

## Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC)

“Separated children” are those separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members or caregivers.

“Unaccompanied children” are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. *Note that some States refer to these children as “unaccompanied minors” in their legislation and policies; UNHCR uses the term unaccompanied children.*

In some cases, UNHCR determines that resettlement is in the best interests of a refugee child based on their situation in the country-of-asylum. These decisions are not taken lightly as resettlement normally means that the child is separated from her or his own community and cultural context. [Best Interests Determinations \(BID\)](#) are conducted by a panel composed of individuals with experience in child protection or child welfare.

Refugee children, especially unaccompanied and separated children, require specialized support services upon arrival in the country of resettlement, which should include appropriate accommodation and family-based care, if they are not traveling with a foster family, counselling, and assistance in accessing health, education and other services (socialisation/recreation, vocational training, mental health services, family reunification, access to legal services, and case management), at a minimum. Foster placements within children’s communities of origin should be prioritized within the country of resettlement. For cases of unaccompanied and separated children, UNHCR will provide resettlement states with all information about tracing efforts or any information on absent parents’ identity and possible whereabouts in order to assist future tracing, see [here for more information](#). Tracing should continue in the resettlement country, until all possible tracing avenues have been exhausted. Additional steps may be required to ensure that child welfare services are aware of the importance of family tracing and have the required expertise and resources.

Supporting the integration of separated minors may sometimes involve a number of complicated legal and social issues. National guidelines can help to ensure a uniform and sensitive approach. Close co-operation and coordination among government authorities responsible for child welfare and refugee resettlement will be critical to ensure an appropriate standard of care for such children. As a result, some countries have specific procedures for assessing care arrangements for refugee minors who arrive with adults who are neither parents nor legal or customary guardians, to ensure that they are provided an appropriate standard of care. This may also include ongoing assessment and monitoring as well as support for caregivers. These steps are important since such arrangements are sometimes unsuitable and may be vulnerable to breaking down.

### **USA: [Office for Refugee Resettlement, Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program \(URM\)](#)**

In the US for example, programs for children and young people who cannot be cared for by their families are the responsibility of state governments. The experience of the USA has been that a specialised response is required for separated refugee minors, since existing domestic programs have developed largely to meet the needs of nationals. In the USA separated refugee minors are eligible for foster care and other alternative arrangements if they are under the age of 18. They can remain in a program until they have finished high school or have reached 20 or 21 years (depending on the emancipation guidelines in force in the particular state in which they have settled). Upon arrival, unaccompanied refugee children who are

resettled to the USA are placed into the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program which ensures that eligible unaccompanied minor populations receive the full range of assistance, care and services available to all foster children in the state by establishing a legal authority to act in place of the child's unavailable parent(s). URM programs encourage reunification of children with their parents or other appropriate adult relatives through family tracing and coordination with local refugee resettlement agencies. However, if reunification is not possible, each program works to design a case specific permanency plan for each minor or youth in care.