



## Where are the children?

A mapping exercise on numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK: September 2000 – March 2001

Carried out by  
the Refugee Council and  
the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering

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# Introduction

This report was compiled by Judith Dennis, the Refugee Council Policy Adviser for Unaccompanied Children and Selam Kidane, Refugee Project Consultant for the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering. The findings of this report mark the results of a jointly conducted mapping exercise on the whereabouts of unaccompanied refugee children that took place between September 2000 and March 2001.

Both agencies were keen to develop services for refugee children where they were most needed and agreed that a better understanding of the location of refugee children was crucial to this development. There was much anecdotal evidence to suggest that over the past two years the geographical spread of unaccompanied children had become larger. A mapping exercise was planned, to collate existing information and build on it, in order to give an up to date picture of where the children are.

We acknowledge that this is only the beginning of the work. The mapping exercise allowed us to build networks of those working directly with the children. This will help us to keep the information presented in this report up-to-date.

As we see later, the way that unaccompanied children are defined may influence the way statistics are collected on them. This report defines an unaccompanied child as someone who is under 18, not being cared for by their usual caregiver and is seeking asylum in the UK.

## Compiling existing information

The task of collating existing information about children's statistics was more difficult than initially envisaged. The main reasons were:

- Some collections are based on voluntarily released information and therefore may be patchy.
- By definition, information about unaccompanied children changes daily. Children and young people are considered adults once they become 18. More rarely, children may be reunited with family members.
- Different agencies collect different information depending to their needs. More details on this are outlined below and shown in the appendices.
- Different definitions of the term 'unaccompanied' are used by different agencies. In the next section we examine the definitions in more detail.
- Agencies may disagree on the way 'child' is defined. This makes collating statistics even more difficult. Children routinely arrive with no documents to prove their age and no definitive test exists. Agencies may disagree on whether or not someone claiming to be a child should be counted as such. In some cases even those identified as unaccompanied children are not counted separately from single adults.

# Who counts the children and how are they defined?

## Home Office statistics

The Home Office started collecting numbers of asylum applications from unaccompanied minors in 1992. These figures are currently made available to the Refugee Council quarterly. They include a nationality breakdown and also how many asylum applications were made 'in-country', i.e. after entry to the UK, or at port.

The figures collected by the Home Office are of children applying for asylum who were '*unaccompanied at the point of their arrival, and not known to be joining a close relative in this country*'. (Annual figures are shown in Appendices One to Three.)

## Local authority statistics

The Department of Health introduced a special grant to help fund those local authorities supporting unaccompanied children for the financial year 1996/7. Statistics are collated each year on those local authorities that claim the grant and on the number of children they have supported. A snapshot figure taken in January 2001 is shown in Appendix Four.

Responsibility for administering the grant has now moved to The Home Office. The grant is payable to a local authority for supporting 'unaccompanied children who are:

- from abroad;
- under the age of 18;
- claiming asylum in the UK or have been granted such asylum or exceptional leave to remain in the UK; and
- are not living with their parent or guardian.

## Refugee Council Children's Panel statistics

The Refugee Council has a database of all unaccompanied minors referred to its Children's Panel of Advisers. The Children's Panel uses the following criteria:

- The young person claims to be under 18 years of age, or is under 21 years old and is responsible for the care of younger siblings (aged under 18). The Refugee Council will accept referrals of those whose age is disputed by other agencies.
- The young person has claimed, or is about to claim asylum in the UK.
- The young person is not being cared for by an adult who is responsible to do so. Where this is not clear at the point of initial contact, a referral will be taken, but the Children's Panel may decide at a later date that it is not appropriate for them to work with the child.

Referrals are accepted from any source, including self-referrals, and all are recorded on the database. Reports are drawn from the database to examine trends of referrals by nationality, age and gender. The latest report is shown in Appendix 5.

## London Asylum Seekers' Consortium statistics

The London Asylum Seekers' Consortium (LASC) has also been developing a data resource system, which collates data on those unaccompanied asylum-seeking children supported by London local authorities. This data also includes detail about the child and where s/he is placed.

For the period up to end March 2001 these details were not available in sufficient detail for our purposes, but from April 2001, LASC will be the source of the most in-depth information about unaccompanied minors supported by London local authorities, and could provide valuable support for those planning services.

## Other research

Over the past year, researchers have attempted to uncover the facts behind the statistics and several reports have been produced. The Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England and Wales published a comprehensive national report entitled "Another country: implementing dispersal under the immigration and asylum act 1999" in June 2000. Barnardos published "Children First and Foremost", a report explaining the predicament facing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK in July 2000. Both reports give some detail about the quality of placements and confirm for the first time that unaccompanied children were being placed outside the area in which they arrived. Both studies received responses from over 100 local authorities.

The Audit Commission's findings suggested that over one half of children over 16 and 12 per cent of those under 16, were in bed and breakfast hostels and hotel annexes in October 1999.

The Barnardos report asked local authorities to identify areas to which young people were sent. Some confusion arose from the wording of the question: the questionnaire asked about 'dispersal' rather than 'out of borough placement'. The results therefore may not be statistically accurate. The report, however, was able to identify a list of areas in which unaccompanied children were living, but who were the responsibility of a different local authority not the one they were residing in.

# Identifying gaps

Most of the unaccompanied children supported by social services departments have been supported by local authorities in London and the South East (as shown in Appendix 4). This was still the case in 2000 except for a small number of local authorities shown in the table. and, apart from a handful of local authorities shown in this table, this was still the case in 2000. Our own work and contacts, as well as the Audit Commission and Barnardos reports showed that the existing data was not showing the full picture.

Those working directly with children outside of London and the South East know that many children have been placed there by the social services department that provides them with support. Some children are placed under Section 20 or Section 24 of the Children Act 1989 - making it mandatory to inform the authority in whose area the child is living. More commonly, children and young people, supported as 'children in need' and funded through Section 17 budgets, are placed in an area outside that which supports them, without the 'receiving' authority being made aware of their presence.

For agencies trying to improve the experience of these young people, this lack of evidence and communication is concerning. Statutory and voluntary agencies need to know where children and young people are living in order to provide the many services to which they are entitled (e.g. education, counselling), or services that may help improve their quality of life (e.g. community based youth groups, advice services).

## Collecting and selecting

Once we identified the gaps identified, we had to decide how to access information to give a snapshot of where children and young people were living.

As outlined above, we were able to collate information from the Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate and Department of Health special grant return figures. The Refugee Council's Children's Panel database reports and information from last year's research conducted by the Audit Commission and Barnardos were also useful.

However, there were no figures available on the numbers of children living in any particular area of the UK. As statutory and voluntary agencies in a particular area were not always aware of these numbers, the only way to uncover them was to ask the local authorities that had placed the children there in the first place. This presented several difficulties:

Many voluntary agencies, including the Refugee Council, had been critical of these placements, as it left many children unsupported and local agencies were not aware of the children's presence. This meant that children were often not getting the support they needed. In addition, the Barnardos survey had asked local authorities to give details of this kind of placement and responses had been few. However, we conducted our research on a non-statutory basis. This meant that local authorities were not obliged to respond. There was no guarantee that the data would be more forthcoming and we therefore decided not to repeat the process of sending a questionnaire to all local authorities.

Instead, we tried to build on the information available and started to fill the gaps by contacting individuals in social services to ask for their co-operation. Taking the Department of Health's figures, we selected all local authorities claiming the grant for an average of 50 or more unaccompanied children

and young people. We spoke to those carrying out the assessments and placing process to ask them how many young people they had placed out of the area and where those were.

Most of the authorities placing children and young people 'out of borough' are in London and the South East. For the purposes of this report, the question related to a geographical area rather than the limits of a local authority's boundary. We felt it was important to make the distinction between a neighbouring borough, where it would be reasonable to expect the same level of service and a distance, which effectively removes the opportunity to 'drop in' or reach as short notice.

## The response

Some local authorities kept very accurate records of where all their children were placed, and were willing to pass this information on to us. Some did not respond despite repeated phone calls or told us that they were unable to give us this information.

A pattern emerged of differing treatment of those children under 16 and those aged 16 and 17. Many local authorities were able to give more accurate figures for the younger group, and most said that they had placed very small numbers of these children outside the area responsible for them. Where they had done so, the receiving local authority was more likely to have been informed of their presence.

For the older group the picture is less clear. Some local authorities place these young people in the same way as adults and therefore either do not count them separately or were unwilling to reveal these figures to us. Several local authorities acknowledged that the figures would be higher if all those young people claiming to be children were treated as such.

# So where are the children?

As previously stated, we are trying to build a picture of the location of children by area, so all children placed in London are counted together. For other areas in England we have counted either by local authority boundary or city. Where there are very small numbers we have combined local authorities in some counties. For these areas, we added together the number of children for which they are responsible (from the Department of Health grant figures) to the total number placed there by other authorities. Where figures were not available from the placing authority, we used estimated figures from voluntary agencies working in the area.

Most unaccompanied young people are still in London and the South East. Apart from local authorities in London, Kent and West Sussex have the largest numbers. Although Kent places a significant proportion of its older children out of the area, it is still the county with the most unaccompanied minors. In fact, some London boroughs continue to place their unaccompanied children in Broadstairs or Margate.

Other seaside towns have small numbers of children; London authorities told us of very small numbers (less than five at any time) in placements in Bournemouth (Dorset), and Hastings (East Sussex). Outside of these areas children are largely placed in cities or large towns.

Most areas still have less than 20 children living within their city or local authority area and are not listed below.

## Areas with 21-50 children

Bedfordshire  
Brighton and Hove  
Coventry  
East Sussex  
Kingston upon Hull  
Manchester  
Slough  
Suffolk  
Surrey

## Areas with 50-100 children

Essex  
Hertfordshire  
Liverpool  
Luton  
Oxfordshire  
Reading  
Sheffield  
Turrock



## Areas with more than 100 children

Birmingham  
Northamptonshire  
West Sussex

16 London boroughs are currently responsible for between 100 and 400 children and young people.

Kent is responsible for over 1000 unaccompanied children. It is estimated that more than 800 unaccompanied children live in Kent.

London local authorities are supporting approximately 3792 children (average over period April 2000 – Feb 2001). Of these, it is estimated that more than 3000 of them are living in London.

We have not included figures for Scotland and Wales, as there were difficulties in obtaining enough information. We know that there are probably 50-100 unaccompanied children in South Wales and will seek to clarify total figures for both Scotland and Wales in any updated report.

# Conclusions and recommendations

Although of limited statistical value, the exercise was useful for the following reasons:

While we were collating above figures, we built valuable networks. Many agencies were extremely helpful and happy to share the information they had.

Similarly, some interesting perceptions of why the information would be useful and a reluctance to share it with others was revealed. More work on the relationships between national and local agencies (both statutory and voluntary) may help to improve matters. This is a long-term aim and involves 'umbrella' bodies as well as the individual agencies concerned.

Many agencies we spoke to tell us that the exercise made them increasingly aware of the need for a central source of data. Some of them have joined in the call for the Government to take responsibility for taking this forward.

Those providing figures to us were able to reflect on the type and accuracy of the data collected and may make changes as a result of this.

We hope to have filled in some gaps and provided a more accurate picture of where these children are. This will help the Refugee Council, the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering and other agencies develop their services outside London and the South East.

The exercise revealed particular concerns about 16 and 17 year old unaccompanied young people. Data about this group was often not collected separately from that on adults. Similarly, many professionals working with this group saw them as having the same needs as adults. Since the responsibility for newly arrived adults has now moved to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), local authorities could take the opportunity to re-examine their services for unaccompanied minors, particularly those aged 16 and 17.

We hope this will be the start of a process aiming to build a comprehensive and ongoing picture of the number of unaccompanied children in the UK, where they live and how they are being cared for. Only when this is known can we truly plan strategically for new services to be developed and improvements to be made.

# Appendix One

Extract from the Home Office Statistical Bulletin *Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1996* published in May 1997.

Website link: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hosb1597.pdf>

# Appendix Two

Extract from the Home Office Statistical Bulletin *Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1999* published in October 2000.

Website link: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hosb1700.pdf>

# Appendix Three

Unaccompanied children, aged 17 or under, applying for asylum in the United Kingdom, by nationality, 2000 (a)

Afghanistan	300
Albania	95
Algeria	25
Angola	100
Bangladesh	5
Botswana	5
Burundi	20
Cameroon	5
Chad	10
China	115
Colombia	5
Congo	5
Congo, Democratic Republic	45
Czech Republic	20
Ecuador	5
Eritrea	85
Ethiopia	60
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	665
Ghana	10
Guinea	5
India	15
Iran	65
Iraq	110
Ivory Coast	5
Jamaica	5
Kenya	5
Libya	5
Lithuania	10
Moldova	5
Nigeria	25
Pakistan	25
Poland	15
Romania	40
Rwanda	50
Sierra Leone	75
Somalia	175
Sri Lanka	170
Sudan	10
Tanzania	5
Turkey	155
Uganda	25

Ukraine	5
Vietnam	20
Yemen	5
Yugoslavia (unknown)	35
Zimbabwe	35
Stateless Palestine	5
<i>Total</i> 2735	2735 (b)

*(a) Unaccompanied at the point of arrival and not known to be joining a close relative in the U.K.*

*(b) This figure includes 20 of doubtful nationality and individual figures from countries where numbers are less than five. Numbers are provisional and have been rounded to the nearest five.*

# Appendix Four

Snapshot figure of unaccompanied minors supported – 26/01/01

Authority	Total
Barking and Dagenham	241
Barnet	62
Barnsley	2
Bedfordshire	39
Bexley	73
Birmingham	58
Bournemouth	7
Bradford	1
Brent	58
Brighton and Hove	27
Bristol City	10
Bromley	34
Buckinghamshire	4
Bury	2
Cambridgeshire	16
Camden	89
Cheshire	2
City of Newcastle	5
Corporation of London	14
Coventry	10
Croydon	177
Derby	3
Devon	4
Dorset	1
Dudley	4
Ealing	130
East Riding of Yorkshire	4
East Sussex	7
Enfield	76
Essex	41
Gloucestershire	5
Greenwich	109
Hackney	64
Hammersmith and Fulham	166

Hampshire	8
Haringey	399
Harrow	46
Havering	67
Hertfordshire	64
Hillingdon	358
Hounslow	47
Islington	347
Kensington and Chelsea	109
Kent	1036
Kingston Upon Hull	3
Kingston Upon Thames	25
Lambeth	215
Lancashire	1
Leeds	6
Leicester	13
Leicestershire	8
Lewisham	116
Lincolnshire	14
Liverpool	7
Luton	51
Manchester	16
Medway	1
Merton	58
Middlesbrough	2
Newham	100
Norfolk	17
North East Lincolnshire	15
North Lincolnshire	2
North Somerset	2
North Yorkshire	1
Northamptonshire	110
Nottingham	13
Nottinghamshire	5
Oxfordshire	95
Peterborough	10
Portsmouth	7
Redbridge	207
Redcar and Cleveland	1



Richmond Upon Thames	166
Rotherham	2
Rutland	1
Sandwell	11
Slough	32
Solihull	3
Somerset	1
South Gloucestershire	4
Southampton	5
Southend on Sea	9
Southwark	186
Staffordshire	4
Stoke on Trent	9
Suffolk	33
Sunderland	1
Surrey	28
Sutton	20
Swindon	18
Telford and Wrekin	1
Thurrock	65
Tower Hamlets	16
Trafford	3
Wakefield	11
Walsall	4
Wandsworth	42
Warrington	3
Warwickshire	18
West Berkshire	1
West Sussex	107
Westminster	116
Wiltshire	4
Worcestershire	7

Note: This table does not include local authorities who supported unaccompanied asylum-seeking children at some stage during 2000/2001 but did not have them in their care on 26 January 2001. Total number of children supported on this date was 6078. Of these, 1376 were under 16 and 4702 were 16 and over.

Statistical source: The Home Office

# Appendix Five

## The Panel of Advisers for Unaccompanied Refugee Children

Brief statistical report on our referrals 2000 – 2001  
(Information recorded at the time of referral)

The number of referrals has fallen slightly since last year:

Year	Number of referrals
1999-2000	4529
2000-2001	4276

Our referrals continue to come from a wide range of agencies:

Referrers	
Advice organisations	40
Asylum Screening Unit	1896
Immigration Service	557
Friend	5
Legal rep	73
Other parts of Refugee Council	160
Via Drop in	662
Refugee Community Organisation	15
Self (not through drop-in)	17
Social Services	441
Other voluntary organisations	17
Other/not known	393
Total	4276

The nationalities of our referrals is as follows:

Nationality	Number of referrals
Afghanistan	498
Albania	167
Algeria	24
Angola	169
Azerbaijan	1
Bangladesh	8
Belarus	1
Bosnia	6
Burundi	36
Cameroon	8
Chad	10
Chechnya	1
China	147
Columbia	1
Congo Brazzaville	5
Czech Republic	2
Democratic Republic of Congo	86

Ecuador	3
Egypt	1
Eritrea	136
Gambia	2
Ethiopia	119
Ghana	7
Guinea	5
India	7
Indonesia	1
Iran	68
Iraq	153
Jamaica	4
Ivory Coast	8
Kazakhstan	2
Kenya	5
Kosovo	1293
Lebanon	3
Libya	1
Lithuania	3
Macedonia	3
Malawi	1
Moldova	15
Montenegro	31
Morocco	1
Nepal	5
Niger	32
Nigeria	32
Pakistan	11
Palestine	4
Poland	4
Romania	74
Russia	9
Rwanda	74
Senegal	1
Serbia	166
Sierra Leone	81
Somalia	219
South Africa	2
Sri Lanka	107
Sudan	12
Syria	1
Togo	1
Turkey	96
Uganda	41
Ukraine	6
Vietnam	34
Yugoslavia	144
Zimbabwe	26
Not known at point of referral	52
TOTAL	4276

The ages of our referrals are as follows:

Age	Number of referrals
4	1
5	1
6	3
7	4
8	7
9	5
10	25
11	31
12	50
13	145
14	384
15	892
16	1361
17	1317
18	23
19	2
20	3
21	2
Age not known at time of referral	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>4276</b>

The gender of our referrals was as follows:

Male	3463
Female	690
Not known at time of referral*	123

\*Referrals from the Asylum Screening Unit reach us as photocopies of a brief form containing limited information. Until recently these forms did not include photos of clients. It was often difficult to tell the gender of the client. We hope this will be resolved as we improve our communications with the ASU.

Contact episodes at the Refugee Council Children's Panel drop-in:

Month	Number of contact episodes
April 2000	Figures not available
May 2000 (weekly drop-in)	33
June 2000 (twice weekly drop-in)	86
July 2000	116
August 2000	132
September 2000	195
October 2000	266
November 2000	260
December 2000	180
January 2001	248
February 2001	253
March 2001	344
<b>TOTAL (for 11 months)</b>	<b>2113</b>