



# The Refugee Council

## Complaints Policy & Procedure

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### Contents

<b>Complaints Policy</b>	<b>Page Number</b>
1. Commitment	2
2. Definitions	2
3. Aims	3
4. How the Refugee Council deals with complaints	4
5. Responsibility for action	5
6. Confidentiality	5
7. Monitoring and Reporting	5
8. How is the Complaints Procedure assessed?	5
9. Dealing with direct services client complaints	5
<b>Complaints Procedure</b>	
1. Introduction	6
2. Who can be involved in dealing with complaints?	6
3. Levels of formal complaint?	7
4. Monitoring and recording complaints	9
5. Other procedures	9
6. How to make a complaint	10
Refugee Council Complaints form	12
Complaint monitoring form	16

# **Complaints Policy**

## **1. Commitment**

- 1.1 Refugee Council believes that if an individual or organisation wishes to make a complaint or register a concern, they should find it easy to do so. Refugee Council welcomes complaints and view them as an opportunity to learn, adapt, and improve service delivery. This policy and procedure are intended to ensure that complaints are investigated in full, in a timely manner and that all complaints or comments are taken seriously.
- 1.2 It is important that complaints are handled fairly for everyone involved and all Refugee Council representatives will respond in a positive and understanding manner to complaints made by service users and clients. Making a complaint will not affect the rights or quality of service to an individual or organisation.
- 1.3 Staff and volunteers wishing to make a complaint should do so using the Refugee Council [Grievance Procedure](#).
- 1.4 We welcome feedback and suggestions from our service users and complaints are an important form of feedback. We aim to find fair and reasonable solutions to complaints as quickly as possible. We record and monitor complaints and make every reasonable effort to resolve issues, demonstrating our commitment to delivering a quality service.

## **2. Definitions**

- 2.1 The word 'service' is used in the broadest sense; it may refer to our services for clients or any other activities of the Refugee Council. Complaints about our fundraising activities should be made using our [fundraising complaints policy](#).
- 2.2 Complaints are defined as an expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of an organisation or about an area that the organisation has responsibility for. Verbal complaints are treated as seriously as written complaints.
- 2.3 Any user of a Refugee Council service may complain; a complainant could be:
  - a person using our services
  - a donor
  - a supporter
  - another professional working with any Refugee Council staff or volunteers or referring clients to a Refugee Council service
- 2.4 Complaints can be made about the delivery of Refugee Council services whether direct or indirect.

- 2.5 This policy is not intended for complaints about organisational policy: e.g. a complainant may not complain about the decision to close a service but may complain about the way in which the service was closed.
- 2.6 If your complaint is regarding our Immigration Advice services, if you are not satisfied with our response to your complaint, or if you do not wish to complain to the Refugee Council, you may at any time complain directly to the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC).

To contact the OISC, you can:

1. Submit a complaint using their [online portal](#) .
2. Email the Customer Service Unit is also available on [info@oisc.gov.uk](mailto:info@oisc.gov.uk), and they will then pass on the query or documents to the correct part of the organisation.
3. Call them on 0345 000 0046 between 9am and 4pm, Monday to Friday, except public holidays, and leave a message.
4. Send them a letter. As a fully remote organisation, documents sent to the OISC by post will take longer to reach the recipient, and you can post them directly to OISC at the following address:

**Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner,  
PO Box 567  
Dartford  
KENT  
DA1 9XW  
United Kingdom (telephone 0345 000 0046).**

### 3. Aims

- 3.1 Refugee Council aims to ensure that:
- making a complaint is as easy as possible
  - we deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially
  - we respond in the right way with an explanation, or an apology where the complaint is upheld
  - we learn from complaints, use them to improve our service, and review annually our complaints policy and procedures
- 3.2 Resolving any expression of dissatisfaction informally at the earliest opportunity is encouraged. However, if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

## **4.How Refugee Council deals with complaints**

4.1 The formal complaints procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

4.2 It is Refugee Council's responsibility to:

- acknowledge the formal complaint in writing within 5 working days
- respond and complete the complaint investigation within 15 working days
- deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint
- take action where appropriate e.g. amend procedures, implement training and development

4.3 A complainant's responsibility is to:

- bring their complaint, in writing, to Refugee Council's attention normally within 6 weeks of the issue arising
- raise concerns promptly and directly with a member of staff in Refugee Council
- explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date
- allow Refugee Council a reasonable timeframe to deal with the matter
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond Refugee Council's control.

4.4 Many complaints can be resolved informally by staff and managers using good communication skills. However, we also recognise that there will be times when people wish to make formal complaints.

4.5 When dealing with all complaints, informal and formal, we will:

- treat the complaints seriously – verbal complaints are treated as seriously as written complaints
- consult complainants about how they wish their complaint to be resolved
- seek to resolve complaints as effectively and quickly as possible
- thoroughly investigate the complaint
- communicate with the complainant to explain what has been done and what will be done in an effort to resolve the issue
- where appropriate, use the outcome of the complaint to improve services
- ensure that complainants are told how they can further their complaint if they are not satisfied
- record and monitor complaints, progress towards resolution of the issue and the means by which a resolution was reached

4.6 We aim to ensure that all formal complaints receive a response within 15 working days of the complaint being made.

## **5 Responsibility for Action**

- 5.1 The Chief Executive is ultimately responsible for the Complaint Procedure. Where the complaint is about the Chief Executive the Chair of the Board of Trustees will be responsible for investigating the complaint.

## **6 Confidentiality**

- 6.1 Except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that Refugee Council maintain confidentiality. However, the circumstances surrounding the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality. Should this be the case, the situation and reasons why will be explained to the complainant.

## **7 Monitoring and Reporting**

- 7.1 All complaints are logged by the CEO Function in the central Complaint Register. In addition, trustees will receive updates of complaints made at each trustee meeting. Complaints will be included as a standing agenda item and the governing body will review all complaints on an annual basis to support staff training and development and inform service improvements.

## **8 How is the Complaints Procedure accessed?**

- 8.1 The Refugee Council Complaints Procedure will be published widely in a Complaints Leaflet, in relevant languages and in a form appropriate to be inclusive. It will be distributed within the Refugee Council and will be published on the Refugee Council website.

## **9 Dealing with direct services client complaints**

- 9.1 We recognise that the best people to deal with client complaints initially are the staff and managers of our direct services.
- 9.2 We recognise that clients may need to be encouraged to complain if they encounter an issue whilst using our services and that the client complaint procedure must be easily accessible.

# **Complaints Procedure**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Users of Refugee Council services are encouraged to make complaints initially by talking to the relevant member of staff or the manager of the service. If they are not satisfied with the response they should instigate Level 1 of the formal complaints procedure by completing a [Complaints Form](#). This accompanies the Complaints Leaflet and is available on our website.
- 1.2 All formal complaints must be submitted using the [Complaints Form](#) or in writing. If a user is unable to submit a complaint in writing themselves, they can ask a staff member or volunteer for help, and they will record the details of the complaint on a Complaints Form for them.
- 1.3 If a user of a Refugee Council service is not satisfied with the response to their complaint at Level 1 of the Complaints Procedure, the complaint may then be dealt with at Level 2 of the Complaints Procedure, if it cannot be resolved otherwise. If a user of a Refugee Council service is not satisfied with the response to their complaint at Level 2 of the Complaints Procedure, they can appeal the decision, Level 3.
- 1.4 If your complaint is regarding Immigration Advice, if you are not satisfied with our response to your complaint, or if you do not wish to complain to the Refugee Council, you may at any time complain directly to the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). See section 2.6 (page 4) above for details on contacting OISC. If you consider taking legal action against Refugee Council in our provision of immigration advice, we confirm we have Professional Indemnity Insurance to meet any relevant claims.

## **2. Who can be involved in dealing with complaints?**

Complainant:	The person making the complaint
Complainant's Advocate:	An independent person, chosen by the complainant to act on their behalf (this may not be a legal representative).
Interpreter:	Appointed by and paid for by the Refugee Council, if deemed necessary by the manager Executive Support Officer or requested by the

complainant

Manager: The person who manages the service about which the complaint has been made

Line Manager: The person who manages the manager of the service about which the complaint has been made

### **3. Levels of formal complaint**

- 3.1 The formal complaints procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.
- 3.2 In the first instance staff members must establish the seriousness of the complaint; if the issue cannot be resolved informally, the complainant should write to Refugee Council, so that he or she has a chance to put things right. If the complaint concerns a Trustee of Refugee Council, rather than a member of Refugee Council's staff, the complainant should write formally to the Chief Executive. The complainant should set out the details of their complaint and the solution they are seeking. Their complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt, and they should get a response and full explanation within 15 working days.

### **3.3 LEVEL ONE complaint**

1. The manager receives a complaint (if the complaint is about that manager, another manager will handle the complaint); the manager notifies [complaints@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:complaints@refugeecouncil.org.uk) in order to monitor timescales and resolution
2. The manager of the service contacts the complainant in writing to confirm receipt of the complaint within 5 working days of receiving it, confirming the date when they will receive a response to their complaint.
3. The manager of the service carries out the necessary inquiries and investigation. If your complaint relates to a service you have received, they will contact your advisor to provide their response to your complaint.
4. The Manager will consider the adviser's response, the information provided in the complaint and any other relevant material (such as the contents of your case file or relevant contact with the organisation about this matter).

5. The manager responds to the complainant in writing within 15 working days of the complaint being made. The manager will send their written response to the complainant. This response will set out the findings of the complaint investigation as well as any suggestions for resolving the matter.
6. The manager sends a copy of the response to the appropriate director.

### **3.4 LEVEL TWO complaint**

- 3.4.1 All formal complaints will initially be dealt with at Level 1.
- 3.4.2 Complaints may be reconsidered at Level 2 if the complainant is not satisfied with the response at Level 1 and the complaint cannot be resolved.
- 3.4.3 If you are not satisfied with the initial response to the complaint, then you can write to Refugee Council's Chief Executive and ask for your complaint and the response to be reviewed. You can expect the Chief Executive to acknowledge your request within 5 working days of receipt and a full response within 15 workings days. If your complaint concerns the Chief Executive, you should write formally to the Chair of Trustees.
- 3.4.4 If a matter requires more detailed investigation, you will receive an interim response describing what is being done to deal with the matter, and when a full reply can be expected and from whom.

#### **3.4.5 *Before the complaints meeting***

1. The manager convenes a formal meeting within 15 working days of Level 2 being instigated.
2. A manager is appointed to hear the complaint as chair and is given all the relevant documentation.
3. At this stage the complainant (if they are a client) may ask to have someone advocate on their behalf and/or request an interpreter.

#### **3.4.6 *At the meeting***

1. The Chair invites the complainant or complainant's advocate to present the complaint. They may be asked for further details, and they will be asked to propose possible resolutions to their complaint.
2. As necessary the Chair may invite relevant members of staff or witnesses to provide information at the meeting.
3. The line manager is at the meeting to answer any questions about their report.



### **3.4.7 After the meeting**

1. The Chair informs the complainant of the outcome of the meeting in writing within 5 working days. An explanation of the decision will be given, and the complainant informed as to how they can take their complaint further if they are not satisfied.
2. The Chair completes a complaints monitoring form.

## **3.5 LEVEL 3: Final Level - Appeal**

- 3.5.1 If you are not satisfied with the subsequent reply from Refugee Council's Chief Executive, then you can write to the Chair of the Board of Trustees, stating the reason why you are dissatisfied with the outcome. You must do this within 15 days of receiving the written response from Refugee Council's Chief Executive.
- 3.5.2 The Chair of the Board of Trustees will respond normally within 15 working days to inform you of the action which will be taken to investigate your complaint, and when you can expect to hear the outcome of the investigation. Their decision will be final.
- 3.5.3 If your original complaint was against the Chair of the Board of Trustees, then the final stage will be handled by another appropriate Trustee.

## **4. Monitoring and recording complaints**

- 4.1 All formal (Level 1) complaints, along with their outcomes, will be recorded by managers using complaints monitoring forms. See 7.1 above for details on central reporting by CEO Function.
- 4.2 Records will be taken of formal Complaints Meetings and Appeal Meetings and all correspondence.
- 4.3 Each team will record and review the number of complaints received each month as part of their regular review of management information and report this in their Quarterly Reports.

## **5. Other procedures**

- 5.1 In some circumstances, it may be necessary to invoke the Disciplinary, Harassment or Child Protection procedures on receipt of a complaint. This may apply where there is a very serious complaint against a member of staff; for example, assault, racial harassment or theft. The manager, in consultation with People & Culture, will make

that decision. In such cases the Complaints Procedure will be suspended until any other ongoing procedure has been resolved.

5.2 Members of staff who are interviewed as part of these procedures may consult their trade union at any time.

5.3 Volunteers have their own procedure outlined in the volunteer policy.

5.4 If you consider taking legal action against the Refugee Council, we confirm we have Professional Indemnity Insurance to meet any relevant claims.

## 6. How to make a complaint

### *First steps*

Refugee Council welcomes complaints and view them as an opportunity to learn, adapt, and improve service delivery. If you would like to complain about the standard of service or care you have received from Refugee Council, we need you to inform us so we can try to resolve any problems, and so that we can improve our service.

Refugee Council will always try to provide you with an opportunity to tell us of your concerns and will work with you to try to resolve them. If you are not satisfied with any aspect of our service, you may initially want to discuss this with your adviser or named contact person, to see if the matter can be resolved quickly.

If you have spoken to your adviser or if you do not wish to discuss your concerns with them, you may wish to make a formal complaint.

If you are making a complaint, please give us as much detail as you can. The key information we need from you to understand and investigate your complaint:

- The time and date when the problem occurred.
- The name or roles of those involved
- The location where this issue occurred.

You can make your complaint either verbally or in writing by:

- a) completing our [online complaints form](#)
- b) emailing [complaints@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:complaints@refugeecouncil.org.uk).
- c) contact the relevant manager by phone or in person
- d) calling our central office on **020 7346 6700**. This phonenumber operates between 9 and 5pm Monday-Friday, and you can also leave a voicemail with your name, number and the nature of your complaint and we'll investigate within 15 working days.
- e) Writing to the local manager or to:

**Executive Team Manager  
Refugee Council  
PO Box 68614  
London E15 9DQ**

Please note that making a complaint will have no impact on the way we will treat you in the future.

***What happens next?***

When we receive your complaint, the manager responsible for investigating the complaint will write to you within 5 working days to let you know that we have received it.

The manager we will then investigate your complaint and will write to you about the outcome within 15 working days of receiving your complaint. If we have to change the timescale for us to respond to your complaint for any reason, we will let you know and explain why.

If you are not satisfied with our response to your complaint, we will provide you with information on what further steps you can take. At all stages we will treat your complaint with the utmost confidentiality and sensitivity.

Refugee Council will keep details of your complaint in a central register. We will also create a separate file or section in your case file in order to record details of the complaint, our investigation and Refugee Council's response to your complaint.

# Refugee Council Complaints Form

The Refugee Council is committed to providing high quality services to all its users. However, we realise that at times we may not always succeed. If you are not happy with the service, you have received from any part of the Refugee Council you can make a complaint.

It may be possible to resolve your complaint and agree on a practical solution through an informal discussion with the relevant manager. If that doesn't work, or if you don't feel comfortable doing this, you can make a formal complaint.

**Your name**

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**Your address and postcode where we can contact you**

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**Your telephone number**

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**Your email address**

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**Your signature**

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**Date**

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**Data Protection Act 2018**

The personal data collected on this form will only be used for the purpose of processing and responding to your complaint and will not be disclosed to any external sources without your express written consent. Both electronic and paper records will be deleted/shredded within 6 months of when the complaint is closed.

# Complaint acknowledgement form

Date

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Dear

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We are writing to confirm that we have received your complaint on

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We will now fully investigate your complaint. We will write to you within 15 working days of receiving your complaint to inform you about the outcome. To contact us in relation to your complaint, you can either contact the local manager you sent the complaint to, or you can contact us by phone: **020 7346 6700**, by email: [complaints@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:complaints@refugeecouncil.org.uk), or by writing to:

**Executive Team Manager**  
**Refugee Council**  
**PO Box 68614**  
**London**  
**E15 9DQ**

# Complaint monitoring form

This form should be completed by the manager dealing with the complaint and sent to [complaints@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:complaints@refugeecouncil.org.uk) , along with a copy of the letter which was sent to the complainant.

Date complaint was received and name of complainant

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Type of complainant (client, trainee, resident, donor, volunteer, supporter, organisation, member of the public)

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Service which was complained about

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How was the complaint resolved?

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Date complaint response was sent to complainant \_\_\_\_\_



Level 2 process instigated? (formal meeting)

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Any further action required at this point?

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