

**FOR EVERY CHILD
IN DANGER**



FAMILY REUNIFICATION AND FAILING PROTECTION

**A STUDY ON THE SITUATION FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND
FAMILY REUNION IN THE DUNKIRK CAMP FOR REFUGEES AND
MIGRANTS**

April 2017

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Safe Passage works in Italy, Greece and France to ensure vulnerable minors can reach their families through safe and legal means.

DEFINITIONS

Unaccompanied child – this study uses the phrase “unaccompanied child” to refer to the children we encountered who were travelling alone; it is not reflective of a legal definition.

Smuggler / trafficker – the children we spoke to during the course of the study did not always differentiate between a smuggler (where the purpose of moving or harbouring a child is solely monetary and the smuggler agrees to arrange illegal passage for the child into another country in exchange for financial or material benefits) and a trafficker (where the purpose is exploitation and the child is always deceived and threatened with force or coercion); as such this report cannot differentiate between the different uses of the term “passeur” which was used in the French version - it has subsequently been translated sometimes as “smuggler” and sometimes as “trafficker” in English.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following on from Unicef's 2016 Report, "Neither Safe Nor Sound" which looked at conditions for unaccompanied refugee and migrant children in northern France, this study focuses on the situation faced by children who were living in the unofficial Dunkirk camp in France and the challenges that they face as they go through the process of being reunited with their family living in the UK. In March 2017, UNICEF interviewed thirteen boys who have an on-going family reunion claim from France to the UK through the Dublin III Regulation.

The study - conducted in March, three weeks before the fire devastated the camp - illustrates what the children experienced during their journeys across Europe and what the situation was like for unaccompanied children in the Dunkirk camp. It shows the camp as a violent place, controlled by a group of Kurdish trafficking gangs.

The report finds that despite frequent contacts with the authorities in European countries on their journeys towards the UK, children are repeatedly not informed about their legal rights to protection, including their right to be reunited with their family.

Fear of detection by authorities and related fingerprinting, physical violence, detention, push-backs and deportation push children towards underground journeys constantly avoiding authorities and at the mercy of smugglers and traffickers. Coming from Kurdish Iraq and Afghanistan, all of these boys had fled conflict settings and persecution, and recounted numerous challenges and difficulties on route.

Currently, unaccompanied children anywhere in Europe are entitled to apply for a transfer of their asylum case to the country where their family member is residing, but as this study finds, most children only discover there is a legal process for reuniting with their family members by word of mouth once they reach the camp in Dunkirk, where they came into contact with volunteers from organisations such as Safe Passage and Dunkirk Legal Support Team who gave them information. Of the 13 boys interviewed, only one had heard about his legal right to family reunion before he arrived in Dunkirk, and this was only from his father in the UK who had seen a report about it on the BBC.

The children described serious abuses by the authorities en route, such as being threatened by police and police-dogs in Bulgaria, and being beaten in prison in Hungary.

An Iraqi Kurdish boy said: "In Hungary, I was locked up for 67 days in a detention centre for foreigners. They hit us every day. They banged my head against the walls. I haven't been well since then. I've lost my memory and I get dizzy spells."

The children fear detention and deportation to the first countries of the European Union they passed through or their country of origin. There was no possibility for them to apply for family reunion in the first EU countries they passed through – Hungary or Bulgaria in these cases. Once they reached Italy and France they feared having their fingerprints taken as they had heard that this would mean that, wherever they ended up, they would be sent back to the country holding their fingerprints as it was evidence of their journey.

Whether this is true in practice, it was the perception of the children we interviewed, and compounded the children's lack of trust in the authorities, which had prevented them from learning about their rights, and encouraged them to turn to smugglers and traffickers as their only perceived source of protection and their only realistic option to join family members in the UK.

But the smugglers and traffickers are not a real source of protection, and children described frequent assaults by them if they did not move quickly enough or if they could not pay. Following terrifying journeys across Europe, during which they would have to walk for days without food or adequate clothing, where many recounted panic attacks from encountering wild animals in the forests, sadly their ordeal did not end once they reached Dunkirk.

Controlled by a group of Kurdish traffickers, all of the children described the immense violence in the camp, constantly fearful of sexual abuse and of attacks with firearms, and said that there was no one, including the police, there to protect them.

One 15 year-old Afghan boy said: “They threaten me so I will pay them. There is gunfire, tear gas, knives, machetes.”

There was particularly strong pressure on the Afghan boys, who were segregated from the Kurds and forced to carry out tasks for the traffickers and to sleep on the floor of the communal kitchen.

Living in a state of limbo with nothing to do all day except focus on getting to the UK, some children interviewed felt they may have made the wrong choice by opting to reach the UK through official channels, as the process was taking so long and they didn't understand what was happening in their cases. Unsurprisingly the situation is also having a negative impact on the children's mental health and often they end up risking their lives to cross illegally to the UK from Dunkirk, even though they have ongoing legal processes.

One Kurdish boy said: “I’m regretful. It’s been 5 months since I tried to cross. And my friends have all crossed. I’m waiting for my file, I have a lawyer, but I don’t have any news”.

At the time of the research in March 2017 there were around 100 unaccompanied children in the camp. None of the boys interviewed who were going through the family reunion legal process had been given accommodation. Nor were they able to explain what was happening in their legal cases.

Families paying for these journeys to try to save these boys' lives, can end up in serious debt. For a journey from Afghanistan or from Kurdish Iraq to France they can be charged between 3,000 and 10,000 Euros and if the hope of being transferred legally to the UK does not work out, they can end up paying smugglers/traffickers a further £3,000 to £12,000 to cross from France to the UK. All the boys interviews mentioned that they would probably have to repay the money in full to the family member who lent it, and although all want to study, they risk economic exploitation when they arrive in the UK in order to pay their debts.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT:

- Work with its European counterparts to quickly, and in the best interests of children, to ensure family reunion processes work to protect children in Europe
- Work with its European Counterparts to ensure that authorities in the countries through which the children pass give children information about their rights in a language and format they understand, including their right to apply for family reunion
- Provide the necessary resources to support prompt and more efficient identification of children in Europe with the right to family reunion, and accompaniment of these children through the legal and bureaucratic processes.
- Work with its European counterparts to strengthen child protection systems in Europe, including guardianship mechanisms, identification systems and referral pathways for children who may have been trafficked or experienced violence, exploitation and abuse, appropriate reception facilities and accommodation that do not involve detention, psychosocial support, and best interest determination processes, so that children start having more trust in authorities and less trust in smugglers and traffickers.
- Amend the UK's Immigration Rules to ensure that children living in conflict-affected regions can reunite safely and legally with their family members in the UK by applying from their places of residence, rather than having to risk their lives on dangerous journeys to Europe to apply from there.

UNICEF'S SIX POLICY ASKS FOR UPROOTED CHILDREN

- Protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence.
- End the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating by introducing a range of practical alternatives.
- Keep families together as the best way to protect children and give them legal status.
- Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services.
- Press for action on the underlying causes of large-scale movements of refugees and migrants.
- Promote measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries of transit and destination.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

After the “Neither Safe Nor Sound”¹ study, published last June, was carried out, UNICEF UK asked Trajectoires to measure the advances in child protection for children in the Linière Camp (Grande-Synthe) who had started a family reunification procedure in the UK. The chosen approach involved prioritising what the children had to say by carrying out semi-structured interviews with 13 of them in a confidential location and with external translators.

Since the sample size was limited, the conclusions cannot be generalised for all of the children at the Grande-Synthe site, estimated at around one hundred by organisations on the ground. The aim of this qualitative work was to better pinpoint the experiences of the children involved in a family reunification procedure, the obstacles and difficulties that explain why they were not engaged with this process before arriving in Grande-Synthe and the risks that they are facing throughout their journey and in the camp.

PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

13 children (6 of Afghan origin and 7 of Kurdish origin) were interviewed. Their names have been changed. Interviews were carried out with:

- Médecins Du Monde
- AFEJI (managing the Linière Camp)
- Legal Support
- La Cimade
- Youth center

ORIGINS AND PROFILES OF THE CHILDREN AND REASONS FOR LEAVING

In the Linière Camp, unaccompanied children are mainly from one of two nationalities: Iraqi (Kurdish) and Afghan (mainly Pashtun). 13 children were interviewed, all children who are being supported in a family reunification procedure by the organisation *Safe Passage*.

THE AFGHAN CHILDREN

Six Afghan children were interviewed (five Pashtuns and one Hazara), two are 15 years old, three are 16 years old, and one is 17 years old.

Among the 6 Afghan children, only one has a level of education equivalent to secondary standard. The others have never been to school or only went to primary school. This means that only one of the children knows how to read and write fluently.

Among these 6 children, four come from villages, one lived in a camp in Pakistan for 15 years and one comes from a town.

With the exception of the young person whose family were refugees in Pakistan and who originates from Panjshir, all come from the East of the country, the area bordering Pakistan. They come from relatively poor rural environments where school access is limited to Koranic madrasas.

Sociologically, the profile of young Afghans has changed when compared with the “Neither Safe Nor Sound”² study, carried out less than a year ago when the children came from urban middle classes and had a level of schooling equal to secondary of sixth form. The children interviewed come from the provinces of Laghman, Paktia and Nangarhar near the city of Jalalabad.

These three provinces are among the most dangerous in Afghanistan. They have all recently been affected by the arrival of the Taliban. The province of Paktia was the location of repeated Taliban attacks in August 2016 as reported by the New York Times³.

The province of Laghman is known as the area where the Taliban and ISIL⁴ are fighting for control of the territory⁵. This is reflected by attacks⁶, as well as pressure on families to enlist their sons in these armed groups. Lastly, Nangarhar province, whose capital is Jalalabad, is experiencing a situation similar to that of Laghman province.

The Taliban are extorting families and seeking to recruit young people in order to fight ISIL which is about to establish itself in the area, as recently reported by the BBC⁷ and Foreign Policy⁸. This insecurity has led to an increase in unemployment and poverty, pushing many family patriarchs to go begging in Jalalabad⁹



FLEEING RECRUITMENT OF AFGHAN CHILDREN BY THE TALIBAN

The reasons given by the Pashtun children for leaving are linked to the risks of being recruited by the Taliban. Although there is still an accumulation of factors that explain their reasons for leaving, the safety factor corroborated by the geographical origin seems to be the main one.

“In my village, the Koranic school has become fundamentalist since the Taliban took control of it. I don’t have anything against Koranic schools but I know that they (the Taliban) wanted to recruit me. My father was the one who told me to stop going to school but the Taliban pressured him to get him to send me back to the madrasa. My father is a labourer, he isn’t powerful and it’s very hard for him to oppose the Taliban. So he preferred me to go to London to stay with my maternal uncle who lives there. He’s the one who paid for my journey to Europe”.

Kaga 15, Paktia province, Afghanistan

“Everyone in my district knew my grandfather. If you go there, you say his name and everyone will remember him. He was threatened by the Taliban on multiple occasions because my father worked for the (government) army. The Taliban were making demands to my grandfather for my father to join them. My grandfather didn’t want to consider this. He was killed by the Taliban. My father recently disappeared, I don’t know if he’s dead or not. The Taliban made it known that they still wanted to recruit me. My brother in law borrowed money to help me leave. Before he died, my grandfather told him that it was him who should protect me”.

Ahmed, 15, Nangarhar province, Afghanistan

A different situation to the previous ones. This is a child whose family, after having lived in Pakistan for almost 30 years, was sent back to Afghanistan. According to the IOM, the Pakistani authorities have unprecedentedly been sending people back for two years: in 2016, 210,998 Afghans¹⁰ were expelled from Pakistan.

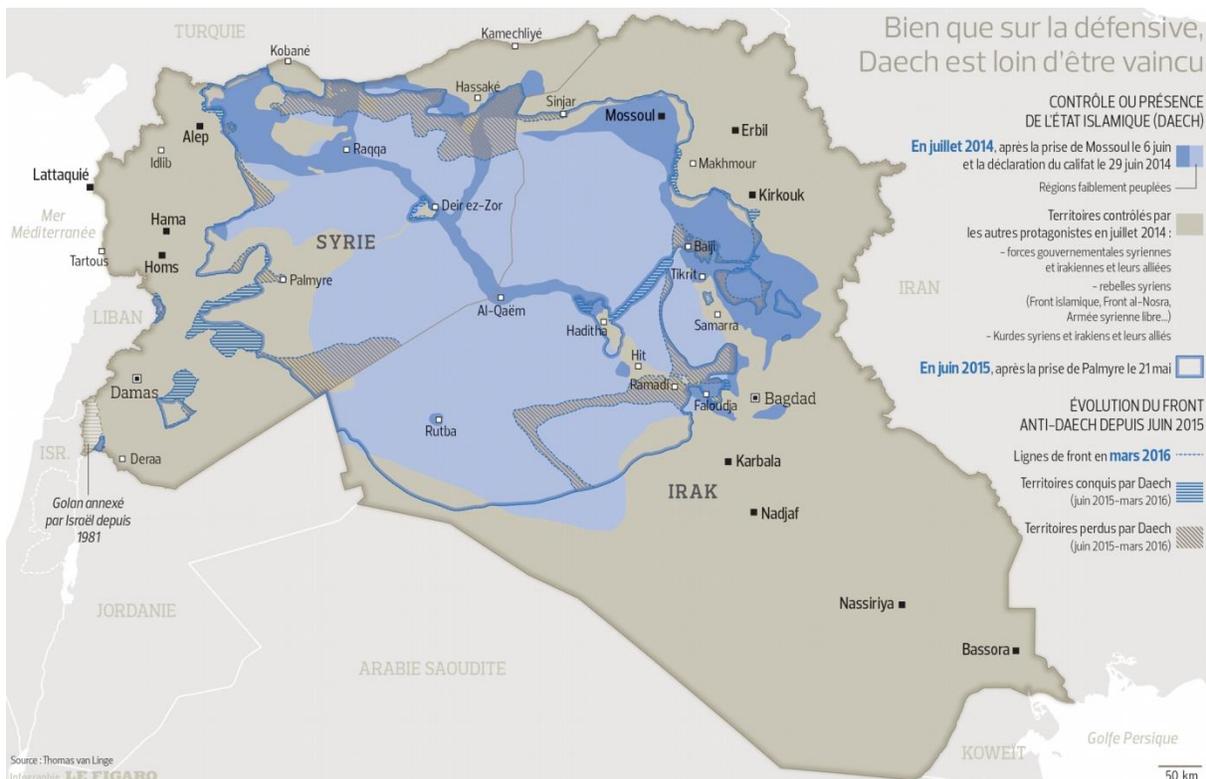
“My family is originally from the Panjshir valley. We were pro-governmental and people called us communists. When Massoud took power my parents had to flee because some of the people from my district were massacred. My family took refuge in Pakistan. I only know Pakistan, where we lived in various refugee camps. I worked in a garage for two years. One day the police arrested me when I was at work and sent me to Afghanistan without my parents. I was held for 15 days and beaten. When they let me go, my brother contacted a friend who is a people smuggler, that’s how I was able to leave”

Ahmet, 16, who lived in Pakistan until he was 15

THE KURDISH CHILDREN

Seven Kurdish children were able to be interviewed. Six are 17 years old (one of whom is almost an adult) and one is 16 and 10 months. Three of them have a level of education equivalent to primary and four of them went to secondary school.

All come from areas occupied or threatened by Jihadists from ISIL: six from the Jalawla region (near the border with Iran) and one from the Sinjar region (Syrian border).



Source Le Figaro, 28/03/2016

“Jalawla is strategic because it is a gateway to Baghdad”, Shirko Merwais, a Senior Kurdish political party official told Agence France Presse¹¹. There has been violent combat in this area in the north of Iraq since 2014 between the Kurdish Peshmergas and the jihadists to take control of the towns¹².

The Sinjar region has also experienced violent combat. This town has been 80% destroyed by coalition bombardments. The only child from our sample who comes from this area, had to leave his village near Sinjar, a few weeks before the town was liberated by some 7,500 Iraqi Kurdish fighters, supported by Yazidi militia and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) at the end of 2015¹³.

THE KURDISH CHILDREN FACED WITH THE ADVANCE OF ISIL

Five had to leave their villages in a hurry following the advance of ISIL during 2016 and were placed in refugee camps in the north of Iraq or with friends or family members in safer areas.

“After the arrival of Daesh¹, we left with all of the members of my family to stay in a refugee camp in Alyawa in Khanaqin”.

Youssef 16 and a half, Jalawla region.

Among them, three lost contact with their families, and were all alone amidst this chaos.

“At the time of the attack, I was playing football with my friends, the pitch was thirty minutes from my village. I then fled with other residents towards the Turkish border. I found out several weeks after that my mother had fled to Zakho¹ with my brothers and sisters”.

Hariwan, 17, comes from a village near Sinjar

Three of the children interviewed lost their fathers, Peshmerga, in combat. One saw his father and two of his brothers murdered by jihadists.

“I had left to play football with my friends. Suddenly, people were panicking and running. Daesh had come to the village. I rushed home and when I got there I saw men killing my father and two of my brothers. My mother and another one of my brothers were not at home, they had gone out to do some shopping. So I fled. A man from my village helped me and took me to Kalar¹”.

Aram 17, comes from a village near Jalawla

DEPARTURES OF KURDISH CHILDREN LINKED TO FAMILY PROBLEMS OR VENDETTA

Even though the Kurdish children come from regions affected by the conflict between ISIL and the Kurdish forces, two have told us that they left for other reasons. One was evasive but mentioned the fact that he had received death threats. We can infer that the child fled because of a history of vendetta, a crime committed for honour, which is still a strong tradition in the Kurdish regions¹⁴.

Another, after his father remarried, experienced violence at the hands of his step mother. When his father, a Peshmerga, died, he was chased from the house by his step mother.

AN UNCLEAR MIGRATION PROJECT

The interviews show that the migration project is not clearly defined for at least three Kurdish children. This situation can be explained by the hurried departure of these young people and by their separation from other family members. In order to flee the conflicts, they head towards northern Europe with the sole aim of protecting themselves. It is in a subsequent phase that the migration project is gradually being defined and they leave in search of a family member living in Great Britain that they do not know very well. Once they reach **the Linière camp, most of the children discover by word of mouth that there is a legal reunification procedure.**

“After the Daesh attack, I fled with some other villagers. We spent a night on the Turkish border on the Kurdish side (Iraq) then the border was opened by the Turkish authorities. We then went to a refugee camp in Mersin (Turkey). Not hearing anything from my mother and not knowing how to join her, I didn’t know what to do. A couple offered to help me. They passed me off as their son with the authorities and took me with them up to Istanbul. I didn’t know where to go. I remembered my uncle and I knew he lived in Europe. And for me, Europe was like Kurdistan. After staying in Istanbul for two weeks with a people smuggler, who agreed to take care of me for free because of what happened to my father (a Peshmerga who died in combat), I was able to reach Hungary by going through Bulgaria and Serbia. I was arrested. I was held for 67 days by the Hungarian authorities. I was with someone else who was being detained, of English nationality and Kurdish origin who was arrested when he went to look for his brother in Kurdistan. When we were freed, when I looked on the Facebook account of my former co-detainee, I found my uncle and I was able to get his details. After I contacted him, he suggested that I join him in Great Britain and he is helping me with my journey.”

Hariwan, 17, comes from a village near Sinjar

GUIDED BY PEOPLE SMUGGLERS

Without an exact destination, the child finds himself wandering, guided by people smugglers. Giro’s journey is eye-opening.

“I wanted to leave for Europe. My cousin helped me by giving me money, I don’t know how much, and he took it upon himself to contact a people smuggler. I took a car up to the Turkish border. We crossed the border on foot. We crossed Turkey on foot and by car. We took a boat and arrived in Bulgaria. It took us 4-5 days to reach Sofia (Bulgaria). Then, after walking through the night we arrived in Serbia, and then Austria in three days. After Austria, I arrived in Malmö (Sweden) where I was arrested”.

Giro, 17, Kurd from Iraq

And even when the migration project seems better thought out, the child can find himself at an impasse.

“It was my father who sorted everything out. I arrived in Germany by passing through Turkey and Bulgaria. I don’t know the other countries. We arrived in Norway. We went through Norway to get to Great Britain. The people smuggler did nothing. I was stuck in Norway for two months. I went down to Sweden to get here”.

Harian, 17, Kurd from Iraq

Summary information

- The Afghan children mainly come from rural areas where access to education is limited. They are fleeing an environment, which has become more and more dangerous because of persecutions which for them mean a risk of being forcibly recruited by the Taliban and death threats for their family if they refuse.
- Iraqi Kurdish children mainly come from conflict areas, their reasons for leaving seem to be more forced than chosen (ISIL attack, loss of a parent, family disagreement, etc.) as well as the choice of final destination.
- Among all the children questioned, their coming to the United Kingdom is linked to having a family member there, more or less close.

A ROUTE MARKED BY DANGER AND VIOLENCE

As we wrote in the study “Neither Safe Nor Sound”¹⁵, there are two kinds of route: The “guaranteed” route, or a more uncertain route managed by the child himself, who gets to different points of the route by his own means and who negotiates directly with the local people smugglers. In the so-called guaranteed¹⁶ route, the people smuggler negotiates with the local people smugglers by telephone at each point of the route. The local people smugglers never appear in order to limit the risk of criminal prosecution. They pay intermediaries, who serve as guides to take children from one border to another, without crossing them. These people are known as “uncle” by the Afghan children.

They can accompany groups of up to 40 children. The other, longer and more risky route, but one which is cheaper, costs around €3,000 and for the child involves getting to different points of the route by his own means and directly negotiating with the local people smugglers. The Afghans call this the “step by step” [method]. Although this was a possible option until March 2016 (date of the Balkans route closure), since then it seems to have been abandoned by the Afghan children and their families because it is deemed to be too uncertain and dangerous.

There is a very clear difference between the Kurdish and Afghan children. The Afghan children that we interviewed all came through the so-called guaranteed route, which explains why their time spent on the route was relatively short: between 6 and 8 months before arriving in France. For the Iraqi Kurdish children, the route and the final destination seem more uncertain.

Whatever the conditions of their departure, all of the accounts mention episodes marked by fear, violence, hunger, thirst, cold, etc., which can lead to post-traumatic disorders.

"We passed over the border between Nimruz province and Iran, on foot and by pick-up. There were lots of other people. We were all crammed in. It was very hot, and there wasn't any water. In Iran I was shut up for 2 days in one place and then in another place, this lasted for 7 days. I don't know if this was to demand more money from my uncle or to hide us. It took two days to get to Turkey and we stayed there for one month in a house rented by the people smugglers near the Bulgarian border. We tried to get to Bulgaria many times. Once we succeeded but we were arrested by the police in Bulgaria. There were German and Bulgarian police. When the Germans left, the Bulgarians took us aside and kicked us and threatened us with their dogs¹. They took our fingerprints and sent us back to Turkey. We were put in a governmental camp there where adults and children were mixed. There were six of us in the room: four adults and two children. After 20 days we were taken to Istanbul by coach and left there. We found the people smugglers and then ended up passing through Bulgaria covertly. We walked for 7 days in the forest to get to Serbia. It was very cold. I was very hungry and I was afraid of wild animals. In Serbia we lived in disused hangars for almost 3 months. We tried to pass through Croatia more than twenty times, and then we finally went through Hungary. We crossed the country in a truck. There were about twenty of us. In Austria, the police arrested us. The police officers told us to go back to Hungary and then they left. We stayed in Austria for 7 days. We slept in parks and under bridges. We then went through Italy to Milan and then Ventimiglia. From there, we hid in the train and arrived in Avignon (France). We then took the train to Paris. We stayed there for 8 days. We slept under bridges with people from Sudan in Jaurès or in the station. There were some people who gave us food and blankets. I finally arrived in Dunkirk 3 months ago".

Kaga ,15, Paktia province, Afghanistan

THE SITUATION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN ALMOST NEVER TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT ON THE JOURNEY

The interviews show that several children were in contact with the authorities on numerous occasions during their journey to reach Great Britain. In most cases, their very young appearance leaves no doubt as to their underage status. Yet, the authorities in countries in the south-east and east of Europe do not take underage status into account. Even worse, children can be put under pressure to say that they are over-age and request asylum.

“I was arrested in Bulgaria. They put me in a cell for 48 hours, then in a detention centre for foreigners. I was made to say that I was over-age and ask for asylum. They took my fingerprints. I was released after 12 days and was taken to a camp for asylum seekers”.

Chalow, 17, Iraqi Kurdish region of Jalawla

Children can also experience violence.

“In Hungary, I was locked up for 67 days in a foreigners’ imprisonment site. They hit us every day. They banged my head against the walls. I haven’t been well since then. I’ve lost my memory and I get dizzy spells”.

Hariwan, 17, Iraqi Kurdish region of Jalawla, comes from a village near Sinjar

The interviews show that the children are not able to make an application for family reunification in the first countries of the EU that they pass through: Hungary or Bulgaria. Then, the Italian or French authorities are perceived as wanting to send the migrants (adults or children) back to the countries in which their fingerprints were taken. This real or imaginary pressure does not encourage children to approach the authorities to obtain information about their rights.

Violence by “uncles” can be added to the harshness of the conditions described. “Uncles” are responsible for taking them from one border point to another.

“If you are too slow, he hits you. You have to obey him or he’ll hit you”.

Ahmet, 16, lived in Pakistan until he was 15

The children try to develop protection strategies by travelling in a group for example.

“The people smugglers make the girls and boys have sex with them. They hit you if you disobey their orders. (...) We always travelled in groups of six for protection. There were cousins of mine and neighbours. We made sure we were never alone”.

Can, 16, Laghman province

For their entire journey, the children are completely dependent on the people smugglers and their accomplices, who take care of everything (lodging, food and passage). They do not feel protected by anyone and are therefore unable to refuse to do what they are told. Some speak of children abandoned by people smugglers in the mountains or forests because they were not walking fast enough or because they were injured.

The relationships with the authorities of the countries passed through do not encourage them to ask for protection. In addition to the violence described at the hands of some police officers, the fear of having to provide their fingerprints is very strong. For them, this is synonymous with the impossibility of regularisation in Great Britain.

“After several attempts to enter Croatia [from Serbia], I managed to get through but the Serbian authorities arrested me. Because I refused to give my fingerprints, the police put me in prison [probably a detention centre] for 7 days, and then I was sent back to Croatia.”

Can, 16, Laghman province

Finally, in the six interviews carried out with the Afghan children, four young people said they had experienced fear when seeing wild animals while passing through the forests in Bulgaria. In fact, in order to escape the police, the people smugglers made the children walk through the Bulgarian forests bordering the European E80 road for several days. This is how they entered Serbia, at the small town of Dimitrovgrad. Since this road became used more and more, the Bulgarian police have started to monitor it often, accompanied by dogs. The people smugglers therefore try to get their group to cross as quickly as possible, making them walk at night in order to avoid them getting caught.

Summary information

There are three main risks experienced by the children along their route:

- the authorities (violence and arbitrary detention)
- the relationship with the people smugglers/traffickers (violence, abandonment, endangerment, exploitation, sexual abuse)
- the conditions (walking, hunger, cold, fear panic, etc.).

There is a much degraded view of the authorities in all of the countries through which they passed. The children interviewed all fear the police (many children describe the violence that they suffered at the hands of the police). They are afraid of detention and being sent back to the first countries of the European Union that they passed through (Bulgaria, Hungary) or to their country of origin. Only one child told us that his father had talked to him about this procedure when he was in Serbia. His father, who lives in the United Kingdom, discovered this possibility from a BBC report. For all the others, it was upon reaching the camp that they learnt about the existence of the family reunification procedure and finally trusted external people who are part of organisations and often volunteers.

IN THE CAMP: VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION AND SEGREGATION



Photo credit: Voix du Nord

The camp is made up of wooden bungalows¹⁷ which can accommodate between 4 and 8 people. There are also collective “kitchens” (long buildings with white roofs on the right side of the photo) and a blue container (middle of the photo) which serves as an emergency shelter for new arrivals. The other buildings are offices and activity rooms for the various staff. In the “Neither Safe Nor Sound” study, we underlined the particularity of the Grande-Synthe camp, which since it appeared, at the time at the Basroch site, was controlled by groups of Iraqi Kurdish traffickers.

Although the camp was moved to the Linière site and the State provides financing for the running of the site, this influence is still very present as evidenced by the frequent settling of scores including one of the most recent ones on 3 March 2017 when five people including a security guard were injured with a firearm¹⁸.

This violence is evoked in all of the interviews with the children.

“The Kurdish gangs are very dangerous. They have weapons. Every third evening there are gunshots. The police don’t want to get involved. I know in any case that they are not there to protect us”.

Can, 16, Laghman province

“I feel more in danger here than in Afghanistan, they threaten me so that I pay them. There are gunshots, tear gas, knives, machetes”.

Ahmed, 15, Nangarhar province, Afghanistan

“I put myself in the area from 1 to 50 on the ground (where the bungalows are visible by the external staff). It’s too dangerous further up”

Aram, 17, Iraqi Kurdish child

According to the interviews, the traffickers put a lot of pressure on everyone to pay them money in order to get in.

“In the camp if you don’t pay you can’t stay. You have to pay to get in. The Kurds amuse themselves by gassing us in the kitchens. If you don’t obey orders you’ll get yourself beaten. Some people pay 3,000 pounds, others up to 9,000. I know children who have been chucked out of the camps because they couldn’t pay. (...)”

Ahmed, 15 Nangarhar province, Afghanistan

Even though all the children are afraid, the pressure put on the Afghan children is particularly strong.

“I don’t have any money and they know so they leave me alone”

Giro, 17, Iraqi Kurdish child

The Afghan children are made to carry out all kinds of small jobs on a daily basis.

“We get hit or gassed regularly by the Kurds [the trafficking gangs]. In the camp, it’s us who have to collect water for the Kurds, make them tea, coffee, do shopping and clean their cabin. Yesterday we were gassed [they were rubbing their eyes throughout the whole interview]. I went to see the camp management to complain but the people in charge said that they didn’t see anything. Day or night, I know that they could hit me for nothing at any time”.

Yusuf, 16, Laghman province, Afghanistan

As we have already pointed out, all the Afghan children that we have met were sleeping in collective kitchens, sometimes even on the floor. After we went there we were able to see that only the Afghans and Pakistanis were subject to these conditions. This segregation would again be because of the groups of traffickers that control the camp.

“I sleep in kitchen 3 most often on the floor. At the start, I was in a bungalow, there were 6 of us [they had taken the place of other Afghans who had probably managed to pass]. After a while the Kurdish gangs saw us and made us go and sleep in the kitchen”

Ahmet, 16, lived in Pakistan until he was 15

Although none of the children have directly spoken about sexual abuse in the camp, some allusions they made lead to believe that there is risk of rape.

“In the evening some traffickers come to the camp. They’ve been drinking, they take you to their cars and say that they’re going to get you across.” He didn’t want to say anymore because according to him “it’s too dangerous to talk about it”.

Jawad, 17, province of Nangarhar, Afghanistan

Summary information

- The children feel insecure in the camp, an insecurity that may be heightened depending on their nationality and / or the area in which they sleep
- The Afghan children are victims of segregation, they are forced to sleep in collective kitchens
- They are subject to violence on a daily basis (tear gas, shots, etc.)
- Some of them talk about forms of domestic exploitation (cleaning, shopping, making tea), and express their fear of sexual abuse.
- The feeling of a lack of protection on the part of the camp manager and the police is common among all of the children interviewed.

THE RISKS LINKED TO CROSSING

Crossing over to Great Britain is the obsession. Some children have fantasies of their future life on the other side of the Channel, of which they have a very vague image when they are interviewed. And although they have sometimes been offered protection in northern European countries, they nevertheless preferred to flee to get to Dunkirk or Calais, migration points necessary for getting to Great Britain.

"I stayed in Sweden for a year. I had somewhere to live, I was fed. For almost a year, nobody came to do interviews. So I didn't want to stay. I prepared to leave and went to the Kurds who were in the same place as me".

Giro, 17, Iraqi Kurdish child

"When I was arrested in Norway they put me in a camp for children. But I didn't want to stay. I wanted to leave as quickly as possible to go to Great Britain".

Harian, 17, Kurd from Iraq

Aware that family reunification will not happen for some of them, they try to cross before reaching the age of 18.

"I have 45 days left [until adulthood]. I try every evening. By training with the human smugglers I've seen how to do it. I slip under the lorries".

Aram, 17, Iraqi Kurdish child

The children find themselves at an impasse between hope and resignation. They are desperate. Their days are punctuated by attempts to cross, eating meals, talks with volunteers, football games...

"I'm regretful. It's been 5 months since I tried to cross. And my friends have all crossed. I'm waiting for my file, I have a lawyer, but I don't have any news".

Jiwal, 17, Iraqi Kurdish child

Behind their discourse an impression of having made the wrong decision by opting for the official route emerges. They talk of their friends who paid human smugglers and quickly arrived in Great Britain. For them, their choice to take the official route is often felt as uncertain and synonymous with lost time.

The danger is real. A child told us that a video is circulating. You can see a man filming himself with his phone, hidden under a lorry. The crossing seems to be going well when the phone is suddenly ejected and continues filming. It can be inferred that the man was crushed by the lorry.

“Crossing over to Great Britain is between 3,000 pounds (€3,500) and 12,000 pounds (€14,000). But for 3,000 pounds, it’s a scam, you could end up in Germany and you have to get back yourself”.

Aram, 17, Iraqi Kurdish child

A FEELING OF DISTRESS AND ABANDONMENT IN THE ABSENCE OF EFFECTIVE CHILD PROTECTION

Officially, there are no unaccompanied children in the Grande-Synthe camp. Yet, all of the agencies with whom we met agree in estimating that there are around one hundred unaccompanied children at the site.

For child protection in the camp, several layers of bureaucracy are involved. Everything has to go through AFEJI, which manages the refugee camp¹⁹. When an unaccompanied child is identified, he must present himself to AFEJI. He is then initially placed in a container in very basic conditions (this place is not suited for housing people, there are no beds or toilets, etc.).

This temporary “sheltering” (the unaccompanied child can stay there for a few days) tries to respond to the non-existence of protection measures for unaccompanied children. Then, the unaccompanied child is informed by AFEJI of what happens next if the child accepts official sheltering as part of child protection.

This process enshrined in the child protection law leads to the child’s case being sent to the EMA²⁰ cell in Lille which is responsible for evaluating whether the child is under 18 and whether s/he is unaccompanied when this child is identified in the Nord department - Local Authority – Nord (North).

Since the start of 2017, a new measure, known as Trajet, has been implemented in the entire Nord department in order to protect unaccompanied children. Three stages have been implemented:

- An initial sheltering and evaluation phase. 22 places are anticipated. Unaccompanied children under the age of 16 and those who are the most vulnerable are prioritised. In view of the number of places, the measure can quickly become saturated with too many children for too few places. There is also the issue of transferring the unaccompanied children to this cell based in Lille.
- A second phase when the child is assessed to be under 18 and unaccompanied, a provisional measure can be put in place while waiting for a decision from the Nord department. 60 places are available in all centres of the department.
- A third phase after the department has made its decision. A Provisional Placement Decree is taken and the child can receive a shared studio or flat and receive an education. 350 places are anticipated.

This measure is managed by three associations:

- AFEJI
- SPREN Lille
- EPDSAE

Since it has only been in place for several weeks, it is difficult to assess the relevance and effectiveness of this measure yet²¹.

For the unaccompanied children left in the camp, estimated at about one hundred, only a few psycho-social activities are proposed by Médecins du Monde and the Youth Center. The on-site school projects are only for young children (kindergarten) or are literacy courses for adults.

Unaccompanied children who want to go to school have to join a traditional teaching class at the schools in town. They can make use of a shuttle to get there. But because they don't speak French, it is impossible for them to follow the classes aimed at French pupils.

CHILD PROTECTION AND REUNIFICATION

Beyond support for a child in danger, an unaccompanied child can benefit from Regulation (EU) No. 604/2013 of 26 June 2013 known as “Dublin III”. This regulation establishes the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for assessing an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by persons from a third country or stateless persons. Article 8 thereof sets out various possibilities for unaccompanied children and their support²². The Member State responsible is the one:

- in which a family member or the brothers and sisters of the child are residing legally;
- in which a relative of the child is residing legally, provided that it is established that this person is able to take care of the child ;
- if there are no family members, brothers or sisters, or relatives, the Member State in which the unaccompanied child has lodged his application for international protection.

THE DUBLIN REGULATION

The current Dublin III regulation sets out the specific rules for determining the State responsible for assessing the applications for international protection lodged by children whose brothers, sisters, other family members or relatives reside in EU territory²³.

The State which receives the child must first verify if a family member, brother, sister, or, failing these, a “relative” regularly resides in a Member State and can take care of the child²⁴. In fact, because of the restrictive interpretation of “family” held by the British authorities²⁵, it is difficult for certain categories of relatives to join family²⁶ on the other side of the Channel.

As we have already highlighted in the “Neither Safe Nor Sound” report, this family reunification procedure is long (notably because of the appointment of an ad-hoc administrator/guardian) and complicated. It is often poorly managed and may raise false hopes among children. The first family reunification processes for children in Dunkirk were only started in September 2016 by La Cimade²⁷.

None of the boys interviewed, who are all engaged in a family reunification process, receives shelter while his case is being assessed. Moreover, none are able to explain how the files are progressing. This is obviously because of the complexity of this type of file and the arduousness of the administrative procedure. The high number of people involved and turnover of people²⁸ responsible for following up on the cases of the unaccompanied children are also destabilising the young people, contributing to a feeling of abandonment.

MENTAL HEALTH AND LACK OF RESPONSE

As we recalled in the “Neither safe Nor Sound” study, the precariousness of the living conditions and the fact that there is no access to schooling or regular meaningful occupation have a direct impact on the psychological health and mental fragility of the children. Difficulties sleeping lead to psychological disorders that could be dangerous for their health.

Many unaccompanied children, because of the crossing attempts or nocturnal activities on the sites, live in a displaced state, going to bed systematically around 2 or 3 in the morning and getting up at 11 or 12. Intellectual inactivity and the wait for a potential crossing lead to an increase in stress and depressive behaviours in young people.

The progressive reduction in services of Médecins Du Monde and Médecins Sans Frontières in the Linière Camp have not been sufficiently replaced by State services. Mental health and medical care for unaccompanied children is almost non-existent. Yet, it has become very clear to us that this need for accompaniment is a necessity.

Many unaccompanied children have experienced traumatising situations during their migratory route and staying in the Linière Camp is far from being synonymous with the end of feelings of insecurity.

During the interviews, many unaccompanied children have been opening up for the first time. They were unable to evoke their experiences, their anxieties, the heartbreak of being separated from their families. There is a high risk of mental breakdown which could translate into acts of self-harm or aggressiveness against others, episodes of chronic depression, etc.

The presence of health professionals on site as well as the presence of translators trained on these matters during consultations are necessary for identifying the children who are most at risk and allowing them access to psychological monitoring.

THE POTENTIAL DANGERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The Repayment of Debt and Risks of Human Trafficking

Although few children wished to touch on the amounts spent by the uncle or brother, those described (by two of the children) have corroborated the information from the “Neither Safe Nor Sound” study. Coming to France would cost between €8,000 and €10,000. This amount includes crossing borders and additional amounts throughout the journey.

The cost of crossing from France to the United Kingdom, which ranges from €3,000 to €12,000, sometimes higher if the human smugglers learn that the children come from rich families, must be added to this amount.

According to our interviews, all of the children met know that they will have to repay this amount in full to the family member who lent it to them. Although all of the young people say that they want to study and then help their uncle, those over the age of 16 and illiterate are at a high risk of becoming victims of economic exploitation. They will probably be forced to work covertly in businesses belonging to Afghan and Kurdish diasporas for no pay for several years in order to pay back the debt incurred during the migratory journey.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT:

- Work with its European counterparts to quickly, and in the best interests of children, to ensure family reunion processes work to protect children in Europe
- Work with its European Counterparts to ensure that authorities in the countries through which the children pass give children information about their rights in a language and format they understand, including their right to apply for family reunion
- Provide the necessary resources to support prompt and more efficient identification of children in Europe with the right to family reunion, and accompaniment of these children through the legal and bureaucratic processes.
- Work with its European counterparts to strengthen child protection systems in Europe, including guardianship mechanisms, identification systems and referral pathways for children who may have been trafficked or experienced violence, exploitation and abuse, appropriate reception facilities and accommodation that do not involve detention, psychosocial support, and best interest determination processes, so that children start having more trust in authorities and less trust in smugglers and traffickers.
- Amend the UK's Immigration Rules to ensure that children living in conflict-affected regions can reunite safely and legally with their family members in the UK by applying from their places of residence, rather than having to risk their lives on dangerous journeys to Europe to apply from there.

UNICEF'S SIX POLICY ASKS FOR UPROOTED CHILDREN

- Protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence.
- End the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating by introducing a range of practical alternatives.
- Keep families together as the best way to protect children and give them legal status.
- Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services.
- Press for action on the underlying causes of large-scale movements of refugees and migrants.
- Promote measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries of transit and destination.

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- ² “Ni sains, ni saufs”, Trajectoires/UNICEF 2016
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- ⁴ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
- ⁵ <http://www.pressestv.ir/Detail/2016/12/25/503381/Afghanistan-Taliban-Daesh-Laghman>
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- ¹⁰ https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/Reports/iom_undocumented_afghan_returns_-_weekly_situation_report_28_october_2016_0.pdf
- ¹¹ http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2014/08/25/l-onu-denonce-le-nettoyage-ethnique-et-religieux-de-l-etat-islamique-en-irak_4476330_3218.html
- ¹² <https://warisboring.com/the-battle-for-jalawla-never-ends-a9db4511bacf#.k3gyg4x13>
- ¹³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/34806556>
- ¹⁴ Benoît FLICHE, “Écraser le serpent ?” [Crushing the serpent?], ÉTUDES RURALES [RURAL STUDIES], 186 | 2010, 197-208.
- ¹⁵ “Ni Sains, Ni Saufs”, Trajectoires/UNICEF 2016
- ¹⁶ The guaranteed route would cost between €8,000 and €10,000 from Afghanistan to Europe, €8,000 from Iraqi Kurdistan to Europe.
- ¹⁷ called shelters
- ¹⁸ <http://www.lavoixdunord.fr/126828/article/2017-03-03/coups-de-feu-dans-le-camp-de-la-liniere-plusieurs-blesses>
- ¹⁹ A lot of worrying information and signals have been sent by La Cimade and Legal Support. Referrals to children’s judges have also been made. Each time, the Departmental Board requires that the unaccompanied children pass through the AFEJI and EMA filter.
- ²⁰ The Evaluation and Protection Cell
- ²¹ We have been unable to interview the director of AFEJI on the implementation of this measure
- ²² www.infomie.net
- ²³ in practice usually limited to mother/father, sibling, grandparent, aunt/uncle
- ²⁴ www.myria.be/les/Migration-rapport-2015-focus-enfant-dublin.pdf
- ²⁵ Many operators including La CIMADE have stated that up to now the family reunification procedures with the United Kingdom works for links with immediate relatives (father, mother, brother, sister) more easily than for uncles and aunts.
- ²⁶ www.france-terre-asile.org/images/stories/accompagnement-hebergement/pdf/rapportFTDA/rapport-calais-bbc-ftda-09-2009.pdf
- ²⁷ Even though family reunification procedure files were launched from 2015 for children in the Calais “jungle”.
- ²⁸ It is mostly volunteers who ensure that the young people’s cases are followed up during the family reunification procedure on the ground in Linière.