itself.

### 2. Templates

- The letters will still need to be adapted to meet the needs of each request, but they should reduce the need for formatting and be reasonably self-explanatory. Hopefully these materials will enable more GPs to provide support requested free of charge.
- The templates will be published on SystemOne to enable you to import them directly into your systems. You will need to make some adjustments to your master copies before you can use them.

#### 2.1 Support related letter templates:

- **Poor accommodation conditions:** This can be used to give to any provider of housing (Council/Home Office/Private).
- **Damp/mould:** This can be used to give to any provider of housing.
- **Request for change in asylum accommodation:** This covers requests to move/not be moved/not share a room.

Please be aware that these requests to influence asylum accommodation decisions are very challenging due to shortages of accommodation. There are criteria in the letter template, which have been set by the Home Office. Unfortunately, many people

are told that they need a letter from a doctor if they want to make an accommodation related request and this creates an expectation. It is important for the patient to be aware that, if they are successful in getting their request met, should the result be less satisfactory than they hoped, a change back to the original arrangement is unlikely to be possible.

As a clinician, if you are concerned about risks, there is scope to make sure those concerns are communicated via this document. Risk of harm to self, to others, a history of disruptive behaviour or a history of human rights abuses are probably the main areas of concern where an explanation from a clinician could be useful.

- **Food/diet:** These are usually requested by patients living in hotels who are not allowed access to cooking facilities to make their own food. It is probably unrealistic to hope that this can be changed, even with a letter from a doctor, but refusing to provide a letter is often counter-productive.
- **Letter for council about housing need priority:** Individuals are sometimes given little time to find accommodation once receiving a decision on their asylum claim. This will result in urgent requests for information to help pressurised housing departments decide who is priority for the limited amount of Council housing they have.
- **Opening a bank account:** Banks expect a 'letter of introduction' to assist a refugee with opening a bank account. The urgency comes when an asylum seeker is given Leave to Remain and suddenly needs benefits paying into a bank account. In some areas refugee organisations can provide this letter. A letter of introduction is more than proof of address. The GP is also confirming that they know the individual professionally. Please refer to the templated letter for further requirements and to publications produced by the Bank involved if you are in any doubt about what is needed.
- **Concessionary travel (bus pass):** This one is written using the criteria for Kirklees Council concessionary travel. If you want to use it, check your own council's criteria and amend the template.

## 2.2 Asylum Claim related templates:

TortureID ([TortureID | Identify, Document, Rehabilitate](#)) have created some materials to better support GPs and their teams with providing timely medical information as efficiently as possible.

Information about serious health problems, risks and vulnerabilities and any evidence of human rights abuses can be crucial in asylum claims. There are obvious health benefits to making sure that people with medical issues have these brought to the attention of people making decisions about their future.

Unfortunately, many people seeking asylum cannot pay for anything. Many asylum seekers now do not even have a solicitor who can access some legal aid funding for them.

- **Short template for reports requested by a solicitor:** Occasionally GPs may be asked to provide short reports by solicitors. It should usually be possible to charge a fee for these. The solicitor usually asks a series of questions which an administrator can drop into the template provided here. It is worth investing in creating a paragraph of CV.
- **Short template for reports requested by a patient:** If a patient asks for a short report and you decide to do one, then this template may be helpful. Again, it is worth investing in a paragraph of CV. The clinician could cut and paste relevant consultations into this template.
- **Letter about relying on GP records in asylum claims (1):** Unfortunately, it is increasingly common that copies of GP records are being used in asylum claims instead of letters and reports. This letter warns of the risks in relying on GP records and can be added as a letter when notes are requested.
- **Letter about relying on GP records in asylum claims (2):** See above. If your practice has a lot of people claiming asylum it may be more efficient to create this letter at new patient registration. A quick link can be added to your templates. This also has the advantage of protecting the patient from misuse of the GP record if they change practice etc.

If you are a clinician who is interested in specialist assessment and documentation of human rights abuses, please feel free to contact [admin@tortureid.org](mailto:admin@tortureid.org) to find out more. We are continually working on templates and proformas to try and identify people who have been harmed.

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<sup>i</sup> This document has been created by TortureID as part of a bank of resources for NHS clinicians who are working with people who are seeking asylum. [www.tortureid.org](http://www.tortureid.org). It has been created by Dr Jo Miller who is a GP working with people seeking asylum. The resources are suggestions, drawn from practical GP experience, about how to respond to common requests. They are not 'official' templates with the endorsement of any organisations. The asylum environment is fast changing, and materials are likely to need updating regularly. Each template needs to be read through, agreed and adapted to the needs of the service planning to use them.