



Home Office

Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) Pilot Process

Version 1.0

This document provides guidance for Home Office staff on the process for the Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) 'opt out' pilot.

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About this guidance

This document provides guidance for Home Office staff on the process of the Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) 'opt out' pilot for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and Accompanied Asylum Seeking Children (AASC) aged 16 and 17. The pilot allows eligible children to proceed to a substantive asylum interview without completing a Statement of Evidence Form (SEF), provided they have secured legal representation and consented to the pilot.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or think that the guidance has factual errors then email Asylum Policy Secretariat.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance, Rules and Forms team.

Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version **1.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **26 January 2026**

Changes from last version of this guidance

This is the first version of the guidance.

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Introduction

Purpose of guidance

This guidance provides instructions for Home Office staff involved in processing asylum claims from Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and Accompanied Asylum Seeking Children (AASC) aged 16 and 17. It outlines the procedures for a pilot process allowing eligible children to proceed to a substantive asylum interview without completing a Statement of Evidence Form (SEF), if they have secured legal representation and provided consent.

Although intended for Home Office staff it is a public document and parts of it may be useful to others working with UASC - for instance, staff in local authority children's services departments including social workers.

This guidance must be read in conjunction with the specific guidance on particular situations. For instance:

- Processing children's asylum claims.docx
- [Section 55](#)
- Family tracing
- Assessing age
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)

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Background

As a matter of Home Office policy, for unaccompanied and accompanied children claiming asylum in their own right, the Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) is the initial opportunity to inform the Home Office about their specific protection needs. It plays a vital role in identifying which cases will need to progress to a substantive asylum interview, and any specific circumstances that caseworking teams will need to be aware of when booking a substantive asylum interview, such as language and medical issues.

The SEF may also help identify cases where a decision can be made without the need for a substantive asylum interview, in accordance with [Paragraph 339NA](#) of the Immigration Rules. The SEF also gathers information relating to the child's family to allow family tracing attempts to be made, as well as information relating to national security concerns.

Policy requires that a completed SEF is received before a substantive asylum interview can take place for a child. The SEF should be submitted within 60 days of the welfare interview. Currently, a significant number of SEFs are not being completed within the allocated time frame, preventing interviews from proceeding and directly contributing to backlogs in children's cases.

Progressing children's claims swiftly and reducing decision-making backlogs is generally in their best interests, as this provides greater certainty about their future. This aligns with our statutory duty under Section 55 of the Borders Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 to carry out our immigration and asylum functions with due regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the UK.

We will trial a **SEF 'opt out' process** to test the impact of advancing children's cases to a substantive asylum interview more quickly, without waiting for a SEF to be returned where children are aged 16 and 17, have legal representation, and have consented to their case progressing without a SEF. Requiring legal representation and providing consent will ensure each child has had the opportunity to seek legal advice both before the interview (which could include advice on whether they should consent to join the pilot) and during the interview itself. Any eligible child who does not consent to taking part in the pilot will generally need to complete the SEF with the help of their legal representative prior to interview. The pilot will apply to both unaccompanied and accompanied children who have made an asylum claim in their own right within this specific age group.

The pilot will be implemented through a trial beginning from 26 January 2026 and will be subject to ongoing review. This document aims to set out the process to be followed. Any permanent reforms introduced to children's asylum casework will be reflected in updated guidance following the conclusion of the trial.

Policy intention

The pilot aims to reduce delays in decision-making for children's asylum claims where the SEF is the only barrier to progression. It supports the Home Office's Section 55 duty set out below to have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and contributes to the reduction of the asylum backlog.

Definitions

For relevant definitions, please refer to: Processing children's asylum claims

Relevant legislation

Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 requires the Home Office to carry out its existing functions in a way that takes into account the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the UK. Please see Processing children's asylum claims guidance for more relevant legislation and legal frameworks in respect of children.

Current UK asylum law is derived from a range of sources; international and European Law, primary and secondary legislation, the Immigration Rules (which are in turn supported by policy and guidance), and a substantial body of caselaw. For more information, please see the 'Relevant Legislation' section of the Assessing credibility and refugee status in asylum claims lodged before 28 June 2022 guidance and Assessing credibility and refugee status guidance after 28 June 2022.

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Eligibility

Eligibility for the pilot is determined by specific criteria that define who falls within and outside its scope:

In scope

In scope of the pilot process (all conditions in the list must be present to seek consent):

- they are an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) or Accompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (AASC) aged 16 or 17
- the Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) is the only barrier to progressing their claim
- the child has secured legal representation, evidenced by a valid letter of authority (LOA), see [Letter of authority](#)

Out of scope

Out of scope (consent will not be sought where any of the following criteria apply):

- children under 16
- children whose claims are being considered under the Family Asylum claims process
- children who fall within the scope of [Immigration Rule 352](#)
- children with other barriers (for example, age disputes)
- children in the streamlined asylum process (see Streamlined Asylum process)
- former children with individual asylum claims now aged 18 or over
- children who do not have legal representation
- a Statement of Evidence Form has already been provided

Children who turn 16 during the pilot period will become eligible and will be included providing they meet the other criteria.

Immigration Rule 352

Children for whom the personal interview is omitted under Immigration Rule 352, will not be included in the scope of the pilot.

If any caseworker has concerns about the ability of a child to understand the pilot or provide consent they should also consider whether rule 352 is relevant.

352. Any child aged 12 or over who has made a protection claim in their own right must be given the opportunity to be interviewed about the substance of their claim before a decision is taken.

The opportunity for a personal interview may be omitted for a child aged 12 or over where:

- (a) the child is unfit to be interviewed; or
- (b) the child is unable to be interviewed; or
- (c) protection status can be granted to the child without an interview based on the evidence available; or
- (d) one of the exceptions in paragraph [339NA](#) applies.

Where the personal interview is omitted, the child must be given a reasonable opportunity to submit further information if insufficient information is available to take a decision on protection status. If the interview can be omitted and the child still requests an asylum interview, then this request must be considered.

When an interview takes place:

- (a) it must be conducted in the presence of a parent, guardian, representative or another adult independent of the Secretary of State who has responsibility for the child; and
- (b) the interviewer must have specialist training in the interviewing of children; and
- (c) the child must be allowed to express themselves in their own way and at their own speed and, if they appear tired or distressed, the interview should be suspended, and the interviewer should consider whether it would be appropriate for the interview to be resumed the same day or on another day.

As with the existing asylum process a social worker or responsible adult should notify the Home Office if they have any concerns that a child may not be suitable for interview. They should also raise any concerns that the child may not have the ability to understand the pilot or consent to take part in it.

What are the benefits of taking part in the pilot?

If an eligible child consents to take part in the pilot they will not be waiting for their legal representative to send in a SEF. This means they are likely to have a substantive asylum interview more quickly and have a quicker decision on their protection claim. This can give a child more certainty about their future.

As we will not have a SEF prior to interview, this means we will need to ask the child more questions at interview in a pilot case. There are some forms set out below that can be returned to help shorten the interview, but those forms do not fully replace the information we obtain from the SEF. However, we consider that an earlier interview may better support some children's wellbeing, even if that interview is longer than it would be if it followed the return of a SEF. When interviewing pilot cases, decision makers must ensure they take into account that the interview will generally be longer and that adequate breaks are part of the process.

Faster decisions may enable local authorities to plan better for care leavers approaching 18, assisting with pathway planning.

Why does the pilot apply to 16 and 17 year olds?

We are applying the pilot to 16- and 17-year-olds, as they are generally more able to understand the nature, purpose and implications of the pilot process and to make an informed decision about whether to participate.

This pilot provides eligible children aged 16 and 17 years old with the opportunity to express their views, with due weight being given to their age and maturity in focussing this pilot on children in this age group. This approach aligns with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children by taking account of children's views in decisions which impact them.

They can still seek support from their social worker / responsible adult and legal representative when making that decision. As noted above, those adults who support them can inform the Home Office if they are concerned that an individual child may not have capacity to take their own decisions.

What are the benefits of remaining part of the SEF process rather than the pilot? Completing the SEF in full enables decision makers to determine whether a substantive asylum interview is required, and in some cases may allow a protection decision to be made without an interview if the evidence is sufficient. The substantive interview will not take as long if the SEF has been completed and returned.

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Pilot process

Identification and triage

The **Children and Secondary Case Progression Unit (CSCPU)** is responsible for identifying cases that may be eligible to participate in the pilot. Initial contact will be made on cases where:

- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and Accompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (AASC) are aged 16 to 17 and where the Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) is the only barrier to progressing to interview

These cases will receive an initial communication about the pilot (set out below). A child **does not** have to be legally represented at this stage to receive this initial communication.

CSCPU will also identify new cases that could receive initial communication where they turn 16 during the course of the pilot and monitor and manage cases that will exit the pilot upon reaching 18.

Initial communication

The initial communication letter should be sent to inform the child about the new pilot process. Initial rollout will focus on cases who have already arrived, and claim is in progress. The initial expectation is that letters will be sent in a staggered way starting with children aged 17 years old in the early stages of the pilot following by 16 year olds. Timing will vary due to the individual circumstances of each case and the overall volume of cases.

As the pilot develops the focus will shift to newly arrived cases in due course. For new arrivals this letter will be sent as soon as practicable after a UASC transfers to a new local authority under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The timescale in which NTS transfers should be completed is ten working days, starting from the date when the child is referred into the NTS by the entry authority and ending on the date that the transfer to the receiving authority has taken effect. If they are an AASC or they are a UASC not referred to the NTS the letter should be sent no earlier than 10 working days after they claimed asylum. Timing will vary due to the individual circumstances of each case and the overall volume of cases.

This initial communication letter will explain how the pilot will work and outline the options to participate or not. The letter advises of the **necessity to obtain legal representation prior to providing any consent** and that a letter of authority (LOA) from their legal representative must be provided to the Home Office. More details of how to send an LOA to the Home Office are set out below.

The initial communications letter must be sent to the claimant, the local authority (for UASC), or the responsible adult (for AASC), and the legal representative if one has already been appointed and this is known to the Home Office. The local authority or

responsible adult should take steps to ensure the child is legally represented. Having a legal representative will help the child decide whether to take part in the pilot or not, and if they do not take part in the pilot, this will help ensure the SEF is completed instead.

If a valid LOA is already recorded in the system when issuing the initial communication letter, you must still send the initial communication letter to those parties set out above and then proceed immediately to issue the Consent letter, see Consent Process.

Letter of authority

A valid letter of authority (LOA) must be submitted for the child by the legal representative in accordance with the details in [Submitting a letter of authority](#). This should be sent to CSCPUEnquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk.

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Consent process

Once the letter of authority (LOA) has been received, the caseworker must check whether the Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) has already been submitted. If a SEF has been provided, the case should proceed through the standard processing asylum claims route and will not be part of this pilot. If the LOA has been received and the SEF has not been provided, the caseworker must issue a copy of the consent letter to:

- the child
- responsible adult / social worker
- legal representative

This should be sent via email to the contact details provided for each recipient.

The consent letter provides a clear explanation of the pilot, the option to participate, and what happens next if they consent to participate and what happens if they do not consent to participate.

Where the LOA is received **after** the initial communications letter is sent to the child, the legal representative should also be sent a copy of the initial communications letter when the consent letter is provided to them.

The consent letter will specify that the child has **20 working days** to respond to set out whether they consent to take part in the pilot. Home Office staff may chase a response after this.

If a child wishes to consent to take part in the pilot, they must sign the consent form and return this via email to CSCPUEnquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk. This can be returned by the child, or the legal representative on the child's behalf. Within this form, there is a section for the legal representative to sign, confirming that the child has received legal advice.

We encourage all children who receive a consent letter to seek legal advice about taking part in the pilot. We cannot compel children to speak to their appointed legal representative about the pilot. If a consent form is returned and a child consents to take part in the pilot and the legal representative has not signed the form we will proceed with the pilot process. However, the Home Office will notify the social worker / responsible adult and legal representative that the child has made a decision to take part in the pilot so that they are aware of the child's decision. They can continue to offer them appropriate support and / or notify the Home Office of any concerns they have about the child's capacity.

If the child does not wish to participate in the pilot, this must be communicated via email by the child or the legal representative to CSCPUEnquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk. For further details, see [Response handling](#).

After a period of 3 months from the date the consent letter was first sent, if no response is received within this timeframe, the child will be assumed to not consent to the process. The child should be notified at this point that given they have not provided consent for the pilot they will remain in the SEF process and that they should work with their legal representative to progress the submission of the SEF but that they can change their mind in the future and join the pilot should they wish to do so. This provides the child with clarity on the process that applies to them.

Forms

For cases taking part in the pilot there are additional forms that can be completed and returned with the consent form which are the **Interview Preferences Form**, the **Security Form** and the **Family Tracing Form**. For efficiency, the consent letter and forms are combined into a single pack for return.

The additional forms do not need to be completed with the legal representative, the child can request the assistance of their social worker/responsible adult if needed. However, their legal representative can assist the claimant with any or all of the forms.

Required form

The **Interview Preferences Form** will collect information about the child's preferred language for the interview, their preference for a male or female interviewer or interpreter, and up-to-date contact details. This form **must** be returned before the interview can be scheduled even if a child consents to take part in the pilot.

If the form is not returned with the consent letter then the case progression officer must chase the completion and return of the form to enable the claim to progress to interview booking. The form should be returned via email to CSCPUEnquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk. This can be returned by the child, social worker / responsible adult, or the legal representative on the child's behalf.

Other forms

It is preferable for the **Family Tracing Form** and **Security Form** to also be returned with the consent form.

The **Family Tracing Form** will collect information required to meet family tracing obligations. Accompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (AASCs) do not complete this form. Although completion of the form prior to interview is not mandatory, it is strongly encouraged to return this because it supports the best interests of the child and helps streamline the interview process. More questions will be required at interview if the form is not returned but relevant processes will be followed to ensure a child has sufficient breaks as appropriate, see [Family tracing section](#).

The **Security Form** will capture the standard security and criminality questions that are asked to all children claiming asylum. As with the Family Tracing Form, completion of the form prior to interview is not mandatory, but it is strongly

encouraged to return as it supports the best interests of the child because it helps streamline the interview process.

These forms should be returned via email to CSCPUEnquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk. This can be returned by the child, social worker / responsible adult, or the legal representative on the child's behalf.

Response handling

If the child agrees to participate in the pilot, the case progression officer must record this decision on Atlas in the notes box '16/17 SEF Opt Out Pilot' and file the consent and required forms on the Home Office Platform Storage repository. The Central Interview Booking Team should then arrange a substantive asylum interview and allocate an appropriate interview slot.

If the child decides they do not wish to participate in the pilot, the case progression officer must record this decision and revert to the standard SEF process which is to complete and return the SEF with the assistance of a legal representative. In this circumstance the caseworker should chase return of the SEF in line with usual timescales.

If a child initially decides to participate in the pilot but the Home Office later receives notification that they do not wish to proceed with this option, the caseworker should update Atlas and revert to the standard SEF process, and the child, social worker / responsible adult, and legal representative should be notified in writing that the SEF must be completed before the substantive interview can proceed.

If a child provides late notification that they wish to opt into the pilot after previously opting out or failing to respond, the case progression officer should re-confirm if the eligibility criteria is met and update Atlas to reflect the new decision and file the updated consent documentation.

Discontinuing cases from the pilot

There may be circumstances relating to the individual facts of a case where the Home Office is concerned that it may not be in the best interests of the child to continue in the pilot process. This guidance cannot cover all relevant scenarios but there may be rare cases where there are particular concerns about vulnerability (outside the Immigration Rule 352 scenarios) or suspicions that consent has not been freely given by the child. In order to safeguard the child in these circumstances Home Office staff can remove a child from the pilot only where it considers that consent has not been freely given or understood and it is therefore in the best interests of the child to do so, such as where there are vulnerability or duress concerns. Social workers and legal representatives should notify the Home Office if they have any concerns of this nature. In such cases the child should be notified of any decision by the Home Office that they will no longer be part of the pilot process and that their case will follow the usual SEF process.

If a new barrier arises after consent has been obtained, for example, a pending prosecution and the child will no longer meet the eligibility criteria their case must be

withdrawn from the pilot process. In these circumstances, the child, their responsible adult or social worker, and their legal representative must be informed that the child is no longer eligible to continue in the pilot. The process will need to restart once the barrier has been resolved and the child otherwise remains eligible, including requesting and obtaining fresh consent.

Time allocation for interview

Interviewing Officers must remain alert that a child may be reluctant to disclose fears without prior preparation through a Statement of Evidence Form (SEF). Interviewing officers should continue to apply their specialised training to explore claims with sensitivity and care. This includes creating a supportive environment, offering regular breaks, and maintaining ongoing check-ins with both the responsible adult and the child throughout the interview. Interviewing Officers should monitor the child's emotional state and adjust the pace or structure of the interview if signs of distress are observed or have been notified through the responsible adult.

Greater use of open-ended questions may be needed to elicit detailed responses relating to the core components of the asylum claim. These questions should allow the child to explain the events and circumstances around who they fear, what they believe will happen if returned, and why they hold these beliefs. Officers must remain alert to vulnerabilities, trauma indicators, and cultural sensitivities, ensuring that language used is age appropriate.

Interviews must not exceed the allocated time slot. Where additional time is required to fully explore the claim, officers should schedule supplementary interviews rather than rushing the child to complete the process.

All existing requirements in relevant guidance will continue to apply to interviews of those participating in the pilot. For further guidance relating to asylum interviews, please see Asylum interview.

All relevant guidance and procedures relating to post interview and asylum decisions will continue to apply to those participating in the pilot, for further information please see Processing children's asylum claims.

Family tracing

In pilot cases where a SEF is not available, we still need to collect family tracing information for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs). The aim is to gather details about the child's family connections while keeping the process practical and proportionate.

The family tracing form is attached to the consent letter. This form will allow us to capture key information such as known family members, their locations, as well as the child's views on tracing where appropriate.

Completion of the form before the substantive asylum interview is strongly recommended, as this supports the best interests of the child and helps streamline the interview process. However, it will not be mandatory. If the form is not completed

beforehand, the family tracing questions should be addressed at the end of the interview.

All information collected must be handled in line with safeguarding and data protection requirements.

The way in which family tracing checks are performed will remain in line with the Family tracing guidance.

When a child turns 18 prior to interview but after the consent letter has been provided

If the individual turns 18 when they are in pilot (having given consent) but have not had their interview yet they will no longer be considered to be a pilot case. This is because they will fall within the current policy where a SEF has not been received when someone turns 18 which means their case proceeds straight to a substantive asylum interview.

If the individual turns 18 and they have not responded to the consent letter the process for a final chaser of the SEF and progressing their case to a substantive asylum interview will take place in line with current policy.

For further information relating to when a child turns 18 prior to the substantive interview, please see: Processing children's asylum claims.

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