

Children in the Asylum System

February 2020

The asylum statistics are published quarterly by the Home Office.

Unaccompanied Children Applications

The number of asylum applications by unaccompanied children is shown in the tables below. From 2010 to 2013 there was a downward trend in the number of applications. The higher numbers in 2015 and 2016 reflect an overall rise in asylum applications and unaccompanied children accounted for just over 10% of all asylum applications in 2019 compared with over 16% in 2008.

Table 1: Asylum applications by Unaccompanied Children (excl. Dependants)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Applications	3,254	3,290	2,401	3,063	3,651
% change to previous year	+67%	+1%	-27%	+28%	+19%

Table 2: Asylum applications by Unaccompanied Children by quarter (excl. Dependants)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
2019	951	753	901	1,046
2018	667	604	851	941
2017	547	602	589	663
2016	693	699	722	1,176
2015	525	576	1,023	1,130

In 2019 there were significant increases in the number of applications from Iran, Iraq, Vietnam and Afghanistan. There were decrease for all the other countries in the top 8 countries of origin.

Apart from these 8 countries there were no other countries with more than 50 applicants in 2019.

Table 3: Top 9 child asylum applicant producing countries (excl. Dependants)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Eritrea	736	413	355	684	579
Iran	227	388	233	269	523
Iraq	182	324	271	332	450
Vietnam	182	194	306	324	446
Sudan	148	255	356	496	439
Afghanistan	694	754	227	223	427
Albania	481	420	265	293	232
Ethiopia	114	104	90	137	71

In 2019 89% of applicants were male, which is similar to earlier years.

Unaccompanied Children: ages

In 2019 the age distribution was:

Aged 16 and over	78%
Aged 14 – 15	20%
Aged under 14	2%

There are also a small number of cases which are recorded as 'age unknown'.

The 'age unknown' category is **not** related to age disputed cases.

The number of **age disputed** cases raised is shown in the table below. These are cases where an applicant claims to be a child but the Home Office assessment of appearance, or occasionally other evidence, leads to a dispute of the claim to be a child. There was a large increase in 2015 and a further increase in 2016. The numbers fell in 2017, but rose in 2018, but fell again in 2019..

Table 4: Age Disputed Asylum applications (excl. Dependants)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Applications	791	929	716	875	782
% change to previous year	+148%	+18%	-23%	+22%	-11%

During 2019 the countries of origin with the largest numbers of age disputed cases raised were:

Eritrea	174
Afghanistan	120
Iran	113
Sudan	104
Iraq	90
Vietnam	51
Ethiopia	24

These countries accounted for 86% of age disputed cases raised.

The Home Office statistics on age disputed cases do not include the category of those applicants who claim to be children but who are treated as adult, according to Home office policy. This used to state that in the opinion of an Immigration Officer "their physical appearance and/or general demeanour **very strongly** indicates that they are **significantly** over 18 years and no other credible evidence exists to the contrary" but the wording has changed since June 2019 to "very strongly suggests that they are 25 years or over".

Unaccompanied Children Decisions

- Of the decisions made on unaccompanied children's claims in in 2019, 76% were refugee status, where the decision was made whilst the child was under 18.
- For decisions on unaccompanied children who have reached the age of 18 the refusal rate dropped in 2017 to 45%, rose to 60% in 2018, then fell to 39% in 2019.
- Unaccompanied children who have reached the age of 18 when a decision is made have generally been more likely to have their asylum claim refused.

- Although there are fewer outright refusals for children under the age of 18 this is because a child who cannot be returned to their country of origin is granted a specific form of leave called UASC leave. Prior to 2013 discretionary leave was granted in these cases, which is why there are now far fewer grants of discretionary leave than in the past.

Table 5: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children aged 17 and under

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
2019	1,822	1,381	79	0	172	42	148
2018	1,325	773	44	2	316	1	189
2017	1,454	817	36	2	386	2	211
2016	1,656	502	50	14	828	2	260
2015	1,568	357	18	38	809	0	346

Table 6: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children aged 17 and under by Quarter

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
Q4 2019	410	330	19	0	31	1	29
Q3 2019	460	353	22	0	53	0	32
Q2 2019	521	401	22	0	41	2	55
Q1 2019	475	297	16	0	47	83	32
Q4 2018	302	205	20	1	47	0	29

Table 7: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children who have reached the age of 18

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
2019	1,292	637	63	5	0	81	506
2018	820	299	29	3	1	3	485
2017	586	307	12	1	0	1	265
2016	295	118	6	1	1	2	167
2015	362	63	1	3	0	0	295

Table 8: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children who have reached the age of 18 by Quarter

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
Q4 2019	224	125	9	0	0	0	90
Q3 2019	263	154	11	1	0	1	96
Q2 2019	330	153	18	3	0	1	155
Q1 2019	398	205	25	1	0	2	165
Q4 2018	165	79	11	1	0	1	73

Decisions by country of origin

The tables below show decisions by country of origin for 2019. The tables include those countries of origin where 50 or more decisions were made during the year.

A high proportion of decisions to grant refugee status can be seen for several countries.

Albania was the country with the highest refusal rate.

Table 9: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children aged 17 and under, 2019

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
Eritrea	498	491	1	0	3	0	3
Sudan	292	289	1	0	0	0	2
Afghanistan	236	142	25	0	17	38	14
Iraq	206	117	33	0	22	1	33
Iran	166	113	2	0	30	0	21
Vietnam	152	116	12	0	17	0	7
Albania	106	6	0	0	61	1	38
Ethiopia	59	32	0	0	12	2	13

Table 10: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children aged 18 and over, 2019

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
Albania	230	15	0	2	0	1	212
Sudan	216	205	0	0	0	5	6
Eritrea	182	174	0	0	0	0	8
Afghanistan	138	41	7	0	0	50	40
Vietnam	125	49	20	1	0	1	54
Iraq	115	27	32	1	0	2	53
Iran	96	50	2	0	0	0	44
Ethiopia	52	13	0	0	0	12	27

As can be seen there are significant differences between these countries of origin.

Calais

Following the closure of the camps in Calais there was an operation to transfer children to the UK. Between 1st October 2016 and 15th July 2017 a total of 769 children were transferred to the UK from Calais. There were 227 children from Afghanistan, 211 from Sudan, 208 from Eritrea and 89 from Ethiopia. There were fewer than 10 children from any other country.

Dependent Children

The annual statistics include figures for the number of asylum applicants who are dependants rather than having an application in their own name. The majority of dependants are children. The table below shows the breakdown of dependants by age. The 2018 and 2019 data only shows the total number under 18, which was 6,699, with 2,280 over 18 in 2018 and was 6,434, with 2,494 over 18 in 2019.

Table 10: Applications by Dependents by age

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Under 5	2,687	2,681	3,052	2,711
5 – 9 yo	1,312	1,337	1,640	1,589
10 – 13 yo	746	670	809	790
14 – 15 yo	307	282	336	319
16 – 17 yo	253	232	264	246
18+ yo	1,969	2,033	2,481	2,205

National Transfer Scheme

This scheme has operated since July 2016. The intention is to share the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children between local councils. It allows a council which has more than a defined proportion of unaccompanied children to refer new arrivals to another region or council.

The table below shows transfers out of and into each region.

Table 11

Region	Transfers	2016 July - December	2017	2018	2019
East Midlands	Out	12	0	0	0
	In	30	24	11	0
East of England	Out	21	69	92	72
	In	32	150	119	72
London	Out	50	168	75	1
	In	4	1	1	0
North East	Out	0	0	0	0
	In	10	13	1	0
North West	Out	0	0	0	0
	In	17	50	16	0
South East	Out	148	153	42	14
	In	54	36	25	12
South West	Out	1	3	0	0
	In	46	51	13	1
Wales	Out	0	0	0	0
	In	1	0	0	0
West Midlands	Out	0	1	0	0
	In	10	35	15	1
Yorkshire & Humber	Out	0	0	9	5
	In	28	44	17	6

NOTE

For unaccompanied children figures for years before 2012 given in earlier briefings are not directly comparable to later figures because of a change in the way the statistics have been compiled. There is a link below to the Home Office publication explaining the change. See page 66 of the guide. The Home Office has now updated the figures for years before 2012 to reflect the change in methodology.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/232217/user-guide-immig-statistics.pdf

For detailed statistics see the government quarterly statistics bulletin [here](#)

About the Refugee Council

The Refugee Council is one of the leading organisations in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees. We give help and support to asylum seekers and refugees, and also work with them to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed by decision-makers.

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