

Consultation Paper for Blueprint on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children – written evidence submitted by The Who Cares? Trust

[The Who Cares? Trust](#) is the leading national charity for children in care and care leavers in England. We are a voice and a champion for children and young people living in care and young care leavers.

Status of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Q: Do you agree with the paragraph above which states that a lack of long-term settlement can lead to insecurity and instability?

Yes, we agree that a lack of long-term settlement can lead to insecurity and instability for children. The process for claiming asylum can be long, due to a backlog at the Home Office, or issues such as age disputes (children may arrive without official documents that prove their age, or they may have documents that show them to be adults to facilitate travel, or may have been told to say they are an adult if stopped¹). Children who arrive in the UK will have to contend with this uncertainty while trying to learn English, settle into a new family and country and go to school, as well as trying to cope with the trauma they have experienced prior to their arrival in the UK. Being granted a period of definite leave to remain means that children know that they have to undergo a further asylum application process, further uncertainty, and suggests to the young person that they have not been believed (all the while becoming more integrated into the community in which they are now living, and with no guarantee that their home country is becoming any safer for them to live). Adolescence is already an insecure time for most young people, not least children not living with their birth families. Further asylum applications and appeals only further compounds this insecurity.

Q: The 3,000 children would be initially screened at European reception centres. In the majority of cases they would be given refugee status. Does this put them in a favourable position to the UASC already in the system?

Yes, screening children in Europe and expecting to grant them refugee status in the majority of cases does put them in a favourable position compared to children who are already in the system. In 2015, 1,559 under 18s applied for asylum. Only 23% were granted asylum, with 52% granted uasc leave and 22% refused any form of leave at all.² Being screened in Europe may also speed up the decision-making process, which further favours this group as they will not have to live with the uncertainty of a pending asylum claim.

Fostering

Q: Given the refugee crisis and the outpouring of generosity, should there be a fast-track process for those who have expressed an interest in becoming a foster carer?

No, there should not be a fast-track process. While we welcome the sentiment expressed by those wishing to foster unaccompanied asylum seeking children from Syria, we believe that the correct processes should continue to be followed, and would encourage them to apply to be foster carers more generally.

¹ http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0002/5945/Not_a_minor_offence_2012.pdf

² Table as_09: Initial decisions on asylum applications from Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, excluding dependants, by sex and age at initial decision. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2015/list-of-tables>

Children who are in care, particularly those who have arrived in the UK unaccompanied, are children to whom the state has a corporate parenting responsibility and this should be discharged by ensuring that they are cared for by well-trained, caring and supportive carers. Children who have arrived as unaccompanied children will be fleeing from traumatic experiences, including war, famine and persecution and will need, and deserve, high quality, and often therapeutic care.

Q: Should there be a national register of foster carers?

We agree with the idea of a national register in principle; we think that it will facilitate greater matching of placements and permanency options for children, however we would like to see more details about how this would work in practice across independent fostering agencies and local authorities and the current localism agenda, as well as who would be centrally responsible for maintaining the register.

Q: Do you believe that when an existing foster-carer moves from one fostering service to another they should have to be re-assessed and approved? Why?

The Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol 2014 and its guiding principles exist to help ensure that the child remains the centre of any decisions, including the transfer of a foster carer from one agency to another. It helps to ensure that decisions cannot be made purely for financial reasons and that where at least one child is in placement at the time, adults responsible for their care continue to think about their best interests. We are not able to comment on current re-assessment and approval processes, however, it is vital that there is always an assessment/protocol in place to ensure that children's best interests are kept at the centre of any fostering decision and that the very best carers are recruited to care for them. We do not want processes to be overly burdensome for carers, however children must be at the centre of all decisions and their best interests and welfare safeguarded.