

Briefing Document UASC – Plymouth’s Perspective

What is Asylum?

Asylum is protection given by a country to someone who is fleeing persecution in their own country. It is given under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. To be recognised as a refugee, you must have left your country and be unable to go back because you have a well-founded fear of persecution.

The UK also adheres to the European Convention on Human Rights, which prevents us sending someone to a country where there is a real risk that they will be exposed to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

An **asylum seeker** is a person who has asked for protection but has not received a decision on their application to become a refugee, or is waiting for the outcome of an appeal. It is normal for a claim for assessment to take up to six months.

An Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC): is an asylum applicant who is less than 18 years old and has no adult relative or guardian to look after them at the time of application.

If an asylum seeker has been granted leave to stay they have **refugee status** and the UK government has offered protection in accordance with the Refugee Convention 1951. Individuals with refugee status are entitled to the same range of services as all other individuals.

Adversities faced by UASC

Typically UASC population face a number of adversities. In addition to the reasons for which they left their country of origin, they usually face a prolonged period of transition to the UK, crossing over many continents and countries. On arrival their ordeal is not over as they have to learn a new language and adjust to different cultural demands. They face uncertainties, sometimes lasting several years, about their asylum status, age and entitlement to services.

Plymouth Perspective

How do UASC arrive at Plymouth?

UASC can arrive via the ferry port in Plymouth, either legally by requesting asylum on entry or illegally - for example, being smuggled in on Lorries. UASC could also enter England from a different location and travel here or be dispersed here by the border agency.

Age Assessments

Any Asylum Seeker who is claiming to be less than 18 years of age will have an Age Assessment. This process is led by a Social Worker from Plymouth’s Advice and Assessment Service who is trained to work with UASC. UASC are deemed to be children in need as they are not able to be looked after by their parents. Plymouth City Council has a dedicated policy and procedure for UASC and a procedure on Asylum Seeking Families. These documents ensure that each applicant is treated fairly and in a consistent manner.

Numbers & Ethnicity

There are approximately 500 asylum seekers in Plymouth of those nine are currently UASC most of whom are described as Middle Eastern, African and Arabic. They are all male and their ages are:

- 6 x 17 years
- 2 x 15 years
- 1 x 13 years

There are further 12 UASC (11 male / 1 female) who are now service leavers, aged 18 to 20 who we still have a responsibility for.

Support for UASC in Plymouth

16+ Team

- The 16+ Team provide both practical and emotional support to this group, through enabling them to attend interviews with the UK Border Agency and supporting them by accompanying them to the interviews.
- The majority of UASC, due their age, are found accommodation by the 16+team. As the majority of UASC have lived independently they choose not to be placed in foster care but choose to live in 'training flats'.
- The 16+ Team supply phone cards to UASC as a way of promoting contact with family members living abroad.

CAMHS

- This group often has unresolved emotional and mental health issues, rooted either in the reasons that led them to seek sanctuary in the UK, or as a consequence of the journey that brought them to the UK. Plymouth CAMHS team provides these young people with emotional support and counselling.

Language Line

- Translators in over 110 languages are supplied by Translate Plymouth to assist with the assessment process.

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