

# ILPA information sheet

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## Making Asylum Claims

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The Asylum Process Guidance on the UK Border Agency website states:

*The Asylum Screening Unit [based in Croydon] will accept asylum applications on a walk-in basis, but to complement this service foreign nationals can also choose to make an appointment.*

However, as explained below, this statement is misleading. It has been misleading for several months. This information sheet provides information about how the UK Border Agency is currently accepting asylum claims. The information about how to make an asylum claim given in previous information sheets on “Making Asylum Claims” (in October 2009) is no longer accurate, and should not be relied upon.

### **Where to make an asylum claim**

An asylum claim may be made at the immigration desk when someone arrives at a port of entry to the UK. For those who enter the UK without making an asylum claim, a claim may be made at the Asylum Screening Unit in Croydon. The full address is:

Asylum Screening Unit, Lunar House  
40 Wellesley Road, Croydon CR9 2BY

The opening hours are Monday to Friday, from 8 am to 1 pm (0800 hours to 1300 hours). **But see below for information about the need to make an appointment.**

### **Can someone just turn up at the Asylum Screening Unit without an appointment?**

The UK Border Agency Asylum Process Guidance states that someone can turn up and make an asylum claim without an appointment (see above). However, for several months this is not what has happened in practice. Many people have been turned away at the Asylum Screening Unit, and told they must telephone to make an appointment. Sometimes an appointment has been made for them before they have been turned away. However, on many occasions it has not. People have simply been told to go away and telephone.

### **Making an appointment by telephone**

The telephone number to make an appointment to attend the Asylum Screening Unit to claim asylum is **020-8196 4524**.

Many people (individuals and legal representatives) have had great difficulties getting through on

this telephone number. Up to August 2011, many individuals and legal representatives have spent days and even weeks trying, and failing, to get through on this telephone number. In some cases, legal representatives have resorted to sending their clients to the Asylum Screening Unit without an appointment, and in these cases they have often provided the client with a letter to give to the UK Border Agency at the Asylum Screening Unit to explain the efforts that have been made to try to get through on the telephone number. Sometimes this has worked, sometimes it has not.

On 2 August 2011, the UK Border Agency expanded the lines available on this telephone number. This should mean that it is easier to get through. However, it is yet to be seen how successful this has been, and whether problems still continue for those trying to telephone to make an appointment to make their asylum claim.

### **What to do if you cannot get through on the telephone**

The UK Border Agency has not made available any alternative to making an appointment by calling the telephone number. What is set out in the following bullet points are a number of things that can be done, but no guarantee can be made that any one of these things will certainly work.

- It may be useful for anyone trying to get through on the telephone number to keep a record of the date and time of each attempt. This may be important evidence in showing that the asylum-seeker or his or her legal representative has made every effort to make the asylum claim.
- It may be possible to write requesting an appointment. Some legal representatives have done this. Some have received an appointment in this way, some have not. If writing, it will be very important to set out all the efforts that have been made to try and get the appointment by calling the telephone number.
- It may be possible to attend in person. The UK Border Agency has said that it has capacity to see people who turn up without an appointment if there is an emergency (if for instance the person is homeless and needs to make the claim in order to get housed). The UK Border Agency has also said that those who turn up without an appointment will not be turned away without an appointment having been made for when they can return to make their claim. However, people have been turned away from the Asylum Screening Unit without an appointment being made for them to return.
- It may be possible to threaten or start legal action against the UK Border Agency for failing in its obligation to permit an asylum-seeker to make a claim for asylum. Individuals should speak to a legal adviser about this.

### **Comment**

ILPA has no information as yet about how successful the increase in the number of lines available on the **020-8196 4524** telephone number may be. However, in the months leading up to August 2011, a great deal of time has been wasted by legal representatives (and we expect others) trying to get through on a telephone number that has been engaged. This has delayed many asylum-seekers in making their asylum claims. It has required Legal Aid lawyers to spend a great deal of time, for which they will receive no Legal Aid payment. It is not the first time the UK Border Agency has introduced a requirement for appointments to be made by telephone without providing sufficient resources for people to be able to get through. In October 2009, a similar requirement was introduced for making a fresh asylum (or human rights) claim. As now, many legal representatives then lost many hours trying and failing to get through to a telephone number that was engaged.

ILPA has suggested to the UK Border Agency that there is a simple solution. The UK Border Agency could allow asylum-seekers or their legal representatives to make claims by post, by fax or by email. The UK Border Agency could then make arrangements for an appointment for the asylum-seeker to attend for interview, if needed. The UK Border Agency has not, as yet, taken up this suggestion.