



Good Company Hub
Ruxley Lane, Ewell, Surrey KT19 0JG
Tel. (ERN): 07432 660653
Tel. (Good Company): 0208 7868 221
Email: epsomrefugeenetwork@gmail.com
foodbank@goodcompany.org.uk

Safeguarding Refugees and Asylum Seekers Policy

Introduction

Nothing is more vital to us at Good Company (Surrey) than protecting people's safety, wellbeing, and human rights. We believe that everyone has equal right to be protected from all forms of abuse.

Through the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network, we help refugee and asylum seeking families to settle and become part of the local community. Though we recognise that refugees and asylum seekers are not automatically "vulnerable", we also know that they may face increased vulnerability to heightened or specific risks. We are committed to understanding and responding to their unique needs, as part of protecting everyone we support from all forms of abuse, while promoting their dignity and wellbeing.

This policy has been created to:

- Communicate our beliefs and approach to safeguarding refugees and asylum seekers.
- Explain the factors that may put refugees and asylum seekers in a position of vulnerability.
- Highlight the specific or heightened risks that refugees and asylum seekers may face, both as children and as adults at risk.
- Outline our practices in relation to safeguarding refugees and asylum seekers, and the ways in which we uphold our duty of care and meet our legal responsibilities.

This policy relates specifically to the safeguarding of refugees and asylum seekers.



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Definitions

Safeguarding – Protecting people’s right to live safely, free from abuse and neglect.

Safeguarding is about people and organisations working together to help prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect, while at the same time making sure that the adult’s or child’s wellbeing is promoted.

This includes, where appropriate, having regard to their views, wishes, feelings, and beliefs when deciding on any action that affects them.

Asylum Seeker – someone who has claimed asylum upon arrival in the UK and is still awaiting approval (or rejection) of their asylum claim by the UK Home Office.

Refugee – a person who has had their claim for asylum approved by the UK Home Office. They are permitted to live and work in the UK, subject to the length of visa or residency permit they have been given.

Child – anyone under the age of 18.

Adult at risk – someone over the age of 18 who has care or support needs, who is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect, and who is unable to protect themselves from abuse or neglect due to their care or support needs.

Factors contributing to vulnerability

Though refugee or asylum seeker status does not necessarily equate to vulnerability in a safeguarding sense, there are many interrelated factors related to their status that can increase exposure to safeguarding risks, including:

Language barriers – Difficulties in communication limit integration, community, and wellbeing. Language barriers have tangible consequences, such as problems with asylum claims, ineligibility for employment, and lack of access to education and healthcare. Misunderstanding of issues such as finance, proper procedures, and acceptable behaviour may also expose refugees and asylum seekers to exploitation.

Cultural differences – Some refugees and asylum seekers may bring beliefs, cultural and religious practices with them from their country of origin that contribute towards abuse.

Isolation and stigma – Many refugees and asylum seekers feel isolated and lack the community support systems to prevent abuse. There is also a social stigma associated with refugee or asylum seeker status, and some people may face abuse linked to racial discrimination.

Poverty and self-reliance – Asylum seekers are often not entitled to work, and they do not have access to the UK's social welfare system. This may contribute to children and adults at risk being unable to meet their basic needs and living in unacceptable circumstances.

Experience of trauma – Some refugees and asylum seekers have experienced extreme trauma, either in their country of origin or during what is often a frightening and dangerous journey.

Family structure – Many factors, including bereavement, separation, additions or changes to the household, and changes in household dynamics – may be adding stress to family life for refugee and asylum-seeking families. Tensions and gaps in care can lead to abuse and neglect.

Unaccompanied children – Unaccompanied children are reliant on social care, rendering them extremely vulnerable to abuse. They may also be incorrectly assessed as being over 18 and placed in unsuitable accommodation alongside adults they do not know.

Mental and physical health – Refugees and asylum seekers may face health difficulties, which often result from their displacement, and may be unable to access appropriate healthcare. Mental health challenges are very common among displaced people, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety disorders.

Access to education – Accessing, remaining and thriving in education can be difficult for refugee and asylum-seeking children. This can compromise their wellbeing, dignity, and sense of agency.

Safeguarding risks

Some of the kinds of abuse that may affect refugees and asylum seekers are outlined below. However, this is not an exhaustive list.

Adult refugees and asylum seekers at risk

Bullying – Arriving in a new community can increase the risk of being bullied in person or online.

Discriminatory abuse – Refugees and asylum seekers may be at risk of abuse relating to their nationality, ethnicity, or other protected characteristics, due to stigma and discrimination.

Domestic violence – Domestic abuse may be unreported, as new arrivals may not be aware that the situation would be classed as a form of abuse in the UK.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – Due to cultural differences, gender dynamics, or a desire to turn to traditional practices, refugee and asylum-seeking women may be at a higher risk of FGM.

Financial abuse – Refugees and asylum seekers can be more vulnerable to financial abuse if they lack understanding of financial processes in the UK or face language barriers or dependency.

Forced marriage – Cultural differences or financial difficulties may contribute to an increased likelihood of refugee and asylum-seeking adults at risk being forced into marriage.

Modern slavery – Through their journey to the UK or arrival in the country, refugees and asylum seekers may face abuse such as trafficking, forced labour, domestic slavery, and debt bondage.

Neglect – The lack of access to funds, food, shelter, clothing, heating, stimulation and activity, or personal or medical care for some refugees and asylum seekers may contribute to neglect.

Online abuse – Refugees and asylum seekers may be new to using computers, including online banking. They may also face online harassment or discrimination associated with their status.

Physical abuse – Some refugees and asylum seekers may not be aware of the different standards for appropriate physical contact in the UK and may have normalised acts that we consider abuse.

Psychological abuse – Refugees and asylum seekers may be at greater risk of emotional abuse.

Radicalisation – Refugee and asylum-seeking adults at risk can be more vulnerable to extremist groups that may attempt to recruit them.

Self-neglect – Due to trauma, stress, mental health difficulties, or inability to access basic essentials may contribute to self-neglect for refugees and asylum seekers.

Sexual abuse – Some refugees and asylum seekers may be exposed to sexual abuse because of fear, dependence on their abuser, inappropriate housing, or cultural differences.

Sexual exploitation – Circumstances of travel to the UK, deprivation, and isolation on arrival may make some adults at risk more vulnerable to exploitation in exchange for money, safety, or services.

Child refugees and asylum seekers

Bullying – Arriving in a new school and community can increase the likelihood of a child being bullied, either in person or online.

Child Sexual Exploitation – Circumstances of travel to the UK, deprivation, and separation from parents and guardians may make some children more vulnerable to sexual exploitation in exchange for money, safety, or services.

Child marriage – Cultural differences or financial difficulties can contribute to an increased likelihood of refugee and asylum seeking children being forced into marriage.

Child trafficking – Through their journey to the UK or arrival in the country, children may have faced or continue to face abuse such as human trafficking, forced labour, domestic slavery, sexual exploitation, and debt bondage.

Domestic violence – Child refugees and asylum seekers in households where domestic violence goes unreported will face more protracted exposure to witnessing and experiencing it.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – Due to cultural differences, gender dynamics, or a desire to turn to traditional practices, refugee and asylum seeking girls may be at a higher risk of FGM.

Neglect – The lack of access to funds, food, shelter, clothing, heating, stimulation and activity, or personal or medical care for some refugees and asylum seekers may contribute to neglect.

Online child abuse – The DSL can help manage the reporting and follow up action, which may require communication with the child's school. If the concern is more serious and there are worries about possible grooming or exploitation then this must immediately be reported to the police.

Physical abuse – Cultural and religious norms may include disciplinary practices such as physical discipline that constitutes physical abuse in the UK. Circumstances and stressors associated with displacement may also contribute to increased physical violence.

Psychological abuse – The difficulties associated with displacement can lead to an increased risk of emotional or psychological abuse of children.

Radicalisation – Refugee and asylum-seeking children can be more vulnerable to extremist groups that may attempt to recruit them.

Sexual abuse – Some refugees and asylum-seeking children may be exposed to sexual abuse because of separation from their parents or guardians, dependence on their abuser, inappropriate housing, or cultural differences.

Recognising a safeguarding concern

A safeguarding concern could be a suspicion, an allegation, an observation, or a disclosure of abuse or risk of abuse. The first step to dealing with safeguarding concerns is to be able to recognise them. It is the responsibility of everyone working with refugees and asylum seekers to be able to notice when something is wrong, and to check with the Safeguarding Leads if unsure.

Responding to a disclosure

If someone discloses information which raises a safeguarding concern, your job is to:

- Act sensitively and appropriately, respecting and reassuring the person disclosing.
- If the person is at risk of immediate harm, you must call emergency services via 999.
- If there is no immediate risk of harm, contact the Safeguarding Lead as soon as possible

It is very important to reiterate that it is not your responsibility to investigate the concern. This should be done by the Designated Safeguarding Lead, or the relevant authorities.

Reporting procedure

1. If there is immediate risk of harm

If there is an immediate risk of harm to a child or adult, or a crime is in progress, you must call 999 and notify the Safeguarding Leads as soon as possible.

2. If there is no immediate risk of harm

If you are concerned about someone you work with, or have a specific safeguarding concern, you must speak to a member of staff at Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network as soon as possible. They will give you the contact details of the Safeguarding Leads, or you can call these directly on:

Jo Sherring: 07775 798 047, jo@goodcompany.org.uk

Jess Brooks: 07754 215 060, jessica@goodcompany.org.uk

Penny Griffiths: 07599 781 128, penny@goodcompany.org.uk

Recording safeguarding incidents

You may need to make a written report. We will provide a form for you to complete. This is when your initial recording of your concern or a disclosure is of vital importance. You must explain your concerns in a fact-based way, without giving your opinions.

EERN Volunteer Safeguarding Agreement

You should always follow this code of behaviour. If it is alleged that you have behaved inappropriately you will be asked to stand down from your volunteering role.

If you become aware of any breaches of this code, you must report them to the Volunteer Coordinator immediately who will address the concern appropriately in line with our policies and procedures.

The EERN Designated Safeguarding Lead is responsible to ensuring all staff and volunteers have accessed basic safeguarding training, and have read and understand their responsibilities set out in the EERN Safeguarding Policy.

Please sign below to acknowledge that you have read and understood the EERN Safeguarding Policy and agree to follow the steps outlined in this policy if necessary in the course of your role.

Signed.....

Print Name:.....

Date.....