

Welcome Pack for New Scots

June 2022

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Information for new Scots

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New Scots

Scotland has a long history of welcoming displaced people from all over the world who are seeking safety.

The [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy](#) was developed in partnership by the Scottish Government, COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) and Scottish Refugee Council. It was informed by an engagement process involving over 2,000 people, including over 700 refugees and asylum seekers. It sets out Scotland's approach to supporting refugees, asylum seekers and our communities.

The New Scots vision is “For a welcoming Scotland where refugees and asylum seekers are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive”. To achieve this vision, we work to ensure that Scotland:

- is a place of safety for everyone, where people are able to live free from persecution as valued members of communities
- enables everyone to pursue their ambitions through education, employment, culture and leisure activities
- has strong, inclusive and resilient communities, where everyone is able to access the support and services they need and is able to exercise their rights
- is a country that values diversity, where people are able to use and share their culture, skills and experiences, as they build strong relationships and connections

The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy sees integration as a long-term, two-way process, involving positive change in both individuals and host communities, which leads to cohesive, diverse communities

Life in Scotland

Scotland is a beautiful country with a lot of variety. Many of the attractions in Scotland are nature-orientated. There are many castles, nature reserves, museums and other cultural attractions you can visit. Scotland has a population of around 5.29 million people.

The 8 cities in Scotland are:

- Edinburgh
- Glasgow
- Aberdeen
- Dundee
- Inverness
- Perth
- Stirling
- Dunfermline

Edinburgh is the capital city of Scotland.

Read more [general information about living in Scotland](#).

Language

Scotland's official languages are English, Gaelic, and Scots. Over 5 million people are able to speak English in Scotland. Around 87,000 people speak Gaelic and more than a million people speak Scots.

Dating back centuries, Gaelic is the founding language of Scotland that is thought to originate from Ireland. It spread its way across the country as the main language of the medieval Kingdom of Alba, extending from the Borders to Aberdeenshire, the Highlands and Islands. There are six standalone Gaelic schools and Gaelic is taught in over 50 other schools across Scotland.

English is the most commonly spoken language in Scotland with 98.6% of the population age 3 and above being able to speak English. The Scots language is also used by some Scots but usually only the occasional word or expression, such as 'wee', 'scunner', 'bonny', or 'peely-wally'. Some people use the Scots language more than others, and some not at all. Read [more information on Gaelic and Scots culture](#).

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) forms a vital part of our work to support refugees and asylum seekers through the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy. We fund a number of organisations to deliver classes, programmes and other support for teaching English to speakers of other languages delivered by colleges, community learning and development services in local authorities, and third sector organisations. Further information is also included in the Education section.

Weather

The weather in Scotland is similar to the rest of the UK and varies between the seasons. Average temperatures throughout the year are outlined below:

- spring – March, April and May (average of 7-13 degrees)
- summer – June, July and August (average of 15-17 degrees)
- autumn – September, October and November (average of 8-14 degrees)
- winter – December, January and February (average of 5 degrees)

Find out [more about the Scottish weather on the VisitScotland website](#).

At times there will be weather that has an impact on the public safety. See [the Met Office website for weather warnings](#)

Travel

[Transport Scotland](#) is the national transport agency for Scotland, covering buses, ferries, rail and air transport. Those aged over 60, or with a disability, and living in Scotland could be eligible for free bus travel by applying for a National Entitlement Card and should apply to their local council. Young people aged 5 to 21 years old living in Scotland can also apply to access free bus travel through the Young Scot Card which can be applied for online, or through their local council.

Scotland has 5 main international airports which are:

- Aberdeen
- Edinburgh
- Glasgow
- Glasgow Prestwick
- Inverness

Public transport in Scotland is reliable. Local bus services, express coaches, national rail services, Glasgow subway and Edinburgh tram lines make up Scotland's public transport network.

The rail operator for Scotland is Scotrail. See [further information, including timetables](#)

One of the biggest bus operators in Scotland is [First Bus](#).

The [Traveline Scotland website](#) provides a journey planner which will help you find out how to travel using public transport. It also tells you how to get travel discounts when buying different types of tickets.

Various apps available for your android or Apple phone are free to download and provide information to help plan journeys in Scotland, including [Traveline-App](#) and [Traveline Scotland](#). [Smart Travel Apps](#) offers the convenience of purchasing tickets by smart contactless payment for travel on bus, rail and subway, rather than needing separate paper tickets for each operator. It includes useful information on different travel options depending on [location](#) and journey.

Government

There are three levels of government in Scotland:

- UK Government
- Scottish Government
- local government

The UK Government is led by the Prime Minister. It is made up of all elected members of the UK Government (MPs) and is the law making body for reserved matters, meaning some issues (such as those related to immigration, asylum and visas) that have a UK or international impact remain the responsibility of the UK Government alone.

The Scottish Government is led by the First Minister. It is made up of all elected members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and is the law making body for devolved matters. The Scottish Government runs the country in relation to matters that are devolved from the UK Government. These devolved matters include:

- health and social care
- education
- justice and policing
- rural affairs
- economic development
- transport

Local government is organised through 32 local authorities with councillors elected every five years by registered voters in each of the council areas. Find [the contact details for your local authority](#).

Elections and voting

Under our human rights law, voting is a right, not a privilege. Voting rights are important to other human rights protected by the Human Rights Act including freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

Everyone who is lawfully resident in Scotland has voting rights; and those with indefinite leave to remain have candidacy rights. This sends a clear message that Scotland is a welcoming, inclusive country, where everyone should be treated equally not matter where they are from.

Foreign nationals living in Scotland who have leave to enter or stay in the UK, including people with refugee status, can register to vote in Scotland. Age ranges for this are 14 or older for Scottish Parliament and council elections, or aged 16 or older for UK Parliament elections.

Increasing the number of people that vote in each election means better representation, more funding to communities, and a better quality of life. Education, healthcare, immigration, infrastructure, the economy, etc. are all affected by vote.

You can [read more information about how you can register to vote in Scotland](#).

You can find out who your local MSP (Member of the Scottish Parliament), MP (Member of Parliament, UK Government) and Councillor is by entering your postcode at the following link: [Write to Them](#). [Find out how your MSP can help you/](#)

Money

The currency in Scotland, as it is in the rest of the UK, is the Pound Sterling (£). £1 (one pound) = 100p (100 pennies, or pence). Cash is accepted in most places but increasingly people use debit/credit cards to pay for goods and services.

Opening a bank account

You have the right to open a bank account in Scotland or any other part of the UK if you have:

- refugee status
- humanitarian protection
- discretionary leave (DLR)
- indefinite leave to remain (ILR),

A basic bank account offers basic banking services. You can use it to pay money into your account, pay other people and take out money.

Each bank has its own list of acceptable identification documents and some banks may require more information than others. You will need to visit the branch of the bank you have chosen and take documents that show who you are and where you live, You should always check with the bank beforehand for what documentation they will accept.

The Scottish Refugee Council has produced some [useful information on how to open a bank account](#).

Normally to open a bank account you will need to give the bank documents confirming:

Proof of identity:

- passport
- driving licences
- national identity cards

Immigration status:

- Home Office letter confirming your status

Proof of UK address:

- generally a recent utility bill
- rental contract
- council tax bill

Mobile phone bills are generally not accepted.

Note that most banks will normally only accept original documents or certified copies.

Weekends and public holidays

The weekend, in Scotland and across the UK, falls on Saturday and Sunday when most business offices close. Banks and post offices are usually open Monday to Friday and on Saturday morning, but close on Saturday afternoon and Sunday. Most shops and restaurants remain open on Saturday and for much of Sunday. However, this may not be the case in all areas of Scotland.

There are a number of public holidays throughout the year. Most businesses close, but shops, restaurants and leisure facilities usually remain open. See [a list of public holidays in your council area](#)

Taxes in Scotland

[Taxes](#) are paid by individuals and businesses based in Scotland on things like income, property transactions and certain goods and services. The revenues collected from taxes are used to fund public services in Scotland such as health and social care, education and transport.

There are three different types of tax in Scotland:

- local taxes, such as [council tax](#) are managed and collected by your local authority area. Council tax is a tax on domestic property collected by local councils and is normally paid by an adult occupying the property. For rented property, payment will be determined by the agreement in place. The money is used to pay for local services like rubbish collection, roads and street lighting. Read [more information on local taxes](#).
- devolved taxes are taxes controlled by the Scottish Government, such as Income Tax and Land and Buildings Transaction Tax. These are either collected by Revenue Scotland or Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). [Income Tax](#) is a tax you pay on your income if you live in Scotland. [Land and Buildings Transaction Tax](#) is a tax applied to purchases of land or property, both residential and non-residential, and to non-residential leases in Scotland.
- reserved taxes are controlled by the UK Government and collected by HMRC. Examples of reserved taxes you might pay are available to view via the following links - [National Insurance, VAT](#) and [reserved taxes](#)

You can get advice and further information about taxes by contacting agencies such as [Citizens Advice Scotland](#) or [TaxAid](#).

Housing

We want all people in Scotland to live in high quality sustainable homes that they can afford and that meet their needs. There is a range of tenure options in Scotland:

- owner-occupied properties
- the private rented sector
- council housing
- housing association properties

Asylum seeker accommodation

The Home Office has a duty to provide asylum seekers with accommodation if they are assessed as destitute and have nowhere else to stay while their claim is assessed.

Any problems arising in asylum accommodation can be reported to [Migrant Help, the Home Office asylum advice and support provider](#)

Asylum seekers can apply for social housing and be put on a waiting list while their application for asylum is being considered, but they cannot be allocated accommodation until they have been granted refugee status. Asylum seekers are often supported in Home Office accommodation until their refugee status is granted.

Once a person has received refugee status, they have the same rights to access housing as those considered to be permanently residing in Scotland.

Social housing

Social housing in Scotland is housing owned and managed by local authorities (councils) and housing associations (registered social landlords)

Registered social landlords have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to promote equal opportunities and to ensure that all people receive fair access to their housing and housing services.

If you are interested to know more about social housing, see the below useful links:

[Find a Landlord | Scottish Housing Regulator](#)

[Social housing: Housing management - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

[Accessing Homelessness Support - Scottish Refugee Council](#)

Private rented sector

If you want to rent a home privately, there are steps you should follow. For example, before you move into a property, you are legally required to sign a tenancy agreement which sets out the terms of your tenancy. You will usually pay the first month's rent and the deposit before you move into the property which must be lodged in a tenancy deposit scheme by the landlord. This means that when you

leave the property your deposit will be returned in full if the property is left in good condition and all rent and bills have been paid. When there is a dispute about the return of a deposit, each of the three approved tenancy deposit schemes in Scotland provide access to a free dispute resolution process.

All landlords and letting agents operating in Scotland must be registered. This ensures that the landlord or letting agent is trustworthy and has passed a 'Fit & Proper Person' Test which is carried out by the local authority. It is always important to check if a landlord is registered before considering renting a property.

Find out if a landlord is registered [by searching the landlord register](#).

Find out if a letting agent is registered [by searching the letting agent register](#).

Many organisations provide homes for mid-market rent. These homes are aimed at helping people on low to modest incomes to access affordable, private rented accommodation. You can check your individual local authority website for information on these homes.

Read [more information for tenants about private renting in Scotland](#)

Read [more information about renting a home from a private landlord](#).

Buying a home

In Scotland, most properties are sold through solicitors (lawyers) and estate agents. However, you can also buy privately through the owner of the property, though it would be advisable to discuss this with a solicitor who will be able to handle any legal matters.

If you want to buy a house or flat in Scotland, there's a legal process which ensures both the buyer and seller are protected during the sale. Read [more information about the legal process](#).

Citizens Advice Scotland provides [helpful information on the things to consider before a property](#).

Assistance in buying a home

If you wish to buy a home but cannot afford the total cost, the Scottish Government might be able to help you.

We operate the [Low Cost Initiative for First-Time Buyers \(LIFT\) shared equity schemes](#), which can help you to buy a home that is for sale on the open market, or to buy a new build home from a housing association or local council.

If you would like support managing everyday activities at home, or help with budgeting or paying bills, you should contact your local council. Further information can be found on the [Shelter Scotland](#) website which has a wide range of information

of the levels of support available and where you can find contact details for your local council.

Education

Education is devolved to the Scottish Government, and Scotland has its own curriculum which is designed to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and attributes they need for life and work. It is the right of every child, and also a legal requirement, for children to be provided with a school education. All children under the age of 16 are legally required to attend school.

An education authority has a duty to provide full-time education for children aged 5 to 16. The duty of the local education authority to provide full-time education also applies to a child who is temporarily living in the area unless the parents have chosen to home educate.

Early learning and childcare (ELC)

All 3 and 4 year olds are eligible for 1140 hours of free early learning and childcare (ELC) per year, funded by the Scottish Government and local authorities. That works out at about 30 hours a week if you use it during school term-time, or around 22 hours a week if you use it year round. A nutritious meal is included with funded ELC.

About a quarter of 2 year olds are also eligible for 1140 hours of free ELC. A 2 year old can receive funded ELC if they are looked after by a local council, or subject of a kinship care order or a guardianship order, or if their parent or carer is receiving certain benefits. [Find more information about funding eligibility for 2 year olds.](#)

Local authorities must make a mandatory amount of early learning and childcare available for eligible pre-school children in their area. These rights belong to all children and young people, including those who are displaced, refugees and asylum seekers.

You can access funded ELC at nurseries, childminders, or playgroups – or a mix of these. It just depends on what's available near you. You do not need to use the full 1140 hours.

Local authorities are responsible for providing funded ELC to eligible children within their area. Each local authority has its own application process.

If you are interested in your child receiving funded ELC, contact your local authority to find out when and how to apply, or to get more information about the range of providers in your area. Your local authority can also provide information about the funded ELC offer for 2 year olds.

See the [local authority contact details for ELC](#).

See more information on ELC in Scotland on the [Parent Club website](#).

School age and stages

All parents have a legal responsibility to educate their children which they can fulfil either by sending them to school or by home educating them. Read more about the [choices available](#).

Scotland provides free school education for all children from the age of around 5 up to the age of 18. Scotland has different enrolment and school entry dates than other parts of the UK. Children usually start school between the ages of 4 ½ and 5 ½, depending on when their birthday falls, and can either apply for a place in a school in their local catchment area or at another school. Read [a guide on how to apply for a school place](#).

Children start in primary 1 and move up to the next class each year through to primary 7. All children in primaries 1 to 5 receive free school meals.

Children move up to secondary school automatically after primary school (aged 11 or 12 depending on when they started school).

Your local council is responsible for providing school education in the area you live. Find more information on [applying for all school places and placing requests](#).

Term time

Term dates will vary depending on your local authority area. Read more information on [school term and holiday dates](#).

What my child will learn

All children aged 3 to 18 learn through [Curriculum for Excellence](#). The curriculum places learners at the heart of education. This is so that they achieve their potential through being successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Education is provided by early learning and childcare settings, primary schools (generally ages 5 to 11) and secondary schools (generally ages 12 to 18).

Scotland's curriculum includes two broad stages.

- the first stage is age 3-15 and is called the 'broad general education'. This stage covers the early years (nursery and early learning and childcare), primary school (primary 1 to 7) and the first three years of secondary school (S1 to S3).
- the second stage is called the senior phase and covers the final three years of secondary school (S4 to S6) when students can study for a range of awards and qualifications. Most young people will continue to learn in school, but, depending on learners' needs and aspirations, there may be collaborative opportunities to study courses at a college or another higher education provider.

The curriculum is designed to provide a variety of pathways for learners to develop and demonstrate their skills and knowledge, preparing them for continuing on to further education, higher education or employment.

Further information about the curriculum in Scotland is available on Education Scotland's [Parent Zone website](#).

Parent-friendly guides to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) have been produced by Scotland's [National Parent Forum](#). Called Nutshells, these include [CfE in a Nutshell](#) and [Senior Phase in a Nutshell](#).

Schools, in collaboration with colleges and employers, have the flexibility to offer a range of experiences to meet the needs of all learners. Young people can also study a range of national and vocational qualifications and awards, including Nationals, Highers, Advanced Highers, Foundation Apprenticeships and Skills for Work courses. Further information on Scottish qualifications can be found on the [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#) website. Comparative information of qualifications across the UK and Ireland can be viewed at [Qualifications can Cross Boundaries](#) and [apprenticeships.scot](#).

The first step is to contact your local authority to find out about the education provision available in your area.

The [Bridges Programme](#) can also offer support with education and qualifications. The Programme supports the social, educational and economic integration of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and anyone for whom English is a second language.

My child needs extra support

All children and young people need support to help them to learn and achieve at school and in ELC settings. Sometimes children and young people will need extra help to get the most out of their education. A child or young person is said to have additional support needs if for any reason, they need more, or different support, to what is generally provided to children of the same age.

There are many reasons why a child or young person might need additional support to reach their full potential at school or in ELC settings. Support is provided to help children and young people overcome barriers arising from:

- learning environment
- family circumstances
- disability or health
- social or emotional factors

This does not just apply to children and young people who have long term difficulties or a medical diagnosis. Some children may need additional support all the way through school whilst others may only need support for a short time.

If you think that your child needs extra help with their learning, you should speak to their school or the education authority.

You can also access advice from [Enquire](#), the national advice and information service on additional support for learning. Enquire have a free, confidential helpline that can provide information and advice on specific circumstances.

Children who are aged between 12 to 15 can access information, advice and support about additional support for learning and their rights to support from [My Rights, My Say](#).

Help with the cost of sending children to school

Free school meals

All children in primary 1 to primary 5 will get free school lunches during school term-time if they attend at a local council school. Your financial circumstances do not matter.

After primary 5, your children will still be eligible to get free school meals if you are in receipt of any of the eligible qualifying benefits. See full details about eligible qualifying benefits for [free school meals](#). You should also check your local council's website as the eligibility criteria might be different in some local council areas.

Support during school holidays

Also, if you are in receipt of eligible qualifying benefits for free school meals (such as Universal Credit) you might also be eligible to receive support from your local council during school holiday periods. Support for eligible families will normally be given through:

- direct cash payments into your bank account
- supermarket or shop vouchers
- local council food package deliveries directly to your home.

Your local council can give you further information about how this support is delivered in your area.

The school holiday periods covered are the summer, Christmas and Easter holidays and also the mid-term holidays in October and February. Please check with your local council to see if you are eligible to receive this support.

School clothing grant

Local councils will pay school clothing grants to eligible families once every school year. If you are eligible to receive the school clothing grant, you will be given £120 for each child in primary school and £150 for each in secondary school. The eligibility criteria for the school clothing grant is set locally by councils. You can check the [eligibility criteria in your local council](#).

If you are unsure whether you will be eligible to receive the school clothing grant, please contact your local council directly to check.

Independent schools

As well as local authority education, parents may consider enrolling their child in an independent school, also known as a private school. Independent schools charge fees to cover costs, although financial assistance, bursaries and scholarships may be available. All independent schools in Scotland are registered and you can see [their details](#) online.

The independent sector includes boarding schools, where children and young people stay at the school, either full-time or perhaps only for part of the week. Where a school provides boarding, it is registered with, and inspected by, the [Care Inspectorate](#).

Further and higher education

There is a range of higher education institutions in Scotland. These include further education colleges and universities who offer flexibility in different methods of study, including full-time, day release, evening, block release or on an open learning basis. See information on [different levels of courses available](#). Courses are available at a range of levels including:

- National Certificate modules or clusters of modules
- General Scottish Vocational Qualifications
- National Qualifications including project-based national courses and cluster units
- Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND)
- degrees

You can find out more about the qualifications on offer by visiting the [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#) and clicking on the 'Qualifications' link at the top of the page. There is also information about apprenticeships, a paid job where the employee learns and gains valuable experiences. Alongside on-the-job training, apprentices spend at least 20% of their working hours completing classroom-based learning with a college, university or training provider which leads to a nationally recognised qualification.

Eligible full time students resident in Scotland – including EU resident students – pay no tuition fees. Some part-time students may have their fees waived. If students are taking a course at HNC level or above they should apply to the [Student Awards Agency for Scotland \(SAAS\)](#) for help with funding.

You can find more information on being a student in Scotland in the [Student Information Portal](#).

For more information on how degree grades achieved abroad compare to the UK's grading scale, please see the following link: [International Degree and Qualification Equivalents | GRB](#)

Community learning and development (CLD) and adult learning

Community learning and development empowers people to make positive changes in their lives and in their communities. The focus of CLD in Scotland is;

- improved life chances for people of all ages, through learning, personal development and active citizenship
- stronger, most resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities

CLD helps tackle inequality and delivering social justice. It includes youth work, community based adult learning, including literacies and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and community development.

They provide young people, adults and families with an alternative trusted relationship so that people can access non-judgmental support to re-engage in education, in employment or in their community.

ESOL learning equips people whose first language is not English with the communication skills necessary to contribute and integrate economically, culturally and socially. Learning ESOL in the community provides a relaxed space where learners can learn English, have a better sense of belonging in the community and less sense of isolation.

Learning is driven by the learners and their needs and often provides essential language skills that will help people establish a new life in a new country as quickly as possible.

Community-based ESOL is delivered in a variety of ways;

- by local authorities
- third sector organisations
- colleges
- community-led organisations

If you want to find out more about community learning and development in your community, contact your local authority. Read more information on [Community Learning and Development](#).

You may be able to gain a qualification in ESOL in your community. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) provides a comprehensive range of ESOL qualifications to meet the needs of ESOL learners, from complete beginner to university entrance level. There are three ESOL literacies units specifically designed for candidates, who are not literate in English, or have little or no literacy in their first language. ESOL learners are also able to gain accreditation for their learning at all levels. This supports transition to other education courses or employment.

Education Scotland

[Education Scotland](#) is an agency of the Scottish Government. The website provides comprehensive information about education in Scotland. It also provides resources

for parents, signposting to other agencies who can provide help, and learning resources to support mental health and wellbeing.

Healthcare

Healthcare in Scotland is provided free of charge by Scotland's National public health service (NHS). Everyone who is a resident in Scotland is entitled to access health care. This includes displaced people, refugees, asylum seekers and people whose claim for asylum has been refused. As a New Scot you are entitled to:

- register with a GP
- access emergency health services
- register with a dentist
- have eye tests
- access specialist healthcare. This includes maternity care, mental health services and any other services for specific conditions.

Read more information on [NHS Scotland](#).

The NHS Inform website also has information about access to [healthcare for refugees and asylum seekers](#), including translated factsheets.

In an emergency

[NHS 24](#) is Scotland's telephone service providing health advice 24 hours a day. The telephone service allows people who feel unwell or those caring for them to obtain health advice if it is not possible to wait until they can contact their GP when the practice is next open. You can call them on 111 if you are ill or need any health services.

The advice line is not intended as a substitute for obtaining an emergency ambulance service. For all life-threatening emergencies you should always call 999.

You will find more information on all health-related topics including dental care, smoking, alcohol, food and nutrition and mental wellbeing on the [NHS inform website](#).

Registering with a GP

When settled in a place of residence in Scotland you and your family should register with a local doctor – a General Practitioner (GP). To register with a general medical practice (GP practice) you'll need to complete a registration form which is available from your GP surgery or can be [downloaded](#). Children under 16 should be registered by a parent or guardian, but do not have to be registered with the same GP as the rest of their family.

The completed form should be handed in or emailed to the surgery and you may then be asked for proof of ID (identity), such as passport, or proof of address. When your registration has been received by the GP practice you will be notified, either by telephone or email to advise if your application to register has been successful.

You can change your GP at any time without having to give a reason by completing a new registration form with your new GP surgery. When you have registered with a new GP, you will no longer be registered with the old one. You can then make an appointment to see the new GP immediately.

Your GP will be able to care for your health conditions and to provide treatment if you become unwell. Any prescriptions prescribed by your GP are free of charge. Read more about [Registering with a GP practice](#).

Registering with a dentist

You and your family can get care, advice and treatment from NHS Scotland to keep your mouth, teeth and gums healthy. Scotland also provides free dental checks. You can find a dentist near you on [Receiving NHS dental treatment in Scotland](#).

NHS eye care

Scotland is the only country in the UK to provide free universal NHS-funded eye examinations. These are available to anyone ordinarily resident in the UK and to eligible overseas visitors. In some cases, the NHS will also give an optical voucher towards the cost of glasses or contact lenses. Read [your guide to free NHS eye examinations in Scotland](#).

Connecting communities

The [Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland](#) is a third sector organisation which helps connect people with local sources of support that will enable them to manage their own health conditions more effectively. Read more in [Connecting you to your community](#).

Mental health

NHS Scotland provides mental health services that offer a range of treatments and self-help advice for those experiencing mild, moderate or more complex mental health problems.

[NHS Trauma Informed](#) provides support for those affected by trauma.

It is only natural to feel anxious or worried as you settle into a new life here in Scotland. Also [Clear Your Head](#) offers guidance on how to improve your mental wellbeing and [Breathing Space](#) is a free, confidential support service available for those wishing to speak to someone about how they are feeling.

Councils should provide advice and referrals to specialist public health services as appropriate e.g. mental health services, adult social care and children's services. Further advice will be provided in due course.

Adult social care

Adult social care is support offered to people who may benefit from a degree of extra help by trained professionals to help them live as comfortably and independently as possible. This may be because of a physical disability, or learning disability, or other impairment which prevents people from being active citizens. The support you can get is varied, and will be based on the degree, and type of support you require. Your local authority will discuss your needs with you first, and if you are eligible for social care support, they will work with you to find the right level of support.

Social care is regulated, to ensure that the standards of care offered are high quality, responsive and person centred.

You can find all information in the following link in relation to [Scotland's social care](#).

Sexual health/family planning clinics

NHS Scotland provides free sexual health services in Scotland. All genders can access professional and non-judgmental care on all family planning conception information, relationships and [sexual health advice](#) or you can also visit your local GP.

Parent Club Scotland

[Parent Club](#) offers up-to-date guidance on your child's health and education. It's full of hints and tips from other parents and carers who've been there before. It also has advice to help you look after your own wellbeing and to point you in the direction of the support available

Scotland's baby box

Every baby born and resident in Scotland is entitled to a free baby box which is full of baby essentials from birth to 6 months.

See further information on [Scotland's Baby Box](#).

Health visiting

Every family in Scotland with a child below school age will benefit from Scotland's health visiting service. This is a series of home visits from a specially trained nurse known as a health visitor. These home visits start at pre-birth and end just before a child goes to school. However, anyone settling in Scotland with a child below school age will receive visits at an appropriate time.

Health Visitors will monitor and promote the health and wellbeing of your child as well as providing advice and support to parents and the wider family.

Women's health

In Scotland, we are working to address women's health inequalities by raising awareness around women's health, to improve access to health care for women across their life course and to reduce inequalities in health outcomes for girls and women.

Useful, women's only, information is included in the following links - [Sexual Health Scotland](#), with more details covering specific health issues under the [Get help](#) tab, as well as a [Guide to Sexual Health](#) detailing services and advice which is available in your area.

Menstrual flow: period products

In Scotland, it is fine to talk about your period and it is important not to feel ashamed or embarrassed about it.

Scotland has become the first country in the world to provide free and universal access to period products; such as sanitary pads, tampons and re-usable period products.

Local authorities and education providers must make period products accessible and free of charge for anyone who needs them. This means that all schools, colleges and universities must make these items available in their toilets, for free.

Cervical screening: smear tests

Cervical screening, also known as 'smear test', provides all women between the ages of 25 and 64 the opportunity to be screened every 3 to 5 years. If you are registered with a GP, a letter will be sent to you when your cervical screening appointment is due.

The cervical screening, or smear test, involves a soft brush being touched onto the cervix (neck of the womb) which picks up a tiny sample. The screening is done by your female GP or a nurse. The screening can pick up very early changes in the cervix that could become cancerous if left untreated.

Breast screening

All women between 50 and 71 can be screened every 3 years for breast cancer. [This screening](#) helps detect any problems and enables early action to be taken. This reduces the number of deaths from breast cancer. The test consists of an X-Ray to look for cancers that are too small to see or feel.

The menopause

The menopause is when a woman stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant naturally. This usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55, but for some can happen earlier.

During this time your period will become less frequent and you may miss several months bleeding at a time. You can still get pregnant whilst bleeding at this time.

The menopause can cause symptoms including irregular periods, hot flushes, night sweats, mood swings, disturbed sleep, brain fog, low sex drive, vaginal dryness and joint aches.

If you are experiencing problems with menopause, you can speak to your GP or nurse.

[NHS Information](#) provides more information about the menopause.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and reproductive health

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are passed on from one person to another through unprotected sex or genital contact. They can have a range of symptoms, but they can also be present without any symptoms for many years.

Symptoms may include:

- unusual discharge from the vagina or anus
- pain when urinating
- unusual vaginal bleeding
- lumps around the genitals or anus
- itchiness around genitals or anus

If you are worried you might have an STI, don't have sex, including oral sex, without a condom, and contact a sexual health service as soon as you can.

Sexual health services are free and available to everyone in Scotland. You can find [your nearest clinic](#).

Contraception

Contraception is a way to prevent pregnancy and it is free in Scotland. Examples of contraception are:

- condoms
- oral contraception pills
- long acting reversible contraception's e.g. the implant or IUD (intrauterine device)

You can contact your GP or family planning clinic for access to contraception. You can also visit pharmacies for advice on contraception and for emergency access to contraception.

Abortion

[Abortion](#) is the termination of pregnancy and is legal in Scotland. It is available free of charge on NHS Scotland. Abortion care and related support, including interpreters where needed, can be accessed through your local abortion service.

In Scotland there is plenty of support if you are not ready to have a child or have an unwanted pregnancy. This situation can be very difficult and emotional for any woman.

Employment and training

People who are recognised as refugees, or have been granted other forms of humanitarian protection including displaced people, have the right to work in the UK.

Asylum seekers do not have an automatic right to work while their asylum case is being considered. If an applicant has not received an initial decision after twelve months, the applicant can request permission to work from the Home Office. If permission to work is granted, any job taken up must be included on the list of shortage occupations published by UK Visas and Immigration. Some asylum seekers may be granted discretionary leave status, which gives them the right to work.

The Scottish Government and local government have a long-term focus on supporting people who need help to access the labour market. Employability is a key priority, which recognises the role of other services, such as education, community learning and development, social care, planning and economic development functions.

Welfare benefits

Refugees, displaced people and people who have been granted humanitarian protection have the right to access welfare benefits. Support for people seeking employment, in terms of support into work and access to benefits, remains reserved to the UK Government. This includes welfare benefits, including Universal Credit. While some social security powers are devolved to the Scottish Government, all employment related and income replacement benefits remain reserved to the UK Government.

Asylum Seekers have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and therefore are restricted from accessing certain public funds which are defined under Immigration Rules. This includes most welfare benefits, local authority housing and the Scottish Welfare Fund. People seeking asylum can apply to the Home Office for financial support, as well as accommodation, if they would otherwise be destitute while awaiting a decision on their application. Asylum, including the provision of asylum support, and immigration, including policy on NRPF, are matters reserved to the UK Parliament.

Finding work

There are a number of ways to find work in Scotland and below is a list of some of the support services that we provide to help you in securing employment. You should ask your Job Centre Plus work coach about these services

- Local authority support – services put in place by local authorities and their partners will assist people to easily navigate public services, providing the right support at the right time and consider your needs as you move towards

work. This support is also available to people awaiting the outcome of asylum applications.

- Fair Start Scotland – this provides 12-18 months of tailored, flexible, and person-centred pre-employment support to help to find and stay in fair and sustainable work

Organisations delivering these services are expected to support individuals to access additional services that they may need to find work, including language support, mental health support, signposting to skills services, as well as further and higher education. These services will also support access to childcare services where appropriate.

Careers information and guidance

Skills Development Scotland is Scotland's national skills body and provides career information, advice and guidance, as well as work-based training programmes aimed at building career management skills. They support a wide range of pathways into work, including Modern Apprenticeships (further information below). There are [Careers Centres](#) based in each local authority area which you can visit to access support.

There is also an online service, [My World of Work](#), which can assist you through every stage of your working life. Anyone can access information on a wide range of subjects, including choosing a career, learning and training, applying for jobs and making a career change. You will find information on researching careers to building your CV.

They also deliver [Career Information, Advice and Guidance](#) (CIAG) services. The service enables people to adequately prepare for, enter and progress through the labour market, and to fulfil their potential in the workplace.

Working in your local area

You can apply to work for your local council across a wide range of job roles and services. Visit the following links to search and apply for jobs in your area:

- [myjobscotland](#)
- [S1jobs](#)
- [ScotCareers](#)
- [Scot Jobs Net](#)
- [Jobs North](#)
- [Indeed](#)

Jobcentre Plus helps people to find and progress in work, including those who are unemployed and claiming benefits. Visit your nearest Jobcentre Plus for help with finding a job and information on any benefits you and your family might be entitled to, or find out more about how to [manage an existing benefit, payment or claim](#).

You can find more information on the support services for [working, jobs and careers](#).

Modern apprenticeships (MAs)

People with refugee or humanitarian protection status can participate in modern apprenticeships.

[Modern apprenticeships in Scotland](#) can offer you opportunities to learn on the job, get the experience you need, and work towards a qualification.

Graduate apprenticeships (GAs)

[Graduate Apprenticeships](#) provide work-based learning opportunities up to Master's degree level for new and existing employees. They have been created in partnership with industry and the further and higher education sector. The apprenticeships combine academic knowledge with skills development to enable participants to become more effective and productive in the workplace.

Volunteering

Displaced persons, refugees and asylum seekers have the right to volunteer. Volunteering can offer some of the same benefits that working provides including: opportunities to use and develop skills; a sense of purpose; and links to other people in the community. Volunteering can also be beneficial as a way of increasing employability, by gaining experience which could ultimately support a job application. For any queries on volunteering speak to your local Third Sector Interface (TSI). There is a TSI in every Local Authority area. Find [your nearest TSI](#).

Your National Insurance number (NINO)

You have a National Insurance number to make sure your National Insurance contributions and tax are recorded against your name only. It's made up of letters and numbers and never changes.

You can look for and start work without a National Insurance number if you can prove you can work in the UK. You can also go online to allow you to authorise an employer to access your data to prove that you have [the right to work in the UK](#).

Employers are required to conduct mandatory Right to Work checks on all prospective employees. Having a National Insurance number is not part of these checks, and the possession of a National Insurance number does not prove that an individual has a right to work.

Find more information on [how to obtain a National Insurance number](#).

As part of the application process for a National Insurance number, you may be required to attend a face-to-face appointment where the Department for Work and Pensions can validate and confirm your identity and right to work.

Qualifications recognition

People with a non-UK professional qualification may need to have their qualification officially recognised to work in a profession that is regulated in the UK. It will need to be recognised by the appropriate regulator for a particular profession.

Professionals with non-UK qualifications should contact the appropriate UK or Scottish regulator for further information. If professionals are uncertain of the appropriate regulator, they can contact: [UK Centre of Professional Qualifications \[UKCPQ\]](#) to find out which regulatory or professional body they should contact for further information on how to get their professional qualification recognised.

If your qualification has already been officially recognised by the relevant UK regulator, make sure you understand the terms of your recognition decision by checking in with that regulator.

UK ENIC is the UK's national information centre for the recognition and evaluation of international qualifications and skills, and provides a Statement Of Comparability service for individuals who need to evidence the level of their overseas qualification(s) for employment, study or professional registration in the UK. Further information on the services provided by UK ENIC can be found on the [ENIC website](#).

Applying for Basic Disclosure

A basic disclosure is a criminal record check issued by Disclosure Scotland an executive agency of the Scottish Government. This is often required by employers when you are applying for a job. You get a certificate showing any 'unspent' criminal convictions you may have that are recorded in records held in the UK.

In the UK, a conviction can be either spent or unspent. There is information about the [rules in Scotland when a conviction can become spent](#). You need to declare an unspent conviction to an employer if asked.

You can use this basic disclosure certificate to show to prospective employers or other people that need to know this information. There is a fee that must be paid [when a basic disclosure application is made](#).

Business support

[Business Gateway](#) offices across Scotland provide in-person business support services and impartial advice to people starting or running a business. They can help find funding, explain regulations, and signpost access to other local authority and Enterprise Agency services. You can call them on 0300 013 4753 every Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm.

Online support can be found via the [Find Business Support website](#) which gives an overview of all funding and services offered by public sector organisations across Scotland. Support includes advice, funding, networking opportunities, training, webinars and more.

Community safety

Scots law

Scots law is the legal system in Scotland, and although elements in the Scottish legal system are similar to those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are important differences between Scots law, English law and Northern Irish law. You can find out more about Scots law on the [Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service \(Scotland's prosecution service\) website](#).

In Scotland, the criminal law can be different to that of the rest of the UK. For example, the Scottish Parliament passed the [Children \(Equal Protection from Assault\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) that made all forms of physical punishment of a child unlawful.

Legal rights and responsibilities

Scotland is a modern, inclusive nation which respects, protects and fulfils internationally recognised human rights. The Scottish Government and other public authorities in Scotland have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil the rights set out in human rights treaties. We are committed to working with the whole of Scottish society to ensure that everyone can live a life of human dignity.

Every person in Scotland has the same [basic human rights and freedoms](#), which are protected in law. For example, every person has:

- a right to liberty
- freedom of thought and the right to practice their religion

However it is illegal if, as part of this, you take part in activities which break laws legislated within the UK and Scottish Parliaments. It is against the law to discriminate against or persecute someone because of their beliefs.

Based on the rights and freedoms protected in law, everyone living in or visiting the UK is expected to adhere to a set of shared values and responsibilities:

- respect and obey the law
- respect the rights of others, including their right to their own opinions
- treat others with fairness

In the UK it is illegal to treat anyone differently because of their protected characteristics. These are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

You should not be treated any differently because of any protected characteristic when applying for a job, looking for somewhere to live, using the National Health Service (NHS) or just buying something in a shop.

Hate crime

Hate crime is the term used to describe behaviour which is both criminal and rooted in prejudice. It can take many different forms – including verbal and physical abuse – and has hugely damaging effects on victims, their families and communities.

Current hate crime laws in Scotland allow any existing criminal offence (assault, threatening or abusive behaviour) to be aggravated by prejudice – this includes prejudice based on race, religion, disability, transgender identity and sexual orientation.

Hate crimes are unacceptable and will not be tolerated in Scotland. It is a serious offence to injure, harass or verbally abuse someone because of their race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity.

If you or someone you know is the victim of hate crime you should tell the police

If you do not feel comfortable contacting the police, you can do so through a third party reporting centre. Third party reporting centres allow people to tell the police about a hate crime without contacting them directly. Examples of third party reporting centres range housing associations to victim support offices and voluntary groups, where their specially trained staff will provide support and assistance in submitting a report to Police Scotland on your behalf.

Keeping women and girls safe

Violence against women is a fundamental violation of human rights and is unacceptable. In Scotland you can access frontline services which support both male and female victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and rape and sexual assault.

Domestic abuse

The Scottish Government's message to those suffering domestic abuse is very clear– you are not alone, you do not have to wait and you should not hesitate to come forward and get help.

Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) see domestic abuse as:

"Any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship.

The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse may be committed in the home or elsewhere including online".

Domestic abuse is not just physical. It can happen in many ways. Domestic abuse can include:

- being threatened
- name calling
- controlling what you do, where you go and who you speak to
- threatening your children
- not being allowed see your friends and family
- accusing you of cheating
- threatening to out your sexual orientation
- sharing - or threatening to share - intimate images of you with family, friends or work colleagues
- being hit, kicked, punched, or have objects thrown at you
- rape, being forced into sexual acts.

How to report domestic abuse

If you, or someone you know, is at risk of domestic abuse, please contact Police Scotland.

You can contact Police Scotland via their [online reporting form](#). If the abuse is ongoing please always phone 101, or 999 in an emergency.

Police Scotland can also provide information on [how to keep you and your loved safe](#).

Support and advice can be provided by local women's aids across Scotland and you can contact Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline on 0800 027 1234 where support is available 24/7

There are 17 rape crisis centres across Scotland available to offer support, and the National Rape Crisis Helpline can offer support from 6.00pm to midnight 7 days a week on 08088 01 03 02. Rape Crisis Scotland provides support to survivors of all genders, including men and all trans and non-binary people.

Rape and sexual crime

The only person to blame for sexual offending is the perpetrator. Police Scotland recognise how difficult it can be to report sexual crime and are there to help and support you.

If you have been raped or sexually assaulted:

- you do not have to cope on your own
- there are many support services that can help you
- officers of Police Scotland know how difficult it is for people to report rape, they will respect you and believe you
- you are not to blame, the person who raped or assaulted you is to blame

Police Scotland can be contacted via 101 or in an emergency always call 999.

Advice and support

[NHS Sexual Assault Response Coordination Service \(SARCS\)](#) is a dedicated NHS service which can offer healthcare and support in the days after an assault, if you are not ready to tell the police or are unsure.

If you have been raped or sexually assaulted within the last 7 days and do not want to tell the police or are unsure about telling them now - you can self-refer to a SARCS. This means you do not need a GP or other healthcare professional to refer you to a SARCS - you can do this yourself.

Rape Crisis Scotland provides support to survivors of all genders, including men and all trans and non-binary people. The National Rape Crisis Helpline can offer support from 6pm to midnight, 7 days a week, on 08088 01 03 02. In addition there are [17 rape crisis centres across Scotland](#) available to offer advice and support.

Honour based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage

We are committed to tackling 'honour based' violence such as Female Genital Mutilation and Forced Marriage. We also considers so called virginity testing and hymenoplasty to be a form of gender based violence. The existence of these procedures directly relates to the strict expectations regarding women's sexual "purity" within some cultures or communities. Perpetrators of honour-based violence will usually justify their behaviour by referencing these beliefs alongside various other socio-cultural factors; this includes references to fixed gender roles that perceive women and girls as gatekeepers of their family's honour. The concept of "honour" is a construct – one that reflects unacceptable gender discrimination against women and girls.

If you're concerned about a girl of any age who may be at risk of honour based abuse you can:

- contact the police
- contact the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) on 0800 028 3550 (24 hour helpline)
- call the Scottish Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline on 0800 027 1234 (24 hour helpline) for guidance and support
- speak to a teacher or any health professional

Child sexual abuse and exploitation

Child sexual abuse involves a child or young person engaging in activity for the sexual gratification of another adult, child or young person. It is never the child or young person's fault. Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse in which a person or person of any age takes advantage of a power imbalance to entice, force or persuade a child or young person into engaging in sexual activity, in return for something received by the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse. Child sexual abuse can take place in person or online and it can be a one off event or occur over long periods of time.

Abuse involves serious crime and isn't something that you need to deal with alone.

If you believe a child or young person is at risk call Police Scotland on 101. If you think they may be in immediate danger 999 and speak to the Police immediately. Officers from Police Scotland will contact you to find out what has happened and will work with you to ensure your child is safe. Specialist Child Protection officers that work jointly with Child Protection Social Work will listen and speak to your child to find out what has happened to them. All incidents of child abuse and exploitation will be investigated by Police Scotland.

The police and their duties

The police exist to protect the public, their rights and the law. The police are there to help and assist you and you should not be afraid to approach them if you are the victim of a crime, see a crime happening, or for general assistance for example if you are lost.

Contacting the police

Emergency

If you need to contact the police in an emergency and for serious incidents where you or another person is at risk of harm then you should call **999**. When you call, say you need the 'police', as this is also the number to call an ambulance or the fire service.

Non-emergency

If you need the police but it is not an emergency, you should call **101**. This non-emergency number will make it quicker and easier for you to contact the police when you don't need an emergency response, for example if you need to speak to your local police officer or report a crime that has already happened, such as a theft or damage to property. Alternatively, reports can be made online by completing Police Scotland's [online reporting form](#).

If you would like to make a complaint in relation to the level of service you have received, you can complain directly to Police Scotland via their [online form](#) or attend a Police Office. You can also complain to the [Police Investigations & Review Commissioner](#) (PIRC) in Scotland, whose role is to impartially, and independent of the police, investigate conduct and behaviour.

In the event of a fire

Please visit [Scottish Fire and Rescue Service website](#) see a guide on how to keep safe in the event of fire.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are the world's fourth largest fire and rescue service and are committed to ensuring our safety and wellbeing.

Communities and culture

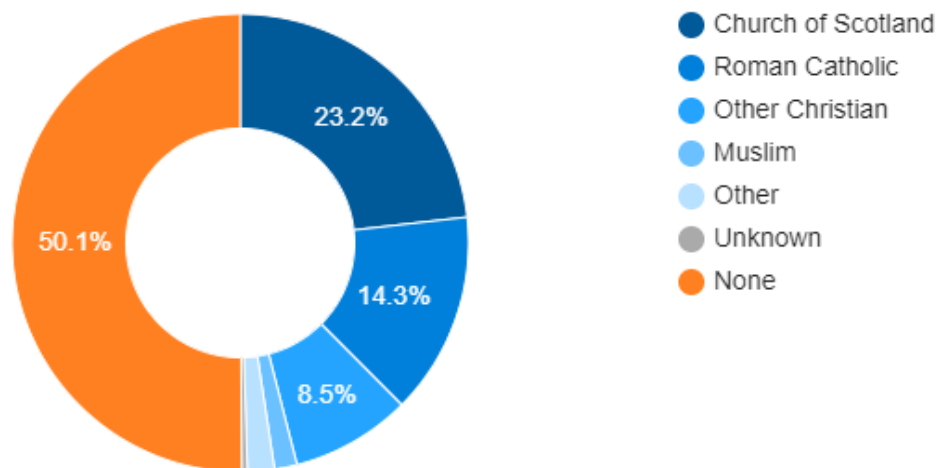
Scotland thrives on a rich and diverse culture thanks to the contributions of people from all over the world. Scotland's long history of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers has seen people settle, rebuild their lives and become part of communities. Established communities and individuals are helping to support newly arrived refugees, displaced people and asylum seekers, by sharing their knowledge and experience. Scottish Refugee Council and other community development organisations continue to support refugees to form their own community groups and forums. Refugees and asylum seekers also have much to contribute to existing community organisations and wider society.

Faith and belief

Scotland is a multi-faith country with many religions found here, including Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Paganism. Scotland is historically a Christian country and a large portion of the population still consider themselves Christian. However, almost half of the population have no religious belief or belonging.

Everyone living in Scotland has the right to choose to practise a faith or not, without discrimination. People's right to freedom of religion and conscience must be respected and is protected in law. Organisations such as [Interfaith Scotland](#) help to promote good relations and dialogue between the different religion and belief communities of Scotland.

Religion in Scotland 2018



Culture

Scotland is a place where culture is valued, protected and nurtured. Culture is woven through everyday life and is shaped by society, rich cultural heritage and creativity of today is inspired by people and place, enlivens every community and is celebrated around the world. [Find out more about Scotland's traditions](#)

Scotland is home to a [wide range of festivals](#) which take place every year, for example, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.



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This publication is available at www.gov.scot

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-80435-180-2 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, June 2022

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS1040910 (06/22)

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