



Home Office

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Lord Alton
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Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 4 July regarding unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and child refugees.

The Government takes the welfare of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and child refugees extremely seriously, and is fully committed to helping and supporting the most vulnerable children. The UK has contributed significantly to hosting, supporting and protecting the most vulnerable children affected by the migration crisis. In the year ending December 2016, the UK granted asylum or another form of leave to over 8,000 children.

You have asked what the Government's position on membership of the Dublin Regulation is, as we leave the EU. Until we leave the EU, the UK remains bound by EU asylum legislation, where we have opted in, including the Dublin III Regulation. Whilst the UK has not opted in to the Dublin IV proposal, we will continue to play an active role in the negotiations whilst we remain a member of the EU. We are ready to discuss the nature of a future relationship between the UK and EU Member States on establishing the responsible Member State for processing an asylum claim.

You have asked what assessment the Government has made of the impact of leaving the EU on the family reunion rights of unaccompanied children, and what steps we are taking to ensure that children's rights are not at risk. The UK has a long and proud tradition of providing protection to those who need it, including some of the most vulnerable children affected by the migration crisis. As a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, we consider claims for asylum in accordance with our international obligations and domestic laws. None of this will change when we leave the EU.

The Government strongly supports the principle of family unity and there are several routes for families to be reunited safely. The UK's family reunion policy is generous, and we have and continue to reunite refugees with their immediate family, including granting over 23,000 family reunion visas over the last five years. We are considering the options to ensure effective cooperation on family reunification of asylum seekers after exit.

Your letter asks how many children came to the UK through the family reunion provisions of the Dublin Regulation in the last year. In 2016, over 700 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were transferred from Europe to the UK under the Dublin Regulation or under the expedited process used to transfer children from Calais who had family in the UK. We do not hold a breakdown of the data by how many of these children were registered as missing in Europe prior to transfer.

You have asked what discussions the UK has been able to have with Europol about the fate of missing children on the continent and in the UK. As you are aware, the National Crime Agency (NCA) provides Europol with staff, including within the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC), and helps to shape the direction of both the EMSC and the investigative doctrine generally.

The Government is committed to ensuring that unaccompanied asylum seeking children and refugee children are safe and their welfare promoted once they arrive in the UK. This is why we remain committed to fulfilling the commitment made to Lord Dubs to publish a safeguarding strategy for unaccompanied and refugee children. Due to the general election this did not happen on 1 May as originally envisaged, but we plan to publish the strategy in the autumn. The strategy will complement and build on existing safeguarding guidance and procedures, in recognition of the increased numbers and specific needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children already in the UK; unaccompanied children who we transfer to the UK from Europe; and unaccompanied children who we resettle directly from outside Europe. The strategy will consider any further action that might be taken to prevent unaccompanied asylum-seeking or refugee children going missing and whether to introduce a new set of standard actions for the police on first encountering unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.



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