



From the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights

The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP

Secretary of State for the Home Department

22 January 2025

Dear Home Secretary,

The Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) has had a long-standing concern about the treatment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK. Our previous Committee undertook considerable work in this area, including by corresponding¹ with the former Home Secretary, and by holding oral evidence sessions as part of its inquiry on the [human rights of asylum seekers](#).

In 2023, as a response to increasing numbers of asylum applications, the then Government housed unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in hotels. The then Home Secretary said that “unaccompanied minors are only accommodated in Home Office-run hotels when there is no other option. When they are, support staff are in the hotels 24 hours a day to make sure they are cared for (...) all contingency sites have security staff and providers liaise closely with local police to ensure the welfare and safety of vulnerable residents”.²

Despite these assurances, it came to light that 440 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children went missing from Home Office hotels, some of which were reportedly as young as 12 years old.³

These missing children episodes led the previous JCHR to hold an oral evidence session looking at concerns about the treatment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK. In this session, Colin Pettigrew, Chair of the Migrant Families Taskforce at the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) gave evidence to the Committee in November 2023 about some of the reasons why children might have gone missing:

¹ [Joint letter](#) from the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee to the Home Secretary. 31 March 2023.

² Letter from the Home Secretary to the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, 19 April 2023.

³ House of Commons, [Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children](#), Volume 726: debated on Tuesday 24 January 2023 and ECPAT UK and UCL, [Behind Closed Doors](#): a storytelling legal and empirical analysis of human trafficking risks in Home Office hotels compared to other accommodation for unaccompanied children and young people seeking asylum in the UK, July 2024.



Joint Committee on Human Rights

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“There is [are] a number of different push and pull factors for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children going missing. They are being trafficked and exploited; they are going missing to avoid future asylum enforcement (...) and they are trying to unify with families or friends in other parts of the country”.⁴

In March 2024, Lord Sharpe of Epsom, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Home Office), informed Parliament that all seven hotels that were being used to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children had been closed. He also mentioned, however, that 118 children who had gone missing still had not been found.⁵

In May 2024, the then Minister of State for Countering Illegal Migration provided evidence to the Committee and [said](#) that hotels were not the “proper and appropriate” place to house unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In this session, I asked⁶ for figures on the number of children who remained missing, but did not receive a response, and the Committee did not receive further clarifications in writing before the election was called.

Given this concerning background, we would like to ask:

1. How many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were housed in asylum hotels between July 2021 and March 2024?
2. How many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children went missing from asylum accommodation between July 2021 and March 2024? What were their countries of origin, sex, and age?
3. Are there any unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who remain missing? If so:
 - a) What are their countries of origin, sex, and age?
 - b) What actions are being undertaken to locate these children and bring them to safety?
4. In relation to the children that went missing but were later found, to what extent did they receive legal, medical, and financial support to ensure their safety and wellbeing after they were located?
5. Had any of the missing children been assessed to identify whether they may have been victims of trafficking or modern slavery before they went missing? If so, were any children identified as victims of trafficking or modern slavery?

⁴ Joint Committee on Human Rights, [Oral evidence](#): Human rights of asylum seekers in the UK, HC 821. 8 November 2023. Q101.

⁵ House of Lords, [Former Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration: Reports](#), Volume 836: debated on Wednesday 6 March 2024.

⁶ Joint Committee on Human Rights, [Oral evidence](#): Human rights of asylum seekers in the UK, HC 821. 15 May 2024. Q170.



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6. Did investigations reveal information as to why children may have gone missing from asylum hotels?
 - a) Is there evidence that any of the missing children may have been taken against their will, or for purposes of trafficking and other exploitation? If any such evidence exists, what steps have been/are being taken to investigate and prosecute those responsible for taking the children against their will, or for purposes of trafficking or exploitation?
7. Were additional safeguards implemented to ensure that children who go through the asylum system do not go missing?
8. Do you agree with the former Minister for Countering Illegal Migration that hotels are not proper and appropriate places to house unaccompanied asylum-seeking children? If so, does the Government commit to not returning to using asylum hotels for accommodating unaccompanied children?

I would be grateful if you could please respond to this letter by **12 February 2024**. A copy of this letter will be sent to The Rt Hon Lord Hanson of Flint, given his role as Lords Minister for the Home Office.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Alton of Liverpool

Chair, Joint Committee on Human Rights