



A Warm Welcome

A blueprint for supporting displaced children seeking protection in the UK

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June 2023

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Acknowledgements

Barnardo's would like to thank all those who contributed to researching and compiling evidence for this report, with special thanks to Save the Children, Refugee Council, and British Future for their significant input throughout the drafting process.

With thanks to those organisations below for their input:

Warm Welcome Task and Finish Group Members:

- Action for Children
- British Future
- Coram Legal Centre
- ECPAT UK
- NSPCC
- Refugee Council
- Save the Children
- The Children's Society

Supporter Organisations:

- Aspris Fostering Services
- Helen Bamber Foundation
- Just for Kids Law
- Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium
- Shelter
- Shining Stars Fostering Agency
- Sulha Alliance
- The Pickwell Foundation
- The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)

Not all the organisations work across all the areas addressed in this report or necessarily endorse all of the recommendations set out.

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Introduction

“If you ever make it to London, you can be sure of a very warm welcome.”

This is a quote from the 2014 movie adaptation of Michael Bond’s books about a charming Peruvian bear called Paddington™.

The story of Paddington, the kind talking bear created by British-born writer Michael Bond captures the anxiety, excitement, loneliness, and sense of independence that comes with finding your feet somewhere new. The character, helped by his Aunt Lucy, emigrates to the UK after an earthquake tragically takes his home.

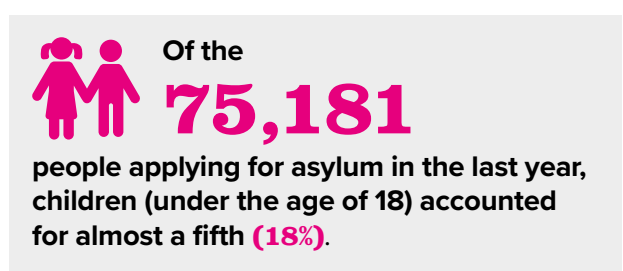
“They will not have forgotten how to treat a stranger.”²

Aunt Lucy tells Paddington, giving him an optimistic last piece of advice before he ships out.

But in the harsh reality of 2023, it seems we have. Our asylum system is broken.



Many people seeking asylum are children and young people; of the 75,181 people applying for asylum in the last year, children (under the age of 18) accounted for almost a fifth (18%).⁶ Some are travelling with their families; others have been separated from their loved ones. Nearly one in three people who came to the UK seeking safety from Ukraine in the last year through the community sponsorship scheme were children.⁷ At a time when the public and political debate about our asylum system has become so bitter and polarised, we need to shift the focus to solutions that will make the system work for these vulnerable children, helping to put their trauma behind them and integrate into their new country.



1 Paddington™ (2014)

2 Paddington™ (2014)

3 [What is the Nationality and Borders Act? – Refugee Council](#)

4 [UK-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership – House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

5 [Illegal Migration Bill – Parliamentary Bills – UK Parliament](#)

6 [How many people do we grant asylum or protection to? – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homes-for-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-and-ukraine-family-scheme-visa-data-by-age-and-sex-of-applicant> (31% of visas issued were to people under 18, up to December 2022)

It is not difficult to imagine that he would not be greeted with a warm welcome, but would instead be faced with threats of removal, detention and hostility.

The UK has a long history of providing asylum to people fleeing war, discrimination and violence, and was one of the original signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, recent developments risk undermining decades of learning and progress. The UK has created visa schemes in response to specific crises outside the general protection framework, but it lacks a national strategy to address forced displacement. In contrast, there is no pathway to protection for people fleeing brutal war in Sudan or Yemen.

All children who enter the UK, regardless of their country of origin, should be given the same support to feel safe and thrive. This is essential to ensure the UK carries out its obligations under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which outlines that children seeking refugee status must receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance.⁸ Crucially, child protection must be the key driver for any strategy developed – children seeking asylum should not be defined solely by their immigration status. The duty to provide care has to remain with local authorities rather than the Home Office, which has no expertise in providing housing and care to separated and vulnerable children.

All children, regardless of their nationality or route to entry into the UK, should have access to the support they need.

Thousands of children have been welcomed into the homes of families across the UK through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.⁹ This scheme is far from perfect, in part because it was developed at speed in a time of crisis. But it shows that the goal of ensuring a warm welcome for every child who is forced to flee and arrives in the UK seeking safety is not just an abstract thought, but can become a reality if families, communities and government work together.

Many children seeking protection in the UK arrive without parents or family members. They are often scared, lonely and have faced significant trauma. It is our duty to welcome them into safety and protection, and ensure they have the foundations to rebuild their lives. Every child deserves the chance to thrive and, most importantly, to be a child. As some of the leading UK's children and refugee charities, we believe the following fundamental principles are essential for children arriving into the UK:

1. A warm welcome and support to integrate
2. A safe and loving home
3. Support and welfare so they can thrive and realise their potential
4. Protection from violence, abuse and discrimination
5. A fairer immigration system that puts the child at the heart of decision-making.

We need to make sure that children are treated as children regardless of their immigration status. To achieve that, there has to be a robust strategic plan in place for supporting and integrating children arriving to the UK, rooted in a wider strategy for displaced people, which the UK currently does not have. Such a strategy has to offer a framework we can build upon to ensure children are protected from harm. Without these core pre-requisites, children will not have access to the best start in life, a safe and loving home, an education, healthcare, and community support.

44%

of the public would support a government 'welcoming programme' to help people integrate into UK society.

Recent research by British Future looked at attitudes to immigration and public views on how we should treat people who have come to the UK, once they are here.¹⁰

⁸ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200809/jtselect/jtrights/157/15708.htm>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/homes-for-ukraine-scheme-launches>

¹⁰ <https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Shifting-Views-Report-Oct-2022-FINAL.pdf>

The research found that 44% of the public would support a government ‘welcoming programme’ to help people integrate into UK society, with just 17% opposed. And almost one in four people (24% of UK adults) said they would be interested in taking part in welcoming activities to help people settle in the UK.¹¹ This means that nearly 13 million people in the UK would be interested in supporting individuals who have lost everything. These individuals have the potential to deeply enrich our communities if we provide them with the right support.

1 in 4

people (24% of UK adults) said they would be interested in taking part in welcoming activities to help people settle in the UK.

13 million

people in the UK would be interested in supporting individuals who have lost everything.

Developing a strategic plan for welcoming children within a wider strategy for displaced people, will allow local government to properly plan for their arrival and ensure they are offered the chance to integrate, thrive in school and develop skills they can give back to society. Studies have shown that providing children with the proper nutrition and care can have a profound impact on a child’s ability to grow, learn and break the cycle of poverty.¹² Investing in children means we are investing in our future. The world of tomorrow simply cannot prosper if children of today are not healthy, educated and protected.¹³



¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/why-invest-children>

¹³ <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/invest-our-future-we-must-invest-our-children#:~:text=Without%20investing%20more%20in%20children,children%20are%20out%20of%20school>

Executive summary

A growing backlog of asylum claims,¹⁴ lack of access to sufficient support and an inconsistent application of immigration policies seriously impacts children’s mental health, making integration into our society difficult. The UK Government has to ‘see the face behind the case’¹⁵ and create a system that is robust but fair and one which unites families. Displaced people must be treated with dignity, compassion and have access to adequate support, including healthcare, education and practical support, regardless of their nationality or mode of arrival to the UK.

In this report, we explore the key components and foundations required for children to thrive during their formative years after arriving in the UK. This includes a warm welcome and support to integrate, looking into the learnings and successes of the various protection schemes currently in operation for those arriving from Hong Kong, Ukraine and Afghanistan, and the role communities can play in offering support. Once a child has been welcomed, they require a safe and loving home, given housing conditions are crucial to a child’s overall wellbeing. We explore what makes a home safe, and how specialist foster care is essential for separated children who have experienced profound trauma. It is vital for a child to reach their full potential, supported by a proper welcome at school, making sure their physical and mental health needs are met, and ensuring children have full wrap-around support and welfare. Children also need protection from violence, abuse and discrimination, which cannot happen when they are subject to unfair age assessment processes and are living in unsuitable temporary accommodation. Finally, none of this will be possible without a fairer immigration system that puts the individual at the heart of decision-making.



14 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/top-10-facts-about-refugees-and-people-seeking-asylum/>

15 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/922973/CCS001_CCS0820050750-001_Resp_to_Windrush_Lessons_CP_293_Accessible.pdf

Barnardo's has a long history of helping people seeking sanctuary in the UK. We offer a range of services that support all displaced children, no matter their route to entry. This includes:

Our National Counter Trafficking Service in England and Wales which delivers the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service (ICTG). Between 2021 and 2022 **we supported over 1,400 children from more than 40 countries** such as Vietnam, Albania, Sudan, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

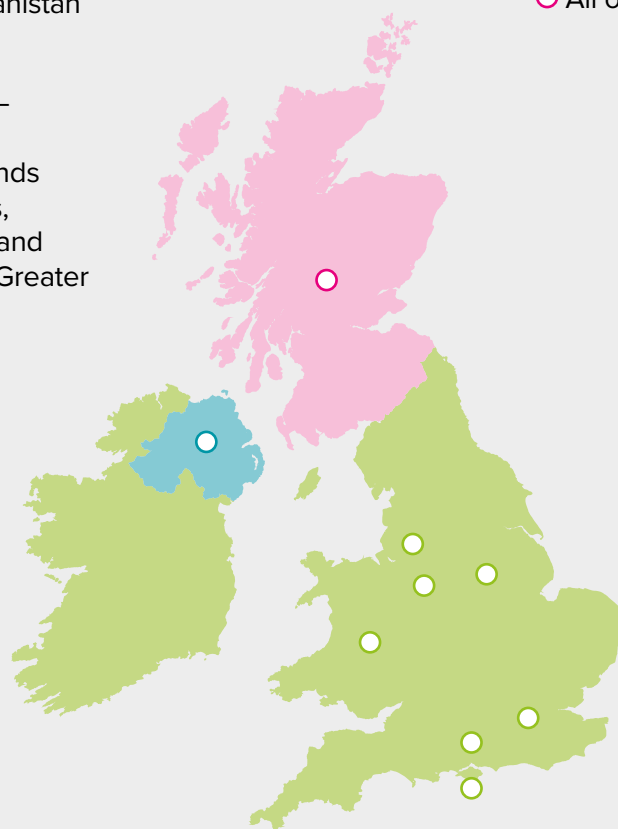
○ Areas (ICTG areas – Wales/Cymru, East Midlands, West Midlands Combined Authorities, Croydon, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and Greater Manchester).

The Independent Guardian Service in Northern Ireland which, as of January 2023, has provided guardians for **over 230 children** who are separated from a legal guardian and who are at risk of human trafficking.

○ All of NI.

A Scotland-wide welcome service to help families from Ukraine. Since June 2022 we have **supported 386 families, 544 children under 18 and 410 parents**. We have also offered host workshops with nearly 500 attendees in total.

○ All of Scotland.



A number of helplines including:

- Asylum Seeker Support Helpline which has had **3,480 contacts** since September 2022 (all of UK).
- Ukrainian Support Helpline which has had **34,221 contacts**, this equates to **15,000 children and young people** supported since March 2022 (all of UK).
- Hong Kong Helpline supporting British National (Overseas) BN(O) families and children settling in the UK which has had **700 contacts** (all of UK).

Since 2015, the Barnardo's NI Refugee Support Service has been supporting families arriving in Northern Ireland via various routes, including the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, asylum-seeking children and families living in contingency accommodation, and families arriving from Afghanistan. The service also conducts home visits under the Homes for Ukraine scheme in Northern Ireland.

The key here has to be answering the question: **are we helping these children to integrate, feel safe in the UK and rebuild their lives?** This report outlines recommendations for central government, as well as civil society and local communities to help secure better outcomes for children who come to the UK seeking safety. Some of the resources, infrastructure and services needed to make this happen are already in place; it is a matter of scaling up and connecting existing provision, learning from and building on the legacy of the government's current protection schemes. However, this cannot be done without creating a systematic culture change for these children, influencing practice to be both relational and trauma-informed.

We have developed **five key recommendations** which are an essential starting point for developing a welcoming movement for children, and paving the way for wider reforms:

- 1. Develop a strategic plan for welcoming all displaced children:** A clear plan underpinned by sufficient funding for local authorities will enable us to unlock our potential as a country to offer displaced children the best possible start once they are here. This should sit within a wider strategy for displaced people.
- 2. Roll out local welcoming hubs for displaced families.** These hubs would work with local employers, colleges and schools and other services to support the integration of displaced people. Activities that hubs might offer include befriending projects and social activities, conversation clubs to help people practice their English and volunteering programmes for refugees themselves.
- 3. Allow all children arriving in the UK means of obtaining safety with their families:** Increase and strengthen safe and regular routes for children and families to seek safe access to the UK and ensure the ability to apply for asylum and international protection regardless of route to entry. Children should also be allowed to reunite with families by simplifying the refugee family reunion process.
- 4. Increase specialist foster care for separated children in the UK:** A review of the barriers to the provision of specialist foster carer for separated children seeking asylum and steps to increase the provision, training and funding for specialist foster carers for children who need them.
- 5. Assign all separated children arriving in the UK a guardian:** A trained adult by the side of each separated child to help them navigate the asylum system, support all their needs and advocate for their interests.



Summary of recommendations

We understand the recommendations listed below apply to multiple government departments and that responsibilities for implementation may fall outside the list of departments mentioned in the report.

Department for Education:

- Urgently review the provision of English as an Additional Language (EAL) in schools so that all pupils have the language and curriculum support they need wherever they go to school.
- It is vital that schools are resourced properly to understand the distinct and varied needs of children arriving into the UK, to ensure staff are correctly trained to identify individual needs and to provide pupils with materials to make them feel welcome.
- Ensure all separated children are taken into care immediately on arrival and have immediate access to a local authority social worker.
- Take steps to increase the provision, training and funding for specialist foster carers for children who need them.
- Provide full and effective guardianship for separated children to ensure all children enjoy the support, services and protection which they are entitled and ensure their social, health, psychological, material and educational needs are met.

Home Office:

- All children arriving to the UK should have the ability to claim asylum, regardless of nationality or route to entry.
- Increase and strengthen safe and regular routes for children and families to seek safe access to the UK and to apply for asylum and international protection.
- Ensure separated children with international protection needs can reunite with their families when this is in their best interests and allow separated children to sponsor their family.

- Age assessments should only ever be conducted if there is reason to doubt the child's age and by skilled social workers, whose practice is trauma-informed and child-centred, rooted in child protection.
- Identify all children who have gone missing from Home Office accommodation. All separated children going missing must be considered at high risk of exploitation and serious incident notifications must be made to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.
- Decisions on children's asylum claims and National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals should be made within six months, and all decisions regarding length of leave must be made with full consideration of what is in the best interests of the child.
- The government should recruit, resource and train decision makers adequately to ensure that NRM and asylum decisions are made in a timely manner.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities/Home Office:

- Develop a strategic plan for welcoming displaced children that arrive to the UK (which sits within a wider strategy for displaced people).
- Develop, promote and scale up community sponsorship and welcoming efforts in the UK and ensure that it forms a blueprint for national integration and support strategy for displaced families.
- Ensure that there is further research and development of practice to support the needs of children seeking protection in the UK, using community-based support.

Ministry of Justice:

- Ensure all children seeking asylum have access to quality free legal advice.

Department of Health and Social Care:

- Healthcare services must be designed with displaced children's specific needs in mind.
- Services should look to co-design their spaces, policies, and procedures with displaced young people to help build on a tailored, trauma-informed approach which best meets the unique needs of those who have newly arrived in the UK.
- Children arriving in the UK need access to specialist support for immediate mental health needs. This will require sufficient investment, to combat the long waiting times and ensure the right pathways are in place to access support by the NHS.

Local Government:

- (Working with Strategic Migration Partnerships¹⁶): Promote integration through 'welcoming hubs' for displaced families that increase social contact between newcomers and receiving communities.
- Provide separated children with welcome packs which contain basic items to help them feel at home, settle and integrate quickly.
- Local authorities should increase the proportion of separated children seeking asylum placed in foster care and residential children's homes. Children should be placed in care as soon as possible upon arrival.
- Identify specific practice leaders across local authorities who are trained in the specific needs of separated children seeking asylum and advocate practice standards across specialist foster care.
- Provide more funding directly to services in order to provide translated resources for children and young people.



16 <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/migrants-and-refugees/london-strategic-migration-partnership-lsmp#:~:text=Kong%20VCSE%20Funding-,About%20the%20Partnership,migrants%20and%20the%20wider%20community.>



Chapter 1: Welcome

Strategic plan for displaced children



“I thought life would be simple and everyone would be smiling and nice to me, instead the welcome was harsh.”

A separated child supported by Barnardo’s

The UK Government does not have a national strategy for displaced people in the UK. This lack of overarching framework means we are unable to provide people seeking safety, particularly children, with long-term solutions. The lack of attention on how we support and integrate displaced people has a detrimental impact not only on people who have lost so much already but also on local governments and our communities. **We urge the UK Government to develop a strategic plan for welcoming children which sits within a wider national strategy for all displaced people.**

The refugee population is often ad hoc and involves very little dialogue and understanding of the challenges that communities are facing already. By developing a national strategy this would allow for local governments to properly plan and prepare services, which they are

currently struggling to do. The strategy would require cross-government and multi-agency working to ensure effective collaboration across departments. We also can and should be doing more to support global efforts to tackle forced migration and support displaced people who have experienced profound loss and suffered unimaginable horrors. A clear strategy underpinned by sufficient funding for local authorities will enable us to unlock our potential as a country to offer displaced people, including children, the best possible start once they are here; the warm welcome they so desperately need.

The strategic plan for children sitting within the overarching strategy should contain the following principles:

- A commitment to treat all children as children first and foremost.
- Child protection must be a key driver, and this begins with ensuring children arriving to the UK are not defined solely by their immigration status. The duty to provide accommodation must remain with local authorities rather than the Home Office, which has no expertise in providing housing and care to separated and vulnerable children.
- Ensure decisions are made with due regard to the child’s best interests – regardless of where they are from or their route to entry.
- The key components laid out within this report should be the foundations for the strategic plan i.e., welcoming, safe housing, protection, access to services and a fair immigration system.

The UK Government published a safeguarding strategy for separated children seeking asylum and separated child refugees in 2017,¹⁷ and whilst we recognise this was a step in the right direction, and welcomed recommendations centred around protecting this group of

17 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-and-refugee-children>.

children,¹⁸ very little has been done to implement this since. The strategy essentially reminds practitioners that the same safeguards apply to this group of children, which is useful, however we need a wider comprehensive strategic plan for these children, that interacts with a strategy for displaced people, as many of the issues these children are facing go beyond social care.

Drawing on the experience of the Devolved Nations, who have taken a different approach to welcoming individuals seeking protection,¹⁹ we know that a national support and integration strategy is an effective tool that benefits refugees and host communities. In Scotland, The New Scots refugee integration strategy 2018-2022 sets out a vision for a welcoming Scotland where refugees and people seeking asylum are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive.²⁰ The strategy has been endorsed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who commended the involvement of refugees and asylum seekers in its development.²¹ Diversity and equality are at the heart of policies that underpin better outcomes for children within the strategy, including education policies that enable children and young people to get the support they need to achieve their full potential.²² For example, the Additional Support for Learning framework entitles children and young people, who do not speak English, to help them overcome barriers to learning in school.²³

Wales is striving to become a Nation of Sanctuary and a 'Warm Welsh Welcome' is a common phrase underpinning the policy landscape. Wales issued the Nation of Sanctuary Plan in 2019, as well as an anti-racist action plan which highlights the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.²⁴ Their refugee strategy included a number of actions and outcomes

to improve the lives of refugee and asylum-seeking children, including ensuring access to independent counselling services for children, working with education practitioners to tackle bullying in schools and publishing a suite of Wales-specific information resources for practitioners working with refugee children and for the children themselves.²⁵

In Northern Ireland, a draft strategy has been consulted on by The Executive Office, as was stated in the Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025.²⁶ It is worth noting that when the draft Refugee Integration Strategy was published for consultation last year, Barnardo's NI welcomed the intentions of the Department to develop a strategy that is welcoming and inclusive, however it is not clear how this strategy will be practically implemented and realised.

We recommend a redrafting of the NI strategy to reflect tangible actions with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the relevant departments, agencies and organisations.

England does not have a national strategy of its own, similar to plans laid by Devolved Governments, nor is there a national strategy for the whole of the UK. Forced migration continues to present itself as a core priority for UK Government and refugee-producing crises do not abate; therefore, we need a national response to manage the challenges that it poses and enjoy the benefits it brings to people and communities.

It is imperative that a framework is created for children arriving in the UK seeking refuge that aligns with and complements the existing frameworks that exist for all children, including the child protection framework and education framework.

18 i.e. We are committed to ensuring children and young people have the information, support and help they need to be safe and to keep themselves safe, and for effective local and national systems to be in place to ensure that children are properly safeguarded. (pg. 17)

19 It is important to note that most asylum policy is reserved to the UK Government; it has control over arrangements for the accommodation and financial support of asylum seekers, and the assessment of their claims for asylum. Therefore, many of the challenges experienced by those seeking protection in the Devolved Nations cannot be fully resolved without policy changes by the UK Government.

20 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-scots-refugee-integration-strategy-2018-2022/>

21 <https://www.cosla.gov.uk/news/2023/supporting-new-scots-6th-February-2023>

22 [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 – 2022 \(scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk\)](https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk)

23 Ibid.

24 [An introduction to an Anti-racist Wales \(gov.wales\) | GOV.WALES](https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/nation-of-sanctuary-refugee-and-asylum-seeker-plan_0.pdf)

25 https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/nation-of-sanctuary-refugee-and-asylum-seeker-plan_0.pdf

26 <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/racial-equality-strategy-2015-2025>

Recommendation: Develop a strategic plan for welcoming displaced children arriving to the UK (which sits within a wider strategy for displaced people).

Same welcome for all

We can take some key learnings from existing resettlement schemes about what makes welcoming work. From the quiet successes of the Hong Kong Scheme to thousands of Afghans being welcomed into the UK only to be housed for months on end in temporary hotel accommodation, and those arriving from Ukraine struggling to move out of hosts' spare rooms, there are clear lessons from the different schemes and from the disparities in treatment of those arriving, not least for the children on these schemes.

Over half of those who have come from Hong Kong, Ukraine and Afghanistan are children.²⁷ The foundation for effective protection has to be rooted in the refugee protection system rather than bespoke visa schemes. Although there will be situations where the UK will need to set up rapid schemes under the immigration rules, they should not be the default position, and we should draw as much as possible from the success of the resettlement schemes, Community Sponsorship models develop additional complementary pathways to enable children to reach the UK safely and thrive once they are here. As such, learning from the Afghan, Ukraine and Hong Kong schemes should inform the development of a comprehensive and concise national strategy for displaced people (outlined below).

Hong Kong

Hong Kong UK Welcome Programme

On 31 January 2021, the UK Government launched the Hong Kong BN(O) Immigration

route in response to China's passing of the National Security Law, which significantly impacts the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong.²⁸

A Helpline Project through Barnardo's supports Hong Kong families and children settling in the UK. The Helpline offers emotional support, advice and signposting as well as six sessions of therapy, which is open to children and adults.²⁷

"I am grateful for the support and a safe place where I could share my thoughts, especially in my mother tongue language. Although I could speak English, a Cantonese-speaking counsellor from Hong Kong let me explain myself easily and clearly, and I felt the counsellor understood what I was saying without further explanation. The sessions changed my views on my relationships with family and life components, I believe I am able to regain control of my life. Apart from counsellor, I also want to express appreciation for the timely referral procedure, and the initial call from your team also made me feel a sense of relief, as finally I could talk to someone about my emotions in Cantonese. Thank you once again for your help. I do hope the service could continue to support the Hongkonger community in the UK, your service could definitely help Hongkongers settle in the UK."

Hong Kong BN(O) using Barnardo's Helpline Therapy Service

However, our advisers have still reported that Hong Kongers can feel isolated and lonely, with one of the biggest barriers to integration being language for this cohort. We have found that there are pockets of Hong Kongers across the country but with nothing to bring

²⁷ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/628b740a6ac4ac36ed7dd1b7/t/62bedbd6c007e04cae574f00/1656675295983/Settling-In-Report-WC4HK.pdf>

²⁸ Safe and Legal Routes factsheet – March 2023 – Home Office in the media (blog.gov.uk) – Since its launch at the start of 2021, over 123,000 eligible Hong Kongers and their family members have chosen to take up this offer and applied for the BN(O) visa. On 30 November 2022, the BN(O) route was expanded to enable adult children of BN(O) status holders who were born on or after 1 July 1997 to apply to the route independently of their parents. This will ensure this cohort who were not eligible for BN(O) status and who may not have been able to apply to the route previously, can now choose to make the UK their home.

²⁹ Hong Kong Nationals Project | Barnardo's (barnardos.org.uk)

them together. Barnardo's have been hosting monthly 'Conversation Clubs' online to try and connect people.

Despite clear issues this cohort still experiences with integrating into a new country, the UK Government's official Hong Kong welcome programme is among the most proactive integration initiatives that the UK has ever had for any incoming group. It has laid solid foundations and **there is a lesson we can learn from the quiet success of Hong Kongers that can be applied to welcoming all children into the UK.**

The report, *Settling in: Hong Kongers and their new lives in the UK*, published by the Welcoming Committee for Hong Kongers, examines all aspects of Hong Kongers' integration into the UK.³⁰ The research suggests that, while people are navigating sometimes complex practical issues such as finding a house, job and school places for children, efforts to welcome Hong Kongers to the UK and help them settle in local communities are going well.³¹ Having secure immigration status clearly paves the way for successful integration for children. A study within this report, conducted in March 2022 found that most of the public (54%) would be supportive if the British government created a welcoming programme linking British people with newly arrived migrants to help them settle and integrate into Britain.³² This requires the necessary infrastructure and processes to be put in place. As far as the welcoming of Hong Kongers is concerned, there are many stakeholder organisations who can take part in this process. They include a number who were set up by Hong Kongers themselves and others who also have strong insights into what is needed.³³

Ukraine

When Russia invaded Ukraine on 24th February 2022, the UK Government launched one of the fastest visa schemes in UK history, communities showed great compassion and people across the country opened their homes.³⁴

Despite a good start to the welcoming process, individuals arriving from Ukraine are suffering the repercussions of the lack of support provided to them by the UK Government. They are struggling to move on from being hosted by their sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine scheme and are finding it challenging to rebuild their lives independently. Hosting families are also left with only a limited time frame of support from the UK Government.³⁵ Barnardo's offers a dedicated Helpline to those displaced from Ukraine.³⁶ A key theme reported by Helpline advisers is a lack of access to basic amenities and practical support, which raises concerns that the cost-of-living crisis is only going to further push the most vulnerable individuals who have faced war and trauma into homelessness and poverty.³⁷

"I had someone to talk to, someone who was willing to listen to me, because I never feel people want to listen to me. I feel stronger now and I wish everyone would listen to me like you have."

Caller to the Ukrainian Support Helpline

The UK Government produced an introductory welcome guide for children under 18 who are moving from Ukraine to England under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.³⁸ As part of this process, our organisations were consulted to offer feedback using the voices of the children we support.

30 <https://www.welcomehk.org/research/settling-in-report>

31 [Why making migrants feel welcome matters – EasternEye](#)

32 <https://www.welcomehk.org/research/settling-in-report>

33 Ibid.

34 [Safe and Legal Routes factsheet – March 2023 – Home Office in the media \(blog.gov.uk\)](#) The UK Government devised three bespoke visa routes for the people of Ukraine, including extending the definition of 'family' to allow applicants to join family members, the Ukraine sponsorship scheme allowing Ukrainian nationals to come to the UK if they had a named sponsor, and the Ukraine Extension Scheme allowing Ukrainians to apply for permission to stay in the UK. A total of 167,600 Ukrainians have now arrived safely in the UK through our Ukraine visa schemes.

35 <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/supporting-refugees-from-ukraine>

36 <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/barnardos-ukrainian-support-helpline>

37 Ibid.

38 Homes for Ukraine: welcome guide for Ukrainian children under 18 – [GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Young people supported by The Children's Society were asked to give feedback on the content of the packs. While providing constructive feedback, they questioned why they, as separated children, never received such a welcome pack and were frustrated that one group of children received a different welcome from others.

Barnardo's Scotland established a Scotland-wide service to help support families to feel welcomed in Scotland. The service identified a number of needs which included the need for initial practical support such as clothing, digital equipment, baby items and toys. They continue to offer support to understand and access benefits/health systems, ensure children have access and are settled in education, offer group support and activities to tackle loneliness and give opportunities to integrate into their new communities. As time has gone on, the need for mental health and wellbeing support is increasing with a number of children and young people now accessing our Barnardo's LINK therapeutic service. Some of the biggest issues reported by our service are how some parents/ children/young people are finding their new life in Scotland challenging with many struggling due to language difficulties which can add barriers to many aspects of daily life; some children and young people have found it difficult to socially integrate and have reported feelings of isolation.

“There is a big problem with language barrier and there is no one certain organisation that can help with different questions (even for example, how to use a meter or gas, how to collect and throw the garbage). People need just one place where they will get the replies for any question.”

Ukrainian using Barnardo's Welcome (Ukraine) Service in Scotland

Afghanistan

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), launched on 1 April 2021, offering relocation to eligible Afghan citizens who worked for, or with, the UK Government locally in Afghanistan.³⁹ In August 2021, the UK Government announced a new resettlement scheme for Afghans under the new Pathway 2 of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).⁴⁰

However, despite these routes, data released by the Home Office show that Afghans were among the top nationalities using small boats to reach the UK in 2022.⁴¹ Most Afghan refugees cannot access the UK resettlement schemes, and there is no way for them to apply. This underlines the vastly different experiences that displaced people from different countries have when they reach the UK.

The inaccurately named 'Operation Warm Welcome' was launched in September 2021 to welcome Afghans to the UK but has instead resulted in families being housed in unsuitable hotel accommodation for long periods. Families with young children have been moved between hotels in different areas of the country; some of these children were right in the middle of their GCSEs.⁴² This broken model of accommodation is continuing, despite the Home Office acknowledging that it is not a long-term solution.⁴³

Furthermore, it is now Home Office policy to close all Afghan bridging hotels in the next few months, with many Afghan families either having been given notice or receiving it shortly.⁴⁴ But without solutions being found in the private rented or social housing sector, there is a real risk of homelessness for many, including families with young children. Families who have been waiting in hotels on the promise of an offer of private rented accommodation from the Home Office are now being told that this is unlikely to

39 <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/03/28/safe-and-legal-routes-factsheet-march-2023/> The ARAP was intended to recognise the service of eligible Afghan citizens and the risks arising to them and their dependent family members due to their work. Since April 2021, we have there have been 12,000 Afghans to the UK under the ARAP scheme.

40 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/refugee-resettlement-facts/> This Scheme intended to resettle 5,000 people in the first year, but so far have been just four people recorded as having been resettled under the Scheme.

41 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-december-2022>

42 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/home-secretary-london-high-court-afghan-children-b2263826.html>

43 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/one-year-on-governments-continuing-commitment-to-afghanistan>

44 <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/04/24/uk-government-support-for-resettled-afghans-in-bridging-accommodation-factsheet-april-2023/>

happen, and they are expected to find their own private rented accommodation.⁴⁵ Families are being expected to achieve in three months what they have not been able to achieve in the past 18 months, i.e. find suitable, affordable private rented accommodation. This policy is likely to lead to many families facing homelessness in the next few months and will put pressure on already stretched local authorities.

Key workers from Barnardo's NI Refugee Support Service are assisting Afghan arrivals in Northern Ireland with universal credit and child benefit applications, helping families access health services including registry at GP's and getting children registered within schools. Parents are also supported to register with English classes. Building on the integration model developed through our Syrian resettlement work, our team support families to access local community services and familiarise with the local area including halal shops, places of worship, parks and amenities, as well as navigating public transport. Our staff use a strengths-based, enabling approach, building independence rather than dependency on our service. Within this we also support families with children of primary school age or younger through Barnardo's School Readiness Programme, and for children 3 and under, an additional 12-week Parent and Infant Programme. This is play-based and delivered across 12 weeks using the most relevant information on child development and builds on parent-child relationships.

The Sulha Alliance⁴⁶ was founded by former Afghanistan veterans and an academic specialist to campaign for and support former Afghan interpreters, other Locally Employed Civilians (LECs), who had worked for the British Armed Forces, and their families. The Sulha Alliance is the only organisation in the UK that specialises in supporting this community and has done so since 2016.

Through its work, the Sulha Alliance has reported that some interpreters who have been resettled to the UK are still separated from their spouses and children and many have received rejections for family reunion applications with

other family members who are under threat. Many interpreters who have settled in the UK have limited access to appropriate social, integration and mental health support.

***“The role that this organisation has played through the interpreter’s evacuation will not be forgotten by the interpreters. I was evacuated with my family by the British Army from Afghanistan on 26th August 2021. It was difficult for me and my family especially for my two kids and my wife as everything was new for them, the culture, language and even the life system. As soon as we settled in our house in Swansea of Welsh my kids got admission to the school so they started to go to school and my wife has started to study English language in college and I start working for NHS for a while and then I have start working as community support officer for the Sulha Alliance. I am so delighted to support and help other interpreters. As time passes my kids get used to go to school and they can speak English and make friends in school and they really enjoy it. My wife speaks English and she can solve her own problems by herself.*”**

I am so happy that my family and I are now safe.”

Afghanistan refugee supported by The Sulha Alliance

45 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-guests-your-guide-to-finding-a-settled-home-in-the-uk>

46 <https://www.sulha-alliance.org/>

Family reunion

To be able to offer a warm welcome to children seeking asylum and to allow them to rebuild their lives, children need to have people who love and care about them, like any child, they need their family. Current UK law allows adult refugees rebuilding their lives in the country to sponsor their immediate family members to join them, but child refugees cannot.

Practitioners from Barnardo's Family Reunion Integration Service reported that family separation has profound impact on mental health and overall wellbeing. Many children don't even know where their families are and are often grieving the relationships that might have been lost forever.

We strongly believe that child refugees in the UK should have the right to sponsor their close family, as adults do. This will help them to rebuild their lives together and integrate into their new community.⁴⁷

The Refugee Council has a dedicated service for separated children, where they receive holistic, wrap-around support. One of the key issues that children continue to raise is the pain of being separated from their loved ones. Children don't understand UK immigration law, their instinct is that families should be together. They find it very hard to accept that the law does not allow them to sponsor their family when they get refugee status.

The Refugee Council recently supported a young boy from Afghanistan who is from a small village in the mountains. He left where he was without saying goodbye to his family, because when the Taliban came, he had to run, following crowds. He has not seen his parents since and has not been able to contact them.

His education and mental health are suffering. He is unable to concentrate on other issues and keeps on saying: "I just want to be able to bring my mum here." He is withdrawn and very anxious because of this painful experience of family separation.

Recommendation: All child refugees should be entitled to reunite with their close family. Simplifying the refugee family reunion process and ensuring decisions on outstanding applications are made promptly has to be at the heart of the best interest consideration and a cornerstone of the warm welcome we offer to separated children.

The Dubs Amendment

Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 was introduced following an amendment tabled by Lord Dubs, which committed the UK Government to transfer 480 separated children seeking asylum from Europe.⁴⁸ The scheme was required to consult with local authorities to determine the number of children each council has the capacity to help. The scheme ended less than a year after it was introduced.

The UK Government has no other scheme for providing protection for separated minors in Europe who do not have relatives in the UK. The end to the scheme effectively means an end to the UK's offer of protection pathway to separated children who desperately need safety and support.

Recommendation: To create a long-term child refugee transfer programme that provides consistent help for separated child refugees in Europe and helps them to make safe passage to the UK, without risking their lives.

⁴⁷ <https://famieltogether.uk/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/policy-statement-section-67-of-the-immigration-act-2016/factsheet-section-67-of-the-immigration-act-2016>

Community support

Many refugees successfully integrate into their new communities but some struggle, particularly in their first years in the UK, which can be a lonely experience. Learning English can prove difficult, particularly if refugees have little social contact with receiving communities. Social contact also helps to break down prejudice and misunderstandings between refugees and receiving communities. Despite its importance, as outlined at the beginning of the chapter, we do not have an integration strategy and there is a postcode lottery of local provision.⁴⁹

Barnardo's Care Journeys Core Priority Programme commissioned a research report to understand how community-based support (such as mentoring and befriending schemes) can support care-experienced young people through life transitions and help them to develop positive relationships. Mentor and mentees were interviewed and were unequivocal that community-based support is of special importance to separated children seeking asylum.⁵⁰

Community-based support can help children learn about their local area, build their skills in spoken and written English, culturally acclimatise, and find communities in their local area that may speak their language or be familiar with their culture. Because current support systems massively underserve children seeking asylum, community-based support represents a significant innovation in the landscape of support they can access. There should be further specialist development of community-based support to help this cohort, and research in parallel to understand their needs and wishes for community-based support specifically.

Recommendation: Ensure that there is further research and development of practice to support the needs of children seeking protection in the UK, using community based-support.

Government, combined authorities and councils need to provide leadership, but there is also a public appetite to help welcome refugees. Nearly 400 community sponsorship groups have welcomed refugees through the Community Sponsorship Scheme and over 200,000 people registered their interest in being a sponsor for the Homes for Ukraine programme. Some 44% of people support the idea of local 'welcoming projects' involving members of the public and 24% of people say they would be very or somewhat likely to want to become involved in such projects themselves. Scaled up, this is more than 13 million welcomers.⁵¹

Faith and civil society organisations should harness this goodwill by setting up local welcoming hubs for displaced families. These hubs would work with local employers, colleges and schools and other services to support the integration of refugees. Activities that welcoming hubs might offer include:

- Befriending projects and social activities.
- Conversation clubs to help people practice their English.
- Access to IT, help in finding work and mentoring.
- Resettlement advice provided by trained volunteers.
- Sporting, environmental and cultural activities to welcome newcomers.
- Volunteering programmes for refugees themselves.
- Coordination and support for community sponsorship schemes.

49 <https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Control-and-Compassion-report.pdf>

50 <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Building%20our%20world%20-%20how%20to%20use%20mentoring%20to%20create%20community-based%20support%20for%20care-experienced%20young%20people.pdf>

51 [Control-and-Compassion-report.pdf](https://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Control-and-Compassion-report.pdf) (britishfuture.org)

The Strategic Migration Partnerships have recently set up 12 ‘Welcoming Hubs’ for new arrivals from Hong Kong on the British National (Overseas) visa programme.⁵² Over time, the aspiration should be to develop meaningful community contact and support offers to those waiting for an asylum decision and to everybody granted protection in the UK, across all routes. **The aim would be that all displaced people would eventually have access to a welcoming hub wherever they are settled in the UK.**

These groups could also increase local support for community sponsorship, as well as finding housing and sponsorship for groups such as Afghans and Ukrainians. The local welcoming hubs should work with the 12 UK Strategic Migration Partnerships. Covering Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the nine English regions, these organisations coordinate services for migrants and encourage cooperation across local authority boundaries.

Recommendation: Promote integration for families through ‘welcoming hubs’ that increase social contact between newcomers and receiving communities.

All children deserve the same welcome

Children are children, regardless of what scheme they arrived under. They should therefore be all be entitled to the same welcome and support.

We believe that through further research and development of community-based support and the introduction of welcoming hubs, this could form the basis of a national framework for welcoming refugee children into the UK. Positives can be taken from the already existing resettlement schemes, but it is clear that more needs to be done to ensure children are properly welcomed and integrated into society.



⁵² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regional-vcse-grant-scheme-20232024-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-welcome-programme>



Examples of welcome and integration activities

Barnardo's Triangles Welcome/Integration pack

Triangles is a participation programme run by Barnardo's. Triangles is part of 'Care Journeys' – a group of Barnardo's programmes that aims to support care-experienced young people to achieve a "positive destination" in their lives, through supporting them to have their voices heard and create real change in their communities. This programme is currently working with separated children seeking asylum on a project called 'Journeys of Hope' where they are developing a comic book to make other young people feel more welcome when arriving in the UK, and less scared and alone.

“This is a book for you, to remind you that you are not alone and to help you over the next few days. You'll meet some nice people who want to help. We will go through this journey with you and talk about what will happen next, giving you English phrases to learn along the way.”

Young person involved in the Triangles project quoted in the comic book

Save the Children/The Scouts

Save the Children UK worked together with the Scouts, to run activities to design welcoming messages for refugees. The children, aged 12-15, wrote messages such as, "You are so brave and I hope you like it here," "REMEMBER YOU ARE LOVED," "Let us take you to safety" as well as practical messages about life in the UK such as "You should try fish and chips". Children and young people enjoyed the opportunity to take part in activities to welcome refugees into their schools and their communities.

Recommendation: All local authorities to provide separated children with a welcome pack which contains basic items to help them feel more at home, settle and integrate quickly.

Chapter 2: Home

The major influences on a child's life, family income, nurturing parenting, and a safe and secure environment, are all directly or indirectly influenced by a family's housing conditions.⁵³ Studies have identified a clear 'housing effect' in relation to important aspects of children's well-being and future life chances. Research has shown that the impact of poor housing on children is both immediate and long term and its influence can stretch well into adulthood and potentially into the next generation.⁵⁴

The Refugee Council supported a teenage girl from Afghanistan (then aged 18) who was evacuated to the UK with her siblings. Her parents are still in Afghanistan, and she has really struggled to rebuild her life and care for her siblings without them. This is what she told us about living in a hotel:

[The first hotel] – “It was so hard in the hotel in Southend, I needed my mum. My sister and my brother they need them. That was so hard for us. I couldn't go to college when we were in the other hotel, I had to look after my brother and sister. I had to take her to school on the bus and it took 45 minutes there and the same going back – I had no time to go to school myself.”

Research from Shelter⁵⁵ on the effects of bad housing for children, revealed the devastating impact on children's life chances, including:

1. Up to 25% higher risk of severe ill-health and disability during childhood and early adulthood.
2. Increased risk of meningitis, asthma, and slow growth, which is linked to coronary heart disease.
3. A greater chance of suffering mental health problems and problems with behaviour.
4. Lower educational attainment, greater likelihood of unemployment, and poverty.



⁵³ [Chance_of_a_Lifetime.pdf \(ctfassets.net\)](#)

⁵⁴ Rashleigh B, Keeping it in the family, Roof, September/October 2005; Marsh A, Gordon D, Pantazis C and Heslop P, Home Sweet Home? The impact of poor housing on health, Policy Press, 1999

⁵⁵ [Chance_of_a_Lifetime.pdf \(ctfassets.net\)](#)

What makes a home safe?

ECPAT UK undertook research into what principles are needed for safe accommodation of child victims of trafficking, in the absence of commonly agreed safety and protection standards across the UK for the placement of children who are suspected or known to be trafficked.⁵⁶ We believe these principles can be applied to all children seeking protection in the UK:

1. The best interests of the child should be at the centre of all decisions regarding the provision of safe accommodation and related support.
2. Children should be asked about what makes them feel safe.
3. Children should be given sufficient information to help them make informed decisions about their accommodation and care.
4. Safety measures should be implemented to reduce a child's risk of going missing, especially within 24 to 72 hours after first contact with the child.
5. Safe accommodation should be understood as multi-faceted, involving physical and psychological elements, with particular recognition of the impact of trauma on a child's perceptions and behaviour.
6. A child's accommodation and safety needs will change over time and should be regularly assessed.
7. A child should not feel punished or overly restricted by measures taken to help keep them safe in accommodation.
8. A child should be given access to a range of psychological, educational, health, social, legal, economic and language support that 'brings safety to the child' and helps them recover.
9. Everyone working with child victims of trafficking should be trained to recognise and respond appropriately to their needs.
10. Efforts to keep children safe should involve the wider community in ways that help create an environment that is difficult for traffickers to operate in.

Families who live in contingency accommodation will face significant barriers to integration, as poor living conditions can severely impact a parent's ability to undertake family activities and things which are stimulating for children. 11% of Barnardo's practitioners (503 respondents) are supporting refugees living in hotel accommodation, with mental health, access to support and children's education being the biggest concerns.⁵⁷ As highlighted above, there are still thousands of Afghan families living in this type of housing, and we urge the UK Government to help families find alternative accommodation without further delay, additional support is vital for families to help them get access into social housing or the private rented sector.

Families and children need to be housed in communities to be able to effectively integrate. We, therefore, remain gravely concerned at plans which are being considered to house individuals in disused army barracks and ships. Barnardo's Welcome (Ukraine) Service has worked directly with families living on the two cruise ships and in many of the Welcome accommodation (Hotels) in Scotland. Practitioners reported that although the surroundings, food and space in communal areas met family's needs which ensured they could move around and meet socially if they chose, cabins were small and at time did not have windows. Living in these circumstances over a long period of time could create significant challenges for families i.e., young people having no personal space,

⁵⁶ <https://www.ecpat.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=d61788dc-0969-4134-a1cf-fc7cf494b1a0>

⁵⁷ Barnardo's Practitioner Survey Wave 14 3(Unpublished) (28 February 2023)

young children's sleep being disturbed, mothers having no personal space or time to grieve or process emotions.

Practitioners also found that the continued movement for these children can create additional challenges for their mental health and wellbeing, as families are supported to settle in one community only to find they have to move again i.e., from the cruise ship, to hosts. To support families to feel safe in the communities they have been welcomed into, it is crucial that continued movement must be kept to a minimum to support integration and allow children and young people to feel settled and able to create a sense of identity in their new environments, make friends etc. Additionally finding secure tenancies after a hosting period continues to be a significant challenge to families and hosts.

Support for tenancies could be provided in a number of ways, including the use of Rent Deposit Schemes to support refugees with private market rentals. This is currently in place in London through the Refugee Council,⁵⁸ although limited capacity means the Private Rented Scheme can only help a fraction of those that need this crucial support.⁵⁹ Additionally, this Scheme helps refugees who have no prior history of renting in the UK to address the issue of guarantors, allowing families to find affordable accommodation through sustainable tenancies. We are calling for urgent resolution for all refugees on the same terms, given recent figures revealed in Refugee Council's report 'Lives on Hold: The Experiences of People in Hotel Asylum Accommodation'⁶⁰ which showed 378 refugees and asylum seekers living in hotel rooms for a year and almost 3,000 (2,826) for more than 6 months. This, however, needs to be coupled with an effective immigration system, given the Home Office has admitted that the slow speed and poor quality of asylum decisions has exacerbated the accommodation crisis.⁶¹

Ahmed, a refugee from Somalia, said:

“House hunting in a big city where you don't know anyone is a nightmare. The system is totally different to where I come from. You have to go to the council, you have to apply, phone the landlord, they ask if you are taking benefits. It's a very long process, and they don't make you feel welcome.”

Linking to our overarching call for a national strategy of welcoming displaced people, having a housing framework in place for those arriving to the UK, would allow local authorities to be able to effectively plan housing need for new arrivals and for responsibility to be shared across the country, leading to better coordination and use of public resources.

The realities for children and families who receive children's social care services are sobering. The need for services is rising, while local authorities are overspending and increasingly struggling to cope. There are 82,170 children in care in England (an increase of 21% since 2012-13) and 3,264 (26% of the increase) were separated children seeking asylum.⁶² Whilst we welcome the UK Government's strategy for improving children's social care,⁶³ and the commitment to increase the number of foster homes across the whole country, there has been little reference to the experiences of migrant children, despite making up a significant proportion of this cohort.

58 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services/private-rented-scheme/>

59 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/how-can-refugees-pay-a-housing-deposit-when-they-arrive-with-nothing-and-are-banned-from-working-refugee-council-calls-on-london-mayor-candidates-to-pledge-support-for-homeless-refu/>

60 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/resources/lives-on-hold-the-experiences-of-people-in-hotel-asylum-accommodation/>

61 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/home-office-asylum-hotel-accommodation-slow-decisions-inspector-borders-immigration-report/>

62 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2022>

63 Children's social care: stable homes, built on love – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Specialist foster care

Foster care provides a safe, secure and stable environment for children and young people who cannot live with their birth family. Fostering provides a caring environment for these children, working with them, their families and the local authority or trust. Many separated children seeking asylum will have particular emotional, practical, language and cultural needs that will require specialist, trauma-informed support that foster carers will have to consider. In 2019, a third of children placed in unregulated settings were separated children seeking asylum, despite making up just 4% of all children in care or a family home.⁶⁴

Recommendation: Local authorities should increase the number of foster care and residential children's home places for separated children seeking asylum. Children should be placed in care as soon as possible upon arrival.

Barnardo's provide over 20 fostering, adoption and short break services across the UK, including providing foster care to separated children.⁶⁵ They provide foster carers with the tools and specialist support needed to help children reach their dreams. Experts provide comprehensive preparation and ongoing training, as well as offering support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Foster carers also get financial support, including an allowance to help make a positive difference to a child's life.

Barnardo's Foster carer C:

"When M first came to me, he seemed scared and fearful, he did not seem happy. I had prepared his bedroom, got him a bed cover with an Eritrean flag on it and he said he liked it. He was very quiet, and I could tell he wasn't happy, he just didn't communicate a lot. He needed new clothing, and I bought him a new coat and shoes.

He had lived in a hostel where there were less boundaries, so he did not like the time he had to come home in the evening and found it hard at first. He was always respectful, and we have gone at his pace to build a trusting relationship. He called me by my first name when he came, and he now calls me auntie but said I am like a mother.

He gets a lot of support from his faith. He showed me his Quran and said that "Allah gives the best thing for you and to protect you. You might not be happy with what he gives you at first. He said when I came here, I wasn't happy but this is the best place for me. Allah gave you to me and I am now very happy".

M's story

"The journey was difficult; I was beaten, and someone stamped on my head and got a perforated ear drum. Sometimes I could eat once or not at all in a day. I was with boys who I trusted, and we stuck together.

When I got to the UK, I lived in a hostel but then moved to a foster carer, I was not told I was going to be moving (to the foster carer). I didn't know anybody here and I had no time to prepare, and I was separated from my friends. When I was with friends, and we spoke our language so there was no improvement in English. When I come here (to the foster carer) I learn a lot. In the previous place (the hostel) when I requested something they would not do it, but when I ask my foster carer, she helps me. She helped me with the doctor and got me a bus pass. When I come here it was family. My foster carer treats me like her son. She helps me with my college work. She is always happy and never gets upset with me even if I make a mistake, she just gives me information and advice. I like the way she is treating me."

⁶⁴ <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2020/09/cco-unregulated-children-in-care-living-in-semi-independent-accommodation.pdf>

⁶⁵ Foster a child | Barnardo's | Barnardo's (barnardos.org.uk)



Interview with Barnardo's Foster Carer M

What impact do you feel you have had on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in your care?

"We have helped young people from Afghanistan to adjust to UK culture, encouraging them to form new connections and interests. We treat all young people as part of our family but are also respectful of the families they have. We are mindful of the difficult experiences they have had. We are always there for them, even after they leave our home."

How are some of these young people doing now who have left your care?

"One young person from Afghanistan is married with a baby. He just messaged the other day with a picture of his new baby! He stays in touch with us, and we still help him with lengthy forms or have him over for dinner."

How do you approach settling a new UASC placement and supporting their transition?

"The first few days and weeks are always a bit difficult as young people

adjust and this is compounded where there are language differences. We try to make any young person feel welcome and relaxed in our home. We are conscious with UASC placements that everything is new and unfamiliar to them. Often there is very limited information available to carers about their background and history. We try to focus on the present moment, settling them into the home and local area and establishing basic routines and practical issues. It would be helpful having access to an interpreting service. It always helps when there is good communication with the local authority."

How do you manage cultural differences?

"We have learnt a lot about Islamic faith and practices from young people we care for and always try to promote them attending Mosque and having somewhere spacious and quiet to pray if this is important to them. We provide Halal food and understand the reassurance they need that this is fully certified. We don't put any pressure regarding religious practices but try to learn about their faith. We take an interest in what their culture means to every young person and are curious about this."

What advice would you give to a carer considering caring for UASC placements?

"Treat them uniquely as you would any other young person in need of care and nurturing. Language differences can be the main issue. It is important to understand the religion and take an interest in parts of their culture and home life that they are missing. Speaking to the young people's parents has been helpful and an opportunity to provide reassurance to families that their child is being cared for and to take on board any concerns they might have and helps with trust from the young person."

Aspris Fostering Services have been providing foster care placements for separated children seeking asylum since February 2009.⁶⁶ Through expert training for their foster carers, combined with the children's remarkable abilities to learn English, this ensured that they quickly settled in the UK and began to make good progress. They have found there are many potential advantages of caring for separated children including:

- **The children can quickly develop warm relationships with their carers.**
- **They have often been well cared for by their own parents and are used to house rules and boundaries.**
- **Good school attendance and a desire to learn.**
- **Strong work ethic.**
- **The children will often keep in contact as young adults living independently within the community.**⁶⁷

Aspris offer a cohort of qualified counsellors free of charge as an essential part of their service given the traumatic journeys many of these young people have had to face. Despite this being offered by some local authorities, there is no regional expectation for this level of support.

Head of Fostering, Matthew Davies, at Aspris Fostering Services said:

“unaccompanied children seeking asylum represent a unique community of children in care and should not be consolidated into the main fostering experience.”

Recommendation: Consider the inclusion of counselling within revision to regional and, or local provider framework agreements, to ensure that separated children seeking asylum benefit from the opportunity to explore their lived experience, with the benefit of a translator, ensuring the child's first language is not a barrier to participating with help and support.

When considering whether a separated child is a good match for a prospective foster family, Aspris requires local authorities to confirm the provision of translating services for the benefit of the child and their prospective foster care. This ensures that separated children and young people are afforded meaningful discussion in their own language. Aspris consider that this is essential if we are to ensure that the wishes and feelings of separated children and young people are understood and advocated.

Whilst the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care⁶⁸ states that oral and written communications should be made available in a format appropriate to the communication difficulties and language of the individual, there appears to be no universal practice standard for local authorities, other than the obvious requirements of social workers within their professional standards.

Recommendation: Ensure that local authority practice standards for separated children reflect the expectation that oral and written communications are made available in their first language.

There are different levels of experience among foster carers who care for separated children seeking asylum around the country, with some local authorities having dealt with a higher volume of cases and developing specialised resources and knowledge.⁶⁹ Whether experienced mainstream foster carers or first-time carers, local authorities must be mindful to the support that carers need for this cohort. A recent study found that the subsequent learning curve had been rather steep and might have been made easier with greater access to specialist training.⁷⁰ **Training is therefore essential for the preparation of foster carers for separated children.** It has also been reported that where the training of carers is carried out by local authorities, it has not been shared more widely between other authorities, and there is often an inconsistent

66 <https://www.aspriscs.co.uk/fostering-services/fostering-asylum-seeking-children/>

67 Ibid.

68 Fostering services: national minimum standards – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

69 https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/write/Migration/Place_To_Call_Home_Post_Implementation_Review_Report_v2.pdf

70 https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/write/Migration/Place_To_Call_Home_Post_Implementation_Review_Report_v2.pdf

level of awareness, creating a post-code lottery of support.

Recommendation: Identify specific practice leaders across local authorities who are trained in the specific needs of separated children seeking asylum and advocate practice standards across specialist foster care.

There is already a shortage of foster carers in the UK; the Fostering Network estimates that fostering services across the UK need to recruit at least a further 7,200 foster families in the next 12 months alone.⁷¹ This will require a coordinated and well-resourced approach to recruit and mobilise new foster carers with specialist skills to support separated refugee and children seeking asylum who have experienced profound trauma. We strongly urge the UK Government to take steps to increase the provision, training and funding for specialist foster carers for children who need them.

Recommendation: The National Foster Recruitment Campaign should contain a specific target for recruiting foster carers for separated and trafficked children with bespoke campaign materials to attract potential foster carers.

Improving supported accommodation for separated children seeking asylum

While we are keen to see the development of more and better foster placements to meet the needs of this group, it is also important to consider that given many separated children enter the UK when they are 16 or 17, it will remain quite common for some of them to be placed in supported accommodation. The use of this type of accommodation for children in the care system in England has grown significantly in recent years – the number of looked-after children living in these settings increased by 76% between the end of March 2010 and the end of March 2021.⁷²

Therefore, any strategy for improving accommodation for this group will need to give careful consideration to how to ensure that supported accommodation providers are equipped and capable of meeting the needs of this vulnerable group of children.

There has been much conversation about how to improve standards of supported accommodation for 16/17-year-olds in England in recent years. The Government have recently passed a set of new regulations which outline standards that are expected from providers who provide accommodation to 16- and 17-year-olds, and a new Ofsted inspection regime for this type of accommodation is expected to commence in April 2024. These new regulations should help to ensure a consistent and higher level of support for all 16- and 17-year-olds in care and ensure that separated children are not placed in inappropriate accommodation as part of their care, including in mobile accommodation such as tents and caravans.

However, as well as ensuring a basic standard of accommodation it is important that these children are provided with the resources they need to enable them to live independently. This is particularly important for these children who will often have arrived in the UK with few or none of their own possessions. Barnardo's has been working with supported accommodation providers in Brent to consider how they can better support older children entering this accommodation as their first placement in care – including those who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. A key finding from this work is that children report they very much benefit from having access to a welcome pack containing basic goods at the start of their placement.

Barnardo's worked with a group of care-experienced young people to develop such a welcome pack which includes a range of resources from toiletries (including shampoos, and shower gel), towels, bed linen and kitchen equipment (including pots, pans and plates). The welcome pack has been piloted with a number of supported accommodation providers in the Brent area and received positive feedback from young people who report that it helps

71 <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/all-about-fostering/recruitment-targets#:~:text=With%20record%20numbers%20of%20children,the%20next%2012%20months%20alone>

72 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7560/CBP-7560.pdf>

those who have arrived with nothing feel more welcome and at home. Following a successful pilot, the packs have been implemented and are a contractual requirement for all Supported Living Accommodation providers in Brent. It also helps facilitate an early conversation between children and workers to help them understand the support that is available to them within the accommodation which is essential in helping them to settle in. As one young person who received such a welcome pack explained:

“I was happy. I mean you know they made my room perfect...and when they gave me the pack and then they said to me, anything you need, you can just come to reception or call us anytime, you know for any help.”

The welcome packs are developed at comparatively low cost (around £200 each) and many professionals working in the sector report that they feel they provide a huge benefit for young people in being able to provide them with a warm welcome to their new accommodation.

“Having the pack will save us time so we can spend more time with the young person.”

Recommendation: Welcome packs should be provided as standard in all supported accommodation settings to help ensure that separated children seeking asylum receive the help they need at the start of their placement to enable them to settle and thrive.

Community sponsorship

The role of community sponsorship is to support children who come to the UK in families. Community Sponsorship enables civil society, friends and neighbours, charities, and faith groups to directly support refugees resettled in the UK as they start their new lives in safety.

Since the scheme began in 2016, a total of 942 refugees have been resettled through Community Sponsorship, including 15 since the start of the ACRS, according to the latest published data (year ending December 2022).⁷³

The Community Sponsorship Alliance⁷⁴, is comprised of seven sponsor organisations who have each welcomed between 7-32 refugee families to the UK. They advocate for the transformation that Community Sponsorship brings to welcoming communities as much as to those who are being welcomed. By growing the Community Sponsorship movement this would ensure that more refugee children in families are welcomed, and more communities are enriched.

Principles for successful and sustainable sponsorship:

1. A safe, humanitarian route for ‘named’ individuals/families to come, *alongside* the UNHCR selected route through the UKRS – and for the UNHCR route to be funded.
2. A true wrap-around *community group* welcome, rather than an individual host.
3. Guided by a Lead or Principal Sponsor throughout the process.
4. Providing a home with its own front door, if you are in a family unit and introducing an option of shared housing for individuals seeking safety.
5. Having a clear beginning and end to the sponsorship.

⁷³ <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2023/03/28/safe-and-legal-routes-factsheet-march-2023/>

⁷⁴ <https://www.thepickwellfoundation.org.uk/community-sponsorship/>

ONS data shows that half (50%) of all the sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine scheme reported they would consider hosting people from other countries.⁷⁵ Inspired by the UK public's response to Homes for Ukraine, the UK Government should set ambitious goals for the development and scaling up of community sponsorship and welcoming efforts in the UK. We would like to see the UK Government produce a Green Paper to develop a strategic plan for welcoming children, drawing on the lessons from Homes for Ukraine and Afghan pilot schemes outlined above. **We want to put the power of the community at the heart of refugee integration.**

Recommendation: Develop, promote and scale up community sponsorship and welcoming efforts in the UK and ensure that it forms a blueprint for national integration and support strategy for displaced people.



⁷⁵ Experiences of Homes for Ukraine scheme sponsors – follow-up, UK – Office for National Statistics



Chapter 3: Support and welfare



Children, after arriving in the UK, continue to face substantial barriers to achieving stability. They need wrap-around support in all areas, from mental and physical health to support in schools and navigating the asylum process, thus providing them with holistic support will help them integrate and settle.⁷⁶

The Refugee Council supported a teenage girl from Afghanistan who was evacuated to the UK with her siblings. Her parents are still in Afghanistan, and she has really struggled to rebuild her life and care for her siblings without them. This is what she told us about living in a hotel.

“I’m in ESOL (English as a Second Language) classes. Now I’m staying in the house for my sister. She is 9 years old.

This June, I’m going to be 20 years old. When my mum and dad come to the UK, I can go to college, university, full-time job... I can use the UK’s opportunities for young people. But now I’m just like a housewife, I stay at home and look at people outside. When I look at other girls my age, they are going to university... I hope my mum and dad will come.

You can see my eyes are red. Because every night I can’t sleep. I sleep at 3 or 4 o’clock and wake up at 7 o’clock for my sister’s school. Every day, I clean the house and go outside to look for jobs. At 3 o’clock I pick up my sister from school. For four months I’ve been sleeping 2 or 3 hours at night.

I have to take on too much because my mum and dad need me, my brother and my sister need me... So that responsibility is hard.”

Barnardo’s research paper ‘A new life for me’: Integration Experiences of Syrian Refugee Children and Families⁷⁷ offers qualitative research which explores the resettlement and integration experiences of Syrian refugee children and their families who are supported by Barnardo’s Northern Ireland Refugee Support Service. The findings reveal the importance of social connections and family relationships during resettlement. While participants describe positive experiences of resettlement and highlight the importance of Barnardo’s support, they often face trauma, difficulties with settling into school, racism, and language barriers.

Translation support

Language needs to underpin every area of support a child is able to have access to. Lack of interpreters and translation issues can create huge barriers for young people in communicating their needs and understanding the support that is offered to them, whether this be in school, a doctor’s surgery or accessing legal advice.

⁷⁶ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/distress-signals-report.pdf>

⁷⁷ https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Barnardos_ANewLifeForMe_web.pdf

Barnardo's helpline advisors and therapists speak a range of languages with access to interpreters when required. Barnardo's Ukrainian Helpline has access to interpreters in both Ukrainian and Russian and is receiving calls from some NHS staff asking for support, as they can't provide their own interpreters.

Barnardo's Action With Young Carers Liverpool is a city-wide service working towards reducing the negative impact that caring can have, socially, emotionally, and educationally. Young carers receive an assessment of need, a support plan and regular reviews. Young carers will also have the opportunity to receive 1-1 support, participate in breaks from caring, attend group activities, take part in personal development opportunities and safety planning for the person they care for.

The service works with a number of children seeking asylum, many of whom are having to provide translation support for their parents who are suffering with mental health conditions relating to the trauma they have experienced. Children within the service have also reported feeling isolated to our practitioners, particularly in a school setting, as they are unable to talk to anyone in their own language.

Local authority commissioners need to look at ways to ring-fence budgets for translated services and provide training for translators to be objective and professional. This level of investment for recently arrived children, in particular, can work to make a substantial difference in improving outcomes for them in the long term.⁷⁸

Recommendation: Provide more funding directly to services to provide translated resources for young people.

Health

Every child arriving in the UK seeking asylum is entitled to an initial health assessment. This should be carried out by a paediatrician in an appropriate setting and is an opportunity not only to identify and address unmet health needs, but also to obtain and understand the child's overall physical and mental health needs, and to engage in health promotion activities. Clinicians undertaking this work should refer to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's (RCPCH) guidance to maintain consistency and ensure best practice at all times.⁷⁹

The RCPCH has collated comprehensive resources to assist clinicians undertaking assessments of displaced children and it strongly encourages anyone involved in the health and social care of these children to review this information in order to inform their care.

Children should not be charged to access healthcare. Every child can obtain an NHS number by registering with their local GP practice, and guidance should be available in a range of languages as to how to do this. Guidance for clinicians is available through the RCPCH's website.⁸⁰

Recommendation: Healthcare services for displaced children must be designed with their specific needs in mind. Taking a trauma-informed approach which builds trust is essential for this cohort, and services should look to co-design their spaces, policies, and procedures with displaced children and young people to help build on a tailored approach which best meets the unique needs of those who have newly arrived in the UK.

Declining mental health is one of the biggest barriers to integration, affecting a young person's ability to socialise and become involved in their local community. Children and young people who have been displaced by war have suffered immensely in the conflict. This can manifest in different ways and the impact may not be apparent for some time.

78 <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/distress-signals-report.pdf>

79 <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/refugee-asylum-seeking-children-young-people-guidance-paediatricians>

80 <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/right-access-healthcare>

The lack of support available, coupled with the thousands of displaced families living in poor conditions in contingency accommodation, means that many turn to third sector organisations, for support.

Most mental health practitioners aren't trained to help traumatised children from different cultural backgrounds. In 2015, the Refugee Council developed 'My View', a specialist mental health service for displaced children and young people who arrive in the UK on their own. My View children's therapy service is a safe, confidential place for them to get well-being support through talking, individual creative work, or group therapeutic support.

Many of the children and young people who use the service have suffered traumatic experiences, unimaginable to most. They have witnessed the death, abduction or torture of parents or other relatives. They have been the victims of torture, violence, abuse or trafficking. Understandably, they have overwhelming feelings of loss, separation or survivor's guilt.

Children said the following about the support they received:

"I did not have any hope when I first came here. I was thinking to harm myself, but you have supported me and gave me education to myself. I feel confidence and you have given me so much. Thank you so much!"

"The counsellor never told me I must do this or that, which gave me confidence to try to say many things, things I can't say to friends. Even if I'm not happy I can say what I want. I just want to say thanks to my counsellor and My View for helping me cope with my problems and feel better."

Following therapy provided by My View during 2020/21, 78% of children reported an improvement in their physical and mental wellbeing, 73% said they were able to sleep better, 82% reported a decrease in feeling suicidal or wanting to self-harm.⁸¹

Practitioners within the Refugee Council's My View therapeutic service for children, are reporting a gap in onward referral pathways for children. Therapists stress the urgency in providing intervention around mental health to secure better outcomes for the children. Because of the growing backlog of asylum decisions waiting to be determined, children end up lingering in the asylum system. They face multiple barriers when accessing provision and are not being referred quickly enough. As a result, their health and overall wellbeing is deteriorating significantly.

For children who may have already endured significant trauma and difficult journeys to get to the UK, it is vital they are able to access appropriate therapeutic support. However, research conducted by The Children's Society found that despite the acute mental health needs of separated young people, the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) which is commonly used to determine a separated young person's need for mental health support, was not identifying their mental health needs adequately.⁸² The average SDQ total difficulties score for looked after separated young people was low and suggested they would have little need for mental health support.

When young people's needs are identified, long waiting lists for assessments and treatment by children's mental health services are well documented, with children waiting anywhere from seven days to almost three years for assessment.⁸³ Barnardo's family support services have reported declining mental health as a common theme for refugee families.

81 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/our-work/mental-health-support-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers/mental-health-services-for-unaccompanied-children/> – Client's feedback was collected using the Young People Core 10 Form (known as YP Core 10), which is a scoring form that indicates the progress made by a client. It is used at the beginning and end of the treatment. This form is used by mental health service providers, including NHS.

82 [distress-signals-report.pdf](#) (childrenssociety.org.uk) p. 7, 30

83 <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/westminster-hall-debate-homes-ukraine-scheme-and-child-refugees>

Barnardo's LINK service is currently providing access to trauma support through online and face to face therapeutic counselling, and psychotherapy services for displaced people arriving from Ukraine. **Since May, 282 referrals for therapeutic support have been received through our Ukrainian Support Helpline.**

Case study of Ukrainian family using Barnardo's LINK service: A mother and son (10 years old) were referred to our therapy service, with support from their host. The referral indicated that the mother was worried about her son and his lack of engagement. She herself was struggling with the move to the United Kingdom.

The therapy provided support to the mother by:

- Allowing her to express feelings around the trauma experienced in Ukraine. Through this she was able to identify supporting factors and build resilience.
- Identifying coping strategies, as well as self-care such as meditation. In later sessions past experiences were explored. Accommodation moves, visits from family and improvements in her son's behaviour meant that the client was ready to close.
- Supporting the son with his own therapist. The mother was able to be seen as a separate individual with her own specific needs and the therapist was able to delay starting to work with her until the work with the child was sufficiently progressed that she was able to focus on her own needs.

Both mother and son made progress over the 8 weeks and were able to grow and build self-confidence. The mother is now in a place where she supports other Ukrainian people on a voluntary basis to empower them to adapt to the change, learn and grow. She is working part time, her English has improved, and she has taken control of her life, feels content, psychologically is more aware and is continuing to grow and self-actualise.

Feedback from the mother ***"I have felt intervention has helped me because having professional input has empowered me to be autonomous, it really made a positive impact on my mental wellbeing as I felt the therapist understood me and I was doing the right things in order to recover"***.

It is vital that our support continues to ensure the needs of this highly vulnerable cohort are addressed and that children can access the appropriate support as soon as they need it. This could be through lower-level support provided in schools and communities or specialist support.

Recommendation: Children arriving in the UK need access to specialist support for immediate mental health needs. This will require sufficient investment, to combat the long waiting times and ensure the right pathways are in place to access support by the NHS.

Education

Education is vital for a child's development. It allows children to build solid foundations and develop an understanding of the world around them. Good education inspires children to be curious, kind and courageous as they grow and develop. Without access to high quality education, children are put at a disadvantage and will face considerable barriers to employment and adverse health outcomes.⁸⁴

Ensuring all children are supported to access to an education, regardless of immigration status, will give them the best chance in life.

British schools have a duty to promote community cohesion, as well as mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.⁸⁵

Learning and schooling are important elements of a child's development and strong determining factors of a child's life chances. Research has found that successful integration of migrant children into schools can benefit the child's wellbeing and performance and help to rebalance the disadvantage stemming from disruption to schooling or negative life experiences before or after arrival in the UK.⁸⁶

Research by the Education Policy Institute found that children seeking asylum who enter the UK separated from their parents are on average over three years behind non-migrant children at school by the time they take their GCSEs.⁸⁷ The considerable gap in attainment between pupils who seek asylum and non-migrant children of 37.4 months is estimated by researchers to be similar in size to the gap for pupils with special needs and disabilities who have the most severe needs.⁸⁸

Children need comprehensive wrap-around support in schools, including help with their English language and extra-curricular activities to allow them to settle more easily and realise their potential. This can be achieved through

better informed teachers and a curriculum that is culturally sensitive as well as accessible, leading to a place where children feel safe and looked after.

Welcoming in school

Research has found that, at an individual institution level, the development of a school-wide ethos of welcoming refugees and children seeking asylum has a positive impact on admissions, and substantial liaison with voluntary sector advocates and support workers can help overcome a variety of barriers to access.⁸⁹

Barnardo's Ukrainian Support Helpline is beginning to receive calls from schools, professionals, and parents in relation to low attendance rates in schools; they are asking for advice and support on how they can get their children to go to school.

Many children arriving in the UK will be enrolling in school mid-term, so ensuring schools provide a proper welcome is imperative and will have a direct impact on attendance and attainment rates.

“Having to wait for college start dates is detrimental, a rolling start date without long summer breaks would be more beneficial.”

A young person supported by a Barnardo's service

A report by British Future found that schools have broadly similar procedures for welcoming new pupils, consisting of an interview with the Head of Year, a tour of the school, and the use of a buddy system to help settle new arrivals.⁹⁰ However, more could be done to ensure that these procedures are implemented in accordance with best practice, to ensure that new pupils know where they need to be and when, and to help pupils quickly settle into their new school⁹¹ as this is not universally

84 [Education | UNICEF](#)

85 [Education and Inspections Act 2006 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

86 <https://www.niesr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/MigrantChildrenIntegrationFinalReport.pdf>

87 [The educational outcomes of refugee and asylum-seeking children in England – Education Policy Institute \(epi.org.uk\)](#)

88 [Ibid.](#)

89 [Access-to-Education-report-PDF.pdf \(unicef.org.uk\)](#)

90 <https://www.welcomehk.org/research/new-in-class>.

91 [Ibid.](#)

implemented. One student attending a sixth-form college noted that she was given no guidance beyond the orientation day and relied on Google Maps to get to the right building for her classes on time.⁹²

Some Hong Kongers noted that some schools asked their children to share about their culture in class or at an assembly. They said that this helped other pupils understand why they had come to the UK and made them feel welcome and included.⁹³

Recommendation: Provide schools with resource to allow them to put together materials such as a welcome pack for all migrant pupils (for the benefit of parents as well as for pupils). This might include information on the layout of the school, the timing of the school day and the names and faces of key support staff.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in school

One of the biggest barriers for children arriving in the UK, which has been reported across many organisations, relates to difficulties with learning and practicing the English language. English language needs of children and young people from different nationalities will vary and ESOL support differs from school to school.⁹⁴

Save the Children worked with Welcome Centres in Wales to provide the support families need to be able to get their children into a school of their choice, as well as for their parents to be able to work and to find and furnish a home near the school. By providing this joined up support, children are able to settle at school and families are able to feel that they are part of a community.

Funding for schools to bring pupils from different religions and backgrounds together is to be cut by 50% from September 2023.⁹⁵ While there are other sources of funding, including the UK Government's 'Controlling Migration Fund', accessed by local authorities, the additional costs of settling migrant pupils are drawn from schools' budgets.⁹⁶ Research by British Future found this affected the level of support schools can provide, recommend that resources need to be placed on a more secure footing to ensure that the needs of Hong Kongers, and all other migrant children, are met. This would enable schools to plan long-term provision, rather than rely on short-term solutions to immediate barriers to learning and to integration.⁹⁷

Recommendation: Funding and provision of ESOL in schools needs an urgent review so that all pupils have the language and curriculum support they need wherever they go to school.

While we recommended that children should be supported to learn English, this should be done whilst also emphasising the importance of their home language.

The Refugee Council set up the Youth Development Project⁹⁸ in 2000 to meet the educational and social needs of separated children arriving in the UK. These children face numerous challenges, including social isolation, loss of identity and culture, anxiety and depression. The Youth Development Project offers a range of classes and activities to help these children take the first steps in rebuilding their lives. Some children had access to education in their home country, however, they also support children who have suffered years of disruption to their schooling in their home countries. ESOL and Maths classes help children get ready to join mainstream UK schools and alleviate social isolation.

92 [Settling-In-Report-WC4HK.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

93 [ibid.](#)

94 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/628b740a6ac4ac36ed7dd1b7/t/62c20f2f3e63957aeb1f2759/1656885065755/Settling-in-Report+Summary.pdf>

95 [Education funding: Schools face 50% cut in shared education cash – BBC News](#)

96 <https://www.niesr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/MigrantChildrenIntegrationFinalReport.pdf>

97 https://static1.squarespace.com/static/628b740a6ac4ac36ed7dd1b7/t/643918d9e9f04415db0d3262/1681463653595/WC4HK+Education+Report_202304.pdf

98 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/projects/youth-development-project/>

One of the teacher volunteers said:

“For separated refugee children the Refugee Council’s Maths and English classes are vital. When they arrive, many feel anxious and insecure. The classes are a safe place where they get lots of attention and care, a place they can grow in confidence whilst waiting for a place at school. I wish them to feel welcome and to know they are important.”

The aim of the project is to restore hope, playfulness, friendship, and security through a range of social and educational based activities and support.

Support in extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities provide opportunities for children and young people to mix with pupils across age groups and backgrounds and can help with social integration.⁹⁹

Research from British Future found that overall, parents of children arriving from Hong Kong said that their children had settled down well in school. They enjoyed having less pressure from tests and homework compared with Hong Kong. Some remarked that their children actively look forward to the school day. However, they also remarked that UK schools offer much less in the way of after-school opportunities for extracurricular activities, such as for sports, music, drama and other activities.¹⁰⁰

Barnardo’s practitioners have also noticed the importance of encouraging children to participate in sports as it helps to bring them and their peers together and invokes a sense of achievement.



Rohman’s story

Ever since Rohman arrived in the UK from Afghanistan in May 2022 all he has wanted to do is play cricket. When he turned 18 a Barnardo’s Leaving Care Worker, Vicki Scott, contacted Rohman’s local cricket club, Wollaton Cricket Club, who were incredibly welcoming; they instantly agreed to Rohman joining the club and connected him with somebody who spoke his first language. They told the Leaving Care Worker that they have a very inclusive club with members from all different backgrounds and this really cemented that Rohman would feel welcome and fit in the club and make new friends. Through the Barnardo’s Young People’s Grant and the support of a local business, The Cricket Room, Rohman’s subs for the year were able to be paid as well as kit including pads, gloves, a bat, a bag, trainers, and a helmet.

Barnardo’s Leaving Care Worker said: ***“I am so happy that I was able to support Rohman with this and that Barnardo’s Young Peoples Grant was able to give us the funds he needed to be able to play a game that he so desperately misses”***. Rohman said: ***“I am so very happy that I have been given this gift and for the support from my Leaving Care Worker. I love cricket and this kit will really help me.”***

99 <https://www.welcomehk.org/research/new-in-class>

100 Settling in: Hong Kongers and their new lives in the UK — WelcomeHK

Better informed teachers

Once children and young people settle into a new country, they and their families will often start to process the trauma caused by the conflict that they are fleeing. Save the Children is working with Place2Be¹⁰¹ in order to provide resources for teachers to help provide long term trauma-informed support for refugees and asylum seekers.

Research has found that teachers require a specific set of skills to support migrant pupils and that these are not necessarily easy to acquire through formal training. ESOL training and experience is not sufficient, and skills may include ensuring that pupils develop good relationships with their peers. Some research has suggested that increasing the proportion of teachers from diverse ethnic or migrant backgrounds could assist integration by enriching pupils' learning experiences and sense of belonging.¹⁰²

Young people from unaccompanied backgrounds can often be overrepresented in special educational settings. When a barrier in communication exists, more serious neurodevelopmental issues can remain unidentified, leaving young people without the sensitive support they require.¹⁰³

Schools should be provided with information about why these children are coming to the UK. A greater understanding of the context around the country the child is coming from will help inform teachers' awareness of some of the mental, emotional, social, and financial pressures that families from Hong Kong are likely to face. Similar information should be provided about other groups moving to the UK.¹⁰⁴

Recommendation: It is vital that schools are resourced to properly train teachers to understand the distinct and varied needs of children arriving into the UK, to ensure they are correctly identifying individual needs.

Destitution and impact of benefit cuts on families with children

“Refugee children and children seeking asylum are always dealing with a level of poverty; the minute you speak to them you are presented with a to-do-list of immediate needs.”

Barnardo's worker

Further complexities come from the current delays of Universal Credit being paid after the application is submitted (it is over 5 weeks)¹⁰⁵ as well as issues arising from the two-child limit on benefits. As many families joining children in the UK may be able to speak little English, children are often faced with having to support families in navigating the complex benefit system. Local authorities at this point may need to step in, especially if a child is living with their family but is still in need, to support that child with housing and essential living needs. The issue usually arises when a family a child is joining has no recourse to public funds (NRPF), so a child would either continue to be looked after by a local authority or they move with their family but still requires support with basic needs because of the family's NRPF status.

It is, therefore, vital that any immigration and asylum applications are dealt with swiftly so that adult members can obtain permission to work and apply for welfare support.

101 <https://www.place2be.org.uk/>

102 <https://www.niesr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/MigrantChildrenIntegrationFinalReport.pdf>

103 <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/distress-signals-report.pdf>

104 <https://www.welcomehk.org/research/new-in-classk>

105 <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/british-family-turn-to-crowdfunding-for-ukrainian-refugee-after-benefits-delay>

Independent Guardians

The immigration system is complicated and confusing for anyone, let alone children who are new to this country, alone and without a strong grasp of English. Rebuilding their lives in the UK can be a difficult and isolating experience for these children. Access to a guardian provides a child with much needed support and someone ‘who is in their corner’. Guardians are necessary to promote and protect children’s best interests and provide support across all settings, to safeguard against a conflict of interest and to support them to navigate through incredibly complex systems and processes.¹⁰⁶ A guardianship service exists in statute in both Scotland and Northern Ireland, but not in England or Wales. Therefore, the majority of separated children in the UK do not have access to such support. The Youth-led Commission on Separated Children (YLCSC), formed by children previously supported by The Children’s Society, are fighting to change this.¹⁰⁷ They are campaigning to ensure all children who arrive in the UK alone receive the support of an independent legal guardian. Such a guardian would be a consistent adult around the child, supporting them to navigate through the complex asylum process, protecting their rights, advocating for their best interests, and ensuring they receive the right levels of support.

“I’m championing this campaign so that other children and young people don’t have to go through the difficulties I went through because I didn’t have a legal Guardian”.

Member of The Children’s Society Youth-led Commission on Separated Children

“If you don’t have a guardian, it’s like trying to look in the dark”.

Member of The Children’s Society Youth-led Commission on Separated Children

What is a legal guardian?

A guardian is someone who works with all services around the child, connecting them with the support they need, instructing solicitors on their behalf and representing their best interests. Their role complements the work carried out by social workers who have neither the capacity nor specialist training to understand the legal complexities of the asylum process. Guardians help safeguard and significantly improve the well-being of separated children, as well as help achieve long-term cost savings for statutory services.

Recommendation: All separated children arriving in the UK should be assigned a guardian to help with their asylum claim and integration.

106 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/publications/legal/5d271cdf7.pdf>

107 Guardians for unaccompanied children | The Children’s Society (childrenssociety.org.uk)



Chapter 4: Protection

Within the current political climate, keeping a lone child that arrives in the UK safe, seems almost impossible. The new Illegal Migration Bill that is currently passing through parliament gives the Home Office power to accommodate children. This will risk creating a **two-tier system** for children in the care of the state: children entering the UK through ‘irregular’ routes, including those who are trafficked, could be treated differently from other looked-after children, potentially missing out on the protections in the Children Act 1989, under which local authorities must promote and safeguard the welfare of children in need in their area. This duty should apply to all children, irrespective of nationality.

Hotel accommodation

Local authorities in England have a legal duty pursuant to the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need. Children seeking asylum who have no responsible adult to care for them are clearly ‘in need’ and will inevitably require children’s services to care for and accommodate them under Section 20 or under a care order of the same Act – this support should begin **“as soon as the child is referred to the local authority or is found in the local authority area.”**¹⁰⁸

Separated children, and families with children, continued to be housed in unsuitable, hotel accommodation. Over 4,000 separated children have been placed in hotels since 2021, with 440 missing episodes during that time, and 200 still missing as of January 2023.¹⁰⁹ **Whilst children are living in temporary accommodation they are not being properly protected against harm.**

Children as young as ten have been placed alone in these hotels without access to help and advice, mental health support, and little access to healthcare. These children are at high risk of trafficking and exploitation and must be given urgent access to specialist care and moved into local authority care, in line with the 1989 Children Act provisions. All children need support and protection, and this cannot be achieved whilst they are living in temporary and unsuitable accommodation, such as these hotels.

Recommendation: We urge the UK Government to find all children that went missing from Home Office accommodation. All cases of separated children going missing must be considered at high risk of exploitation and that serious incident notifications are made to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

Although we recognise local authorities are facing significant pressures and many might not have the infrastructure in place to support separated children, the ‘emergency and temporary situation’ has now turned into business as usual and set a dangerous precedence in terms of the care framework for separated children. The UK Government has to support local authorities by offering sufficient funding to ensure we offer proper support to all separated children who arrive on our shores.

¹⁰⁸ Department for Education, Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery: Statutory guidance for local authorities

¹⁰⁹ Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children – Hansard – UK Parliament

The UK Government states that separated children currently living in Home Office hotels have 24/7 supervision and support from teams of social workers and nurses.¹¹⁰ However, a report from the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, into the use of hotels for housing separated children found “social workers were located in the hotels, though only during office hours, leading to concerns that the opportunity to assess young people at risk of trafficking had been missed, as by the time the social workers came on shift these young people may have already disappeared”.¹¹¹

Recommendation: Ensure all separated children are taken into care immediately on arrival and have immediate access to a local authority social worker.

Keeping children safe from trafficking

The Illegal Migration Bill also contains worrying implications for child victims of trafficking and modern slavery and child victims of trafficking whose family members meet certain conditions who have their claim deemed inadmissible and their protection disqualified. Separated children’s claims will also be made inadmissible once they turn 18, even if they have previously been identified as a victim of trafficking.

Barnardo’s ICTG service¹¹² supports children to cope with the practical and emotional trauma of being trafficked and helps them to understand and navigate social care services, criminal justice and immigration. Practitioners within the service are already reporting examples of children feeling unwelcome or facing hostility from members of the public. We are concerned this Bill could be used by exploiters as another way of keeping children and young people in their control, for example by threatening them with removal if they were to leave the perpetrator and seek help.

Barnardo’s ICTG service received a referral for Abdi* after he had been reported as missing. Abdi fled the war in Syria and arrived in the UK in January 2022 a few months before his 18th birthday. Abdi was accommodated by a local authority in England where he was supported to access the opticians, dentist, and medical appointments; he was enrolled in college and was attending regularly. Abdi went missing in May a few months after arriving in his placement, he took a bag and clothing with him when he left. Abdi was reported missing the same day and enquiries were made to locate him. At the strategy meeting held after he went missing it was highlighted that shortly before he went missing Abdi had shared his anxieties with his placement worker about news reports that the Home Office would be sending those seeking asylum in the UK to Rwanda and that he could potentially be deported.

*Pseudonym

Child-focused solutions

ECPAT UK is a leading children’s rights organisation working to protect children from trafficking and exploitation. They have been working with young people to identify which distinct outcomes are important and meaningful to them and have contributed to the development of a new ‘Positive Outcomes Framework’ which can be used by practitioners and policymakers when interacting with and supporting young victims of trafficking. The report found that outcomes discussed by young people were rarely linear or confined within short, medium, or long-term framings. Instead, young people discussed how outcomes changed over time alongside their needs and in response to their experience of the systems, people and services they encounter.¹¹³

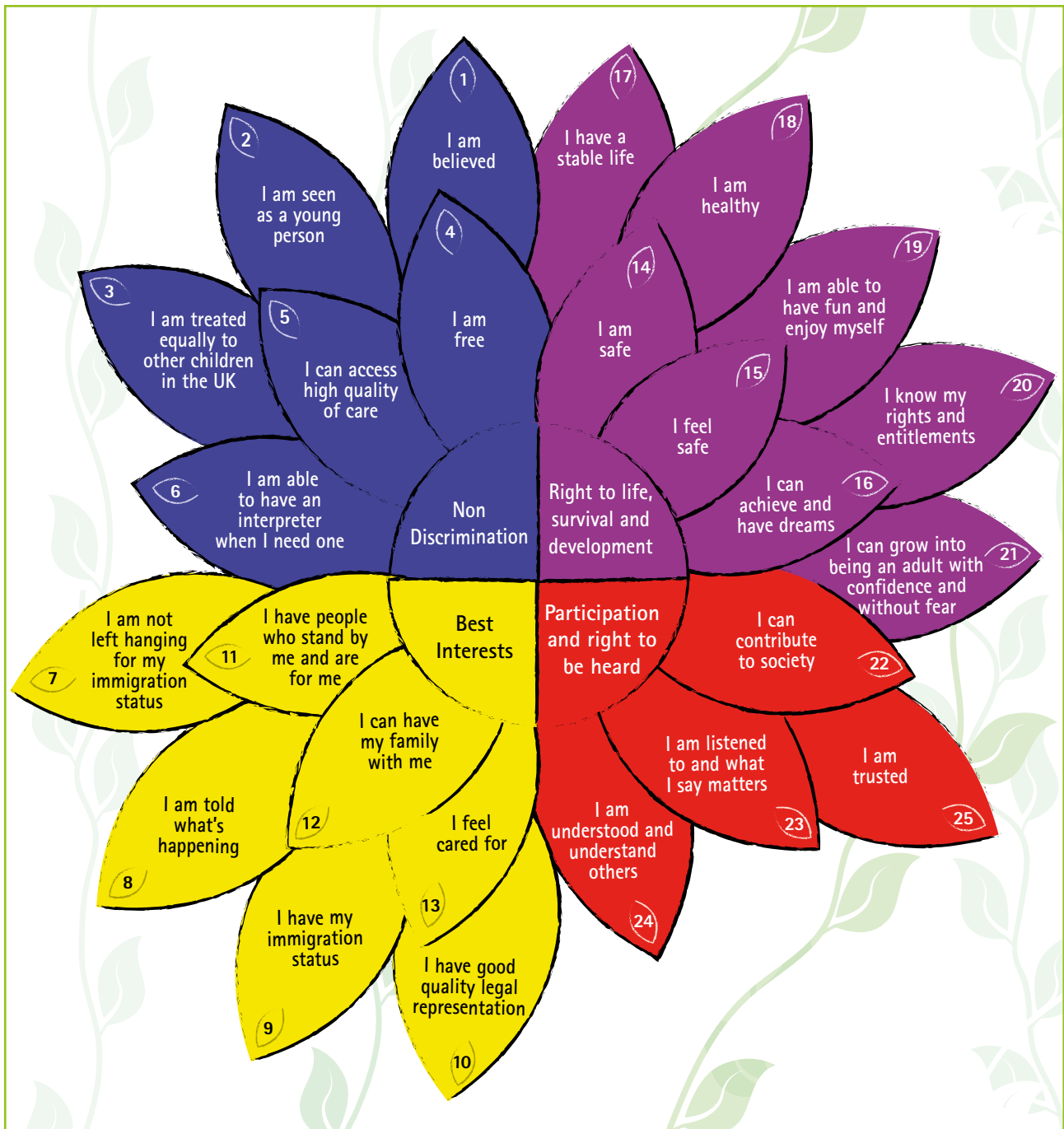
110 [Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children – Hansard – UK Parliament](#)

111 [Inspection of Country of Origin Information \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

112 <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/protecting-children/trafficked-children>

113 [Download.ashx \(ecpat.org.uk\)](https://www.ecpat.org.uk)

Summary photo of ECPAT UK's Positive Outcomes Framework:



Leave to remain

The UK Government must consider a grant of limited leave to remain for child victims of modern slavery and trafficking in line with international law following a positive conclusive grounds NRM decision.¹¹⁴ This is to ensure they can recover from exploitation and transition to adulthood in safety and stability.

However, data obtained by ECPAT UK through a Freedom of Information request showed that between January 2019 and December 2020, only 17 (or about 2%) of child-related considerations

114 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt5802/itselect/jtrights/964/96409.htm>

resulted in a grant of leave to remain as child victims of modern slavery.¹¹⁵ Even in the few cases this leave was granted, it was for a very short period of time and did not lead to a pathway to settlement in line with a child's best interest. Children who are trafficked and meet the criteria for asylum should be able to access that protection and their best interest considered in a grant of leave to remain as child victims, including a pathway to settlement.

Age assessments

“I did not know my date of birth, no-one in my culture did, it had not been shared with me.”

Separated child supported by a Barnardo's service

We are not able to protect and keep children safe when the UK Government is denying they are children in the first place. Many children who come to the UK on their own from countries such as Afghanistan, Sudan and Eritrea are unable to show official identity documents, such as passports or birth certificates, because they have either never had them; they've been destroyed, lost or taken; or the child has been forced to travel on false documentation.¹¹⁶ Without ID, it might be difficult to determine a child's precise age, and many will have their age 'assessed' by the Home Office and/or local authority children's services. Children wrongly treated as adults receive no information or support on how to address what has happened to them and struggle to access legal advice.¹¹⁷

The UK Government's published data does not disaggregate to make clear how many children are treated as adults by Home Office officials, nor how many are subsequently placed in hotels or immigration detention, despite repeated calls from civil society and parliamentarians for this information.¹¹⁸ Data collected by the Helen Bamber Foundation found that in 2022 over

1,300 referrals were made to local authority children's services departments of young people who had been sent to adult asylum accommodation/immigration detention. Of those, two thirds were found to actually be children, meaning over **850 children had been wrongly put into the adult asylum system with no support or protection.**

Many of these children, some as young as 14, have been forced to share rooms with adults.¹¹⁹ Of the 233 young people referred to the Refugee Council in 2021 who had initially been determined by Home Office to 'certainly' be adults, 94% were later found to be children.¹²⁰

The UK Government has emphasised the threat posed by adults who pretend to be children if they are placed in children's settings. But it ignores the real risk of serious harm a child faces when wrongly assessed as an adult and placed in adult accommodation. Horrifyingly, there have been a number of reports of incidents of violence and sexual assault against children in hotels.¹²¹ There are no safeguards in place when a child is living in an adult environment, in contrast, there are safeguarding procedures in children's settings. The Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) has already recognised that treating a child as an adult could result in trauma which may reach the threshold of violating Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and earlier this year, the European Court of Human Rights *Darboe & Camara v Italy* found violations of Articles 3 and 8 after a child was treated as an adult (due to a wrist x-ray) and placed in an adult reception centre.¹²²

115 [New data obtained from the Home Office shows only 2% of child victims of trafficking are given Discretionary Leave to Remain in the UK | ECPAT UK](#)

116 [Children treated as adults_HBF_HFRN_AA_April23.pdf](#) (helenbamber.org)

117 [The risks of age assessments for young asylum seekers – Coram](#) (childrenslegalcentre.com)

118 See Stuart McDonald MP in [Home Affairs Select Committee evidence session on 'The work of the Home Secretary'](#), 23 November 2022

119 <https://www.helenbamber.org/resources/reportsbriefings/disbelieved-and-denied-children-seeking-asylum-wrongly-treated-adults>

120 Refugee Council, [Identity Crisis](#), September 2022

121 The Independent, [Labour MPs raise concerns over welfare of child migrants](#), 7 November 2022

122 [Darboe and Camara v. Italy](#) (coe.int)



Case study from The Refugee Council

A 17-year-old boy arrived in Dover by small boat, having fled Iran. He was mentally and physically exhausted when he arrived. He gave the Immigration Officers his date of birth, but they did not believe him, and said that he looked older than 17. He recalls one particular female Immigration Officer being particularly aggressive towards him.

He was processed as an adult before being transferred to an Immigration Removal Centre several days later. His mental health deteriorated. He described the Removal Centre as “a prison, somewhere meant for people who commit crimes.” He felt confused and scared: “why am I being put there? It is like I am being accused of a crime.”

He recalled telling the detention staff that he was a child and being ignored. The detention environment caused him significant emotional distress. He spent a month in detention before he was supported by the Refugee Council’s Age Dispute project and was taken into care by local Children’s Services. He felt so relieved when he was finally released from detention and placed into child-appropriate accommodation. He said that he finally had some hope, that he felt people were behind him and supporting him. Following a Merton-compliant age assessment, his claimed age as a 17-year-old child was definitively accepted.

Recommendation: Age assessments should only ever be conducted if there is reason to doubt the child’s age and by skilled social workers, whose practice is trauma-informed and child-centred, rooted in child protection. The Home Office should amend its policy on visually assessing age and ensure that all those claiming to be children whose ages are disputed are referred to child protection experts for a further assessment.

Chapter 5: A fairer immigration system

The root cause of many of the issues facing children seeking asylum in the UK is the immigration system. If the asylum system worked as it should, children would get timely decisions on their claims and would be able to focus on family reunion and integration in their new country. Instead, they face uncertainty and struggle to access education, healthcare and trauma informed support. They often spend years fighting for their right to feel safe and settled.

“I was placed in a police station straight away here in the UK, I felt like I did something wrong, I don’t want other children to feel that way. I did not know that coming over to the UK in a boat was illegal, I just wanted a safe haven.”

A separated child supported by Barnardo’s ICTG service.”

Young people are often re-traumatised navigating this complex system, experiencing delays and mistreatment by the Home Office. This affects all aspects of their integration from declining mental health to poor attainment in schools.

The Nationality and Borders Act, followed by the more recent Illegal Migration Bill will only further exacerbate this; removing protections from children and making the asylum system harder to navigate and less fair.

It must be emphasised that merely introducing a handful of safe and legal routes (outlined above), cannot compensate for the lack of a functioning asylum system.

Recommendation: All individuals arriving to the UK should have the ability to claim asylum, regardless of route to entry. Proposals in the Illegal Migration Bill that would introduce a de facto ban on the asylum system and the protections offered by the NRM should be abandoned.

Processing asylum claims

According to the Refugee Council’s analysis,¹²³ at least six out of ten (60%) of all those who made the dangerous Channel crossing to the UK in small boats last year will be recognised as refugees through the asylum process, and four in 10 come from five countries with grant rates of over 90% or 80%. At the same time, the number of people starting new lives in the UK under formal resettlement programmes such as family reunion have fallen dramatically – suggesting that more people seeking refugee status are taking the dangerous Channel journey. Most of those crossing the Channel are people fleeing war-torn or oppressive countries with no safe and formal routes, such as refugee visas, and are, therefore, unable to arrive safely in the UK to seek protection. This is in contrast to those escaping the war in Ukraine, where more than 200,000 visas have been issued under the Government’s UK refugee scheme.

According to Home Office data published quarterly,¹²⁴ at the end of December 2022, there were:

166,300 people awaiting an asylum decision, of whom:

- 161,000 were awaiting an initial decision.
- 5,300 were awaiting the outcome of further review, such as an appeal.

¹²³ <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/resources/the-truth-about-channel-crossings/>

¹²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-december-2022>

- Of those awaiting an initial decision, 68% (110,000 people) had been waiting for more than six months.

The total number of people awaiting an asylum decision more than doubled between 2020 and 2022, from around 70,000 to 166,300. The number of cases waiting more than six months for an initial decision has more than doubled since 2020 and increased nearly ten-fold since 2016, suggesting a growing backlog of older cases. The number of new asylum applications being made has also risen in recent years, and the speed of asylum decision-making has slowed down.¹²⁵

Despite a 62% increase in caseworkers from 2011/12 to 2021/22, decision making rates have decreased by the same amount in this period.¹²⁶ And in December 2022, there were 1,237 caseworkers who made an average of four asylum decisions per month per staff member, compared to 380 caseworkers with a productivity rate of 13.7 decisions in 2011/12.¹²⁷ An inspection of asylum casework by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders (ICIBI) in 2021 noted a number of factors contributing to this decline in productivity including a shortage of technical specialist staff to provide guidance and support to asylum decision makers and conduct quality assurance, inadequate training for asylum interviews, inadequate training for asylum interviews.¹²⁸

A report from the Refugee Council¹²⁹ found the number of children waiting longer than a year for an initial decision has increased more than twelve-fold from 563 children in 2010 to 6,887 in 2020. It was reported that almost 500 children had been waiting for more than three years for an initial decision at the end of December 2020, and 55 of these had been waiting for more than five years. This represents a significant proportion of a child's life lived in legal limbo.

Recommendation: Decisions on children's asylum claims and NRM referrals should be made within six months, and all decisions regarding length of leave must be made with full consideration of what is in the best interests of the child.

Waiting for years on end has a devastating impact on children's mental health and wellbeing. Research has been conducted into the impact of delays on separated children, including by legal and children's organisations. The Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMAIU) report 'Wasted Childhoods'¹³⁰ includes concerns raised by social workers of the damage to mental and physical health and deterioration in engagement with professionals and education provision. Similar concerns relating to mental health have been raised by the Children's Society in their report 'Distress Signals'.¹³¹

We are particularly concerned about the effects the Illegal Migration Bill will have on children, forcing them to live in immigration limbo for years, knowing they will be detained and removed at the age of 18.

Recommendation: The UK Government should recruit, resource and train decision makers adequately to ensure that NRM and asylum decisions are made in a timely manner.

125 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9737/>

126 [Asylum backlog | Institute for Government](#)

127 Ibid.

128 [An inspection of asylum casework \(August 2020 – May 2021\) – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

129 [Living-in-Limbo-A-decade-of-delays-in-the-UK-Asylum-system-July-2021.pdf \(refugeecouncil.org.uk\)](#)

130 <https://gmiau.org/new-report-wasted-childhoods-the-impact-of-covid-19-asylum-delays-on-children/>

131 [distress-signals-report.pdf \(childrensociety.org.uk\)](#)

Access to quality legal advice

ECPAT UK's Creating Stable Futures Positive Outcomes Framework highlights how having good legal representation and not being left waiting endlessly for immigration status are within the 'best interests' of what the child wants.¹³²

Access to quality legal advice is essential to anyone who is presenting their asylum claim. The UK system is very complex, many people don't speak English or not well enough to self-advocate and reference case law in support of their claims. The onus is on the claimant to prove their case. Many people are forced to flee with only clothes on their backs and often loose documents as they travel to safety. An experienced legal advocate can help people put their cases in chronological and logical order, making it easier for the Home Office to decide on a person's case.

However, finding a good lawyer under the legal aid contract is far from easy.¹³³ Children's asylum claims require more experience and time to prepare, for example because children may not have an understanding of why they might be at risk. There is also an issue of the impact of trauma on memory.¹³⁴ Considering all these factors, work with a child requires a special set of skills that not many legal advisers have.

Recommendation: Ensure all children seeking asylum have access to immediate and quality free legal advice.



132 [Download.ashx \(ecpat.org.uk\)](https://www.ecpat.org.uk/download.ashx)

133 Wilding, Jo (2019) *Droughts and deserts: a report on the immigration legal aid market*. Technical Report. University of Sussex.

134 Given-Wilson, Z., Hodes, M. & Herlihy, J. A review of adolescent autobiographical memory and the implications for assessment of unaccompanied minors' refugee determinations. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104517748697>

Conclusion

“Please look after this bear, thank you”, is written on the label around Paddington’s neck as he arrives to London Paddington Railway Station.

This symbol is perhaps even more relevant today than it was when *A Bear Called Paddington*, Michael Bond’s first Paddington novel was published in 1958. It is a plea to uphold values such as kindness, compassion and humanity.

As we advocate for durable solutions that would fix a broken asylum system, we can also take some learnings from the Paddington story, which so many of us grew up reading as children and perhaps are now reading to our children and grandchildren.

A comprehensive and resourced strategy for displaced people, which includes a framework for integration of refugee children and their families by all agencies who have the responsibility to meet their needs, while aspirational, will have limited success without the acceptance and participation of local communities.¹³⁵ Communities must be encouraged, enabled, and supported to understand the trauma, needs and aspirations that people seeking safety have. As a country, we need to work together to provide safe and stable futures for children who went through unimaginable horrors; a warm welcome that will help them succeed in life and realise their dreams.



135 Wilding, Jo (2019) Droughts and deserts: a report on the immigration legal aid market. Technical Report. University of Sussex.

About Barnardo's

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. In 2021-22, we reached 357,000 children, young people, parents and carers through our 794 services and partnerships across the UK. Our goal is to achieve better outcomes for more children. To achieve this, we work with partners to build stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures.

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Believe in children



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