

APRIL 2026

# Deaths of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people

in the care of,  
or supported by,  
local authorities

**An investigation**

Research by  
**Benny Hunter**

Commissioned by  
**Da'aro Youth Project**



Da'aro Youth Project is a registered charity | No. 1189245

[campaigns@daaroyouth.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@daaroyouth.org.uk)

This report includes data related to the deaths, including deaths by suicide, of young people.

The presentation of statistics can be dehumanising.

We want to re-affirm the humanity of every young person who has lost their lives after travelling to the UK to seek safety and sanctuary.

Each number discussed in this report was a person who had a family, friends, and a community.

We embark on this work in the hope that illuminating this issue will help prevent future deaths from occurring.

Our hope is for a United Kingdom in which all young people can feel safe and supported, and in which they can thrive.

# Executive summary

- Over a 10 year period, between 2015 and 2024, at least 52 unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people died whilst being cared for, or supported by, a local authority or health and social care trust in the United Kingdom.
- In addition, an unknown number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children died whilst trying to access care. This research identifies two children who were in touch with a local authority, and who had sought to become looked after, who died during this period.
- Of the total number of 54 deaths, the majority – at least 31 young people – died by suicide.
- Teenagers make up more than two-thirds of those known to have died by suicide.
- Eritrean nationals were disproportionately represented, making up more than one half of all deaths by suicide.
- Most deaths occurred in the most recent five-year period – a total of 25 suicides and 19 other deaths between 2020 and 2024. More unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people died in 2024 than in any previous year (a total of 14 deaths).
- The second-leading cause of death for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in the care of, or supported by, a local authority was homicide.
- These deaths have resulted in only four published case reviews, including two serious case reviews, one child safeguarding practice review, and one safeguarding adults review.
- No prevention of future deaths reports have been identified by this study as having been published following an inquest.
- Over this same 10 year period, the total number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in the care of, or supported by, local authorities in the UK has more than tripled, rising from approximately 7,200 to 21,890 in England alone.

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These research findings demand a meaningful response from the UK government, as well as from devolved and local governments. We have four key **recommendations**:

1. **Data:** The UK government must collect and publish appropriate data.
2. **Inquests:** Local authorities must be required to notify and provide evidence to the coroner presiding over an inquest where the deceased was a looked after child or care leaver.
3. **Reviews:** A rapid review must be undertaken when a looked after child or care leaver dies. The UK government must undertake a national review of the deaths in this report.
4. **Rights & Entitlements:** The UK government must strengthen the rights and entitlements of these young people and ensure implementation of a new safeguarding strategy.

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# Introduction

Da'aro Youth Project was founded in 2018 in response to the deaths by suicide of four teenagers, who were young asylum-seekers from Eritrea. As a registered UK charity, Da'aro Youth Project provides targeted youthwork and psycho-social support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people (up to the age of 24), who are from countries in the Horn of Africa and living in London.

In 2021, Da'aro Youth Project wrote to the UK government, with 45 other organisations from across the refugee rights, mental health, and children's sectors, raising the alarm about unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people dying by suicide. We made a number of recommendations to government, only one of which was implemented.

At that time, the UK government agreed to make changes to the way that the Department for Education (DFE) monitors deaths of care leavers who are still in touch with local authorities, and some of whom will still be in receipt of housing, financial and other support. This policy change was consulted on and is included in the most recently published version of statutory guidance, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (see page 141).

In the absence of any accurate historic data on the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who die each year, Da'aro Youth Project commissioned this investigation.

## Who is this report about?

This report is about the deaths of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in the care of, or receiving support from, local authorities and health and social care trusts in the United Kingdom. Hereafter we shall use the term 'unaccompanied young people' to refer to this group.

This group includes not only those who have previously made a claim for asylum, but also those who have received a decision on their asylum claim, including those granted refugee status or humanitarian protection, and refused asylum-seekers.

This group includes both children and young adults (up to and including 24 years of age).

When a child enters the United Kingdom and they are unaccompanied by any adult family members, they may be accommodated by a local authority, under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. A child who has been in the care of a local authority for more than 24 hours is known as a looked after child. Unaccompanied children who are 'looked after' are more commonly accommodated in foster care if they are younger, and in residential care if they are older. Looked after children are entitled to a dedicated social worker who should meet with them regularly and ensure that they have an up-to-date Care Plan and Personal Education Plan, to ensure their safety, health, and educational needs are met. They are also entitled to support from an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) whose primary focus is to quality assure the care planning process for each child and to ensure that their current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.

Most looked after children will leave care at the age of 18 and become known as a care leaver. Many of these care leavers will continue to be entitled to ongoing support from a local authority until the age of 21 years of age, or 25 years of age where required. Former relevant children (those care leavers aged between 18 and 25 who were previously in care for at least 13 weeks after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday and for some time after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday) are entitled to: a Personal Advisor; a Pathway Plan, kept under regular review; assistance with employment, education and training; assistance with accommodation; and help with living costs where applicable. Many former relevant children live in supported accommodation with accommodation keyworkers who provide support, but some live independently and others may continue to live with their foster parents in a 'staying put' arrangement until they are 21.

The 'unaccompanied young people' we are therefore referring to in this research are: i) unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are 'looked after' and in the care of local authorities; ii) young adult care leavers, who were previously unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and who are in receipt of support from local authorities as former relevant children.

As is also touched on in this report, some unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, end up outside of the care system, due to having their ages disputed (being believed to be 18 years of age or older by the Home Office or a local authority) or otherwise having local authority care gate-kept from them.

## Methodology and limitations

In order to establish the data published within this report, Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were made to every local authority children's services department in England, Wales and Scotland, as well as every health and social care trust in Northern Ireland, asking for information about unaccompanied young people who were looked after children or former relevant children, who had died between 2015 and 2024.

Through a process of engagement with these public bodies and engagement with the Information Commissioner's Office, a final response was eventually received from every local authority and trust by the end of 2025.

In total, 37 local authorities and trusts indicated they had relevant information. This included one health and social care trust in Northern Ireland, two local authorities in Scotland, zero local authorities in Wales, and 34 local authorities in England.

Of these, all local authorities (bar one) provided the requested statistical information in full by the time of their final response. The majority also provided the requested demographic information, with a minority providing some or none of that information.

A number of local authorities provided information that was incorrect when viewed alongside already established information. For example, Enfield Council did not provide correct information about the deaths of asylum-seeking Children Looked After (CLA), even though the death of 'YT', an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child looked after by Enfield, had resulted in a serious case review, published in 2017 (see '**Case Reviews**' section).

# Information held centrally by government

The Department for Education (DFE) will only be made aware of the death of a looked after child or care leaver through a child safeguarding incident report from a local authority. Local authorities **must** notify the Secretary of State for Education and Ofsted of the death of a looked after child and **should** (but are not mandated to) notify the Secretary of State for Education, and Ofsted of the death of a care leaver up to and including the age of 24.

The child safeguarding incident report system was amended on 1 December 2022 to ensure local authorities could flag when an incident related to a Child Looked After (CLA) and/or a person who was, or had previously been, an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC). In addition, care leaver status was added to the child safeguarding incident report system on 1 January 2024, following our campaigning work. For more information see the most up-to-date version of the statutory guidance '[Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)' and guidance on the government website titled '[Report the death or serious harm of a child or care leaver](#)'.

The DFE published [data on care leaver deaths](#) for the first time in 2025, indicating they had been notified by local authorities in England of 91 deaths in the year to 31 March 2025, with the majority being aged 16 to 21. Comparatively, there were 45 [deaths of looked after children](#) for which the DFE was notified in the year to 31 March 2025. No information on causes of death is published by the DFE. Neither the published care leaver deaths data nor looked after children deaths data disaggregated by 'unaccompanied asylum-seeking child' status. This breakdown was therefore requested from the DFE and provided by them. Demographic information and information on cause of death was requested but withheld, and a complaint has been made to the Information Commissioner's Office (a decision notice is still pending at the time of writing).

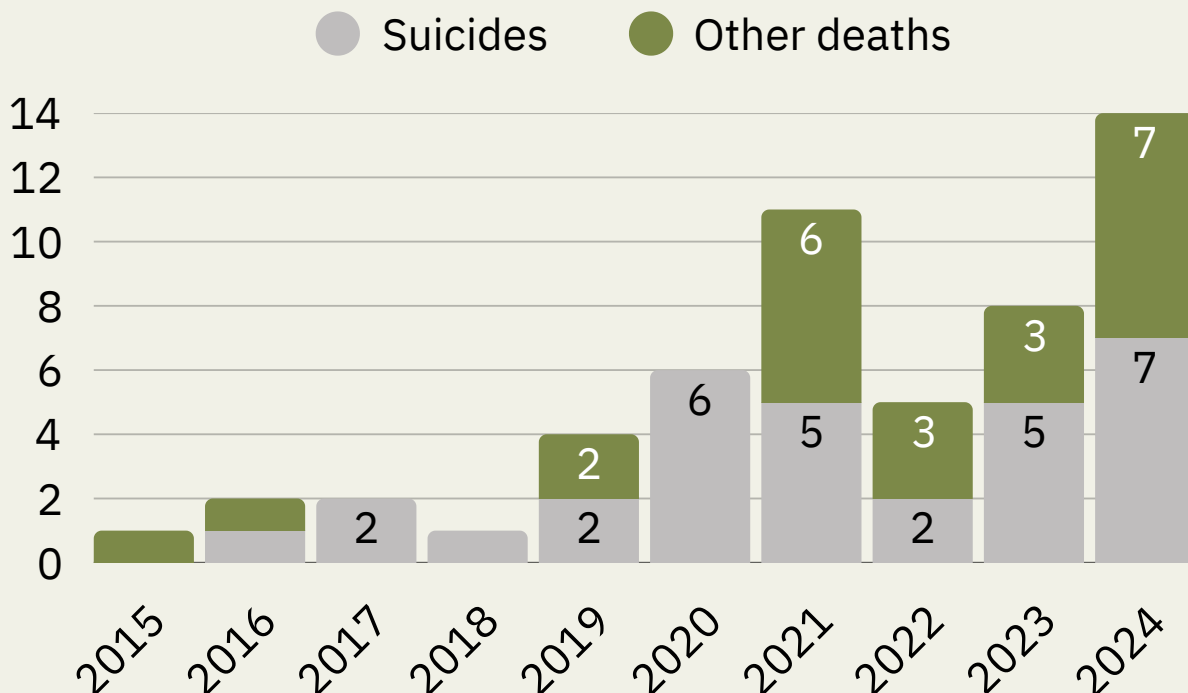
The DFE also initially claimed that there had been no notifications to them of UASC CLA deaths during a two-year period for which there had been deaths. This position was later rectified following an internal review, and they indicated UASC CLA had died during the period they had information about. The fact that some local authorities – and the Department for Education itself – did not correctly respond in the first instance to enquiries about data on deaths of looked after children or young people in receipt of care leaver support, suggests that data is not always being recorded accurately.

As well as making requests for information from local authorities and the DFE, we requested relevant information from the Home Office about the numbers of asylum claims that had been closed due to the claimant having died, for both children (aged 17 and under), for young adults (aged 24 and under), and age-disputed people. The Home Office gave some statistical information but refused most other requests for information, incl. nationality information.

Appeals were made to the Information Commissioner's Office resulting in three decision notices ([IC-391477-W0P4](#) | [IC-391475-Z2N9](#) | [IC-406880-L5G8](#)) requiring the Home Office to further disclose information that had been withheld. Since 2024, the ICO has issued five separate decision notices upholding complaints that the Home Office was wrongly withholding requested information about asylum-seekers who have died. The Home Office has since appealed four out of five decision notices to the information tribunal (including the three decision notices listed above). At the time of writing, these tribunal appeals have yet to be heard.

# The data

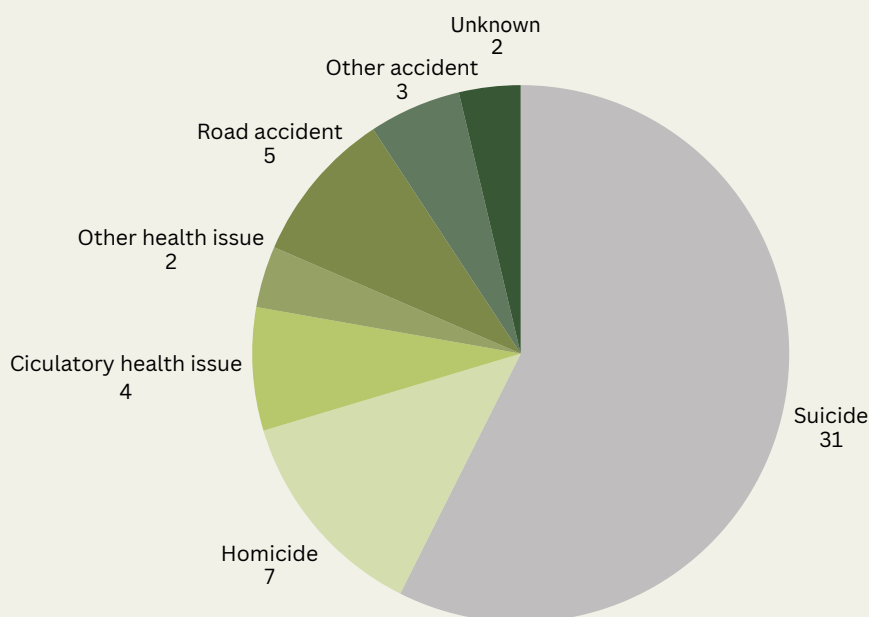
**Figure 1**  
Deaths (2015-2024),  
bar chart.



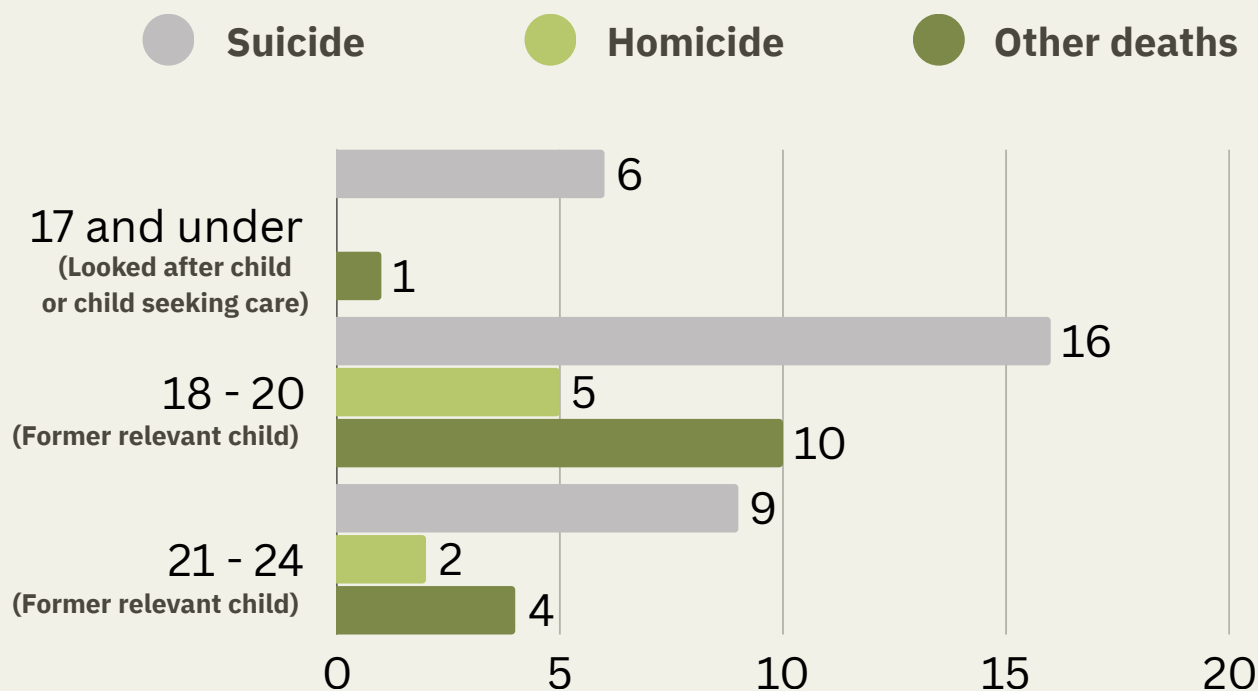
The graph in **Figure 1** represents 52 unaccompanied young people who died whilst in the care of, or whilst still in touch with, a local authority or health and social care trust in the United Kingdom, as well as 2 children who died whilst trying to access local authority care (a total of 54 deaths).

The majority of deaths have taken place in the last five years, a total of 25 deaths by suicide and 19 other deaths during 2020 to 2024. 2024 was the year with the highest number of deaths of unaccompanied young people, with 7 deaths by suicide and 7 other deaths.

A further breakdown of cause of death is provided in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2**  
Cause of death,  
all deaths (2015 -  
2024), pie chart.



**Figure 3** Age group / Cause of death (2015-2024), bar chart\*

As shown in **Figure 3**, seven children died during this period, of which six died by suicide. Of the seven children, five were looked after and two were children outside the care system who had sought to be brought into care shortly before their death (see Dawit in **Case Reviews** section and Amir Safi in **Other publicised cases** section).

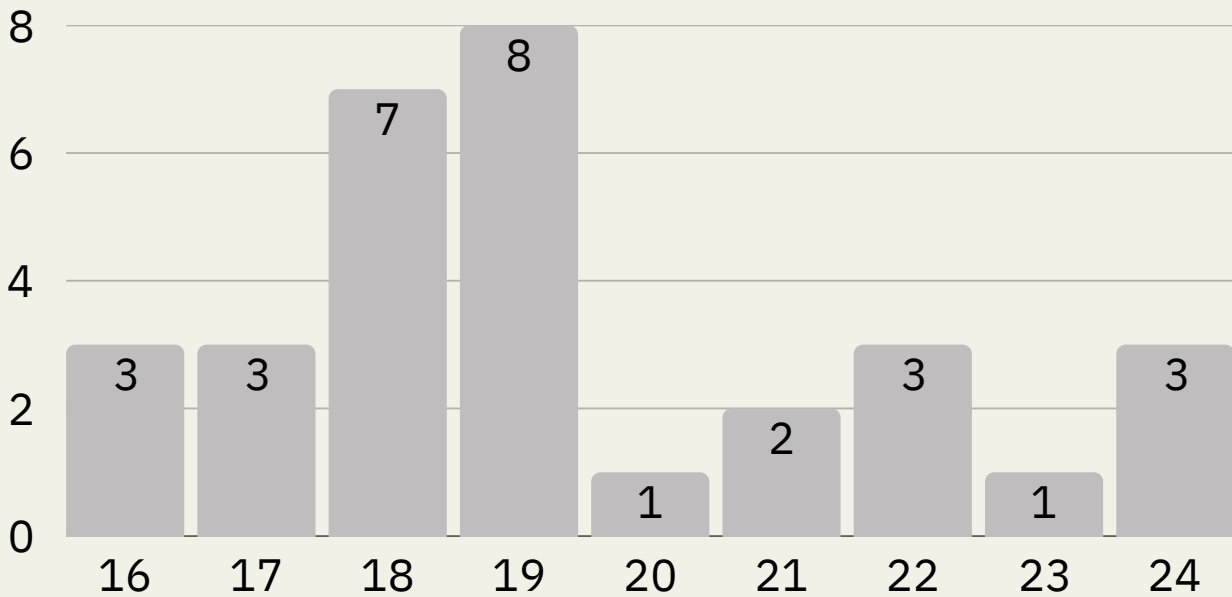
The remaining 47 deaths are of former relevant children (which is the name for young adult care leavers who have previously been in care for more than 13 weeks after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday and for some time after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday).

Local authorities are required to keep in touch with all care leavers up until the point they reach age 21, and to make their best efforts to contact all care leavers aged 21 to 24 annually to remind them that they remain eligible for support. If a young person chooses not to take up support between 21 to 24 years of age the local authority may no longer be aware of a care leaver’s whereabouts or circumstances (and therefore their death).

\*Not included in **Figure 3** is one death of a former relevant child, 18+, exact age unknown and cause of death also unknown.

# Deaths by suicide

Suicide, or self-inflicted death, was the leading cause of death across the entire date range, and for each of the three age groups (as shown above in **Figure 3**) and also in every year, except for 2015 and 2022 (see **Figure 1**).



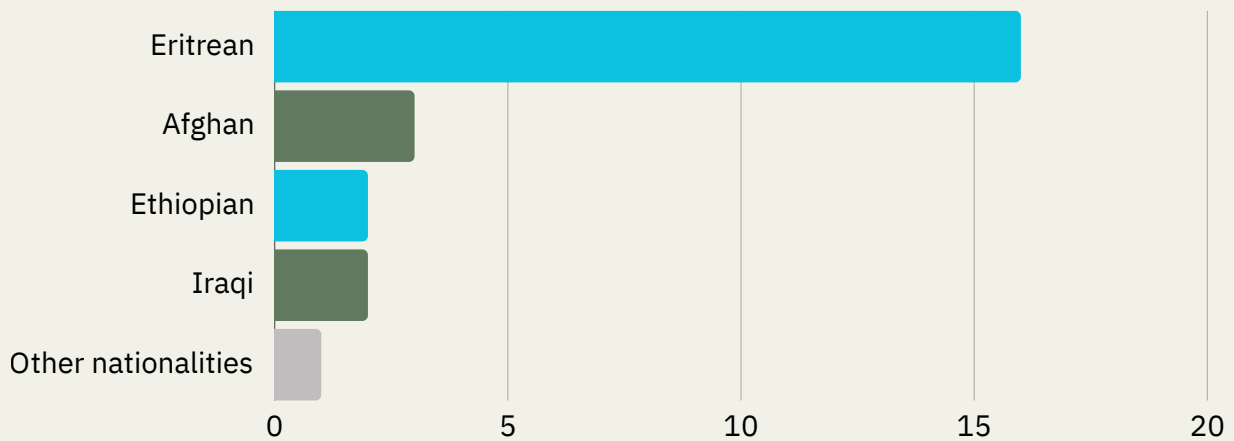
**Figure 4** Age / Number of deaths by suicide, bar chart

Teenagers made up 2 out of 3 deaths by suicide during this period (see **Figure 4** above).

Most unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrive in the UK aged 16 or 17 years of age (90% of unaccompanied children in care, according to [Department for Education statistics](#)). At 18 years of age, looked after children become young adult care leavers and the level of support they receive from the local authority changes (as described in previous section '**Who is this report about?**')

The abrupt change in the level of support they receive at the age of 18, as they exit care and are no longer 'looked after' is often referred to as a "cliff edge". It is notable in the above chart that considerably more unaccompanied young people died by suicide in the two years after they left care than at any other period.

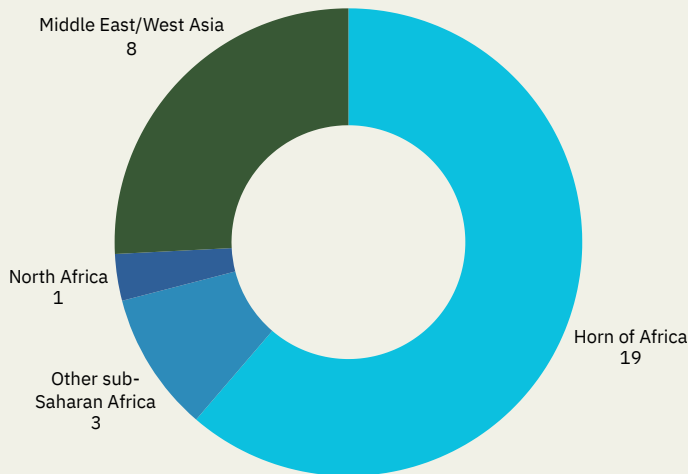
**Figure 5** Nationality / Number of deaths by suicide (2015-2024), bar chart



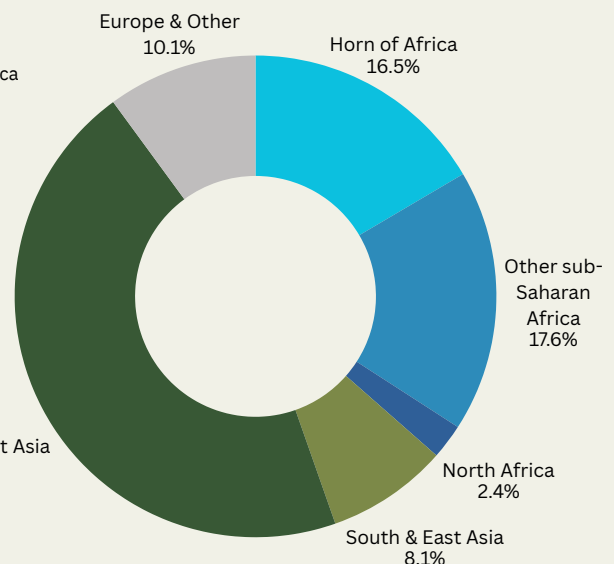
In **Figure 5**, other nationalities for which one death was recorded include: Algerian, Chadian, Kazakhstani, Saudi, Somali, Sudanese, South Sudanese and Syrian.

The data gathered as part of this research showed a clear disproportionality for deaths by suicide of Eritrean nationals, accounting for more than half of all deaths by suicide (Eritreans only accounted for 12.5% of all asylum applications by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children for the 2015-2024 period).

As in **Figure 6**, African young people accounted for three-quarters of deaths by suicide during this period, with most deaths being nationals of countries within the Horn of Africa. **Figure 7** shows the origin of unaccompanied children who claimed asylum in 2015-2024\*.



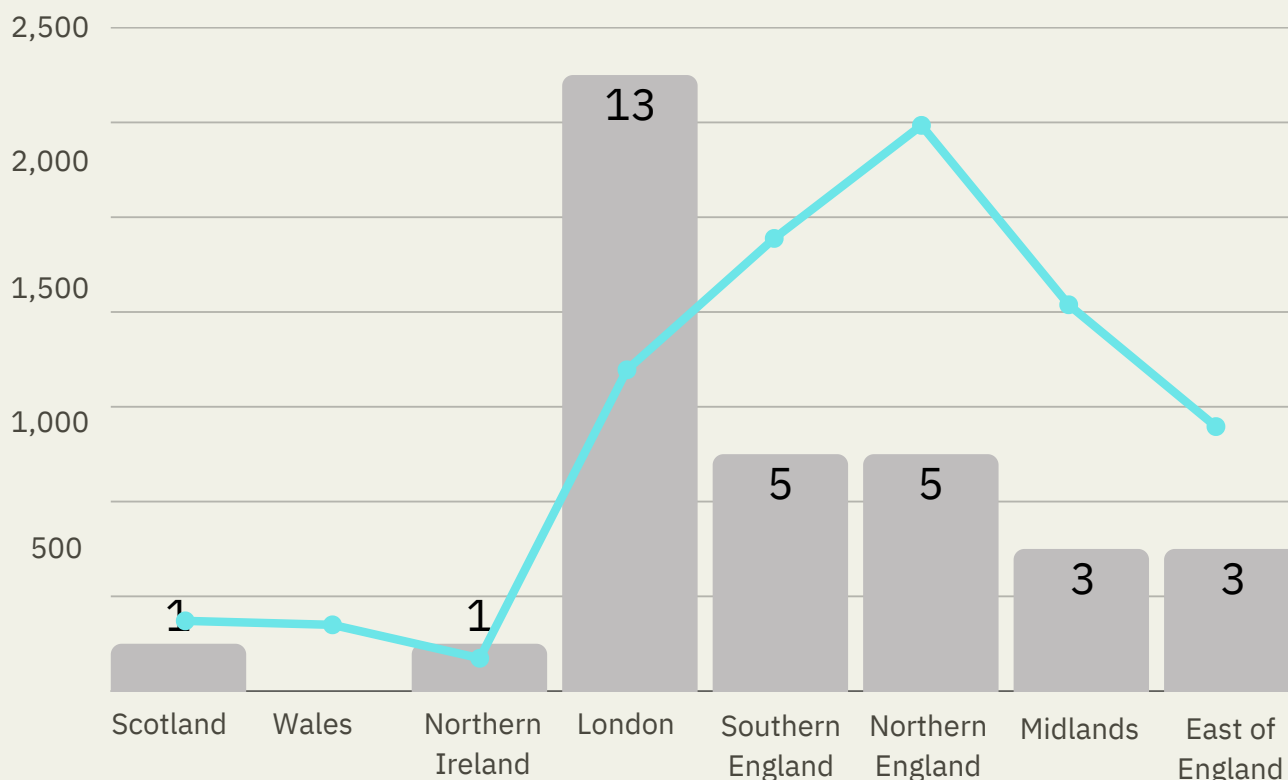
**Figure 6**  
Region of origin /  
Number of deaths by  
suicide (2015-2024),  
pie chart



**Figure 7**  
Region of origin for  
unaccompanied  
children claiming  
asylum (2015-2024),  
pie chart.

\*In **Figure 6** and **Figure 7**, Sudan is included in 'Other sub-Saharan Africa'

**Figure 8** Deaths by suicide by region / number of unaccompanied children in care by region (2015-2024), bar and line chart



As per **Figure 8**, more unaccompanied young people living under the care of London local authorities died by suicide during this period, even though less unaccompanied young people lived in their care compared to local authorities in Southern England, Northern England or the Midlands (in 2024).

Some local authorities experienced more than one death by suicide during the period of 2015-2024:

- Kent County Council, which cares for the largest number of unaccompanied children of all local authorities in England and Wales, experienced 4 deaths by suicide of unaccompanied young adult care leavers\*, and 2 deaths through other causes.
- London Borough of Camden, which cares for far fewer people than Kent, experienced 3 deaths by suicide of unaccompanied young adult care leavers, all of whom were Eritrean.
- London Borough of Enfield also experienced 3 deaths of Eritrean nationals, of which 2 were deaths by suicide.

Other local authorities that experienced two deaths of an unaccompanied young people, or more, during the period were: London Borough of Croydon; London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham; Hertfordshire County; Manchester City; Milton Keynes City; Surrey County; and London Borough of Wandsworth.

\*This figure includes three former relevant children and one qualifying care leaver

# Estimating a suicide rate

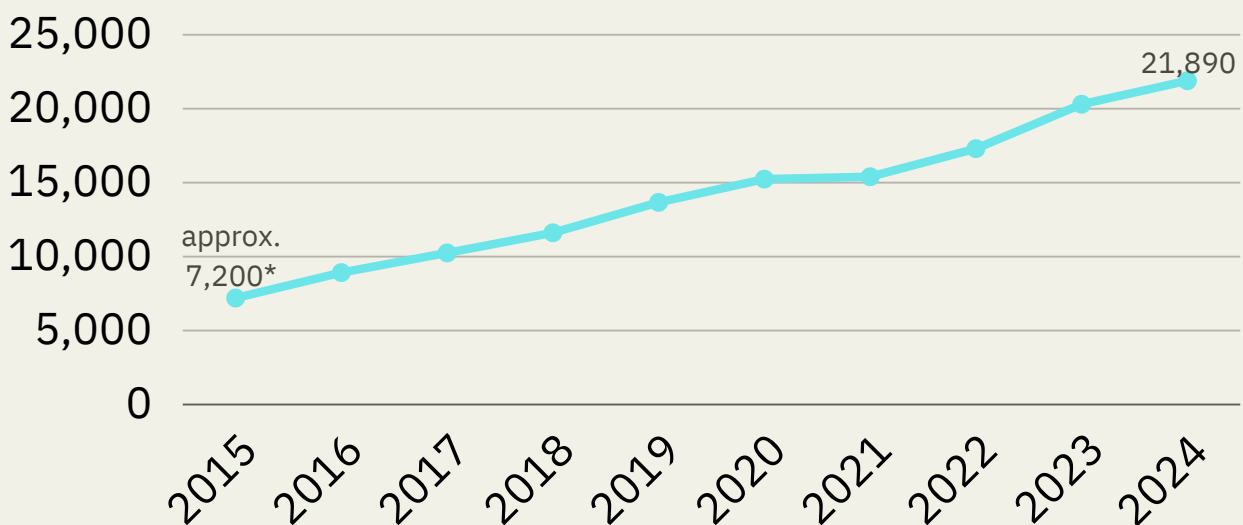
Suicide rates are an important tool for comparing the risk of suicide between different groups. They are most commonly calculated as the number of deaths per 100,000 per year. For example, for boys and men aged 10-24 years in UK, the suicide rate in 2023 was 6 deaths per 100,000, according to the [Office of National Statistics](#).

[Samaritans guidance](#) on understanding suicide rate states that: “Smaller populations often produce rates that are less reliable as the rates per 100,000 are based on small numbers. Therefore, differences in the number of suicides may have a bigger impact on the rate than in a larger population... Year-on-year fluctuations can be misleading. It is important to look at suicide trends over a relatively long period of time. Increases and decreases year-on-year should not necessarily be viewed as ‘true’ changes to the trend that are attributable to any specific psycho-social factors.”

In order to estimate a suicide rate for this group, it is important to establish the population size. This is surprisingly difficult because some regions of the United Kingdom do not hold such data centrally.

The [Department for Education publishes data](#) on the number of children in care and care leavers (aged 18 to 21) who previously arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. We know from this data that between 2015 and 2024 the number of unaccompanied young people supported by English local authorities has more than tripled (see **Figure 9**). Both the Scottish Government and the Department for Health Northern Ireland told us that they do not collect or publish this data for local authorities and trusts in their respective areas. The Welsh Government only had this information for children in care and not for care leavers.

Following publication of this report, collecting more relevant data and estimating a suicide rate for this group will be an important step to addressing any issues of group disparity in suicide prevention. This important work should be undertaken by the UK government and devolved administrations.



**Figure 9** Population of unaccompanied youth, 0-21 years of age, England, line chart

\*(caveat: DFE is missing data on 18-year-olds for 2015, so this has been estimated here)

# Case reviews

The following four case reviews were identified as part of this research as relevant to the period and subject matter. Three of them relate to children under the age of 18 (or individuals claiming to be) and only one relates to a young adult care leaver.

## ‘Dawit’

[Dawit: local child safeguarding practice review](#)

Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership - Published 2022

‘Dawit’ was a 16-year-old boy who died by suicide in May 2021. Dawit had arrived in the UK from an African country in October 2020 to live with his sister after both his parents had died. Dawit’s sister was a Lambeth care leaver, having previously arrived in the UK as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child. Dawit and his younger brother were reportedly living with their sister in a one-bedroom flat, where at least one of the brothers slept on the floor. The 16+ Leaving Care Services referred Dawit and his brother to Children’s Social Care and a decision was made to undertake a Section 17 Child and Family Assessment. The outcome was for no further action as the assessment identified no concerns about the boys and it was thought that there was sufficient support in place for their sister to look after her brothers. She did not have parental responsibility for her brothers.

## ‘Adult A’

[Safeguarding Adult Review: Adult A](#)

Thurrock Safeguarding Adults - Published 2022

Adult A died by suicide in April 2021 having arrived in the UK from Algeria in November 2018, claiming to be 16 years of age. Later in the same month, Adult A went to London, did not return to his placement address, and was reported as missing. Although initially identified as a potential victim of trafficking, an assessment by the National Referral Mechanism process concluded that there were no reasonable grounds to suspect that the individual was a victim of modern slavery. Then, in January 2021, Adult A presented as homeless in Manchester. In February 2021, Adult A requested to return home to Algeria and had regular contact with the Home Office Voluntary Returns Service. Adult A remained homeless but moved to London before his death. Doubts are raised in the review about Adult A’s age.

## ‘Child C’

### Serious case review: Child C

Shropshire Safeguarding Children Board - Published 2018

Child C claimed to be a 17-year-old male child from Vietnam who died in December 2016 by drug misuse. Child C presented to services as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child in April 2016 after being discovered in a lorry in Shropshire. He was suspected to have been trafficked into the UK. He went missing from his foster care placement within days of being placed. He remained as a missing person until he was found deceased in Derbyshire. Doubts are raised during the review about Child C’s age.

## ‘YT’

### Serious case review: 'YT'

Enfield Safeguarding Children Board - Published 2017

YT was a 17-year-old Eritrean boy who died after his arrest for illegal entry into the UK and subsequent placement in foster care. YT was found in the back of a cargo lorry in Enfield and was taken into police custody. YT was seen to act in an agitated way in the police interview room and at one stage stood up and punched a wall in the interview room, causing a small dent. He was placed in handcuffs by the police. Once it was established YT was a child, a foster placement was sought and he was taken to a foster family the same day. The foster family struggled to communicate with YT but were planning to introduce him to another Eritrean person the next day. Late the next evening YT was found dead by suicide.

## Other publicised cases

### Filmon, Alexander, Osman and Mulue

Four Eritrean teenagers died by suicide over an 16-month period between November 2017 and February 2019. All of them were care leavers who had previously arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and to varying degrees were all known to each other. Filmon died in November 2017. Alexander died in December 2017. Osman died in May 2018. Mulubrhan (known as Mulue) died in February 2019. Both the Guardian newspaper and BBC News wrote overview pieces about this group of four teenage boys and what happened to them. Da’aro Youth Project supported the families of Alexander, Osman and Mulue to have legal representation in their respective inquests.

In 2019, the Senior Coroner for Inner North London, Ms Mary Hassell, directed the London Borough of Camden to alert other local authorities that there may be an increased risk of suicide amongst Eritrean young people who arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Since then, at least eleven Eritrean young people have died by suicide whilst supported by local authorities.

## Amir Safi

Amir Safi was an asylum-seeker from Afghanistan. He died of injuries sustained in a collision after he was seen walking on an M1 slip road at about 4:30am in April 2023, hours after a Nottinghamshire county council social worker told him that they agreed with the Home Office that Amir was an adult, not a child. The social worker told the Coroner's Court that Amir had shown her a photograph of a Tazkira, an Afghanistan identity document, on his phone, but she was unable to read it as it was not in English. She did not seek to have it translated. The ID showed his date of birth as October 2006, which would have made him 16 at the time. The inquest heard that Amir described the outcome of the Brief Enquiry as an "*injustice*" and that he was "*very quiet and subdued and appeared worried*" when he was told that the social worker did not accept he was a child. The Coroner read evidence from a roommate that Amir was very sad and "*hopeless*" and "*helpless*".

Amir's case is detailed in write-ups by the charity [INQUEST](#), by [the Guardian](#) newspaper and by [BBC News](#). Da'aro Youth Project supported the family of Amir Safi to have legal representation in the inquest that followed his death.

## Emma Alraabeah

Emma Alraabeah fled to the UK in 2022, aged 16, from Saudi Arabia, and claimed asylum. She had previously been in the care of Essex County Council. At 18 years of age, Emma was found dead in her supported accommodation. The coroner heard that Emma came out as transgender at the age of 14 and had told her GP that changing gender in Saudi Arabia could result in prison or death. The persecution she would have faced led her to come to the UK. The Coroner recorded a verdict of suicide. Emma's case was highlighted in reporting by [BBC News](#).

## 'Teenage Afghan'

An [unnamed 19-year-old care leaver](#) died by suicide in 2021. This young person originally arrived as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child from Afghanistan at 13 years of age and had been in the care of Solihull Council. An inquest heard that he was a likely victim of modern slavery after he was found to be working in a pizza shop without payment. A referral was made to the National Referral Mechanism which investigates those thought to be victims of modern slavery and provides them with support. He was granted temporary leave to remain in the UK until the age of 18 but was then at risk of deportation and had to make a further asylum application to the Home Office. His personal adviser who was supporting him in his transition from childhood to adulthood and independent living, said that he had been concerned about his immigration case.

# Deaths of other young asylum-seekers

This research has been concerned primarily with ‘unaccompanied’ young people seeking asylum, who are those who arrive in the UK before they turn 18 years of age, and are then mostly accommodated and supported by local authorities.

Those who reach the UK at 18 or later, will not enter local authority care or be entitled to care leaver support, even though they may be the same age as asylum-seeking care leavers, and may have left home as a child and experience many of the same upheavals and difficulties. These young people are, in most cases, accommodated by the Home Office for the duration of their asylum claim.

We asked the Home Office how many of these young people had their asylum claim closed because they had died, and then identified those who weren’t care leavers. This question does not provide for individuals who died after their asylum claim was closed for any other reason – for example, Alexander Tekle who died shortly after his claim was withdrawn by the Home Office for non-contact. It is unclear whether this data includes individuals who died after being refused asylum or whilst in the appeals process.

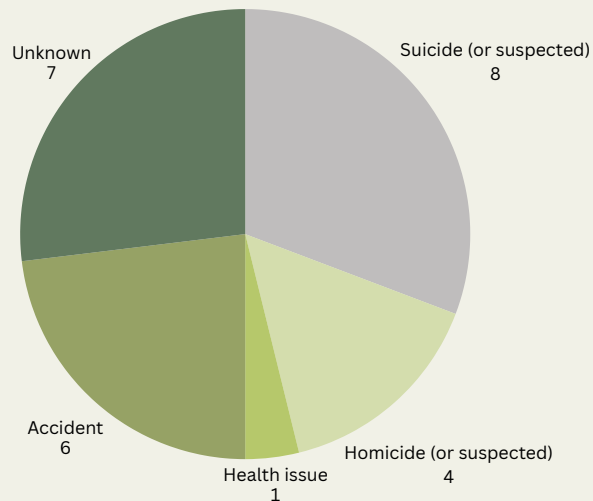
Between 2015 and 2024, the number of young adult asylum-seekers (aged 18 to 24 years of age) who were not care leavers and who died is at least 26, of which at least 8 died by suicide. Of those the Home Office has indicated to have died by suicide, their ages are:

<b>18 years of age</b>	<b>1 individual</b>	Nationality data withheld by the Home Office (see <b><i>Information held centrally by government</i></b> section).
<b>19 years of age</b>	<b>2 individuals</b>	
<b>20 years of age</b>	<b>2 individuals</b>	
<b>21 years of age</b>	<b>nil</b>	
<b>22 yeears of age</b>	<b>2 individuals</b>	
<b>23 years of age</b>	<b>nil</b>	
<b>24 years of age</b>	<b>1 individual</b>	

However, we are particularly concerned by the accuracy of this Home Office data on deaths of asylum-seekers, and do not believe it stands up to scrutiny. The Home Office had listed ‘No Information Held’ for cause of death for 7 individuals. As well as this, the data does not correspond with cases that are publicly known about. Da’aro Youth Project supported the family of asylum-seeker Henok Zaid Gebrsslasie, who died aged 23 in 2021 (see below). The data provided by the Home Office indicates no known deaths of a 23-year-old asylum-seeker in 2021. There are a number of other deaths reported on by Liberty Investigates that also do not correspond with this data.

**Figure 10**

Cause of death for young adult asylum-seekers not in receipt of local authority support (2015-2024), pie chart.



We asked the Home Office what policies and guidance it follows when an asylum-seeker dies in asylum accommodation. The Home Office said (in response to [FOI 2025 15290](#)) it had “no officially published policy or procedure” but that “staff are issued with operational guidance.” It also said that there is no standard policy or procedure for making contact with a coroner and providing them with information in an inquest, and no specific policy or procedure for conducting a ‘review’, though they said they “would participate in such a review if required.” They also told us that “The Home Office does not attempt to locate or make contact with living family members when a person dies within the asylum system.”

## Publicised cases of young asylum-seeker deaths

### Henok Zaid Gebrsrlasie

On 2 August 2021, 23-year-old Eritrean asylum-seeker [Henok Zaid Gebrsrlasie](#) was detained under the Mental Health Act at the Caludon Centre, Coventry. This followed his arrest earlier that day, after being found on a bus with a plank of wood in a state of extreme distress. He was assessed as likely suffering from acute psychosis, against a background of past trauma and stressors. Henok was supposed to be on 15-minute therapeutic observations on the ward, but observations were missed by staff, leaving Henok entirely unobserved for 3 hours. Ward staff members falsified the observation records for these three hours. An inquest jury concluded that multiple failures in respect of Henok’s clinical supervision and care contributed to his death. Henok’s inquest resulted in a [prevention of future deaths report](#).

### Ismael Maolanzadeh

19-year-old [Ismael Maolanzadeh](#), a Kurdish-Iranian national, died by suicide at an asylum-seeker hotel in Birmingham on 10 December 2023. His body was discovered by his older brother, Mustafa, with whom he shared a room, who told reporters that Ismael’s mental state had deteriorated after he was left for months with no news on his asylum claim or support from hotel staff. The Director of public law at Duncan Lewis said the government’s Illegal Migration Act was to blame for Ismael and others like him being left in limbo, adding without it “there’s a strong likelihood his case would have progressed and he would not have killed himself”.

# Analysis

In summary, the data shows that:

1. **Deaths are rising.** This appears to be at a greater rate than the increase in population size for unaccompanied young people supported by local authorities.
2. **Eritrean unaccompanied young people appear to be more at risk of dying by suicide.** More than half of deaths by suicide by unaccompanied young people were Eritrean nationals, whilst only 12.5% of asylum claims by unaccompanied children were by Eritrean nationals for the period 2015-2024.
3. **Unaccompanied young people appear to be more at risk of dying by suicide shortly after leaving care.** More than two-thirds of deaths by suicide were of teenagers. More 18 and 19-year-olds died by suicide than any other age.

The number of unaccompanied young people supported by local authorities who are dying each year is rising. However, without data it is not possible to know whether unaccompanied young people die by suicide at a greater rate than other groups, although the data we have collected here indicates that unaccompanied young people are likely dying by suicide at a greater rate than their age peers in the general population. The data also does not tell us why Eritrean unaccompanied young people might be more at risk of dying by suicide.

Additionally, we also do not know other relevant information about those young people who died by suicide, such as: their immigration status or time spent in the asylum system; their experience of being age disputed; their level of contact with the criminal justice system; their contact with mental health services; whether they were accommodated in foster care (or a staying put arrangement), supported accommodation or independently; and whether they had previously been referred to the National Referral Mechanism as a suspected victim of trafficking.

Inquests have not provided any direction as to how future deaths could be prevented. It is deeply concerning that some inquests have been observed to have taken place without the care status of the unaccompanied young person being mentioned, or when mentioned, without the local authority providing information, a witness statement or being called on as an in-person witness.

Of the four case reviews identified by this research, three relate to a death by suicide and one relates to a death by drug overdose. Only one review, the SAR, relates to a young adult.

- ‘SCR: YT’ relates to an unaccompanied child who died by suicide soon after entering care.
- ‘SCR: Child C’ and ‘SAR: Adult A’ both relate to individuals who had been missing / not in contact with the relevant local authority for some time before they were found to have died, and for whom the age of the individual was in doubt.
- ‘CSPR: Dawit’ relates to an unaccompanied child who had sought to enter care but for whom the local authority had decided it was not necessary to bring into care, before they had died.

There is little analysis provided by these reviews of the systematic or structural issues as it relates to these young people and their lives. In our view, none of the reviews provide recommendations for preventing future deaths of consequence for national policy makers.

# A note on Eritrean unaccompanied youth

Da'aro Youth Project is a charity founded by former Eritrean refugees in London and has for more than seven years provided youth services to unaccompanied young people from the Horn of Africa. Because of our expertise in this area, we feel well situated to explore the particulars of the mental health burden many Eritrean unaccompanied young people manage. Our experience of working with young people from Eritrea is that they share many similar life experiences.

Many young people from Eritrea experience and witness acts of violence (including sexual violence) and experience serious deprivation on their journeys to Europe and onwards to the United Kingdom. These experiences can leave lasting mental injury.

These young people will sometimes have high expectations of what life in the United Kingdom will be like, and find life here to be different than expected. They struggle with acculturation, language barriers and social and cultural isolation (especially in parts of the UK with smaller migrant populations), as well as racism.

There exists some stigma in the Eritrean community around mental health issues and in Eritrea accessing traditional forms of talking therapy is not the norm. Some young people from Eritrea therefore won't access mental health services in the UK but will manage stress, depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress by way of substance use and abuse. For some young people this can lead to problems accessing other kinds of support and/or can lead to criminal offending, which in turn can further add to stress and can worsen wellbeing.

Bureaucratic state-led processes – such as the asylum process or the process of being age disputed – can create barriers to accessing necessary support and can create worry and in turn this will exacerbate anxiety, stress, post-traumatic stress and other mental health concerns. For those who do arrive in the UK before 18 years of age, the cliff-edge of support at turning 18 can feel dysregulating, with a sudden reduction of contact time with care professionals and an ineffective or absent transition from children's to adult's services.

There is also social pressure to take on the responsibility of providing support for family members living in poverty back home. There is also a lack of easy contact with family in Eritrea. We have worked with many young people from Eritrea who have young siblings who are outside of Eritrea and/or who are making onward journeys to Europe. Worry for their wellbeing can also exacerbate stress and mental health issues. A lack of access to family reunion for unaccompanied young people means they do not have an easy way to be with their families or protect them if they are in crisis.

For those young people who do have those shared experiences, they can coalesce and lead to self-harming and suicidal ideation. We also are aware that some of the young people in this study were struggling with psychosis. It is also the case that people who migrate in adolescence have an increased risk of psychosis, with research showing that the link is particularly strong among black and north African people.

# Recommendations

In order to prevent further deaths of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, we make the following recommendations.

## Recommendation 1: Data

- A) **The Department for Education (DFE) must collect and publish appropriate data on an annual basis.** This data should be in line with the data sought in this research and published in this report, including disaggregated data that shows how many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young adult care leavers die each year whilst in touch with a local authority; the cause of death for each person; their age; their nationality; which local authority was accommodating them; and in what kind of accommodation. The DFE must also seek information from the Home Office as to: whether the person had been age-disputed; what the outcome of their claim for asylum had been; and whether they had been referred to the National Referral Mechanism. This information must be collated and published together.
  
- B) **The UK government must establish and publish an annual suicide rate for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people** (including both children and young adult care leavers). This is in line with the Government's 5-Year Strategy in '[Suicide prevention in England](#)' which states as an ambition that *"there is more comprehensive research on, and better understanding of, national trends and suicide rates in particular groups, including... refugees and asylum seekers"*.
  
- C) **The UK government must address failures in the Home Office system for recording deaths of asylum-seekers**, where the Department has no single established dataset (information is split across multiple active spreadsheets) and cause of death is not routinely confirmed and recorded (due to there being no policy requiring contact with a coroner following a death). The Home Office should cease its appeals to the information tribunal and agree to publish disaggregated data.

## Recommendation 2: Inquests

- A) **Local authorities must be required to automatically make contact with the coroner presiding over an inquest** where the deceased person is a looked after child or care leaver up to and including the age of 24 – and notify the coroner of their statutory role. This must happen within 5 days of learning of a death, in-line with the time requirement with serious incident reporting.
  
- B) **Local authorities must be automatically entitled to Interested Person (IP) status in an inquest** where the deceased was a looked after child or care leaver, in the same way that a parent is always entitled to IP status. As a corporate parent, there should be an expectation on the local authority to actively participate in and assist the proceedings unless there is good reason for not doing so.
  
- C) **All local authorities and the Home Office must approach inquests with candour** and be required to supply basic information (such as a statement from the deceased's social worker, personal adviser or IRO, and case notes) within one month of learning of the death.
  
- D) **Coroners should receive specific guidance and training on safeguarding and the legislative provisions that most commonly apply to looked after children and care leavers** (including unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people), so that they are equipped to identify missed opportunities and issue reports to prevent future deaths.

## Recommendation 3: Reviews

- A) **The UK government must undertake a national review of the deaths identified by this research**, with the set intention of preventing further deaths. This review must consider the impact of the asylum and immigration system, and of the gate-keeping of local authority support, on the health and wellbeing of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.
  
- B) **A rapid review must be undertaken in all cases when a young person dies in the care of the state, or in receipt of support as a care leaver**, regardless of whether or not abuse or neglect is known or suspected (a Local Safeguarding Practice Review can then follow this). At present, this is not the case in England and Wales. Since 2021, in Scotland, social work services are required to undertake a multi-agency review upon the death of a looked after child or young person in receipt of continuing care or aftercare provision at the time of their death.
  
- C) **A local authority must automatically provide to the coroner presiding over an inquest a copy of the rapid review** completed following the death of a looked after child or careleaver, regardless of whether or not it meets the requirement of a Local Safeguarding Practice Review.

## Recommendation 4: Rights & Entitlements

- A) **The UK government must ensure that unaccompanied children and care leavers are seen as children and young people first and foremost and are given equal protections** alongside other children in care and care leavers. In line with this, the government must strengthen the rights and entitlements of unaccompanied young people and **ensure implementation of a new and updated safeguarding strategy.**
  
- B) **The UK government must ensure that the existing form of refugee status for unaccompanied children and young adult care leavers is retained,** so that those young people who are recognised to be refugees are granted five years' Leave to Remain, with the ability to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) after the five years. The Home Office must consider the best interests of unaccompanied children as a primary consideration and make prompt asylum decisions that are in line with the duty to safeguard and promote their welfare.
  
- C) **The UK government must bring into the immigration rules the ability for unaccompanied children and young adult care leavers to apply to be reunited with their parents and siblings.**
  
- D) **The UK government must address the systemic misclassification of unaccompanied children as adults** by limiting the role of the Home Office in age determination and ensuring age assessments are local authority-led. Young people asserting they are children should be treated as adults on arrival only in exceptional circumstances, and in such cases the relevant local authority must always be informed.
  
- E) **Devolved governments, mayoralities and local governments also have the capacity to take action.** For example, the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish governments, the Mayor of London's Office, and others should have conduct of their own reviews of the issues raised in this report. Action should be taken to strengthen the rights and entitlements of unaccompanied young people living in these areas and ensure that the safeguarding of this group is strengthened.
  
- F) **The UK government and devolved administrations should have sight of recently published research commissioned by London Councils on 'Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People Living in London' and consider the additional recommendations made therein.**

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