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SAFETY AND SECURITY



Credit: The
Scottish Sun

**A GUIDE FOR ORGANISATIONS, VOLUNTEERS AND INDIVIDUALS
WORKING IN TEMPORARY ASYLUM SEEKER ACCOMMODATION.**

This guide outlines some of the basic safety and security needs for organisations, volunteers and individuals working in temporary asylum seeker accommodation such as hotels. This guide has been made by HOPE not hate and Safer Foundations, a refugee and vulnerable migrant services and safeguarding support organisation.

HOPE not hate has recorded a **102% increase in anti-migrant activity over the last year**, with a large amount of activity focussed on demonstrating outside accommodation sites or filming around accommodation sites. In some cases, actors even try to gain access to asylum seekers inside accommodation. There have also been incidents of asylum seekers being harmed in the wider community due to perceptions of their behaviour and the stigmatisation of asylum seekers more broadly.

BOX: WHAT DOES THE SECTOR THINK?

A survey of organisations working to support people who are asylum seekers and refugees carried out by Refugee Action's insight and data hub with HOPE not hate in March 2023 found that:

- **48%** of organisations report that **far right activity** against them or their service users has **increased** in the last 12 months
- **60%** of respondents said their **service users have experienced abuse and hate crime** in the local community – the majority having experienced verbal abuse, threats and harassment.
- **95%** of organisations are responding to the far right threat, including creating / updating **risk assessments** (52%) and coordinating with **local authorities** (52%), **hotel contractors** (38%) and **police** (33%)

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION AROUND SAFETY

- When discussing safety and security, it is important to strike a balance between informing people and making them so aware of danger they become paranoid or distressed. Emphasise that the point of security planning is to understand the risks in advance, and then put steps in place to ensure you are equipped to deal with it.
- It is also important to mention that depending on the context and sentiment of a local area, certain individuals might be more at-risk than others. For example, people of colour working in accommodation sites could be more at risk of abuse or attacks if they are assumed to be asylum seekers by those with an anti-migrant agenda.
- As well as thinking about safety for staff, volunteers and service users, it is also really important to consider wellbeing. Constantly assessing risk and worrying about security can take its toll. It is important you have wellbeing support measures in place.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN TEMPORARY ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION

The organisations below need to have adequate steps in place to manage day-to-day security and respond appropriately in the event of an incident. These procedures and policies should already be in place, but due to the last-minute nature of some decisions about temporary accommodation, there can be gaps. If you feel the key stakeholders are not providing the service they should be, you should contact them directly.

POLICE

Different police forces organise relationships with accommodation providers differently, but if you contact your local police community liaison lead you should find your way to the right person. Having a working relationship with the police should look like:

- Mutual sharing of knowledge of **far-right activity** in or around the hotel.
- Mutual sharing of knowledge of **community tension** or points of conflict which could compromise the safety of residents or people working in accommodation. Information from social media, anecdotes heard at the school gate or in shops and police reports can all provide data points on community tensions.
- **Connections** to other parts of the community such as local schools, faith groups etc. who can also feed into information around tension and conflict.
- **Reporting hate crimes.** This is particularly important for generating accurate records of the amount of incidents in the hotel or the surrounding area. This should also include any harassment of your staff or volunteers. If the victim of the hate crime does not choose to report it, you can report anonymously on their behalf without compromising their asylum application or privacy.



**Report a
hate crime**

ACCOMMODATION PROVIDER

- Asylum accommodation falls under the responsibility of a Home Office subcontracted housing provider. The most common are Mears, Clearsprings Ready Homes and Serco. In some cases, these bigger providers further subcontract to different local private providers. The provider has a responsibility to ensure the safety of the accommodation and you should expect the following from them:
- A **Critical Incident Response plan**, which details the steps that need to be taken in the event of any critical incident, who leads on which activity and how the hotel & its residents can remain safe.
- A **Lockdown Policy** which details who makes the decision to lock down,

how the lockdown is implemented, which areas of the hotel are safest and how this will be communicated to residents.

- Clear **lines of communication** which mean that people working in the hotel have round-the-clock access to leadership who can implement these policies clearly and robustly.



WHAT IF THE POLICE AREN'T FOR ME?

Some organisations or groups of people will have difficult relationships with the police and other institutions, and for valid reasons. The presence of institutional racism and misogyny in the police is widely accepted. However, the police retain certain powers in society that are currently unique to them; for this reason, they are often the main authority in these matters. It can be worth trying to engage with police liaisons and trying to get an understanding of their willingness to be flexible and work with you, as well as their understanding of the contexts and experiences of asylum seekers.

Organisations which don't work with the police manage this by having strong relationships and links to other organisations who can share skills, especially to do with technology and security. Having local networks of similar organisations can be helpful in general, but in particular for organisations who might want extra help with keeping safe or sharing experiences of working in a traumatic or difficult environment.

Crimestoppers is a national charity where crimes can be reported free of charge and independently of police. You can report crimes anonymously and if you want to withhold certain information – such as the names of victims or staff involved – you can do this. They can be accessed [online](#) or through a free phone helpline. The organisation Vision Change Win has a [toolkit](#) explaining a community safety approach and how to embed it in organisations.

However, wherever possible the one form of engagement with the police that can be extremely helpful is reporting hate crimes. This is because the far-right are encouraging members of the community to report incidents of violence they perceive themselves to experience in the local area from asylum seekers. If there are no recorded instances of hate crimes against asylum seekers, it is harder for police to understand the tensions in a community.

MIGRANT HELP

This is the subcontractor for the Home Office which deals with all aspects of support for asylum seekers, including those staying in hotel accommodation. Migrant Help focuses its support on financial assistance for those seeking asylum in the UK, including starting claims and dealing with any payment card issues. Migrant Help does not offer any advocacy support in resolving problems – these should be referred into your local refugee and asylum charity for casework resolution. However, they should be the main point of contact for safeguarding concerns in asylum accommodation:

- Any risk should be alerted to Migrant Help, the housing provider and the Home Office safeguarding hub immediately in an email to three main contacts: (1) AsylumSafeguarding@homeoffice.gov.uk, (2), Escalations@migranthehelpuk.org, (3) the accommodation provider (see above).
- By risks, we mean incidents or acts of hatred, any tensions within the hotel population that drive risk, hunger strikes, inability to obtain medical treatment, domestic abuse and similar. People working with vulnerable populations should have undertaken the relevant safeguarding training and be confident in making referrals when necessary.

[At this link](#) you will find some guides made by Asylum Matters on the contractual obligations of the asylum accommodation and support contract (AASC), which can help you challenge any issues you are having with support.



HOTEL SECURITY

Having security guards is a requirement of asylum accommodation. If you are concerned at all about the role or behaviour of hotel security, you should flag this with the hotel manager and the Home Office via Migrant Help. You can expect the following from them:

- Professional and responsible behaviour towards guests.
- Objectivity of approach towards guests, including being trained to spot safeguarding concerns.
- Understanding and following the risk assessments in place and ability to assist staff members working in the hotel itself with your risk assessments surrounding questions of entry, exit and critical incident procedures.

LOCAL AUTHORITY

Local Authority duties apply to anyone resident in their areas, including in asylum hotels, barracks or dispersal accommodation. This includes responsibility under usual Social Care legislation. For this reason, any organisations working in asylum accommodation should be aware of the services and involvement provided by local authorities. In addition to escalating any concerns regarding safety or well-being with the Home Office contractors you should also escalate these to the Local Authority social care teams as relevant: adult services for an adult at risk; children's services for a child at risk. You should also refer any cases you suspect of adult residents being children (even if they've been age assessed as an adult) to your local children's services team and request an age assessment.

WHAT IF I HIT A DEAD END WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS?

We've encouraged contacting key stakeholders to ask for documents, policies and information, as well as for support with incidents. However, some organisations have reported difficulties with receiving a response from these stakeholders. For general queries and information, the best way forward would be to consult and work with other groups in the sector. A combined response means a shared workload and also potentially higher pressure on the organisation you are waiting for to respond.

However, if key stakeholders are failing to fulfil their legal requirements, for example safeguarding requirements, you should seek legal representation to commence "PAP" or pre-action protocol. This is a legal notice to the Home Office that you are escalating the situation due to a breach of duty by the service provider. The aim of these letters is to identify the unresolved issues and provide 14 days for the issues to be resolved and, failing that, for legal proceedings to continue. A lot of the time, issues identified by a PAP letter will be resolved in the 14 days and will not go onto further judicial review. If your organisation has no existing links with legal representation for the sector, other local immigration, refugee and asylum charities may be able to help, as well as social care centres.

SAFETY ADVICE FOR PEOPLE WORKING IN ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION

Supporting people living in accommodation, particularly with the current context of hatred and tension, can be difficult. Beyond this, many staff members or volunteers also live in the community they serve. It's important that these risks are recognised and everything possible is done to reduce them. Some people will be working in accommodation as a representative of a wider organisation, in which case they can follow existing risk assessments and safeguarding policies set up by their parent organisation. However, others will be working on a more informal or individual basis.

TEAMS LIVING IN THE LOCAL AREA

If your team is living in the local area and they've been subjected to harassment this should always be reported to the police. If the perpetrators know where they live they can ask the local police to open a 'TAU Marker' on their home. Being marked as TAU, or Treat As Urgent, means that in the event of any emergency call regarding the marked property the police will seek to expedite the response and they'll be able to access the background information relating to the harassment. Also, if the home address is known and threats have been made, the local crime prevention team may be able to help and advise on fitting a 'fire box', an external letter box that prevents anything being posted through the door. These have been used in community based asylum accommodation and refugee resettlement homes previously.

TRAUMA AND WELLBEING SUPPORT

As mentioned above, it is important that organisations and volunteers take care of mental and emotional health, as well as looking out for residents. If the accommodation site has been subject to a lot of incidents or staff/volunteers are experiencing high levels of stress, it's worth considering bringing in specialist trauma support to debrief with your team however regularly you can. You should always do this in the event of any significant incident, whether it involves staff, volunteers, security or residents.



RISK ASSESSMENTS

These play an important part in ensuring staff safety – the person making the risk assessment should look at the unique characteristics of the specific accommodation site and create a risk assessment. This should include:

- **Entry and exit** – teams entering and leaving accommodation which is subject to scrutiny in the community and possibly being watched can be risky. Some organisations encourage staff to avoid entering and leaving alone by meeting colleagues on the way and travelling the last bit of the journey to the accommodation together.
- **Travel to accommodation site** – Does the hotel have a secure car park, or is the car park within sight of the road? If staff and volunteers drive to the site, will anyone filming or photographing be able to capture faces or car number plates? Where are the public transport links? In the worst case, are taxis a safer form of travel and will budget be set aside to cover this?
- **Check-in and check-out** – have a system of checking everyone has arrived and reached home safely when travelling to work in accommodation. Record emergency contacts who you can contact if someone hasn't sent a check-out update by the agreed time.
- **On site risk escalation** – who is responsible for supporting teams when they're on site and how do they escalate concerns? Create chains of command so it is clear who needs to be informed of incidents, the time frames expected for incident reporting and how concerns and incidents can be recorded.
- **Police contact** – know police liaison contact details, who is the point of contact, how records of previous interactions are stored.
- **Digital risk assessment** – if you are working online, you should consider the following questions. How will you provide safeguarding support through Zoom, Teams or similar? Will you have an online check-in and check-out process? Are debriefs conducted after challenging conversations? Are residents in a safe and private space before commencing any online conversations? Is information still being risk-assessed and shared in the same way it would be if in-person?
- **GDPR and data security** – organisations working with asylum seekers have access to personal information which, in the wrong hands, makes service users very vulnerable. Digitally stored data should be compliant with GDPR and stored securely, including devices such as laptops and phones being locked and secure. Consider how widely personal details and contact details of service users need to be shared. Hard copies with identifiable client information such as notebooks and contact lists should be safely packed away upon entry and exit into the hotel, and wherever possible in notes you should avoid using full names and identifiable information.

SAFETY FOR EVENTS

Hosting events such as community conversations, drop-ins or talks can be an excellent way of engaging the community and spreading news of your organisation and its work. However, in some cases these events can be targeted by individuals who disagree with the premise and who might become a risk to the event. These cases are rare, and so it is important for you to assess the risk well in advance and decide which, if any, safety measures you need to take. Bear in mind that sometimes introducing safety measures means compromising on aspects of the event, so you will need to decide how to strike this balance.

- You should do a **risk assessment** of events considering the venue and who will be in attendance. It might be helpful to have a guest list of known attendees in advance of the event, or security on the door if the event is open to the public. If vulnerable people will be in attendance, you should consider informing them of the assessment.
- Consider your **event publicity**: does it need to be publicly advertised on social media or on your website, or could you reach your desired audience through closed groups or mailing lists? When will you disclose the location of the event to your audience?
- **Avoid live social media posts** – it may be safer to wait until after you and all other staff and volunteers have left the area, so your location will not be revealed.
- **Exit strategy** – When using a venue, check the room where you set up, and work out a plan for how you and attendees will be able to leave safely. Of course, most of the time this will not be necessary, but it can be reassuring to know just in case.
- If you are out and about it can be a good idea to have a **buddy support system**. Let your buddy know what time your meeting or event is likely to end, and text them to say you are home safe. If your buddy does not contact you to say they are home when you expect them to, and you cannot get hold of them, you should have the contact details of who they would like you to contact to raise the alarm.



IF YOU ARE THREATENED:

- Immediately ring the police or ask someone nearby to do so.
- Do not argue with the person threatening you, or engage in conversation. You may be being filmed!
- Try to position yourself near other people if you can.
- It can be reassuring to enter a shop or other public space where there are other people.
- If it is safe to do so, do record any incident on your mobile phone.
- Remember, these types of incidents happen very rarely, and by adopting a few sensible steps, we can minimise the risk and the impact.



“CITIZEN JOURNALISTS” ENTERING AND FILMING IN ACCOMMODATION

In the last few years, multiple incidents have been recorded of far-right actors entering accommodation in order to speak to residents or film inside. In some cases, people will be honest about their intentions and in others they will argue that they are “citizen journalists”. In the UK, it is legal to record someone in photos or videos in public, unless you are doing so for criminal reasons (i.e. “casing the joint”). For example, social media influencers often take videos or photos in public in which people will appear in the background. People concerned with doing this ethically might make an effort to obtain permission from those around, but it is not a requirement by law. “Public” is defined broadly as anywhere there is no “reasonable expectation of privacy”. Only the exterior and foyer/lobby area of a hotel could definitely be classed as public spaces. Some areas with public access, such as shopping centres, are private property so they can make their own rules around filming. In order to get footage deleted or take footage away from the recorder, a court order is needed. For this reason, once video or images have been taken of accommodation it is hard to get them taken down.



Amanda Smith
(AKA Yorkshire Rose)

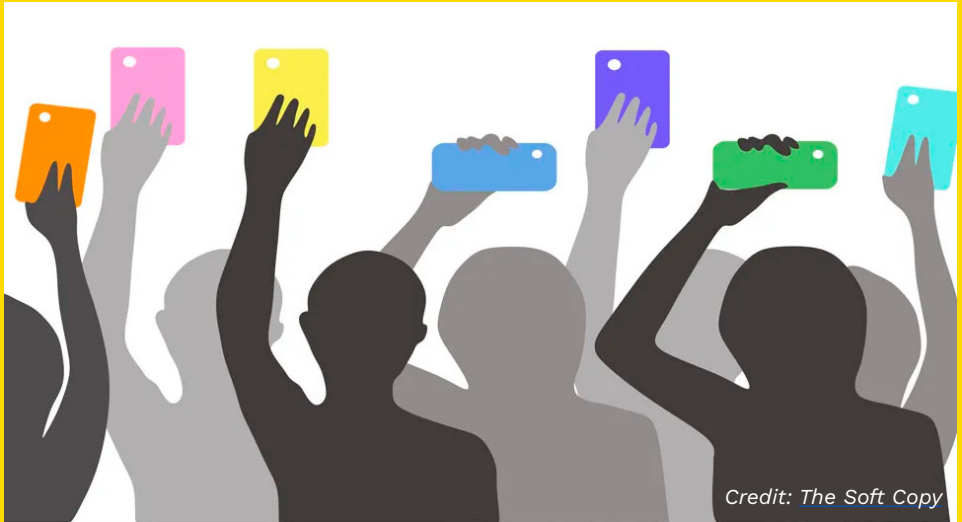


Alan Leggett
(AKA Active Patriot)



Steve Laws

The most active far-right individuals filming in accommodation sites over the last year.



Credit: The Soft Copy

IF YOU ARE BEING FILMED:

- Even if you are feeling nervous, try to remain calm and composed.
- Avoid any interactions with people suspected of being a far-right activist.
- If you are continuously asked questions, or asked why you are not responding, repeating something like “No comment” or “I don’t want to answer your question” is the best response.
- Try not to swear or use inflammatory language, this will make the video more exciting and inflammatory for social media.
- Try to move from a public space into private property (e.g. in a hotel, move from the foyer into an office) if you can. If the recorder continues to pursue you, remind them that you are now in a private space and that they are now filming you without your consent.
- If filming persists and the recorder refuses to leave the location, you or a colleague should call the police (see “If you are threatened”).

SAFETY ADVICE FOR RESIDENTS OF ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION

A critical part of working in hotels is supporting the residents to orientate themselves. Most are newly arrived in the UK and many have little accurate knowledge of the asylum system, life, law and cultural norms in the UK and their local environment. Helping them to understand how to stay safe and enjoy life in the UK can be one of the most important things you do.

It can be very difficult to frame the conversation around safety without feeling like you are patronising or assuming the worst of asylum seekers and the community. However, given past experiences of inflammation from the far-right and community tensions, it is important to address community hostility head-on. The likelihood is that most information you give them will be something they have already sensed from being in the community, but hearing advice from a friendly source will be reassuring. Emphasise that the information is precautionary, and residents are free to act as they wish but you want them to be informed. Here are some tips on what to discuss and how best to do it:

- **The level of risk in the local area** – Is it safe for residents to go out on their own or should they ideally go out in groups, are there any particularly hostile areas, is it safe to be out and about at night? If you are going to highlight hostile areas, be sure to keep the information updated. If there has been recent tensions or an incident, residents might need to know. If you are judging an area based on a hunch, consider the effect that avoiding this area might have on asylum seekers' lives e.g. reducing access to green spaces or more affordable shops.
- **Risk factors that the community is particularly sensitive to** – Think about what people in a community social media group find concerning. For example, is it stereotypical things like hoodies, hanging around in big groups and talking loudly or convening near schools and playgrounds? Although it can seem unfair to impress these expectations and stereotypes on residents, in the interest of safety it is better for them to have all the information and can make their own choice once they know how their actions might be received.
- **Be specific** about the risks so your advice is clear. If residents choose to be cautious, they may be less able to access key services. Try to ensure there are clear ways for residents to access their daily needs, including wellbeing needs.
- **Disseminate information about tension and incidents with residents** – There should be a plan in place on how to do this. Knowing this in advance can prevent panic from both staff and residents. You should know which members of staff have access to contact details for residents (it doesn't have to be all residents, it could just be a core group of community leaders which cover the languages spoken by residents) and ask them to disseminate a message securely. An

alternative to online communication is asking a hotel staff member to put up a notice on message boards in the hotel itself, which can also helpfully be accessed by those without a mobile phone.

COMMUNITY LINKS

In most communities there are a wealth of other resources and organisations that can benefit asylum seekers, even if they are not specifically targeted towards that group. Most areas have hobby-based activities that residents can join in with, such as football clubs, gardening projects, cooking projects or crafting groups. Faith-based groups often have useful contacts or run similar services so they can be useful to be in touch with. Also, country-wide community organisations such as Women's Institutes, Scouts and Girlguiding or Men's Sheds are good to connect with as they will have existing members who are looking to teach and share skills with new joiners. These are really important to get people out of the hotels doing something positive. There isn't always a need to create new and separate services for residents, as in fact joining existing groups can help them meet more members of the community and experience life beyond the accommodation. In addition to this, it is important for the local community around the hotel to meet some of the residents, engage with them and realise they're just people who need a bit of support right now.

CASE STUDY: KNIT AND NATTER

A small church group in Ardrossan, North Ayrshire, met every week to continue with knitting and sewing projects and chat to each other. Although the group originally only consisted of members of the church's congregation, local Muslim refugees who were coming into the church hall for other activities were invited to join in, too. The small and informal nature of the group made it easy for group members to share stories and experiences and get to know one another, and many come to the group not only for crafting but for the social interaction.





CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY GARDENS

Scotswood Garden in Newcastle is a community garden where schools, groups for the elderly and refugee groups can take part in activities such as beekeeping, fruit and vegetable growing and woodwork. Similarly, at Windmill Hills Centre in Bensham, Gateshead, refugee and asylum volunteers have been using their access to the community garden as a helpful resource for their mental health and quality of life. Volunteers at community gardens come from all different backgrounds and are able to chat to each other whilst they work, forging community relationships between people that otherwise might not have been able to make contact.

Group activities like gardening can help people feel connected to the community in a way that is not forced or resentful, but based on mutual enjoyment and understanding. Local gardening projects, Green Gyms and allotment projects tend to be really popular with asylum seekers and refugees. Many come from agricultural economies and are interested in learning about the natural habitat in the UK. Also, these activities tend to be a little quieter than sports and enable building individual relationships with the community.

GROUP BRIEFINGS ON LIFE IN THE UK FOR RESIDENTS OF ASYLUM ACCOMMODATION

Briefing residents on what to expect of being in the local community can be really helpful, as many will have very little or no knowledge of what to expect of the local environment, as well as laws, cultural norms, rights and general life in the UK. Sessions can include:

- **Local environment:** what amenities are there in the local environment e.g. shops which might stock food and other goods that are familiar to asylum seekers, cheaper or value shops, faith organisations.
- **Getting around:** train, tram or bus routes for any other locations they may need to access, as well as how to purchase tickets or fares for these.
- **UK asylum system:** finding a representative, asylum seeker rights, family reunion.
- **Healthy relationships:** information and support on healthy relationships including domestic abuse, consent (including ages of consent), LGBTQ+ relationships and reporting services.
- **Cultural norms:** attitudes to talking to strangers, engaging in small talk when out and about, CCTV, shopping and spending, driving and cycling.
- **Laws and rights:** hate crimes, protected characteristics, asylum seeker rights to education, rights of children including the school system, medical care.
- **World of work:** employability, finding vacancies, CVs and cover letters, interview support.



SHARE YOUR STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE WITH US!

HOPE not hate are always looking to champion communities who put up a fight against harmful far-right narratives. If you would like to share news about acts of solidarity happening in your community and be the hope for someone else, email us at towns@hopenothate.org.uk



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