

**Ophthalmic Services
General Ophthalmic Services Memorandum**

13th December 2022

**To all Optometrists and
Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners
providing General Ophthalmic Services**

Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Access to General Ophthalmic Services

Update of MOS 313 Asylum Seekers

This memorandum gives guidance regarding access to General Ophthalmic Services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

***An asylum seeker is a person who is seeking international protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined.**

***A refugee is a person who has been recognised under the 1951 Refugee Convention to be a refugee.**

Access to General Ophthalmic Services differs for these two groups of people.

1. Eligibility for GOS for Asylum Seekers

The Health & Personal Social Services Provision of Health Services to Persons Not Ordinarily Resident Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, s.9. (b) makes provision for persons who “have made an application to be granted temporary protection, asylum or humanitarian protection under those rules”. These visitors are entitled to health services in Northern Ireland on the same basis as someone ‘ordinarily resident’ and will be issued with a Health and Care Number (HCN) on registering with a GP.

When the Home Office accepts an application for asylum, if the applicant is eligible for assistance with Health Costs from the National Asylum Support Service they are issued with a **HC2 certificate**, which is usually valid for 6 months. This HC2 certificate provides entitlement to GOS, as is the case with other persons who have received a HC2 certificate. The HC2 certificate is re-issued periodically during the application process.

It is important to note that as with any GOS provision:

- a. the patient must also have a valid Health and Care Number
- b. the patient may be entitled to a GOS (Sight Test) for other reasons (age, medical exemption e.g. diabetes etc.....).

Providing Support to Health and Social Care

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2. Eligibility for GOS for refugees

Refugees (**for example Ukrainian refugees**) are entitled to funded access to healthcare in Northern Ireland, in the same way as patients normally resident in Northern Ireland. They may apply to register with a GP and then will be issued with an HCN. Unlike asylum seekers they will not automatically be issued with a HC2 as part of that application process.

Unless they fall into one of the eligible categories for GOS in regards age, medical exemption e.g. diabetic or family history, they must apply with a HC1 form (*click link [HC1 Application](#)*) in the usual way and provide the HC2 or HC3 as evidence of eligibility for GOS.

NB: The patient should **not** be asked to provide their passport or proof of their nationality e.g. that they are a Ukraine National, as this is not relevant for the evidence that is required to determine eligibility contractor.

When a person presents to your practice requesting access to GOS you are advised to ask them to confirm their personal details and ask to see their HC2 or HC3 certificate in order to evidence eligibility. As with any patient if they do not have their HC2 or HC3 certificate with them you should explain the importance of the validity of the HC2/HC3 and that they are signing a GOS claim which contains a self-declaration stating they have a HC2/HC3 and hence have financial assistance with charges. You should advise the patient that you can still proceed to provide GOS but that you will be stating that you have NOT seen evidence of the HC2/HC3 certificate and that the responsibility for the declaration of exemption sits with the patient and that they may be subject to an exemption status check. In this instance you should tick the "evidence not seen" box on the appropriate GOS claim form.

If you have any queries please email ophthalmic.services@hscni.net

