

UK provides new home for 478 children seeking asylum

The UK government announced today that it has successfully completed the transfer of 478 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016. Amongst some of the most vulnerable children in Europe seeking asylum, this important work has given them an opportunity to start a new life in the UK.

Today's announcement has demonstrated that the UK continues to build on its long and proud history of offering protection to those who need it.

In 2016, the government committed to transfer 480 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children displaced in Europe. The UK granted protection to over 7,320 children in the year ending March 2020 and more than 44,900 children since 2010 through a range of legal pathways, including asylum and through our world leading refugee resettlement schemes. The government has worked closely with local authorities to place children into appropriate care.

Transfers began following the French authorities' clearance of the Calais camp in 2016, and there remain two outstanding transfers delayed as a result of coronavirus. They will be safely completed at the earliest opportunity.

Minister for Immigration Compliance, Chris Philp, said:

We have made clear that protecting vulnerable children is a key priority for this government and the progress we have made – with generous support from local authorities – underlines our commitment to that.

The UK provides a number of legal routes for those seeking protection and we will continue to offer a range of support for those who often need it most.

In 2019, the UK received more asylum applications from unaccompanied children than any country in the EU and accounted for approximately 20% of all UASC claims made in the UK and the 27 EU Member States. The UK offered protection – in the form of asylum, humanitarian protection, alternative forms of leave and resettlement – to 20,339 people in the year ending March 2020, 17% higher than the previous year.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative to the UK, Rossella Pagliuchi-Lor, said:

The section 67 scheme has been a lifeline for 480 extremely vulnerable unaccompanied and separated children, who were identified with the support of UNHCR and partners.

Programmes such as this assist over-burdened host states, and prevent children from making dangerous journeys in search of safety.

UNHCR will keep supporting pathways to protection in the UK like transfers of asylum-seekers under the Dublin III regulation, bringing refugee family members here under family reunion visas, and through the UK's new global resettlement program.

Under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), the government is now close to hitting its target of resettling 20,000 vulnerable refugees affected by the Syrian civil war, with 19,768 vulnerable refugees – many of whom children – resettled since September 2015.

Due to coronavirus related restrictions on movements both overseas and in the UK, it is not currently possible to undertake any refugee resettlement activity, but this commitment will be met as soon as possible once conditions allow.

Last year the UK received more unaccompanied asylum-seeking children than any EU country accounting for 20% of all cases reported in the EU and UK. As a result, local authorities are looking after more than 5,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and we are working to support them with this, particularly as a result of pressures brought on by coronavirus.

The UK continues to work with our European neighbours and plays a leading role on the world stage in providing international protection to the most vulnerable.