



The Lord Alton of Liverpool
Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

13 March 2025

Dear Lord Alton of Liverpool,

Thank you for your letter of 22 January 2025 on behalf of the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) about the Committee's previous work on the use of hotels to house unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). You have written to ask for an update on the UASC who went missing from these hotels.

Responses to the questions raised in your letter are set out below:

How many UASC were housed in asylum hotels between July 2021 and March 2024?

6,257 UASC were accommodated in dedicated UASC hotels between July 2021 to 31 January 2024, when the final hotel closed¹.

How many UASC went missing from asylum accommodation between July 2021 and March 2024? What were their countries of origin, sex, and age?

The Home Office operated hotels to accommodate UASC from July 2021 until January 2024. In the period where hotels were in use, there were 472 episodes where a UASC went missing which related to 464 different individuals (the term missing episode is used as some individuals went missing on more than one occasion).

The breakdown of the claimed nationalities for these missing episodes is as follows:

Nationality	No. of Missing Episodes ²
Afghanistan	64
Albania	305
Algeria	<10
Cameroon	<10
Egypt	14

¹ Please note that data provided above has been taken from live management information and is therefore subject to change. This does not form part of our usual published data and has been compiled from management information to answer your questions in the detail in which you have requested it.

² When there are fewer than 10 individuals within a category we do not provide the specific number to help prevent individuals from being identified.

Eritrea	<10
Ethiopia	<10
India	<10
Iran	25
Iraq	13
Kuwait Bidoun	<10
Libya	<10
Morocco	<10
Pakistan	<10
Sudan	<10
Syria	13
Turkey	<10
Vietnam	<10
Total	472

Of the 472 missing episodes, 468 related to males and 4 to females.

The breakdown of the claimed ages of these young people when they went missing is as follows:

Claimed Age	No. of Missing Episodes
12	<10
13	<10
14	13
15	75
16	135
17	241
18+	<10
Total	472

Where the claimed age is 18 years, this would be because the individual(s) were placed in the UASC hotel before their 18th birthday but went missing shortly after they had turned 18.

Are there any UASC 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?

a) Out of the 464 individuals who went missing, there are 78 young people still missing (as of 3 February 2025).

The breakdown of their claimed nationality is as follows:

Nationality	No. Still Missing
Afghanistan	<10
Albania	67
Egypt	<10
India	<10
Iran	<10
Pakistan	<10
Total	78

All of the 78 individuals that remain missing are male.

The breakdown of the claimed ages of these young people when they went missing is as follows:

Claimed Age	No. Still Missing
12	<10
14	<10
15	<10
16	16
17	55
Total	78

Based on the claimed ages at the time the individuals went missing, fewer than 10 of the 78 young people who remain missing are still aged under 18 years old.

Please note that the following caveats apply to these figures:

- They are based on local management information taken from live operational data sets and are therefore subject to change.
- There may be delays in the Home Office being notified that a UASC has been subsequently located.
- The ages and nationalities referred to are those claimed by the individual at the time they went missing rather than accepted by officials as accurate.

b) Any child going missing is extremely serious. The Home Office worked with the police and local authorities to seek to urgently locate any missing UASC at the time that they went missing to ensure that they were safe.

The legal duties, in relation to investigating missing UASC, sits with the local police force where the child went missing. This is in line with standard processes for any missing child in the UK. When UASC went missing from Home Office hotels, the MARS (Missing After Reasonable Steps) protocol was followed. A multi-agency, missing persons meeting was chaired by the local authority in which the hotel was located to try and establish the young person's whereabouts and to ensure that they were safe.

The National Police Chief's Council, in collaboration with the Home Office and the National Crime Agency, published detailed guidance to police forces on missing migrant children, available at:

<https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/publications-log/national-crime-coordination-committee/2023/npcc-guidance---missing-migrant-children.pdf>.

Alongside this, there was operational advice on investigative options which has been shared with police forces to further lines of enquiry in their investigations.

The Home Office continues to regularly review our systems for any updates regarding these individuals, sharing any relevant information with the responsible police force to aide their ongoing investigations. Throughout their investigations, the police liaise with the Home Office and the local authority where the young person went missing from.

In December 2024, the Home Office undertook a reconciliation exercise with local police forces to ensure that all UASC who remained missing were still flagged on the Police National Computer (PNC) as missing and cases were actively being pursued.

In addition, due to the large majority (87%) of those currently missing being Albanian nationals, we are currently undertaking conversations with our international migration taskforce to understand further lines of enquiry which may support the identification of any individual who may have returned to Albania. This follows several instances where Albanian nationals, who were missing, have been identified as they returned to Albania. In addition, The Home Office operates Operation Innerste, which is an Immigration Enforcement led child safeguarding initiative. This was developed in 2018 to better safeguard unaccompanied migrant children and tackle the complex issues which lead to a child going missing.

The first responder (usually the police) engages in a structured welfare conversation with the child to build early rapport. This provides the child with a safe environment to express their needs and concerns, and the opportunity for authorities to explain the support, services, and protection entitled to them. The creation of a relationship of trust between the professional and the child is intended to reduce the influence of traffickers and prevent them from absconding or going missing. The child will be referred by the First Responder to Local Authority Children's Services to be placed in accommodation. Separate arrangements are in place in Kent, where UAS children are predominantly encountered via small boat arrival. The Home Office work closely with Kent County Council who provide emergency accommodation and support.

The operation continues to operate successfully, standardising processes, in 39 Police Forces across England and Wales, safeguarding over 2,000 unaccompanied children in the last five years.

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?

When a missing UASC had been located, support would have been provided on a case by case basis depending on the needs of the child and the circumstances surrounding their missing episode.

As set out in the National Police Chiefs' Council guidance, referenced and linked above, when a missing child is located a prevention interview should be conducted. This should be done by a police officer from the force area where the missing child was located. All young people who returned to the hotels after their missing episodes had a prevention interview to ensure that they were safe and to ascertain if any criminal offences had been committed against them. The young people who did not return to the hotels following their missing episode but were still aged under 18 at the time they were located were referred to the relevant local authority for further support.

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?

The Home Office operated hotels which accommodated young people who had claimed asylum. Therefore, when they arrived in the UK as part of the asylum process a welfare interview was conducted by Home Office staff. The details obtained from this would have been used to assess whether there were any indicators that the individual may be a potential victim of trafficking or modern slavery. If there were indicators of this, the child would have been referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and the hotel alerted in advance of their arrival.

Each UASC hotel had a dedicated team of professionals who would support the complex needs of each child. This included access to nurses, social workers available during the day and support staff who were resident within the hotels. Where there were concerns regarding potential trafficking risks, then a plan was put in place to support that child, whilst an NRM referral was made.

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?

The return from missing interviews that were conducted with the young people after they were located revealed that there was a variety of reasons as to why they went missing from the hotels. Some were only missing for short periods of time after getting lost in the local area; others went to join family members already in the UK. Unfortunately, some UASC who went missing were subsequently located in exploitative situations and may have been trafficked or victims of other forms of exploitation. Several children who were placed in UASC hotels went on to receive positive conclusive NRM decisions.

As stated above, the police force where a missing migrant child is located is responsible for completing a prevention interview and investigating whether any criminal offences have been committed against the child.

One of our UASC hotels, based in the Brighton and Hove local authority area, came under media scrutiny due to 137 UASC children going missing from that hotel, mainly during the summer of 2022. In January 2023, the Brighton and Hove Children Safeguarding Partnership (BHSCP) commissioned an Independent Scrutineer to examine the Partnership response to UASC who had gone missing from this hotel. The full report can be accessed here: <https://www.bhscp.org.uk/2023/02/28/bhscp-statement-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-uasc-scrutiny-paper/>. In summary, the report found good multi-agency working, a genuine will across all agencies to protect and safeguard these children and no evidence to support claims of kidnapping or direct evidence of coercion by criminal gangs.

Were additional safeguards implemented to ensure that children who go through the asylum system do not go missing?

If any concerns are identified regarding a child who is going through the asylum process, including concerns that they could go missing, then a referral will be made by Home Office staff to the relevant local authority.

Local authorities are responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children in their area, including UASC. Local authorities have a statutory duty to care for, and accommodate, unaccompanied children. A local authority's duties under the Children Act 1989 apply to all children, irrespective of immigration status, based on need alone.

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?

The last hotel operated by the Home Office to accommodate UASC closed in January 2024. Kent County Council are now taking UASC directly into local authority care.

This Government is taking all possible steps to support local authorities, including Kent County Council who accommodate all UASC arriving via small boats, to fully discharge their statutory duties to unaccompanied children. The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, introduced in Parliament on 30 January 2025, repeals certain sections of the Illegal Migration Act 2023, including provisions relating to the accommodation and transfer of unaccompanied children (sections 16 to 21). This reflects our view that unaccompanied children should be in the care of local authorities which are best placed to support these young people.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Angela Eagle".

Dame Angela Eagle DBE MP
Minister for Border Security & Asylum