

**UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING MINORS
IN THE
UNITED KINGDOM**



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Introduction

The information featured in this report was collected during the period from the 5th to the 13th June, 2007 as part of the ENARO exchange. The information featured is a result of the data collection and field observations held in Kent, UK.

The report will focus on asylum-seeking minors, with references toward other asylum-seeking groups.

1.0 Reception of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Minors in the UK

Age definitions

For the purpose of the asylum process a child means any person less than eighteen years of age. An unaccompanied asylum seeking child is any person under the age of eighteen who has arrived/ is currently in the UK not accompanied by either one of his/ her parents and or legal guardian/s.

1.1 Age determination

As soon as a person claims to be under the age of 18 in the UK he/she will be referred to the reception centre for an assessment of age. The assessment is carried out by a social worker in the presence of the person claiming to be a minor, his/her translator and his/her care worker. During the assessment the social worker directs questions to the person claiming to be a minor in the following areas;

- Stated date of birth
- Health conditions
- Education
- Journey to the UK- Including dates of transit from other countries
- Family history

Throughout the entire interview both the social worker and key worker also aim at assessing the interviewee's level of maturity in an attempt to be in a better position of determining the exact age and act accordingly.

1.2 Detention / Detention Facilities

In the case of unaccompanied minors, there is no detention policy in the UK. As soon as a person claims to be a minor he/ she will be referred to the reception facility whereby a social worker from the duty team will commence an in depth assessment to establish the age of that person, following which future plans shall be made.

1.3 Initial Accommodation and Reception

All newly arrived unaccompanied asylum seeking minors are accommodated at Appledore Reception centre in Kent. Here the newly arrived asylum seeking minors have a 24 hour facility with support, assessment and specialist life

skills training. The reception centre is also responsible for the liaison of multi-agency assessments, mainly undertaking work with education, health and immigration police authorities.

The reception centre is located in a countryside area in the southern region of England, in the county of Kent. The residential facility has only recently been refurbished two years ago and the facility can accommodate a total of 26 unaccompanied minors in 13 double bed rooms. Presently there are no persons with any form of physical disability accommodated in the reception centre, however the centre can cater for persons with disability as it is situated on one a ground floor, fully accessible to wheelchair users. Moreover bathrooms for persons with disability are installed in the facility.

The area is surrounded by a spacious area of greenery where service users can recreate and it is close to a nearby city centre which provides all amenities.

The common room of the facility is in the middle part of the centre and while it is furnished with all home furniture and equipment related to personal recreation it also has a direct link with the care worker's office from a glass door connecting such room with the office.

Overall the facility is a very safe environment, equipped with health and safety equipment and clearly visible and accessible fire exits and fire fighting equipment.

Lastly the facility is equipped with a medical room, which fully meets national standards. The reception centre's staff is fully trained in the handling and dispensing of medication.

1.4 Food

Each unaccompanied minor is responsible for the preparation of his/her own breakfast while at the reception centre. It's a part of the plan to enable minors be able to move out from the centre and be able to look after themselves. Lunch and dinner are prepared regularly by a chef. The food is adapted to culture and religious habits. For example, there's never pork on the menu. As much of the groceries as possible, are bought from the local area. That helps to get a better connection with the locals and at the same time the centre get good and fresh groceries. The quality of the food which is served at the centre is very good, healthy and available.

1.5 Recreational and Educational Activities

The staff at the reception centre work their best on integration of asylum seekers in the hosting country. Every Wednesday an outdoor activity is organised for service users, while at the same time minors are encouraged and supported to attend local youth clubs, town centres and other social clubs.

Moreover within the reception centre itself weekly evening talks are organized. The subjects featured in such talks range from drug awareness, English law and order, fire safety and sexual health and the main aim of such talks is to help asylum seekers to get a feel of how English society operates

1.6 Cultural and Religious observances

All service users at the reception centre are given any material related in the practice of their own religion and are also assisted in attending places where they can practice their own respective religions. The facility covers for all expenses related to transport costs in this case.

1.7 Information

Upon admission to the reception facility the staff on duty will explain the aim of the residential set up, outlining client's rights and responsibilities while explaining what will happen from the day of admission onwards. During the first week following their admission UMAs will meet with their legal representative from the Refugee Council and with the social worker appointed to them. Both the legal representative and

the social worker will, from the day of admission onwards help the minor in his asylum claim. All interviews with UMAs are facilitated by a professional translator.

1.8 Staff Composition at the Reception Centre

Key-workers are not needed to have a university-degree, its more a question about suitability and experience of working with people in need. When it comes to social workers, they now need a degree of university, which was not necessary before. |

Staff at the reception-centre are roistered in a way that in the morning and afternoon there are six-key-worker at duty, there are 3 key-workers on duty throughout the night. Moreover during the day social-workers from the duty-team visit regularly to interview and monitor the minors at the reception-unit, while the head of home and her delegates will be present from Monday- Friday during mornings and afternoons.

1.9 Interpreters

Interpreters are order from a independent firm. All the interpreters are professional. The interpreters are staying at the centre in the evening to give minors a possibility to ask questions and to talk about whatever they feel like. They can also ask about papers they had received during the day. It's possible to choose gender of the interpreter if its requested. It's the same procedure through all the asylum-process. Moreover since the interpreters are usually native speakers of the respective language and share similar experiences to those of the clients they usually develop a good relationship with the translators. Adding to this from our observation at the reception centre it seems quite obvious that interpreters seem to have a very good insight about the reception centre , thus they are also involved in helping to explain the aims and the procedures involved to new comers, making their transition a more smoother one.

1.10 Client information

All staff members working in the reception centre have access and can contribute to the building of the client's files. Information is generally gathered through interviews with the clients and via the staff's observations. The information gathered mainly covers areas such as health, education, assessments and include an in depth assessment of the life skills of each service user which involves skills in the following areas;

- Personal Appearance and hygiene
- Housekeeping
- Laundry
- Money-management
- Equipment (knowledge on the use of home equipment)
- Food management
- Transportation
- Health
- Sexual health, family planning and contraception
- Legal skills
- Emergency and safety skills

All of the above is continuously re-assessed by the reception centre’s staff members and before clients leave the reception centre to go to live independently they have to perform satisfactorily in all the areas mentioned above. Once the unaccompanied minor leaves the reception centre, his / her file will be passed on to the social worker who will be following him/ her in the community. It is here where the community social worker will add information on the client’s integration and adaptability in the hosting community, while monitoring his / her improvement or lack of it and chronologically recording contents of the regular visits to the client.

1.11 Actions Taken while at the Reception Centre

As soon as an asylum seeker claims to be a minor he/ she will be referred to the reception unit until his age is established. Next is a brief description of the actions taken from the moment of admission to the moment of termination from the reception unit;

<i>Time Frame</i>	<i>Actions Taken</i>
<i>The first 24 hours</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purchase of appropriate clothing, linen and towels. ▪ Access and meeting with interpreter ▪ Commencement of day to day observation of physical, intellectual, emotional and social behaviour. ▪ Key worker is allocated and together with the minor he/she starts assessing and working on the achievement on independent living skills. ▪ Minor’s file is set up.
<i>First Monday after admission</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial doctor’s assessment in the presence of an interpreter
<i>Within 7 days of admittance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dentist & optician check up in the presence of an interpreter ▪ The minor is issued with culturally appropriate material needed like Koran, Bible, Prayer mat etc.
<i>After the first 7 days</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long term key worker is allocated. ▪ Educational assessment begins. ▪ Referral to legal assistant is made, who eventually takes instructions for the application for asylum. ▪ Initial clothing allowance and the minor is taken by a member of staff on first shopping trip

<i>14-28 days</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Educational assessment completed- Young person is placed in college/ education.
<i>Within first 28 days</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ External agency initial review, case owner to initiate referral to initiate referral to long term team.
<i>After 28 days</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Reception unit's staff involved in matching young people with accommodation- this may either be independent living or foster care. In the case of young people moving to live independently in the community they will be provided with a full house pack including TV and clothes.

1.12 Medical screening and Access to Health Care

A general practitioner visits the reception centre every week in order to medically screen UMAs admitted during that same week. Any other resident can also make use of the services offered by the doctor on a weekly basis. In emergency cases residents can avail themselves of the services offered by a doctor nearby to the facility. If there is medical reasons for any minor in need of any other form of medical care he will be accompanied by a member to staff to visit the health professional which will be in a better position to meet the minor's needs. Moreover all asylum seekers and their dependants are eligible to receive National Health Service (NHS) treatment without payment while their claim is being considered. They are also eligible for an Health Care Certificate, also known as HC2 which gives entitlement to:

- Free NHS prescriptions
- Free NHS dental treatment.
- Free NHS wigs and fabric supports.
- Free NHS eye sight tests.
- Vouchers towards the costs of spectacles and related equipment.
- Refunds of necessary travel costs to and from NHS treatment.

A useful leaflet from the NHS, which explains the role of the UK health services to newly arrived individuals seeking asylum is available through the department of Health Care website, where it can be downloaded in 41 different languages.

1.13 Schooling and education

Basic English classes are offered in the education building nearby to the reception centre. The main aims here are assessing in which level the unaccompanied minor is educationally. If they are illiterate in their own native language, they are firstly coached in such a language prior to educating them in English.

As regards to other educational areas, all unaccompanied minors shall be treated as any other native child and shall have the full opportunity to be enrolled in a college and for those who choose to continue university the government can still support them, provided that they were previously in care.

1.14 Dispersal Policies and Practices

After the age of the person involved is determined he or she will be dispersed to other parts of the country. This is mainly done on the basis of the actual age of the minor and on other conditions as follows:

Minors under 12 years of age; Will automatically be referred for fostering, and permanently settled in families. The minor will still be followed by a social worker until he reaches adulthood. The family hosting the minor will receive a monthly allowance which shall cover all expenses related to the upbringing of that minor.

Minors between 12 and 16yrs; Currently there are not many unaccompanied minors who arrive in the UK under this category. Those who however, fall under this age group will either be directed to fostering (if they are close to 12yrs) or an assessment of their skills and capabilities to live independently is commenced (if they are closest to turn 16). In both cases however, the minor will be enrolled in full time schooling as he/she will still fall under the statutory compulsory school age.

Minors over 16 years of age; If any minor over 16 years of age has been assessed by the reception centre as having the capacity to sustain him/ herself efficiently in the community, he/she will be assisted in moving to live in such a community and will be followed by a social worker until he/she is 24 years old.

1.15 Freedom of Movement

Asylum seeking minors and older adults living independently in the community both have freedom of movement in the country, given that they inform the Home Office of their whereabouts.

1.16 Financial support

Minors the reception centre are entitled to a weekly pocket money which they can spend at their own liking. Within the reception centre they receive food, medical and need be psychological care and minors do not pay for any costs related to the latter. Moreover all transport fees related to either medical care or education is also free of charge. Once the minor for any reason ceases to reside in the reception centre he or she will not be expected to refund any of the expenses mentioned above.

Once a minor is moved to live in the community he/she will receive a weekly amount of £45.50 which should cover his/her subsistence expenses. Expenses related to rent will be covered by the social security until the person is 21 years old. In certain cases the financial support mentioned above can be extended until the person is 24 years old. This extension of financial support shall be granted only in cases whereby the minor is enrolled in vocational or higher education.

As regards to financial support for adult asylum seekers the UK introduced new rates of financial support which came into force in April 2007 as follows;

- Asylum seeking couple; £64.96p weekly
- Lone parent aged 18 or over; £41.41p weekly

In the case of pregnant women or women with children under three years of age they are entitled to additional payments for the purchase of healthy foods.

Babies under the age of one receive an additional £5 weekly, pregnant women and children between the ages of one and three receive an additional £3 weekly.

All of the above is subjected and regulated by section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum act of 1999.

2.0 The Asylum Seeking process;

Waiting periods and Current Practices in the UK

In May 2005 the English home office started implementing the New Asylum Model , (N.A.M), in an attempt to introduce a faster and more tightly managed asylum process with an emphasis on either rapid integration or removal. Next is a brief outline of the main features of the NAM;

4. **Segmentation:** The idea of segmentation is that all asylum cases are sorted at the screening stage according to their basis characteristics. When first proposed the model had 9 significant segments, but this has been changed and the model has now only 5 main segments that are, third country nationals, minors, Potential non- suspensive appeals , late asylum applications and general case work.
5. **Case ownership;** The case owner is an official from the Home Office responsible for an asylum seeker's case throughout the process- from application to the granting of status or removal.
6. **Faster processing;** The whole asylum process – from application to the issuing of a decision shall be held over a period of 35 days. This process is outlined in the next table.

2.1 The New Asylum Model- Table

THE NEW ASYLUM MODEL (N.A.M)	
Day 0-2	Minor applies for asylum and is screened and finger printed while a self evidence form is issued. The case is then allocated to the asylum team and an appointment to meet with the case owner shall be allocated within a maximum of ten working days.
Day 10	Introductory meeting with the case owner who will eventually determine the asylum claim. This meeting shall serve to outline the asylum process and the asylum seeker will now be given an appointment for the second interview, which will be a more detailed one.
Day 20	Self evidence form has to be sent to the case owner by this day.
Day 25	In depth asylum interview is held
Day 30	From day 25 to day 30 all parties in the asylum process have the right to make further representations or submit further information. On the 30 th day, following the asylum application, the case owner is bound to have made a decision in the claim for asylum.
Day 35	Case owner will communicate decision in person to the asylum seeker.
Day 35- Onwards	Appeal from previous decision.
6 months	First active review /contact meeting between UMA and case owner after decision.

2.3 Legal services in the asylum process

All UMAs are appointed a legal representative who will accompany them throughout all the asylum process and who will carry in depth interviews in order to assist the asylum seeker to develop his own personal story and enable him to present such story to the Immigration authorities.

The legal representative also explains in depth the immigration process and how the asylum claim will be treated by the Immigration authorities, outlining time frames and rights of appeal.

All minors who have not attained 12 years of age will be accompanied by their legal representative to the interview with the immigration authorities and the role of the legal representative here will be to ensure that the interview is carried out fairly. Need be, legal representatives have the right to speak on their client's behalf at the end of the interview.

3.0 VICTIMS OF TORTURE, RAPE AND PHYSICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE, VICTIMS OF TRAUMA AND OTHER PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THE UK

The Medical Foundation for the care of victims of torture deals with clients which are survivors of torture and organised violence, children and adults, who are trying to cope with the pain of the effects of torture and exile. Most of them are refugees or asylum seekers.

The Foundation works with individuals and families needing assistance regardless of their country of origin, ethnic origin, gender, age, political or religious beliefs, offering counselling sessions in which clients can talk to one person on a regular basis to relieve their painful feelings and emotions.

The foundation runs regular groups for different groups of people namely; young people, women and mixed groups for both men and women. The groups meet regularly to share experiences and help each other better deal with such experiences.

Need be a report by the foundation is prepared for the immigration authority describing the effects that the trauma has had on the individual in an attempt to better help the individual in the asylum process.

Referrals are accepted from survivors themselves, friends and family, GPs, solicitors, refugee community organisations or any other voluntary or statutory sector body. All services are free to the client. Referrals must be made in writing using the foundations referral forms or by contacting the foundation's headquarters in London, or the appropriate centre elsewhere in the UK.

3.1 Interpreters

If the person making use of the foundation's services is unable to communicate in English he or she can indicate her language preference when making an appointment and the foundation will take care of finding an appropriate interpreter. Correspondence in languages other than English is also accepted.

3.2 Confidentiality

The foundation is independent from both the government and the immigration authorities and therefore all information given by the client will only be passed on to other organisations with the written consent of that same client.

1 Good Practices

Safe transfer arrangement

Although there are rules about dispersal placement, the social workers, when it is time to move from the short-term centre, planning the transfer along with the minor and, as far as possible, try to place him/her in a place whereby he/she has friends/relatives if it is possible according to the needs the social worker assessed the minor to possess.

When it is time to move, the minor knows where and why he moves to a particular place and is prepared for it. Eventually when it is time to move the social worker accompanies the client for the transition and from that point onwards the social worker will continue to monitor the client in the community through periodical home visits.

The New Asylum Model (2005)

Another example of good practice is NAM because of the fast procedure. Asylum seekers do not need to wait long for the decisions in their cases.

However, there is a danger with this procedure when it comes to asylum seekers who are suffering from trauma of torture or other types of abuse. This group are very much in need of having a safe relation with someone professional, to be able to tell about what they have been through. There is a risk within the NAM that this group do not get an opportunity to tell their whole story because of the short period of time they have to present all facts, thus an inability to form in depth relationships with the interviewer.

5.0 **Appendix 1.**

Countries of Origin of Asylum Seeking Minors in the UK (2006)

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Minors arrivals in 2006 - Services for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (SUASC)

