



Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Under CUAET:

**A call to position Canada as Best in Class Leader
in the protection and welfare of children & youth**

CWICE & JIAS Toronto report to IRCC

December 2022

Prepared By:

Peel CAS' Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE)

&

JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services) Toronto

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Acronyms

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| BIA | Best Interests Assessment |
| BIC | Best Interests of the Child |
| BIP | Best Interests Procedure |
| CAST | Children’s Aid Society of Toronto |
| CBSA | Canada Border Services Agency |
| CCAS | Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Toronto |
| CRC | Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| CUIAS | Canadian Ukrainian Immigrant Aid Society |
| CUAET | Canadian Ukrainian Authorization for Emergency Travel |
| CWICE | Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence |
| DR | Designated Representative |
| IRB | Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada |
| IRCC | Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada |
| IRPA | The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act |
| ISS | International Social Services Canada |
| JFCS | Jewish Family and Child Services |
| JIAS TORONTO | JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services) Toronto |
| JFCY | Justice For Children and Youth |
| MCFD | Ministry of Child and Family Development |
| MCCSS | Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services |
| MLITSD | Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development |
| OCL | Office of the Children’s Lawyer |
| OACAS | Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies |
| PCAS | Peel Children’s Aid Society |
| PRAIDA | Regional Program for the Settlement and Integration of Asylum Seekers |
| RLO | Refugee Law Office |
| TCRC | The Centre for Refugee Children |
| UASC | Unaccompanied and Separated Children |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund |

Foreword

The following report was completed to address UASC arriving in Canada under IRCC's CUAET visa. In exploring the issues, and because of the nature of the issues, it is impossible to separate systemic issues for all UASC. This report will provide recommendations to deal with the situation now and moving forward.

There are five themes that emerged in the project, and the main issue surrounds the absence of a national strategy to support UASC and no consistent definition of UASC being applied across Canada. It is important that services be inclusive, and service providers have the tools and resources to assist UASC.

This document provides immediate recommendations recognizing the varying level of understanding which exists about the needs of UASC. The immediate recommendations are turnkey solutions which have been given considerable thought. Addressing systemic recommendations will require IRCC to identify a Lead Agency to develop a national strategy in consultation with a national coalition of key collaborators and coordination across provinces.

The issues related to UASC are complex in nature, and few experts exist in Canada on the subject matter. This report is complemented by the use of appendix documents to guide the reader, providing additional subject matter resources that support the pragmatic recommendations contained within.

Introduction

The Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE) is an Ontario-wide service and training centre, operated by Peel CAS, and co-founded by Peel CAS and OACAS. JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services) Toronto is a settlement agency committed to welcoming and supporting immigrants and refugees and building a vibrant Jewish community. CWICE and JIAS Toronto are pleased to submit this report to Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada (IRCC). This report addresses Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) arriving in Canada under

the CUAET visa and provides insights into the issue in order to prevent this issue from arising in other situations.

Issue

The Canadian government announced the CUAET visa in March 2022. To date, over half a million people have applied. Given the nature of the war in Ukraine, parents are choosing to send their children to finish high school in Canada, sometimes without their parents arriving accompanied with them. Parents are looking for safe pathways to make this possible, including going to social media platforms because there is no formalized process in place. As a result, there is confusion and chaos. People have been forced to access information online and from various individual sources. Parents are making plans that may be putting children and youth at risk. This project and report is an opportunity to address this issue in a comprehensive and inclusive way. In doing so, IRCC can address the urgent need and ultimately become a global leader in the protection and welfare of children.

In June 2022, CWICE was engaged by JIAS Toronto to lead this project and develop recommendations. This has been an inclusive process, including presenting to Operation Ukrainian Safe Haven National Secretariat. Also, multiple stakeholders across provinces were invited to participate in this study, to ensure all issues were raised and addressed in this report. Some of the issues identified are systemic issues in nature. These will eventually need to be addressed to prevent the situation from repeating itself over again. The second half of the report will provide pathways for IRCC to address this.

CWICE focuses its work on building capacity across the child welfare sector, and advocates for continuous strengthening of service coordination through partnerships, for the benefit of children and families. As thought leader on many issues facing children, youth, and families within the child welfare system, and intersecting immigration and settlement sector, CWICE promotes equitable outcomes, so children and youth receive consistent services, approaches, and their rights are upheld independent of location or service provider.

This report has been formulated with a focus on children’s rights, needs analysis, and child/youth-centred lens.

UASC have unique needs. Their vulnerability as children and youth is in part due to their age and their being dependents, however it is also impacted by the very fact they are separated, sometimes abruptly and traumatically from their parent(s). In every crisis – humanitarian, conflict, or natural disaster – children and youth become separated from their parents and

guardians. This has been well documented since World War II, with many international organizations having made recommendations to government and non-government organizations worldwide. It is predictable that children and youth will arrive in Canada unaccompanied or separated, and we believe it is a shared responsibility – regionally, provincially, and federally – to ensure their safety, protection, wellbeing, permanency, and eventual reunification.

Following safety as priority, the wellbeing of children and youth who are separated from their parents/guardian is critical. Their needs must be understood within a larger family unit and community, as well as their need for sense of belonging. While UASC is not a large demographic in Canada, they are often vulnerable and are at increased risk of exploitation. Consistent identification and tracking of UASC are key elements of our findings. Service coordination must be strengthened around shared definitions and principles of service. Children and youth are rights holders and service providers are duty bearers so must ensure rights are upheld.

The readiness of cross-sector partnerships to respond to the needs of UASC was explored. Duty bearer professionals must be thoroughly trained, understand the unique needs of UASC, and have seamless processes/procedures in place. Sectors require policy development, cross-sector protocols, training, communication plans, and services provided consistently. This means there must be time to develop and implement cross-sector protocols which safeguard children and allow for information sharing. Privacy and information management is an important consideration; however, the safety of children and youth will always remain paramount and trump privacy issues.

Ensuring children and youth across Canada are safe and protected is both practical and urgent. We recommend developing a national cross-sector framework, identifying a Lead agency and coalition across provinces and territories – essentially a mechanism to *activate the network* – when a child or youth is in need.

We recognize the many challenges all government and non-government actors face today. We make these recommendations in order to make meaningful shifts that will have a positive impact for children and youth for many years to come and enable Canada to be Best in Class Leader globally for its protection and welfare of children and youth.



Elise Herzig
JIAS Toronto Executive Director



Danielle Ungara, BSW, MSW, RSW
CWICE Manager

Literature Review

Several international organizations have published reports, handbooks, and guidelines on interpretations and implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). As signatory, Canada has a duty to ensure the CRC is upheld through legislation, policies, and practices. The term and concept Best Interests of the Child (BIC) needs to be contextually understood. The UNHCR's *Best Interests Procedure Guidelines (2021)* provides four important factors¹:

- Views of the child, the parents or caregiver
- Child's situation in terms of family and close relationships
- The child's development and identity needs
- Considerations affecting the child's safety and protection

Within Canada, there are no data gathering mechanisms specific to UASC and particularly around reunifications. An absence of this data and information is a hinderance to policy decisions.

Project Overview and Design

The CWICE project team implemented a qualitative study approach, by conducting closed consultations with service providers and receiving written submissions. The development of the consultative group questions was an iterative process. The list of questions was reviewed by the project team and refined over a span of a few weeks. The questions were designed based on a review of the literature, and using our expertise in CWICE from working directly with UASC.

Five consultation sessions were conducted in July 2022, with a total of 36 individual participants (for full list of organizations represented, see page 1). These individuals joined from various organizations and sectors, including child welfare, settlement, community, legal, and all levels of government and civil society. Discussions were audio-recorded for note-taking purposes and transcribed then analyzed using qualitative techniques, including content analysis, to generate themes.

For additional background information and additional literature review, please see appendices.

¹ UNHCR, *2021 Best Interests Procedure Guidelines: Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child*, May 2021, 49, <file:///Users/nataliavalencia/Documents/CWICE/2021%20unhcr%20bip.pdf>.

Overall, there was consensus that there is information missing that parents and professionals need to best plan and support UASC. As well, all groups agreed a national framework in Canada is prudent and must be created to support and coordinate services for UASC moving forward. Ultimately a prevailing question remained – ***‘who is responsible for UASC?’*** It is clear, in the absence of a framework there is no leader identified to coordinate the roles that many individuals and organizations should and do play related to UASC currently. This has been most evident in the current situation supporting UASC arriving as part of the CUAET visa.

The following section discusses priority themes which emerged in this project. Each section discusses the issues raised, with immediate recommendations related to the CUAET visa, as well as recommendations related to services for all UASC. The five themes which emerged include the following:

1

Equity & child-rights considerations in policies & programs

2

Shared definition of and understanding of UASC’s needs

3

Identification of and referrals for UASC

4

Tracking and reunification of UASC with their families

5

Cross-sector training on the Best Interests of the Child

Findings and Recommendations



Theme 1: Equity and child-rights integration

Equity refers to *fair treatment* and takes into account the structural barriers and disadvantages that impact how people participate, access services and opportunities, and experience the world. Anti-oppressive practice can be understood as a framework for working towards equity.² *Equity involves fairness and justice in both process and outcomes*, thus requires analysis.³

Child Rights refers to the 54 articles of the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This international human rights treaty was adopted in 1989 and Canada ratified the CRC on December 12th, 1991.⁴

With the introduction of the CUAET visa, new inequities were created. For example, temporary residents arriving in CUAET are not able to access federal programs such as Canada Child Benefit but may check eligibility after 18 months in Canada*. Individuals arriving with a CUAET visa will receive one-time financial support by federal government, and some provinces provide income support up to six months. By contrast, individuals in the resettlement program receive support up for a year. Inconsistencies can lead to confusion especially as service providers are responding to multiple mass migrations at the same time. Also, in some situations UASC may be deemed ineligible for financial aid as the sole applicant. *Individuals’ access to the Canada Child Benefit is currently being raised through a court challenge by a coalition of Ontario-based organizations.

Recommendations



CUAET visa

- ✓ Collaborate with provinces and municipalities to expand and strengthen current financial program eligibility, so individuals can access financial support up to one year and ensures accessibility for UASC applicants.

² Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS), “Equity and anti-oppression in child welfare,” accessed August 11, 2022, [Equity, diversity, & inclusion - Equity and anti-oppression in child welfare - OACAS Library Guides at Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies \(libguides.com\)](https://www.oacas.org/library-guides/equity-diversity-inclusion).

³ University of McGill, “Equity,” accessed August 23, 2022, [Definitions | Equity at McGill - McGill University](https://www.mcgill.ca/equity).

⁴ Jean-Francois Noel, “The Convention on the Rights of the Child,” Department of Justice, Last modified January 1, 2015, [Overview - The Convention on the Rights of the Child - Topics in Family Law: A Collection of Articles \(justice.gc.ca\)](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/153003/153003.html).



Theme 2: Shared definition and understanding of UASC

Definitions of UASC

Through the consultations, it became apparent there is no consensus on the definition of UASC in Canada, which results in more confusion when crises arise. This is most strikingly apparent with UASC arriving through the CUAET visa. Several organizations do not have a working definition of UASC in place, while other organizations define UASC based on age of a child/youth, or immigration status of UASC, assessment of vulnerability/need.

In each province/territory in Canada, the family laws in place designate the age of a child (Appendix F). The age of an adult may be 18 in some regions (e.g. Ontario and Quebec) but 19 years of age in other regions (e.g. British Columbia). Some organizations spoke of being able to extend services to young adults over 18 years of age, who are unaccompanied and separated, because their vulnerability is seen as being increased since many services end at age 18 despite the individual's need remaining constant.

Some organizations defined UASC by their immigration status. For example, they provide service to UASC who are asylum seekers. These organizations may not recognize a range of other immigration statuses UASC may have, including arriving with CUAET visa or citizens being repatriated back to Canada. There was recognition that some children may become UASC after arriving in Canada, either through family breakdown or having arrived with an 'adoptive' family which may not be legally recognized. There was also a discussion of custody agreements made under duress, which could be contested, as in some situations occurring in the CUAET visa currently.

Scenarios:

Ukrainian parents are looking for information to send their teenager to Canada to complete high school, and they are not able to attend, so they join a Facebook Group. They network over social media and are trying to locate a safe adult to care for and "host" their son (age 16). They meet an individual who agrees to support their son, and they sign some paperwork they find on the internet used for international students arriving in Canada as part of home stay programs and they send their son.

An UASC arrives in Canada and stays with their "host" for three days before moving. Within their first two weeks they reside in two places as they had left the arrangement planned for them by their parents.

A sibling group/separated children arrive as part of CUAET and are residing in a hotel. They indicate their plans are to move to another region, and they share that their parents made this arrangement. It is later revealed they have not had contact with their parents for 3 years. Additional scenarios within addendum.



Recommendations

CUAET visa:

- ✓ Government (federal and provincial), child welfare service providers, legal, settlement and community-based service providers adopt the definition of UASC established by the UNHCR and endorsed in the Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children:

A Child means any person under the age of 18, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.⁵

Unaccompanied children (also called unaccompanied minors) 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.⁶

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.⁷

UASC may be seeking asylum.

- ✓ An information package is developed and available for children, youth, and parents online, who are applying in the CUAET visa. The centralized information includes:
 - This information needs to be circulated inside Canada and across media platforms where newcomers seek information (ie. Outside Canada in various languages etc.).
 - Information about and organizations that support UASC in Canada, including legal representatives, settlement, and housing services
 - Information on the rights of children and youth
 - Explanation of financial supports available in each region and eligibility, including who and how can these be accessed and for how long.
 - Highlight areas of concern for parents:
 - Advise caution regarding matching hosts online with UASC
 - Explain risks of safety when children and youth are separated from parents

⁵ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 3.

⁶ ICRC, *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, 2004, 13, accessed August 12 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/children/4098b3172/inter-agency-guiding-principles-unaccompanied-separated-children.html>.

⁷ ICRC, *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*, 13.

- Recommend individuals consult legal or other professionals before signing guardianship or custody documents.
- Encourage parents to register any children/youth they are separated from to aid in reunification planning.



Theme 3: Identification and referrals of UASC

No Process of Identification & Registration for UASC

Throughout all five consultation sessions, service providers were clear there is no process of identification and registration for UASC in Canada. Participants asked: “Who is responsible for these children and youth?” Consultations identified complicating factors in the identification of UASC arriving in Canada. These include time of identification (pre-arrival or upon arrival), tracking international students under 18, and children and youth arriving from visa-exempted countries.

The consensus was CUAET UASC are not identified upon arrival by CBSA, nor is IRCC or CBSA identifying pre-arrival. As no one has the current responsibility to track or report this data, it is impossible to identify UASC under the CUAET visa. Yet this is critical information which will help address gaps identified. Organizations working with UASC across Canada may gather or report data using different parameters/definitions, such as age or immigration status. For example, CWICE receives approximately 50 referrals per year and has provided the first baseline data in Canada over the last four years. However, using the UNHCR’s definition of UASC for tracking (described in theme 2), it is believed that the actual number of UASC is much higher.



Recommendations

CUAET visa

- ✓ IRCC and CBSA circulate 1-pager tip sheet in English, French, and Ukrainian across the country to officers, including questions and script prepared. This information sheet will also serve to assist in the identification of a Ukrainian national who is UASC.
 - CBSA accesses their existing networks of child welfare services, because UASC are eligible for child welfare services as outlined by provincial child welfare legislation across Canada.
 - As a result of their separation from their parent/guardian, UASC are eligible for child welfare service that assesses their safety, identifies their needs, determines whether they are children in need of protection on an

ongoing basis, and planning accordingly for their immediate needs, longer term reunification or independence needs.

- ✓ Greater coordination and defined protocols between federal immigration agencies (IRCC/IRB/CBSA) and provincial child welfare agencies.
 - IRCC, CBSA, and IRB refer all UASC to local child welfare agencies for assessment and referrals.
 - IRCC and CBSA develop new processes and procedures to identify UASC prior to their arrival in Canada.
 - Immigration officers review and refer UASC any UASC Ukrainian nationality that have already arrived for follow up and assessment by local child welfare agencies.
 - Local child welfare agencies may wish to consult CWICE about best practice approaches for child welfare professionals when assessing and planning for UASC, including making community-based referrals.



Theme 4: Cross-sector training for immigration officials, with a focus on the Best Interests of the Child

Through consultations, service providers shared a range of concerns related to the experiences of UASC when involved with immigration officers. Some describe children/youth being interviewed alone without an adult for hours. Others described youth reporting feeling intimidated or scared when interviewed by immigration officers, and in some cases, youth have been detained. There was consensus that the needs of children may not be well understood, or even evident, in some situations.

There was acknowledgement there are many service providers in the ‘network’ and these professionals are experts in child rights and/or trauma-informed clinicians that offer child-centred services.



Recommendations

CUAET visa

- ✓ Children and youth who are determined to be unaccompanied or separated arriving as part of CUAET visa, are *only* interviewed in the presence of a representative (i.e. child welfare professional, DR, or legal representative) at ports of entry or inland offices. Use of one-pager communication (theme 4) should be utilized.



Theme 5: Family reunification and Best Interests of the Child

Barriers to Family Reunification

Service providers outlined the vulnerability of children/youth that are separated from their parents, particularly during conflict such as the situation in Ukraine. Therefore, emphasis was given to the importance of creating pathways for family reunification as part of a durable medium to long-term solution and these recommendations are fully noted in the system recommendation section below. This should be considered during the evaluation of CUAET visa.



Systemic Recommendations Across Themes

Beyond the issues identified related to the CUAET visa, there were several issues identified for all UASC arriving in Canada. These systemic issues are outlined below using the same five themes, and sustainable recommendations are provided. Taken together, these steps would surely solidify Canada as a leading nation in protecting vulnerable children.

Theme 1: Equity and child-rights integration

We consistently heard through consultation sessions the immigration and asylum system were designed for adults, meaning there is limited support available to **all** children and youth who are unaccompanied and separated. For example, Designated Representatives (DR) are only available to UASC making asylum claims. However, even the process to obtain a trained DR varies considerably across provinces. As well, by the very nature of being separated from their parent/caregiver, UASC encounter unique barriers obtaining identity or other documents needed for various immigration applications or processes.

While CUAET applications have been processed more expediently, and this is seen as positive given the humanitarian crisis faced by Ukrainian nationals, it was acknowledged other nationals facing similar circumstances are experiencing lengthy processing times. Many of these individuals and families are residing outside Canada for some time before arriving through the refugee resettlement program. Therefore, within initiatives developed for unaccompanied and separated children, services for individuals from all countries of origin should be planned and provided.

Systemic recommendations:

- ✓ IRCC identifies a lead service provider and funds the development of a national cross-sector framework for UASC.
 - Lead service provider identifies key collaborators in each province to form a coalition representing child welfare, immigration, and settlement sectors.
- ✓ IRCC implements a comparative study examining its programs. Review suggested to include application requirements, processing times, asset support within IRCC/CBSA, resource allocation, and impact on children/families using child impact assessment.
 - IRCC is recommended to also incorporate an equity-based assessment for all existing immigration laws, regulations/policies, and practices that impact children, youth, and families.
 - The review would ensure immigration and asylum laws, regulations/policies, and practices are in line with international conventions and standards regarding child rights, child rights are integrated and reference the Best Interests of the Child.

- ✓ Policy and decision makers at IRB, CBSA, and IRCC receive training about being Duty Bearers and training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive approaches.
- ✓ Lead service provider and key collaborators expand role and duties of Designated Representatives (DRs) to support non-asylum-seeking UASC.

Theme 2: Shared definition and understanding of UASC

Understanding UASC needs

It was noted that there are many circumstances that lead to children/youth becoming unaccompanied or separated meaning there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. However, it was also consistently identified that UASC have many needs, including needing protection, housing, income supports, health/mental health services, psychosocial supports, food security, education, immigration and legal services, culturally specific services, connections to their culture/faith/community, and may need language services.

It was noted that service providers, particularly government funders, must understand the role race plays in resource allocation and access, supports and settlement experiences, and system navigation including experiences with the immigration system in Canada. It was acknowledged that many individuals (and families) are experiencing “uncooperative systems” which are inflexible and present barriers. Also, it was highlighted that all UASC benefit from connections to communities that represent their intersectional identities and lived experiences.

Systemic recommendations:

- ✓ The federal government should review new funding opportunities to partner with programs that specifically support UASC needs around housing, food and financial security, mental health and health services, education, and language services.
- ✓ All UASC programs, services, and supports funded by provincial and the federal government should ensure trauma informed and culturally appropriate services are available.
- ✓ All UASC programs, services and supports funded by provincial and the federal government should be client and child rights-centred and be available for all immigration statuses in Canada (i.e. Child rights exist for visitors and permanent residents).

Theme 3: Identification and referrals of UASC

No Process of Identification & Registration for UASC

Some participants indicated that they would contact CWICE if they became aware of an UASC, however, all acknowledge there is no current, reliable procedure for identifying UASC. Other barriers to tracking/registration include no lead service provider in place to track UASC, nor a comprehensive understanding of the number of unaccompanied children and youth who are international students. Consultations also yielded concerns about imbedded bias and assumptions within the immigration system, for example, believing a child/youth is part of a family or not recognizing the various ways children become separated before or after arriving in Canada (see addendum for example of contested custody).

Understanding the Role of Child Welfare

While discussing the protection of UASC, the issue of child protection emerged. In Ontario and British Columbia, there are clear mandates to provide service to children and youth who have been or are at risk of separation from their parent/caregiver/family. Of significance, some service providers did not recognize a child/youth being unaccompanied or separated from their parent as a concern of child protection, instead referred UASC for child welfare services only if there was another identified concern, such as a disclosure of abuse.

Child welfare service providers across Canada were clear they often become involved long after children/youth arrive in Canada, and this can often complicate service delivery and meeting the needs of children and youth. There was discussion about the role of child welfare in providing services to UASC.

In many instances, child welfare professionals have been involved in verifying documentation, particularly guardianship agreements, assessing safety with alternative/kinship caregivers, and supporting children/youth to reunify with parents/family. In discussion about services available, Voluntary Youth Service Agreements in Ontario for youth aged 16 and 17 years old were raised as options for UASC. Legal service providers indicated they often become aware of UASC through referrals from child welfare professionals for their services. It will be important for all service providers working with UASC to be aware of processes and procedures in place across sectors.

There was concern that UASC are “falling through the cracks” and not being referred to child welfare. There was a question about fear surrounding child welfare involvement at ports of entry, and acknowledgement that child welfare services are changing across Canada to be early intervention focused and expanding community-based partnerships.

It was acknowledged that there are information gaps – lack of data collection and coordinated information sharing among service providers as it pertains to UASC. Child welfare service

providers agreed that a national, collaborative, community-based, family-centred approach, which centered the child’s voice was important. There was also recognition that UASC referred for child welfare service would have different needs resulting in different service and support from the sector. It was also noted that understanding parents’ experiences of both the child welfare and immigration systems is critical, particularly to mitigate systemic racism.

Systemic recommendations:

- ✓ The identified lead service provider brings together key collaborators to form a national coalition. The group develops a national framework that includes information sharing practices and service coordination. Recommended expertise includes regional representation, ethno-cultural community organizations, and individuals with lived experience.
- ✓ As part of the framework, the lead service provider coordinates direct pre-arrival services for UASC across Canada and provides data management services.
- ✓ Lead service provider and key collaborators ensure child welfare organizations have a plan to “activate the network”, enabling legal professionals, settlement agencies, shelter/housing supports, other service providers to support the ongoing needs of UASC pre-arrival or upon arrival. This recognizes and honours the expertise that already exists within many communities across Canada. In addition, connecting children with ethno-cultural community supports should remain a central focus.
- ✓ Lead agency implements an evaluation process which includes an anti-oppression framework and disseminates disaggregated race-based data.
- ✓ If/when federal government is planning on evacuating individuals, it is recommended children travel with an identified parent or family member¹. In the absence of such verified arrangement, it is important for strong communication to local child welfare authorities prior to arrival.
 - For example, CWICE has a strong partnership with Global Affairs Canada consular officers who repatriate Canadian citizens and CWICE coordinates pre-arrival, arrival, and post-arrival service.

Theme 4: Cross-sector training for immigration officials, with a focus on the Best Interests of the Child

It is important that immigration officials are aware of the unique needs of UASC, and the supports available. Training should infuse principles of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as well as child rights.

Systemic recommendations:

- ✓ Identified lead service provider and key collaborators develop shared principles across sectors, with protocols that clearly delineate roles pertaining to interviewing children without parents/guardians to determine the identity, needs, and age of the child/youth.
- ✓ Lead service provider develops cross sector training for immigration officials that provides a broad understanding of interviews for children: considering the unique needs of children, uses a child's rights lens, and manages cognitive bias and/or assumptions.
- ✓ Lead service provider establishes ongoing communication strategy for cross sector 'activate the network' coalition.

Theme 5: Family reunification and Best Interests of the Child

At present, service providers were unclear about reunification opportunities for children/youth who are UASC. Many were concerned there are no viable solutions for reunification in place. This was highlighted to be inconsistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which clearly supports a child's right to be with their parent or family.

Others shared proactive family reunification should occur, particularly for orphaned children. It was identified that the main obstacle comes from immigration provisions that deny children access to family reunification, as they cannot sponsor their parents, nor add their parents on their permanent residence applications even once they are accepted as protected persons.

Systemic recommendations:

- ✓ Lead service provider and key collaborators define tracing, tracking, and family finding as it pertains to reunification.
- ✓ Lead service provider and key collaborators develop national tracing and tracking standards for UASC.
- ✓ Lead service provider maintains a national database for UASC.
- ✓ Key collaborators partner with international agencies that support reunification efforts, such as ISS Canada and the Canadian Red Cross.
- ✓ IRCC reviews immigration policies that relate to UASC rights and reunification efforts.

Conclusion: A call to action

We recognize this has been an incredibly challenging time for all service providers around the world. These last two years have shown that large scale and widespread change can occur rapidly. Therefore, constant innovation will be necessary to ensure we are adequately supporting the needs of the individuals and families arriving in Canada. The development of a UASC national framework would help Canada position itself as best in class leaders in the world supporting refugees.

In a short period of time, the needs of people intensified everywhere. As a country, we should be proud of the diverse ways we've collaborated and bridged those needs. We wish to thank the participants for their time and expertise during the project. We also thank JIAS Toronto and IRCC for funding this exploratory project.

Through five consultation sessions, over one month, we were able to confirm key issues outlined in the literature. Our findings resulted in five themes: equity and rights integration, shared definition and understanding, identification, cross-sector training, and family reunification. These five themes broadly explain the emerging issues and trends related to UASC. Within these themes, we have highlighted six immediate recommendations with twenty-two systemic/ongoing recommendations. Moving towards action there are guidelines developed around the world which can be utilized in Canada.

This project aims to build awareness and desire to implement these recommendations, which ultimately support robust early identification of UASC and strong cross-border collaboration. In 2019, the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) made a resolution that a national framework is required in Canada to support these children and youth.⁸ While there is no current national framework or guidelines, it is fundamentally important that this be designed. Selecting a lead service provider and ensuring funding would begin to provide an answer to the resounding question – *who is responsible for these children and youth?*

In our work with several federal agencies, CWICE has found and documented successful approaches including providing pre-arrival, arrival, and post-arrival services for UASC. This model of service coordination would be useful in the creation of a national framework to support UASC. As CWICE has built strong relationships and networks across Canada, both within child welfare and in cross-sector partnerships, it is best positioned to provide leadership on the development of a Canadian framework and guidelines to support UASC.

⁸ "Developing a National Framework for Unaccompanied Minors in Canada," Canadian Council for Refugees, 2019, <https://ccrweb.ca/en/resolutions-subject/children>.

This report has been written so wherever a child lands, they get the same care, protection, and sense of wellbeing. Or, whenever a child lands, their service providers have a shared responsibility, and have engaged in cross-sector partnership, training, and collaboration. Just as Canada is a recognized global leader supporting humanitarian efforts, so too must Canada be a leader in protecting the rights of children.

Now is the time to launch a national strategy to support UASC, to ensure children’s safety and the rights of children are at the forefront of all services and supports. A national framework must be inclusive and consider the various needs and identities of UASC. This is an opportunity to involve a coalition of service providers across Canada and to harness the talents, knowledge, and expertise on UASC subject matter.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Background Document

Today, over 100 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced by conflict, violence and human rights abuses.⁹ The number of children and youth (under 18 years of age) being displaced continues to grow, with a record of 36.5 million children displaced by the end of 2021.¹⁰ According to the UNHCR, there has been a yearly increase in the number of asylum applications by UASC, with 27,000 new asylum applications being filed in 2021.¹¹ This data is worrying, and with ongoing conflicts and emerging crises, greater responsibility-sharing and durable solutions are needed.

Over the past four years, CWICE has operated the centralized consultation centre in Ontario, to support child welfare workers managing complex child protection cases that have an intersecting unresolved immigration, settlement, or border-related issue. With a focus on equitable outcomes, CWICE believes it is in the best interest of children to develop a national framework for UASC in Canada.

CWICE is operated by Peel CAS and our work focuses on the safety and wellbeing of children, while strengthening families, communities, and systems through partnership. Since 2018, CWICE has been leading the Ontario-wide strategy for UASC within the child welfare sector. CWICE incorporates the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and infuses principles of diversity, equity and inclusion within its service and training centre.

In partnership with JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services) Toronto and with funding from Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), CWICE conducted stakeholder consultations with service providers and organizations working on issues related to unaccompanied and separated children. These include settlement, voluntary, and civil society. The project ran for eight weeks, with consultations taking place in July 2022, culminating in this report and recommendations.

⁹ “Global Displacement Hits Another Record, Capping Decade-Long Rising Trend,” UNHCR, June 16, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/6/62a9d2b04/unhcr-global-displacement-hits-record-capping-decade-long-rising-trend.html#:~:text=UNHCR%202021%20Global%20Trends%20Report,events%20seriously%20disturbing%20public%20order>.

¹⁰ “A Record 37 Million Children Displaced Worldwide: UNICEF,” UN News, June 17, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1120642>. This figure does not include children and youth displaced by environmental shocks or disasters, or those displaced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

¹¹ UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2021*, June 16, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021>. *Project participant coined the term – *activate the network*

Appendix B: Context in Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022 has caused millions of people to flee Ukraine and seek protection in bordering countries. At the beginning of the war, and in response to the immediate danger, Ukraine declared martial law and required male Ukrainian citizens between the ages of 18 to 60 remain in Ukraine.¹² As a result families have separated; with women, children and older adults fleeing the country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is providing aid and support to Ukrainian refugees. Through their Operational Data Portal, which gathers data from various border crossing points, the UNHCR reports that since February 2022, there have been more than six million refugees from Ukraine that have sought protection across Europe.¹³

In response, the Canadian government created a new priority processing temporary resident visa for Ukrainian nationals. The CUAET, Canadian Ukrainian Authorization for Emergency Travel visa, provides Ukrainian nationals affected by the war safe passage to Canada and temporary residence for up to three years. This enables individuals to enter Canada as visitors with the option of an open work permit and/or study permit for post-secondary school. Children and youth arriving as part of this visa, who are studying in elementary or secondary school levels, can register to publicly funded schools for free and do not require a study permit. The Canadian government has waived the fees for work and study permits for Ukrainian nationals and are working in partnership with provincial governments and settlement agencies to provide additional support and services. Ukrainians arriving through this visa have access to settlement support services, employment services, provincial health care, and a one-time financial support to cover immediate basic needs and shelter costs.¹⁴ Canadians have also demonstrated their support to Ukrainian nationals; with several notable social media groups providing informal information to Ukrainians, including people offering to host newly arrived families.

CWICE and settlement organizations providing support to Ukrainians are learning that some of the host arrangements are not lasting, leaving families in vulnerable situations, in a new country where they may have a limited network and neither speak English nor French. As part of the crisis, parents are seeking ways to send their children with host families, drafting papers to give guardianship to strangers and children being matched with strangers.

¹² Iana Fremer, "Ukraine: Martial Law Introduced in Response to Russian Invasion," Library of Congress, 2022. www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-03-03/ukraine-martial-law-introduced-in-response-to-russian-invasion/

¹³ UNHCR, "Ukraine Emergency," August 2022, [Ukraine Situation \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/ukraine-situation).

¹⁴ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), "Immigration measures and support for Ukrainians and their families," 2022, [Immigration measures and support for Ukrainians and their families - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2022/04/immigration-measures-and-support-for-ukrainians-and-their-families.html).

We are particularly concerned about children and youth traveling alone to Canada and accepting help from strangers to care for them. There are no rules or protocols in place currently and all stakeholders and service providers must be aligned in an approach (ie. IRCC, CBSA, settlement agencies, child welfare professionals, grassroots organizations etc.). CWICE has been in contact with service providers across several provinces regarding concerns that UASC and parents/caregivers are giving custody of their children to unknown host families or individuals, strategies that bypass standardized mechanisms to ensure safety for children and youth when unaccompanied or separated from parents/caregivers.

Appendix C: CWICE Background & UASC Context

Since 2018, CWICE has implemented a consistent response in Ontario to requests of assessments, placements, and support for UASC arriving here. We recognize the circumstances surrounding each UASC vary from individual to individual. These youth have distinct identities and we share this information year-over-year in our annual reports.¹⁵

It is important for government to comprehensively understand UASC's needs if we are to achieve positive outcomes including safety, wellbeing, and permanency. UASC have various lived experiences and needs. They have a range of living situations and immigration status. Of the UASC we support, they may be:

- Living in the community with relatives or friends of their parents;
- Residing with older siblings;
- Transitioning to live independently;
- Planning reunifications with parents;
- Unstably housed; or
- Staying in out-of-home care situations (formerly known as foster care).

The UASC we support also have a range of immigration statuses in Canada, including refugee claimants/asylum seekers, protected persons resettling in Canada (i.e. government assisted refugees), Canadian citizens repatriating to Canada after living outside Canada for a time, or temporary residents (visitors or international students).

In 2019, CWICE held a roundtable conference with child welfare leaders in Ontario where it was resolved to use the UNHCR's definition of UASC in practice. In 2020, CWICE held a national dialogue conference with child welfare leaders in Canada and the same UNHCR definition of UASC was endorsed to be used in practice across Canada.

Child welfare authorities are known in Canada for their protection of children, as well as their ability to assess and approve temporary and alternative living arrangements when parents are not available. In addition, they are legally mandated to explore reunification of children with families. It is critical that we consider the role of child welfare authorities today, especially as it relates to a situation of unverified guardianship (unverified guardianship scenario below).

UASC with CUAET visas also have distinct experiences, identities, and needs. This observation is consistent with our work with UASC over many years. Brief scenarios are presented on page 30 to provide an understanding of some of the situations described to CWICE by service providers from across Canada and of situations CWICE was involved in service delivery or coordination.

¹⁵ CWICE, "CWICE Publications," Peel Children's Aid Society, [Publications \(cwice.ca\)](https://www.cwice.ca/publications).

Scenario: Unverified Claim to Guardianship

A 14-year-old child from a visa exempt country traveled alone to Canada with what appeared to be a notarized document giving guardianship to a family friend living in Canada.

A month later, the caregiver in Canada contacted CWICE reporting they were no longer able to care for the child. The child welfare agency in the child's country of origin was contacted and we learnt that the notarized documents were not valid. The person who prepared the documents did not have custody of the child. The child's legal guardian was not aware the child had traveled to Canada.

This child was able to enter Canada unaccompanied and child welfare was not notified. The documents which appeared legal were later confirmed to be invalid.



Scenarios: UASC from Ukraine

A 15-year-old child arrived from Ukraine. At the airport, she was picked up by a limo company to transport her to a private school. The school pre-arranged a host family on behalf of her parents. Child welfare was notified and assessed, and she was determined to be safe.

Two youth (aged 16 and 17) arrived from Ukraine as a couple. Upon arrival, they obtained income support and knew this would continue for 6 months. They decided to locate housing and did not wish to remain in the host home. The eldest youth was turning 18 and was considering becoming guardian to his partner. They believed it was required for the 16-year-old to have a guardian in Canada.

A youth, aged 17, arrived as a student from Ukraine. When a child welfare worker connected, she was residing in housing provided by a Canadian host. The individual was identified to be a family friend and the parents confirmed they had known the individual for many years. The youth was not residing with the host and was residing with other youth in housing provided by the host. The youth wanted to finish high school and complete College in Canada.

A 15-year-old child arrived from Ukraine. He was residing with a host family, who his parents met online. He had been living there less than a month and was not feeling as comfortable as he had hoped. He had also been learning more about Canada since arriving and was hoping to move to Ontario. He was reaching out to service providers to support him in locating housing.

A same sex couple arrived from Ukraine (aged 16 and 18). They were seeking housing and exploring moving provinces. They were told by someone in the community in Canada that the 18-year-old should obtain custody of their partner. They were considering this option. Local settlement staff were concerned about the potential power imbalance should one partner have custody of the other and tried to determine how to best support them locate housing. Before a plan was developed, the couple moved provinces.

A 17-year-old youth arrived from Ukraine and did not have a plan for housing. They were provided housing at a municipal run hotel, operated by a local service organization. The youth did not wish to attend school and as focused on finding employment. They began to feel safe exploring their gender identity and were receiving support to locate safe housing in the community.

Appendix D: Literature Review

Several international organizations have published reports, handbooks, and guidelines on interpretations and implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These guide countries developing policies and practices for the care and protection for children. For example, UNICEF published a handbook: *Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2007)*¹⁶ or the UNHCR's *Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child (2008)*.¹⁷ Of particular interest, UNHCR has also published various guidelines¹⁸ related to UASC, which highlight key issues such as family reunification, information sharing, cross-sector early identification, and registration/data collection.

The CRC emphasizes the protection of children. There are several key CRC articles that need to be highlighted pertaining to child rights/UASC rights, including:¹⁹

- **Article 2:** Non-discrimination principle
- **Article 3(1):** Best interests of the child
- **Article 10:** The right to family reunification
- **Article 12:** Respect of the views of the child (child's voice)
- **Article 20(1):** Obligations by the state to provide special protection and care to the child (deprivation of family environment)
- **Article 22(1):** The right to protection for refugee and asylum-seeking children
- **Article 22(2):** The principle of family unity for refugee children

It is imperative that service providers in all phases of service – from design and data analysis to frontline services – ensure child impact assessments are included.

Within Canada, the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)* of 2001 states that the Act is to “be construed and applied in a manner that complies with international human rights

¹⁶ UNICEF, *Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 2007,

<https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/22071/file/Implementation%20Handbook%20for%20the%20CRC.pdf>.

¹⁷ UNHCR, *Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child*, 2008,

<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/children/4566b16b2/unhcr-guidelines-determining-best-interests-child.html>.

¹⁸ For example: UNHCR, *Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in Dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum*, 1997,

<https://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/3d4f91cf4/guidelines-policies-procedures-dealing-unaccompanied-children-seeking-asylum.html>.

¹⁹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, November 20, 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577,

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html>.

instruments to which Canada is a signatory.”²⁰ As Canada has signed and ratified the CRC, all procedures resulting from legislation need alignment with the CRC. However, translation of the articles into practice has been challenging. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issued General Comments that call attention to the implementation (or lack thereof) of several CRC articles. For example, family reunification is recognized as invaluable for UASC, with the CRC, noting in Article 10 the state’s responsibility to support family reunification in a “positive, humane and expeditious manner.”²¹ Nonetheless, the national legal and policy frameworks and related immigration procedures in place are in direct violation of some of the principles reflected in the CRC.

While the term and concept Best Interests of the Child (BIC) is often raised, this has been criticized by being open-ended and subjective. In the absence of legal rules or a hierarchy of values, the best interests approach depends on the value system of the decision-maker. This principle is to be applied on a case-by-case basis since the best interests of the child is contextual. In Canada, IRPA states that the child’s best interest be “taken into account” as opposed to it being a “primary consideration” as outlined in the CRC. This results in immigration decisions that are not child-centered, nor best interests focused. The UNHCR’s *Best Interests Procedure Guidelines (2021)* provides four factors²²:

- Views of the child, the parents or caregiver
- Child’s situation in terms of family and close relationships
- The child’s development and identity needs
- Considerations affecting the child’s safety and protection

These four factors should be considered when determining the best interests of the child.

Within Canada, there are no data gathering mechanisms specific to UASC and particularly around reunifications. At present, the data collected nationwide pertains to the number of asylum seekers who are children. An absence of this data and information is a hinderance to policy.

²⁰ “Chapter 1: Introduction,” Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Last modified December 15, 2021, <https://irb.gc.ca/en/legal-policy/legal-concepts/Pages/RefDef01.aspx#n1414>.

²¹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), Treaty Series, vol. 1577, 3, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html>.

²² UNHCR, *2021 Best Interests Procedure Guidelines: Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child*, May 2021, 49, <file:///Users/nataliavalencia/Documents/CWICE/2021%20unhcr%20bip.pdf>.

Appendix E: Child Welfare in Canada

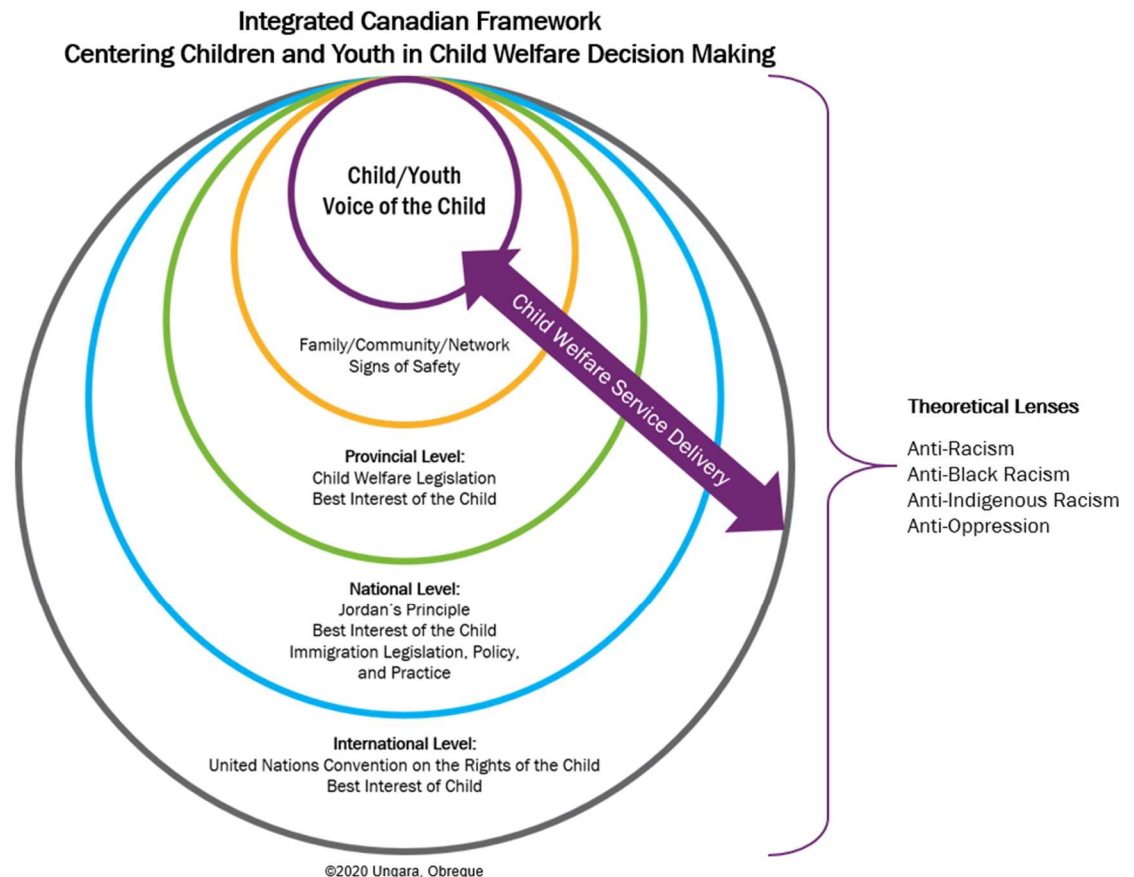
| Province or Territory | Child Welfare |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Alberta | Ministry of Children's Services |
| British Columbia | Ministry of Children and Family Development |
| Manitoba | Child and Family Services |
| New Brunswick | Social Development |
| Newfoundland & Labrador | Department of Children, Seniors, and Social Development |
| Nova Scotia | Department of Community Services |
| Northwest Territories | Department of Health and Social Services |
| Nunavut | Nunavut Department of Family Services |
| Ontario | Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services |
| Prince Edward Island | Social Development and Housing |
| Québec | Centre Jeunesse de la Montérégie |
| Québec | Centre Jeunesse de L'Estrie |
| Québec | Directeur de la protection de la jeunesse (DPJ) |
| Saskatchewan | Ministry of Social Services |
| Yukon | Department of Health and Social Services |

Appendix F: Child Welfare in Canada – Age of a Child

| Province or Territory | Child Welfare |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Newfoundland and Labrador | Under 16 years old |
| Saskatchewan | Under 16 years old |
| Northwest Territories | Under 16 years old |
| Nunavut | Under 16 years old |
| Alberta | Under 18 years old |
| Manitoba | Under 18 years old |
| Ontario | Under 18 years old |
| Prince Edward Island | Under 18 years old |
| Quebec | Under 18 years old |
| British Columbia | Under 19 years old |
| New Brunswick | Under 19 years old |
| Nova Scotia | Under 19 years old |
| Yukon | Under 19 years old |

Appendix G: Decision Making Tools

Centering Children and Youth in Child Welfare Decision-Making



The UNHCR guidelines provide a step-by-step process on how to conduct a best interests procedure (BIP). As part of the process, it indicates that:¹

- ✓ Staff with appropriate expertise, skills and knowledge in child protection should carry out the best interests assessment (BIA) and all steps of the BIP
- ✓ Encourages a referral to child protection actors who would be responsible for BIP
- ✓ Early detection of risks is vital for the protection of children; therefore, identification and referral mechanisms must be established. Identification of children at risk should start as soon as possible **UNHCR, 2021 Best Interests Procedure Guidelines: Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child, May 2021, 49,**

<file:///Users/nataliavalencia/Documents/CWICE/2021%20unhcr%20bip.pdf>.

Appendix H: CUAET Recommendations to Position Canada as Best in Class leader in the protection and welfare of unaccompanied and separated children (Strategy to address systemic issues)

Legend: IRCC – Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada; CBSA – Canada Border Services Agency; IRB – Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada; CW – Child Welfare; SS – Settlement Sector; LS – Legal Service providers; All other service providers, NGOs, coalitions/groups.

| CUAET Recommendations | Key Stakeholder(s) Responsible | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------|-----|----|----|----|-----------|
| | IRCC | CBSA | IRB | CW | SS | LS | All other |
| Create an online information package about UASC for families accessing CUAET. | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Develop processes and procedures for pre-arrival and arrival identification of UASC. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| Prepare interview guide for officials to identify unaccompanied or separated Ukrainian nationals. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| Communication sent to staff regarding intention to adopt UNHCR's definition of UASC. Update Policies/Regulations as needed. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Refer all UASC arrivals of Ukrainian nationality to local child welfare agencies for assessment, planning, and referrals. | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| Ensure all UASC are <i>only</i> interviewed with representatives present. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| Refer unaccompanied or separated Ukrainian nationals <i>already arrived</i> to child welfare professionals. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Collaborate with provinces to expand current financial program eligibility for UASC CUAET visa holders (ie. Ontario Works). | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Child Welfare agencies consult CWICE about best practices and referrals to community-based service providers | | | | ✓ | | | |

Appendix I: Systemic Recommendations to Position Canada as Best in Class leader in the protection and welfare of unaccompanied and separated children (Strategy to address systemic issues)

Legend: IRCC – Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada; CBSA – Canada Border Services Agency; IRB – Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada; CW – Child Welfare; SS – Settlement Sector; LS – Legal Service providers; LEAD – Lead Agency identified by IRCC; All other service providers, NGOs, coalitions/groups.

| Theme | Systemic Recommendations | Key Stakeholder(s) Responsible | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------|------|-----|----|----|----|------|-----------|
| | | IRCC | CBSA | IRB | CW | SS | LS | LEAD | All other |
| Equity and child-rights integration | IRCC identifies a lead service provider and funds the development of a national cross-sector framework for UASC. | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| | Lead service provider identifies key collaborators in each province to form a coalition representing. | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| | IRCC reviews its programs including equity-based and child impact assessment, to ensure child rights and Best Interests of Children are integrated throughout. | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| | Policy and decision makers receive training about being Duty Bearers and training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive approaches. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| | Lead service provider and key collaborators expand role and duties of Designated Representatives (DRs) to support non-asylum-seeking UASC. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Shared definition and understanding of UASC | The federal government should review new funding opportunities to partner with programs that specifically support UASC needs around housing, food and financial security, mental health and health services, education, and language services. | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

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| | All UASC programs, services, and supports funded by provincial and the federal government should ensure trauma informed and culturally appropriate services are available. | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | All UASC programs, services and supports funded by provincial and the federal government should be client and child rights-centred and be available for all immigration statuses in Canada (i.e. Child rights exist for visitors and permanent residents). | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Identification and referrals of UASC | The identified lead service provider, and key collaborators, develop national framework that includes information sharing practices and service coordination. | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| | Lead service provider coordinates any pre-arrival services for UASC across Canada. | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| | Lead service provider and key collaborators ensure child welfare organizations have a plan to “activate the network”, enabling legal professionals, settlement agencies, shelter/housing supports, other service providers to support the ongoing needs of UASC pre-arrival or upon arrival. | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| | If/when federal government is planning on evacuating individuals, it is recommended children travel with an identified parent or family member ¹ . In the absence of such verified arrangement, it is important for strong communication to local child welfare authorities prior to arrival. | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Cross-sector training for immigration officials, with a focus on the Best Interests of the Child | Identified lead service provider and key collaborators develop shared principles across sectors, with protocols that clearly delineate roles pertaining to interviewing children without parents/guardians to determine the identity, needs, and age of the child/youth. | | | | | | | ✓ | |

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| | Lead service provider develops cross sector training for immigration officials that provides a broad understanding of interviews for children: considering the unique needs of children, uses a child’s rights lens, and manages cognitive bias and/or assumptions. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| | Lead service provider establishes ongoing communication strategy for cross sector ‘activate the network’ coalition. | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Family reunification and Best Interests of the Child | Lead service provider and key collaborators define tracing, tracking, and family finding as it pertains to reunification. | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| | Lead service provider and key collaborators develop national tracing and tracking standards for UASC. | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| | Lead service provider maintains a national database for UASC. | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| | Key collaborators partner with international agencies that support reunification efforts, such as ISS Canada and the Canadian Red Cross. | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | IRCC reviews immigration policies that relate to UASC rights and reunification efforts. | ✓ | | | | | | | |

Appendix J: Project Team

Alicja Grabarczyk is an Immigration Specialist at Peel Children’s Aid Society with the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence, with 11 years of child welfare experience. Alicja holds a Bachelor of Social Work degree from Ryerson University, a diploma in Social Services and certificate in Customs and Immigration from Humber College. Alicja is passionate about immigration related issues, which has been a focus in her educational and career development.

Claudia Obrequé is a child protection worker and immigration specialist in CWICE. She holds a Master of Social Work (MSW) and has over 30 years of experience working in the social services sector. Claudia co-led the CWICE training curriculum development as a subject matter expert and is the lead trainer for the CWICE certificate program.

Danielle Ungara co-manages the day-to-day operations of the Ontario-wide Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence at Peel CAS. Danielle regularly promotes the importance of early help and ensuring child rights and the voice of children and youth are elevated and respected. An inclusive leader of integrity, Danielle believes in furthering social justice outcomes and equity in practice through service excellence, collaborative partnerships, and research.

Jayachandran Soloman has a double Master’s in Social Work from India and Sweden. He has 30 years of international child welfare experience. He is currently a child welfare supervisor and has been working with Peel CAS for the past 17 years.

Liz Okai is a manager at CWICE, Liz is a seasoned and dedicated child welfare professional and leader. She is passionate about and contributes to the ever-growing body of knowledge regarding the intersectionality of child welfare, immigration and settlement. She leads from a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion framework, collaborating with partners across all levels of government to ensure better outcomes for children, youth and families.

Mandisa Sifelani is a Registered Social Worker, working within CWICE as an Immigration Specialist. Her passion is working with newcomer families and unaccompanied and separated children, to regularize their immigration status and ensure their safety while transitioning into life in Canada. She has a keen attentiveness to the importance on the Best Interests of the Child, and their voice within child welfare.

Natalia Valencia is the Research and Data Project Coordinator at the Ontario-wide Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence at Peel CAS. She is committed to addressing complex social and policy issues through collaborative action, and data-driven strategies with an intersectional, gender-informed lens.

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