



Home Office

Department for
Communities and
Local GovernmentDepartment
for International
Development

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING AND REFUGEE CHILDREN JUNE 2016

BRIEFING NOTE

Background

- The crisis in Syria and events in the Middle East, North Africa and beyond have seen an unprecedented number of migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Europe. Some have gone on to reach the UK via Northern France, including many unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). Other children are still in the Middle East or North Africa or are in Europe and the Government has committed to resettle a number of these vulnerable children.
- The UK has a proud history of granting asylum to those who need our protection, including UASC. During the passage of the Immigration Act it was clear, across Parliament and the country, that there is a strong desire for the UK to provide support for vulnerable children seeking refuge, whether they are in the UK, Europe or the Middle East and North Africa.
- The current system means that in most cases these children stay in the care of the local authority where they claim asylum, resulting in a small number of local authorities looking after the vast majority of the children – most notably Kent – and many local authorities looking after very few or no UASC.
- That is why, in close consultation with the Local Government Association and Association of Directors of Children's Services, we are introducing a national transfer scheme, underpinned by powers in the Immigration Act 2016. The scheme will ensure there is a more equitable distribution of unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children across the country.
- The Immigration Act also includes a provision to resettle refugee children who are in Europe. The Government has committed to resettle vulnerable children who are in the Middle East and North Africa. Many of these children will either be with their family or reunited with family already living in the UK, but some will be unaccompanied in the UK. For unaccompanied refugee children brought to the UK under these programmes we intend to use the same national transfer scheme.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children

- Across the UK there were over 3,000 asylum applications from UASC in 2015, a 56% rise compared to the year ending March 2015. This remains below the peak of over 3,900 reached in 2008.
- The Government has committed to resettle up to 3,000 individuals from the Middle East and North Africa region as part of the 'children at risk' scheme; we

expect the majority will arrive with family or carers but there will be some unaccompanied children within this cohort.

- The Government will also resettle a specified number of refugee children who are in Europe; many of these children will be reunited with family members in the UK, but there will be a number of unaccompanied children.
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children can come from a variety of backgrounds and have a range of characteristics. The vast majority of spontaneous UASC are male (around 90%) and aged 16 or 17 (over 61%).
- According to analysis of Home Office data nearly all of UASC under 16 are fostered. For UASC aged 16-17 half are placed in semi-independent living arrangements, and half are fostered.
- Any person claiming to be an unaccompanied child seeking asylum undergoes a welfare interview by Home Office staff to collect biometrics and bio-data, establish whether they have immediate health or protection needs.
- For unaccompanied refugee children that are brought to the UK as part of a resettlement scheme we will have more information about the child before they arrive from a pre-arrival screening interview, this will include information on health and educational needs.

The national transfer scheme

- We are committed to having a transfer scheme operating from 1 July 2016.
- The principles of the scheme are for it to:
 - Be fair, equitable and transparent
 - Be voluntary and locally-led
 - Have distribution based on a proportion of the total child population (up to 0.07%)
 - Build on existing structures and regional models with a phased introduction
 - Pool knowledge and resources; joining up with, and recognising existing commitments.
- We would like all local authorities to join the transfer scheme and for there to be strong regional coordination facilitated by the Strategic Migration Partnerships.
- If a UASC arrives in a local authority area with a low concentration of UASC (below 0.07%) the expectation will be that the child is cared for by that local authority. If a UASC arrives in a local authority area with a high concentration of UASC (over 0.07%) the expectation will be that the child will be transferred to an area with lower numbers. Initially we would look to transfer within the region, but if the region has a high concentration of UASC the transfer would be to another region. For major ports of entry we are likely to transfer UASCs across regions to ensure an equitable share across the UK.
- For unaccompanied refugee children resettled in the UK, the national team will allocate children to regions, based on the proportion of children in each region and work with the regional coordination team to allocate to a local authority.

- The Home Office will produce regular data to show the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children in each local authority area. Data on the current position will be provided at the forthcoming regional events.
- Whilst regional arrangements are put in place a national team will be in place to support the transfer of UACS.

Funding

- The same rates of funding will be provided for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children regardless of their route into the UK.
- From 1 July new national rates for local authorities looking after unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children will be:
 - £41,610 per child per year for children under the age of 16;
 - £33,215 per child per year for children aged 16 and 17;
 - £200 per child per week for UASCs who qualify for leaving care support.
- These rates represent an increase of between 20 and 33 per cent when compared to the national rates for 2015.
- We are considering additional funding to support the regional coordination teams and will make a decision about that shortly.

Next Steps

- Over the next two weeks there will be follow up events in each region. Following those events we would like each local authority and region to:
 - Confirm that they will be part of the national transfer scheme;
 - Consider what arrangements will work best for regional coordination in your region;
 - Consider how many unaccompanied refugee children in Europe could be cared for in your area (in the context of likely UASC demands).