



**BAOBAB CENTRE**  
for Young Survivors in Exile

# Unaccompanied Minors, Mental Health and the 'Danish Model'

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Briefing

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# Briefing: Unaccompanied Minors, mental health and the 'Danish model'

## Introduction

Over the past few years, both the UK Conservative and Labour governments have sought to emulate, sometimes explicitly,<sup>1</sup> aspects of Denmark's restrictive asylum policy, in particular since Denmark's asylum 'paradigm shift' in 2015 and 2018 in reaction to the increase in Syrian forced migration towards Europe during the Syrian civil war.<sup>2</sup> The 'Danish model' is considered by the Labour government to be a left-wing strategy to assuage far-right calls for stricter migration rules. In broad terms, it is made up of provisions from three Acts: 1) the *Aliens Act*, 2) *Integration Act* and 3) the *Act on Social Housing*. They govern the rules on immigration, detention, (temporary) protection, residency, family reunification, the policing of 'non-Western' communities, access to benefits and more.<sup>3</sup> In this report, we are focusing on the temporary protection aspect, and the effects it has on integration and mental health of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors (UASCs), known as unaccompanied minors (UMIs) in Denmark. Broadly, this briefing asks what this 'Danish model' for asylum policy has meant for unaccompanied children seeking asylum and refuge in Denmark, with the aim of informing UK government policies about the likely consequences of such a paradigm shift for asylum-seeking unaccompanied children. As the UK government embarks on a mission to imitate Denmark's restrictive and insecure asylum policies, it would do well to digest some of the documented effects of Denmark's policies on some of its most vulnerable members – children and young people arriving without families to the country.

While good summaries of Denmark's asylum policy shifts since 2015 exist<sup>4</sup>, few focus on the impacts on children seeking asylum in Denmark per se. Nevertheless, these policies – restricted or delayed family reunification rules, delayed access to permanent residency, or the 2018 Ghetto Package designed to dismantle immigration-majority

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<sup>1</sup> See the Hansard here: UK Parliament Debate, 17 November 2025, "[Asylum Policies: Danish Model](#)"; for a BBC article, see: BBC, 8 November 2025, "[UK seeks Danish inspiration to shake up immigration system](#)"; and for a Financial Times account, see: Financial Times, 17 November 2025, "[How Britain's migration crackdown compares with Danish model](#)".

<sup>2</sup> Refugees Welcome Denmark, nd., "[The Paradigm Shift](#)".

<sup>3</sup> Corry, December 2025, "[On the perils of the 'Danish model'](#)".

<sup>4</sup> For instance: Legal 500, November 2025, "[The UK's interest in the Danish asylum and immigration model](#)", and McKinney & Kirk-Wade, 10 November 2025, "[Research Briefing \(No. 10391\)](#)".

neighbourhoods<sup>5</sup> – all have and will continue to impact asylum-seeking children's ability to settle and grow in Denmark.

Firstly, this briefing will outline the differences in context in between Denmark and the UK. Second, it details the rights accorded to UMIs in Denmark. The third section discusses the negligible impact that the 'Danish model' has had on UMI numbers in Denmark. The fourth and fifth sections highlight studies on the mental (and sometimes physical) health challenges that UMIs face because of the restrictive policy environment. The sixth section concludes.

## Differences in Context

The so-called 'Danish model' operates in a legal and political-geographical context widely different to the UK, which in itself should give pause to UK policy makers adamant on policy imitation. As a member of the European Union, for instance, Denmark is part of the Dublin agreement on transferring asylum-seekers and the Schengen agreement on free movement, although it obtained an exclusion clause to many of the EU-level asylum laws. While the UK government has trumpeted Denmark's "success" in reducing asylum applications to their lowest level in 40 years (with Danish figures indeed showing a decrease since the peak of 2015<sup>6</sup>), it is unclear such a result can be replicated in the UK. There are particular historical and structural elements behind people's choice of the UK as destination for asylum (language, historical colonial links, established migration networks, etc.)<sup>7</sup> and the UK no longer has access anymore to the EU's Dublin transfer agreement. Moreover, the purported link between 'deterrence' policies and a decrease in migration figures, is highly problematic, as illustrated in a recent study commissioned by House of Commons: "deterrence policies are not thought to influence asylum seekers' choice of destination."<sup>8</sup> An abundance of

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<sup>5</sup> The law targets residential areas who fail to meet two of four standards of lawfulness, employment, income and education levels. Those with over 50% "non-Western" people were labelled "ghettos" and liable to be broken down, leading to displacement and removals through demolition, sale or eviction. See: Hedlund, S., November 2024, "[Denmark's uprooting of settled residents from 'ghettos' forms part of aggressive plan to assimilate nonwhite inhabitants](#)". In December 2025, the European Court of Justice ruled that this law is incompatible with the EU's directive on equal treatment. See: Amnesty International, 18 December 2025, "[Denmark: ECJ ruling that ghetto law is potentially unlawful is important step in protecting basic human rights](#)".

<sup>6</sup> Sky News, 18 November 2025, "[UK government looking at Danish migration model - here's how it works](#)"; BBC, 8 November 2025, "[UK seeks Danish inspiration to shake up immigration system](#)"; Refugees Welcome Denmark, nd., "[How many are coming, and from where?](#)".

<sup>7</sup> See: Peck, 2023, "[An evolving migration-development nexus: DfID and British politics of race and belonging](#)". She says that: "diasporic-centred development can be considered a racialised socio-political mechanism, shaped by the shifting politics of race and belonging, which are themselves bound to colonial pasts and contemporary colonialities." For general information on the connection between colonisation and migration, see: de Haas, 2010, "[Migration transitions: A theoretical and empirical inquiry into the developmental drivers of international migration](#)", p. 7-10. See also: de Haas, H., 2023, 'Myth 5: Development in poor countries will reduce migration', in "[How Migration Really Works: 22 Things You Need to Know about the Most Divisive Issue in Politics](#)".

<sup>8</sup> McKinney & Kirk-Wade, 10 November 2025, "[Research Briefing \(No. 10391\)](#)". On the fact that deterrence policies have likely very little impact on numbers of people claiming asylum in the UK, the briefing quotes research by the Oxford University Migration Observatory, 23 January 2024, "[UK policies to deter people from claiming asylum](#)".

scholarship backs this up<sup>9</sup> – as even a recent Home Office study admits: “Existing evidence (...) indicates the correlation between state policies and strengthening border control on the one hand, and asylum seeker decision-making on the other, is highly disputed if not denied. (...) [T]ightening migration policies is ineffective given the complexity of people’s choices to migrate”.<sup>10</sup> Based on the available evidence and the different national contexts, UK attempts to replicate Denmark’s policies to reducing arrivals are unlikely to succeed. However, it should be noted that some research does show that family reunion rights (a restrictive migration policy) can have an impact on asylum seekers’ destination choices.<sup>11</sup> However, given that UASCs don’t have family reunification rights in the UK according to the current rules, this would not be relevant to their decision-making.<sup>12</sup> Regardless, at the time of writing, the UK has frozen family reunification rights for all refugees and people granted humanitarian protection.<sup>13</sup>

Denmark’s experience with “draconian” restrictions<sup>14</sup> on asylum policy however does offer an interesting reference point to evaluate the impact of these policy changes on vulnerable populations such as unaccompanied children. Given these changes started being implemented 10 years ago in Denmark, we now have a good vantage point from which to draw lessons that should be of primary concern to UK authorities.

## The rights of UMIs under Danish rules

UMIs have retained specific rights under Denmark’s asylum rules as they fall under the protection of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>15</sup>: faster application processing times, access to a representative for all asylum-related procedures, and access to specific asylum accommodation centres. However, unaccompanied minors recognised as refugees will only receive a temporary residence permit, “valid for between one and two years”, as with all refugees in Denmark (according to the Danish government portal to apply for asylum).<sup>16</sup> This is renewable but essentially an insecure

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<sup>9</sup> See: Cummings et al., 2015, [“Why people move: understanding the drivers and trends of migration to Europe”](#); Crawley & Hagen-Zanker, 2019, [“Deciding Where to go: Policies, People and Perceptions Shaping Destination Preferences”](#); UNHCR, 2019, [“Destination Anywhere: The profile and protection situation of unaccompanied and separated children and the circumstances which lead them to seek refuge in the UK”](#).

<sup>10</sup> Home Office, 2022, [“Asylum seeker decision-making in journeys to the United Kingdom \(2022\)”](#).

<sup>11</sup> See: Diop-Christensen & Diop, July 2021 [“What Do Asylum Seekers Prioritise—Safety or Welfare Benefits? The Influence of Policies on Asylum Flows to the EU15 Countries”](#).

<sup>12</sup> Additionally, evidence from Australia shows that after the introduction of temporary protection mechanisms that did not include family reunion rights, there was an increase in the number of women and children arriving by small boat. A possible consequence of the UK policy is that fewer children arrive through family reunion routes and instead take dangerous journeys by small boat (either accompanied by family members or as UASC). Crock & Saul, 2002, [“Future seekers: refugees and the law in Australia”](#).

<sup>13</sup> Last edited on 18.02.2026. See: Jorgensen, September 2025, [“Q&A: The UK’s new approach to refugee family reunion”](#).

<sup>14</sup> Sky News, 9 November 2025, [“Reform’s been pretty quiet since Labour started exploring Danish migration model - and this is why”](#).

<sup>15</sup> Danish Refugee Council, nd., [“FAQ: Unaccompanied Minors”](#).

<sup>16</sup> The Danish Immigration Service, 3 August 2023, [“Unaccompanied Minor Asylum Seekers”](#).

status. Unaccompanied minors deemed mature enough<sup>17</sup> but not accepted as refugees – similar to the UK's special 'UASC leave'<sup>18</sup> – can also obtain a residence permit valid until they are 18 (under Aliens Act section 9 c (3) (ii)). However, for children 15 and up this permit must also be renewed each year until they turn 18. At that point the young person, in the words of the government portal to apply for asylum, "will normally have to leave Denmark".<sup>19</sup> Unlike the UK, these residence permits are only available to unaccompanied minors if they have no family network in their home country.

*While the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child imposes some safeguarding measures for unaccompanied minors arriving in Denmark, protections offered, either as refugee or as a minor, are restricted and insecure.*

## Impact of 'Danish Model' on UMI numbers in Denmark

Applications for asylum in Denmark from unaccompanied minors (some as young as seven years old<sup>20</sup>) followed the rapid increase in asylum applications across Europe following the Syrian Civil War and peaked in 2015, reaching 2,130 before reducing to around 400 per year in 2017 (an 81% reduction rate). They have remained stable since at between 100 to 300 per year<sup>21</sup> – in effect returning to the levels recorded *prior* to the 2015 peak.<sup>22</sup> Nothing in these numbers suggests that Denmark's paradigm shift on asylum policies had any particular effect on deterring unaccompanied minors from applying in Denmark. Denmark in fact saw *less* of a reduction in asylum applications from minors post-2015 than its Nordic neighbours, with both Finland and Sweden, for instance, seeing a 96% reduction rate in applications from unaccompanied minors between 2015 and 2017.<sup>23</sup> The numbers of new applications from UMIs in Denmark have since 2018 (245 arrivals) held steady with 115 new applications in 2021, 315 in 2022,

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<sup>17</sup> "Unaccompanied minors will only be required to complete the asylum procedure if they are deemed sufficiently mature" – if not, and as long as they have no family network in their home country, then they might apply for a special residence permit under Aliens Act Article 9c (3) (i) – although this will only be "under very special conditions". Once deemed mature, normal asylum procedures resume. See: EDAL, February 2018, "[Denmark: country profile](#)" and Danish Immigration Service 2023, "[New to Denmark](#)", np.

<sup>18</sup> CORAM Children's Legal Centre, March 2017, "[How to support a child with UASC leave](#)".

<sup>19</sup> Although they could also apply for a residence permit on special grounds (Aliens Act section 9 c (1)).

<sup>20</sup> Oak Foundation, 20 June 2024, "[Partner Story: Vores Asylbørn](#)".

<sup>21</sup> Nordisk Samarbejde / The Nordic Co-operation, 28 February 2022, "[Asylum applicants and unaccompanied minors](#)".

<sup>22</sup> Refugees Welcome Denmark, July 2016, "[Alone in a strange country – unaccompanied refugee children](#)".

<sup>23</sup> Finland, for instance, went from 4,790 applications in 2015, to 175 in 2017, an even steeper decline. Sweden went from a record high of 34,300 applications in 2015 to 1,290 by 2017. Source: Nordisk Samarbejde / The Nordic Co-operation, 28 February 2022, "[Asylum applicants and unaccompanied minors](#)".

190 in 2023, and 135 in 2024 – again with no discernible trend.<sup>24</sup> European countries today continue to see regular arrivals of unaccompanied minors on their territories.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, grant rates for minors seeking asylum in Denmark do not show much effect of any particular 'Danish model'. In 2024, 63% of first instance asylum decisions for unaccompanied minors were positive, with an additional 35% of review decisions (also known as appeals) being positive.<sup>26</sup> Unaccompanied minors arriving in Denmark to claim asylum come mostly from Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, Morocco and Eritrea<sup>27</sup> "the same countries as the other asylum seekers who seek Europe – their countries of origin are closely related to where in the world there is an escalation of wars and conflicts".<sup>28</sup> While (as noted above) minors arriving unaccompanied benefit from some rights under Danish law as regards their asylum application, on the whole, their decisions follow the adult decision-making process.<sup>29</sup>

Lastly, Denmark is a signatory state to the European Union's so-called 'Dublin III' regulation (European Union Regulation 604/2013, applicable to all asylum applications in the signatory states from 1 January 2014). Under this regulation minors seeking asylum in Denmark can be transferred to another signatory country provided they have family members there and/or this is in the child's best interest (Articles 6 and 8 of Dublin III regulations)<sup>30</sup> – and then only if they want to.<sup>31</sup> In practice, this has meant that while some requests for Dublin transfers of unaccompanied minors are made each year by Denmark (69 in 2023 and 44 in 2024), very few are accepted and actioned, with 2 unaccompanied minors having actually been Dublin-transferred in 2023 and 2024, respectively.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Eurostat, September 2025, "[Unaccompanied minor asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data](#)".

<sup>25</sup> In 2024, 36,290 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum for the first time in the EU. Germany alone received 13,345 applications. As a comparison, the UK received 4,584 UASC applications in 2024, roughly the same as the Netherlands but with 4 times the Dutch population. Source: Eurostat, September 2025, "[Unaccompanied minor asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data](#)".

<sup>26</sup> Eurostat, August 2025, "[First instance decisions on applications by type of decision, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data](#)".

<sup>27</sup> Danish Red Cross, 10 December 2024, "[Case Study: Danish Red Cross Protection and Assistance to Unaccompanied and Separated Children through Temporary Guardianship](#)".

<sup>28</sup> Danish Red Cross, 10 December 2024, "[Case Study: Danish Red Cross Protection and Assistance to Unaccompanied and Separated Children through Temporary Guardianship](#)", p 2.

<sup>29</sup> Danish Immigration Service, August 2023, "[Unaccompanied minor asylum seeker](#)".

<sup>30</sup> Refugee Council, March 2019, "[Policy Briefing: The Dublin III regulations and family unity](#)".

<sup>31</sup> Refugees Welcome Denmark, nd., "[The Dublin Regulation](#)".

<sup>32</sup> For the Dublin-transfer requests of unaccompanied minors in 2023 and 2024, see: Eurostat, November 2025, "[Outgoing 'Dublin' requests by receiving country \(PARTNER\), type of request, legal provision, sex and type of applicant](#)". For the implemented transfers, see: Eurostat, November 2025, "[Outgoing 'Dublin' transfers by receiving country \(PARTNER\), legal provision, duration of transfer, sex and type of applicant](#)". To find the referenced data, customise the reporting geopolitical entity to Denmark, not the PARTNER geopolitical entity.



*Numbers from 2015 for asylum applications from unaccompanied minors show no discernible impact of the restrictions brought to the Danish asylum system in 2015 and 2018, while EU Dublin regulations restrict Denmark's ability to transfer arriving children to other EU countries. In particular, the shortening of the duration of residence permit, leading to insecure protection status having to be renewed every year or two, seems to have had no deterrence effect on numbers of minors seeking asylum in Denmark.*

## Mental Health of Danish Unaccompanied Minors and Young People

The most widely documented impacts of the recent restrictions on asylum seekers' rights, particularly for children and young people, fall into three main areas:

1. The transition to adulthood and the treatment of minors whose asylum claims are refused when they turn 18.
2. The insecurity created by temporary residence permits that require renewal every two years.
3. The effects of the Aliens Act and Integration Act on the integration, stability, and well-being of minors and young adults aged 18-25.

While restricting access to long-term, secure asylum protection for minors has produced very little results in terms of numbers of minors arriving in Denmark, it has had severe and well-documented consequences on the mental health of young asylum seekers and refugees. Negative nation-branding and a 'hostile environment' (the creation of a harsh narrative intended to deter arrivals<sup>33</sup>) has been shown to lead to poorer mental health outcomes among refugee children in Denmark, as a host of recent Danish studies have shown.

While the Danish government has designed policies to deter children arriving in Denmark from seeking asylum, researchers have shown how, on the contrary, UMs in Denmark have heightened needs that would deserve more attention. A 2020 study thus found that more than 40% of asylum-seeking minors needed immediate psychosocial intervention upon arrival in Denmark. The high prevalence of mental distress was leading to sleeping (15%) and eating problems (20%), and chronic headaches or toothaches (27%).<sup>34</sup> In addition, a 2016 study of over 2,000 asylum-

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<sup>33</sup> McKinney & Kirk-Wade, 10 November 2025, "[Research Briefing \(No. 10391\)](#)", p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Eiset et al., 2020, "[The health status of newly arrived asylum-seeking minors in Denmark: a nationwide register-based study](#)".

seeking children in Denmark found that a third were not immunised in accordance with national guidelines, despite regular mandated health screenings.<sup>35</sup>

The new systematic policy of relocating age-disputed young people in adult reception centres was also found to lead to significant increases in psychological distress.<sup>36</sup> This is the case especially as the methods used to conduct age assessments in Denmark are highly invasive, relying on an examination of "the undressed youth's body", X-rays of teeth and bones in their hand, and have been shown to be unreliable.<sup>37</sup>

In Denmark, the insecurity of legal status, which needs to be repeatedly renewed, and the threat of deportation after age 18, have also been shown to have significant stress-related impacts on children – in particular in overloading children's cognitive resources, making them unable to learn, remember, sleep or engage in meaningful activities.<sup>38</sup> According to a 2020 meta-analysis from evidence in Nordic countries,

"...research shows the negative impact temporary permits have on mental health and that several of these UMIs have hurt themselves or tried/committed suicide, and large numbers of them have disappeared. In the UMIs' own words, waiting for one's asylum decision in a reception centre is filled with uncertainty, day and night. This makes it difficult to sleep, causes nightmares, and raises lots of anxiety."<sup>39</sup>

A 2008 Danish study had already shown how insecurity in accommodation had clear negative mental health impacts: children who were undergoing four or more relocations were shown to have a significantly higher risk of developing psychiatric symptoms and stress than those with more stable accommodation situations.<sup>40</sup> Further research in 2018 conducted among Danish UMIs has shown how losing one's residence rights when turning 18, along with rights to regular employment, access education, public benefits or housing, were associated with poorer mental health, since all four rights were found to promote mental health for UMIs.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Nakken et al., 2018, "[Vaccination status and needs of asylum-seeking children in Denmark: a retrospective data analysis](#)".

<sup>36</sup> Nielsen et al., 2008, "[Mental health among children seeking asylum in Denmark – the effect of length of stay and number of relocations: a cross-sectional study](#)".

<sup>37</sup> For a Danish critique, see: Refugees Welcome Denmark, 2016, "[Questionable test determines the age of refugee minors](#)"; Critique of teeth X-Rays in Danish age assessments (in Danish): Tandlægebladet, 7 January 2017, "[Aldersvurdering ved hjælp af tænder \(Age-assessment using teeth\)](#)".

For a UK critique, see: Helen Bamber Foundation, March 2025, "[Lost Childhoods: Consequences of Flawed Age Assessments at the UK Border](#)"; Royal College of Paediatrics and Children's Health, 14 September 2023, "[RCPCH responds to UK Government plans to authorise the use of x-rays in age assessments of children seeking refuge and asylum](#)".

<sup>38</sup> Rehn-Mendoza, 2020, "[Mental health and well-being of unaccompanied minors: A Nordic overview](#)", p. 35-36.

<sup>39</sup> Rehn-Mendoza, 2020, "[Mental health and well-being of unaccompanied minors: A Nordic overview](#)", p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> Nielsen et al., 2008, "[Mental health among children seeking asylum in Denmark – the effect of length of stay and number of relocations: a cross-sectional study](#)".

<sup>41</sup> Jarlby et al., 2018, "[What can we learn from unaccompanied refugee adolescents' perspectives on mental health care in exile?](#)".

Despite the Danish Integration Law requiring that asylum seekers be offered health check-ups, a 2020 study of over 20,000 refugee children in Denmark has shown discrepancies between availability of healthcare on paper and in practice. Refugees between 15 and 22, it found, were facing “significant barriers” to accessing psychiatric healthcare, including “fewer outpatient contacts, consultations with psychiatrists in private practice, and prescribed medicine purchases”.<sup>42</sup> A 2016 comparative analysis had previously shown that refugee children were less than half as likely to access psychological support than Danish-born children, likely because they “do not receive adequate assessment of their mental health and subsequent referral to specialist services.”<sup>43</sup> A 2024 study confirms that refugee minors or youth (18-35 years old) in Denmark have significantly higher rates of non-affective psychotic disorders, such as hallucinations or delusions, compared to the majority youth population.<sup>44</sup> Incidence was nearly three times higher among young men and almost twice as high among young women, a pattern the authors link to longer delays before entering treatment, discrimination, social exclusion, and acculturation stress. Interestingly, incidence rates were also higher in Denmark when compared to similar populations in neighbouring Sweden, a difference the authors attribute to “the more immigrant-friendly policy stands in Sweden”.<sup>45</sup>

## Mental Health Effects of Integration Policies

In the Danish legal framework, the Aliens Act and the Integration Law function as two sides of the same coin, collectively shifting the focus of the asylum system from long-term settlement to temporary stay and mandated return. Under the Aliens Act, many unaccompanied minors are granted status only until they turn 18. At this point, if asylum is refused or a permit expires, the Integration Law ceases to support them; they lose the right to attend regular educational institutions and the right to formal employment. This legal requirement to constantly prove one's integration while living under an insecure 2-year temporary permit leads to young asylum-seekers having no mental room left to concentrate on learning or vocational training. On these points, Waheed, a young man from Syria, who had his college diplomas from Egypt rejected, said:

“I cannot concentrate in school anymore. When we go to school this is all we talk about. Everyone is scared. I hear it in the news all the time. It demotivates me.

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<sup>42</sup> de Montgomery et al., 2020, “[Psychiatric healthcare utilisation among refugee adolescents and their peers in Denmark](#)”.

<sup>43</sup> Barghadouch et al., 2016, “[Refugee children have fewer contacts to psychiatric healthcare services: an analysis of a subset of refugee children compared to Danish-born peers](#)”.

<sup>44</sup> de Montgomery et al., 2024, “[Incidence of non-affective psychotic disorders in refugees and peers growing up in Denmark and Sweden: a registry linkage study](#)”.

<sup>45</sup> de Montgomery et al., 2024, “[Incidence of non-affective psychotic disorders in refugees and peers growing up in Denmark and Sweden: a registry linkage study](#)”.

In the news, they say that even if you learn Danish, it makes no difference for your opportunity for staying here. So what is the point of even trying?"<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, Lena, a local integration policy worker said:

"The temporary residence permit has created a lot of frustration. You feel when they [the young refugees] get closer to the date of expiry and have to apply for extension of residence permit; the doubt about 'Am I a part of Denmark? Is the effort I do really worth it?' begins again. And the shorter the residence permit is, the more often this doubt will occur [...]. Many of the [young refugees] work extremely hard to manage school, and at the same time they are worried, they cannot sleep at night and have trauma, and it is obvious that they are under an extra pressure: 'Will I get this extension [of the residence permit]?'"<sup>47</sup>

Integration and contribution unfold across many dimensions of young refugees' lives are is shaped not only by their own efforts but also by the structural conditions surrounding them – rights, stability, and security – regardless of whether policy interventions are present.<sup>48</sup> The desire to contribute to Danish society through their own education and employment is central to most young asylum-seekers and refugees' aspirations. However, these efforts are hampered by constant stress about return, including from caseworkers and society, which makes it even harder for young refugees to make a meaningful contribution. Hamid, an Afghan refugee who came to Denmark as an unaccompanied minor said:

"I hope that one day I no longer have to receive the benefits. That I can take care of myself. I would like to get educated. Often there are new rules and new rules about integration and it all means that foreigners are not welcome in Denmark. This pressure affects me. One thing that really affects me is the municipality. There are no possibilities. I want to get a job, to earn my own money. I try to find a job. I really try. They say 'get a job, get a job, get a job' but I really try. I want to go to Copenhagen. I know it is difficult to find a place to live. But I can sleep on the street. I cannot survive at this place with the pressure from the municipality. I will rather live on the streets of Copenhagen than living here with this pressure. When I am young, I wish to make friends. I want to take care of myself and become independent. I want to get rid of the benefits and move to Copenhagen so I can take care of myself."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Dänge, 2022, "[Taking control and reorienting future aspirations: how young refugees in Denmark navigate life between integration and repatriation](#)", p. 662.

<sup>47</sup> Vitus & Jarlby, 2022, "[Between integration and repatriation – frontline experiences of how conflicting immigrant integration policies hamper the integration of young refugees in Denmark](#)", p. 1504.

<sup>48</sup> Kierans, 2021, "[Integration in the UK: Understanding the Data](#)"; Spencer & Charsey, 2021, "[Reframing 'integration': acknowledging and addressing five core critiques](#)".

<sup>49</sup> Dänge, 2022, "[Taking control and reorienting future aspirations: how young refugees in Denmark navigate life between integration and repatriation](#)", p. 663-664.



*Restrictions brought to children's asylum protection in Denmark, leading to insecure status, short-term residence permit, threat of deportation at 18, have been documented to impact children and young people in dangerous ways: from throwing up obstacles to integration, to access to healthcare and education, to significantly higher mental health distress. While no impact could be detected on the official goal of such policies (i.e. a reduction in the number of asylum applications), severe mental health impacts have been documented over the last 10 years, impacting young people ready to participate fully in Danish life at a crucial moment of their development into adulthood.*

## UK Policy Implications

Key proposals from the government's *'Restoring Order and Control'* announcement include granting refugee status on a temporary basis, subject to review every 30 months, limiting settlement rights to those who have resided in the UK for over 20 years (following a points-based 'earned' system), imposing stricter family reunion criteria, and introducing measures such as confiscation of valuables upon arrival and expanded use of age assessments. Comparable restrictions have already been implemented in Denmark, where their long-term effects have been documented – including evidence on how delays to family reunification have harmed fathers' mental health.<sup>50</sup> Due to the larger numbers of arrivals to the UK<sup>51</sup>, the policy changes the government seeks to introduce will likely have even larger societal impacts than have been documented in Denmark – impacting people and making their journey to life in the UK far more complicated, while doing little, if anything at all, in reducing headline numbers.

Undermining young people's ability to build stable, healthy lives in the UK serves no social or human benefit. Policies that worsen their mental health or block their recovery are at odds with the commitments this country has made and hold itself to a standard to. A nation that helped shape the 1951 Refugee Convention and has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should recognise the obligation and the value of supporting young people to rebuild their futures, not placing further barriers in their way.

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<sup>50</sup> Hvidtfeldt et al., 2022. "[Waiting for family reunification and the risk of mental disorders among refugee fathers: a 24-year longitudinal cohort study from Denmark](#)".

<sup>51</sup> UASC asylum applications totalled 6295, 4921, and 4584 in 2022, 2023 and 2024, respectively. See: Home Office, 2025, "[Asylum claims and initial decisions detailed datasets, year ending September 2025, Asy\\_DOI](#)".