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Chris Philp MP
Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

Your Ref: MIN/0005557/20

8 May 2020

Dear Chris

Thank you for your reply of 21 April to my correspondence concerning the impact of Covid-19 on people with no recourse to public funds and asylum seekers.

I welcome the steps you have outlined to date, including allowing people at the end of the asylum process to remain in their accommodation until the end of June, and enabling asylum claims to be registered at a number of additional locations, including in Glasgow.

Although the Scottish Government would not normally support the use of hotels to accommodate people seeking asylum, I recognise that in the current situation, hotels can help to enable the provision of enhanced support to ensure that people are aware of government guidance and receive any additional assistance they need. However, it is essential that any changes of accommodation or support arrangements are communicated clearly to both those directly impacted and the organisations that support them.

I do have some concerns remaining. Despite assurances from the Home Secretary at the Home Affairs Select Committee that the UK Government would provide the right kind of support to asylum seekers, both in terms of accommodation and financial provision, I am concerned that people who have been moved into hotels in Glasgow are no longer receiving financial support payments. Worryingly, I understand this to be Home Office policy.

I appreciate that people are being provided with full board accommodation, but as you will be aware, financial support is about much more more than food costs. People must be able to purchase other essentials, including personal hygiene products, over the counter medication and phone credit.

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While I am aware that Mears are providing some additional items, including toiletries, there is also a question of human dignity and agency here. We need to ensure people retain some autonomy, despite the difficult situation, and have what might seem the small freedom of being able to choose to purchase a bottle of juice or a bar of soap.

I urge that you use your discretion to provide some level of financial support to people who are accommodated in hotels, either through providing an additional payment or allowing some flexibility in food provision, such as the option of half board. This would allow some choices for those who are in the hotel accommodation.

Digital access is now more important than ever, not only for people to be able to contact Migrant Help or their Mears support officers, but to be able to keep up to date with public health advice; to maintain social connections which boost wellbeing; and to enable contact with the NHS, support organisations and legal representatives.

I am aware that WiFi is available in the hotels in Glasgow, though only in shared spaces in some facilities and I have asked Mears on their plans to extend this to hotel rooms. However, I would be grateful if you could also provide detail of the arrangements being made to provide digital access in dispersed asylum accommodation.

I am particularly concerned about families with children, who should be participating in online education or activities while schools are closed, but may not be able to do so if they do not have the necessary internet access. In the longer term, and given that so much of our government guidance and public services are now delivered online, I believe that digital access and phone credit costs must be considered as part of the essential needs of people seeking asylum, and appropriate financial support provided.

I understand that the Home Office is currently reviewing asylum support rates. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, I was increasingly aware of the challenges that people seeking asylum have been facing trying to budget for their essential daily needs, and the lack of autonomy and choice that they have in their lives. I believe that the true costs of daily life must be reflected in the asylum support rates, including things like digital connectivity and travel, and that support rates should be increased, both now to meet the extra costs associated with Covid-19, and for the longer term.

Further, I understand that the Home Office has been making changes in immigration detention in response to Covid-19. I would be grateful if you could update me on the position at Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre, including the measures that are in place to ensure physical distancing and how many people are still detained there. I want to ensure that anyone released from Dungavel, who will be remaining in Scotland, has access to the support and accommodation they need. I would be grateful if you could advise on the arrangements that have been made to ensure support is in place and that people are signposted to organisations that can help them.

The Scottish Government, local government and the third sector stand ready to work with the Home Office to consider how people with NRPf and asylum seekers are supported, once the most immediate threats of Covid-19 have receded, and we enter the recovery period. We already have established partnership working arrangements in Scotland led by the Regional Partnership Board, and I would encourage you to make the most of the expertise that partners in Glasgow can offer, to ensure a smooth transition.

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The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic will be long term. We need to ensure that everyone in our communities has access to the support they need to be safe, and that we learn from the outcomes of the measures we have had to take at very short notice during this crisis.

I appreciate that the Home Office has made a number of positive changes to the asylum system. As we move into recovery, I would like to see work with partners continue to ensure that these positive improvements are retained. I believe this would be of benefit to all of us.

I look forward to your urgent response and would be happy to discuss these issues further.

Kind regards



AILEEN CAMPBELL

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11 May 2020

Your Ref: MIN/0005557/20

Dear Chris

I wrote to you in general terms last week, in response to your letter of 21 April and to raise specific concerns about asylum accommodation and support in light of Covid-19.

Since that letter was sent, you will be aware that news of a fatality in hotel based asylum accommodation has come into the public domain. Details which have emerged about the unfortunate death of a man accommodated in the Maclays hotel, note that his friends had concerns about his mental health, some addiction issues and the impact of being moved into hotel accommodation, as well as the removal of financial support.

This highlights the seriousness of the issues set out in my letter and additional concerns for the wellbeing of other asylum seekers and Mears staff, in the light of this incident. I would therefore emphasise the need for an urgent response.

AILEEN CAMPBELL





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Chris Philp MP
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19 June 2020

Dear Mr Philp

I understand that the Home Office is now progressing plans to move out of asylum contingency measures put in place in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and that there is likely to be a phased restart of discontinuations of support to people at the end of the asylum process.

In my letters of 8 and 11 May, to which I have not yet received a reply, I made clear that the Scottish Government, local government and the third sector stand ready to work with the Home Office to ensure that people seeking asylum are supported, as the most immediate threats of Covid-19 recede. As I noted, we have established partnership working arrangements in Scotland, which include the Home Office, and which are led by the Regional Partnership Board, chaired by Glasgow City Council. The Partnership Board has the expertise, experience and local knowledge, which are essential to achieving a smooth transition, and it has stepped up its work to take this forward.

I strongly urge you to work with the Partnership Board on detailed transition plans. In the first instance, both the Scottish Government and the Partnership Board need to see current transition plans as soon as possible, including plans for restarting discontinuations of support and for exiting hotel accommodation. This will enable us to ensure that they are appropriate to the Scottish context and to work with you in the best interests of everyone involved.

I look forward to your urgent response and to receiving the requested plans.

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Chris Philp MP
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2 July 2020

Dear Mr Philp

Thank you for your time on Monday, following the horrific incident in Glasgow on 26 June. I appreciated the discussion and thought it would be useful to record the points we agreed, as well as to raise some further points that we did not have time to discuss.

I welcome your commitment to working collaboratively with local partners, as we move out of asylum contingency measures put in place in response to Covid-19. I have been advised that the hotel exit plan has now been provided to Glasgow City Council. As an important first step in developing our partnership working, I would also welcome sight of the plan. I am keen that the Home Office engages with all partners, as the hotel exit planning continues and as wider contingency exit plans on cessation of support are developed. This is critical to the future delivery of asylum in Glasgow.

We agreed that lessons must be learned from the events on Friday, and you noted that police investigations are ongoing. I am keen to know what steps the Home Office will take to also investigate the incident to ensure that any changes that are needed to ensure people's safety and wellbeing – in all types of asylum accommodation provided by the Home Office – are put in place. The key principle of our New Scots refugee integration strategy is that integration begins from day one of arrival, not just from when refugee status is granted. The future asylum system must reflect this, and the provision of accommodation and support must work for everyone, but most importantly for people seeking asylum, who are still suffering the effects of the traumas they have experienced.

I was pleased that you agreed to reconsider the issue of financial support for people in hotel accommodation. As you will know, the Scottish Government believes the amount provided is too low, and it should not be removed when people are in hotels. As I said during our call, I recognise that meals and basic toiletries are provided, but people need the agency and dignity, as well as the self-reliance, of being able to make some decisions and buy some small items for themselves. The lack of any personal financial support has been repeatedly raised as an issue by people in the hotels and those that support them as a factor that

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impacts on mental health. I look forward to hearing the results of your considerations as soon as possible.

I was also pleased that you agreed to a joint meeting with the Leader of Glasgow City Council. My Private Office will be in touch to take this forward, and I hope that it can be quickly arranged. The role of Glasgow City Council and the Health and Social Care Partnership is fundamental to the delivery of asylum in the city, and they have been at the forefront in providing social work support to people affected by the incident on Friday. It is vital that you have discussions with Council Leaders on the needs of the city, both as a result of this incident, but also in the longer term.

There were points I wanted to raise with you that we did not have time to discuss in detail during our call. One of these is the routing of people seeking asylum to Glasgow. Given the need to exit hotel accommodation and the numbers of people seeking housing in the city, I ask that the Home Office pauses asylum routing to Glasgow from elsewhere in the UK, until the situation has stabilised. Will you undertake to do this?

I am also aware that, over the past few months, Glasgow has been receiving a high number of people 'walking in' to claim asylum. We would find it really helpful to understand why the number of 'walk-ins' is currently so high, and what you can do to address this issue. Can the Home Office provide data on why this is happening and anticipated numbers?

You have raised the question of widening asylum dispersal outwith Glasgow. Scotland has always welcomed refugees and people seeking asylum and, in principle, the Scottish Government would support the widening of dispersal. However, as we have outlined on several occasions over the past few years, the Home Office needs to change the model, so that asylum dispersal works well for all involved. We have raised numerous times, as have Glasgow City Council, dispersal local authorities in the rest of the UK and stakeholders, that there are issues with the system, particularly the lack of partnership working and financial support provided. We have pointed to the very successful resettlement of Syrian refugees, now in every local authority area in Scotland under a different programme, and urged you to follow that model. We cannot expect other local authorities to take on dispersal without investment by the Home Office in the services that local authorities provide in support of asylum dispersal, including support around the impacts of mental health issues, currently without any funding. Your policies in this area have been and remain a significant barrier in dispersal, and this needs to be addressed.

I am keen that we keep in regular contact, so that we can anticipate any emerging issues and tackle them before they become significant problems. As part of this, it would be helpful to reinstate the Four Nations meetings on asylum, as I found them a useful forum for joint discussion on common issues with devolved governments. There has not been a meeting since 24 April 2019, and raising issues by correspondence is not always satisfactory or timeous. I see no reason why these meetings could not be initiated virtually immediately.

I look forward to hearing from you and to speaking again soon.



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HOCS Reference: MIN/0009105/20

3 July 2020

Dear Aileen,

Thank you for your letters of 8 May, 11 May and 19 June about support arrangements for asylum seekers in Glasgow and the impact of Covid-19 and I was grateful for the opportunity to speak with you on Monday 29 June regarding the tragic incident in Glasgow last weekend. Glasgow continues to make a valued and important contribution to Home Office schemes to protect the most vulnerable.

As the events of 26 June show, support arrangements for asylum seekers are a sensitive issue and we need to reflect carefully on what more we can do to keep them safe and secure. This is an issue we are likely to return to later, but for now I will try to respond to the points in your letters.

I am grateful for your recognition of the reasons why we are currently using hotels in Glasgow and other areas of the UK to provide accommodation to people in the asylum system who have no alternative suitable housing. In light of the social distancing and travel restrictions, there has been no outflow from the normal asylum accommodation; we have used hotels as there are no realistic alternatives available in light of the continued increase in intake. However, as we begin to return to normal arrangements, I hope that we can steadily reduce the use of hotels. The speed at which we do this depends heavily on freeing up other asylum housing ("dispersal accommodation") by assisting those who are granted asylum to move to other housing arrangements and encouraging and enabling failed asylum seekers to return to their own countries. I would be grateful for your support for this work. And in response to the concerns expressed in your letter of 20 June, I can assure you that we will be discussing the practical arrangements with Glasgow City Council.

You are aware that those in the support system who are accommodated in a full-board facility, including those in hotels, do not receive support in the form of cash. It may be useful if I set out in detail what is provided in the hotels we are currently using:

- Three meals are provided daily to meet dietary requirements – these are placed outside each room if the person is self-isolating, or are provided in communal dining rooms with staggered times to cater for social distancing requirements.
- Tea, coffee, water and fruit are available all day.
- 24-hour reception staff are on duty in case of an emergency
- Full laundry facilities are available.
- Space is set aside for NHS staff and medical services.
- There is full provision of soap, sanitiser, clean towels, linen, toiletries and feminine hygiene products.
- TV and WIFI is available in each room.

I would like to assure you that this package of support meets our obligations to provide for asylum seekers' "essential living needs" (the legal test).

In contrast, individuals supported in dispersal accommodation (generally flats and houses) and who do not benefit from the provision of catering needs, are provided with a weekly cash allowance to enable them to meet their essential living needs. The level of the allowance is reviewed annually, using a methodology that has been in place since 2014 and which both the English and Scottish courts have agreed is sound and rational. The 2020 review is ongoing, but we have implemented an immediate temporary increase in the allowance with effect 15 June, from £37.75 to £39.60 per week for each person in the household (a rise of around 5%). The increase is significantly higher than current rates of inflation.

In your letter of 8 May, you also raised the issue of access to WIFI for those in the support system. Those accommodated in our larger Initial Accommodation facilities, where there is no WiFi provision, are now being given access to the internet via the issue of SIM cards. There are no plans to do the same for those in dispersed accommodation. We accept that the need to communicate may in certain circumstances constitute an essential need. The cost of doing so effectively are built into the review methodology of the cash allowance that I have described. In practical terms, this is done by working out the costs of purchasing and using a mobile phone. More details of the way the costs are assessed can be found in the reports published at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-on-review-of-cash-allowance-paid-to-asylum-seekers>.

I understand the point you make about children and their access to services related to their education needs; however, education matters are a devolved responsibility.

Your letter of 8 May specifically queried changes in immigration detention in response to Covid-19. I can assure you that the Government is committed to a fair and humane immigration policy that welcomes those here legally, while tackling abuse and protecting the public. The Home Office is always mindful of its legal obligations in respect of immigration detention, in particular in assessing that for each individual there is a realistic prospect of removal in a reasonable timescale. Decisions to detain are made on a case-by-case basis and kept under constant review. Our priority in current circumstances is to maintain the lawful detention of the most high-harm individuals, including foreign national offenders. Where appropriate, we will also maintain the detention for enforcing the swift removal of other individuals, who have no right to remain in the UK, but who refuse to leave voluntarily.

Regular and detailed information on numbers in detention, levels of release and numbers of returns is published within the [Immigration Statistics Quarterly Release](#).

The High Court recently ruled that the Home Office is taking sensible, precautionary measures in relation to coronavirus and immigration detention. This is in line with the public health guidance and these measures are in place to protect staff and detainees during these unprecedented times. We consider this judgment to be a strong endorsement of the important measures we have taken.

I note your concerns in the same letter about access to support and accommodation for individuals released from Dungavel IRC. When an individual is being released from the centre into the community, a letter is provided by the healthcare team to the individual that summarises their medical history. The person is advised to forward this to their GP if they have one, or to register. Following a temperature check carried out by the healthcare team, they are also provided with a mask and gloves on discharge from the centre.

A Reception Officer at the centre then provides the individual with an Accommodation Support letter which gives details of where they can obtain financial support. If the Home Office has concerns about an individual who is being released, a Multi-Disciplinary Team meeting is convened in advance of the release, to ensure that any required support is put in place.

On one final point, I am of course aware of the tragic death of an individual asylum seeker who was accommodated in the Maclays hotel, as mentioned in your letter of 11 May. This is a matter for the relevant authorities, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

I trust this letter is helpful in setting out the Government's position.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Philp', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chris Philp MP

Ms Haughey

You requested additional information on Friday's incident in Glasgow.

Information from Glasgow HSCP has been provided [redacted]. Information from NHS GG&C has been provided [redacted].

[redacted] has made us aware that there were discussions on Saturday morning with Scottish Government colleagues and with MPs, MSPs and local elected Glasgow City Council members.

The following responses to the Minister's questions have been provided.

1) an update from NHS GG&C on what mental health support has been requested/ offered in response to yesterday's events in Glasgow city centre?

- Support is being provided to those affected by the incident by NHS and Social Work staff within the Asylum Health Bridging Team. All agencies are working closely.
- Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership have close operational working relationships with Mears,
- There are clear pathways between Mears and the range of health and social care services, all of which have continued to operate, to the same degree as the other mainstream services during lockdown.
- [redacted] the Asylum Health Bridging Team [redacted] was making a routine visit to The Park Hotel when the incident happened.
- [redacted] was evacuated to the pub across the street with residents of the hotel and was on site to provide immediate support and advice as required.
- [redacted]
- A social work team leader and 6 social workers were on site immediately after the incident and worked with Mears in their efforts to support and then to relocate residents.
- No formal mental health assessments/reviews were carried out at the time. Instead practical advice and assistance was prioritised and provided. This included access to medication, taxis, toiletries, clothing etc and other supplies as required.
- Social Workers and the Asylum Health Bridging Team were aware of any physical and/or mental health support requirements of residents. These were arranged.

- 79 of the 91 residents were supported to move to another hotel contracted by Mears by 11pm (Hallmark Hotel) on Friday 26th evening. The remaining 12 were either receiving hospital treatment or made their own arrangement on the night and have subsequently returned to the Hallmark Hotel.
- Social work staff remained on site to assist residents in the transition. A further planning meeting has been arranged for Monday morning to consider ongoing support arrangements.
- Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership has indicated that it has no record of any previous referral by Mears or the Home Office in relation to the person suspected of carrying out the attack. This is being verified through liaison with Mears.

2) confirmation what reviews / critical incident investigations they have or are putting in place as regards mental health support for asylum seekers?

- GHSCP has not initiated any formal reviews or an SCI in relation to mental health as there is an ongoing police investigation to the incident.

3) Can NHS GG&C be asked about current service provision to the people moved into hotel accommodation and if those people previously engaged with mental health services have continued to be seen by their own care teams?

- Glasgow HSCP provide the Asylum Health Bridging Team to provide health screening, assessments and access to services to all asylum seekers placed in Glasgow by the UK Home Office, or presenting for asylum in Glasgow.
- This team includes a Community Psychiatric Nurse and other health and social care professionals and works closely with other key services given the experiences of some asylum seekers e.g. Sandyford, Rape Crisis, Glasgow Psychological Trauma Services, Addiction Services and a range of other organisations.
- When asylum seekers are dispersed to local areas the Asylum Health Bridging Team acts as the bridge to local health services ensuring continuity of care.
- Once dispersed, access to health and social care is via local teams (GP, Community Mental Health Teams etc).

[redacted]

Ms Haughey
Ms Campbell

Further to your requests for additional information relating to the incident in Glasgow on Friday 26 June, officials have been in touch with Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership.

The following information has been provided [redacted]. It comes with an apology for the delay in responding.

The following responses have been provided.

Whether, post the move to hotel accommodation, there had been continuity of care for more well established asylum seekers who were already engaged with community mental health teams? (Ms Haughey)

- The vast majority of asylum seekers moved to hotels from serviced apartments were new asylum seekers and the apartments were classed as IA (Initial accommodation). Only 9 people were in apartments classed as DA (dispersed accommodation)
- The Health & Social Care Partnership confirm that continuity of care would not have been disrupted by the move to hotel accommodation for those more well-established asylum seekers. Arrangements were in place to ensure this.

Apart from the Bridging service which is listed in this update, there isn't as much about any stepping up of support across the other Mears sites. Can we be firmer in our understanding that this has not been left out and that any triggering of past trauma has been considered amongst that wider group that has been accommodated in hotels across the city? (Ms Campbell)

- As previously advised, the Glasgow HSCP provide the Asylum Health Bridging Team to provide health screening, assessments and access to services to all asylum seekers placed in Glasgow by the UK Home Office, or presenting for asylum in Glasgow.
- Prior to the incident on 26 June, MEARS already had staff including welfare/housing managers present at all locations including out of hours.
- Since the incident, members of the MEARS management team are present at hotels supporting the staff and residents.
- Members of the management team are currently working out of the Hallmark and security has been increased across all locations.
- The HSCP (Qualified Social worker and CPN resource), MEARS counselling service and Scottish Refugee Council are currently processing all the Hallmark residents through individual case conference arrangements in determining any additional support needs. This process is not likely to

conclude until the end of next week where we will have more comprehensive insight to the broader needs of this service users group.

Would like reassurance that NHS Glasgow / HSCP have taken into account non-Mears asylum seekers that are supported by Simon Community or the Night Shelter that are also deeply vulnerable too. (Ms Campbell)

- The HSCP have been in routine contact with the Simon Community, the Glasgow Night Shelter for Destitute Asylum Seekers and the Ibis management team with regard to ongoing support arrangements and operational inter-faces.
- The HSCP have also linked with Police Scotland and the Neighbourhood and Sustainability Services to ensure community cohesion and public protection issues are addressed whilst the Ibis Hotel is in use for accommodating homeless households.
- There are is also routine contact from Hunter Street Homeless Health and care management Services with the Ibis Hotel.
- Immediately following the incident on 26 June HSCP staff were in contact with the partners involved in the operation of the Ibis Hotel to ensure the safety and security of Ibis residents. In particular colleagues from Police Scotland ensured appropriate security advice was provided and an increased visible police presence and hotel security was put in place.
- We are beginning our planning for the ending of the provision located in the Ibis Hotel. Part of this process will be identifying and working towards positive accommodation destinations. Whilst we undertake this exercise we will be cognisant of our statutory duties and the vulnerabilities of the Ibis population.

Are staff covered in this support? I had asked Mears that staff were supported and they said they were but again any firmer understanding for our benefit would be good. (Ms Campbell)

- MEARS hope that the information provided above provides assurance regarding the supports they have in place, which extend towards the support towards their own work force.

[redacted]

[Redacted]

Sent: 19 June 2020 14:11

[Redacted]

Subject: Off Sens: Inventory for SU's in hotel accommodation

Dear colleagues please see email update sent on behalf of [redacted] on the point raised at NASF around standard inventory lists.

Dear all,

There has been a question outstanding regards the Inventory for SUs in hotel accommodation. I can confirm the requirements are as follows:

- no room sharing of unrelated adults unless desired – family rooms provided
- access to own bathroom and toilet facilities
- 3-meals per day (full dietary needs met – religious, special and compliant with NHS Eat-Well Guidance)
- provision of drinks; water, tea, coffee and others (i.e. juice) and snacks
- laundry provision for clothing
- new bed linen and towels at least once per week
- provision of underwear, personal hygiene and sanitary items either directly or via cash payments
- free hotel Wi-Fi and TV facilities
- access to telephony to enable calls to AIRE etc
- access to resident facilities dependent upon availability
- welfare management on-site in day hours with out of office arrangements dependent upon location(s)
- managed links with local NHS services
- bespoke arrangements regards social isolation ref: COVID symptomatic SUs i.e. meals in rooms etc
- partnership arrangements with local VCS as appropriate to support SUs

I have enclosed a link to the Statement of Requirements and refer to 2.3 [http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-1112/AASC -
Schedule 2 - Statement of Requirements.pdf](http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-1112/AASC_-_Schedule_2_-_Statement_of_Requirements.pdf)

This link refers to Initial Accommodation but as you'll recognise the above extends beyond that and responds to current Public Health guidance etc.

There will inevitably be small differences between hotels and providers in response to what is operationally possible but the expectation is these requirements are broadly fulfilled by AASC providers.

Current public health guidance prevents Migrant Help from attending hotels etc but services, in particular, completing ASF1s is conducted via telephone and there no current delays or difficulties within this. Migrant continue to consistently meet their required targets for ASF1 completions etc.

Public Health England have advised that Wi-Fi should be provided within IA settings for the period of the COVID-19 lockdown and the Home Office has responded to that by providing that facility.

Kind regards,

[redacted]

Contract & Compliance Manager

Resettlement, Asylum Support & Integration

[redacted]