

Refugee Women Digital Empowerment and Connect Project

Guide to accompany workshops 1 and 2



An introduction to getting online and accessing online services

This guide has been developed as a supporting tool for women participating in the Digital Refugee Women Empowerment and Connect project workshops. It is targeted at women who have refugee status, humanitarian protection or refugee family reunion and live in the UK. The project is funded by the Home Office Refugee Asylum Support and Integration fund and aims to help support women facing digital exclusion to access integration resources and information online.

We would like to thank the members and ambassadors of the VOICE's network who have supported the creation of these legacy documents by providing their insight from experience. Materials are available in English, Amharic, Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish (Sorani) Somali, Tigrinya and Urdu. It is hoped that refugee women who were not able to take part in workshops may still find it of use to work through and explore the information here at their own pace.

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Preface

This tool is unable to explore in full advice on accessing services online and is intended as a basic introduction which hopes to draw your attention to some key points and where you can

find further information. Although this guide contains some information about rights, it is not a legal document. It is illegal for anyone not accredited to give immigration advice or legal advice. We refer to relevant specialist organisations who can provide tailored information for individuals where possible. It is important to note that we hope to provide information about rights and methods of ensuring safety or protection, but we cannot promise that information or a course of action will lead to safety.

Throughout this guide you will find embedded links within the text, which if you click on these will take you to the website mentioned. For example, if you click [here](#) you will be taken to the British Red Cross website. Where possible, we have tried to include links to translated resources, but many of the links in this guide are for information which is in English. Whilst we acknowledge the limitations of automated translation, we have given information about how to use this function in this guide.

We acknowledge that discussing topics relating to abuse and criminal offences can be sensitive and often taboo. Our humanitarian mission and the principle of do no harm means we are called to action to do what is in our power to tackle gender-based violence, including providing information to support people to make choices that empower them and decisions that protect them.

Key terms

Data - a collection of facts, such as numbers, words, measurements, observations or descriptions of things

Digital - using or storing data via a computer system

Mobile Data - wireless internet access provided through a portable device

Online - something that is done while connected to the internet / a computer

Personal Data - information that can identify an individual



Introduction to Getting Online

Internet usage and access to information and communications technology is recognised by the United Nations as an essential part of future 'minimum' living standards¹, but many people in the UK don't have adequate internet access or struggle to get online and to find the essential information they need.²

Getting Online – WiFi and mobile data

WiFi (wireless internet connection) is often available for free in public spaces, but at home many people don't have a stable way to get online. Internet access often costs money, either by paying for **broadband** for your home, or by using a **mobile data** package. Broadband is a type of high-speed internet connection. There are many providers of home Wi-Fi offering fixed-term contracts for broadband.

Comparison websites can be helpful as they provide a **free service** to compare internet speed, monthly internet data allowance, length of contract and cost. Examples of comparison websites are:

- [USwitch](#) They also have a [guide on how to choose broadband](#)
- [Compare the Market](#)
- [MoneySupermarket](#)

Some people use mobile phone data packages, **MiFi** devices or dongles to **tether** their laptop or home computer to the internet, instead of getting broadband. Broadband is usually considered more reliable and faster than mobile data, but performance of any internet service can vary for example depending on where you live, and how many people are using the service at one time.

Do you know how to check your internet speed? Visit www.checker.ofcom.org.uk/broadband-test

Tackling digital exclusion

People can find themselves excluded from accessing services online because they don't have data or devices, or because of a lack of digital knowledge.

[Refugee Action](#) have produced a [handbook to Digital Inclusion](#) in collaboration with [Greenet](#), and have some **helpful guides** to buying or sourcing smartphones, laptops, tablets, mobile data deals and broadband and Wi-Fi routers, which were developed based on work by refugee support agencies [LASSN](#) and [NACCOM](#). Be aware this information is targeted at organisations, not individuals, but it may still be helpful to you.

¹ United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/infrastructure-industrialization/>

²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04>

Being aware of your personal data

Personal information is anything that helps identify you: Name, age, address, date of birth, your immigration status, biometrics, email address, information on your location, or ID numbers such as your National Insurance Number or BRP number. Internet users are often asked to share their personal data when accessing online services.

Why does personal data matter?

Online services use personal data to identify people and process information to provide a service to them. Offline you may also find that you are often asked to share personal data, for example a caseworker may ask for personal information to help you complete an application form. Almost every transaction and interaction you have with most organisations involves you sharing personal data, such as your name, address and birth date.

Culturally, the UK places importance on information such as a date of birth, which is part of a legal registration system used to identify people, their rights, and their entitlement to access services. Date of birth may be used to identify whether a person is considered an adult (a person over 18) or a child (under 18).

Consider these questions:

Can you think of when you were last asked to provide personal information?

Do you know why information may be requested by online services

Do you know how to protect your personal data?

Do you know what to do if you have concerns about how your data may be used?

Common examples of when personal information may be requested are:

- to confirm your date of birth and/or address when you phone your GP.
- to provide your National Insurance Number when you contact the Job Centre or apply for a job.
- to provide your email address to a business or company so that they can contact you in future.
- to log into your bank account online using biometrics (fingerprints or facial recognition)

Personal data online - risks

We share data online, about our habits or interests, through visiting a website, searching or buying something, using social media or sending an email. Data sharing is an inescapable part of using the internet.

It is important to be aware of the implications of sharing data online, and to know your rights on the sharing of your data.

Personal data is valuable and worth money to companies who may use it to target individuals with adverts. It can also give away your identity, which means that **identity theft** can be a risk, where data such as your name, address and date of birth, is used to create

another “you” without you knowing, for criminal purposes e.g., opening bank accounts, taking out loans or credit cards or applying for welfare benefits in another person’s name.

Visit www.getsafeonline.org for more information on protecting your personal data online.

Why protect your personal data?

Your internet browser, websites you visit and companies you interact with track what you do and store some data on your online activities. Sometimes this is to ensure that things work properly, webpages open and your browser functions well. Other times, you may be tracked to learn about what you are interested in and to gather data on you which can then inform adverts that are targeted at you.

You should be careful of what you share with people online. A helpful guiding principle is **less is more**. The less you give away about yourself, the lower the risk of information falling into the wrong hands.

Data sharing; your information and rights

Personal data is **your** information, and you have the right to keep this private. Laws around data protection mean that companies and organisations **must** use your data properly and for agreed purposes only. Privacy laws say that individual rights should be protected and legally companies must tell us when and how our data is being collected, and for what reason.

Organisations, companies or individuals that misuse your data or use it with intent to harm can be fined or even face criminal charges. You can check what information companies hold on you by making a [subject access request](#).

If you have concerns about how your data is being used, held, or shared, you should report it to the company first. You can also report concerns to the regulatory body, the **Information Commissioners Office** www.ico.org.uk



Zahra is shopping for a new outfit. She goes to the till to pay and the cashier asks for her email address to provide a digital receipt. Zahra agrees to this and gives them her email address. The cashier then also asks for her home address to issue the digital receipt.

What do you think Zahra should do?

The shop **does not need** her home address to provide a digital receipt, only her email address, so this information is not necessary for them to gather. She can request a physical copy of the receipt instead.

Why do you think they may want this extra information?

Zahra asks why they need her home address information, and the cashier explains they need it to open an account for her. Zahra did not know they were going to open an account for her. On further enquiry Zahra learns that the email address used to open the account would be used for direct marketing (sending emails about sales or offers) to her. Zahra declines to open the account and explains that had she opened an account with the store, it would have been unlawful for them to use her details to send her marketing material because it would be a change of the purpose for which her email address was given

If you are asked for your personal information, such as date of birth, postcode, or any personal reference numbers like your National Insurance Number or BRP number when accessing a service, you have the **right** to ask why it is needed, and to choose not to share it – particularly if it doesn't feel like a relevant or reasonable request. In some situations, you may wish to take legal advice before you choose not to provide personal information, for example to the police, the Home Office or other government or public bodies. Your privacy is important but not paramount; other laws may take priority over your right to keep some

information private and companies may have a legal duty to share or keep your information on record.

Internet use in the UK

Do you think the following statements are True or False?

Everyone in the UK has household internet access as standard.

No, but according to the Office for National Statistics, in 2020 96% of households were estimated to have internet access. This means that there are assumptions made by services that most people do have internet access at home.

In the UK people are increasingly asked or required to access important public services online

Yes. Applying for financial support from the Job Centre, registering for council housing, or applying for an educational place all often (but not always) ask you to first try to do some application or registration online.

Sending or receiving email is the most popular internet activity

Yes. The ONS reported 84% of UK adults sending or receiving email in 2018. Finding out information about goods or services was the second most popular activity at 77%. An email address is **essential** for communication, particularly from services based online.

It is often expected that you will be able to manage your private accounts and life through online portals.

For many people essential daily services are accessed over the internet. Almost 76% of people conducted some form of internet banking in 2020 online, nearly 87% shopped online for goods or services, and 32% of people ordered deliveries from restaurants.

Email

Email is essential to interact with online services. To create an account with any online service provider (e.g., Ebay, your local council, a supermarket) you will need to provide an email address and password that is unique to you.

There are many different email providers, and it is **up to you** which provider you choose. We have used common providers Google's [Gmail](https://www.gmail.com) (gmail.com) and Microsoft's [Outlook.com](https://www.outlook.com) (outlook.com) as examples below. They are free and reliable choices according to consumer champion Which¹.

Do you have an email account or know how to create one?

To create an email address, go to the official website of the provider by typing in these addresses to your browser address or searching in your search engine.

outlook.live.com

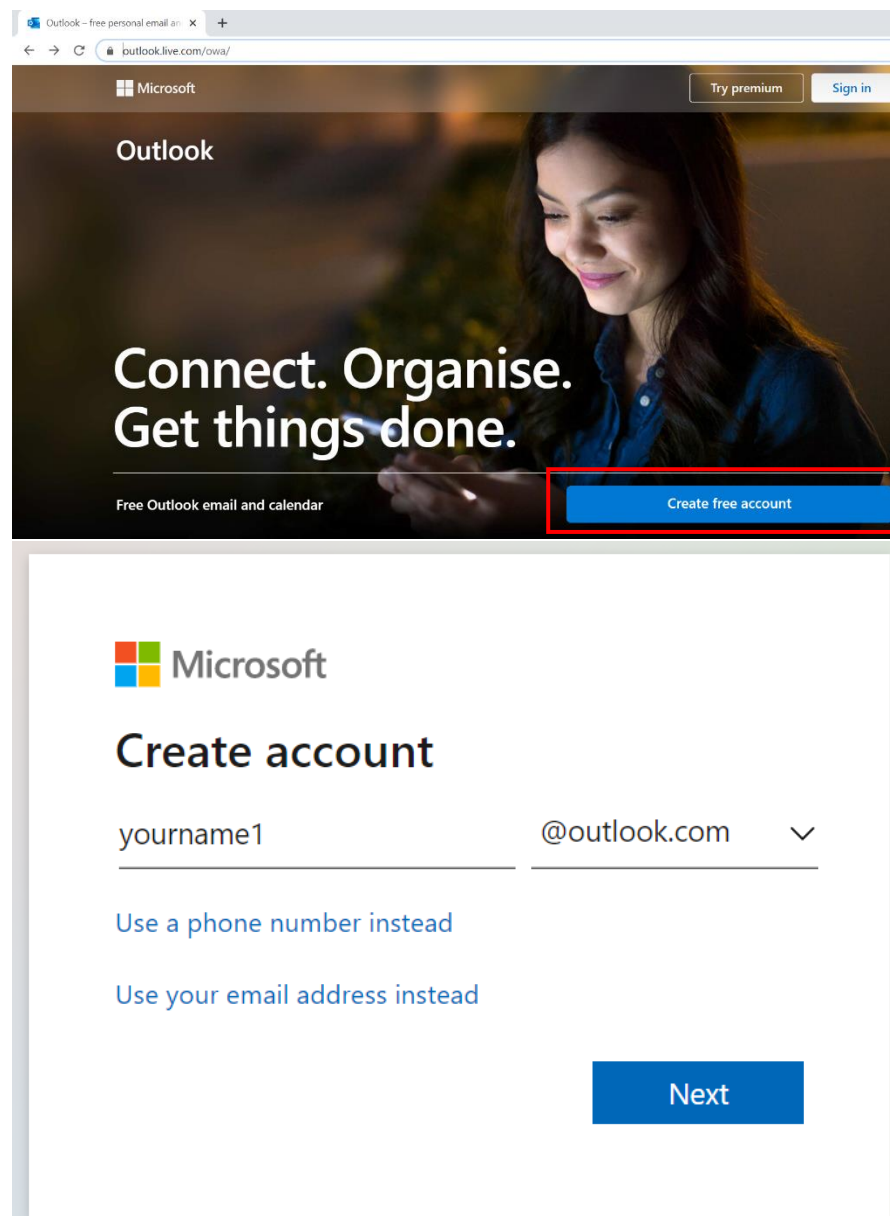
accounts.google.com/signup/

You will need to click on “create account” and fill in the form that appears, giving your name, creating a password and providing personal information such as your date of birth. You will then be able to sign in and use your email account to send and receive email.

It is important to remember that your email needs a **strong password**. This means using three random words, and including capital letters, numbers and symbols e.g., 2Dog!LampBall1!

Sometimes the email name you want to use will already exist. You can use different combinations until you find a version that works for you and is available.

Outlook sign up looks like this



The screenshot illustrates the Outlook sign-up process. The top section shows the Outlook homepage with the Microsoft logo, a 'Try premium' button, and a 'Sign in' button. The main heading is 'Outlook' with the tagline 'Connect. Organise. Get things done.' Below this, it says 'Free Outlook email and calendar'. A red box highlights the 'Create free account' button. The bottom section shows the 'Create account' form with the Microsoft logo. The form has two input fields: 'yourname1' and '@outlook.com' with a dropdown arrow. Below these fields are two links: 'Use a phone number instead' and 'Use your email address instead'. A blue 'Next' button is at the bottom right.

Gmail looks like this:



Create your Google Account

First name

Last name

Username

@gmail.com

You can use letters, numbers & periods

[Use my current email address instead](#)

Password

Confirm

Use 8 or more characters with a mix of letters, numbers & symbols

☐ Show password



One account. All of Google working for you.

[Sign in instead](#)

Next

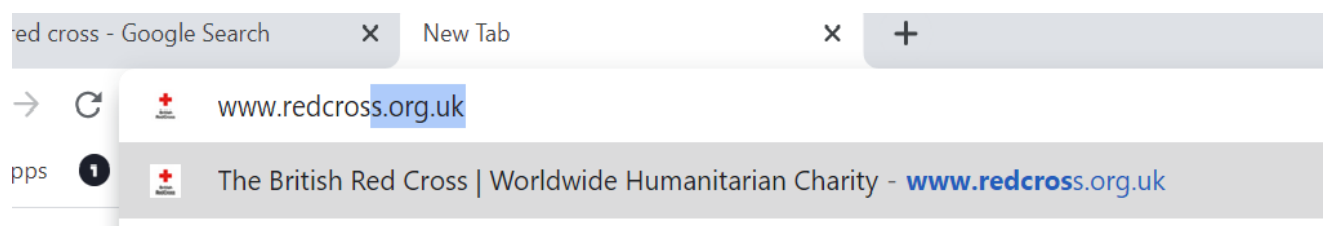
Finding what you are looking for

To get online you need an **internet browser**. There are lots of internet browsers, and a device will usually come with one already installed by the manufacturer.

Common symbols and icons for browsers are below and if you click on one of these on your computer desktop it will take you to the browser **homepage**, from where you can start to browse the internet.

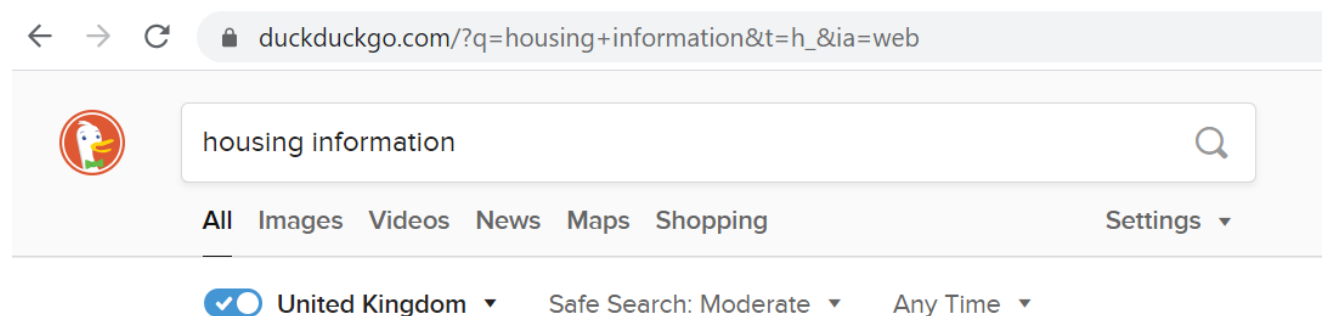


If you know which website you want to visit you can type in the **address bar or URL bar** of your internet browser, usually starting with **www.** or **https://**.



Using a Search Engine

A **search engine** is an extremely useful tool for finding information you need on the internet. Common examples of search engines include Google, Bing and Yahoo. To use a search engine type in key words for the subject you want to search for. These websites search the internet and bring back results for you to browse and assess.

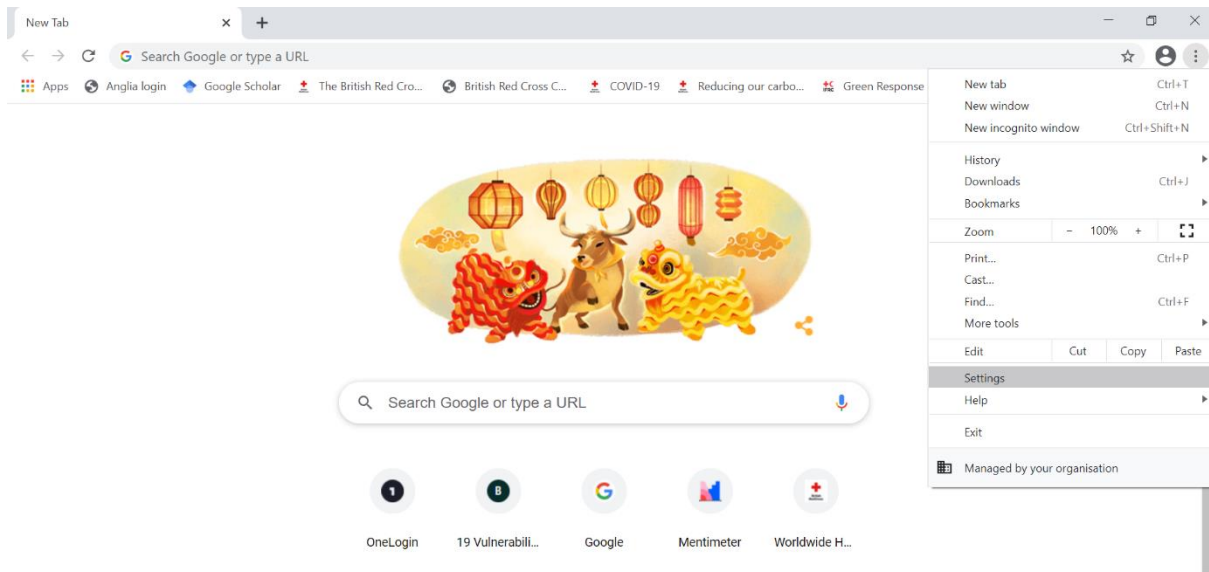


If the results aren't quite what you are looking for, you can try different keywords, or quotation marks to search for a specific phrase, e.g., "housing information" for more specific results.

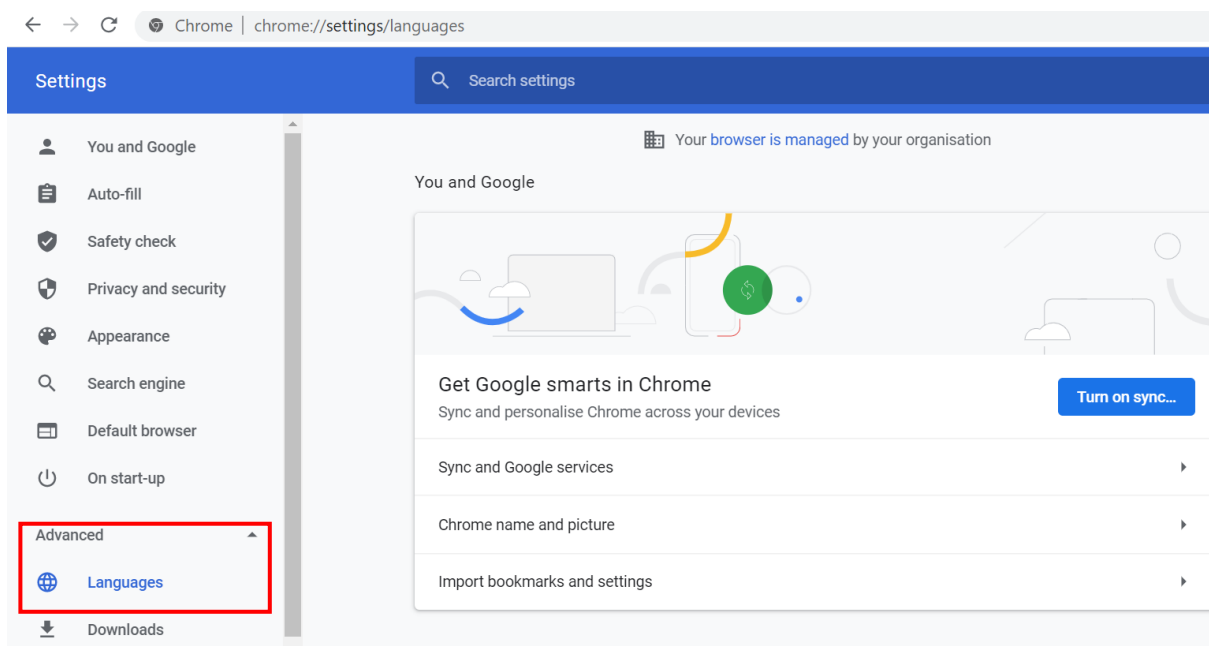
Changing languages on a web browser:

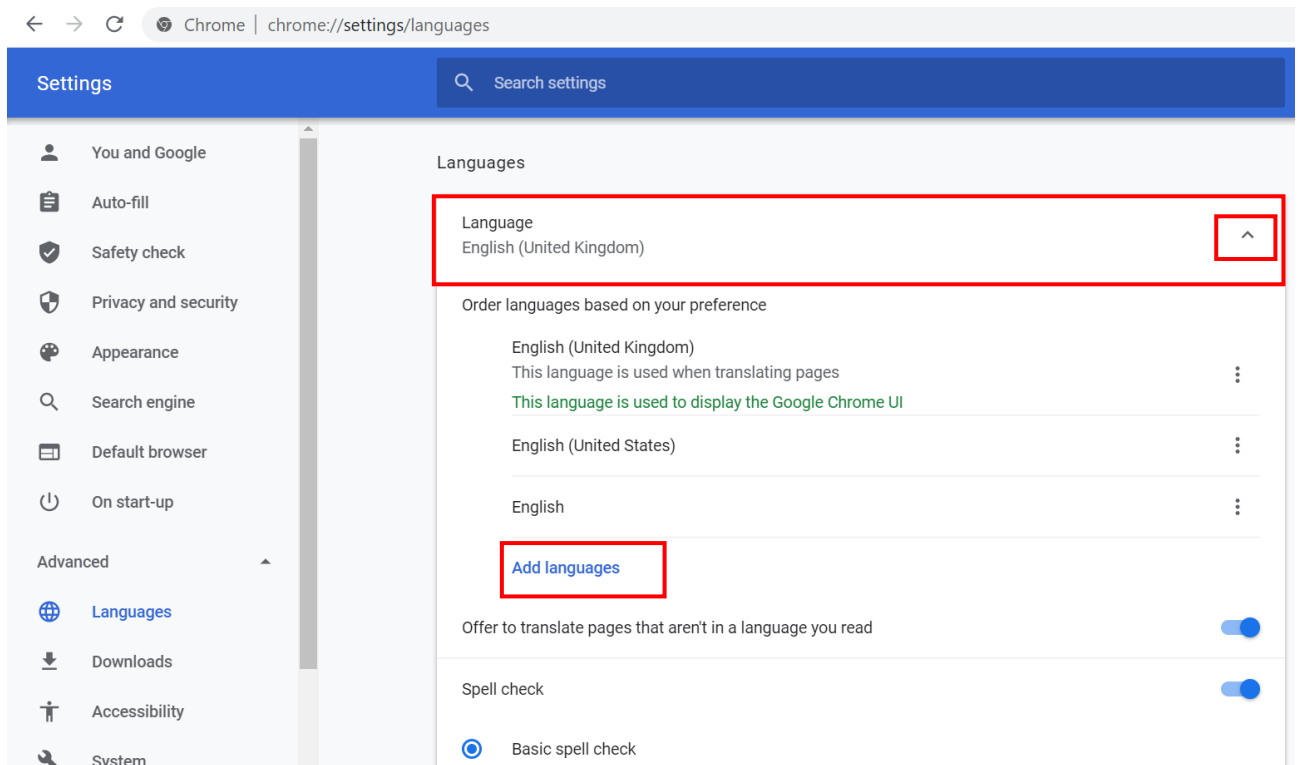
To change a language on a browser, you will normally be able to do this from the internet browser's **settings menu**. The below example is using the Google Chrome browser.

Open the Google Chrome browser, go to the settings menu



From the 'advanced' tab as below. You then choose the language you desire from the 'Add Languages' **drop-down menu** and **install** it.



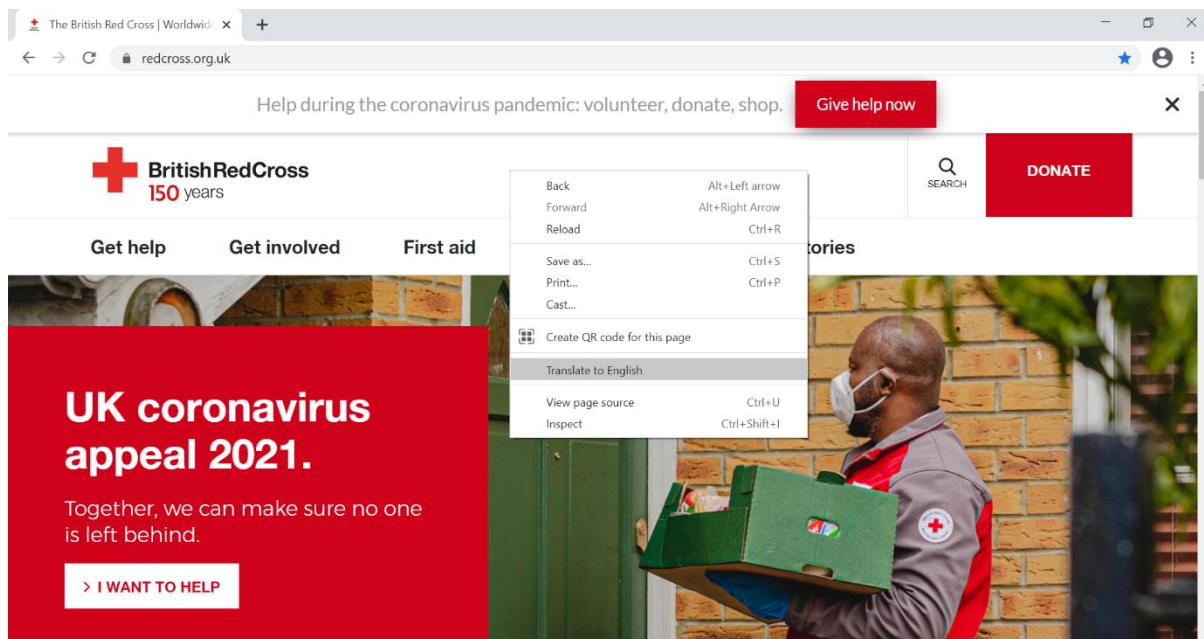


When you find the language, you need and set this as the **default language**, content on any webpages you access will be automatically translated. Translations, however, may not be fully accurate.

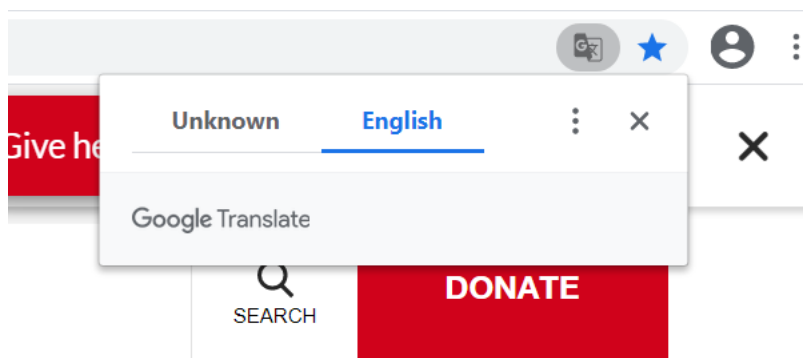
Translating a page

Using Google Chrome (which uses Google Translate) you can translate the text of a webpage without changing your browser settings.

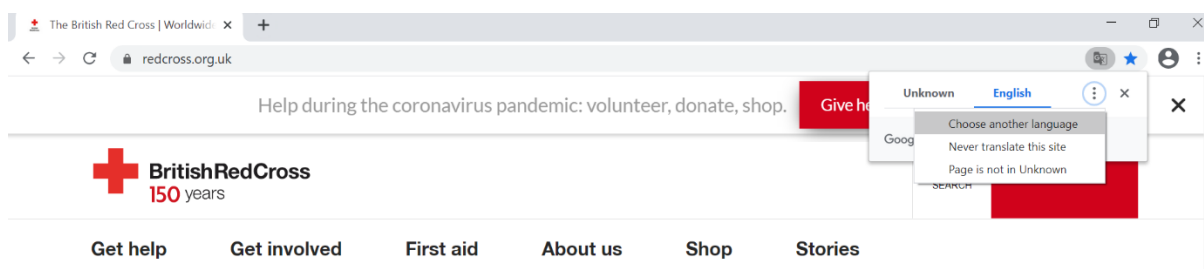
Right-click your mouse on the webpage and choose the option that says, "Translate to English." You can then change the language the page is translated into.



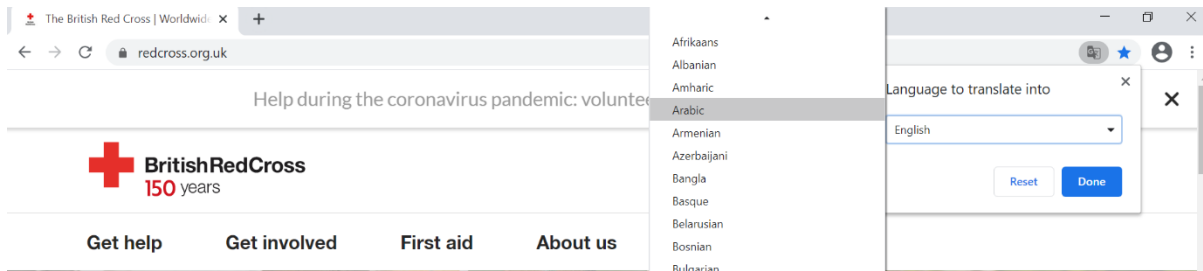
This will open this box in the top corner of your browser.



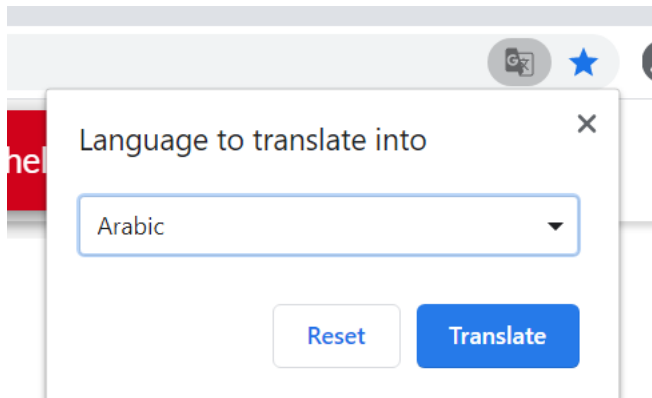
This browser is currently translating into English, so click on English and “Choose another language”.



This will bring up a list of lots of different languages (in English script). You can choose the language you would like.



And then click on the Translate button.



It is worth bearing in mind that automated translation may not be as accurate or clear as translations made by a person, but it could help you find a vital telephone number or help find some key information.



Safe Searching and browsing

Your search history and results are stored by your browser when you search for information.

Using a search engine can pull up a wide range of results from across the internet, and sometimes these can include images or websites that you may not wish to see or may not wish others using a shared device to see.

Safe or Moderate search settings can be activated on an internet browser to filter search results and hide explicit content. For information on how to do this search for “[your browser] + safe search settings”.

The example below is from Google Chrome’s SafeSearch settings.

Search Settings

Search results

Languages

Help

SafeSearch Filters

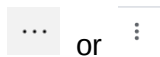
Turning on SafeSearch helps hide explicit content, like pornography. SafeSearch preferences may be set by your device or network administrator. If you can't turn it off, check with the administrator of your network or device.

☒ Turn on SafeSearch [Learn more](#)

Delete browser history

If you want to delete your browser history, you may want to search for how to do this as it varies across browsers. Search for “delete browser history + [your browser e.g., Mozilla Firefox]” to find the right instructions for your device.

Generally, you will be able to do it by opening your browser and then selecting **More**, often this is shown by three dots



Click **History**

Click **Clear browsing data or clear history**.

Click **Clear data**.

Deleting cookies

You will be asked on all websites to consent to **cookies** and data use. Cookies put little files on your device to save information such as who you are, the time you visited the website and what you did. Cookies often present as pop-up questions or banners when you visit a website. Companies are required under data protection legislation to tell you what data the cookies collect and ask you to accept or manage the use of cookies when you are on that website.

Sometimes clearing your browsing history will also give a choice to clear cache and cookie information that has been built up and stored when you are browsing websites.

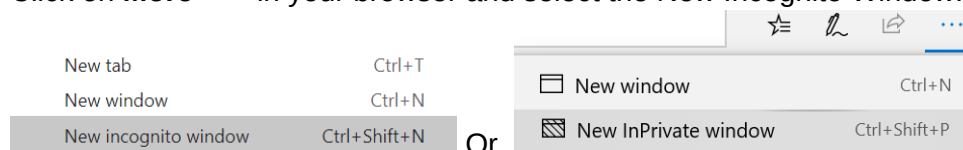
These links go to instructions for deleting your cookies if you use [Google Chrome](#), [Microsoft Edge](#), or [Mozilla Firefox](#). You can also search for instructions on how to delete cookies and cache history by searching in your browser for “**[Your browser] +clear cookies**”.

Incognito and Private browsing

All internet browsers will also have the possibility to browse ‘in private’ or ‘incognito’, which means that any website visited whilst in this mode will not be stored on a device history. This can be important if you wish to search or browse for information that is sensitive, private or if you are concerned for your safety.

In private or incognito browsing can be activated by:

Click on **More** in your browser and select the New Incognito Window:

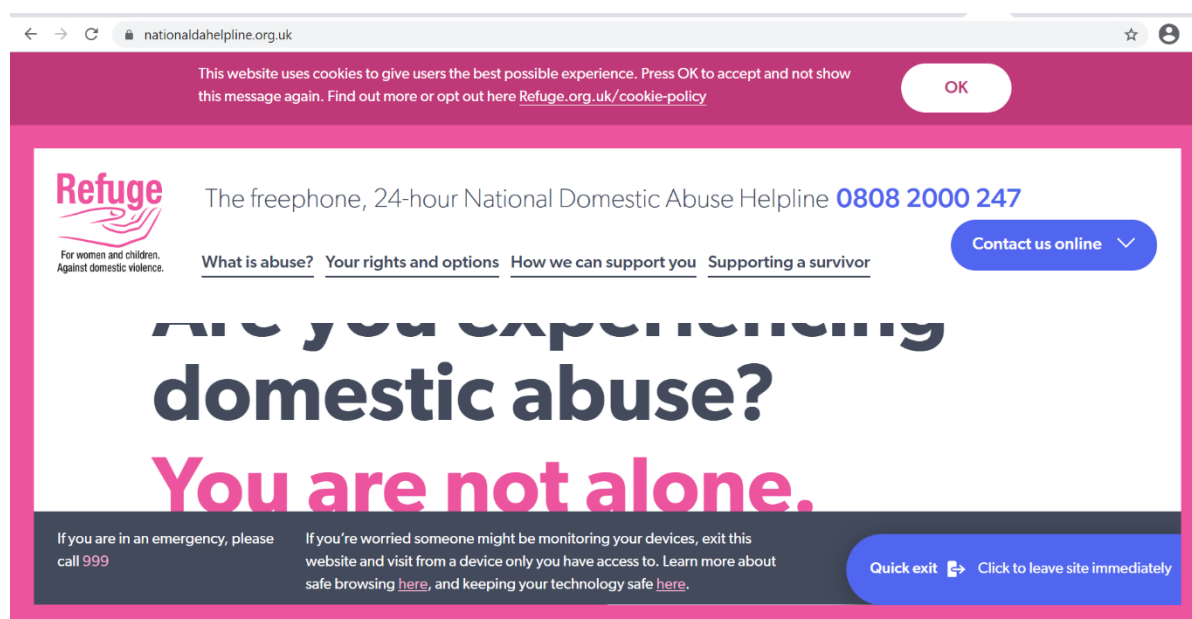


Safe Exit Buttons

Some websites which provide sensitive information about women's issues, including domestic and other forms of abuse will have a **Safe Exit** button. This is a place on a website that can be clicked on and will immediately take you to a new website, hiding any digital tracks that you visited that website.

Safe exit buttons are purposefully designed to support people to exit a website quickly and safely, where searching for information online could put them at risk from an abuser.

You may wish to experiment with using a safe exit button to see what happens and how your screen looks after you use them. Try using the quick exit button on National Domestic Abuse Helpline www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk



Digital parenting

Digital parenting means being aware of what your child is doing online. There are child-friendly settings (parental controls) that can be activated by you on devices (e.g., phones, tablets) or you can contact your data provider (3, BT, EE, etc.) and ask them to turn parental controls on.

Your child will then not be able to search for anything inappropriate. There is more advice on how to set up parental controls on the [NSPCC website](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety), and help you to understand how to talk to your child about online safety and make them aware of risks when using the internet.

NSPCC www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety

Accessing Services Online - Education

We have noted that many services in the UK ask you to try and register for services or download or discover information via the internet. You may want to find out information about educational opportunities for yourself or your family, apply for schooling or even take part in digital learning. The following pages provide some links and information that may be useful if you have to navigate to find information online.

Adult Education

- The **National Careers Service** can link you to courses which are free to participate in www.nationalcareers.service.gov.uk
- In Scotland you may want to visit **My World of Work** www.myworldofwork.co.uk/learn-and-train
- In Wales, **Careers Wales** www.careerswales.gov.wales
- In Northern Ireland, **NI Direct** www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/careers
- **Migrant Help** also have information on distance learning including English as a Second Language (ESOL) <https://www.migranthelpuk.org/distance-learning>.

You may be contemplating returning to University or taking a degree apprenticeship (where you work, get paid, and earn a qualification). You can find information on applying for further education, degree apprenticeships, and funding here: www.prospects.ac.uk

Information on apprenticeships can be found here: www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship

You can apply online for University, college, short courses and community center classes. University applications are submitted through **UCAS**: www.ucas.com

Sometimes you may be eligible for a **grant, bursary, loan** or other financial support to cover the cost of your course or even your living costs during higher or further education. This depends on what type of course you study, your age, your financial and personal situation. You can check your eligibility here: www.gov.uk/further-education-courses/financial-help

Other providers may offer you **free or heavily discounted participation** if you meet financial eligibility or other eligibility criteria e.g., you are in receipt of benefits. One example is the **Workers Educational Association (WEA)** www.wea.org.uk or www.weascotland.org.uk (**WEA Scotland**) who offer courses including interpreting, science, digital skills, and skills for the community.

You can ask at your local job centre if there are other training providers who offer similar free or discounted training in your area.

Online courses

Many learning providers including universities and employers are now delivering courses for free online, and some commercial training organisations are also offering their paid courses for free. Make sure to check there is no cost before signing up and be aware that private companies offering online learning are not always inspected or approved by the government

for their quality. Subjects and levels of courses can vary widely, and the National Careers Service has a **guide to choosing an online course** which may also help you to find good quality courses online: www.nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/getting-the-most-out-of-online-learning

Some examples of providers of free online courses are:

- Alison www.alison.com/courses
- Barclays Lifeskills www.barclayslifeskills.com
- Coursera www.coursera.org
- FutureLearn
- Pearson (UKlearns) www.uklearns.pearson.com
- Reed www.reed.co.uk/courses/free
- The Open University www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses/full-catalogue
- Vision2Learn www.vision2learn.com

Improving your digital skills

Whether for your own interest, to improve your employment prospects or to help your children online, you may want to consider participating in some online training to help you improve your digital skills. This includes things like being able to use software such as Microsoft Office 365 or Google Suite or just to know more about how to use the internet and to stay safe online.

The above-named providers may offer some digital courses, but you may want to look at:

- Barclays Digital Eagles www.barclays.co.uk/digital-confidence/eagles
- Google Digital Garage www.learnwithgoogle.com/digitalgarage/courses
- Future Learn www.futurelearn.com/subjects/it-and-computer-science-courses
- Khan Academy www.khanacademy.org/computing
- Rolls Royce Digital Academy - www.rolls-royce.com/products-and-services/digital-academy.aspx
- WEA - www.wea.org.uk/digital-skills

Children's Schooling

In the UK education is provided by the state for free, but there are also private schools where you must pay fees, or you can choose to homeschool your children. All children must attend school between 4 or 5 and 16 years old. More information on rules and expectations relating to children's education can be found here: www.gov.uk/browse/childcare-parenting/schools-education

You can apply for a place at a state primary school online or through the council. Even if you are applying for schools in another council area you apply through your local council. There are lots of parents/learners who won't necessarily have access to make an online application for school places and it is okay to say you need help with this if your local school or council want you to apply online. What does matter is that you make the application in time before the admission deadline.

To find your local council website on applying for **primary school** (age 4-11) follow this link and [enter your postcode here](#)

To find your local council website to apply for **secondary school** places (11 -16) follow this link and [enter your postcode here](#)

If you want to find out more about school admissions and performance, you can visit the school (most schools have open days), visit their website, check the **OFSTED** (school standards) report for that school, or their [school performance tables](#).

If you need **financial help** to cover the costs of some aspects of school attendance, you may be able to ask your school about help with free school meals, travel, and uniform. You can search for information on free school meals here: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

Go to your Local Authority website, or use a Search Engine, and try to find information about your local school admissions process. Do you know what is the application deadline for applying for a primary school and secondary school place in your area?

Accessing Services online - Employment

Think about the following questions and try to find relevant information online

- What might you want to know about starting a job in the UK in terms of your rights and entitlements?
- Do you know where to go if you have questions or need help with a dispute with an employer?
- Does everyone have the same rights in employment in the UK?

Relevant employment rules

The UK has employment laws that protect employees and ensure minimum standards.

- **National Minimum Wage**, details the amount your employer must pay you as a minimum which varies according to your age
- **Working hours' time regulation** states adults shouldn't work more than 40 hours a week for an employer unless you have specifically opted to do that in your contract
- Many **health and safety laws** and rules which are designed to keep employees safe.
- **Non- discrimination laws** that say your employer cannot treat you differently because of a protected characteristic (age, race, sex, sexuality, religion, gender, disability etc)
- **Paid holiday, sick and maternity or paternity leave laws** which outline the duration of, and amount of paid leave employees are entitled to in these circumstances
- **Pension contribution laws** that require your employer to have pension arrangement in place

Zahra gets into a dispute with her employer about her salary. She says she is not being paid minimum wage. She is 25 years old and working as an employee in the UK.

Using your internet browser to search for the information, how much should Zahra be paid as a minimum per hour? Does this change if Zahra is younger or if she is an apprentice?

The answer can be found here: www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates

Do all employment laws apply equally to everyone who works in the UK?

No. The laws that apply to you may vary depending on whether you are considered a worker, self-employed or employed. Some employment laws also depend on your age (minimum wage, type and hours of work permitted) or how long you have been employed for (holidays, maternity leave etc).

As an example, zero-hour contracts are increasingly common in the UK, as a type of employment where a person is only paid for the number of hours that they actually work which may be 0 or 40 hours a week depending on demand. e.g., Uber drivers, some shop assistant or bar-staff work. Unlike more traditional employment arrangements, they do not guarantee a basic income (salary) and do not pay you if you are off work because of illness.

If you work on a zero-hours contract you do still have rights: to minimum wage, paid holiday, pay for being on call and right to rest breaks at work and between working days. More information can be found here: www.acas.org.uk/zero-hours-contracts

Further information about these laws and your rights in work can be found online.

- **Government:** www.gov.uk
- **Acas** who provide employees and employers free advice on workplace rights and best practice. www.acas.org.uk/advice
- **Citizen's advice bureau** www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/

Trade Unions are also another source of support and advice about employment rights, provided through self-organisation of employees: www.gov.uk/join-trade-union

You can also speak free and confidentially with a money advice service to be clear on your pay and tax entitlements:

Money Advice Service www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

Careers advice and job searching

If you are looking for information on how to get into a particular role or job you may wish to look at careers advice from the below websites. When you find a job, you want to apply for, many will ask you to complete a form online or send a CV (a summary of your qualifications, skills and employment history). You can find examples, free templates and advice on how to write an effective CV by searching online and most of the below websites offer advice on applying for jobs too.

- **England** www.nationalcareers.service.gov.uk
- **Scotland** www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk or www.myworldofwork.co.uk
- **Wales** www.careerswales.gov.wales
- **Northern Ireland** www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/contacts-az/careers-service

Jobcentre Online:

- **England, Scotland and Wales:** www.gov.uk/find-a-job
- **Northern Ireland:** www.jobcentreonline.com/JCOLFront/Home.aspx

Volunteering

Volunteering can be a useful way to meet new people, gain new skills and familiarise with life in the UK. **NCVO** provide advice and tools to find a volunteering opportunity that suits you. www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/i-want-to-volunteer

Or you may want to speak to your **local volunteer centre:** www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/find-a-volunteer-centre

Individual organisations will have information about opportunities to volunteer but there are also websites which list volunteering opportunities

- **Do It** www.do-it.org
- **CharityJob** www.charityjob.co.uk/Volunteer-Jobs
- **Volunteering Matters** www.volunteeringmatters.org.uk

Accessing Services Online - Housing

How do I find a home?

Housing in the UK is complicated, and your options can depend on where in the UK you live in and your situation. Shelter (England, Scotland and Wales) and Housing Advice NI can provide advice on your rights and entitlements if you have questions.

- [Shelter \(England\)](#)
- [Shelter \(Scotland\)](#)
- [Shelter Cymru \(Wales\)](#)
- [Housing Advice NI \(Northern Ireland\)](#)

Do you think the following statements are True or False?

1. **Housing costs will always be covered if you are receiving universal credit.**

If you are receiving universal credit, be mindful of the fact that [housing costs from universal credit are capped](#), so there is a maximum you can claim, regardless of whether you are in council housing or private rented accommodation. You can also speak to the **Citizens Advice Bureau** or **Advice NI** if you have questions about managing housing costs, debt or rent arrears.

- **Citizens Advice Bureau** www.citizensadvice.org.uk/housing/renting-privately/private-renting/get-help-with-renting-costs/
- **Advice NI** www.adviceni.net/advice/debt

If you are struggling to pay housing costs your local authority may be able to support with a discretionary housing payment. You may also be entitled to **council tax reduction** or reduced **rates**.

2. Council Housing / Social housing (Housing owned by the local authority) is a right and so you will always get this help if you ask for it.

No. The state can help to house families in some situations, for example if accommodation is overcrowded, or in a very poor condition, if you are at risk of violence or if you are at risk of homelessness. You can find government information on council housing, also called 'social housing' [here](https://www.gov.uk/council-housing). www.gov.uk/council-housing

It's important to know that each council has its own rules. You will usually have to join a waiting list and councils do not have enough properties to meet the need, so it is not guaranteed you will get a home.

3. The council can help if you are homeless.

If you are homeless or think you may be homeless in the next 56 days, you can apply for council housing through your Local Authority housing office (they can also be called the Local Council), or if you are in Northern Ireland, you can contact the Housing Executive. There are conditions to getting help if you are homeless. You can find out where to contact your local authority housing office to make a homelessness application for council housing here:

- [England and Wales](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)

4. Applying for a council house is decided by whoever is most in need.

The Council (or in Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive) oversee who can get a social house and operate waiting lists. They decide who gets a house based on points or "banding" systems, which are based on need. Your council will have their own rules on who can apply and who has priority. You can check what your council's rules are on their website.

Find your **local council website** here: <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>

Northern Ireland Housing executive: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Housing-Help/Apply-for-a-home>

5. Once I have told the council of my need, they will take care of everything and find me a permanent place to live.

You can register to apply for social housing if you are over 16 and have the right to live in the UK. Some councils will offer a way for people to choose to bid on available houses, rather than being placed on a waiting list. If you are eligible and want to apply for council housing, you can follow this [link](#) and enter your postcode to find out where you can register for housing and bid to rent council owned properties.

It can take many months, or even years, to get to more permanent social housing, and it is your responsibility to look for and bid on houses. You may be placed in emergency

accommodation, like a Bed and Breakfast or Hostel, while a homelessness application is made and then temporary accommodation until a more permanent solution can be found.

For more information on the types of council tenancy, making repairs to your council home, making complaints or buying your council home you can follow the links [here](#).

Case Study

Zahra and her children arrive in the UK to live with her partner on a refugee family reunion visa. Zahra, knows that in this visa category she is entitled to public funds, including those related to housing. They need to find a new home because her partner currently lives in a shared house, and the family have to sleep in one room. They are overcrowded. She and family visit the local authority and ask for advice on their options and for help to find a new home.

What do you think the local authority will want to know?

See if you can find out the rules in your area on what a council homelessness assessment includes by searching for information on the internet.

Zahra learns that the council don't have to offer housing to everyone who is homeless. She learns that generally, across the UK, most councils will look at the following 5 conditions:

- **They have to be “legally” homeless** e.g., evicted from home or unable to stay because of violence or fire etc.
- **They have to meet conditions for public funds** linked to immigration status
- **Be in a priority need:** This could be a family with children under 16, be pregnant, homeless due to a fire flood or other disaster or classed as vulnerable (e.g., at risk of domestic abuse).
- **Be homeless through no fault of your own** for example, if you have been evicted because you were undertaking criminal or antisocial behaviour, or chose to leave your home when you could have stayed this could be “intentionally homeless”.
- **Have a local connection to the area:** live or work there, have family there or have lived there when were granted refugee status.

Zahra learns that If they didn't have a local connection where they have asked for help, the council can refer you to a different council where you do. They can't do this if you'd be at risk of domestic abuse! The council place her family on a waiting list and register the family to bid for council properties. Acknowledging they are over-crowded they offer to either move them to emergency accommodation 5 miles away in a hotel and register them to be able to bid on social housing, recommending they should also look for private rentals.

Alternatives to social housing or council housing

Private rental

Renting privately can be a good choice and may be easier and quicker to find than waiting on social housing. There are no eligibility requirements to rent from a private landlord and renting privately is the most popular way of renting a home in the UK.

You can find private places to rent by searching online: There are lots of popular UK wide rental websites. Some examples are below, or you can search online for “[your area] + house to rent”.

- [Zoopla](#)
- [Rightmove](#)
- [Propertypal](#) (Northern Ireland)
- [Spareroom](#)

Your local council or housing executive website will normally have a link to local letting agency websites that have available private properties too.

If you are getting Universal Credit, you may find some landlords or letting agents will say they cannot rent to you and adverts for properties will say “No DSS” (which means no-one on state welfare support including housing benefit). This could be unlawful in England and elsewhere, following a legal ruling in 2020 and you should speak to Shelter or the Citizens Advice Bureau for advice.

Housing Association

Housing associations offer housing to people on low income or who need extra support. You can apply to housing associations directly, or through your local council. You can also search online to find out what is available in your area.

If you aren’t safe in your home

If you are facing domestic abuse at home, or if you have fled your home because you feel unsafe you may be able to make homelessness application at your local council office. They may place you in emergency accommodation or transfer you to a refuge or another area to be safe. You should contact your local council or the **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** for advice on what the safe next steps are for you. If you feel in immediate danger, always contact the **police** on 999.

If you have fled, you may be able to find a place in a women’s refuge. A refuge is a safe house which may or may not be in the same area as where you currently live.

[Refuge](#) and [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) 0808 2000 247

Summary

You should now be able to

- Understand how your personal data may be used online
- Moderate your search to be “safe” in search results, browse privately and delete your browser history.
- Translate a webpage and change languages on your browser
- Find information on key topics and know where to look if you need more information.

