

Why the Home Office should provide childcare

Campaign for the provision of childcare for women asylum seekers during asylum claim interviews

Document prepared by the Refugee Women Stakeholders Group

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1. INTRODUCTION

Currently the Home Office conducts routine interviews for asylum applicants in front of their children as no special provision of childcare is available at asylum interview centres. Although this issue has been raised in the past, and in particular since the Gender Guidelines were introduced (as this lack of provision puts women at a greater disadvantage), the Home Office has argued that the costs of such an improvement will exceed their resources.

The principal aims of this pack are: 1. to put an end to the economic reasoning that maintains that it would be expensive to provide childcare during asylum interviews, 2. to demonstrate that the benefits of the provision of childcare for asylum claimants at interviews outweigh the costs incurred and 3. to provide ideas of mechanisms that can be implemented at a regional level at asylum interview centres in order to develop on-site crèches.

Here we will argue that unless childcare is provided by the Home Office at asylum claim interviews, claimants with children are extremely unlikely to be able to find alternative childcare provision themselves. This is due to costs, lack of informal support networks, lack of information, and language difficulties. Claimants therefore have to bring their child/ren with them to their interview with the Home Office. This situation poses major difficulties both for the claimant and the interviewer/Home Office.

This pack has been put together by the Refugee Women Stakeholders Group (RWSG), an informal network of more than 50 members interested in the barriers faced by women asylum seekers. If you want to join the RWS e-group please e-mail elaheh.rambarzini@refugeecouncil.org.uk.

2. DISMANTLING THE MYTH

Providing an on-site crèche at asylum interview centres is cost-effective, and brings major benefits both to the claimant and to the Home Office. Below we provide suggestions for overcoming the practical difficulties the Home Office faces, such as pressure of space. Moreover, an on-site creche is preferable to a policy of reimbursing individual claimants for childcare they have sourced independently or providing an 'off-site' crèche (i.e. not at the venue of the interview). This is because:

- If multiple children are utilising the on-site crèche at the same time this is far cheaper than reimbursing childcare individually for each claimant.
- Childcare would only need to be provided for the duration of the interview. If the childcare was off-site, additional childcare would need to be provided for the length of time it took the parent to travel to and from the interview centre to the childcare provider.
- There are multiple barriers to claimants sourcing and arranging their own childcare, including language difficulties and a lack of information on childcare options.
- For the Home Office, on the contrary, it would be very easy to recruit crèche coordinators on an hourly basis to be based at interview venues and crèche workers to be called upon according to demand, and to obtain CRB checks for the former at the beginning of their service.
- Equally, these services could easily develop Child Protection Policies based on the ‘Child Protection Policies and Procedures Toolkit: How to create a child-safe organization’ published by ChildHope UK in 2005 which is available for purchase (£15; to order ring 020 7065 0950)
- If the service is provided for more than 2 hours a day, by providing an on-site crèche the Home Office can ensure the crèche workers are Ofsted registered thus complying with the Care Standards Act 2000.
- Claimants are not used as a third party to pass on Home Office money to the childcare provider they have personally sourced.

3. ADVANTAGES OF THE PROVISION OF CHILDCARE

Outlined below are the major advantages of providing childcare for asylum claimants at interviews:

- **Reduction in interview duration**
Currently, claimants with children have to bring them in to the interview room as no childcare is provided. The claimant thus has to attend to their child/ren at the same time as being interviewed. This is distracting for both the claimant and the interviewer, and can lead to disruptions during the interview. Providing childcare will ensure there are no disruptions to the interview and that the claimant is not distracted, thus speeding up the interview.
- **Better quality decisions**
Currently, claimants with children are forced to disclose information about their case to the interviewer in front of their child/ren. However, this potentially inhibits claimants from disclosing full details about their experiences – particularly with regard to gender based persecution – because the claimant may not want to give details in front of their child/ren of their experience of e.g. rape due to the distressing nature of the subject matter. Providing childcare would remove this inhibition and help to ensure all relevant information is disclosed at

the earliest stage – thus ensuring good quality decisions and preventing delays occurring from ‘late disclosure’ of important factors in an asylum claim.

- **Child Protection**

Providing childcare will help to protect the children of applicants from potential trauma arising from hearing their parent recount distressing details of persecution. Furthermore, there are health and safety risks associated with children being in the interview room. The parent’s full attention will not be on the child if they are being interviewed, thus increasing the potential for accidents.

- **Equal Opportunities**

Claimants with children may feel significantly inhibited about disclosing key information regarding their experiences due to the presence of their child/ren at the interview. They are therefore disadvantaged with respect to those without children in gaining a decision from the Home Office that accurately reflects the full gravity and reality of their experiences.

- **Gender Equality Duty**

As of 7th April 2007 all public authorities are required to demonstrate that they are promoting equality for women and men and that they are eliminating sexual discrimination. With respect to childcare, it is predominantly women who have primary childcare responsibilities both within refugee communities and within UK society as a whole. Therefore, the inequality of opportunity arising from a lack of childcare provision at asylum interviews has a gendered impact – women are more likely to suffer this disadvantage than men. Providing childcare during asylum interviews would rectify this situation and ensure compliance with the Gender Equality Duty. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate consulted on its Gender Equality Scheme and Action Plan in February 2007, describing this as an important piece of work.

4. HOW TO PROVIDE CHILDCARE

The provision of an on-site crèche at asylum interview centres is the simplest and most cost effective method of childcare provision. Here are some ideas of how to do it:

- One room at the centre would be allocated for the crèche. If the crèche is inspected and approved by Ofsted, the crèche can be held in the room for any duration. If the room is not Ofsted registered, the room can be used as a crèche for up to 2 hours at a time.
- Mobile crèche workers can be employed to come to the centre on a sessional basis to provide the childcare. It is not usually a requirement that parents need to pre-register with the crèche workers. They can just turn up on the day and fill in a personal details form for the crèche workers.
- The number of children that can utilise the crèche depends upon the size of the room, and the ages of the children present. (The ratio of children per crèche worker varies according to the age of the children.)
- There are various options for the opening hours of the crèche at the asylum interview centre. For example, the crèche could be open at all the times interviews

- are taking place, or the crèche could be open on particular days and/or particular times. Obviously the most suitable option would depend on how many claimants would be using the crèche and the feasibility of arranging interviews according to any pre-restricted crèche opening hours.
- To overcome pressure on space, if the crèche is only open at certain times it might be possible to use space that is otherwise normally used for interviewing if this can be adapted appropriately.
 - To reduce pressure on crèche places, claimants could be asked to only bring their children with them if absolutely necessary.
 - Claimants with school-age children should be given interviews whilst the children are at school and the timing should allow sufficient time for the claimant to take them to or from school before or after their interview.

NB: The number of childcare places that would need to be provided would depend upon the time of day the interview takes place. If the interview is during school hours childcare will usually only need to be provided for children under 5 years.

5. USEFUL CONTACTS

New Asylum Model Teams: Information on local Children's Information Services and mobile crèche providers

Glasgow

Glasgow Childcare Strategy & Information

Nye Bevan House

20 India Street

Glasgow

Scotland

G2 4PF

Helpline: 0141 287 8307

Fax Number: 0141 287 6786

Mobile crèche providers:

- Maryhill Mobile Creche: sally@mmcreche.fsnet.co.uk / 0141 945 1888
- North Glasgow Mobile Creche Service: 0141 564 1492
- Greater Govan Mobile Creche (LEA): 0141 445 5244
- Kidcare Ltd Mobile Creche: kidcare@oneplus.org / 0141 564 1150 / 07974 790877
- East End Mobile Playteam: eempt@eastend.org.uk / 0141 550 7338
- One Plus Mobile Creche: 0141 5881596
- Carnwadric/Arden/Kennishead Creche and Mobile Creche: 0141 620 0199
- Garnethill Mobile Creche (LEA): 0141 333 9470
- East Pollokshields Mobile Creche: 0141 424 0099

Leeds

Children's Information Service:

<http://213.210.8.133/>

Leeds Children's Information Service

6th Floor East

Merrion House

Merrion Way

Leeds

LS2 8DT

Tel: 0113 247 4386

E-mail: cis@leeds.gov.uk

Mobile crèche provider:

- Eduplay (Sonija Pollard 0113 2706903 ext 24)

Liverpool

Children's Information Service

Municipal Buildings

Dale Street

Liverpool

L2 2DH [\[map\]](#)

Tel: 0800 085 20 22

Fax: 0151 225 4918

Email: lcis@liverpool.gov.uk

- Mobile minders: 07949363572

Solihull

Keeper's Lodge

Chelmsley Road

Chelmsley Wood

Solihull

England

B37 7RS

Helpline: 0121 788 4288

Fax Number: 0121 788 5341

Email: Childrensinfo@solihull.gov.uk

Wales

Cardiff Children and Young People's Information Service

2nd Floor

Alexander House

Excelsior Road

Western Avenue

Cardiff

Wales
CF14 3AT
Helpline: 029 2052 0100
Email: cyis@cardiff.gov.uk
Website: www.ifanc.org.uk

- Happy Hours Mobile Crèche: 01492 513650 or 07967216201

London

The London Teams will be based in central and west London.

Hounslow (West London team)

Hounslow Childcare Information Service

Early Years and Childcare Section

Smallberry Green Primary School

Turnpike Way

Isleworth

England

TW7 5BF

Helpline: 0800 783 1696

Fax Number: 020 8583 2740

Email: childcare.information@hounslow.gov.uk

Website: www.hounslow.gov.uk/index/education_and_learning/childcare.htm

- Family & Community Team hold a crèche register: 020 8570 3624.

City of London (Fleet Street team)

City of London Community and Children's Services

Family and Young People's Information Service

St Alphage Garden

West Wing

London EC2Y 5DA

Tel 020 7332 1002

Fax 020 7332 1621

Email: cisinfo@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Website:

www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/our_services/Education/childrens_info_service.htm