The UK Government is aware that organised immigration crime exists in migrant camps, with people smugglers recruiting victims. Volunteers can help refugees and migrants avoid harm from organised immigration crime.

What is irregular migration?
The International Organization for Migration, acknowledging there is no universal definition of irregular migration, defines it as “movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries”.

What are the challenges of seeking asylum in the UK?
People seeking asylum often arrive in countries without a valid visa and so the recipient country has to deal with their cases. Countries may have procedures that make it challenging for asylum seekers to gain formal refugee status; governments prefer people to follow the official channels.

European regulations allow countries in Europe to return an asylum seeker to the first European country they arrived in. Refugees are not given the choice of what country they will live in, or where they will be placed within that country.

There is no legal way to reach countries such as the UK for the specific purpose of claiming asylum. It is not surprising, therefore, that some asylum seekers choose to try and bypass official processes to get to where they want to. The UK does, however, operate resettlement programmes that allow refugees to come directly to the UK safely and legally (for more information on resettlement, visit the Refugee Council website).
Government’s role is to ensure that those fleeing persecution and seeking asylum can access the services they are entitled to.

**How can you help refugees and migrants avoid harm from organised immigration crime?**

To protect people from the dangers of organised immigration crime, if you are volunteering in a camp with people who need to claim asylum, we recommend you encourage them to claim asylum in the country that they are in (if in the EU), or in the first safe country they arrive in after leaving their home country. In addition, consider appropriate ways of supporting refugees that do not lead them towards taking dangerous risks to cross land or sea borders.

Please read the [What is organised immigration crime?](#) and [What do I need to know about UK asylum and irregular migration?](#) factsheets.

If you have concerns regarding the wellbeing of migrants or have seen or heard anything that worries you, share your concerns with a long-term volunteer or a named person from a known organisation. If you are volunteering with an organisation, make sure you ask to see their safeguarding procedure as part of your induction so that you follow their safeguarding procedure should the need arise.

**Why should you take care about the advice you give?**

It is understandable that as a volunteer who is in everyday contact with people in desperate need, you will feel under pressure to give advice about their situation.

You should take care about what sort of advice you give. It becomes easy for volunteers to influence the behaviour and actions of vulnerable migrants and this may be done unwittingly.

Your words can have real world consequences for migrants who may use this to support decisions on their next steps – this could include whether they take up the dangerous and exploitative services of smugglers or not.

Avoid giving migrants or refugees advice on travel options or their specific asylum or immigration case. Advice-giving on immigration is complex, requires a full legal understanding of individual cases, specific training and must be carried out by an organisation that is experienced and has credibility in this subject.

In the UK, for example, it is unlawful to provide any official immigration advice without holding an Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner certificate which can only be gained through an accredited organisation. Instead we recommend that you signpost migrants to legally qualified people who can offer specialist immigration expertise.

When volunteering, you won’t be able to help everyone you want to but you can make a useful contribution by following the information given in this guidance.

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Read NCVO’s [Guidance on volunteering safely](#) for further information.