

A housing guide for refugees in Scotland

Racial harassment

Leaflet 4 – December 2010

Whatever type of accommodation you are in, you and your family have the right to live there in safety and without fear of intimidation or abuse. If someone is treating you badly because of your race, colour, ethnicity or national origin, this leaflet tells you what you can do about it.

What is racial harassment?

Racial harassment is a serious criminal offence and is illegal. It takes place when a person or persons from one racial group offends, upsets or threatens someone from another racial group. It can take many forms, including:

- verbal abuse, such as name-calling, insults or racist jokes;
- damage to your property or home;
- racist graffiti;
- dumping of rubbish outside your home or through your letterbox;
- nuisance phone calls, texts or emails;
- bullying, intimidation and threats; or
- physical abuse or violence.

Should I just put up with it?

No. Everyone has the right to live in safety without fear of attack against themselves, their families, property and homes. If you do nothing, it may get worse, so it is better to act early.

What can I do?

You do not have to suffer in silence. If you think it is a racially motivated crime, then it should be accepted as that by police and any other agencies. There are many things you can do and there is lots of support available to you.

- **Contact the police**

Because racial harassment is a serious criminal offence, the first thing you should do is to contact the police, who will investigate it as a racial incident. It is illegal, and people who do it can be prosecuted through the courts. The police will treat it seriously, so do not be afraid.

If you are in immediate danger or the crime is happening right now, call the police straight away by dialling 999. Otherwise, you can call in at your local police station, or speak to any police officer.

Get the names of the police officers who you speak with; they should give you a crime reference number, which will be helpful if you need to speak with the police about this incident again.

If you are unable or unwilling to speak directly with the police, you can use a confidential third party reporting scheme. This allows you to report the crime to a trained volunteer at an agency such as Scottish Refugee Council (0800 085 6087). They will take down all the details and you can choose whether you wish the police to investigate. Find contact details of reporting centres near you on the Strathclyde Police website:

<https://www.strathclyde.police.uk/index.asp?locID=353&docID=-1>

- **Contact your local council**

All local councils have a duty to protect their communities from racial harassment. In Glasgow, for instance, you can call the Anti-Social Behaviour Task Force free on **0800 027 3901**. You can check the website of your own local council for details of how to report racial harassment or anti-social behaviour.

- **Contact your landlord or accommodation provider**

If you rent from a council or housing association, you can report racial harassment to them. They have policies for dealing with such harassment and will work with you and the police to deal with it. You can speak to them at their office or, if you live in a block of flats, the concierge.

If you are in temporary homeless accommodation, speak to your homeless caseworker.

If it is a member of staff causing the problem, you can speak to someone else that you trust in the organisation or seek advice from an organisation like Scottish Refugee Council or Positive Action in Housing; they will help you decide what to do. You will find their phone numbers at the end of this leaflet.

If you have a private landlord who is causing the problem, you can speak Scottish Refugee Council or Positive Action in Housing who will be glad to help you.

- **Record what is happening:**

- make a note of what has happened, including the time, date and place where it happened
- keep any notes, letters, texts or emails sent to you
- take photographs of any damage caused
- talk to other people (for example, other neighbours or tenants) who may have been affected by the person's behaviour.

- **Seek support**

Don't let racial harassment isolate you. Make sure you tell someone you trust.

You may already be in touch with local organisations, such as an integration project, that can provide friendly support. The police and your council can also put you in touch with agencies who will offer you support. In particular, you may wish to speak with Victim Support, who can provide emotional and practical help. They will also support you if you need to go to court about your case. You can phone them on 0845 603 9213 or find more information the Victim Support Scotland website:

<http://www.victimsupportsco.org.uk/page/victims.cfm>

Where can I get further information?

Scottish Refugee Council's Refugee Housing Team

Phone this number free for advice or to make an appointment with an advice worker: 0800 085 6087

Positive Action in Housing

Phone this number for information about its services: 0141 353 2220