



Guardianship Scotland

National Child Trafficking Support Service



Protecting the Rights of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

When unaccompanied young people arrive in Scotland, they have often survived things no child or teenager ever should. Many have fled violence, persecution, trafficking, or exploitation, and they have had to make incredibly hard choices while completely alone. By the time they reach safety, they're exhausted, scared, and carrying experiences that would overwhelm most adults.

In those moments, every young person deserves someone in their corner, someone who listens, believes them, and helps protect them from further harm. For a young person who has been controlled, exploited, or betrayed, having a supportive adult who sees them as more than their trauma can be life-changing. Independent Child Trafficking Guardians are that steady, trusted presence.

Without someone to guide and advocate for them, the risks do not simply disappear on arrival. A Guardian helps protect them during the most fragile part of their journey. The time when they're trying to navigate a new country, new systems, and a new life, all while coping with what has happened to them. No young person should face that alone. Every child deserves safety, dignity, and someone who stands beside them while they recover and grow.

These young people are resilient, hopeful, and full of potential, even after everything they've been through. With the right support, they can begin to feel safe again, rebuild their confidence, and start imagining a future in communities where they belong and can thrive. For that potential to be realised, young people need systems around them that recognise their rights, protect them from harm, and empower them to rebuild their lives. In order to Keep the Promise to Scotland's care experienced community, it is essential that everyone responsible in this area recognises that our duties equally include unaccompanied children and young people.

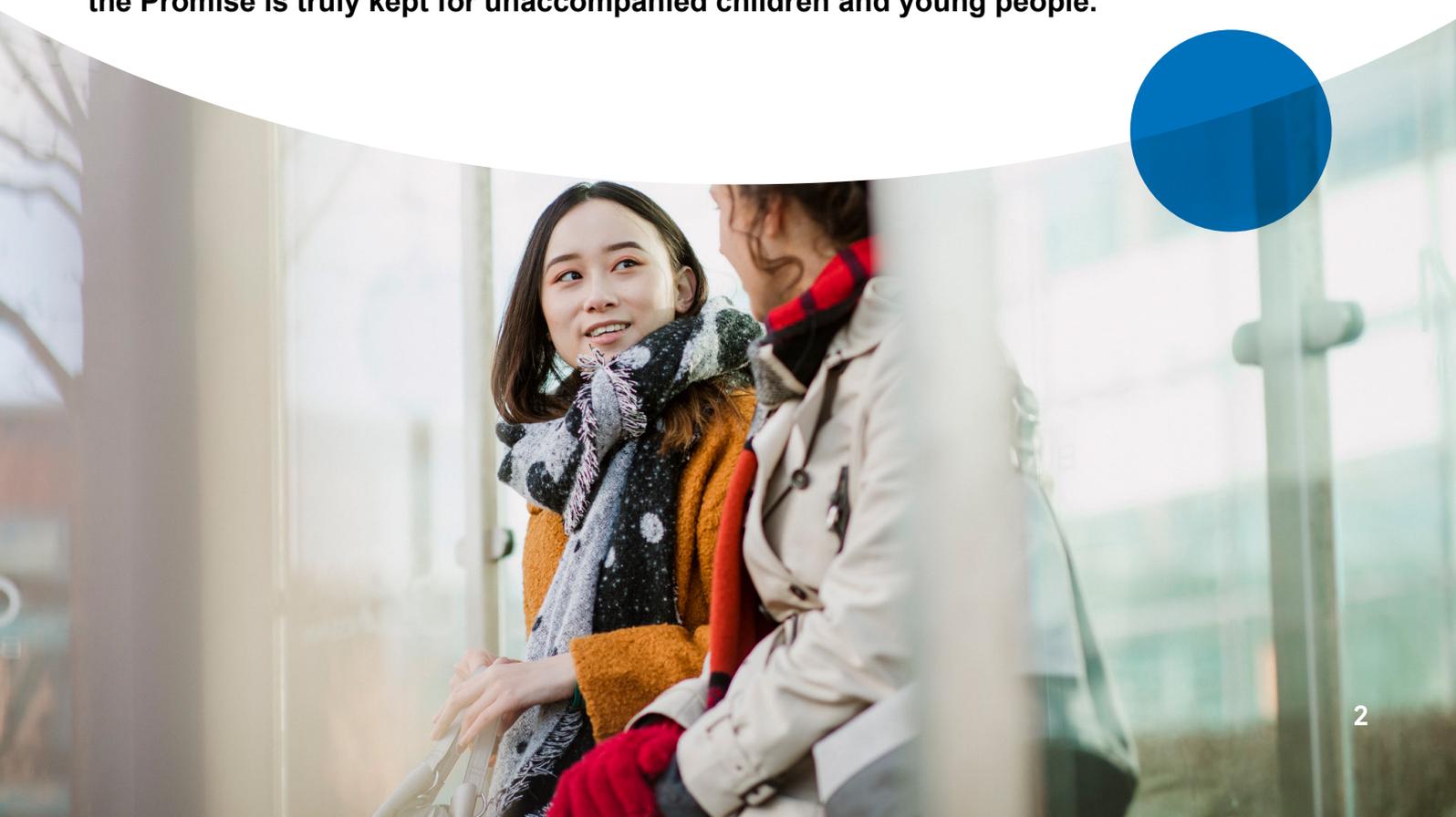
The next Scottish Parliament must commit to a rights-led, cohesive national approach in which every unaccompanied child in Scotland feels the full protections of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, the Promise and the GIRFEC framework. Immigration enforcement must never override children's rights, and Scotland must ensure that every child, regardless of immigration status, feels that they belong, are valued, and can thrive within our communities.

UNCRC

With the UNCRC Act now in force, children and young people have new legal powers to uphold and enforce their rights. All public bodies, services, and systems supporting unaccompanied children must embed UNCRC provisions in law, policy, and practice. This means ensuring rights-based, trauma-informed support rooted in the UNCRC's core principles: non-discrimination, best interests, survival and development, and meaningful participation. In doing so, Scotland shows its dedication to caring for one another, emphasising that safeguarding the rights of all children and young people is integral to our daily lives in Scotland, and that, as a nation, we value diversity not just as a principle but as a real strength that enriches both our society and our economy. A nation that proudly welcomes and protects young people most in need of support.

A cohesive Scotland is one where everyone has a role to play, and where institutions champion the well-being and inclusion of every child and young person. Where gaps exist due to legislative limits, the Scottish Government must act as a strong advocate for unaccompanied children when engaging with the UK Government and the Home Office. Only by doing so can we strengthen the connected, compassionate communities Scotland strives for - communities where children feel safe, supported, and able to flourish.

Fulfilling these commitments will not only uphold international children's rights standards but also bring us closer to a Scotland in which everyone can belong and thrive, and where the Promise is truly kept for unaccompanied children and young people.



To make this a reality, we are calling on the next Scottish Government and all political parties to commit to actions that will ensure unaccompanied children and young people are fully protected, supported, and empowered. Our key asks for unaccompanied children and young people are:

1. Use all available legislative and policy levers available to the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament to secure further protection of the rights of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).
 2. Ensure all Scottish local authorities are equipped and resourced to meet their statutory duties to UASC, including dedicated, specialist social work teams able to respond to their complex needs.
 3. Ensure unaccompanied young people are treated as children first. Guarantee that all unaccompanied young people under 18 are treated as “looked after” under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, with holistic assessments and Looked After Reviews (LAC), where this is what the young person wants.
 4. Strengthen corporate parenting responsibilities so that unaccompanied young people receive equal protection and support, including proactive action to secure immigration status, citizenship, and passports as part of corporate parenting duties.
 5. Issue clear national guidance on the rights and entitlements of UASC, including consistent application of Section 25 duties.
 6. Embed anti-racist, trauma-informed and culturally competent best practice standards across all guidance, decision-making, and services supporting UASC.
 7. Improve data collection on UASC, including legally requiring the recording of ethnicity, nationality, and immigration status, and ensure this data is used to identify and challenge systemic racism and other barriers uniquely experienced by UASC.
 8. Discourage referrals to the National Age Assessment Board (NAAB) and ensure age assessments are grounded in best practice and children’s rights.
 9. Increase funding for age assessment training for local authorities so assessments are robust, fair, and consistent.
 10. Work with universities to introduce specialist training on UASC and age assessment into social work education.
 11. Implement the recommendations of the Your Voice Matters Report (2024) to ensure policies and practices reflect lived experience.
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About Us

Guardianship Scotland

Guardianship Scotland is a specialist statutory service providing Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTG) to all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, victims of trafficking and children vulnerable to trafficking who arrive in Scotland alone. Delivered in partnership with Aberlour Children's Charity and Scottish Refugee Council on behalf of the Scottish Government, it replaced the Scottish Guardianship Service on 1st April 2023.

Aberlour Children's Charity

Aberlour is Scotland's largest children's charity. Delivering more than 50 services across Scotland, we work with disadvantaged, marginalised, and discriminated-against children, young people, and families, providing support in communities nationwide. We help to overcome significant challenges families face, such as the impact of drugs and alcohol, growing up in and leaving care, poor mental health, living with a disability, or the impact of poverty and disadvantage.

Scottish Refugee Council

Scottish Refugee Council is Scotland's national refugee charity, and has 40 years' experience providing information, advice, and advocacy services to refugees and asylum seekers, and supporting refugee integration across all its aspects. We work within increasingly complex and interconnected settings that impact refugees living in Scotland.



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Delivered in Partnership by



[aberlour.org.uk](https://www.aberlour.org.uk) | [scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk](https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk)

Aberlour Charity no: SC007991 | SRC Charity no: SC008639