

## Basic Information for Asylum-seekers in Sri Lanka

### Role of UNHCR

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is known as the refugee agency of the United Nations and was established in 1951 to provide international protection to refugees and to find solutions for their displacement. UNHCR works to safeguard the rights of refugees, promote their well-being and help secure durable solutions for them.

### Who is a refugee?

According to the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, a refugee is a person who **“...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”**

Please also note that Applicants who are found to be responsible for serious crimes would be excluded from refugee status as they would be found to be undeserving of international protection.

### How do I register with UNHCR?

Registration is the first step in seeking international protection with UNHCR. Registration involves recording your personal biodata, travel route, reason for seeking asylum as well as capturing your photo for identification purposes.

#### Step 1:

In order to obtain an appointment for registration with UNHCR, you are requested to come to the Office on any day from Monday – Friday 8.30 a.m.-4.30 p.m. (except on UN Holidays). Please fill in the “New Arrival Information Sheet” that can be obtained at the gate and submit it to the office with your passport if you hold one.

#### Step 2:

For those who are unable to speak English UNHCR will arrange an interpreter. The date and time of your registration appointment will be communicated to you by phone. Registration usually will be completed within 2-4 weeks from the date you approached the office. (Step 1)

However, in-person registrations have been temporarily suspended due to Covid-19 situation in the country since mid-2020 and registration will be conducted remotely for individuals who approach UNHCR office.

Upon registration, your basic information will be shared with relevant Government authorities in Sri Lanka. However, your reasons for leaving your country will remain confidential.

#### What should I bring with me on the day of registration?

- Please bring all documents relevant to your case i.e. passports, identity papers, marriage certificate, birth certificate, family information sheet and National ID etc. on your appointment date;
- Please bring a detailed written statement, in the language of your choice of how and why you left your country of origin and why you cannot return.

#### Remember that:

- All persons seeking asylum (including family members and/or any other dependants) should be present at the UNHCR Office for registration; please be at the UNHCR Office 15 minutes before your interview time.
- It is important that you provide correct and complete information when registering. Incomplete or incorrect information may be detrimental to your case.
- Each person or family that is registered will have a registration number and all further communication with the Office must indicate this registration number;
- You may need to spend a full day at the office. Please be patient and be prepared.
- Once registered with UNHCR you will be issued with an asylum-seeker certificate which will expire in three weeks from the date of registration. From then on it will be renewed on a half-yearly basis. (June 30 and December 31).
- UNHCR staff will be present at the following places for the distribution of asylum-seeker certificates on these dates.
  1. UNHCR office in Colombo. (No: 97, Rosmead Place, Colombo 07)
  2. Refugee Community Centre in Negombo. (NAFSO, No.10, Malwatta Road, Negombo)

### Family Inclusion

- If your family members arrive in the country of asylum and they want to seek asylum, please follow the steps mentioned in the “HOW DO I REGISTER WITH UNHCR” section.

### Updating information

- Please inform UNHCR of any changes to your information provided at registration or at any other stage during the process of your case.

e.g. marriage, birth of a child, change of address, change of phone number, serious medical illness etc.

### How to complete Police Registration

Once you are registered with UNHCR, you are requested to register with the local Police (closest Police Station to your place of residence).

At your registration interview, you will be counseled on how to do this. Proof of the completion of this registration will be required prior to the renewal of your asylum-seeker certificate.

### Refugee Status Determination (RSD) by UNHCR

Once you are registered you will automatically enter the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process and you will be scheduled for an RSD interview. The RSD interview will be used to gather information to assess if you are a refugee according to the 1951 Refugee Convention or not.

#### ***During the Refugee Status Determination procedure, you are required to:***

- Submit all documents and evidence that you have in your possession regarding your application.
- Tell the truth and be cooperative.
- Inform UNHCR about family members accompanying you. Adult family members will be interviewed individually.

#### ***During the Refugee Status Determination procedure, you have the right to:***

- Be interviewed in a language of your choice.

#### ***How long will it take for me to be issued with a decision?***

- This depends mainly on the nature of your case, and also, the host country conditions. Each case has to be assessed

individually, and there could be country conditions beyond the control of UNHCR.

#### **What if I am not recognized at first instance?**

- If you are given a negative decision, you have the right to submit an appeal to UNHCR within 30 days from the date of notification of the decision. When you submit an appeal, your claim will be assessed by different officers than the ones who decided your claim in first instance.
- The appeal officers may overturn the first instance decision and recognize you as a refugee. However, if the first instance decision is confirmed, your case will be closed, and the Sri Lankan state authorities will be informed that you are no longer a person of concern to UNHCR.
- Everyone who submit an appeal may not be interviewed.

#### Please note that,

Failure to appear at RSD interviews without prior notification, may lead to the closure of your case.

#### **Please note that:**

- **Each applicant has a different profile, background and reason for fleeing his/her country; hence each case will be assessed individually according to UNHCR rules and procedures.** Please, do not pay attention to anyone who says that specific stories have to be presented in order to be recognized as a refugee.
- **Intentionally misleading UNHCR about the facts of your case or your identity is fraud.** Please note that this will negatively affect the processing of your case and may lead to a negative decision. UNHCR reserves the right to take appropriate measures regarding such cases in accordance with policies and procedures in place.
- Your statements and documents will be kept confidential and will not be shared by UNHCR with third parties without your consent; **Please note that under no circumstances will UNHCR share your information with the Government of your country of origin.**
- While in Sri Lanka you, like any other foreigner, are expected to respect the laws, customs and traditions of the society hosting you.
- **Verbal and physical threats made to UNHCR staff violate national law. UNHCR will report any person making such**

**threats to the Police and such persons may be prosecuted.**

#### **Detention**

The Sri Lankan Government is not party to the international conventions which recognize and protect refugees (*1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol*). This means that while you are in Sri Lanka you will not be recognized as a legal resident in the country.

#### **If you are stopped/arrested by the Police**

- You should calmly cooperate with the police and other authorities and find out the reason for your arrest;
- Show the police your UNHCR document/UNHCR Registration Number and tell the police to call the **UNHCR Hotline number 11-268-3968** to verify your status;
- Memorise the UNHCR Hotline number and if possible, your UNHCR Registration Number;
- Alert UNHCR, friends or family as soon as possible and provide UNHCR Registration Number, place of arrest/detention, which police station and the contact number of the Investigating Officer (if possible).

#### **Services for Asylum-seekers and Refugees**

As an asylum seeker/refugee, you *can* access treatment at all public (government) health facilities free of charge upon showing your asylum- seeker/ refugee certificate.

UNHCR doesn't provide financial or material assistance to asylum-seekers. Both asylum-seekers and refugees are not authorized to engage in any type of work.

You may approach other humanitarian organizations /charities or religious institutions for services and assistance.

You may contact UNHCR Community Services staff for further assistance in identifying service providers by emailing us, [lkaco@unhcr.org](mailto:lkaco@unhcr.org)

If you wish to speak to an officer regarding any matter please receive a prior appointment before you visit the office. Those who come without an appointment will not be seen unless it is an emergency.

#### **Durable Solutions**

Once you are recognized as a refugee, you will receive a refugee certificate in substitution of your asylum-seeker certificate.

The durable solution provided at present would be voluntary repatriation.

**Voluntary Repatriation** is when a refugee safely and willingly decides to return to his/her country of origin. UNHCR may be able to assist you to return home if you choose to do so.

All UNHCR services are free of charge. Please report anyone who is requesting money or any other favour from you in order to benefit from UNHCR services by using the Complaints Box situated in front of the security area at UNHCR or by emailing to [lkacofraud@unhcr.org](mailto:lkacofraud@unhcr.org)

#### **UNHCR Contacts:**

When you write, call or approach UNHCR in person for any reason related to your case, always make reference to your registration number. Please do not share your registration number with third parties.

#### **Address:**

**UNHCR Representation Office in Sri Lanka  
No: 97, Rosmead Place, Colombo7**

**Telephone:** +94-11-268-3968

**Fax:** +94-11-268-3971

**Email:** [lkaco@unhcr.org](mailto:lkaco@unhcr.org)

**Given the number of queries received daily by the office, please be patient, we will respond to you as soon as possible**

#### **Complaints:**

Complain about any mistreatment, harassment, abuse or other improper conduct. You can drop your written complaints into the Complaints Box situated in front of the security area of the UNHCR Office or email it to [lkaco@unhcr.org](mailto:lkaco@unhcr.org).

**Your complaint will be treated with sensitivity and will be kept strictly confidential.**

*Please note that UNHCR cannot consider anonymous complaints.*

**UNHCR, September 2022**