

Children in the Asylum System

February 2022

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. Unaccompanied children accounted for just under 8% of all asylum applications in 2021 compared with over 16% in 2008.

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

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Applications	2,399	3,063	3,775	2,773	3,762
% change to previous year	-27%	+28%	+23%	-27%	+36%

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

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
2021	516	715	1,235	1,296
2020	786	462	888	637
2019	1,008	780	921	1,066
2018	667	604	851	941
2017	546	602	588	663

In 2021 there were increases in numbers of applicants for all the countries in the top 7 countries of origin except for Sudan and Eritrea.

Apart from these 7 countries there were no other countries with more than 100 applicants in 2021.

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

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Iran	233	269	545	352	1,022
Afghanistan	227	223	437	457	547
Sudan	356	496	457	470	383
Eritrea	355	684	597	356	354
Iraq	271	332	459	212	350
Syria	39	39	53	98	279
Albania	265	293	238	105	115

In 2021 94% of applicants were male, which is slightly higher than earlier years.

Unaccompanied Children: ages

In 2021 the age distribution was:	Aged 16 and over	78%
	Aged 14 – 15	27%
	Aged under 14	3%

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 very large increase in the number of age disputed cases in 2021.

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

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Applications	716	875	798	853	2,517
% change to previous year	-23%	+22%	-9%	+7%	+195%

During 2021 the countries of origin with the largest numbers of age disputed cases raised were:

Iran	902
Afghanistan	391
Iraq	253
Sudan	224
Eritrea	197
Vietnam	161
Syria	158

These countries accounted for 91% 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 2021, 91% 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, but by 2021 had fallen to 13%.
- Unaccompanied children who have reached the age of 18 when a decision is made have in the past generally been more likely to have their asylum claim refused.
- There are fewer outright refusals for children under the age of 18 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
2021	892	816	20	1	24	0	31
2020	678	547	18	2	56	1	54
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

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 2021	252	238	4	0	0	0	10
Q3 2021	220	206	5	0	3	0	6
Q2 2021	238	206	7	0	17	0	8
Q1 2021	182	166	4	1	4	0	7
Q4 2020	128	114	1	1	4	0	8

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
2021	1,627	1,335	78	1	0	3	210
2020	689	414	32	0	0	2	241
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

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 2021	498	412	30	0	0	0	56
Q3 2021	476	407	20	1	0	1	47
Q2 2021	380	300	18	0	0	2	60
Q1 2021	273	216	10	0	0	0	47
Q4 2020	185	139	6	0	0	1	39

Decisions by country of origin

The tables below show decisions by country of origin for 2021. 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, 2021

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
Afghanistan	206	184	5	0	13	0	4
Sudan	134	131	1	0	0	0	2
Vietnam	129	128	0	0	0	0	1
Iran	120	108	1	0	5	0	6
Eritrea	93	92	0	0	0	0	1
Iraq	69	51	11	0	3	0	4

Table 10: Initial asylum decisions on unaccompanied children aged 18 and over, 2021

	Total	Refugee status	Humanitarian Protection	Discretionary Leave	UASC Leave	Family or Private Life	Refusals
Iran	327	288	1	0	0	0	38
Eritrea	275	273	0	0	0	0	2
Sudan	242	237	0	0	0	0	5
Iraq	187	97	54	0	0	0	36
Vietnam	184	165	1	0	0	0	18
Afghanistan	87	69	7	0	0	0	11
Albania	83	27	3	0	0	1	52

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. 5,338, with 1,833 over 18 in 2020 and 5,562 with 2,393 over 18 in 2021.

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	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
East Midlands	Out	0	0	0	0	0
	In	24	11	0	9	24
East of England	Out	69	92	72	45	15
	In	150	119	72	96	80
London	Out	168	75	1	1	36
	In	1	1	0	30	46
North East	Out	0	0	0	0	0
	In	13	1	0	4	14
North West	Out	0	0	0	0	0
	In	50	16	0	32	38
Scotland	Out	0	0	0	0	0
	In	0	0	0	9	29
South East	Out	153	42	14	213	410
	In	36	25	12	30	60
South West	Out	3	0	0	1	0
	In	51	13	1	10	27
Wales	Out	0	0	0	0	0
	In	0	0	0	3	22
West Midlands	Out	1	0	0	0	0
	In	35	15	1	16	75
Yorkshire & Humber	Out	0	9	5	1	0
	In	44	17	6	22	46

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2021/list-of-tables>

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.