

# International Reconnection

**Information on process only, the below does not constitute immigration advice and does not substitute advice on a specific case**

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## 1. Minimum standards for pathways into accommodation for non-UK nationals

Our role as homelessness professionals is to help a client resolve their rough sleeping by understanding their rights and entitlements in the UK, accommodation options that are available to them and support to ending their homelessness. For some clients, there may not be sustainable routes into accommodation within the UK, due to the current legislation and restrictions on accessing public funds, and therefore a client's route to ending their homelessness may be through international reconnection. For others, they may have rights and entitlements in the UK, and still choose to be supported into accommodation elsewhere in the world. Regardless, our role is to help clients explore and understand their options and to help them make the decision that is right for them.

It is important to recognise that all pathways into accommodation for non-UK nationals within the UK or abroad should meet some minimum standards in order to ensure they are sustainable and take into consideration the client's rights, entitlements and wishes. The main criteria to be met are, as follows:

1. The accommodation pathway provides a sustainable route out of homelessness regardless of whether the housing option is in the UK or elsewhere in the world. This is thoroughly risk assessed against specific areas.
2. The client has access to immigration advice to understand their rights and entitlements including implications of leaving the UK on current and future status.
3. The client has capacity and wishes to accept the pathway into accommodation.

The Migrant Accommodation Pathways Support (MAPS) service has developed specific guidance around those minimum standards, which can be found at: [mungos.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Pathways-into-Accommodation-for-Non-UK-Nationals.pdf](https://mungos.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Pathways-into-Accommodation-for-Non-UK-Nationals.pdf).

## 2. Assessment and addressing support needs in the UK

### **Questions to consider:**

- 1) Has the client been assessed by a homelessness professional?
- 2) What are the client's wishes? If the client wants to resolve their homelessness outside the UK, what country is this? Do they have a right to reside there? On what basis?
- 3) Is the country that the client wants to reconnect to a safe country according to the UK government? Be extra cautious if client wants to reconnect to a country who they fled in order to seek asylum/humanitarian protection.
- 4) Are there any concerns around the client's mental capacity? If yes, are any statutory services involved in the case?
- 5) What are the client's support needs? Any other support agencies involved in the case?
- 6) Are there any indicators of forced labour/trafficking?

### **Advice:**

In any case where accommodation options outside the UK are considered as a means for a client to resolve their homelessness, it is of utmost importance to have a good understanding of the client's needs, wishes and entitlements. To do this, it is vital that a holistic assessment is done with the client in a language they can understand.

An initial assessment should include, amongst others:

- details about the client's current immigration situation and if further advice is needed to establish this; Detailed employment history (in the UK and elsewhere); Entitlement to welfare benefits; The length of time they have been in the UK and other countries they have lived in; Detailed housing history both in the UK and abroad; An understanding of their motivations for coming to the UK and their hopes for the future; Support needs and relevant support in place including physical and mental health, substance use, budgeting, and independent living skills; Offending history in the UK and elsewhere in the world
- The assessment should also cover any important relationships and connections – and whether support is required to rebuild these.
- Indicators of forced labour/trafficking, and if appropriate, referrals made to the National Referral Mechanism. More information on the indicators of modern slavery can be found here:
  - [Understanding-Modern-Slavery-and-Homelessness.pdf \(passage.org.uk\)](#)
  - <https://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/>.

The assessment should aim to help to build a picture of the client's rights and entitlements in the UK and in their home country/third countries where the client has a legal right to reside.

If during the assessment process it emerges that an individual wishes to return home/a third country where they have a legal right to reside and/or will not be entitled to support in the UK, then further questions related to this option should include:

- The barriers to returning to their home country. This may include, amongst others, outstanding loans/debts, issues with family members, peer pressure from others, misinformation about availability of services and support in home country, legal issues.

- What is the client's situation in the country of reconnection, e.g., have they ever received support from organisations, personal networks or social services there? If yes, are they able to share the details of these services or contacts?

**NB:**

If during the assessment of the client's needs, it appears that there are concerns around their **mental capacity**, this needs to be investigated thoroughly. We would strongly advise you to arrange for further support from statutory services (these might include mental health services, GP or Adult Social Care) for a capacity assessment, specifically about the client's ability to make decisions around resolving their homelessness, including by leaving the UK.

You can get in touch with MAPS for more support and advice if needed.

### 3. Facilitating immigration advice

**Questions to consider:**

- 1) What is the client's current immigration status? Has this been confirmed by documents/an immigration advisor?
- 2) Has the client been advised by an immigration advisor about their rights and entitlements in the UK?
- 3) Has the client and/or you receive a Written Confirmation of Advice letter?
- 4) Are there any concerns around the client's ability to understand and retain the information in the advice letter?

**Advice:**

It is vital for clients to have access to independent immigration advice from an OISC-regulated advisor/solicitor to understand their rights and entitlements, including implications of leaving the UK on current and future status. It is also very important that a client has access to their Written Confirmation of Advice, so that they can refer to it at a later stage. We would also strongly encourage you to make sure that the client has understood the advice given, using an interpreter where needed, and support the person to weigh up the pros and cons of the options available to them including the likely timeframes around any current/future applications and risk around continued rough sleeping.

There are instances where clients might reject the offer for immigration advice. If mental capacity is confirmed, it is advisable to document the refusal and to keep re-visiting the possibility for arranging an immigration advice session at a later stage.

If you are struggling to access immigration advice for your client, you can get in touch with Street Legal: [Streetlegal@mungos.org](mailto:Streetlegal@mungos.org), use the online UK government 'find an immigration adviser' search service: <https://www.gov.uk/find-an-immigration-adviser> or the online directory of organisations providing communication support around EUSS for vulnerable citizens: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-support-for-vulnerable-citizens/list-of-organisations>.

**Assisted Voluntary Return:**

The immigration adviser should also advise the client on their eligibility for the Home Office Voluntary Returns Service. Choosing to apply for the Home Office Voluntary Returns Service has significant consequences and the client must be fully advised about these before being supported to apply. It is in the client's best interests to be informed and advised on all their options, as well as the implications of the respective choice so that they can make an informed decision.

If the client chooses to leave the UK via the Voluntary Returns Service, please keep in mind that this is not a replacement for a thorough homelessness intervention as in most cases, the Home Office will only pay for flights and provide the financial reintegration package.

If further advice on the process of supporting a client through the Voluntary Returns Service is needed, or what other things may need to be put in place for the client's homelessness to be resolved, you can get in touch with MAPS for more information.

#### 4. Exploring accommodation options and meeting the individual's needs in the country of reconnection

##### 1) *Security, safety, human rights and public health concerns:*

If after receiving immigration advice the client still wishes to explore reconnection outside the UK and before any travel arrangements are made, it is important to do initial research on the destination country and the specific area/region/state/city they will be travelling. Issues that we advise you to consider, include:

- Check the current UK Government travel advice for the destination country at: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>.
- Pay specific attention to any security issues/public health issues, including COVID-19-related requirements and human rights issues (including, but not limited to: LGBTQI+ rights; discrimination/persecution of people on the basis of their ethnicity/race/religion/language/country of origin. If there are any concerns around this, flag these to the client's immigration advisor.
- If there are security risks in the country of reconnection, discuss with the client their perception and experience of the risks and gather additional information from the consulate and any in-country community organisations/human right groups, to build a fuller picture.
- Check if the client has valid ID to be able to travel and that this proves their right of residence or citizenship. If the client does not have a valid ID, check with the respective Consulate for the procedure to issue a travel document.
- Remember that contacting a foreign embassy is sharing information with that country's authorities so be mindful of any risks.
- Please note that contacting foreign embassies is likely not covered by your organisation's privacy notice and this should only be done with your client's consent.
- Check travel vaccination requirement and public health measures and make arrangements, where necessary to meet those (Covid 19-related and non-Covid 19-related). More information about travel vaccinations and public health concerns is available at: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>; <https://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/destinations> and <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/travel-vaccinations/>.

**NB:** MAPS has developed a [template risk assessment](#) that you can use to risk assess the reconnection and the controls that can be put in place to mitigate against identified risks. Each reconnection should be risk assessed individually, not all reconnections will be safe to facilitate.

## 2) Exploring accommodation options in the destination country:

Once you have established that a country/region is safe to travel to, you need to explore what accommodation options are available for your client. Refer back to your initial assessment and any further casework you've done with the client since to help with your enquiries. The sustainability of the reconnection depends on the client's needs being met, not only finding accommodation.

**NB:** Sharing information outside the UK is not covered by the GDPR legislation and will need the client's consent before doing so.

- **Own property:** In many cases, clients might have a property that they can live in. If this is the case, consider the following:
  - Does the client have access to the property; if not, who has access to it – family/friends/neighbours?
  - What is the condition of the property? Who has access to it? If neighbours/family/friends have access to the property, can they confirm it is still habitable?
  - Is there electricity/water/gas supply? If not, how would the client arrange for those to be restarted? It might be useful to confirm this with someone local especially in cases where the client has not been living there for an extended period of time.
  - What provisions will be there for accessing food and general amenities?
  - Are there any unpaid utility bills or debts?
  
- **Family & friends:** a lot of clients may have family members/friends that they can stay with upon travelling and this may be the best option for them to resolve their homelessness.

When exploring this option, consider the following:

- Is the client comfortable with you contacting their family members/friend and are there any risks you should be aware of? Are they comfortable with you disclosing any of their support needs, including that they are currently homeless? Always obtain written consent before making contact.
- Is the client in contact with the family/friends already? If not, what options may exist for the client to establish contact – social networks; assistance from Consulate; assistance from local services, such as community groups and organisations, local GP practices, local Mayors/councils.
- Make sure you have access to an interpreter or a native speaker who can assist you in the communication with any friends/family members/professionals that do not speak or understand English.
- Once contact is established, confirm with the family/friend what kind of support they are able to/willing to provide? For how long? Have they been providing support in the past? Are there any barriers or conditions attached to this support/accommodation.

- If the client has support needs, are the family members/friend aware of those? Are they able to support the client with addressing those? Are there services in the community that you are able to link your client with?
  - Are there family members/friends who are able to support the client with getting an ID and any documents they might need to obtain a travel documents; fund travel arrangements, including flight tickets and travel within the destination country.
  - Verify all these details before proceeding with the reconnection by having direct contact with the friend/family member, or in a 3-way conversation including the client.
- **Homelessness services/other services:** At times, the most viable option for a client to resolve their homelessness will be to seek support from statutory or voluntary services, which might be able to provide accommodation and other support for the client upon their arrival in the destination country. If you are exploring options around accessing accommodation services/homelessness support outside the UK, we advise you to consider the following:
    - Which specific area/city/town does the client want to go to? What specific area/city/town does the client have a connection with? A lot of countries operate like the UK system of local connection, so it is important to establish where this is for the client, as options outside the local connection might be limited.
    - Has the client accessed services in the destination country the past?
    - Explore what options are available in the destination city. To do this, you might need to: do research on the Internet, use the local language to conduct these searches/use online tools such as [Google lens](#); contact the respective Consulate for support; contact local social services, organisations and community groups, including religious organisations; contact community groups and organisations in the UK; etc. It is useful to keep a log of all services that have been contacted/explored. When reaching out to organisations in the first instance, be mindful of how much identifiable information you are sharing about the client.
    - Use the client's local knowledge of services and involve them in the process of exploring options.
    - Once a suitable option is established you would need to get in contact with them in order to liaise with them re: referral process, what support are they providing, including housing, food, social support, medical support and for how long? Is the service providing support with a move-on? Can the service signpost you and the client to other services, which might be able to support the client?
    - Often services will require interviews with the client, so you will need to facilitate this remotely.
    - At times, services, especially statutory services, might say that they cannot establish what support a client will be entitled to unless a client presents to them, and they do an assessment. In these cases, explore this further – can the client present at the service by themselves; what will the contingency plan be if the client is refused support; what support might the client need to be able to access the service.
    - When contacting organisations abroad, make sure you have international calls enabled and keep the time difference in mind, and use interpreters where needed.

### 3) Meeting the client's support needs



Whatever accommodation option is identified, you will also need to check how your client's other needs will be met in the reconnection destination, e.g. access to primary and secondary healthcare, does the country require health insurance or contributions to have been paid in order to access this. If your client is taking prescribed medication, speak to their GP about how much medication can be safely prescribed in advance for the client to travel with, if there are any restrictions on these medications in the country of reconnection, any storage requirements, and ask the GP to provide a supporting letter for any continuing care.

Make sure you explore what treatment the client will be able to access in the reconnection country and consider liaising with social services if the client has particularly high health needs.

#### **Support around substance use:**

If the client is on an opiate-substitute script, you will need to explore what provisions there are for the client to continue this treatment in the reconnection country. If there are no suitable services, work with the client's substance use service in the UK to explore what options there are before the client travels, e.g. detox or reducing the script gradually.

If a client is alcohol dependent, discuss options with substance use and other health professionals, e.g. arranging a detox in the UK before travelling and a rehab option in the country of reconnection. If this is the option identified, the travel logistics will need to be carefully planned to ensure that the timings work out. If a detox is not required but the client has alcohol support needs, ask the alcohol support service or GP to assess fitness to fly and if there are any recommendations to make the journey safer, especially for long journeys.

Exploring options can often take time and services will vary significantly from country to country. It might not be possible to resolve your client's homelessness in a way which meets their needs. In these cases, you might need to look at UK options instead and raise these cases with your Commissioners and Senior Managers.

Consider using the [risk assessment template](#) to help assess whether the option will resolve the client's homelessness and meet their needs.

**NB:** A reconnection plan may include a combination of support options – for example, the client may be able to stay with family and access outpatient treatment or the client may be able to stay in a homeless shelter/rehab facility and then be supported to reintegrate with their family.

## **5. Travel logistics and safety planning**

Once a suitable accommodation offer with the respective support needed has been identified and the client has accepted the offer, you can start planning the travel logistics.

The travel plan should start from the client's current accommodation right through to the final destination. You can use websites like [Rome2Rio](#) to help. Make sure to build in enough time for unexpected delays on route.

If the client is rough sleeping, consider placing them in accommodation before travelling, at least for 1 night beforehand as doing a successful reconnection from the streets is much more complicated.

When you plan the journey, you may need to consider the following:

- The journey might end up being very long - explore the different options and discuss these with the client, what would work best for them, e.g. an early flight or one later on in the day? Would they prefer not to fly and take a train/bus if this is an option?
- What support might the client need to manage the journey safely and successfully? Would they benefit from staff accompanying them on the journey? If this isn't possible, can the family or the service supporting in the reconnection country meet them at the arrival airport?
- Special assistance can also be arranged at the airport for the client. If a client is working with a mental health service, consider if mental health support staff could travel with the client.
- What is the plan after arriving in the destination country? Does the client have to present at a service in order to be housed? Check travel logistics and timings to ensure this is possible.
- If the client does need to present at a service once in the reconnection country, it is important to have agreed a contingency plan in case they are not accommodated on the day of arrival. This is easier to navigate if staff are travelling with the client, but you could also support remotely, if this is appropriate for the client's needs. Prepare a travel itinerary for the client.
- Consider providing a support letter for your client to travel with explaining that they are being supported by a homelessness charity to resolve their homelessness by being reconnected to the accommodation option you have arranged.

**NB: Risks of being stopped at the border, in the UK or in the destination country.**

Consider doing ACRO/PNC checks before travelling if the client discloses pending criminality or there is evidence showing that this is a significant risk.

Consulates may be able to support with doing a pending criminality check in the reconnection country, and if this flags up as a risk, you should look into arranging solicitors/legal support in the reconnection country if possible.

If there is a risk that your client will be stopped on the border in the country of reconnection, make sure that the accommodation option you have identified will still be available at a later date.

Always make sure that the client is aware of any risks and is making an informed decision.

Consider flagging risk of being stopped at the border with senior management/commissioners, where needed.

**Staff travelling with the client to the reconnection destination**

If staff do travel with the client, have a conversation with the client in advance of any strategies that will help manage the journey, e.g., reading books, playing card games, downloading music etc.

Be aware that flight schedules may make it impossible for accompanying staff to return on the same day as the outward journey. If this is the case, be sure to make arrangements for staff accommodation before leaving the UK.

For staff travelling, some safety tips to follow are:

- Make sure work phones have international data roaming enabled and that there aren't any blocks on using the phones abroad.
- Make sure that staff and the client know local emergency numbers.
- Check any visa/entry requirements for the staff member travelling, including expiry date of their travel document.



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- Ensure you have local currency and/or credit cards which can be used internationally.
  - Consider doing a separate risk assessment covering the staff travelling and refer to your organisational policies.

## 6. Post-reconnection support and follow-up

When supporting international reconnections, it is important to ensure proper handover has been carried out in order to ensure continuity of care, wherever possible and relevant.

We would want to encourage you to consider the following:

- Where clients are accompanied by staff on the journey, staff should be travelling with clients to the service they have been referred to. That way they can ensure the reconnection has happened as planned and give local staff a handover. The handover should include key documents including support needs, discharge notes or information regarding medical conditions and treatment to ensure continuity of care. Again, remember that sharing information outside of the UK is not covered by GDPR and should be done with the client's consent.
- For clients who travel without staff support, you should provide a handover to local services before the reconnection if possible and follow-up within 24 hours to ensure safe arrival by contacting the client, their family or the service they have been referred to. If possible, you should also provide the client with details for a contact in the UK if they experience any difficulties during the reconnection.
- Arrange follow up contact with your client directly, with family and services to get a further update on the client's progress. This is also a good opportunity to seek feedback on how effective the service has been in preparing the client for a return. Ideally you would do post-reconnection follow ups at 1 week, 1 month, 3 month and 6 month intervals following the reconnection to ensure that it has been a successful homelessness intervention.

*For more information or to discuss a specific case, you can contact the Migrant Accommodation Pathways Support (MAPS) service at: 0203 092 7455 or [maps@mungos.org](mailto:maps@mungos.org).*

*The advice line is open Monday to Friday between 9:30am to 5pm. We aim to respond to all queries within 24 hours.*

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