

Unaccompanied Asylum seeking children

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The National Transfer Scheme

- The NTS was established in 2016 and updated in 2021
- Mandatory since February 2022
- Set up “to ensure a fairer, more equitable distribution of unaccompanied children across local authorities”
- Uses rota system to allocate children from councils to regions and devolved nations
- Regions (SMPs) then allocate children to councils
- How many children each region and council is expected to support is based on a formula

The NTS in operation

The number of young people arriving in the country to seek asylum has risen significantly since the NTS was established

Published NTS data shows the increased scale of transfers:

- 1 June 2016 – 31 December 2021: 2,792 transfers nationally (66 months, average of 42 per month)
- 1 January 2022 – 30 September 2023: 5,542 transfers nationally (21 months, average of 264 per month)
- Slight reduction this year but not yet clear why

Rota system does not take into account an LAs capacity to support young people nor their specific needs/ wants

The statistics

- As at 31 March 2023:
 - 7,290 children in care were UASC, up 29% on 2022
 - UASC currently represent around 9% of all children in care, up from 7%
 - There are 1,630 more UASC than last year (29%), and this follows a 37% increase in the year prior, meaning a 42% increase on pre-pandemic 2019 figures
 - 96% of UASC are male, an increase from 90% in 2019. The increase in UASC is almost all due to an increase in males
 - 14% were aged under 16 years, compared to 74% of all children in care
 - 88% have a primary need of 'absent parenting', 7% were in need due to abuse or neglect and 4% due to the family being in acute stress

2023 High Court Judgment

- Home Office is unlawful using hotels
- Kent CC unlawful not bringing all children arriving in Kent into its care
- Duty on Kent CC to accommodate all children arriving in Kent prior to their dispersal via NTS
- Expectation on Home Secretary to do more to enforce the NTS – judicial review
- Judge was clear that he considered this a children's social care issue, not an immigration issue, and with that the primacy of the Children Act 1989

Challenges

- Placement sufficiency challenges
- Age assessment
- Funding
- Impact of the Illegal Migration Act
- The NTS is no longer fit for purpose