The educational outcomes of refugee and asylum-seeking children in England

An experimental methodology for analysing attainment, absence and exclusions

Working paper

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Executive Summary

The outcomes of refugee and asylum-seeking children are poorly understood due to a lack of nationally collected data. Without a fuller understanding of how well these (often highly vulnerable) children fare, it is difficult to make the case for targeted resources and interventions to support them.

In this working paper, we explore a new method for identifying the records of children most likely to be refugees or asylum-support recipient children and then use that method to estimate their outcomes in relation to attainment, absence and exclusion from school.

Our method triangulates data from the National Pupil Database (NPD), published asylum and migration statistics and freedom of information (FOI) requests to the Home Office. Our FOI requests asked the Home Office for details of the number of children living in asylum-seeking families who are destitute or families who have been refused asylum and who are destitute, by local authority as well as the total number of refugee children who have been resettled into the UK via one of the UK Resettlement Schemes, by local authority and year of arrival.

In December 2017 there were just under 24,000 children under 18 years old in receipt of asylum support under Section 4 or Section 95 in England.[1] There were an additional 4,560 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) looked after by local authorities in England in March 2017. Additionally, around 1,000 children aged 5-16 were resettled in England in 2017 under schemes for designated refugees. There are no figures available for the total number of child refugees as records of this are not kept after asylum is granted and this is not possible to estimate from the flows of asylum grants as insufficient detail on the ages of those granted asylum in each year is published.

We evaluate outcomes for the cohort of children who reached year 11 (absence, exclusions) and/or who sat Key Stage 4 examinations (attainment) in the academic year of 2016/17.

Initial Findings

Attainment

In line with the EPI methodology used for our Annual Report on Education in England, we rank children by their mean GCSE results and evaluate the average position of (a) unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and (b) refugee/asylum-support recipient children, relative to White British children who speak English as their first language and have attended a school in England since the start of reception.

[1] Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 permits the Secretary of State to provide asylum seekers and their dependents with support if they appear to be destitute or likely to become destitute due to a lack of adequate accommodation or being unable to meet other essential living needs. Section 4 support is provided to asylum seekers and their dependents whose claims have failed and provides accommodation and a payment card for other necessities, but the payment card cannot be taken without living in the prescribed accommodation.

We estimate that, in 2017:

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were on average **34 months** behind non-migrant children in English and Maths GCSEs, and **37.4 months** behind across all GCSE subjects. This attainment gap is similar in size to the gap experienced by children with Special Needs and Disabilities in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Children with a likelihood of being a resettled refugee or asylum-seeker in receipt of support were estimated to be **15.5 months** behind non-migrant children in English and Maths GCSEs, and **17.3 months** behind across all GCSE subjects. Refugee and asylum-support children are estimated to be similarly vulnerable to children with local authority child protection plans or those who were persistently disadvantaged over the course of their school life.

It's important to note that, although the estimated attainment gaps for refugees and asylum support recipients appear slightly smaller than for disadvantaged children (those who have been eligible for Free School Meals at any point during the last 6 years) at 17.3 months for GCSE English and maths in 2017 (compared to disadvantaged pupils at 17.9 months), this is due to using different comparison groups in each case. As we discuss in the Test Results section, we compare the attainment of refugee and asylum-support children to that of non-migrant children but compare the attainment of disadvantaged pupils to that of non-disadvantaged pupils. As non-disadvantaged pupils tend to have higher attainment than non-migrant pupils, this results in a smaller gap despite the lower attainment by refugee and asylum-support children.

Absence

Our methodology suggests that:

- **Mean absence rates for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Year 11 in 2017 were 6.8 percent, compared with a 6.6 percent average for non-migrant children.**

- **In contrast, resettled refugee or asylum support children in Year 11 were estimated to be absent for 5.0 percent of their time in school, relative to the 6.6 percent for non-migrant children.**

Although resettled refugees and asylum support children may face similar levels of trauma and deprivation to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, their higher-than-average attendance at school could be driven by a range of possible factors including having parents who can actively encourage and supervise attendance at school and having experienced a less stressful transition to life in the UK once they arrive.

Exclusions

Finally, we analyse rates of fixed period and permanent exclusions for UASC and for refugee and asylum-support recipient children. We estimate that:

- **Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children experience higher rates (7.1 percent) of fixed period exclusions than the non-migrant population (5.2 percent)**, while possible resettled refugee or asylum support children are estimated to be less likely to experience a fixed period exclusion (4.4 percent).

- The picture is slightly different for permanent exclusions: **Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have extremely low (near zero) levels of permanent exclusion, and resettled refugee or asylum support children have an estimated permanent exclusion rate of 0.04 per cent, which was lower than the 0.11 per cent for non-migrant children.** This makes sense in the context that schools are advised to avoid wherever possible the permanent exclusion of children looked after by the local authority, including Unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Overall, our analysis reveals that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are a highly vulnerable group within secondary schools in England, with very low attainment even by comparison with other vulnerable groups of pupils and experiencing higher-than-average rates of school absence and fixed period exclusions.

Refugee and Asylum Support children fare better, with low estimated rates of absences and exclusions, but in spite of these possible educational advantages, they are still subject to low GCSE attainment, comparable with that of other highly vulnerable groups such as persistently disadvantaged pupils.

Finally, it is important to stress that this is an experimental methodology on which we are seeking feedback. We acknowledge that there are some key limitations to our analysis (as we set out in the Working Method section) and it is likely that our probability-based methodology will lead to underestimation of gaps for possible resettled refugees and children on asylum support. Nevertheless, to our knowledge no published research so far has attempted an assessment of outcomes for as broad a group of refugee and asylum-seeking children, and we hope that this working paper takes a first step towards redressing that.

Working paper aims

This working paper aims to contribute towards filling the gaps in our knowledge about outcomes for refugee and asylum-seeking children. Refugee and asylum-seeking children are poorly represented in administrative data sources, and as a result most research focuses on the subset of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are looked after by the local authority (O'Higgins, 2019; Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018).

This paper attempts to incorporate resettled refugees and accompanied children living in families on asylum support by proposing an experimental methodology that triangulates between administrative National Pupil Database (NPD) data, published asylum and migration statistics and freedom of information (FOI) requests to the Home Office. We select pupils who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) who first appear in the school census at some point after Reception year and narrow down to the pupils whose first language is spoken by the nationalities of asylum and refugee resettlement. We then allocate these children a probability of being a refugee or asylum-seeker, based on the volume of asylum and resettlement flows experienced in the year that the pupil appears in the school census. Finally, we draw on FOI requests to the Home Office for flows by local authority area which enable us to fine-tune our probability estimates.

Our methodology enables us to construct probability-weighted descriptive statistics that tell us something about outcomes for refugees and asylum-seekers in England. We conduct provisional estimates of attainment, absence and exclusions from school for these pupils.

Data scope and structure

Data sources

With the exception of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children taken into care, administrative data sources available to researchers do not record refugee or asylum-support recipient status among children and young people. In order to conduct analysis of outcomes for this group, we therefore triangulate total flows of resettled refugee and asylum-support recipient children from an FOI request to the Home Office with the existing administrative data to come up with probability estimates for belonging to one of these groups. These amount to 'best guesses' of how likely each pupil record is to be a refugee or asylum-support child, given a range of data about them. These estimates are likely to be imperfect and to involve both inclusion and exclusion errors.

Our first data source is **Freedom of Information requests to the Home Office** regarding:

- The total number of children living in asylum-seeking families who are destitute (thereby being eligible for Section 95 support) or families who have been refused asylum and who are destitute (thereby being eligible for Section 4 support), by local authority;
- The total number of refugee children who have been resettled into the UK via one of the UK Resettlement Schemes, by local authority and year of arrival.

We then triangulate this data with the following **administrative data sources**:

- Spring School Census records spring 2006 to spring 2017 [Jan];
- Children Looked After 'CLA' Census from 2006 to 2017 [Mar];
- Key Stage 4 pupil examination data for 2017;
- Pupil absence data from termly school census records for 2017;
- Exclusions data for 2017 – permanent and fixed period exclusions.

Cohorts

We evaluate the cohort of children who reached year 11 (absence, exclusions) and/or who sat Key Stage 4 examinations (attainment) in the academic year of 2016/17.

Matching

Pupils were matched across data sources with their anonymised pupil matching reference (PMR) as the sole matching key and duplicates were dropped.

Children Looked After (CLA) Census data structure

Unlike the school census and pupil examination data, the CLA census is structured by episodes of care. Data were cleaned and converted to pupil-level prior to matching with the pupil-level school census, attainment, absence and exclusions data.

Working method

We analysed the records of 534,086 secondary school pupils who sat Key Stage 4 examinations and 536,530 pupils who were in Year 11 in the academic year of 2016-17.

We investigate two groups of children:

- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) who are looked after by the local authority under the provisions of the Children's Act 1989 because they have no parent or guardian in the UK, who are directly flagged in the Children Looked After (CLA) census; and
- Children who have a likelihood of being either a resettled refugee or an asylum-seeking child whose family is in receipt of asylum support. Resettled refugees have been designated as refugees by the UNHCR and granted permission for permanent residence in the UK before they arrive. Asylum support is provided by the Home Office to asylum applicants who are destitute, in the form of accommodation and/or cash for subsistence while their application for asylum is being processed, or, in the short-term, after the refusal of an asylum application.

We construct these groups as mutually exclusive, enabling us to distinguish outcomes between unaccompanied and accompanied asylum-seeking children.

Part A: Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Step 1: Flag unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

The first step of the analysis was to flag all children who are flagged in the Children Looked After (CLA) census as an 'unaccompanied asylum-seeker'. This is the only definite flag of asylum-seeking or refugee status that exists within the administrative data, but these children represent a small proportion of the total refugee and asylum-seeking children in the UK. We look at outcomes for these pupils as a distinct pupil group.

Limitation 1: Analysis excludes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children placed in non-mainstream, bespoke or language programmes

In our analysis of KS4 attainment, we only include UASC who have a recorded examination result at KS4. However, we know that some UASC are not placed in mainstream educational provision, particularly if their language skills are not adequate or if there is uncertainty about their age. In these cases, UASC are sometimes placed in bespoke education provision, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) language classes or programmes of orientation to living in the UK, or in vocational courses at FE colleges. Our analysis of KS4 attainment will not include these pupils because they did not sit GCSE or other KS4 exams and are therefore not included in the GCSE examination data.

Similarly, in our analysis of absence and exclusions, we only include UASC who are flagged as being in the national curriculum year 11. This will exclude younger UASC pupils and those who are not in mainstream education.

Part B: Refugees and accompanied asylum-support recipient children

Step 1: Flag possible migrant children (late entrants into the English state school system who speak English as an Additional Language)

We then attempt to investigate outcomes for non-UASC asylum-seekers and refugees by triangulating various pieces of administrative data in the NPD with published statistics and freedom of information requests to the Home Office.

As a first step, we select all children who are late entrants into the English state school system – after Reception year – and speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). This is because refugee and asylum-support children are likely to enter the school system at a late stage, usually a short time after their arrival in the UK. However, to reduce the inclusion of pupils who move from independent schools into the state school system at a late stage, we also condition based on speaking EAL.

Limitation 2: Excludes migrant children who arrived in the UK before starting school

We identify possible migrant children by using school census records, flagging all EAL-speaking children who are not present in reception but make an appearance at a later stage. This means that we are not able to identify migrant children who migrated to the UK prior to starting school, and therefore are present in reception. Some children in families in receipt of asylum support will have been born in the UK or arrived before school age and therefore have attended school from reception.

In particular, it is likely that many children in families that have been refused asylum and are in receipt of Section 4 support (because they are unable to leave for health reasons or because it is not safe to return to their country) will have been born in the UK, as most of these children are under five.[1]

Step 2: Exclude children who are UASC, White British, or speak English as their first language in the latest year

In order to make accurate comparisons between unaccompanied and accompanied asylum-seeking children, we exclude all pupils who we know are UASC from our second group of pupils.

Refugee and asylum-support children are highly unlikely to be flagged as White British. We therefore remove all White British pupils from the group arrived at by Step 2, as well as removing all pupils whose first language is English in the latest year of available data (2017).

Assumption 1: Refugee and asylum-support recipient children do not have English as their first language and are not identified as White British

Refugees or asylum-seeking children who arrive in the UK at a very young age may come to be fluent in English to such an extent that it is recorded as their 'first language'. Others may speak English as their first language in their country of origin. Since we utilise first language to filter out possible refugee or asylum-support status, we are unable to include these English-speaking pupils in our analysis of probable refugee or asylum-support groups.

We also use the ethnicity data in the school census to exclude White British pupils. However, it is possible that some refugees or asylum-support children will be white and come to identify as white British.

Step 3: Using pupils' first language, calculate for each possible nationality the probability of being a resettled refugee or an asylum-seeker

We take the group of non-White British, non-UASC children arrived at by Steps 1 and 2 and allocate them probability scores to reflect their likelihood of being a refugee or asylum-seeker. The school census contains a First Language variable which enables us to calculate the approximate probability of a late-arriving EAL-speaking child having a nationality with a high volume of asylum applications or refugee resettlements.

We do this by triangulating between the First Language variable in the school census and published Home Office migration statistics on entry clearance visas, asylum applications and resettled refugees over the period 2006-2016 inclusive. We focus on the main listed nationalities with asylum applications and resettlements for children under-18 from 2006 to 2016.[2] We make a list of the main languages spoken in these countries and then use the First Language variable in the NPD to allocate pupils with a list of possible nationalities that are consistent with their first language. [3]

We then utilise published Home Office data to calculate the probability of a child being an asylum-seeker or refugee, conditional on their imputed possible nationality. We calculate this by comparing each possible nationality's asylum and refugee flows relative to their total flows for each year:

$$p(G \mid N)_{G,N,Y} = \left(\frac{(V+A+R)}{\sum_{N=1}^{n}(V+A+R)}\right)_{N,Y} * \left(\frac{G}{V+A+R}\right)_{G,N,Y}$$

[2] More specifically, we select the countries in the 9th and 10th decile of total asylum (UASC + non-UASC) applications and resettlements for under-18s.

[3] https://www.infoplease.com/world/countries/languages-spoken-in-each-country-of-the-world

where G is the relevant group (asylum applicants, asylum support applicants, resettled refugees), N is nationality, V is the number of entry clearance visas, A is the number of asylum applications, R is the number of refugee resettlements, and Y is year of entry to the UK.

By way of example, a child may have entered the English state school system relatively late, in Year 5 for example, because they migrated from France to the UK as an EEA citizen. This pupil does not constitute a refugee nor an asylum-seeker. Assuming that their first language is recorded as French, they will be allocated a very small probability of being an asylum-seeker or refugee, on grounds that there are a small number of refugee countries for which French is one of the main languages.

By contrast, a child entering the English school system at the same point whose mother tongue is Kurdish will be allocated a relatively high probability of being an asylum-seeker or refugee, since there are a number of high-volume refugee nationalities (Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey) for whom Kurdish is a main language.

Assumption 2: Children's first language is one of the main languages of their nationality

This step involves an assumption that is unlikely to be accurate in all cases: that children speak one of the main languages of their country of origin. This will not apply for all children. We manually mapped languages to nationalities using information sourced from the CIA World Factbook.

Step 4: Condition asylum-seeker probabilities on being eligible for free school meals (FSM)

While most children who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) conditions are not eligible for free school meals, pupils who are in receipt of Section 95 support from the Home Office are eligible for FSM by definition. We can therefore exploit the administrative data on FSM receipt to narrow down our probability scores to the asylum-support recipient group by assigning all non-FSM children zero probability of being a child living in an asylum support family.

Assumption 3: All children in families in receipt of Section 95 asylum support have been eligible for free school meals at some point over the last six years

Asylum-seeking children are among those who are subject to No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions, which would usually mean that they are ineligible for free school meals (FSM) via their ineligibility for benefits. However, there is an exception for children living in families in receipt of Section 95 support: they are eligible for FSM automatically. This makes it reasonable to assume that all children in receipt of Section 95 support have been eligible for FSM at some point over the last six years and enables us to utilise the administrative data to improve the accuracy of our probability estimates.

Step 5: Calculate overall probability of being a resettled refugee or a child on asylum support

So far, we have individual probabilities of being an asylum-support recipient or resettled refugee conditional on a vector of nationalities. In order to calculate a pupil's overall estimated probability of being an asylum-support recipient or refugee, we combine these probabilities by the following:

$$p(G)_{G,Y} = \sum_{N=1}^{n} p(G \mid N)_{G,N,Y}$$

where G is the relevant group (asylum applicants, asylum support applicants, resettled refugees), Y is the year of entry, N is nationality and n is the number of nationalities.

Step 6: Apply LA-level multipliers from FOI Home Office data

After conducting these steps, we utilise LA-level data from FOIs submitted to the Home Office on the number of children under-18 in receipt of Section 95 or Section 4 asylum support, and the number of children aged 5-16 who have been resettled as refugees.[4] This enables us to scale our probabilities so that they are more in line with the LA-level geographical distribution of asylum and refugee claims in England.

For example, let's assume a child is allocated a non-zero probability of being a resettled refugee from steps 1-6, but we know that they attend school in a local authority in which there are no resettled refugees according to the Home Office (e.g., Worcestershire). Applying the LA-level multiplier would scale their probability score to zero, thereby making our probability distribution more accurate.

By contrast, a child attending a school in local authority that has a relatively high proportion of resettled refugees (e.g. Bradford) will have their probability scaled up relative to pupils living in other LAs, again making our probability distribution more accurate.

Step 7: Calculate the combined probability of being a resettled refugee or a child on asylum support

At this stage, we conducted weighted descriptive statistics of children with a non-zero probability of being one of the three groups mentioned: an asylum-seeker, a resettled refugee, or a child on asylum support respectively.

This step indicated that our probability-based method was likely too coarse to accurately capture asylum-seekers as a separate category: while 9,157 children were assigned a non-zero probability of being an asylum-seeker generally, just 1,438 children were assigned a non-zero probability of being a resettled refugee.

[4] Responses were received on 27 October 2020 (resettled refugee children aged 5-16 by local authority), 19 November 2020 (resettled refugee children aged 5-16 by gender and nationality) and 22 December (children in receipt of S95/S4 asylum support as at 31 December 2016, by local authority).

This is likely because the list of nationalities from which asylum applicants originate is much larger than that for resettled refugees or asylum support applications and includes some low-frequency nationalities that are less likely to be associated with socio-economic deprivation and disadvantage (e.g., United States, Georgia, Canada). Meanwhile, we were able to sharpen our Section 95 asylum support probabilities significantly by conditioning the probabilities on being eligible for FSM.

The calculated probabilities (of being an asylum-seeker, resettled refugee, or a child on asylum support) are not mutually exclusive, and it would imply a spurious level of accuracy simply allocate a pupil their highest probability as an identity. Given that our asylum support probabilities can be fine-tuned by the FSM administrative data, we therefore decided to evaluate outcomes for a combined group of pupils who have non-zero probabilities of being either a resettled refugee or in receipt of asylum support.

Limitation 3: Estimates exclude accompanied asylum-seeking children who are not eligible for asylum support

While our methodology seems to have been reasonably effective at narrowing down to an appropriately sized group of children with a non-zero probability of being a resettled refugee or an asylum-seeker in receipt of Section 95 support, it appears to have been too imprecise for predicting asylum-seeker status. The final group with a non-zero probability of being an asylum-seeker is implausibly large and likely includes children with migrant backgrounds who have not experienced the same sort of challenges and deprivation as most asylum-seeking children.

Therefore, we decided to focus our estimates on asylum-seekers in receipt of support and resettled refugees. This unfortunately means that our estimates do not represent outcomes for asylum-seekers who are not on asylum support. However, published data appears to indicate that approximately two-thirds of all asylum applicants have applied for Section 95 asylum support.[1] There is also a significant gap in our knowledge about outcomes for asylum support children, and in prioritising analysis of this group we are attempting to redress this.

Step 8: Analyse characteristics and outcomes of refugee and asylum-support recipient pupils

Having obtained a flag of unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) status and an estimated probability for refugee or asylum support status, we then conduct weighted descriptive statistics for these groups, comparing them with non-migrant pupils in their cohort.

Limitation 4: Underestimation of inequalities in outcomes for refugee and asylum support children

It is neither possible, nor was it the intention of our analysis, to definitively identify refugee and accompanied asylum-support recipient children from administrative data. Our methodology at best allocates children with a probability score that roughly indicates whether they are likely to be a refugee or asylum-support recipient, and at worst approximates a group of children with migrant backgrounds more generally. Since refugees and children in receipt of asylum support are an extremely vulnerable group, this means that we are likely underestimating the inequalities in outcomes between them and their peers. Our test results should therefore be considered as conservative estimates.

Test results

In December 2017 there were just under 24,000 children under 18 years old in receipt of asylum support under Section 4 or Section 95 in England. There were an additional 4,560 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children looked after by local authorities in England in March 2017. Additionally, around 1,000 children aged 5-16 were resettled in England in 2017 under schemes for designated refugees.

There are no figures available for the total number of child refugees as records of this are not kept after asylum is granted and this is not possible to estimate from the flows of asylum grants as insufficient detail on the ages of those granted asylum in each year is published. We do know that the proportion of asylum applications overall (including adults) which eventually resulted in asylum or other leave to remain had risen to around half of all claims by 2017, which suggests that the number of child refugees is probably in the order of tens of thousands.

Using the methodology described above, we conduct separate analyses of educational outcomes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and children who have a likelihood of being a resettled refugee or child in receipt of asylum support. Specifically, we investigate the following:

- **Attainment:** How far behind are refugee and asylum-support children in terms of learning and development relative to their peers?
- **Absence:** How do attendance and absence rates of refugee and asylum-support children compare with those of the rest of the population?
- **Exclusions:** How much more or less likely are refugee and asylum-support children to experience a permanent or fixed period exclusion from school?

Attainment

In line with EPI's mean rank difference methodology for calculating attainment gaps (see Hutchinson et al, 2020), we rank children by their mean GCSE results and evaluate the average position of refugee/asylum-support children relative to non-migrant children (i.e., children who are not EAL-speaking post-Reception entrants). Using non-migrant children as the comparison group for both of our ASR groups (UASC and resettled refugee/asylum support) ensures that we have a consistent comparison group in our analyses.

We estimate from the administrative NPD data for 2017 that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were on average **34 months** behind non-migrant children in English and Maths GCSEs, and **37.4 months** behind across all GCSE subjects.

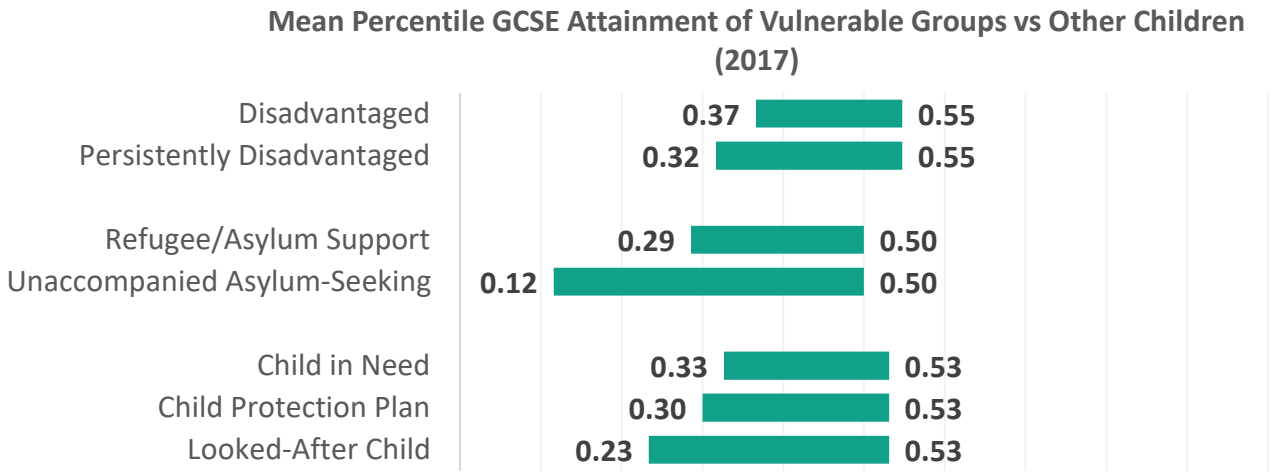
Meanwhile, our experimental working method as outlined in the previous section (drawing on a mix of NPD, published statistics and FOI data) suggests that children with a likelihood of being a resettled refugee or asylum-seeker in receipt of support were on average **15.5 months** behind non-migrant children in English and Maths GCSEs, and **17.3 months** behind across all GCSE subjects.

Figure 1: Attainment gaps for UASC, refugee and asylum-support children at the end of secondary school, 2017

		Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)	Possible resettled refugee or asylum support children	Non-migrant children
GCSE average grade	Mean rank percentile	0.123	0.344	0.5
	Attainment gap (months)	37.4	15.5	
English and Maths GCSE	Mean rank percentile	0.116	0.286	0.5
	Attainment gap (months)	34.0	17.3	

Comparing these attainment gaps with disadvantage gaps for the same year, it is clear that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are an extremely vulnerable group within English schools, with a similar attainment gap to children with Special Needs and Disabilities in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Although the estimated attainment gaps for refugees and asylum-support recipients appear slightly smaller than for disadvantaged children eligible for Free School Meals during the last 6 years, at 17.3 months for GCSE English and maths, this is in fact an artifact of the comparison group used in each case. The percentile attainment gaps for disadvantaged children and children in contact with social care are shown alongside the estimated gap for refugees and asylum-support recipients for comparison below.



While non-disadvantaged children attained at the 55th percentile in 2017, non-migrant children had higher attainment at the 50th percentile. This meant that although the estimated attainment of resettled refugees and asylum-support recipients was lower than that of disadvantaged children (at the 29th percentile versus the 37th percentile) the gap between disadvantaged and non-

disadvantaged children was made larger by the higher attainment of non-disadvantaged children compared with non-migrant children.

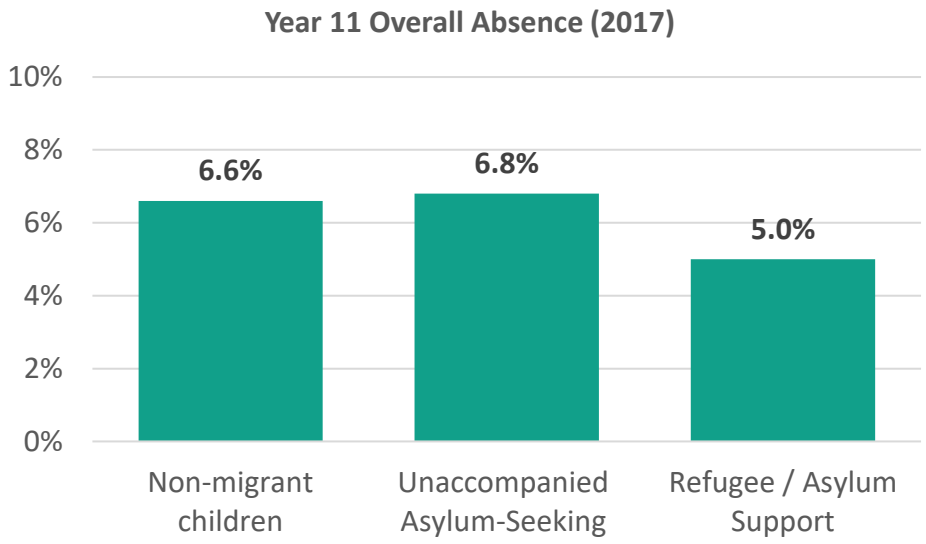
In terms of GCSE attainment, refugee and asylum-support children are estimated to be similarly vulnerable to children with Child Protection Plans or those who were persistently disadvantaged over the course of their school life. Other research has clearly indicated the key role of lack of proficiency in the English language as a driver of educational disadvantage and attainment gaps within the wider of group of children who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL); this accounted for a gap of 18.6 months for late-arriving EAL-speakers in GCSE English and maths in 2017, similar in size to the gap for disadvantaged children, and somewhat smaller than the gap for refugee and asylum-support recipient children.

Absence

Our methodology suggests that:

- Levels of absence from school (for all reasons, known as 'overall absence') among Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are similar to but slightly higher than those for non-migrant children. **Mean absence rates for UASC pupils in Year 11 in 2017 were 6.8 percent, compared with a 6.6 percent average for non-migrant children.** The slightly raised estimated levels of absence are consistent with evidence elsewhere that UASC face practical and psychological barriers to engagement with school, including sleep problems caused by trauma, isolation from the lack of a family structure, and poor living conditions in UASC accommodation.

- In contrast, our working method suggests that absence rates for children with a likelihood of being a resettled refugee or on asylum support are somewhat lower than average absence rates. **Possible resettled refugee or asylum support children in Year 11 were absent for 5.0 percent of their time in school, relative to the 6.6 percent for non-migrant children.** It appears that having the support of family members enables these children to attend school well and suggests that their disadvantage in terms of attainment is not as a result of lower engagement with education.



While resettled refugees and asylum support children may face similar levels of psychological trauma and material deprivation to UASC, their higher-than-average attendance at school could be driven by a range of possible factors. First, some of the ethnicities that are represented in these groups tend to place a high cultural value on education and, unlike UASC, children who are resettled refugees or on asylum support may benefit from having parents who can actively encourage and supervise attendance at school. Second, parents in asylum support families may be especially keen to send their children to school in order to ensure that they receive a hot meal, supervision and care during the day, while parents may have to care for younger children and attend meetings and conduct administrative work in relation to their asylum application. Third, absence rates appear to

be especially low for children who are possible resettled refugees. Since their asylum application has been approved prior to arriving in the UK, they have experienced a less stressful transition to life in the UK once they arrive.

Exclusions

Finally, we analyse rates of fixed period and permanent exclusions for UASC and our predicted refugee and asylum group.

- The results for fixed period exclusions mirror the results for pupil absence: **UASC experience higher rates (7.1 percent) of fixed period exclusions than the non-migrant population (5.2 percent)**, while possible resettled refugee or asylum-support recipient children are less likely to experience a fixed period exclusion (4.4 percent).

- The picture is slightly different for permanent exclusions: **UASC have extremely low (near zero) levels of permanent exclusion, and resettled refugee or asylum support children have an estimated permanent exclusion rate of 0.04 per cent, which was lower than the 0.11 per cent for non-migrant children.** This makes sense in the context that schools are advised to avoid wherever possible the permanent exclusion of children looked after by the local authority, including UASC.

Table 2: Exclusions from school for Year 11 pupils in 2017 by UASC, asylum support and refugee status

	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)	Possible resettled refugee or asylum support children	Non-migrant children
Fixed period exclusions rate (%)	7.1	4.4	5.2
Permanent exclusions rate (%)	0.00	0.04	0.11

Summary of Estimated Outcomes

Overall, our analysis reveals that Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children are a highly vulnerable group within secondary schools in England, with very low attainment even by comparison with other vulnerable groups of pupils and experiencing higher-than-average rates of school absence and fixed period exclusions.

Refugee and asylum-support recipient children fare better, with low estimated rates of absences and exclusions but, in spite of these possible educational advantages, they are still subject to low estimated GCSE attainment, comparable with that of other highly vulnerable groups such as persistently disadvantaged pupils.

How to give feedback

We welcome feedback on this working paper and the methodology we have used to estimate educational outcomes for refugee and asylum-support recipient children. Please return any feedback to feedback@epi.org.uk by 30 January 2022.

You do not need to give us any personal details in order to send us feedback. Comments received will not be publicly attributed to you or your organisation without your prior consent. Any personal details you do supply will be managed according to our privacy policy: https://epi.org.uk/privacy-policy/