



# Settlement and citizenship for children in care

January 2026

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“Getting immigration status sorted early would make such a big difference — it would give children in care a sense of belonging, stability, and hope”- Child in care

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## Our asks of local authorities in Greater Manchester:

We are asking local authorities to **sign a public pledge** to identify and support all children in care with immigration issues before they turn 18. The pledge recognises that this is the responsibility of the local authority, and that they will work with GMIAU to improve their systems and policies to ensure this happens for all children in care. Local authorities will identify those affected, connect them with legal advice and support them with pathways to citizenship.

We can support local authorities in Greater Manchester to:

- Adopt a passports for all policy. By applying for a British passport for all children in care, local authorities will know which of their children are already British.
- Work with GMIAU to ensure systems, care proceedings, and care plans are designed to capture children's nationality and immigration status at the earliest point.
- Work with GMIAU to deliver training to staff, [guides](#) on how to resolve common issues, and immigration consultation sessions about specific children.

### Context of our work:

We have been working with children and local authorities in Greater Manchester for a number of years to ensure children in care without immigration status, or who are not British, are identified and supported to regulate their status before they turn 18. [Research](#) has shown that at least **1 in 10** children in care in England do not have British citizenship. These children may have been born in the UK or have lived here since they were very young.

In our experience, local authorities are well able to identify children in care seeking asylum as their route into care makes this more obvious, and there are clear routes for them to apply for status in the UK. However, the broader group of children with non-asylum immigration needs are too often not identified when they enter care and have less obvious routes to settlement for social workers to explore. We want to ensure that every child leaving care is supported by their local authority to flourish and succeed; and this includes having their citizenship or immigration issues recognised and resolved at the earliest opportunity.

We are asking local authorities in Greater Manchester to commit to a pledge to identify and support all children in care with immigration issues before they turn 18. We have spoken with children in care with immigration and nationality needs about their experiences of being supported by the local authority to support them with their immigration needs.

We want social workers and local authorities to be aware of the impact of insecure immigration status and uncertainty about citizenship can have on children in care and ensure every child under their care turns 18 with the best outcome possible.

Resolving immigration status for children is a priority for the government- and there are legal routes for them to do so. The May 2025 [Immigration White Paper](#) included a commitment to support children who have been in the UK for some time and turn 18 without having their immigration status resolved. This will include children in care and care leavers.

## Having secure immigration status, or citizenship is important to children in care

Through our work, we know the impact of not having citizenship, or immigration status on children in care can be huge. It can impact their sense of **security** and **belonging**, alongside having **practical implications** (such as planning for the future and having the same opportunities as peers). Children we work with told us:



*“Personally, having citizenship is important to me because this country is where I belong now, my future lies here. Citizenship will allow me to join in with my peers. When they travel for a school trip or any group activities that requires travelling abroad, without citizenship I miss out on a lot of core memories – memories any child would cherish for the rest of their lives.”*

*“I want them to just be more empathetic about the differentiation between a person who has strong blood ties to their family and familiar support, and children who were estranged and have to live forever wishing they were the former. Often times, no citizenship can lead to no education and no employment and inevitably homelessness. That's why it's so crucial to provide access to amenities for kids once they grow out of the system and ensure their security early on.”*

*“It's really important because young people in care shouldn't have to go through all that stress on their own. If it's sorted early, it saves so much worry and makes sure no one is left without status when they turn 18.”*

*“In most cases, young people in care who don't have settled status are in that situation through no fault of their own. They're there because their parents or guardians have failed them, and they're already dealing with the pain and insecurity of not having their own family. Being placed with people who aren't your immediate family can affect how you see yourself – you already feel different. They shouldn't also have to go through the struggle of feeling like they don't belong in the country they call home.”*

## Resolving status and citizenship is important to children in care

We have seen children go through care proceedings and be looked after for a number of years before there is any exploration of their immigration status and citizenship. Often this only becomes apparent when looked after children try to access other services such as a national insurance number or applying for university. It is crucial that a child's **whole identity**, including their nationality, is included in care proceedings and care planning. If a local authority has assessed it is in a child's best interest to remain under their care and in the UK, plans should be made to **resolve** their status or citizenship- there are legal routes for them to do so.

Where a local authority has failed to identify an immigration need or citizenship issue and a child becomes an adult, and a care leaver, we ask that they support them to get legal advice to resolve this.



*"Lots of young people don't even realise they have a problem with their status until it's almost too late. If social workers checked earlier and helped out, it would save a lot of worry and stress. No one should suddenly find out when they turn 18 that they might have to leave or that their future is at risk and everything they build".*

*"It's really important. Once we turn 18, we're basically left to fend for ourselves, and without status there's very little support available. Making sure every child in care has their immigration status or citizenship sorted before 18 can prevent a lot of stress and uncertainty later on."*

*"Getting immigration status sorted early would make such a big difference – it would give children in care a sense of belonging, stability, and hope."*



## Understanding the emotional impact of applications is important to children in care

Once a child is identified and supported to get immigration advice, they will then need to go through a legal process to regulate their status or apply for citizenship. Local authorities should support children through legal immigration processes. We therefore recommend [triple planning](#) for all children with immigration or nationality issues, to ensure children understand the possible outcomes of an application and the support they have.

Local authorities should ensure their **systems** are designed to capture all the information a child may need for an application and that professionals understand the processes children are going through.

*“Personally, waiting creates an eerie suspense for me because i never know where I might end up. For a helpless child like me, all I rely on is the help of the Care system and the nature of my status in the county - that which I don't not have yet. This scares me. It's like every day, there's a lurking despair that I might not be allowed to stay in the country anymore.”*

*“Waiting was really hard. It affected my mental health and made me anxious about what would happen. It's difficult to plan your life when you don't know if you'll be allowed to stay. Getting a positive decision lifted a huge weight off my shoulders.”*

*“It's given me needless anxiety, I've had to halt so many plans I've looked forward to for over a year, it's made me cry at night. I've looked at my peers pursuing what they love and enjoying fresher's week at uni while I'm stuck waiting for weeks to month just for another Home Office denial. Its been really heavy on my heart and I don't wish this on anyone. I want to consolidate my career so I'm stable for when I will not have any more support.”*

*“It was really hard and stressful. I felt scared most of the time because I didn't know what was going to happen or how long it would take. I tried to stay positive, but it was always on my mind. It felt like my whole life depended on something I had no control over.”*

*“Getting letters at a young age saying I might not be entitled to free healthcare, and that I had to prove my status, was really scary. I don't know if I'll be able to continue my education next year because my application is still undecided. While my friends are getting their driver's licenses and going on holiday, I feel stuck, unable to do the same things as them. I can't get a job to support myself and have to rely on money from the Local Authority, which isn't what I want for my life.”*

## Understanding the positive impact having citizenship can have is important to children in care

It's important that children have permission to be in the UK and their future in the UK is secure. British Citizenship is often the best and **most secure** application that can be made for young people. The benefits of having citizenship include, no more applications, no restrictions on time outside the UK, right to vote, protects against deportation and gives children in care a sense of identity and belonging. It is important **not to assume** a child's nationality.

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*“Most kids under the care service do not have the luxury of choice and probably don't even know what it means to be recognised as a citizen of this country. If the social service think it's a good option for them, they should grant the grace.”*

*“Every young person deserves to have security and a future. If they've grown up here and want to stay, they should have that chance – this is their home.”*

*“Every child should leave care with British citizenship or permission to stay if they want it, because no young person should have to face uncertainty about their future after leaving care. It gives them stability, security, and the chance to build their lives here.”*

*“It's like I finally got my life back. I don't have to wake up in fear anymore, and I can start planning my future with confidence. It feels safe, without all the uncertainty hanging over me.”*”

**To SIGN this pledge or discuss this work further please contact Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit via [kathleen@gmiau.org](mailto:kathleen@gmiau.org)**

We can support to help you learn more and sign the pledge. We can also help ensure your local authority understands the legal routes for children in care, when and where to get help, and ensure your systems are set up to identify and resolve immigration issues.

