

Benefits Processes and Procedures

Introduction

One of the key tasks for sponsors in the initial period after arrival is to ensure that refugees apply for benefits and receive the correct amount within a reasonable timescale.

This process can be complex. This document is designed to guide you through the key aspects of the procedure, particularly how they relate to refugees. It should be read in conjunction with our Introduction to Benefits which provides guidance on the common benefits that refugees may apply for.

You are required to support refugees to apply for benefits within three days of their arrival. In practice, this has been defined as within three working days from the day of arrival. Depending on which benefits they qualify for the application will either be in person, online or by phone with the Jobcentre Plus.

Your role

Although you will be there to support a refugee through the process of applying for benefits, you should not feel that you need to become an expert in benefits advice. We would encourage refugees to make use of local specialist support services, such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, as much as possible. This will help reduce their dependency on you.

For applications and appeals for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA), it is essential that the refugee receives expert advice and support from a specialist welfare rights advisor. These are complex applications and it can take months to receive a decision, and specialist advice significantly increases the chances of a positive decision. It is not necessary to claim these within three days of arrival. Where these are applicable, we recommend an appointment with a specialist welfare rights advisor within the first few weeks.

Where possible, we suggest you contact local advice services in your area during the planning process so that you are aware of the support they can provide.

Challenges

Supporting refugees to access benefits can be challenging. Some Jobcentre Plus staff can be unfamiliar with the policies they should be following. In some situations, they can provide information that is false or misleading. You may be able to avoid some of these issues by building a relationship with the Jobcentre Plus in advance of the refugees' arrival. However, you should anticipate that you may have to provide some advocacy

when engaging with the Jobcentre Plus to ensure that refugees receive the necessary level of service.

In our experience, some Jobcentre Plus can be reluctant to provide interpreters. They may say that they do not provide the service and ask you to provide interpreters yourself. You do not need to provide interpreters for regular Jobcentre Plus appointments. They should provide them for anyone in a vulnerable situation whose command of English is not good enough to access their services. DWP guidance states that refugees can be considered “people in a vulnerable situation”.

You may wish to have a conversation with the refugees about this, as if they give the appearance of understanding English (for example responding with “yes” to questions they have not understood) this could lead to Jobcentre Plus staff believing that an interpreter is not required. In our experience this is a message that you may have to repeat frequently, both to refugees and Jobcentre Plus staff if required.

We have found that in some circumstances we have to advocate strongly on this point. In these circumstances, it can be helpful to put the responsibility on to the Jobcentre Plus worker, for example sending a group member to accompany a refugee to an appointment without an interpreter. They can then ask Jobcentre Plus staff how they plan to communicate with the refugee and ensure that they understand all the information they have been given.

The Jobcentre Plus branches that are unfamiliar with working with resettled refugees may be unaware of the fast-track procedures that they should follow. You may need to be specific that these procedures are for resettled refugees, which are different to the procedures they would follow with people granted refugee status in the UK through the asylum process.

If you do encounter this problem, seek support from your DWP Refugee Lead who should be able to confirm the correct policy and relay this message to staff. If you are unable to find out who your DWP Refugee Lead is, or if speaking to them does not resolve the problem, then contact your Lead Sponsor, or [Reset](#) for advice and support.

Timescales

Under the fast-track procedures refugees should expect to receive payment for Jobseeker’s Allowance, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit within 2-3 weeks, if they are eligible for them. However, there can be delays and sponsors should manage refugees and their own expectations, support refugees to budget accordingly while they wait for benefits to be processed, and advocate to resolve any issues.

We have produced a separate briefing on Universal Credit due to the complexities involved, but timescales for processing these applications are longer (minimum five weeks). Sponsor groups will need to support refugees to budget their cash allowance for

this period of time and should consider providing additional financial support if there is a delay in receiving a payment from Universal Credit. If you are in the situation where you need to do this, you should take time to explain to refugees how this will work, and why you are doing this.

Sponsors are also required to provide £200 per person in cash to each refugee to support them while they wait for their benefit applications to be processed. We suggest you provide this in a range of denominations. This initial cash payment is per person, not per adult (so if you are supporting a family made up of 1 parent and 3 children, the initial cash payment will total £800).

In areas where refugees claim Universal Credit, they are likely to have wait longer for their benefits to be processed. In these circumstances, Local Authorities suggest you provide an additional £100 (£300 per person in total) to each refugee on the day of arrival.

Fast-track procedures

Benefit applications from resettled refugees should be processed under fast-track procedures, which significantly reduce the waiting time for payments. There is Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) guidance on this which is available to Jobcentre Plus staff on their internal intranet.

Once you have an arrival date for a family, you should approach your local Jobcentre Plus to discuss this process. Within the DWP, each area has a Refugee Group Lead who manages refugee related products and can help you to arrange a meeting with your local Jobcentre Plus.

Once an arrival date is known, the Home Office will automatically notify the DWP via their internal IT systems. This will start the process of a National Insurance Number (NINO) being created. Jobcentre Plus staff will be able to access this information via their internal systems. If there are any problems with this process, then you should contact the Refugee Group Lead.

As part of the fast-track procedure for resettled refugees, the Jobcentre Plus will:

- Receive notification of the arrival and the National Insurance number (NINO) in advance.
- Offer an appointment to take the application in person.
- Take applications for Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit and submit them to dedicated teams at Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).
- Provide paper copies of all required application forms.

- Process applications for Jobseeker’s Allowance quickly (within 2-3 weeks), or assist the refugee to make a claim for Universal Credit, “annotating the journal” to make clear the refugee requires a non-digital relationship if appropriate. (This means that the refugee will not be dependent on accessing the English language online system for Universal Credit in order to manage their claim.)

At the time of application, the only ID that the refugees are likely to have are the UK entry visas on which they arrived (these are attached to a yellow A4 sheet of paper). These documents are sufficient ID to make the benefits application. The Work Coach should copy and verify these for every family member and every relevant benefit.

The refugees will then need to bring their biometric residence permit cards (BRPs) at a later date.

Jobcentre Plus relationships

You may find that staff at the [Jobcentre Plus](#) are unaware of this process and may be reluctant to follow it or to search for the appropriate guidance. If you encounter difficulties, you should refer to the DWP Refugee Group Leads Network for support, pursue local contacts if you have them, or contact Reset for advice.

Once you have an arrival date it is advisable to contact the Jobcentre Plus to arrange a face-to-face meeting with them to discuss this process and take their guidance on which benefits the refugees may be eligible for. You can also discuss when they will receive the paper copies of the application forms, how they will pass these to you, and whether they will provide these to you to partially complete or if they will complete them all on the day.

You should start developing these relationships in advance of the family’s arrival, at the latest as soon as you have an arrival date. You will also need to approach your local Jobcentre Plus to ensure they are aware of this and agree how the benefits will be processed.

Refugee appointment at Jobcentre Plus

At this appointment, refugees should meet their designated Work Coach, who will take all the relevant applications, and take copies and verify their Entry Visa (the visa that is given to travel to the UK). The refugee will later need to bring their BRP to the Jobcentre Plus once they have received it.

If claiming JSA or Universal Credit, the refugee will also complete their claimant commitment, where they agree what steps they will take to look for work. These steps should be reasonable and take account of the individual’s circumstances. Further guidance can be found in our [Benefits Interview Guidance](#).

Refugee empowerment

When working with refugees it is important to bear in mind that they may have no experience of claiming state benefits, so you may need to give them some background information on this and explain which agencies the money is coming from. They may also need to be made aware that they are receiving the same benefits as any other person in the same situation, and not receiving these payments because they are refugees. Sponsor groups have told us that it can be useful to explain where the money for benefits comes from, and that this is taken from the taxes those working in the UK pay. This may help to reduce any feeling of dependency a refugee may feel in claiming benefits.

You should make it clear to the refugee that although you will be supporting them, that it is their application, and ultimately they are responsible for attending appointments and meeting their commitments, and the possibility of getting sanctioned if the appointments or commitments that are made are not kept.

All benefits agencies have access to telephone interpreters, but you may need to advocate for them to be used. You can contact the relevant agency yourselves to clarify their procedures and will need to advise the refugee how to request an interpreter when they need one. We recommend encouraging Jobcentre Plus to use their own interpretation services rather than providing interpreters for them.

Bank accounts

Most benefits are designed to be paid into a bank account. We recommend you support refugees to open one as quickly as possible, however, it is important to be aware of the challenges you are likely to face in opening an account for someone with no proof of address and limited ID documents. It's important to consult local banks in advance to clarify what information they will need to open an account. Read our [bank accounts resource](#) for more information and tips about opening a bank account for newly-arrived refugees.

Some benefits can make payments by alternative methods as a short-term measure when someone does not have a bank account. JSA, ESA and IS uses the Payment Exception Service, and further information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/payment-exception-service>. Benefits provided by HMRC (Tax Credit and Child Benefit) can be provided by Giro cheque.

These methods can usually only be used for the first payment, however if there are exceptional circumstances preventing the refugee opening a bank account you should contact the relevant agency to discuss this.

Change of circumstances

If there are any changes in the refugee's situation – for instance, if they get a job, change address, begin a college course, give birth – this could affect the benefit amount they are entitled to.

The refugee must inform all relevant agencies of this information. Failure to do so could result in them having to repay any overpayments, receiving a fine, or being charged with benefit fraud.

The Work Coach should make this clear to the refugee, but you may need to re-iterate this, and advise them that it is their responsibility to inform the Jobcentre Plus (with your help if needed). It is advisable to make it clear that the sponsor group will not automatically relay information to the Jobcentre Plus on their behalf, to avoid any confusion on this point and the potential for financial penalties.

Dates of Claims

The date that refugees claim benefits from should always be the date they arrived and not the date the form is being completed. If they arrive on the 1st of April, complete their claims on the 3rd of April but mistakenly include the 3rd of April as the date of the claim, they will lose two days of payments that they are eligible for.

Benefits calculator

To calculate the amount of benefit money a refugee may be entitled to, you could use the benefit calculator such as the ones on these websites: www.entitledto.co.uk and www.turn2us.org.uk.

Turn2us also has a grants search function which may be useful if the refugee has additional financial needs. Use the calculator as a guide only as the final amount can vary from the estimate.