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Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion

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# **CASEpaper: Unseen Children: The hidden lives of children in families seeking asylum in the UK**

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## **Abstract**

Children seeking asylum with their families in the UK face significant challenges and marginalisation, yet they are rarely acknowledged in public and policy discourses and in publicly available data. This working paper sets out new analysis of both publicly available administrative data from the Home Office as well as new data obtained through Freedom of Information requests to shine a light on children seeking international protection with parents and carers. Over the last decade, children and adult family members generally comprised around 40% of all those claiming asylum in the UK annually. While their protection claim is processed, families are restricted from accessing social security benefits and are generally prohibited from working. Instead, if they are destitute, they can access 'Asylum Support' via the UK Home Office. However, the financial support provided is extremely limited, placing families below the poverty threshold. Children and families make up a significant part of the population receiving Asylum Support; around two-thirds (63%) of Section 95 support recipients between 2017 and 2022 – the main form of support for families awaiting their asylum claim. At the end of 2022, families with children had been receiving Section 95 support on average for around three years and three months (3.24 years) – an increase of 11 months from 2017. A fifth (20%) of families with children had been on Section 95 support for five years or more at the end of 2022 – for many a considerable portion, or even all, of their childhood. Their welfare and circumstances should be a core consideration in policymaking and service development, including as the government develops its cross-departmental child poverty strategy that is intended to include all children. The findings also point to a need for further disaggregated data and better transparency.

Keywords: children, families, Asylum Support, child poverty, administrative data

JEL number: I30, I38

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## **1. Introduction**

Children and young people in asylum-seeking families in the UK are often 'seen' as asylum seekers first and foremost (Education Select Committee, 2012; Garin et al., 2016; Hek, 2005) if they are acknowledged at all. Their 'invisibility' is also apparent in the lack of basic demographic and disaggregated data available to inform policymaking, research, and service development. Although this is by no means a unique problem for the UK (International Data Alliance for Children on the Move, 2023), it does have important implications for the effectiveness of policy development and service intervention and in promoting children and young people's most basic rights. Between 2014 and 2023, 110,915 children (under 18) claimed asylum in the UK, making up over a fifth (22.4%) of all applicants and dependants during that time (510,006). Most of these children (78,179) claimed asylum with their families – 15.6% of asylum seekers overall. The remaining 6.8% (32,736) were children who claimed asylum on their own as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (author's analysis of immigration datasets, Home Office, 2024a). Yet beyond this, there is very limited publicly available, disaggregated information about children applying for asylum in the UK with their families. Aside from a basic count and some demographic information on children's sex, nationality, and broad age categories, there is no data on children's ethnicity, race or religion, or those of their parents. Nor is there any publicly available data on family structure and size, the precise age ranges of children, or whether they or their parents have a disability. The publicly available data tends to categorise applicants as either 'main applicants' or 'dependents', so while it may be possible to obtain some age-disaggregated data, it is not possible to know the relationship between adults and children within family groups, such as whether children are claiming asylum with parents, older siblings, grandparents, or other carers. But understanding this information about children and families' circumstances, their place in, and journeys through the asylum determination process and linked support systems, is a

necessary starting point for designing effective policies and interventions that are responsive to their needs, their histories of trauma, take account of their vulnerabilities and the safeguarding risks that they face, and their wider circumstances.

This working paper is part of a doctoral study focused on the material needs, experiences and outcomes of children and families receiving financial support through the Asylum Support system, and those generally restricted from the labour market. An important starting point for the study was, therefore, to identify the number of children and families receiving Asylum Support. However, as with the asylum process data, disaggregated data about the numbers of children and parents entering and being supported under the Asylum Support system each year and related demographic data are not published as part of the quarterly immigration statistics, though some of this data is captured by the Home Office. According to the Home Office, beyond age, sex, nationality and religion/belief, the majority of protected characteristics data relevant to individuals and families who are accommodated and supported through Asylum Support are not collected or available in a reportable format (Home Office, 2019). Having such information would help in furthering our understanding of the multiple intersecting disadvantages that children and families face.

Furthermore, other information salient to the study of families' experiences of the Asylum Support system, such as whether family members are applying for and being granted permission to work, to what extent children and families can take up the additional support that they are eligible to, and what additional support is available in their locality, is also lacking. Yet these are all relevant in developing a more comprehensive understanding of children's exposure to poverty during the asylum process, its depth and

persistence, and the resources they have in place to cope with such challenges.

Some have argued that 'statistical invisibility' of asylum-seeking children may be seen to aid integration efforts (Pinson & Arnot, 2010) and act as a form of protection against enforcement action. However, it can also mean that those providing services to children, like schools and local authorities, are left without adequate information, government funding or advice (Ibid) to provide effective support. This can result in children and families missing out on crucial services like school transport, Free School Meals or Pupil Premium entitlements, which enable access to extracurricular activities. A lack of effective and timely data can also pose significant challenges to effective safeguarding and child protection efforts, as exemplified by various child protection cases involving asylum-seeking families (Jolly & Gupta, 2022), such as the case of Baby T (Mellor, 2020).

This paper sets out the key findings from an analysis of administrative data conducted as part of my doctoral research focused on children and families receiving Asylum Support. The analysis incorporates data obtained from the Home Office through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests<sup>1</sup> alongside analysis of published quarterly immigration statistics, building on previously published work (Pinter, 2021). I begin by considering the findings related to asylum applications and decision-making before going on to look at the findings in relation to Asylum Support.

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<sup>1</sup> A new Asylum Support casework system (ATLAS) was introduced in March 2018. As part of the transition to the new system, work to ensure the data meets the standards required of National Statistics is ongoing. A common stipulation with FOI returns (received between 2020-24) was that data for 2018 onwards should be considered provisional until this transitional work has been completed. As some of the data was obtained via FOIs it is not as current as the publicly available data.

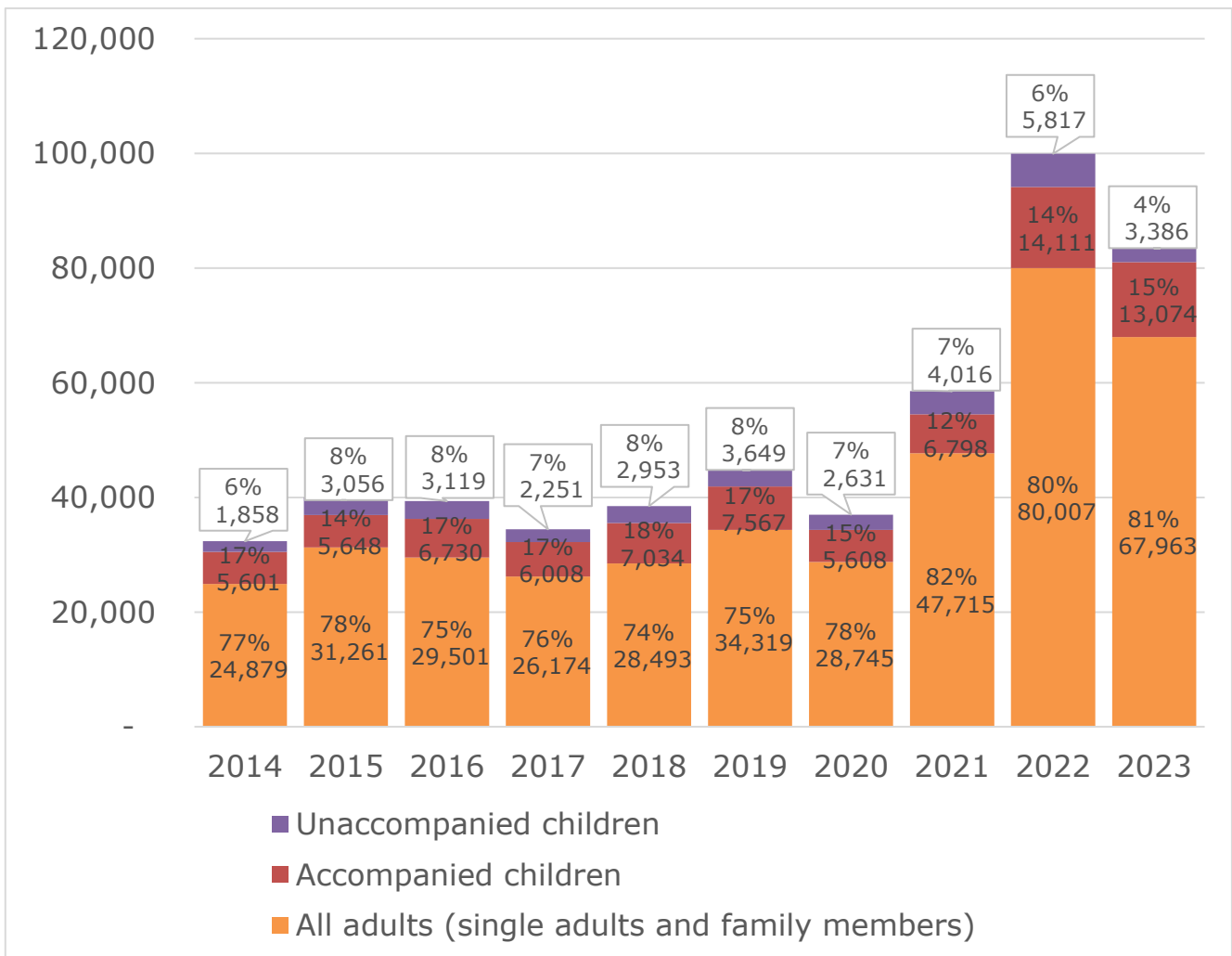


## **2. Asylum decision-making**

### ***2.1 Asylum claims from children and families***

The number of people claiming asylum in the UK increased significantly between 2022 and 2024, and this includes the number of children applying either with families or on their own. The overall number of children claiming asylum almost doubled from 9,987 children in 2018 to 19,928 children in 2022 before falling to 16,460 children in 2023 (Figure 1). Children consistently represented a significant proportion of the asylum-seeking population. On average, children comprised over a fifth (22%) of those seeking protection in the UK between 2014-23.

**Figure 1 Number of asylum applicants each year by applicant type**

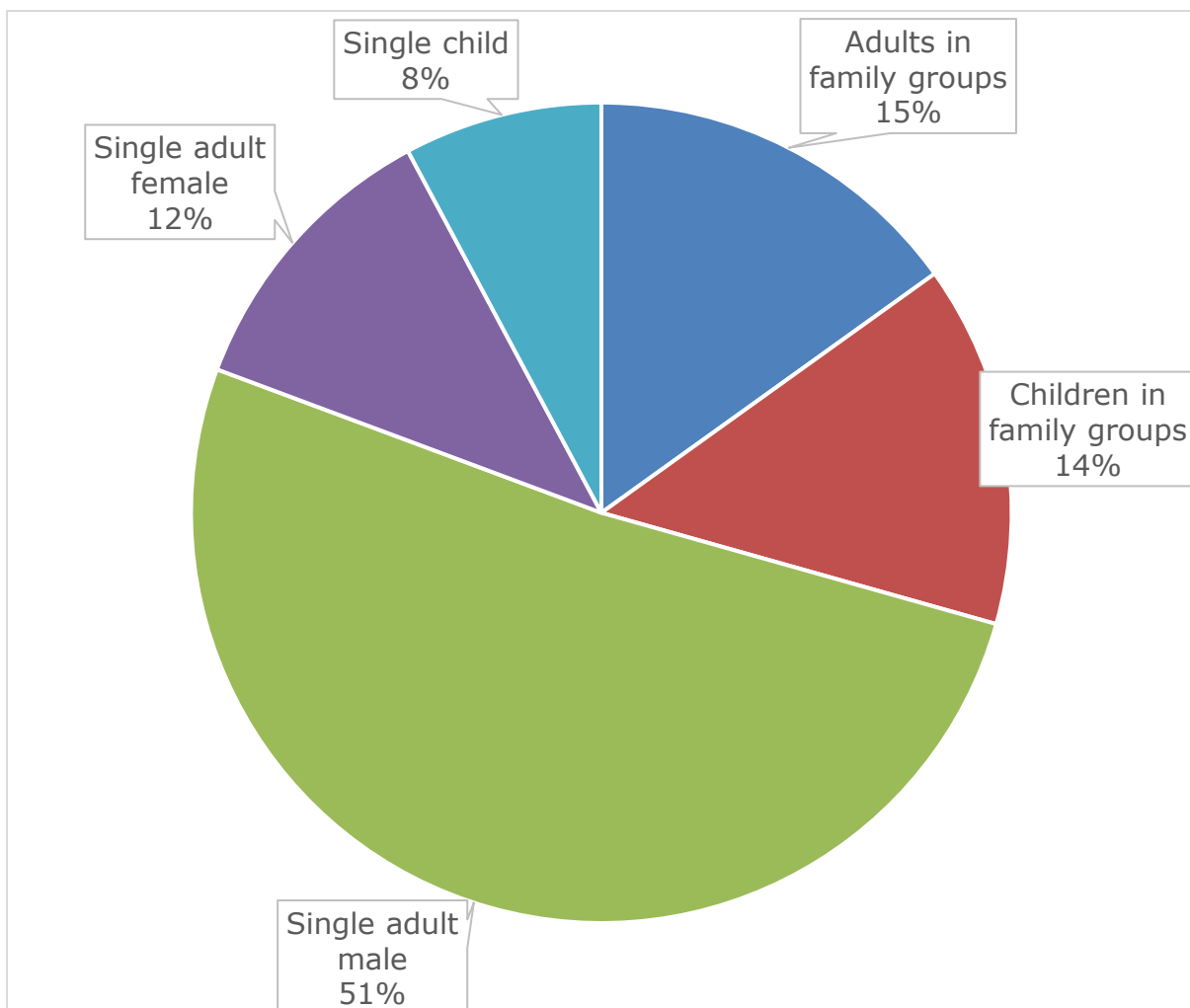


Source: Figures include all main applicants and dependents. Analysis is based on Home Office quarterly immigration statistics for the year ending March 2024, published in May 2024 Table Asy\_D01: [Immigration system statistics data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables)

While publicly available data does differentiate between children who claimed as unaccompanied children and those who claimed as part of a family unit, it is not possible to differentiate between adults on the same basis. There are some further breakdowns for 'main applicants' and 'dependents' but it is not possible to differentiate between adults that applied for asylum as single adults and those that applied as part of a family unit, with or without children. This makes it difficult to know the prevalence of families among the asylum-seeking population. However, FOI data has

provided additional information about the likely proportion of applicants who are part of a family unit. As data in Figure 2 reveals, taking the average numbers of applicants and dependents between 2013-22, we can see that 37% of all asylum applicants, including main applicants and dependents were children or adults that were part of a family group while 51% were single adult males and 12% were single adult females.

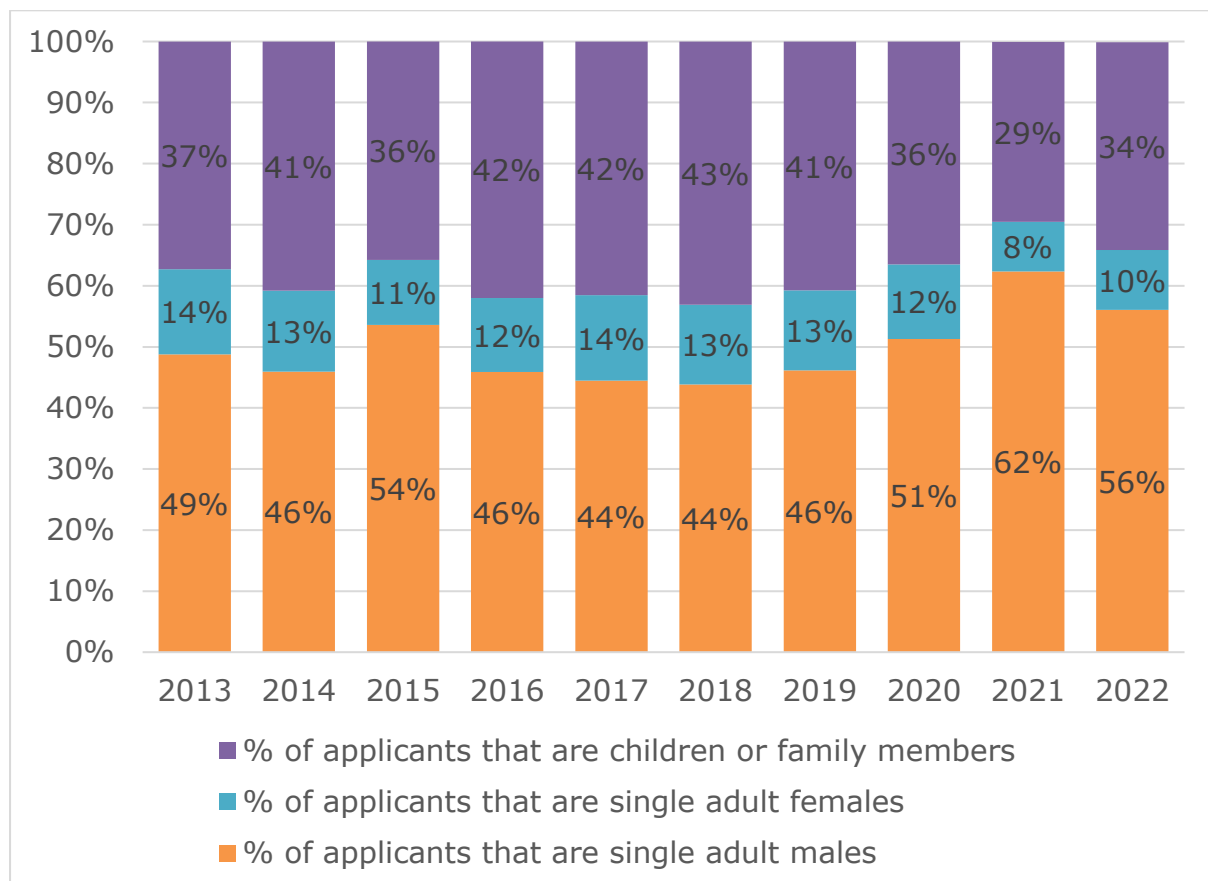
**Figure 2 Composition of asylum applicants by type based on average numbers between 2013-22**



Source: Data includes all main applicants and dependents. Based on data obtained from the Home Office through FOI request.

Looking at the data over time (Figure 4), we see that, on average, children and family members made up 38% of all asylum applicants between 2013 and 2022, though this was brought down by lower proportions in the last two years. The data shows that while single adult males made up the majority of asylum applicants in the last two years, this has not been the case consistently in previous years and prior to 2020, single adult males comprised less than half of all applicants.

**Figure 3 The proportion of asylum applicants by type of applicant (including main applicants and dependents)<sup>2</sup>**



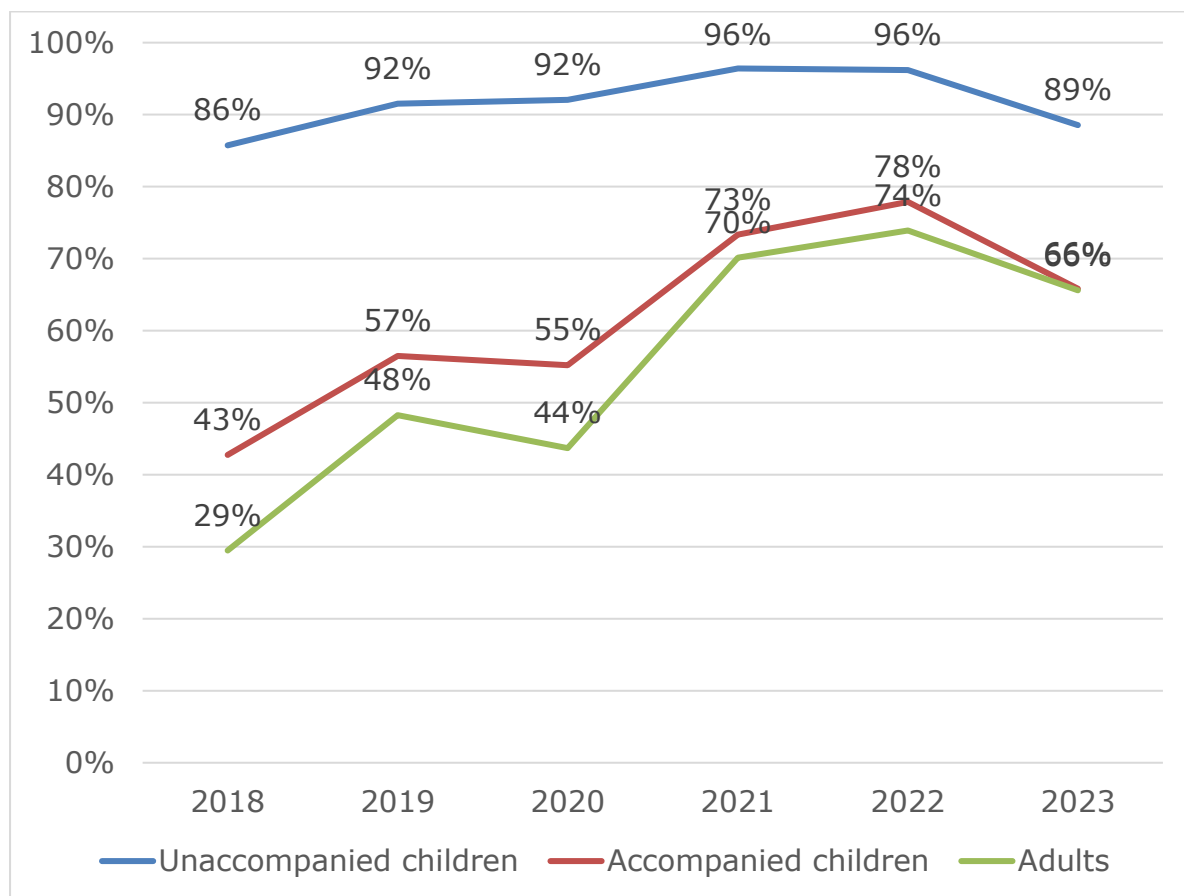
Source: Home Office data provided through FOI

<sup>2</sup> 'Children' in this figure refers to both the numbers of 'accompanied' and 'unaccompanied' children who claimed asylum that year. This is grouped with 'family members' referring to any adult part of a family group, as this was the only data that could be obtained through FOI requests.

## **2.2 Protection outcomes**

Much of the analysis of asylum protection grant rates has tended to focus on variance by country of origin. However, protection rates also vary by age. Children are generally more likely to be granted refugee protection or some other form of leave than adults. This is especially true for unaccompanied children but even children claiming asylum with family members (accompanied children) tend to have higher grant rates. As Figure 5 shows, between 2018 and 2023, on average 92% of initial decisions for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children resulted in a 'Grant of Protection' (Refugee Status or Humanitarian Protection) or another type of leave to remain (including Discretionary Leave, Calais Leaver and 'UASC Leave') which gives children a temporary form of status to remain in the UK. During this time, children in families were, on average, less likely to be granted protection or another type of status (62%) than unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, but this rate was higher than for adults (55%). Grant rates for children in families were generally higher than those for adults between 2018 and 2023, peaking at 78% in 2022 before converging in 2023 to 66% for both children and adults.

**Figure 4 Grant rates in initial asylum applications (Protection and Other type of leave)**



Source: Author's analysis of immigration statistics - detailed data table: Asy\_D04 'Outcome analysis of asylum applications' data from 2018-23

The overall grant rates increase when you factor in the additional grants of protection received through appeals, which increased the rate by about 14% on average between 2012-21, though breakdowns by age or type of applicant are not available. The difference between initial decisions and final outcomes has also dropped in recent years due to the growing backlog of initial decisions.

### **2.3 Processing time for asylum decisions**

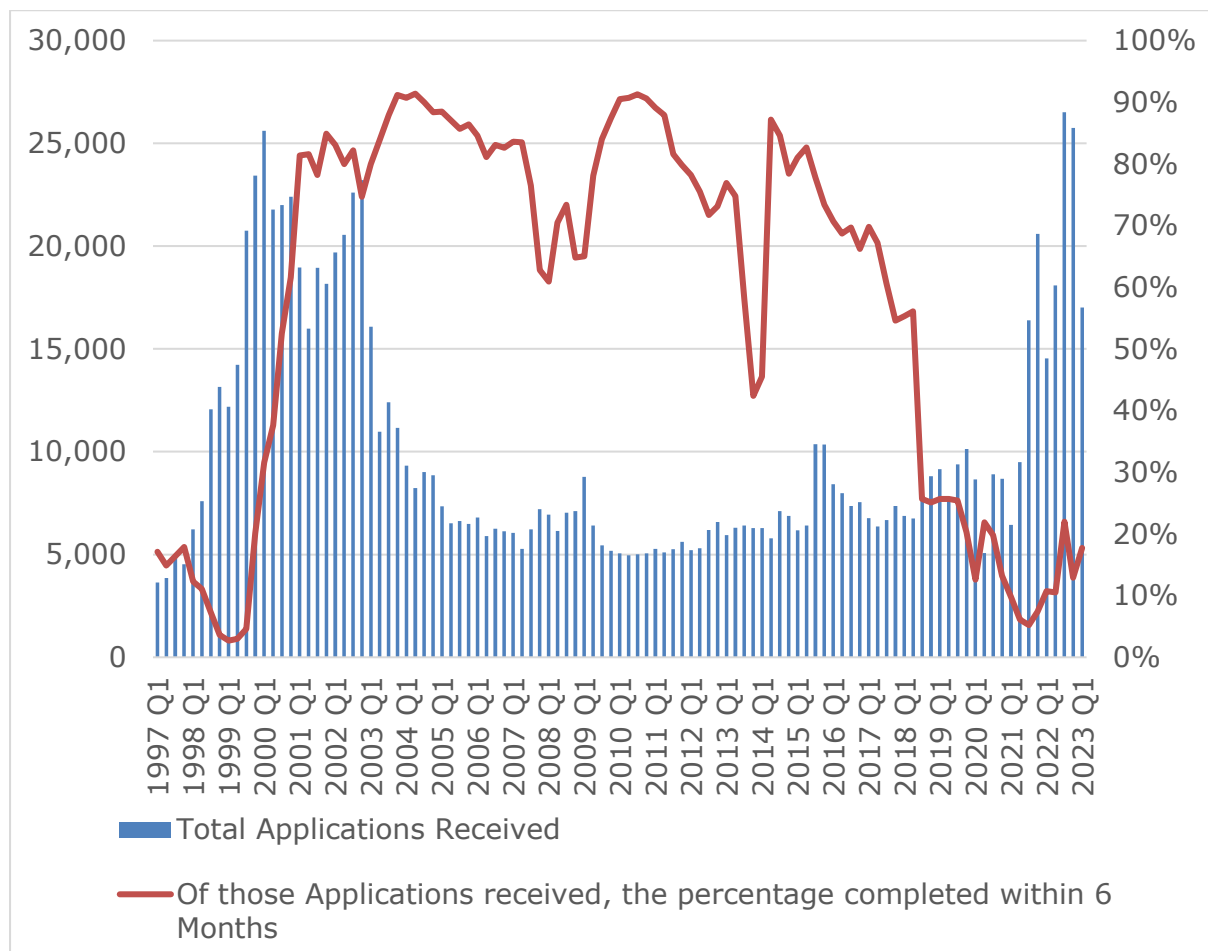
While children and families generally go on to receive protection, according to current rates, this is often after a long time of waiting for an asylum

decision, and as we see below, spending this time in receipt of Asylum Support. Several reports in recent years have drawn attention to the growing backlog in unresolved asylum claims (Hewett, 2021; Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, 2022a, 2022b; Lenegan, 2024; Women and Equalities Committee, 2023). Analysis of government data shows that there was a steady increase in the number of people awaiting an asylum decision since 2011, with a rapid increase between 2018 and 2023, reaching a peak of over 175,000 individuals awaiting a claim at the end of June 2023 (Morris, 2024; Tyler-Todd et al., 2023, pp. 1-4; Walsh & Sumption, 2023, Figure 1). While there was some growth in the number of asylum applications in recent years, the analysis commonly cites that declining decision-maker productivity was among the key reasons for the growing backlog prior to 2023 (Tyler-Todd et al., 2023; Walsh & Sumption, 2023). More recently, the backlog has also grown as a result of policy changes under the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (NABA22) and the Illegal Migration Act 2023 (IMA23). Measures under NABA22 to determine whether claims will be deemed admissible have built-in a further delay while the IMA23 halted some decisions altogether, creating, in effect, three separate backlogs (Lenegan, 2024). Decision-making has since resumed under the Labour government and although the decision-making process itself is not the subject of this study, it should be noted given the connection between increases in asylum application processing times and the length of time that households are likely to spend in receipt of Asylum Support.

A commonly cited metric to analyse the speed of decision-making is the proportion of initial decisions made within six months, published quarterly as part of the Home Office's Immigration and Protection transparency data. The publicly available data only goes back to 2014, but data provided through an FOI response, enables us to see the rate of decisions over the last two and a half decades as set out in Figure 6. This combines archival

administrative data obtained from the Home Office with published quarterly data on the proportion of applications that were completed within six months.

**Figure 5 Number of asylum applications received each quarter (left axis) and percentage of decisions completed within 6 months (right axis)**



Source: Using combined data from FOI response for Q1 1997- Q1 2014 and published Immigration and Protection transparency data from Q2 2014 to Q1 2023

The low levels of the subsistence payments provided to asylum-seeking families and individuals under the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) system when it was first established in 1999 were in part justified because



the original design of the scheme had intended for support to be provided on a temporary period. NASS – later renamed as 'Asylum Support' - when introduced, was designed as a new and separate support system based on the premise that initial decisions would be made within two months, leaving a further four months for appeals (Home Office, 1998; Kaye & Williams, 2010), though initially rates of support were generally (though not entirely) aligned with Income Support levels under the legacy benefits system. The rate of initial decisions completed within six months increased rapidly between 1999 and 2001, from a low of 2.7% in Q1 1999 to 91.4% in Q2 2004, remaining above 70% for most of the quarters between 2001 and 2013. However, since 2014, this rate has declined steadily, contributing to a significant backlog, which has built up further since.

Although I was not able to obtain age breakdowns for data on the rates at which decisions are made when children are involved, other analysis suggests similar patterns. According to data obtained by the Refugee Council, the number of children waiting for more than a year (but less than three years) increased fourteen-fold from 450 children in 2010 to 6,388 in 2020. Almost 500 children had been waiting for more than three years for an initial decision at the end of December 2020, and 55 of these had been waiting for more than five years (2022). These figures likely include both unaccompanied and accompanied children, who may experience different waiting times. This was echoed in an independent inspection of asylum decision-making in 2021, which found that claimants who received a decision in 2020 were waiting an average of 449 days, and this rose to 550 days for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, 2022a, p. 7), but disaggregated data for children and families was not reported.

For the purpose of this study, the important take-away is that despite often waiting a long time for asylum decisions, many children seeking asylum in

the UK do go on to get a grant of protection or leave to remain that allows them to stay in the UK. As campaigners and scholars have shown, the effects of decision-making delays on unaccompanied children and young people have been significant (Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, 2023; Stalford et al., 2023). This is echoed in wider research on the mental health and well-being of refugee and asylum-seeking children (Blackmore et al., 2020; Fazel et al., 2012). In some cases, the time taken to receive a decision represents a significant proportion of a child's life. However, limited attention has been paid to the effects of delays on children and families, many of whom are likely to face deep poverty and unemployment, whether they are receiving Asylum Support or not.

### **3. Asylum Support recipients**

Children and families seeking asylum in the UK are generally restricted from accessing mainstream welfare benefits like Universal Credit, Child Benefit and Housing Benefit, and are not entitled to social housing. At the same time, parents are generally not permitted to work. Those that have been waiting for over 12 months for an asylum decision due to no fault of their own can apply for permission to work. However, employment is limited to the 23 occupations listed in the Immigration Salary List and only main applicants can apply; dependent partners and spouses and all under 18s are not permitted to work in any circumstances. Therefore, in practice families who have no other sources of income or sufficient personal savings to support themselves, or family members who can support them, may be eligible to apply for Asylum Support under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 if they are destitute. There are three main types of support: Section 98 – emergency or initial accommodation support; Section 95 – the main form of support for those awaiting their asylum claim; and Section 4 – primarily for refused asylum-seeking adults. Section 95 support is generally provided to individuals and families while they await their asylum claim.

Families with children under the age of 18 can continue to receive this support if they are refused asylum and have exhausted their appeal rights until they leave the UK. Families are provided with weekly subsistence payments (currently at £49.18 per person per week for 'essential living needs') and dispersed self-catered accommodation. Some families may also be placed in catered accommodation where they receive £8.86 per week.<sup>3</sup> The available data does not differentiate between the two though it is assumed that most families with children are in self-catered accommodation.

There is another type of support – Section 4 support – which is intended for adults who have been refused asylum but who, for various safety, legal, administrative or medical reasons, are unable to leave the UK. This provides accommodation and cashless subsistence payments to families. If a child is born after an asylum refusal, children may then end up Section 4 support for refused asylum-seeking adults. Before this study, there was no publicly available information on how many children were in receipt of Asylum Support. The first analysis from this study was published in 2021 (Pinter, 2021) and the following sections provide further analysis and updated figures.

### **3.1 Type of support and accommodation**

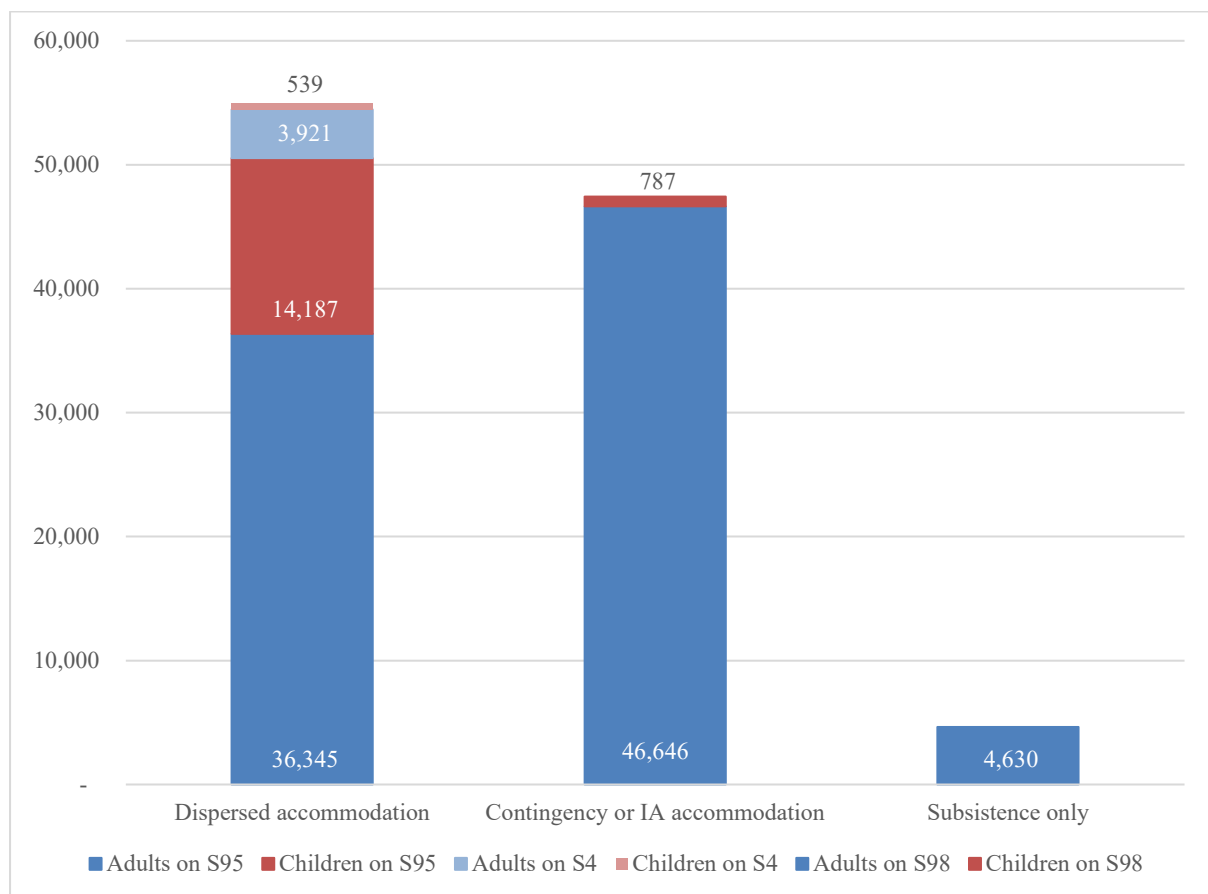
There are currently no disaggregated data on children receiving Asylum Support in the quarterly statistics published by the Home Office, but data obtained through FOI requests reveal that there were 15,513 children receiving Asylum Support at the end of December 2022 – 14% out of a total of 109,383 support recipients (both main applicants and dependents,

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<sup>3</sup> Further details of the Asylum Support system and the cash-based and in-kind support and services provided to families with children are set out in Chapter 2 of the original thesis available upon request: Pinter, I (2024) *Living a differentiated childhood: children and families' experiences of poverty and material deprivation within the UK's Asylum Support system*. Doctoral Thesis. London School of Economics.

and for which data was provided). The breakdowns by the type of support provided and the accommodation type are set out in Figure 7. Most children (14,187 or 91%) were receiving Section 95 support at the end of 2022 and were in dispersed accommodation, while 539 children were receiving Section 4 support also in dispersed accommodation. The remaining 787 children were receiving Section 98 support meaning that they were either in Initial Accommodation (457) or contingency hotel accommodation (330). There were no children receiving subsistence-only Section 95 support. This contrasts with adults: 46,646 (52% of all 93,485 adults on Asylum Support at the end of December 2022) were in contingency accommodation and 36,345 (43%) were in dispersed accommodation, with 4,630 (5%) receiving subsistence payments only.

**Figure 6 Support recipients by support type, accommodation type and age group at the end of 2022.**



Source: Home Office data provided through FOI response

The number of people accommodated in hotels increased significantly after 2019, from 1,490 at the end of 2019 to 56,042 at the end of September 2023, before beginning to fall. Data obtained by the Refugee Council found that around 10% (2,569) of those in hotel accommodation at the end of 2021 were children (Refugee Council, 2022), though by the end of 2022, this figure appears to have fallen to 330 based on the FOI data obtained as part of this research. This may have been due to attempts to clear the legacy backlog (Lenegan, 2024) and move families out of hotel accommodation, which have had detrimental effects on children’s welfare (Human Rights Watch & Just Fair, 2023; Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, 2022b; Jones et al., 2022; Women and Equalities

Committee, 2023). There is limited information about how many children and families were in asylum hotels targeted by attacks during the riots that took place in August 2024, which raised serious safeguarding concerns for its residents. Although more recent disaggregated data by age are not available, it is not possible to say how many of the 35,651 individuals remaining in contingency hotel accommodation at the end of September 2024 were children (Home Office, 2024b).

The figures provided in this section are 'stock' figures rather than 'flow' figures, meaning we do not see how many children passed through, for example, Section 98 support Initial Accommodation or contingency hotel accommodation, before being dispersed and placed onto Section 95 support. We can only see an end-of-year snapshot, though over time, it is useful to see the patterns. Published data on the numbers of granted applications for Section 95 support are available. However, these are only disaggregated by whether the support was provided to a family group or a single adult rather than the full number of family members who were granted support or any age breakdowns. Between 2013 and 2022, on average 14% of granted applications for Section 95 support were from a family group and 73% from single adults<sup>4</sup>. However, there are some significant gaps in the data; for example, in 2022, 45% of the granted applications were recorded as 'unknown'. Therefore, it is not possible to know reliably and precisely how many children and families were granted support each year.

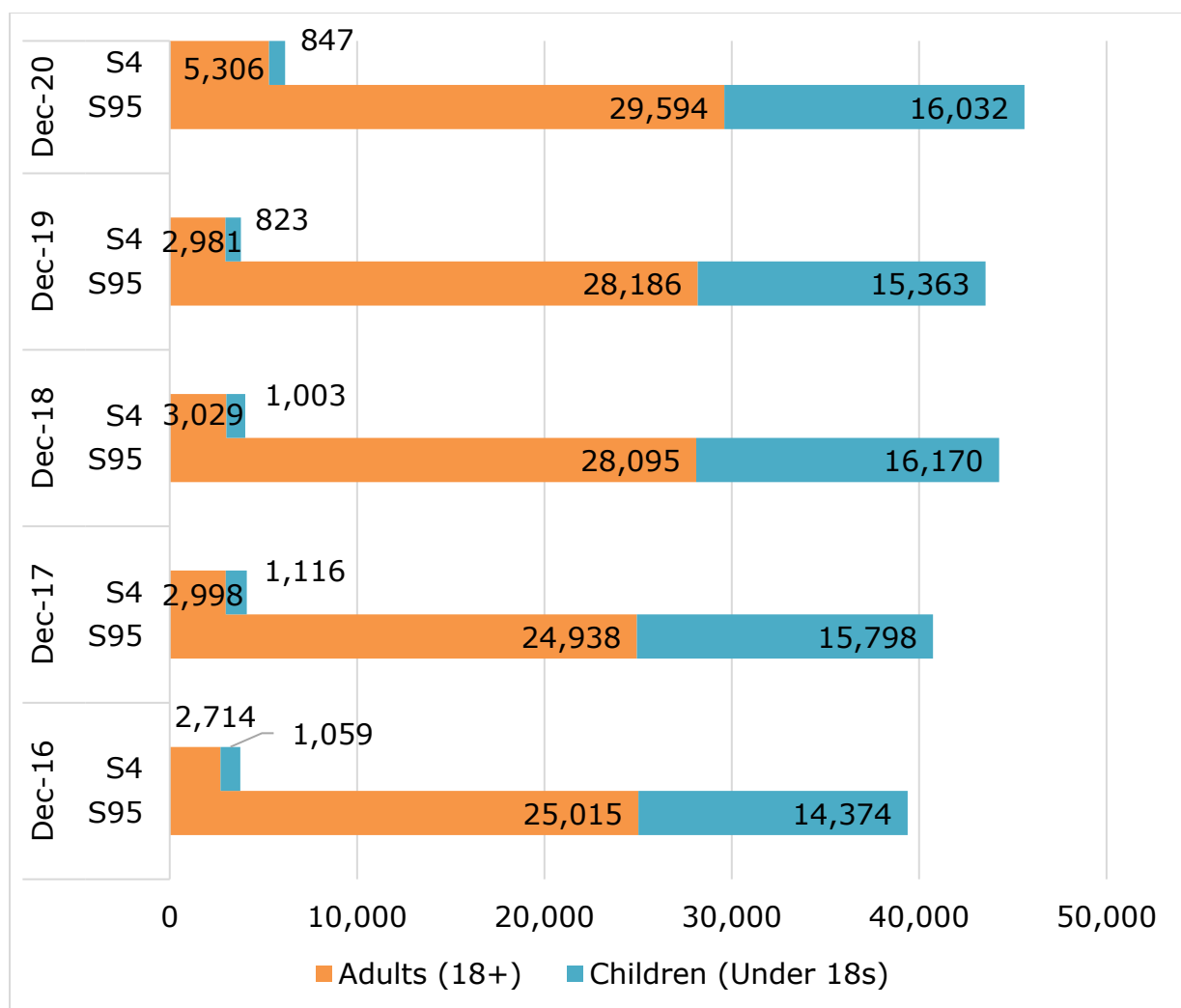
Figure 8 allows us to see how the number of children in receipt of Asylum Support has changed over time. Between 2016 and 2020, there were, on average, 16,517 children receiving Asylum Support at the end of each year.

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<sup>4</sup> Analysis of quarterly migration statistics: Applications for section 95 support detailed datasets, year ending December 2022 (Asy\_D10): <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables#asylum-and-resettlement>

Around one thousand (970) were children receiving Section 4 support while the remaining 15,547 were children receiving Section 95 support.<sup>5</sup> As in the previous figure, these numbers refer to all main applicants and dependents who were in receipt of Section 95 and Section 4 Asylum Support at the end of each year (in December), rather than the total number of recipients who were supported throughout that year.

**Figure 7 Number of individuals receiving Asylum Support at the end of each year by age group and support type**



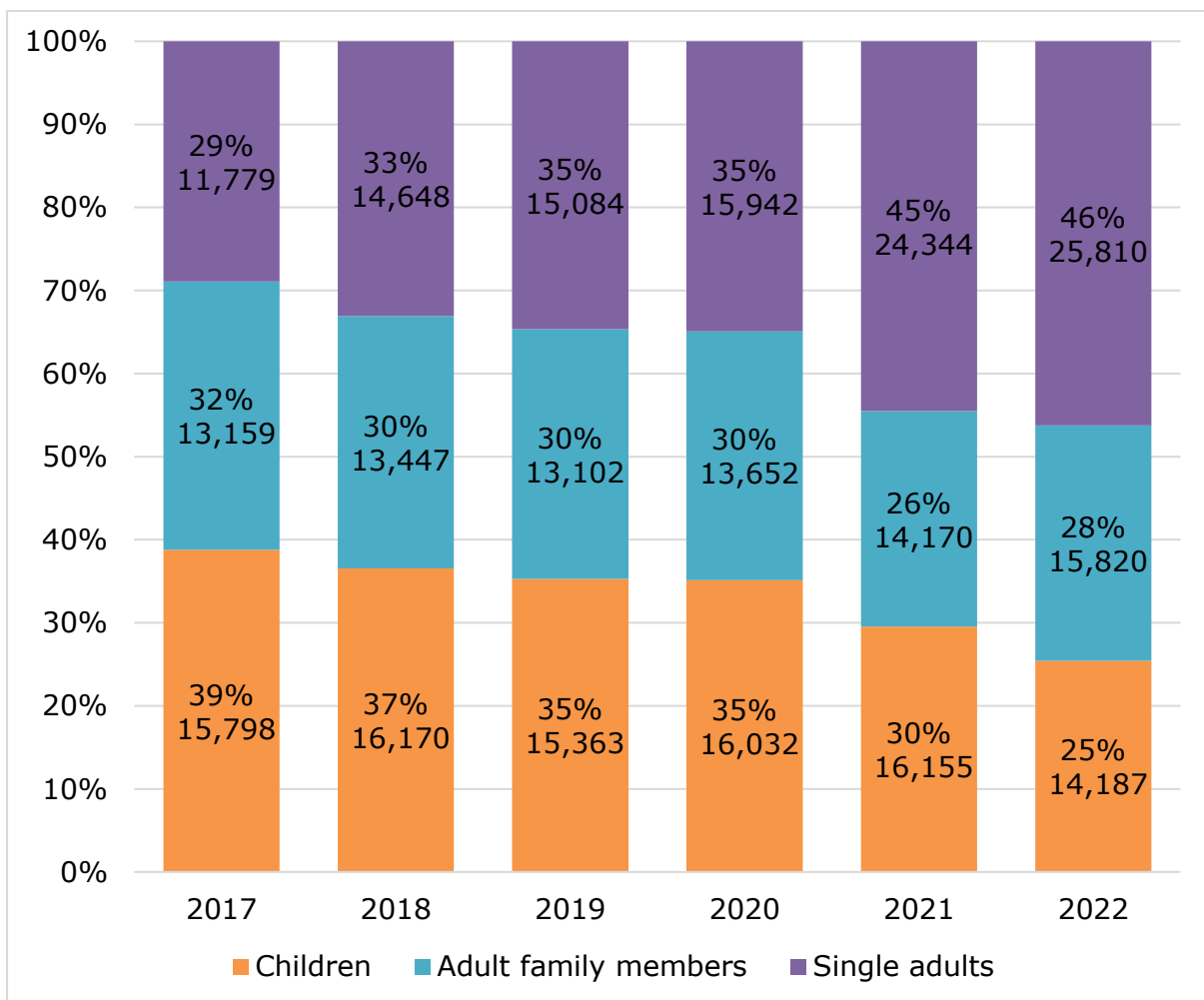
Source: Home Office data provided through FOI response

<sup>5</sup> It has not been possible yet to obtain figures for more recent years.

### 3.2 Composition of Asylum Support recipients

As set out in Figure 9, children and adult family members made up, on average, around two-thirds (63%) of Section 95 support recipients between 2017 and 2022. Children represented a third (33%), adult family members slightly less (29%) and single adults just over a third (37%).

**Figure 8 Composition of Section 95 support recipients at the end of each year between 2017-2022**



Source: Home Office data from multiple FOI responses

It is important to note that 'adult family members' relate to anyone in a family, whether there are children in the family or not. It includes any partner or spouse, adult child, elderly relative and so on. The data provided



did not distinguish between family members who were part of a family unit with children or not.

The proportion of support recipients that were children or adult family members reduced in 2021 and 2022 as the number of single adults increased significantly by almost 10,000 between the end of 2020 and 2021. Nevertheless, children and family members still made up over half of support recipients each year. In part, this is because families with children receiving Section 95 support do not usually have support terminated after a refusal like families without children or single adults, even after they have exhausted their appeal rights providing vital protection from homelessness and destitution, or additional pressures on local authorities.

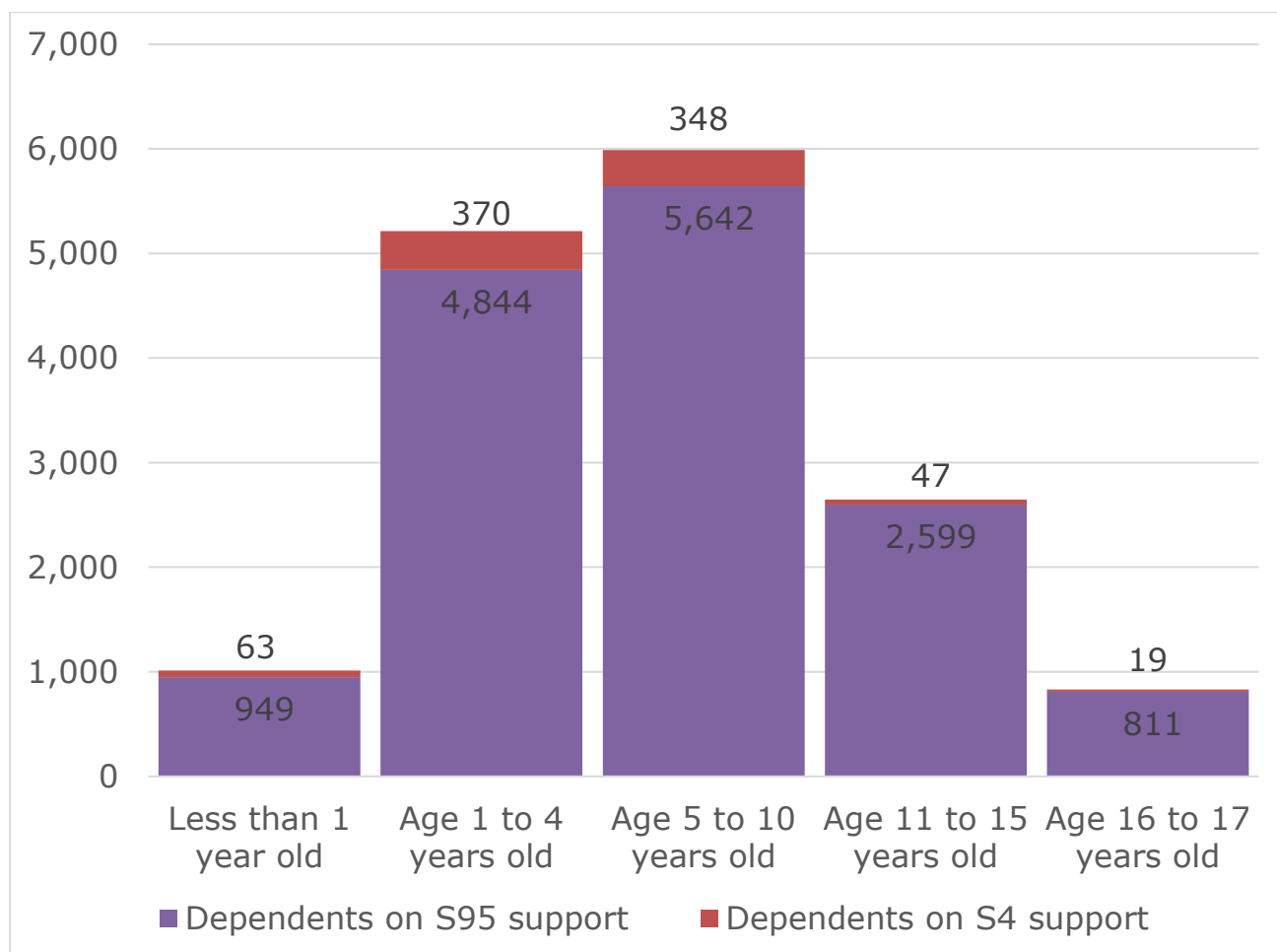
### ***3.3 Age of children receiving Asylum Support***

As mentioned earlier, there is very limited information available on the population of individuals and households receiving Asylum Support, including demographic information on age, sex, ethnicity, disability, household types and size, and so on. Some of this information may be available in individual case files, but these are not in a format that allows for data to be provided through FOI requests due to cost limitations. However, some age breakdowns were provided via FOI requests: Figure 14 below tells us that at the end of 2020, of the 15,692 children receiving Asylum Support accommodation and subsistence<sup>6</sup>, 40% (6,226) were under 5s, 41% (5,990) were of primary school age, while 22% (3,476) were of secondary school age. Children on Section 4 support (847) tended to be younger, with over half of them (51% or 433) under 5 years of age and the vast majority (92% or 781) aged 10 years or less.

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<sup>6</sup> As shown in Figure 11, at the end of December 2020, there were a total of 16,032 children receiving Section 95 and 847 children receiving Section 4 support. However, data in Figure 14 on the ages of children receiving Section 95 only accounts for 14,845 children, while the ages of the remaining children were not provided. The explanation within the FOI response suggests that this is because the data on age breakdowns only includes dependants in dispersed accommodation and does not include those receiving subsistence only.

**Figure 9 Number of child (under 18s) dependents in receipt of Section 95 and Section 4 Asylum Support at the end of December 2020 by age group<sup>7</sup>**



Source: Home Office data from FOI response

It is interesting to note that almost half (49%) of the children receiving Section 4 support are over five years old. Given that Section 4 is generally not intended for children, and that children are usually on Section 4 support

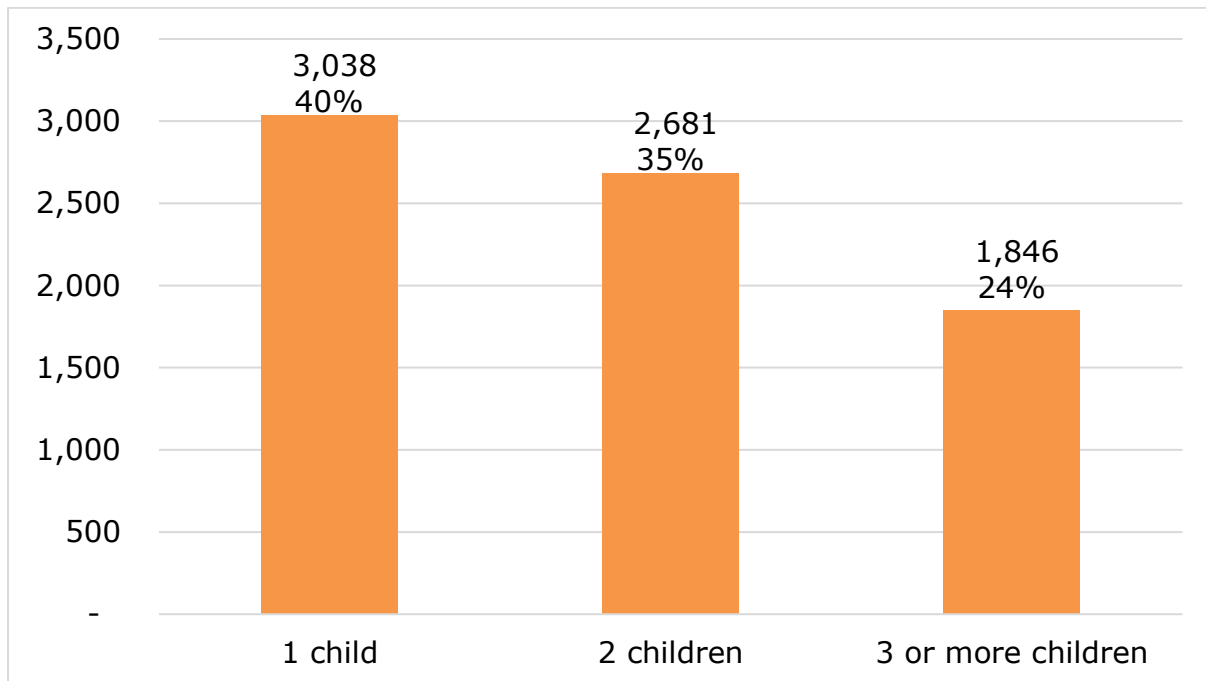
<sup>7</sup> This graph combines data provided by the Home Office through two separate FOI responses. The data on S95 recipients only refers to children receiving both asylum accommodation and subsistence support; it does not include dependants on subsistence only although there were likely to be very few as most families make applications for both accommodation and subsistence. Figures for both S95 and S4 recipients have been taken from an operational database and have not been assured to the same standards as national statistics. As such, figures should be treated as provisional and may be subject to change as information on that system is updated.

only if they were born after their parents' claim has been refused, this finding suggests that hundreds of children are remaining on cashless S4 support for many years, some for over a decade. It would be important to consider how these patterns have changed over time. Furthermore, understanding whether there are any demographic patterns in how children are dispersed would also be beneficial to ensure that appropriate services, including childhood vaccination regimes, school places, early years provisions and other relevant interventions are planned at a local level.

### **3.4 Family size**

Although it was not possible to obtain any data on the structures of families receiving Asylum Support, for example, what proportion of households were single-parent or carer households, it was possible to get some data on the numbers of children within families receiving support. Figure 15 sets out the average figures based on data provided for the numbers of families receiving Section 95 support at the end of each year between 2017 and 2021. These show that, on average, during this period, 40% of families on Section 95 support had one child, 35% had two children, and 24% had three children or more. Compared to the general population, families on Section 95 support were more likely to have more children: population estimates between 2017-21 show that on average, of families with dependent children, 44% had one child, 41% had two children and 15% had three or more children (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

**Figure 10 Number of families receiving S95 Asylum Support by number of children in the family based on average figures from the years ending 2017 to 2021**



Source: Home Office data from FOI response

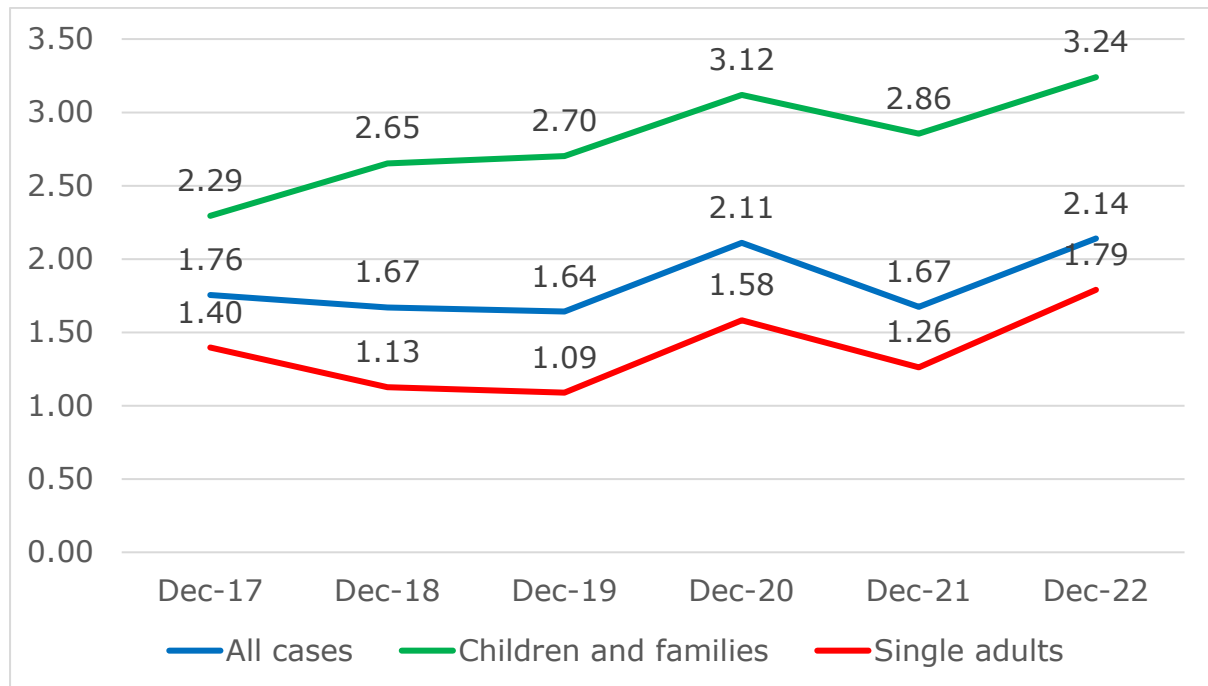
### **3.5 Length of time spent on Asylum Support**

As set out in Chapter 2, historically, a justification for providing lower levels of support to asylum-seeking families has been that support is intended to be temporary (Kaye & Williams, 2010) and that decisions, including through appeals would take altogether six months (Home Office, 1998). While this data is not published as part of the quarterly statistics, it was possible to obtain it through FOIs.

Home Office data reveals that the average time cases had been receiving Section 95 support went up by almost five months between 2017 and 2022. On average, cases were receiving S95 for just under two years (1.76 years) in 2017 but over two years (2.14 years) at the end of 2022. This increase was even greater for families (over 11 months). Families with children were on Section 95 for an average of just over two years (2.29 years) in 2017

and around three years and three months (3.24 years) by 2022 – see Figure 13.

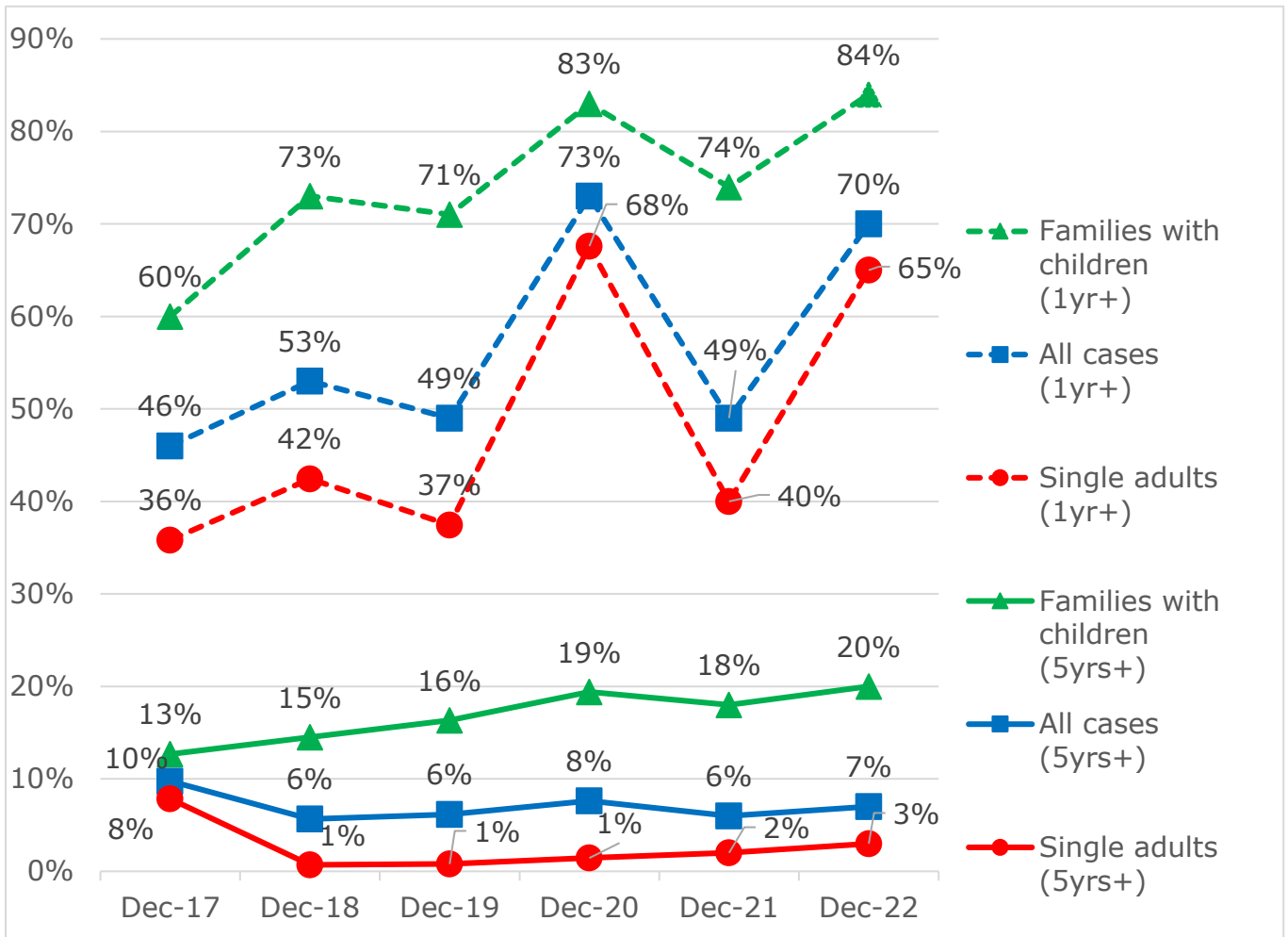
**Figure 11 Average length of time that cases have been receiving Section 95 Asylum Support for by case type at the end of each calendar year (in years), 2017-2022**



Source: Home Office data obtained via FOI

However, there is significant variance in how long families can remain on Asylum Support: at the end of 2022, 84% of families with children had been receiving Section 95 for over one year, and 20% for over five years as shown in Figure 14.

**Figure 12 Proportion of cases receiving S95 for over 1 year or over 5 years (at end of each calendar year, by case type)**



Source: Home Office data obtained via FOI

In assessing how long people spend in the asylum system, most policy analysis relies on figures relating to the length of time applicants wait for an initial decision, which are available in published quarterly statistics. However, this is only a partial measure as it fails to factor in the length of time spent waiting for an appeal and other procedures. Instead, the length of time that families with children spend on Section 95 support would provide a far better indicator, including for adults, of the end-to-end asylum process. There may be some discrepancies if family protection grant rates are higher. Still, given that families do not appear to be prioritised in decision-making, these differences may not be substantial.

## 4. Conclusion

Over the last decade, children and adult family members have generally made up around 40% of all those seeking asylum in the UK. They also make up a significant part of the population receiving Asylum Support – between 2017-22, they made up around two-thirds (63%) of all those receiving Section 95 support. Although these proportions have reduced in recent years, children and families nevertheless make up a significant proportion of the asylum-seeking and supported population. Therefore their welfare and circumstances should be a core consideration in policymaking and service development. This paper also sets out new demographic information about children and families receiving Asylum Support, such as breakdowns of children by age groups and family size, which is also important in effective service delivery. Finally, this analysis shows that children and families remain on Asylum Support for many years and that the length of time has increased considerably in recent years. Home Office data reveals that the average time cases had been receiving Section 95 support went up by almost five months between 2017 and 2022. This increase was even greater for families with children (11 months) who had been receiving Section 95 support on average for around three years and three months (3.24 years) at the end of 2022. At this time, a fifth (20%) of families with children had been on Section 95 support for five years or more. For many, this would have constituted a considerable portion, or even all, of their childhood. While analysis commonly uses published statistics on the proportion of initial asylum decisions made within six months, these metrics provide a more realistic representation of the end-to-end asylum process.

It is also important to note that around a thousand children are receiving cashless support under Section 4 with their families at the end of each year. This type of support is intended for adults who have been refused international protection but are prevented from leaving for various reasons,

including health and safety concerns or unresolved legal issues. However, by virtue of when they were born, over 800 children received this support at the end of 2020.

Given that most of this data were not publicly available and that disaggregated data is limited, there are also important implications for policymaking and service development here. The analysis in this paper helps to shed light on an often 'hidden' population of children and shows how a lack of disaggregated data can lead to problematic assumptions and (mis)understandings about the population of individuals and families seeking international protection in the UK. One way to address these shortfalls could be by publishing quarterly statistics that provide standard age variables to differentiate between children and adults, different age groups of children, and data on whether adults are part of a family unit under the Asylum Support system. Further data is also needed to assess how many children pass through the Asylum Support system each year including through initial and contingency accommodation and the length of time spent there. Additionally, information should also be provided about the structure of families supported, for example, single parent households. Much of this data is already collected but not available publicly. There is also additional data, which is critical in better understanding the population, such as data relating to protected characteristics like disability, ethnicity, religion and pregnancy. These would be vital in providing effective support and services to families on a national, regional and local level. While statistics are in themselves insufficient in telling us what we need to know about the lived experiences that children and young people have and the challenges they face within the Asylum Support system, they are nevertheless important to make sure that as individuals and as a collective, children in the asylum system are counted and acknowledged.



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