

Abstract

‘Lost in Transition’: An exploration of the professional competencies required to mitigate the risk of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children disappearing from care.

This study investigates risk factors that contribute to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children disappearing from care homes in Ireland, with a focus on enhancing professional competencies to mitigate these risks. Using qualitative methods, including twelve semi-structured interviews with social care workers, NGO professionals, and academics, the research identifies key challenges such as inconsistent training in human trafficking awareness and cultural competency among staff. Findings also highlight significant concerns that may contribute to disappearances, such as delays in appointed social workers, unclear aftercare entitlements, and the inadequate safeguarding standards of Special Emergency Accommodation Centres. The study emphasises the need for trauma-informed, whole-systems approaches, recommending targeted interventions to address administrative delays, enhance trauma-sensitive practices, and align with UN Guidelines on Alternative Care. This research advocates policy reforms and strengthened support for unaccompanied children, contributing valuable insights to improve care practices and reduce disappearances in Ireland’s child protection system.