

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

London, 19 June 2019

Dear Home Secretary,

We, the undersigned specialist civil society organisations, Members of Parliament, and public figures, are writing to you today to urge you to take concrete and immediate action to support the health and wellbeing of young asylum seekers in the UK.

In view of the commencement of the new Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts (AASC), alongside the forthcoming AIRE Contract, the Home Office is faced with a unique opportunity to ensure that adequate care and support is provided for 18 to 25-year-old asylum seekers in Britain. We propose that the Home Office, as a matter of urgency, addresses the gap in support for this demographic group through an alignment with the existing British model of support for care leavers, by introducing equivalent provision for 18-25-year-old asylum seekers. To this end, we ask you to appoint Youth Welfare Officers to initial and dispersal accommodation where these young people are placed.

The Government's Care Leaver Strategyⁱ acknowledges the difficulties faced by young adults: the struggle of independent living and the need to provide the care, support and guidance that young people would usually receive from their parent or legal guardian. We call on your Office to apply the same framework for asylum seeking youths aged 18 to 25 years placed in adult asylum accommodation. This proposal moreover aligns with the statutory duty placed on local authority children's services under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which stipulates that children's services should provide asylum-seeking minors with similar support as care leavers, from the moment they age out of care until they reach their 25th birthday.ⁱⁱ This model is merely an extension of the existing care and support measures provided for care leavers in the absence of a guardian, and is hence nothing new *per se*.

As you will be aware, young adult asylum seekers in the UK often face unique and complex challenges to their mental health and wellbeing, with many having survived unimaginable experiences within their countries of origin, and/or during their long and treacherous journeys to reach this country. While the UK Government's Safeguarding Strategy for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee childrenⁱⁱⁱ, which acknowledges the profound vulnerability of minors in the asylum system and the need to safeguard them from abuse, exploitation, neglect and self-neglect, should be commended, we urge the Government to acknowledge that these vulnerabilities do not end immediately upon reaching adulthood at age 18. Young adult asylum-seekers are often more vulnerable than their under-18 peers since they frequently no longer have access to the guidance, care and support they require.^{iv,v,vi}

It is widely known that young people seeking asylum are often affected by serious mental health problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disorders, behavioural issues, anxiety, depression and self-harm; with several young lives already tragically lost to suicide in recent years.^{vii,viii} For 18 to 25 year-olds, the lack of adequate care and support upon arrival in the UK, and throughout

the asylum process, risks contributing to a further exacerbation of psychological ill-health amongst young asylum seekers,^{ix} not least due to social isolation, language difficulties, anxiety about the asylum process, and fears about the future – all of which are major factors that can exacerbate the effects of past trauma.^{xi}

Another important reason for the urgent provision of Youth Welfare Officers is the fact that age-disputed children can often end up being wrongfully placed outside of local authority care, in adult accommodation. The Refugee Council's Age Dispute Project has reported that 89% of the age-disputed young people they worked with in 2017 were eventually accepted as children.^{xii} When age-disputed children end up in adult asylum accommodation, they are especially vulnerable, often end up confused and falling into homelessness, and therefore require additional care and support which a Youth Welfare Officer could provide.

We are proposing that, in line with existing provisions for care leavers, a full time Youth Welfare Officer is urgently placed in all initial accommodation, with one Officer per area where there is dispersal accommodation, to monitor and support the welfare of these young people seeking asylum by signposting youth to available psychological, emotional, welfare and social support, guidance and information.

We urge you to seize the opportunity presented as the new contracts come in to force to take concrete action to support the mental health and well-being of young asylum seekers. We remain at your disposal for any further information at the following correspondence address: Refugee Rights Europe, 71-75 Shelton Street, London, WC2H 9JQ.

Sincerely,

The Baroness Massey of Darwen
The Lord Scriven
Afzal Khan MP
Alex Cunningham MP
Alex Sobel MP
Angus Brendan MacNeil MP
Anna Turley MP
Carol Monaghan MP
Caroline Lucas MP
Catherine West MP
Darren Jones MP
David Linden MP
Debbie Abrahams MP
Rt Hon Diane Abbott MP
Geraint Davies MP
Helen Hayes MP
Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP
Hywel Williams MP
James Frith MP

Jess Phillips MP
Jon Cruddas MP
Kate Green MP
Kate Osamor MP
Kerry McCarthy MP
Matt Western MP
Mohammad Yasin MP
Paul Blomfield MP
Paul Farrelly MP
Paul Sweeney MP
Dr Paul Williams MP
Peter Kyle MP
Preet Kaur Gill MP
Ruth Cadbury MP
Ruth George MP
Teresa Pearce MP
Rt Hon Tom Brake MP
Tulip Siddiq MP
Vernon Coaker MP

Art Refuge	J M Wilson Solicitors
Asylum Link Merseyside	JustRight Scotland
Baobab Women's Project	Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network
Breadwinners	MEENA
CARAS (Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers)	Migrant Voice
CILD (Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights)	Missing Children Europe
Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG)	RefuAid
Coventry Migrant Women's Houses	Refugee Action
Help Refugees	Refugee Rights Europe
Hopetowns	Refugee Youth Service
Islington Law Centre and MiCLU (Migrant and Refugee Children's Legal Unit)	Right to Remain
	The Hummingbird Refugee Project
	The Jewish Council for Racial Equality
	Young Roots

Dr. Rachel Rosen, Associate Professor and Programme Leader - MA Sociology of Childhood and Children's Rights, Department of Social Science, University College London

Dr. Veena Meeto, Research Officer, UCL Institute of Education

Dr. Sarah Crafter, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, School of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University

Shiza Khan, Caseworker

Siân Thomas, Lecturer in Social Work, University of Birmingham

Dr. Surinder Guru, Lecturer in Social Work, School of Social Policy, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Birmingham

ⁱhttps://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266484/Care_Leaver_Strategy.pdf

ⁱⁱ [Part 1\(3\), Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)

ⁱⁱⁱhttps://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/656425/UASC_Safeguarding_Strategy_2017.pdf

^{iv} <https://becomingadultproject.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/ba-brief-5-low-res.pdf>

^v <https://becomingadultproject.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/ba-brief-4-low-res.pdf>

^{vi} <https://becomingadultproject.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/ba-brief-7-low-res.pdf>

^{vii} <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jun/17/suicides-raise-alarm-about-uk-treatment-of-child-refugees-eritrean>

^{viii} <https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/our-policy-work/equality-improvement/vulnerable-migrants/>

^{ix} <https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/our-policy-work/equality-improvement/vulnerable-migrants/>

^x http://refugeerights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/RRE_A-Hostile-Environment.pdf

^{xi} https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/distress-signals-report_0.pdf

^{xii} The project supported 172 cases in 2017, 41% of which had only had an initial decision of age determined by Immigration Officials rather than through a proper age assessment. Of these, 89% resulted in the young person being later accepted as a child.

https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/what_we_do/childrens_services/agedisputeproject