

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children National Transfer Scheme Frequently Asked Questions

The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) was established in 2001 and is funded by the Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to facilitate strategic leadership, advice and coordination on migration. The WSMP is hosted by the [Welsh Local Government Association](#) (WLGA) to reflect the Partnership's All-Wales role around migration.

The WSMP Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Coordinator oversees transfers of children into Wales through the various Home Office schemes and provides support and capacity building for councils and other partners.

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Who is an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC)?

Home Office immigration rules define an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child as one who is:

- under 18 years of age when the asylum claim is submitted
- claiming asylum in their own right
- separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so.



Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children are usually referred to as 'UASC', '**separated children**' or 'unaccompanied minors'. They are a child/young person outside their country of origin and without the care and protection of parents or legal guardians. The council in which the child first presents is normally responsible for their care.

What is the National Transfer Scheme (NTS)?

The [National Transfer Scheme](#) was originally developed on the basis of a **voluntary** agreement made between councils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure a more equitable distribution of unaccompanied children across councils. The NTS is intended to ensure that an individual council does not face a disproportionate responsibility in accommodating and looking after unaccompanied children, simply by virtue of being the point of arrival of unaccompanied children (e.g. Kent Children's Services).

The revised NTS operates as a national rota and was **mandated** across the UK in December 2021, requiring the involvement of all councils' Children's Services departments.

What are the routes through which a UASC could arrive in Wales?

National Transfer Scheme – See above.

'Spontaneous' Arrivals – many UASC arrive in the UK by their own means and are encountered at their port of entry, at the Asylum Intake Unit in Croydon, or are otherwise encountered by police/social services.

Refugee children, (who do not have to go through the asylum process), may also arrive into the UK under the [UK Resettlement Scheme](#).

Adult Asylum route – young people 'age disputed' by the Home Office or other councils may be placed in adult asylum dispersal accommodation in Wales. On arrival in Wales these young people may be referred to Children's Services in their area and require an age assessment.

What is the Welsh model for the NTS?

The **NTS** consists of a national rota. The Home Office expects every council to accept young people into their care, unless they are over 0.1% of UASC to their child population. UASC arriving spontaneously will usually need to be accommodated and supported by the local authority that they first present to (and don't count towards that councils NTS allocations).

The Home Office has indicated that Wales will be required to accept 60 unaccompanied children over a course of 4 cycles. There is no indication of over what period of time the 4 cycles will be spread.



What are the profiles of children arriving via the NTS?

The WSMP UASC Coordinator will share details of the child to be transferred; councils would need to consider several types of accommodation dependant on the age, health and educational needs of young people. Typically, the largest majority of UASC that arrive in the UK are male aged 14 to 17 years old.

In the year 2024, there were **4,017 applications from unaccompanied children**, Sudan was the country of origin for the largest number of unaccompanied children in 2024 ([Top facts from the latest statistics on refugees and people seeking asylum - Refugee Council](#))

What support do Councils provide to UASC?

While immigration legislation and policy are not devolved to Wales, most services that young people receive in Wales are the responsibility of Welsh Government, Councils, and other public bodies in Wales. An unaccompanied asylum-seeking child is seen as a **child first and foremost** and any assistance and support must be based on putting the needs of the child at the forefront.

All UASC are children looked after under Section 76 of the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*.

A young person who is alone in the UK with no family or friends to support them is entitled to an assessment, support, and protection in the same way as any other child under the [Social Services & Well-being Act provisions](#) on assessing and meeting need, with such entitlements remaining until the young person leaves the UK or their needs are otherwise met.

UASC will be classified as '**looked after**' children and therefore will be provided with accommodation, financial support, a social worker and have access to education and health services. The majority of UASC in Wales will also be entitled to 'leaving care' support.

All children and young people in Wales of statutory school age should receive full time education, consistent with their key stage level.

Young people with specific vulnerabilities and risks arising from abuse, neglect or other harms are entitled to the application of the [Wales Safeguarding Procedures and All Wales Practice Guides](#) and entitlements for the child/young person to a 'best interest consideration' flow from the principles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) and of the [Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 Section 55 duty](#) on United Kingdom Visas and Immigration, (UKVI).



All councils in Wales have an obligation to offer an independent professional ‘voice’ or **advocate** for every looked after child and young person, care leaver and child in need of care and support who wants to take part or comment on decisions about their lives.

This also applies to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (See page 5 [‘Third Sector Support’](#)).

What type of accommodation do UASC usually stay in?

Accommodation offered to UASC will be dependant on their age and their ability to support themselves. Following an assessment of needs by the council, young people will be either placed in foster placements, supported lodgings or semi-independent or independent accommodation.

Will the young person transferred via the NTS require an age assessment and is there any further information available on this?

Some young people referred to Wales via the NTS may be classed by the Home Office as ‘age-disputed’ but will not have had a full [Merton-compliant](#) age assessment (many young people would have been assessed by immigration officers based on their physical appearance and demeanour).

The Social Services & Well-being Act does not specifically set out a duty to assess age. However, the duty to support children entails a **duty to assess eligibility for children’s social services**. If the Council has no doubt about a young person’s claimed age, there is no need to assess age. However, if there is doubt then an age assessment should be carried out in order to determine access or not to children’s social services.

Welsh Government have published an **Age Assessment Toolkit** which provides social workers with information on carrying out an age assessment. The toolkit can be accessed on the following link [Unaccompanied asylum seeking children: age assessment toolkit | GOV.WALES](#)

Do councils receive any funding to support UASC?

The Home Office provide financial support to councils for looking after UASC and former UASC care leavers. The full funding instructions can be found at the following link; [Home Office Funding Instructions](#) and financial claims need to be submitted to the Home Office.

What support does the WSMP UASC Coordinator offer?

The role of the UASC Coordinator at the WSMP is to facilitate the operation of the NTS and of ‘spontaneous’ arrivals of UASCs across Wales. The UASC Coordinator works with the Home Office, Welsh Government, Children’s Services and a wide range of partners across Wales on the identification of appropriate placements for children, delivering a person-centred and effective matching, coordination and



transfer process and
working to ensure that the appropriate support and services are in place.

The UASC Coordinator can provide advice and guidance to councils in Wales on any matters related to the support and care of UASC's and on the National Transfer Scheme.

What support from the third sector is there in Wales for UASC?

[TGP Cymru - Young Asylum Seekers and Refugees Programme](#)

TGP Cymru provides Advocacy, Participation and consultation work with councils across Wales and supports young asylum-seekers and refugees up to the age of 25.

[Welsh Refugee Council \(WRC\)](#)

The WRC are the leading organisation in Wales promoting equality for and fostering good relations towards asylum seekers and refugees. They provide specialist advice and support services to asylum seekers and refugees in Wales to ensure they can access the services they need.

[Migrant Help](#)

Migrant Help runs a free asylum helpline 24/7 accessible to **all** asylum seekers in the UK. They can assist with applications for asylum support, reporting maintenance issues with asylum accommodation, requests for assistance, and advice on any asylum-related queries. For UASC Care Leavers, they can contact Migrant Help if their support from the council is being stopped. Councils would also need to contact them if they are an age assessed UASC and deemed to be an adult.

[NYAS](#)

NYAS is a rights-based organisation that provides **advocacy** to some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Wales. Alongside advocacy support they provide youth participation programmes for care-experienced young people which include mental health and wellbeing, a child's rights approach to policing, support for young women who are pregnant/have children, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and youth homelessness.

[Barnardo's](#)

Barnardo's provides direct, specialist support to trafficked children. They run a specialist [Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service](#) (ICTGS) in Wales that:

- build trusting relationships with trafficked children to help them build a positive future.
- helps children navigate the criminal justice, immigration and social care systems.
- gives practical support, such as help with housing, medical needs and education.
- give emotional and psychological support.

- train professionals working with children so they can spot the signs of trafficking and know how to support trafficked children.

British Red Cross

The British Red Cross is the UK's largest independent provider of services for refugees and people seeking asylum. They offer emergency help, one-to-one support and casework, special services for children and families, and help with reuniting families.

What is a Trauma Informed Approach and how does it relate to UASC?

Research in Wales shows that UASC may have experienced particular difficulty in regard to parental separation/loss, child abuse and exploitation particularly on the journey, witnessing or experiencing violence and a lack of social and emotional support to cope with adversity. A [trauma informed approach](#) recognises these factors and what would make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people to reduce the likelihood of re-traumatisation or long-term impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences, ([ACE's](#)), and support resilience. ACE Aware Wales have also published the following reports:

[ACES in Child Refugee & Asylum](#)

[Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\) and Refugee Children in the 1930s in the UK: A History Shaping the Future](#)

What legal status does a UASC have?

All asylum and immigration policies and practices at every stage of the process must comply with the duty to treat a child's best interests as a **primary consideration**. The duty applies to all Home Office functions and to all agencies working with children, irrespective of the child's immigration status.

This means that the process for claiming asylum as a child is slightly different to the process for adults. Children must be interviewed for their asylum claim by specially trained interviewers/caseworkers, and children under the age of 12, or older children who lack capacity, may not be interviewed at all.

The Home Office are likely to grant one of the following statuses to a UASC;

- **UASC Leave** - A child who is under the age of 17 ½ and who has applied for asylum but has been refused refugee status and humanitarian protection will be granted a form of limited leave if there are no adequate reception arrangements in the country to which they would be returned.



- **Refugee**

Status – this is valid for 5 years. Following which the young person can apply for indefinite leave to remain.

- **Humanitarian Protection:** this is granted if the Home Office do not accept that the child meets the criteria of the [Refugee Convention](#). It is granted if their individual circumstances mean that it is too dangerous to

return them back to their country of origin. It is valid for five years following which they can apply for [indefinite leave to remain](#).

UASC are entitled to free legal advice and there are several specialist immigration solicitors in Wales specialising in providing advice to asylum seekers.

Are UASC able to bring over their family or are they reunited with their families?

If a UASC discloses that they have family in the UK, then the council must assist the young person in maintaining contact with the family.

The [British Red Cross](#) offer a family tracing service for any young people who have lost contact with their family, in most parts of the world.

Under the Immigration Rules, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are not eligible to apply for family reunion with family members overseas.

What are WSMP UASC Coordinator contact details for further information?

Please email WSMPComms@wlga.gov.uk and put 'UASC / NTS query' in the subject line.