

Children in the Asylum System

March 2021

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. Unaccompanied children accounted for just over 8% of all asylum applications in 2020 compared with over 16% in 2008.

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

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Applications	3,290	2,399	3,063	3,775	2,291
% change to previous year	+1%	-27%	+28%	+23%	-39%

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

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
2020	763	118	848	562
2019	1,008	780	921	1,066
2018	667	604	851	941
2017	546	602	588	663
2016	693	699	722	1,176

In 2020 there were decreases in numbers of applicants for all the countries in the top 8 countries of origin except for Syria.

Apart from these 8 countries there were no other countries with more than 60 applicants in 2020.

Table 3: Top 8 child asylum applicant producing countries (excl. Dependants)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sudan	255	356	496	457	406
Afghanistan	754	227	223	437	376
Eritrea	413	355	684	597	303
Iran	388	233	269	545	269
Vietnam	194	305	324	459	258
Iraq	324	271	332	459	158
Syria	140	39	39	53	90
Albania	420	265	293	238	86

In 2020 91% of applicants were male, which is similar to earlier years.

Unaccompanied Children: ages

In 2020 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. Although the numbers of age disputed applicants has reduced, in 2020 the percentage of those applicants claiming to be children whose claim was disputed rose to 32%.

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

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Applications	929	716	875	798	732
% change to previous year	+18%	-23%	+22%	-9%	-8%

During 2020 the countries of origin with the largest numbers of age disputed cases raised were:

Sudan	178
Afghanistan	149
Eritrea	106
Iran	72
Vietnam	41
Iraq	34

These countries accounted for 79% 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 May 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 2020, 83% 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 and 35% in 2020.
- 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.

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
2020	585	486	14	2	41	1	41
2019	1,830	1,382	79	0	172	42	155
2018	1,325	773	44	2	316	1	189
2017	1,455	817	36	2	386	2	212
2016	1,658	503	50	14	828	2	261

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 2020	125	114	1	1	4	0	5
Q3 2020	98	77	1	0	6	0	14
Q2 2020	39	32	1	0	3	0	3
Q1 2020	323	263	11	1	28	1	19
Q4 2019	410	330	19	0	31	1	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
2020	598	368	20	0	0	1	209
2019	1,289	638	63	5	0	81	502
2018	820	299	29	3	1	3	485
2017	585	307	12	1	0	1	264
2016	293	117	6	1	1	2	166

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 2020	185	139	6	0	0	1	39
Q3 2020	129	57	6	0	0	0	66
Q2 2020	40	30	1	0	0	0	9
Q1 2020	244	142	7	0	0	0	95
Q4 2019	223	125	9	0	0	0	89

Decisions by country of origin

The tables below show decisions by country of origin for 2020. 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, 2020

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
Vietnam	103	97	1	0	5	0	0
Eritrea	93	90	1	0	2	0	0
Sudan	93	92	0	0	0	0	1
Afghanistan	78	64	4	1	6	0	3
Iran	67	51	0	0	9	0	7
Iraq	59	40	5	0	7	0	7

Table 10: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children aged 18 and over, 2020

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
Sudan	111	111	0	0	0	0	0
Eritrea	98	97	0	0	0	0	1
Albania	81	11	3	0	0	0	67
Vietnam	71	48	3	0	0	0	20
Iraq	60	11	12	0	0	0	37
Iran	57	35	0	0	0	0	22

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.

Section 67 ('Dubs') children

Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 placed a duty on the Home Office to transfer a specified number of unaccompanied children to the UK from elsewhere in Europe. After consultation with local authorities this number was set at 480. These children have all been transferred to the UK. More than 400 of these children were from four countries of origin: Eritrea, Afghanistan, Sudan and Ethiopia. The majority were transferred from France.

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. Since 2018 the data only shows the total number under 18, which was 6,698, with 2,281 over 18 in 2018. It was 7,211, with 2,589 over 18 in 2019 and it was 4,783, with 1,802 over 18 in 2020.

Table 10: Applications by Dependants 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	2020
East Midlands	Out	12	0	0	0	0
	In	30	24	11	0	9
East of England	Out	21	69	92	72	45
	In	32	150	119	72	96
London	Out	50	168	75	1	1
	In	4	1	1	0	30
North East	Out	0	0	0	0	0
	In	10	13	1	0	4
North West	Out	0	0	0	0	0
	In	17	50	16	0	32
Scotland	Out	0	0	0	0	0
	In	0	0	0	0	9
South East	Out	148	153	42	14	213
	In	54	36	25	12	30
South West	Out	1	3	0	0	1
	In	46	51	13	1	10
Wales	Out	0	0	0	0	0
	In	1	0	0	0	3
West Midlands	Out	0	1	0	0	0
	In	10	35	15	1	16
Yorkshire & Humber	Out	0	0	9	5	1
	In	28	44	17	6	22

For detailed statistics see the government quarterly statistics bulletin via the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2020/list-of-tables#asylum-and-resettlement>

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.