



Department  
for Education



Home Office

# **Safeguarding Strategy**

**Unaccompanied asylum seeking and  
refugee children**

**November 2017**

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## Joint ministerial foreword

Unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children can be some of the most vulnerable children in our society. They are alone and in an unfamiliar country, at the end of what could have been a long, perilous and traumatic journey. Some of these children may have experienced exploitation or persecution in their home country or on their journey to the UK. Some may have been trafficked, and many more are at risk of being trafficked, being exploited in other ways, or going missing once they arrive in the UK.

We must remember that they are children. It is true that their immigration status will have an impact on their future, but they should not be defined solely by their status as an asylum seeking or refugee child. They are children who are likely to have faced many difficulties in their lives and will need to be cared for while they are in the UK. They are children who will need access to education and a range of public services to offer them the support and accommodation they need to promote their safety, health and wellbeing.

The UK has a proud history of offering this support to people fleeing persecution and war. In addition to the Government's own commitments, we will continue to bring together the voluntary sector, community groups and individuals to galvanise the huge generosity and will of the British people to help the most vulnerable unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children.

Our vision and commitment to caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children – through whatever route they arrive – is set out in this strategy.

The Government's commitment to not incentivising dangerous travel, to resettling the most vulnerable directly from conflict regions, and safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children in the UK, remains the right one.

The success of this strategy will not rest with central government alone. It relies on all the many partners who play a role in caring for these children and we would like to take the opportunity to thank all the local authorities, non-governmental organisations and carers who have helped us develop this strategy. We would also like to express our thanks and gratitude to Edward Timpson for all of his work supporting vulnerable children, and our thanks to Lord Dubs for being a tireless advocate for unaccompanied and refugee children.

We are pleased that we can fulfil the commitment to publish this strategy, set out in a joint Written Ministerial Statement in November 2016, in our new roles as Minister of State for Children and Families and Immigration Minister.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, loopy initial 'R' followed by several overlapping loops and a final downward stroke.

**Robert Goodwill MP**  
**Minister of State for Children and Families**

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a large, stylized 'B' that loops around, followed by the letters 'ran' and a long horizontal tail stroke.

**Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP**  
**Minister of State for Immigration**

# 1 Introduction

The rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children in the UK in recent years, and a complex, rapidly-changing international situation, have highlighted challenges specific to this group of children. We are committed to addressing these challenges.

This strategy sets out the additional actions that the Government will take to safeguard and promote the welfare of these children, in recognition of the increasing numbers and specific needs of unaccompanied children<sup>1</sup> in the UK, unaccompanied children arriving through a legal pathway and unaccompanied children arriving clandestinely.

Our aspiration is that all unaccompanied children have access to the care, services and support they need, with a more equal distribution of caring responsibilities across the UK. This means no one local authority should be caring for a disproportionate number of unaccompanied children. We want every local authority to feel capable of supporting their welfare needs, with professionals in place with the right skills, training and experience to deliver high quality care. And we want to ensure that children have access to high quality placements and support that meets their needs and helps them fulfil their long-term potential – whether their future is in the UK or elsewhere.

## Background

In 2015 and 2016, the number of unaccompanied and separated children claiming asylum in the EU was 160,000. Over the same period, over 6,000 unaccompanied children claimed asylum in the UK, approximately 4% of the total claims in the EU.<sup>2</sup>

The migration crisis has seen the plight of unaccompanied children given particular focus. The Government is clear about our moral responsibility to assist those who are suffering as a result of world conflict. There are safe, legal routes by which people, including children, in need of international protection can be resettled in the UK, thereby avoiding people risking their lives by making dangerous journeys to Europe. These include the Gateway and Mandate schemes as well as the Vulnerable Person's Scheme, of which around 50% of people resettled will be children, and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement schemes. We will resettle over 23,000 people by 2020.

Our resettlement schemes are in addition to accepting responsibility for the asylum claims of unaccompanied children with family in the UK, as set out in the EU's Dublin Regulation, and section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'unaccompanied children' is used frequently in this document to refer to unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children.

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_quarterly\\_report](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report)

The rapid increase in the number of unaccompanied children arriving in the UK has placed some local authorities, who have traditionally supported a large number of unaccompanied children, at risk of becoming overwhelmed. In response to this emerging situation, the Government introduced the National Transfer Scheme: a voluntary transfer arrangement between local authorities to ensure a more even distribution of caring responsibilities across the country. The introduction of the National Transfer Scheme coincided with the introduction of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 to transfer a specified number of unaccompanied children from Europe.

### Key facts

- Of the 72,670 children being looked after by local authorities at 31 March 2017, 4,560 were unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This was a 6% increase in looked after unaccompanied asylum seeking children from the previous year. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017>)
- At 31 March 2017, unaccompanied asylum seeking children represent 6% of the looked after children population. As a percentage of all looked after children, this has returned to the level seen in 2009. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017>)
- There were 2,944 asylum claims from unaccompanied children in the year ending June 2017, a 17% decrease compared to the previous year (3,545). Overall, claims from unaccompanied children represented 11% of all main claims for asylum. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2017/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to>)
- At 31 March 2017, 78% of unaccompanied asylum seeking children were aged 16 years of age and over, with 22% aged under 16 years. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017>)
- We transferred over 900 children from Europe in 2016, including over 750 children as part of the UK's support to the clearance of the Calais camp. (<https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2017/02/24/fact-sheet-government-support-for-vulnerable-children/>)
- An unaccompanied asylum seeking child is defined as an individual who is:
  - under 18 years of age when the claim is submitted;
  - applying for asylum in their own right;
  - separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so.

## The purpose of the strategy

We have robust systems in place in the UK for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. Our reforms to improve children's social care, as set out in *Putting Children First* (2016), and in provisions in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 will benefit vulnerable children. This includes reforms to ensure the children's social care workforce has the right knowledge and skills, with leaders who are equipped to support and nurture practice excellence, and a new set of 'corporate parenting principles' to which local authorities must have regard as they take on the role of parent to looked after children – including unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

But we know there are particular issues and challenges facing these children and the professionals and carers who work with them. This strategy sets out the future actions the Government will take to address the specific challenges they face through:

- improving the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking children by increasing placement capacity, improving the skills and confidence of foster carers to care for them, and reviewing funding available to local authorities;
- supporting professionals caring and working with these children through revised guidance, information and resources;
- improving the information and advice available to children and families who are reunited through the Dublin Regulation;
- preventing children from going missing including improvements to initial information collection and information sharing between agencies;
- improving the processes for transfer of children from Europe and supporting local authorities to assess and provide support for both them and their families; and
- strengthening transparency and accountability through publication of data and reports to the four UK Children's Commissioners and Parliament.

Whilst immigration and asylum is a reserved matter for the UK Government, child protection and children's social care is mainly devolved. The actions in this strategy relate to asylum and immigration therefore apply to the UK (excluding the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies), whilst actions related to children's social care relate to England only. Annex A sets out the approach of the Devolved Administrations.

The UK is committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The overarching principle of acting in the best interests of the child has been at the heart of our approach in developing this strategy. We recognise that all children need to be protected from harm, their views heard and acted upon, and to have consistent support provided for their individual needs.

We have consulted widely with local authorities, NGOs and carers to develop the strategy and will continue to work closely with these partners to ensure successful delivery of our ambitions. We will keep the strategy under review to ensure that any new or emerging issues preventing these children from thriving are appropriately addressed.



## 2 Improving the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking children

- An unaccompanied child is entitled to the same local authority support as any other looked after child, and our ambitions for these children are the same: to have a safe and stable placement, to receive the care that they need to thrive, and the support they need to fulfil their educational and other outcomes.
- At 31 March 2017 the number of looked after unaccompanied asylum seeking children increased by 6% compared to 2016: up to 4,560 from 4,300 children. 2016 had seen an increase of 56% compared to 2015: 4,300 children at 31 March 2016 from 2,750 in 2015 and up from a low of 1,950 in 2013.  
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017>)
- We are committed to improving the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking children by increasing placement capacity, improving the skills and confidence of foster carers to care for them, and reviewing funding available to local authorities.

### The National Transfer Scheme

The National Transfer Scheme was launched in July 2016 and has successfully transferred a large number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children away from local authorities in England caring for disproportionate numbers. In transferring unaccompanied children we continue to work towards a more equal distribution of caring responsibilities across the UK, to ensure that unaccompanied children are given the care they need.

The National Transfer Scheme protocol sets out the responsibilities of the Home Office and participating local authorities who are involved in transferring unaccompanied asylum seeking children from one local authority to another. We want to explore ways in which we can strengthen the scheme to build on the regional and child-centred approach and will take forward this work with partners.

The legislation underpinning the National Transfer Scheme currently only extends to England. We have always been clear that the National Transfer Scheme should be a national scheme and are committed to extending the provisions in the Immigration Act 2016 to the rest of the UK as soon as possible.

### Increasing fostering capacity

Local authorities are required, under the Children Act 1989, to take strategic action to ensure sufficient numbers and diversity of placements for looked after children in their

area. Data does not indicate that there is a national shortage of foster carers<sup>3</sup> (there are more registered fostering placements than there are children being fostered), but gaining a real-time picture of capacity is difficult, and local authorities report that placements are not necessarily available in the geographical area they are needed at the right time. Local authorities also report shortages of carers for certain placement types, including for teenagers or sibling groups.

The increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children has highlighted wider issues with the fostering system, such as how local authorities undertake their duties on sufficiency planning, commissioning practices, and the support foster carers receive. Such issues shape capacity and are not restricted to unaccompanied children.

The National Fostering Stocktake was launched in April 2017 and is a fundamental review of the fostering system in England, being led by independent reviewer Sir Martin Narey, supported by Mark Owers. The Stocktake will consider the current provision and identify what is working well and where improvements can be made, culminating in a report and recommendations for government by the end of 2017. It is important that issues about capacity in the fostering system are considered strategically in the round, to ensure that foster care works as well as it can for all children, whatever their background and needs.

In the short term, we will build capacity in the fostering system by supporting local areas to recruit and retain foster carers with both the motivation and the skills to look after unaccompanied children. To achieve this we will:

- work with NGOs in the sector to promote myth busting resources on fostering, including what is involved in caring for unaccompanied children. The resources will address specific concerns we know that carers have such as concerns about age assessments and safeguarding children from radicalisation. They will be made available to local authorities to support the recruitment of carers and can be tailored to meet local need; and we will
- support the Muslim Fostering Project research, delivered by the Fostering Network and funded by Better Communities Business Network (BCBN) to ensure that all local authorities know how to access evidence-based resources to reach and recruit new Muslim foster carers.

## **Training for existing foster carers**

Increasing the capacity of foster care for unaccompanied children also means providing high quality training to existing carers, so they have the skills and confidence to look after these children. We know that one of the risk factors associated with unaccompanied

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-in-england-1-april-2015-to-31-march-2016/fostering-in-england-2015-to-2016-key-findings>

children going missing is having carers who are not able to develop trusting relationships and who are not adequately trained to understand the experiences and risks they face including the child's vulnerability to exploitation or radicalisation.

In 2016 we commissioned ECPAT and the Refugee Council to train foster carers and support workers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who are at risk of going missing from care due to being trafficked. The training aimed to increase awareness of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and enable both foster carers and support workers to be more alert to children's specific needs, to recognise the indicators and impact of trafficking, and to apply practical support to prevent them from going missing. 1,230 people were trained. Independent evaluation of the training showed that participants felt more confident following the training and 99% of participants said that the course had assisted them in their role in looking after these children.

Demand for training has exceeded the number of places available. We have consulted the regional Strategic Migration Partnerships, who monitor the training needs of local authorities in their area, and will:

- commission a further 1,000 training places. These will be allocated to each local authority according to the number of places they have pledged to the National Transfer Scheme.

## **Encouraging the provision of supported lodgings**

Supported lodgings play an important role in meeting the needs of unaccompanied children. This type of placement is where a young person over the age of 16 lives in a family home but with a lower level of monitoring than in foster care. Local authorities have told us that this provision can be particularly appropriate for unaccompanied children but that it is under-used. Local authorities indicate that this placement type would be commissioned more frequently if they had access to high quality providers and were reassured that Ofsted consider this type of provision appropriate.

Discussions with local authorities and NGOs have highlighted that, whilst the public know about the option of becoming a foster carer, there is little awareness that being a supported lodging host is an option or how to find a provider to work within their local area. While those wanting to help may decide that being a foster carer of an unaccompanied asylum seeking child is not the right choice for them, they may consider that being a supported lodging host is more viable. To encourage the use of supported lodgings, where appropriate, we will:

- continue to work with a number of NGOs to develop information and good practice resources that will be shared with local authorities through existing networks, websites and events. The resources will explain how supported lodgings can be used appropriately to place unaccompanied children and will help local authorities to recruit new hosts and to work with supported lodgings service providers;

- work with NGOs and local authorities to identify a single point of contact in each local authority and make this available to the public so prospective hosts can be signposted to advice and information; and
- will work with NGOs to develop information and good practice resources on high quality supported accommodation to be shared with local authorities. Supported accommodation differs from supported lodgings, in that it typically has multiple rooms and young people provide peer support to each other. Staff are available on site and typically have experience in helping young people to settle in and begin to develop independent skills.

## **Funding to support unaccompanied and refugee children**

Local authorities caring for unaccompanied children are able to claim funding from the Home Office for each day they are looking after them. The funding covers accommodation, social work and administrative support and amounts to £41,610 per annum for an unaccompanied child under 16 and £33,215 per annum for an unaccompanied child aged 16 and 17. In addition, for those unaccompanied children who have reached the age of 18 and go on to attract leaving care support, the Home Office provides funding of £200 per week.

The Government is committed to reviewing the funding that is available to support and care for unaccompanied asylum seeking children on an ongoing basis. The funding review will conclude by the start of the financial year 2018-19.

## 3 Supporting professionals working with children and young people

- Many local authorities, school, health services, immigration officials and the police deliver excellent services to support unaccompanied children - in addition to the vital role played by the voluntary and community sector.
- Recent legislative changes, such as the Modern Slavery Act 2015, introduction of the National Transfer Scheme, and events around the recent migration crisis have led to more professionals across the country coming into contact with unaccompanied and refugee children. For some local authorities and professionals, providing support to unaccompanied children will be a new experience.
- We are committed to ensuring that guidance and support is as clear and useful as possible to support professionals, whatever agency or organisation they work in. We have worked closely with organisations, including local authorities who are very experienced in looking after unaccompanied children, and those who are new to this, to understand what would be of most use to them to help them in their duties.

### Revised statutory guidance for local authorities

*Statutory guidance on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children* was first published in 2014. The guidance sets out the steps local authorities should take to plan for the provision of support for looked after children who are unaccompanied asylum seeking children, unaccompanied migrant children or child victims of modern slavery including trafficking.

Since summer 2016 we have worked with an Expert Reference Group comprising of: local authorities with high numbers of unaccompanied children; the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS); the Local Government Association (LGA); NGOs working with unaccompanied and trafficked children; and other government departments. The Expert Reference Group – and a public consultation conducted in March 2017 – concluded that the guidance needed revision to reference new legislation, to describe the range of children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers more accurately, and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of local authorities regarding their overarching duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of unaccompanied looked after children who need to be able to navigate the asylum and immigration systems.

The guidance has been subject to a substantial revision to address the above points and is now available on gov.uk. We will work with the ADCS, LGA and other key partners to ensure that the guidance is promoted and used to shape care services for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children.

## Supporting local authority interaction with asylum and immigration processes

It can be a challenge for social workers to fully understand their role in supporting unaccompanied children through the asylum process. Whilst local authorities are not required to be the experts on asylum and immigration, they need to be in a position to be able to help children understand what is happening to them, to be able to reassure them, and to support them to navigate a complex system. We will therefore:

- develop downloadable training resources to enable social workers to understand the detail of when and how they are required to be involved in a child's asylum claim; and
- commission the development and dissemination of good practice resources for social workers and personal advisers who need to undertake "triple pathway planning" for unaccompanied children. Triple plans cover any of the eventualities faced by children who have an uncertain future and who: may be returned home when they reach 18; or stay in the UK pending a further decision; or stay after being granted leave.

## Supporting other professionals

The National Transfer Scheme protocol sets out the responsibilities of the Home Office and participating local authorities who are involved in transferring unaccompanied asylum seeking children from one local authority to another. The Home Office Processing Children's Asylum Claims Guidance describes the end to end process that Home Office staff, responsible for handling asylum claims from unaccompanied children, must follow. The guidance includes comprehensive instructions for staff to ensure children claiming asylum are safeguarded.<sup>4</sup>

As looked after children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children will have access to the same entitlements and support, including support from the Virtual School Heads – local authorities in England are required to appoint at least one person to discharge their duty to promote the educational achievement of their looked after children. Virtual School Heads manage the Pupil Premium Plus for looked after children and local authorities receive £1,900 per looked after child aged 4-15.

Guidance for Virtual School Heads, and for the Designated Teacher for looked after children (who is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of looked after children on the school roll in every school) is being revised in light of changes in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. We will ensure that the specific needs of unaccompanied children are reflected in the revised guidance and will look for other opportunities in central government guidance – for example in forthcoming revisions to *Working Together to Safeguard Children*.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/processing-an-asylum-application-from-a-child-instruction>

## 4 Information and advice for children and families

- Unaccompanied children may be unfamiliar with systems in the UK and may be mistrustful of officials depending on their treatment in their country of origin and in transit to the UK. Whatever their entry route into the UK, children may need help to understand where they are, what their rights and entitlements are, and support to understand what will happen to them next.
- We are committed to ensuring that children receive clear and accurate information in a format they are able to understand to enable them to navigate the immigration system and public services in the UK and to adapt to their new environment.

### Information on rights and entitlements

There are many different ways that an unaccompanied child may come to the attention of the authorities. Some children may enter the UK through one of our legal routes including Resettlement programmes directly from conflict regions, transfer from Europe under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 or the family reunion element of the Dublin Regulation. Unaccompanied children may present at a port of entry, or at one of the main asylum intake units. Equally they may come to the attention of police following clandestine arrival or through an Immigration Enforcement operation. When an unaccompanied child first comes to the attention of the authorities they will receive a range of different information both verbally and in writing.

Regardless of their method of arrival we recognise that there is no one document which sets out for the child a description of what will happen next, their rights and entitlements and the role of the different agencies and people that they will come into contact with – as well as their need to engage with the process and how to do so. We have been working with a range of stakeholders to:

- produce a document which provides this valuable information in an accessible and easy to understand way. It will be reproduced in a number of different languages (reflecting the main nationalities represented in those unaccompanied children claiming asylum) and will be available online to ensure the information reaches all of those it is intended for. We will test the information with unaccompanied children in order to ensure the information is appropriately pitched and presented in a way that helps to communicate key messages.

## Information on what it means to be ‘looked after’

Children who enter care may have had months or years of being completely independent while they travelled to the UK, and may be unaware of what it means to be “looked after”. An equivalent to children’s social care may not exist in their country of origin, and they may have no concept of what to expect – or what will be expected of them. We will therefore:

- work with NGOs and experienced local authorities to develop information which can be given to children across the country about what it means to be a looked after child.

## Children’s Commissioners

The Children’s Commissioners are independent holders of public office whose respective remits extend to England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The statutory functions of the Commissioners differ but all centre upon the promotion and protection of the rights of children within their jurisdiction, with particular regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes listening to and enabling the voices of children and young people and encouraging adults who make decisions which will affect them to always take their best interests into account.

Each of the Commissioners in the UK is responsible for working on behalf of children within their jurisdictions, in particular, those whose voices are least likely to be heard, where this is appropriate and in accordance with their statutory remit. They will have a particular focus on those who may be at risk of having their rights infringed.

The Children and Families Act (2014) strengthened the independence and powers of the Office of the Children’s Commissioner in England. The Children’s Commissioner can carry out assessments of the impact of new policies and legislation on children’s rights, has the power to carry out investigations that have wider implications for children’s rights, and may choose to publish reports on particular matters relating to the interests of children. The Commissioner also has powers to offer advice or assistance to any child living away from home or receiving social care - including unaccompanied asylum seeking children.



## 5 Protection and safeguarding

- Whether unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children arrive via the Government's Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme directly from conflict regions, are transferred from elsewhere in Europe, or claim asylum when they reach the UK, ensuring they are properly safeguarded requires a swift and co-ordinated response. Unaccompanied children can be highly vulnerable and can be particularly at risk of going missing due to trafficking and exploitation.
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children is a key duty on local authorities and requires effective joint working between agencies and professionals. From the point at which they come into first contact with officials, to their placement in safe and appropriate accommodation with their health, educational and other needs adequately supported, clear pathways and clearly defined legal responsibility is vital.
- 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.

### Preventing children from going missing

When any looked after child goes missing or runs away they are at risk. Local authorities are responsible for protecting children whether they go missing from their family home or from local authority care and will refer to DfE *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care* (2014). The Home Office coordinates the cross-Government work to support missing children, adults and their families. Many existing programmes of activity, including training funded by the Department for Education for foster carers and support workers, look to raise awareness of child trafficking as a factor for children going missing.

Any unaccompanied child is highly vulnerable and should they go missing they are at risk of being exploited or mistreated. We have worked closely with local authorities to identify further action that might be taken to prevent unaccompanied asylum seeking or refugee children going missing and many of the actions outlined in other parts of this strategy are aimed at tackling this risk of children going missing and have been generated in collaboration with local authorities.

One of the risk factors associated with unaccompanied children going missing is having carers who are not able to develop trusting relationships and who are not adequately trained to understand the experiences and risks they face. The training we will

commission and support, as set out in Chapter 2, to increase placement capacity should help to address this.

Local authorities told us that unaccompanied children sometimes go missing because they are worried that they will not be granted leave to stay in the UK and will be sent back to their country of origin. As set out in Chapter 3, triple plans cover any of the eventualities faced by children who have an uncertain future and who: may be returned home when they reach 18, stay in the UK pending a further decision, or stay after being granted leave. The good practice resources that we will develop on 'triple planning' will help social workers reassure unaccompanied children that they have support and need not run away and to build resilience in this group of children.

Local authorities told us that unaccompanied children sometimes go missing because they feel unsupported in their application for asylum. As set out in Chapter 3, the downloadable training resources to enable social workers to understand the detail of when and how they are required to be involved in a child's asylum claim will help social workers support children.

Local authorities also told us that children go missing because after months or years of being independent while they travelled to the UK, children can be unaware of what it means to be "looked after". They may be unaware that they need to communicate their whereabouts to carers and the local authority for example. As set out in Chapter 4, the information we will provide for children about what it means to be 'looked after' will help address this, and will provide numbers for children to ring if they do go missing but want to return home.

Our discussions with local authorities and other partners have also highlighted that there is a lot more to know about what works effectively to prevent unaccompanied children from going missing including a need for evidence from frontline services. We will therefore work across government to:

- undertake deep dives in local authorities with high numbers of missing unaccompanied children and share findings on risk factors and effective responses.

## **Standardised police procedures related to unaccompanied children**

When an unaccompanied child first interacts with the police, they may be mistrustful of authority, unclear about what will happen to them, and need reassurance and support. To strengthen that initial interaction with newly arrived unaccompanied migrant children, we are working to develop consistent welfare processes across all Police Forces and Home Office Departments for first responders who encounter arriving unaccompanied migrant children. We are piloting a new welfare approach with police forces.

To address these concerns we have been working with a range of partners and will:

- pilot a new standardised process for police when they first encounter an unaccompanied child which has a minimum standard of biometric recording, with the primary focus on safeguarding and information gathering prior to handing over to children's services; and
- introduce a new welfare form, primarily focused on safeguarding the child and completed by the first responder. This will be completed through a conversation rather than a questioning style approach, to allow the child the opportunity to express any needs, concerns or worries and will facilitate a relationship of trust between the professional and the child. The conversation will provide the child with a thorough explanation of the services to which he/she is entitled.

The new standardised procedures will ensure that the child is aware of the next steps with the aim of preventing the child going missing from children's services care. The child's environment and welfare is paramount and our focus will be to ensure that their identity, nationality, details, welfare and family ties or links are all accurately recorded. In all cases, this data will be shared with children services and relevant departments.

## 6 Reviewing processes for children in Europe

- The Dublin Regulation establishes the EU Member State responsible for the examination of the asylum application. We remain committed to fulfilling our obligations under the Dublin Regulation and continue to work with our European partners to ensure that those children with close family members in the UK can be brought here to have their asylum claim assessed.
- We are committed to continuing this collaborative approach overcoming barriers to the timely and efficient operation of the Dublin Regulation. We are working with key partners to increase capacity for family tracing, information provision, and other ideas put forward to ensure children are supported and transferred to the UK where they have a right to do so and in accordance with their best interests.
- As this is a new area of work, little is currently known about the experiences of children once they are in the UK. We will therefore work with local authorities and other partners to understand what further support is needed for these children and their families.

### The timely and efficient operation of the Dublin Regulation

The Government is working with other EU Member States and relevant partner organisations to ensure the efficient operation of the Dublin Regulation<sup>5</sup> at all stages of the transfer process. This includes official-level visits to confirm the process for identifying, assessing and transferring children and we are developing a collaborative approach to overcoming barriers to implementation. These efforts are supported through the secondment of experts to Greece and Italy to work with officials to facilitate the transfer of children under the family reunion elements of the Dublin Regulation and under section 67 of the Immigration Act.

In partnership with international organisations and NGOs based in the UK, we have convened a group to review the processes for transferring children from Europe under Dublin and to develop a collective approach to ensure its efficient operation. Specific areas of focus include:

- supporting family tracing and evidence to demonstrate family links; and

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<sup>5</sup> Article 8 of the Dublin Regulation relates to Member States' responsibilities for assessing minors' asylum claims: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013R0604>

- increasing processing capabilities to ensure children are supported and transferred quickly and in accordance with their best interests.

## Supporting children and families

Reuniting children and families under the Dublin Regulation is a new area of activity for local authorities and more guidance is needed regarding the types of assessments they need to conduct before the child can be reunited with relatives and the level of support that they will need to provide children and families after they have been reunited. Organisations working with Dublin families have also told us that children and families are not always aware of what support is available to them.

Very little is known about the experience and needs of children who have been transferred to the UK to live with relatives, and no national ongoing data is currently being collected on this cohort. We do know that some young people who were brought to the UK, with the intention of being reunited with family, are now being looked after by a local authority because these arrangements broke down – but little is known about how frequent this is or the reasons why the planned arrangements did not work. To tackle these issues we will:

- revise the family and friends care statutory guidance for local authorities to explicitly address the needs of this new cohort;
- work with local authorities and NGOs to develop information that can be given to children and families regarding what support and help is available to them; and
- commission external research to develop a clear picture of their experience and a comprehensive understanding of the impact and challenges facing local authorities which are supporting them.

## 7 Implementation and measuring progress

### Improving transparency and measuring progress

During development of the strategy we have consulted each Devolved Administration, and a range of relevant bodies across the UK. We have provided an update to each Children's Commissioner outlining progress in the development of the strategy. As we implement the strategy's commitments we will:

- report quarterly to each Children's Commissioner on progress against delivery of the commitments until delivery is complete;
- provide annual updates to Parliament on delivery against the strategy and we will encourage the Commissioners to consider and respond to these;
- publish data on the children transferred from elsewhere in the EU to the UK; and
- begin to publish data on the number of children transferred within the UK under the National Transfer Scheme. This will allow the Government, local authorities and other agencies to appropriately target support to ensure that the individual needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children are met.

### Delivery of the strategy

This strategy has been developed in partnership between the Department for Education and the Home Office and in collaboration with local authorities, representative organisations and practitioners. We will continue to work closely together throughout the delivery of the strategy and have improved organisational structures across Government to ensure delivery – bringing together a number of common themes, including safeguarding vulnerable people, working with local authorities and delivery partners to better support the wellbeing and security of service users and communities.

We will keep the actions in the strategy under review, working closely with the partners we rely on, to ensure that appropriate responses are in place for any emerging issues. We are committed to learning from what works and to looking holistically at the needs of unaccompanied children. The Vulnerable Person's and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement schemes, for example, are being evaluated to understand the effectiveness of different local delivery models at facilitating integration and will identify opportunities for future improvement. This activity will focus on families that are resettled through the schemes but learning will be applied, as appropriate, across our range of resettlement and transfer schemes to ensure successful delivery of our ambitions for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children.

## 8 Commitments in the strategy

### Improving the care of unaccompanied children

- We will work with Fosterline, The Fostering Network and others in the sector to promote myth busting resources on fostering unaccompanied children.
- We will work with the Muslim Fostering Project and Fostering Network to promote evidence-based resources on recruiting new Muslim carers.
- We will commission 1,000 training places for foster carers and support workers caring for unaccompanied children.
- We will work with NGOs to develop information and good practice resources to promote the use of supported lodgings and supported accommodation.
- We will identify a single contact for supported lodgings in each local authority and make this available to the public to aid recruitment of prospective hosts.
- We will regularly review the local authority funding available to support and care for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children.

### Supporting professionals working with children and young people

- We are publishing revised statutory guidance to clarify the role and responsibilities of local authorities and other agencies.
- We will work with local authorities to share good practice resources for social workers and personal advisers on “triple pathway planning” for unaccompanied children.
- We will develop downloadable training resources to enable social workers to understand when and how they should be involved in a child’s immigration claim.

### Information and advice for children and families

- We will work with international organisations, NGOs and experienced local authorities to develop information which can be given to children about what it means to be a looked after child.
- We will continue to work with a range of stakeholders to produce an accessible and easy to understand document which provides information to unaccompanied children

on their rights and entitlements, the role of the different agencies and people that they may come into contact with, and how to engage with the asylum process.

## **Protection and safeguarding**

- We will work with local authorities with high numbers of missing unaccompanied children to understand and identify risk factors and effective responses.
- We will pilot a standardised process for police when they first encounter an unaccompanied child.

## **Reviewing processes for children in Europe**

- We will work with key NGOs to ensure the efficient and timely operation of the Dublin Regulation for children with a right to have their asylum claim transferred to the UK.
- We will continue to build our already strong working relationships with EU partners to ensure the Dublin Regulation operates efficiently, through regular meetings and dialogue with key Member States.
- We will revise the family and friends care statutory guidance for local authorities to explicitly address the needs of this new cohort.
- We will work with NGOs to develop information for children and families reunited under the Dublin Regulation regarding what support and help is available to them.
- To inform future support for children and families reunited under the Dublin Regulation, we will commission research on the experience of children and the local authorities supporting them.

## **Implementation and measuring progress**

- We will report quarterly to the UK Children's Commissioners on progress against delivery of the commitments until delivery is complete.
- We will provide annual updates to Parliament on delivery against the strategy.
- We will publish data on the children transferred from elsewhere in the EU to the UK.
- We will publish data on the number of children transferred within the UK under the National Transfer Scheme.



- We will evaluate existing immigration schemes to understand the effectiveness of different local delivery models at facilitating integration and opportunities for future improvement. Learning will be applied, as appropriate, across our range of resettlement and transfer schemes.

# Annex A: Supporting unaccompanied children in the Devolved Administrations

## Wales

The Welsh Government has developed policy and law in a number of areas relating to the care and support of children and young people, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 provides the legal framework for social care and unaccompanied children have the same entitlements as looked after children in respect of safeguarding, protection, advocacy and other support and in relation to other public services. The Welsh Government is proud that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is enshrined within this legislation and that Welsh Ministers have a duty to consider the rights of children in all of the policy and law they develop. Welsh Government recognises however that there are specific needs to be met among this cohort and this work needs to be undertaken both in respect of devolved public services and in working with the UK Government on matters relating to immigration and asylum.

Fostering capacity, training for foster carers, the provision of appropriate accommodation, preventing unaccompanied children from going missing and reuniting unaccompanied children with their families, are all areas worthy of policy focus. These also are all areas where Welsh Government has developed policy responses and where a Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children, oversees and scrutinises progress in delivering on a number of work strands. One such work strand is in respect of delivering for unaccompanied children. In addition, the Children's sub-group of the Welsh Government Refugees and Asylum Seekers Operations Board, is in the process of reviewing its Terms of Reference and membership. Its work to date has focussed on the Syrian Resettlement Programme and the transfer of unaccompanied asylum seeking children from Europe.

Existing policy responses include the development of a National Fostering Framework which will be implemented during 2017-18. The framework is a collaborative enterprise between local government and other key partners, supported by the Welsh Government. It seeks to increase capacity within the fostering sector, improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers, and improve outcomes for children and young people in foster placements and leaving care. Key to success will be more collaborative working at a regional level on issues such as recruitment, training and specialist placements, including those for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Another response is the All-Wales National Action Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation which sets out ways of supporting those who are suffering, or at risk of suffering, from this appalling form of child abuse. This plan is another collaborative exercise and was produced in partnership with a range of police and justice organisations and health and social care organisations in the statutory and third sectors. Other work

includes updating our existing core guidance for professionals working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Wales, the All Wales Practice Guidance on Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People and other All Wales Child Protection Procedures; and responding to the unaccompanied children related recommendations of the National Assembly for Wales Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee report in to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Wales 'I Used to be Someone', notably the development of a Guardianship Service.

Welsh Government is considering a number of proposals for the development of resources and research in these areas. This work will be in addition to existing work with the Welsh Local Government Association and Wales Strategic Migration Partnership to develop approaches to spending £350,000 of Welsh Government investment to support social work capacity to improve services to unaccompanied asylum seeking children; work to support the transfer of vulnerable children already in Europe under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2017 (known as the 'Dubs Amendment'), using £200,000 of Welsh Government funding and developing a Welsh-specific National Transfer Scheme Protocol and supporting guidance for when the Scheme is extended to Wales.

## Scotland

The Scottish Government has a number of mechanisms under development and in place which provides for the safeguarding, protection and nurturing of looked after children which includes unaccompanied children. Looked after children in Scotland are provided for under Section 25 of the Children (S) Act 1995 and more recently, under the Children and Young People (S) Act 2014. The former describes how a local authority must provide for a looked after child in terms of accommodation and safeguarding and the latter describes what a young person is entitled to as a care leaver. Scotland has also implemented the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (S) Act 2015 which put on a statutory footing the role of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian. This Guardian supports the unaccompanied child and the local authority as they integrate into Scottish life and, where relevant, make their way through the asylum system. Also, the First Minister of Scotland announced in 2016 that an independently led Care Review would be undertaken. The Review will be 'root and branch' will look at the underpinning legislation, practices, culture and ethos of the system. It will take a fresh approach and will be driven and shaped by care experienced young people themselves. The Review starts officially this spring and will run for 2 years.

The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and supporting guidance stipulates that responsibility for ensuring that foster carers are appropriately trained and prepared to meet the needs of vulnerable children lies with the appropriate local authority. Following a recommendation from the 2013 Foster Care Review, the Scottish Social Services Council was commissioned to develop a learning and development framework for foster carers to better prepare those who work with our most vulnerable

children to improve the outcomes of these individuals. A final Standard has now been published following consultation with experts in the sector. The Standard includes crisis prevention and intervention training.

Work is also underway to introduce a bespoke residential child care degree level qualification, in accordance with recommendations of the National Residential Child Care Initiative (NRCCI) report 'Higher Aspirations, Brighter Futures' and further to their 2008 review of residential child care services. The review has highlighted a strong relationship between the quality of service and both the qualifications and the education levels of staff, with residential childcare staff reporting that training and gaining relevant qualifications can greatly increase their confidence in undertaking their duties.

In January 2016, the Scottish Government launched a national campaign to raise public awareness and understanding of child sexual exploitation. The campaign, developed and supported by stakeholders, included a national TV advert and campaign website [www.csethesigns.scot](http://www.csethesigns.scot), which provides information on the many forms of child sexual exploitation, along with advice on where adults, children and young people can go for and help and support.

The Scottish Government's National Missing Persons Strategy for Scotland provides a framework for partnership working to reduce harm and will provide a national focus for consistent good practice. It will recommend that return interviews are undertaken every time a child or young person has been missing and that prevention planning takes place, and will include a commitment to ensuring that relevant training and guidance for practitioners highlights the links between going missing and vulnerability to abuse.

The UK charity Missing People provide the Runaway and the Say Something UK helpline services. Say Something raises awareness amongst children and young people of the risks and dangers of sexual exploitation and provides advice on how to keep safe and where to seek support. The Scottish Government is funding Missing People from April 2016 to March 2019 to market these helpline services directly to young people in Scotland, to ensure that more children and young people are supported when they are thinking of going missing or need help to stay safe.

## Northern Ireland

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 came into force on 4 November 1996. The Order deals with the care, upbringing and protection of children, in Northern Ireland. The Order sets out the duties of an Authority (a Health and Social Care Trust) towards any child it looks after. A HSC Trust must:

- safeguard and promote the child's welfare; and
- make reasonable use of the services which are available for children cared for by their own parents (Article 26(1)).

Since late 2014, Northern Ireland has had a dedicated residential unit for unaccompanied, separated, trafficked and asylum seeking children and young people who have arrived in Northern Ireland from various parts of the world. Provision allows for a maximum of eight children, aged 13 upwards. The unit is intended as a reception/assessment facility; therefore to meet its intended purpose it is able to offer emergency access.

In the last five years, there have been an average of 13 referrals each year, peaking at 17 in the 2014/15 financial year. The predominant countries of origin to date are Somalia, Sudan, Iran, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe and Syria. Unaccompanied children presenting in Northern Ireland have mainly been in the older adolescent age group and in terms of gender, males are particularly prevalent.

A Regional Practice Network for Separated and Unaccompanied Children has been established. This is a multi-agency regional forum with representation from key statutory bodies and primary voluntary organisations. The Departments of Health and Justice are also represented on the Network, which is chaired by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB).

Two key guidance documents have been developed to support HSC Trusts and other agencies working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. These are:

**Guidance on Working Arrangements for the Welfare and Safeguarding of Unaccompanied and Separated Children and Young People**; this regional guidance was produced by the HSCB and has been endorsed by the Departments of Health and Justice. It has recently been revised and updated to take account of policy and legislative changes.

**Guidance on Working Arrangements for the Welfare and Safeguarding of Child Victims and Potential Child Victims of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery**; this is a joint Police Service of Northern Ireland and HSCB document, which has been endorsed by the Departments of Justice and Health. It sets out the arrangements that are in place to identify and support child victims and potential child victims of human trafficking and modern slavery.

In addition, a regional electronic information system on separated and unaccompanied children which will track each child's journey and associated outcomes is currently in progress and near completion. Procurement of an Independent Guardian Service for separated and unaccompanied children as required by Section 21 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 is currently being progressed by the HSCB. It is intended to have this service operational by November 2017. Work is also underway to establish a practice learning forum for social work staff primarily to develop knowledge and skills and embed learning and culturally competent and informed practice; the NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre is engaged with the HSCB in the establishment of this forum.



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