



Home Office

Robert Goodwill MP
Immigration Minister

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To all Local Council Leaders

8 September 2016

Dear Councillor,

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING AND REFUGEE CHILDREN

I am writing to you about the commitments the Government has made in relation to supporting and caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children. I know you and your officers have been liaising with my predecessors, James Brokenshire and Richard Harrington on these issues. I am honoured to be taking over this extremely important area of government business.

I would like to start by acknowledging the efforts made by those local authorities that are already engaged in delivering the commitments made across the range of schemes. I know many of you are facing real pressures at this time and I welcome the continued close working between your officers and my officials to find constructive solutions.

I thought it might be helpful to write now to set out further progress and next steps across the three schemes relating to children. I would be grateful if each council could respond via their Strategic Migration Partnership to three formal requests set out in this letter.

The first is to request those local authorities that have not already done so to register for the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) which launched at the beginning of July. The Government is clear that we want to see a fair distribution of unaccompanied children between local authorities, with the NTS the mechanism to achieve this.

The second is to request that you confirm the total number of unaccompanied children that could be placed in your authority for the remainder of this financial year, noting the 0.07 threshold operating under the NTS.

The third is to consider taking children and their families under the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme. These will be children that UNHCR has identified as the most vulnerable and at risk of child labour, forced marriage,

child carers and other forms of abuse and exploitation. We are starting to receive referrals from UNCHR under the scheme and now need to secure pledges of support.

(1) National Transfer Scheme

The NTS has been in place for over two months now. Since the scheme was implemented on 1 July 2016 over 60 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) have been transferred successfully under the provisions set out in the transfer protocol. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your teams for the constructive way in which you have engaged with this important work. I understand the regional events that took place over the summer were positive and highlighted a real commitment – both at the regional level and at individual authority level – to make the scheme work and ensure these vulnerable children receive the care and support they need.

I recognise that we still have a long way to go; not least the need for more regions to fully participate in the scheme as quickly as possible, so we are not reliant on the goodwill of a small number of areas. The scheme is designed to ensure that no local authority is required to care for more UASC than it can cope with. If we are to achieve that objective we need more local authorities to take on responsibility for unaccompanied children. As we have already done with the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPR), we want to encourage a regional approach. Therefore we have offered additional funding of up to £60,000 for those regions participating in the scheme to bolster their regional structures. This is in addition to the £60,000 we have already provided to allow a regional approach to SVPR. My officials continue to work with the Strategic Migration Partnerships to ensure implementation is successful and those areas with limited experience of caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children receive the support they need.

(2) Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme

As you are aware, the Government announced the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme in April to complement the SVPR scheme in helping vulnerable people displaced by the migrant crisis. The scheme will involve resettling up to 3,000 people during this Parliament, made up of children at risk and their families from the Middle East and North Africa region. The vast majority of the children qualifying under this scheme are expected to be resettled with their families and not as unaccompanied minors. We only expect a very small number of unaccompanied children to be brought to the UK under this scheme. We are working with the UNHCR to identify cases suitable for resettlement, ensuring it is always in the best interests of the child. We expect the first families to arrive in the late autumn, and we hope to resettle several hundred before the end of the financial year.

We continue to need the support of local authorities to provide homes and support for those we resettle under this route, and this was discussed at our regional conferences and the engagements with the Local Government Associations in England, Wales and Scotland earlier this year. The key

difference between this scheme and the SVPR is that this scheme is open to all nationalities in the region in need of protection, due to the vulnerability of a child or children. The funding for families will be in line with that provided for the SVPR scheme, and for the small number of unaccompanied children we will fund in line with the national transfer scheme rates.

(3) Unaccompanied refugee children in Europe ('the Dubs amendment')

In addition to the VCRS, the Government committed to bring over unaccompanied refugee children from within Europe as set out in the Immigration Act 2016 (commonly known as 'the Dubs amendment'). We have been working closely with the three Member States – France, Greece and Italy – as announced by the former Prime Minister David Cameron, to identify suitable cases and introduce processes where necessary to transfer these children to the UK.

The Immigration Act requires us to consult local authorities before arriving at a total number for the scheme. This was also discussed during the regional events. I recognise that this commitment puts additional pressure on local authorities. This is why it is vital that we are able to agree a number that works in the best interests of local authorities recognising the children already in your care, unaccompanied asylum seeking children who arrive spontaneously, and those we are bringing to the UK through our formal schemes.

Placing unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children

We have always been clear that unaccompanied children will be treated the same irrespective of their method of entry into the UK, including those arriving clandestinely. It would be unfair to prioritise the placement of unaccompanied children based on arrival method. For this reason, all unaccompanied refugee children who are brought to the UK under a formal scheme, but are not reuniting with family members, will be placed into local authority care through the NTS. Local authorities will receive the same daily funding rates for these unaccompanied looked after children as they do for all other unaccompanied asylum seeking children placed through the NTS.

Unaccompanied children will only be brought to the UK where it is deemed to be in their best interests and the Home Office will share information we obtain on individual children with the relevant local authority ahead of transfer. It is crucial that the NTS is fully operational to transfer and properly support unaccompanied refugee children who are brought to the UK, and make a success of this new initiative.

Next steps

I hope this letter provides some further clarity on the different schemes for children. Annex A provides some additional detail on the criteria for the three schemes.

I would be grateful if each council could confirm by 21 September through your Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP):

- 1) that your local authority is participating in the NTS, if you have not already done so;
- 2) how many unaccompanied children could be placed in your authority for the remainder of this financial year. This should not include those who will be reunited with family members; and
- 3) whether you are able to accept children and their families under the VCRS and the offers of accommodation that you are able to make.

If you have questions, please contact your SMPs or contact officers using the contact details in the annex.

I will be working closely with my Ministerial colleagues, Edward Timpson, the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families and Lord Bourne, the Minister for Communities and Local Government. On behalf of all three departments I would like to thank you again for all your continued support. We very much look forward to meeting with you and working with you all over the coming months.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, local authority chief executives, directors of children's services, finance directors, Lord Porter of Spalding as Chairman of the LGA, Dave Hill as President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, and the Strategic Migration Partnership leads.

Best wishes.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'R' followed by several loops and a final flourish.

ROBERT GOODWILL

Annex A – Summary Table

| | Unaccompanied asylum seeking children transferred through the NTS | Unaccompanied Refugee Children in Europe ('Dubs amendment') | Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Government Commitment | Government committed to considering claims lodged in the UK. 3,043 claims made in 2015 | To be confirmed | Up to 3,000 people this Parliament |
| Summary Eligibility Criteria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children who arrive in the UK and lodge a claim for asylum <p><u>Additional information</u> Most UASC are male and aged 15-17</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aged under 18 In Europe before 20 March 2016 Will or are likely to qualify for refugee status The transfer to the UK is determined to be in the best interests of the child Priority will be given to cases with a UK family link <p><u>Additional information:</u> Cases will be a mixture of family reunion cases and unaccompanied children</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those deemed to be 'Children at risk' as identified by the UNHCR <p><u>Additional information:</u> In the majority of cases, children will be accompanied by their families or carers. We expect a low number of unaccompanied children to be resettled</p> |
| Nationality | All | All | All |
| Referral countries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> France Greece Italy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turkey Lebanon Jordan Iraq Egypt |
| Leave granted | To be determined on a case-by-case basis | To be determined on a case-by-case basis | 5 years' Humanitarian Protection |

| Region | SMP lead | Email | Home Office Contact Officer | Email |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| East of England | Gosia Strona | Malgorzata.Strona@eelga.gov.uk | Cheryl Cohen | Cheryl.Cohen@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk |
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