



News release

Asylum seeker review highlights general good practice and areas for improvement

30 July 2024

We have published [a review of legal firms providing asylum services \[https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/thematic-review-asylum-legal-services/\]](https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/thematic-review-asylum-legal-services/), as part of ongoing monitoring of immigration legal services in England and Wales.

The review of 25 firms included sole practitioners and firms who held a legal aid contract, as well as five that had previously been visited as part of a [2022 immigration thematic review \[https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/immigration-asylum-thematic-review/\]](https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/immigration-asylum-thematic-review/). The thematic review aims to help us better understand how firms are delivering asylum support to clients on a day-to-day basis, what supervision and training is in place, and what firms are doing if concerns arise. It also helps identify best practice to share across the sector.

The review found that a large number of those firms visited had robust procedures in place to validate potential asylum claims and properly scrutinise the authenticity of client identities and evidence. Most firms took a proactive approach to obtaining and verifying evidence. On average, firms visited rejected around 10 per cent of cases that approached them for representation.

The review also found that most people seeking asylum services paid privately, even though they were eligible for Legal Aid. Firms reported a lack of legal aid providers available to refer clients to, as well as long waiting lists.

Other findings included:

- WhatsApp was the preferred communications tool for clients for sharing information and evidence. However, few firms had formal policies in place to govern its use by fee earners.
- Most firms had monitoring and supervision in place, Providing monitoring and supervision is a requirement in our rules, so this needs to be improved, and more needs to be done to show supervision is taking place.
- Most individuals were aware of our reporting guidance and requirements.
- Just over half of the firms (13) used professional interpreters.

Paul Philip, SRA Chief Executive, said: 'Users of asylum legal services can be some of the most vulnerable. It's common for many to experience

stressful or difficult circumstances, and they might have little knowledge of our legal system.

'The consequences of poor legal work can be particularly severe, long-lasting and difficult to rectify. It's welcome news that in the main, firms appear to be doing the right things.

'We urge all firms delivering asylum services to read this review.'

The thematic review is part of our ongoing work, including guidance and a [warning notice \[https://consultations.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/immigration-work/\]](https://consultations.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/immigration-work/), as well as closing down firms involved in a national newspaper sting in July last year. We have also published a review into [training records being kept by firms working in immigration \[https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/immigration-asylum-training-records-review/\]](https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/immigration-asylum-training-records-review/).

The primary objective of these reviews is to support our work in understanding risk arising within legal services and what it might need to do to address it. They are also useful for sharing knowledge across the profession to support its understanding of risks. If we identify matters of concern during a review, the thematic team will refer this to the disciplinary system for proper investigation. In this thematic review, no such issues were uncovered.

[Read the asylum seeker thematic review \[https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/thematic-review-asylum-legal-services/\]](https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/thematic-review-asylum-legal-services/).