



PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE OF UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

British Red Cross

CASE STUDY

Title page: Children participating in British Red Cross programming
Photo credit: British Red Cross

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Background

Young refugees are a strategic priority area for the British Red Cross (BRC). The BRC aims to support young refugees to feel safe, live with dignity, and have choice and opportunity in the UK.

To achieve this strategic goal, the BRC has recruited its first ever permanent post for a National Young Refugees Manager in October 2023, and is currently developing the first ever Young Refugee Strategy in line with its Strategy 2030. It is strengthening the operational capacity of our frontline teams to support young refugees by operating a Young Refugee Working Group that develops national resources, guidance, and training on supporting young refugees.

Operationally, the BRC does not have a young refugee-specific national programme. BRC runs a number of projects providing casework and group work to separated children across the UK, all funded separately and managed locally, as well as working with a significant number of separated children through our tracing services and with children joining relatives in the UK via BRC's family reunion programme.

Who was Supported and How

For BRC, a "young refugee" is a young person aged 15–25 who is in the UK alone seeking protection. This includes unaccompanied children and young adults, because BRC recognises the additional vulnerabilities of young adulthood in line with UK laws and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement approaches.

BRC also consider "young refugees" children who arrive in the UK with their family through safe and legal routes. These children are supported through post-arrival casework with their parents/carers.

Direct support for young refugees emphasises one-to-one advice and life skills learning.

- Through one-to-one support, BRC ensures that young people and families can understand their rights and access the services they are entitled to. BRC delivers this provision across most areas in the UK. The top 3 issues BRC supported unaccompanied minors with in 2023 were destitution, health & wellbeing, and access to legal advice (including understanding age assessments). The top 3 issues we supported children in families with were access to benefits, safe and suitable accommodation, and school registration.
- Through BRC's life skills sessions, it supports young people to learn new activities, develop their skills and build their confidence in a safe space. Life skills sessions are delivered in several areas in the UK (London, Kent, Portsmouth, Glasgow, Birmingham, Peterborough). BRC provides sessions for both female and male young refugees and signpost to external providers for LGBTQ+ activities.

BRC work with these populations is guided by trauma-informed principles. This involves acknowledging the impact of traumatic experiences children and young people may have had and resisting re-traumatisation. This is achieved by creating safe and trusting relationships, enabling choice, and recognising cultural background in relation to young people's needs. BRC collaborates with other agencies, such as doctors, education providers, Children's Services, and youth organisations, for pathways that ensure that young people can access timely and appropriate help.

In 2023, BRC carried out a Refugee Support-wide survey, and nearly 90% of the young people surveyed reported that they trust and feel safe with the BRC.

Successes

The BRC does not have a national framework of co-produced outcomes for young refugees. However, it does support high numbers of young refugees and can show its impact in numbers.

- In 2023, BRC supported 5,790 young refugees aged 15-25.
- Young refugee-specific projects in London, Kent, Glasgow, and Peterborough supported 848 people.
- BRC supported over 500 age-disputed young people with having their age accepted and accessing care.

Learn more about one of BRC's previous projects and the impact it achieved: **Surviving to Thriving Impact Report**.

BRC collects data and advocates for change for young people. BRC's Policy & Advocacy team highlights points in the immigration system that make young refugees vulnerable to lack of support, poverty, and exploitation. BRC staff working with young refugees support Policy colleagues in their engagement with the rapidly changing UK asylum policy and with advocating for safe routes and a fair asylum process accessible to all.

Challenges and Difficulties

Some of the challenges experienced by BRC in their implementation of programming with young refugees include:

- BRC does not have a set of co-produced outcomes for its tailored work with young refugees. This makes it more difficult to monitor and evaluate its work. BRC is developing its first ever Young Refugee Strategy that will develop co-produced outcomes for its national work in the implementation stage, and are involving young people in formulating these.
- The increasing complexity of the UK immigration system, and challenges around accessing health care, education, while also dealing with social issues in communities all present challenges to young refugees at a time in their lives when they are often less equipped to deal with them. BRC wants governments to recognise every young person's needs in the immigration system.

The main policy changes affecting BRC services relate to the Illegal Migration Bill 2023 (IMA), the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (NABA), and Streamlined Asylum Processing.

- The IMA is not fully commenced. If it were to commence, it may result in increases in homelessness/ destitution faced by BRC supported young people, and the detention and deportation of age disputed-young people and unaccompanied minors in care when they turn 18.
- The NABA has brought into force new regulations allowing the use of scientific methods in age assessments for unaccompanied children. It also gives power to the Home Office to set out new regulations for age assessments that are not safeguarding-led.
- Streamlined Asylum Processing (SAP) aims to move people faster through the asylum system, but has led to thousands of newly granted refugees becoming homeless in the move-on period and large numbers of asylum claims being withdrawn by the Home Office.

Lessons Learned

- The importance of having a consistent offer for young people across BRC's many UK locations has become evident. While it is appropriate that BRC local services have a degree of variation due to local needs, the differing level of provision, expertise and capacity of teams makes it more challenging to achieve equity of support and is a barrier to reporting consistently to donors. BRC are beginning to address this through the development of its first ever national young refugee strategy and through a national Improvement Work programme that aims to improve the quality and consistency of BRC services.
- The need for holistic support. BRC prioritises providing 1:1 support to young people to access their rights and entitlements, however this should ideally be complemented by group life skills sessions and psychosocial support to enable young people to achieve their full potential. Most of BRC's services are only able to provide 1:1 support and not other essential elements due to capacity, funding restrictions, and the challenges of the external environment. BRC addresses this by signposting and referring young refugees and families to external providers, where available.