

**Re: The rights of children**

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to you as organisations and charities on the frontline of supporting children in the UK, to raise our concerns about a sustained attack on children's rights emerging from recent migration policy.

The government has committed to undertake a Child Rights Impact Assessment of its proposals in 'Restoring Order and Control' and 'A Fairer Pathway to Settlement'. However, proposals are already being implemented and this assessment has not been published. We are deeply concerned that proposed radical overhauls of the immigration system and routes to settlement, as well as drastic changes to the asylum system, family returns and asylum support provision, will threaten the safety and security of hundreds of thousands of children, babies and young people in the UK.

Not only do these asylum and immigration reforms disregard children's rights. They also impede the Government's ambitions to reduce child poverty, raise the healthiest generation, tackle educational inequalities and ensure 75% of children reach a Good Level of Development when they start school. In Scotland, these proposals risk undermining the Scottish Government's statutory child poverty targets and duties under the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024.

Among the measures that threaten the psychological safety, health and life chances of children in the UK are:

- **Earned settlement:** placing over 300,000 children already in the UK on 10, 15 or even 30 year routes to settlement will throw the lives of families who've made decisions about their children's education and futures into chaos, while economic analysis shows up to 90,000 children will be trapped in poverty by these plans.
- **Family returns consultation:** removing support from families refused asylum and increasing family returns - including enforced returns using child detention - risks harming children and leaving families destitute. Meanwhile stripping away Children Act 1989 safeguards will reduce the support available to destitute families in England - leaving children facing homelessness.
- **Leaving care support:** the family returns consultation also proposes to cut off leaving care support in England from appeal rights exhausted young people who have claimed asylum and penalising any care leaver whose local authority has failed to support them to resolve their immigration status. Attempting to remove a group of care leavers from landmark Children Act 1989 protections designed to safeguard and protect all children is a dereliction of what we owe to young people in the care of the state, calling into question the Government commitment to creating a clear pathway for children in care.
- **Use of force:** plans to handcuff and physically handle children in circumstances such as 'a parent refusing to release a child's hand' risk causing distress, trauma and lasting emotional damage to children. To describe such harm to children as 'unfortunate but necessary and justified' is abhorrent.

- **Refugee children:** whilst many of these measures put all migrant children at risk, there are particular threats for refugee children, who already have the lowest educational outcomes of any group of children, and have now seen the safe route of family reunion suspended, face the constant uncertainty of 30-month temporary protection, and have no clarity on how they might be included in more secure work-and-study routes.
- **Language:** It is reprehensible to suggest, without evidence, that children's lives are being risked for the 'personal benefit' of their parents or others. When addressing any instances of child exploitation, policy must be grounded in fact.

This Government's Opportunity Mission is about breaking down barriers for children, not creating more. The Child Poverty Strategy makes a vital commitment to lifting 550,000 children out of poverty by 2030, as well as a specific commitment to ensuring vulnerable migrant children receive the support that they require, regardless of their immigration status. Yet for migrant and refugee children, babies and care leavers, these plans risk entrenching the very poverty you are rightly seeking to eliminate.

We urge you to change course, and create policy that reflects simple facts we all know to be true. Children who grow up here belong here. Children need stability and certainty to thrive. Care leavers deserve love, special care and a clear path to a future. And we must do everything in our power to prevent children from experiencing homelessness, distress and trauma.

We urge you to put the welfare and rights of children at the heart of asylum and migration policy.