

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE MODERN SLAVERY INQUIRY ON SEPARATED CHILDREN IN EUROPE

Introduction

This report is submitted in response to the request for evidence to support the Modern Slavery Inquiry on Separated Children in Europe. It seeks to respond to the questions:

1. What are the present risks of exploitation including trafficking to separated children in Europe?
2. What legal options are available to protect separated children?
3. Is there any evidence that the UK's admission of children under Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 (commonly known as the 'Dubs amendment') is serving as a so called 'pull factor' to encourage traffickers
4. Are there specific patterns of exploitation of separated children in Europe?
5. Has anything changed since the introduction of the Dubs amendment?

This report draws on evidence gathered during the course of the 'EVI-MED - Constructing an evidence base of contemporary Mediterranean migrations' funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and UK Department for International Development (DFID). The data presented were gathered between November 2016 and April 2017 and provide another facet of unaccompanied child migration to Europe.

Researching Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Europe

The UNHCR records that between 1 January and 31 December 2016, 100,264 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria, of whom 33,806 (34%) were unaccompanied or separated children.¹ These children arrived through three principal routes: via Turkey to Greece and Bulgaria by sea; by sea to Italy; and by sea to Spain and overland. While Greece saw the largest number of arrivals, above all from Syria, the vast majority of children were accompanied. An estimated 8 per cent were unaccompanied and were principally older child migrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria. By contrast, in Italy an estimated 92 per cent of the 28,223 children who arrived in 2016 were unaccompanied.

In relation to the large number of children, until recently, we had little disaggregated data by gender in the UNHCR regular reports which tend to treat minors as gender neutral.² The most recent UNHCR data record that the majority of unaccompanied and separated children who arrived to Italy, Greece and Bulgaria in 2016 were boys between 15 and 17 years old (92% in Italy; 84% in Greece and 72% in Bulgaria). An examination of the data collected during the pre-registration exercise in Greece further reveals the gendered composition of this flow. Until the age of 14 years, the gender balance is fairly even; it is only among those 15-17 years that boys clearly outnumber girls. Such an imbalance becomes even more pronounced among unaccompanied minors with 6% girls as opposed to 29% boys out of 1225 unaccompanied minors in Greece (Hellenic Republic and UNHCR 2016). As children become older so does the gender imbalance become more marked. Up to 9 years, there are equal numbers of girls and boys, from 10-14 years, 4% of the total number of unaccompanied children, are

¹ UNHCR 2017. Refugee and Migrant Children- Including Unaccompanied and Separated Children - in the EU Overview of Trends in 2016, UNHCR April 2017. Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/55971>

² Belloni, M. and F. Pastore. 2016. *Addressing the Gender Dimension of Contemporary Asylum Flows in the Mediterranean. Towards a more gender sensitive governance of international protection as a common Euro-Mediterranean priority*. WE Women empower the world

girls compared to 13% boys and among those aged 15-17 years, 10% of the total number are girls and 66% boys.

The protection challenges on the journey to Europe are numerous. As the UNHCR records for the Central Mediterranean and Aegean routes:

On both routes, the most common alleged protection incidents witnessed or experienced by respondents, including children, were violence and emotional abuse committed by third parties (smugglers, local police, other travellers), arduous routes, detention or being kept against their will by persons other than the authorities. Nearly 75% of interviewed children in Italy exhibited a unique set of risk factors linked to human trafficking indicators.

Such reports were less frequent on the Eastern Mediterranean route though the incidence of exploitation is more pronounced among children than adults (UNHCR 2017).

While the majority of unaccompanied and separated children have been housed in special reception centres and in Greece, such children may be housed with adults. Out of 2300 unaccompanied and separated children in Greece, only 1,142 were in dedicated shelters.

The challenges of identifying and protecting unaccompanied and separated children who are not in sheltered accommodation, are numerous and such children are especially vulnerable. In addition to the loss of family unity, and lack of opportunities for personal development, commonly cited protection challenges include:

- Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Abuse
- Exploitation
- Physical and Psychological Harm
- Detention
- Smuggling and Trafficking
- Financial Dependency
- Security Risks

Research Context and Methods

The EVI-MED project is specifically focused on refugees and migrants arriving to the European Union's external borders in Sicily, Greece and Malta. It seeks to explore and map the reception context, where reception is understood to include the point at which arrivals seek international protection. In the *Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection*, regulates access to housing, food, health, medical and psychological care and employment while claims are examined, vulnerable persons, such as minors unaccompanied minors, should be identified so as to respond to their needs.

Specifically, the EVI-MED project seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of migration flows across the Mediterranean? How are these changing?
2. What are the different profiles, motivations, and experiences of those who migrate to Europe?
3. How do migrants make their often complex and dangerous journeys?
4. What is the impact of government policies on migration decisions and experiences along the route?

5. What are the migrants' experiences of arrival in the Mediterranean (including reception, assistance, pathways towards the rest of Europe)?
6. What is the nature of international, national and local multi-agency systems of reception?

To address the above, the research team engaged local organisations in Greece (Greek Council for Refugees), Italy (Borderline Sicily), and Malta (People for Change Foundation) who assisted with the field research. The local teams administered a questionnaire to participants in Greece (300), Sicily (400), and Malta (50). With the addition of some pilot surveys, the total number of individuals surveyed was 752. Survey research was followed by in-depth interviews with migrants (45) in each of the three countries, and key informants (35) including representatives of government offices, humanitarian and relief agencies, NGOs and activist organisations. Further to a supplemental research grant from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, an additional 18 life-history interviews were conducted with migrants on the Western Balkans route in Serbia, between October and November 2016.

Description of Data Collected

The survey research was not focused on minors, however, it did record 69 individuals who gave their age as 18 at the point of interview. Of these, 47 travelled alone and were from Afghanistan (4), Egypt (5), Eritrea (7), Gambia (13), Ghana (2), Guinea (4), Ivory Coast (1), Mali (3), Nigeria (14) Somalia (4), Sudan (1), Syria (91) Senegal (1); a further 10 individuals were from other countries. These were overwhelmingly male - only six of the participants aged 18 were female, which generally reflects the gender composition of unaccompanied minors in Europe who are primarily teenage males. In addition three males, including a 17 year old Nigerian in Sicily, a 17 year-old Moroccan national and a Pakistani aged 18 years who had entered as a minor were interviewed in Northern Greece and in Athens. The first two had left during the second half of 2015 and were housed in an asylum centre.

Few of the interviews held in reception centres in Greece (20), Malta (5), Serbia (18) or Sicily (14) were conducted with unaccompanied minors specifically. Those included below provide further contextual information about the challenges of migrating both to Europe and within Europe, in the search for protection.

Findings

These individuals encountered a number of hardships en route including dehydration, scabies, and diarrhoea, while one contracted pneumonia.

Both 17 year olds paid for their journey in a lump sum whereas 11 of the 18 year-olds paid in instalments. A total of 24 participants aged 18 and under claimed to have been subject to arrest and detention in transit. Two thirds of these reported receiving psychosocial support and counselling.

One of underage Afghani female reported that her decision to leave was prompted by her parents' refusal to allow her to remain in school in Afghanistan and was exacerbated by a bomb blast which killed her uncle. Feeling unsafe and with no opportunities, she decided to leave for Europe.

One Pakistani, now 18, described how he was encouraged to leave by his father who was keen for him to establish a business. Although he was initially travelling with acquaintances via Iran, after some time in Turkey, working as a street seller, he was without protection. He needed 6000 Euro for the journey and chose to enter Greece by land, scared of the boat journey.

We arrived in Turkey in January 2016. In Turkey I had the chance to work for about 2 months as a street seller. The amount of 6.000 euros my father had to pay the smugglers, where not enough for me to continue the trip to Europe. So, I had no way but work for a while and find the way to leave. My father's friend had left to Greece and I was unprotected and alone in Turkey. But I was very motivated to survive. After 2 months in Turkey, I joined a group of people they had a plan to enter in Greece through land.

He was now receiving support from the Social Services Department of the Greek Council for Refugees, an in particular the Minors' Aid Team.

One Guinean who was interviewed in Sicily, left his studies aged 17 and was now 18, spoke about how he fled political protests and racial violence in Conakry only to travel through Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and was eventually detained in Libya.

Once we arrived in Libya we were not confronted by the police but by groups of rebels. I had all my documentations with me including date of birth and national ID, the rebels took all of it and ripped it up, they even threw me in jail for two weeks.

So as I looked into their eyes, they pointed their guns at me and in a short period of time, three bullets were fired in my direction. After three days I couldn't hear anything because they gun fired, three bullets! ...After that, they seized us and threw us in an isolation cell, it was as dark as the night there, every single day spent there felt like a night not a day...I stayed two weeks imprisoned in such conditions.

He then provided a harrowing picture of life in detention in Libya.

I had no clue that in Libya people were being imprisoned, brutalised, killed and tortured. For example, people who tried to escape from prison were shot dead right away in the most inhuman ways. They were slaughtered, I witnessed people being beaten up to death, I witnessed several assassinations, I was really frightened by all these things. When I was taken to prison, on the first day, they isolated me because they thought I had money, they took everything I had, all my clothes. They even threaten to kill us immediately if we did not give our money.

He the described his exit from prison, having bribed his way out and eventually being smuggled in the boot of car which took him to the shore where he eventually caught a boat.

I found someone there who spoke the same language but this person was imprisoned for two years and is now working in the prison. He was preparing food for the prisoners, in other words he was working for the Libyans there. One day, I talked to him even though he was not allowed to speak to us and he told me that if I had a bit of money he would help me to leave the prison. After that, I called him and we went to the toilets to discuss in all discretion where he asked me if I had any phone numbers or any type of people in my country that would be able to send me money to leave the prison. He told me that to get out of prison I needed to pay 3 000 500 Guinean francs.

In Italy, we further witnessed the arrival of six Gambians aged between 14-17 who had left their reception centre on Mount Etna and were keen to take their chances in Catania, when they reached an Info-Point, a pop-up service provided by the Italian Red Cross by the central station. The minors described how, along the way, they were approached by some American missionaries who gave them bibles and lightweight tracksuits. The Red Cross team informed the researchers that the only way in

which the minors could receive protection was if they remained in a reception centre and it was therefore their intention to encourage them to return to the centre they had left.

Finally, the team interviewed one female from Nigeria who was 18 at the time and had been smuggled out. She was satisfied with her living conditions in Italy and even received pocket money.

Analysis

The above data is limited in scope, not least because the project did not aim to capture the experiences of unaccompanied children. It does, however, illustrate that those who left for Europe were largely motivated by uncertainty and unrest in their home country, though some were economic migrants. These findings, though small, nonetheless challenge the dominance of the 'pull-factor' argument.

Unaccompanied minors who remained in official reception centres were generally well cared for. The vulnerabilities they experienced en route were in part the result of their separation from parents and extended family/kinship networks. Equally, the concerns of humanitarian agencies in Greece and Italy in particular, reflect an awareness that, outside of the formal system, unaccompanied child migrants, just like other migrants, do not enjoy protection but must confront precarious situations on a daily basis.

These findings raise other questions for the protection of unaccompanied children elsewhere in Europe. Throughout our meetings in Italy and Greece, we learned of systems of exploitation which were not limited to adults. In many instances it included exploitative labour, though we also received accounts of lone individuals forced into prostitution and crime.

Unaccompanied children have particular needs and, while reception centres may offer shelter and protection, this can only be considered a temporary measure. All of the under-age minors we spoke to had been encouraged to apply for asylum. Yet, while asylum may offer a new life to migrants in Italy, the situation in Greece is distinctly less positive and the majority of those we interviewed had only intended to treat Greece as a transit point, fearing limited opportunities for integration and a sustainable livelihood. However this has begun to change with the EU-Turkey deal (some people had managed to find a niche in Athens e.g. the young Pakistani who had an uncle). Such people will depend on opportunities for resettlement and relocation in other EU states or elsewhere in North America. Few individuals expressed a wish to make their way to the UK.

Conclusion

The protection challenges facing unaccompanied and separated children cannot be underestimated. They face serious risks in transit, especially for those on the Central Mediterranean route who may be subject to smuggling, trafficking, detention and forced labour in Libya, but also once they reach Europe. Accounts of exploitation against refugee children in Italy, Greece and Serbia are far from uncommon and the most effective means of protection is for them to remain within the reception system. While this offers the possibility of seeking asylum in these countries, we must recognise that for many there is no viable future in some host countries, especially Greece. In this instance, resettlement takes on additional importance.

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