

Refugee Council

Briefing



SUPPORTING AND
EMPOWERING
REFUGEES

ASPEN card guide

August 2018

Brief outline:

The Asylum Support Enablement Card (ASPEN) was rolled-out nationally in May 2017. It has replaced previous methods used to make cash payments (people on s95 support) and Azure card payments (people on s4 support). It is a green Visa pre-paid card onto which subsistence support is automatically allocated. People in receipt of asylum support can use the ASPEN card in any retail outlets in the UK as long as they accept Visa card payments.

The administration service around the ASPEN card is provided by Sodexo, a French facilities management company, which has a contract with the Home Office for the operation of the ASPEN card system.

The Home Office monitors locations that the card is spent in. We were assured however they do not routinely monitor what people spent money on when they use the ASPEN card, nevertheless the Home Office can check it should they wish to.

How the ASPEN card work:

There is a difference in how the ASPEN card operates, and it depends on the type of support that a person is on. A person in receipt of s95 support can withdraw money with their ASPEN card using ATM machines. There is no Home Office imposed limit on how much money they can withdraw, providing they have the requested funds available on their account.

It is advised that people use bank ATMs rather than ATMs in shops. This is because in case of any problems with the ASPEN card, issues can be resolved quicker as banks reconcile their transactions at the end of the business day.

People who are in receipt of s4 support cannot withdraw money from ATMs, they can only use their ASPEN card to make chip and pin payments in stores for goods they purchase. Should they attempt to withdraw money then such a transaction will be unsuccessful and there should be no impact on the balance of their account. However, unlike the Azure card, there is no restriction on which shops the card can be used in, other than that they accept Visa card payments.

It was confirmed that it will not be possible to use ASPEN card for on-line payments, however ASPEN card can be used to get refunds. Lastly, the Home Office is looking into the possibility of uploading money for travel purposes onto ASPEN.

What to do when you have problems with an ASPEN card:

Please contact **Sodexo** directly on **0127 668 7099** when you experience problems with ASPEN card (requesting money not paid out but depleting from the account, card not working, getting money back

because of the void transaction, problems with refunds etc.). Once you contact Sodexo, they will inform you how long it will take for money to be returned if it was deducted in error.

If an adviser or a person in question is unable to call Sodexo themselves then Migrant Help can assist in such situations. They can be reached on **0808 800 0630** and by e-mail: IAAdmin@migranthelpuk.org. A Migrant Help adviser will call Sodexo and ask them to clarify whether the transaction is pending and when it is expected to go onto the card. Migrant Help can also make the Home Office aware if the person is immediately destitute. The Home Office will then advise if an emergency payment or another solution can be arranged.

Emergency cases:

In the scenario when a person contacts Sodexo to say that they had a **problem with a transaction and as a result have no money left and are immediately destitute**, Sodexo will then advise them to contact the Home Office. There is no direct contact to the Home Office that is publicly available. You can contact the Home Office only through Migrant Help on IAAdmin@migranthelpuk.org (please note that you may not receive reply from this e-mail address immediately therefore it is advisable to follow-up with a phone call on **0808 800 0630** in order to make sure case is prioritised).

About the Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is one of the leading organisations in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. We give help and support to asylum seekers and refugees, and also work with them to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed by decision-makers.