FROM FAITH TO ACTION

Inter-religious conference to protect the rights of children affected by migration

FROM FAITH TO ACTION: INTER-RELIGIOUS ACTION TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY MIGRATION WITH A FOCUS ON EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities

unicef ✪ | for every child

World Council of Churches

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCME – Churches' Commission for Migration in Europe

ECARO – Europe and Central Asia Regional Office

EHO – Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization in Serbia

FBO – faith-based organization

ICMC – International Catholic Migration Commission

JLI – Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities

NGO – non-governmental organization

SAR – search and rescue

UASC – unaccompanied and separated children

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

WCC – World Council of Churches

ZMD – Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This publication aims to highlight the actual and potential roles of faith actors in contributing towards an effective and holistic response to child displacement in Europe and Central Asia. These roles range from providing shelter and other material support to fostering psychosocial and spiritual wellbeing, speaking out against xenophobia, promoting peaceful coexistence, and influencing policymakers to protect the rights of children on the move.

While it must be recognised that faith actors have also played negative roles, this publication aims primarily to serve as a useful tool to improve cooperation between faith actors and other stakeholders, such as UNICEF and national authorities, in the protection of children and youth on the move.

This publication aims to highlight the actual and potential roles of faith actors in contributing towards an effective and holistic response to child displacement in Europe and Central Asia.

We developed this publication through an extensive review of academic articles, research reports, conference reports, and other documents focusing on key issues affecting young refugee and migrants and on the roles of faith actors in supporting children on the move. This publication is organized into an introductory section, a central section underlining different areas in which faith actors are engaged with some remarks on challenges and opportunities, and a final section highlighting three case studies with faith-based organizations (FBOs) working with children and youth on the move in Germany, Greece, and Serbia.

This publication illustrates a plurality of ways in which faith actors actively support children and youth on the move, namely, by ensuring their protection and social inclusion, providing spiritual and psychosocial support, countering xenophobia and discrimination, and advocating for policy changes.

Five main areas in which faith actors have a positive impact on children on the move in Europe and Central Asia

1. Providing assistance for children on the move along safe and unsafe migration routes, and when they arrive. For example, faith actors perform or fund search and rescue (SAR) operations, establish safe and legal routes for children to travel (e.g., humanitarian corridors), and provide shelter, food, and legal advice and other essential services for children and their families.

2. Facilitating integration and social inclusion by enhancing access to social services (particularly education) and bringing host communities and newcomers closer together by fostering empathy, cultivating welcoming practices, and identifying shared spaces.

3. Offering spiritual and psychosocial support that can enhance resilience, sustain a sense of belonging, and facilitate the process of migration and integration.

4. Fostering social cohesion, combating xenophobia and discrimination, promoting inter-religious dialogue, speaking out for peaceful coexistence, and addressing the root causes of conflict that have forcibly displaced children and families.

5. Advocacy to influence decision-makers towards more inclusive approaches in response to the displacement of children and families. Strategies include building inter-religious coalitions for advocacy, using their influence to speak to policymakers on migration, and advocating for the rights of children and for governments and communities to welcome refugees and migrants.

INTRODUCTION

This publication emerges from discussions in Europe and Central Asia about the role of faith actors in protecting children on the move. The content was developed in preparation for the conference From Faith to Action: Inter-religious action to protect the rights of children affected by migration with a focus on Europe and Central Asia held online on 10-11 December 2020. The primary topics include the need to safeguard and protect children, the realities of migration and forced displacement, inter-religious cooperation and the roles of faith actors, and how these threads intersect in the Europe and Central Asia region.

The "From Faith to Action" initiative is built on the principle that a child is a child, and reinforces the principle of the best interest of the child.

The publication starts with some key facts and figures on the current situation of migrants and children on the move in Europe and Central Asia. We have also included information on the impact of COVID-19 in the region. The first section ends with an overview of key issues affecting children on the move and their families. The second section presents an overview of faith-based engagements with children on the move in Europe and Central Asia. It is structured in five subsections:

- Faith actors' support to provide protection for children on the move.

- Social inclusion and access to social services.

- Spiritual and psychosocial support for children on the move.

- Faith actors' efforts to combat xenophobia and foster peaceful societies.

- The role of faith actors in policy and advocacy.

These subsections build on previous work, including the Faith Action for Children on the Move forum held in Rome in 2018[1] and the Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities Initiative (FPCC)[2], a collaboration between UNICEF, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLI), and Religions for Peace.

The next section highlights challenges and opportunities for discussion during the conference, and focuses on the five main thematic areas indicated. The publication also includes a glossary and annexes citing relevant legal and policy documents and country-specific information.

The final section includes three case studies. The first one, developed with the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization, focuses on their work in providing material and psychosocial support to children on the move in Serbia. The second one, developed with Apostoli, illustrates their engagements towards the inclusion of youth on the move in Greece. The last one, developed with the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, describes their activities, including policy and advocacy efforts, to foster social cohesion and mutual support between established communities and newcomers.

SITUATION ANALYSIS SUMMARY

In 2020, an estimated 94,800 refugees and migrants arrived Europe from countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Morocco, Tunisia, and Syria. Nearly one in every five (18.5%)[1], was a child. At the end of 2020, there were some 60,000 refugee and migrant children in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, and Serbia. Among them were 12,000 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) whose lives depended on humanitarian assistance. UNICEF and partners worked tirelessly to reach approximately 51,000 refugee and migrant children with a range of support[2] to protect their health and well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly affected the influx of refugees and migrants into Europe. UNICEF and humanitarian partners had to adapt quickly to the fast-moving situation across the Europe and Central Asia region, and ensure that children were prioritized in procedures related to disembarkation and accommodation. The European Union (EU) registered a 33% overall decrease in the number asylum applications. However, the decrease was not evenly spread across Europe, and many local communities received unexpectedly large surges of new arrivals[3].

The pandemic raised many additional concerns about the health and safety of children and families.

Refugee and migrants living close together have often faced a 'double lockdown' – with additional restrictions imposed on their confinement in settlements and camps, that compounded their stress and isolation. As classroom learning adapted to online modalities, a major challenge was connecting refugee and migrant children to education opportunities when access to Internet technology and digital devices was very difficult.

The impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional stress on humanitarian supply chains[3] and heightened risks faced by displaced populations. Children and families often live in overcrowded settings[4] with limited access to clean water, hygiene and other basic services,[5] and are often excluded from access to information.[6] Displaced children and youth are witnessing a decline in family incomes. Cuts in remittances may cause children and youth to drop out of school and seek work, migrate, or put them at risk of child marriage or trafficking.[7] Social distancing restrictions may further impede the limited education opportunities that may be available to most displaced children.[8] The lack of devices or stable internet access can be a barrier to online learning. [9]

As governments tighten border controls and impose stricter health requirements on new arrivals, some have been criticized for using COVID-19 as an excuse to toughen immigration policies, suspend asylum procedures, and retreat from international legal obligations to rescue and provide safety – as has been the case for many refugee and migrants crossing the Mediterranean.[10] Some nationalist and populist voices see refugees as transmission threats and push for hard-line immigration policies, feeding into populist rhetoric in fear of the "other."[11]

Of the 94,800 refugees and migrants who arrived in Europe in 2020, nearly one in five was a child.

At the same time, responses to COVID-19 have also played unifying role. Advocacy and humanitarian organizations continue to push for a narrative that sees the pandemic as an opportunity to expand health care and social protections for refugees and migrants.[12] Multilingual information dissemination, including health and public safety instruction, has become common practice in several European countries.[13]

Key issues faced by children on the move and their families

Exploitation (including online exploitation), smuggling and trafficking

Children on the move are exposed to great risks and are vulnerable to trafficking, smuggling and various forms of exploitation.[14] Around 75% of 14 to 17-year-old refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa to Italy experience exploitative practices such as arbitrary detention or forced labour.[15] Since digital tools are especially important for children who travel unaccompanied or separated from family, they are at high risk of online exploitation.[16]

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1 *UNHCR data for Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain as of 31 December 2020. 'Operational Portal Refugee Situations: Mediterranean situation',*

2 *UNICEF Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe Humanitarian Situation Report 2020 No. 38*

3 *https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en*

Obstacles to family reunification

Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) form a significant percentage of children on the move.[17] Although all children have the right to be with their families or guardians, obstacles to family reunification are common.[18] Family reunification processes may impose, for example, increased income requirements, expensive medical tests, restrictions on who can apply, and long waits under the Dublin regulations.[19]

Detention of refugee and migrant children

Ending detention of refugee and migrant children is one of the priorities of the international community.[20] However, in there was an increase in the number of immigration detentions of children arriving in Europe.[21] Urgent measures that are being called for include scaling up of efforts to end new detentions, the release of child detainees into non-custodial and community-based alternatives, and the improvement of conditions in detention centres where alternative measures are not possible.[22]

Access to healthcare

Children need to live in a safe environment and should have continuous access to quality healthcare. In unsafe and overcrowded living conditions, children are often exposed to heightened risks of contracting COVID-19 or the inability to access health services such as vaccination.[23]

Access to education

A quarter of children who arrived in Europe through the Central or the Eastern Mediterranean routes in 2017 had not completed any formal education, while a further 33% had only attended primary school.[24] For children on the move, access to education is crucial to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers. However, most reception centres often do not have learning facilities or teaching personnel.

Discrimination and xenophobia

Nationalistic, xenophobic, misogynistic, and explicitly anti-human rights agendas of many populist political leaders have required human rights proponents to rethink many longstanding assumptions. Highly politicised narratives that support pushback operations and restrictive policies fuel xenophobic sentiments, putting children at risk of experiencing violence and discrimination.[25] Preventing and combating xenophobia and discrimination against young refugees and migrants is crucial in efforts aimed at protecting their rights, fostering their livelihoods, ensuring access to health and education services[26] and overcoming language barriers that severely affect their social inclusion.[27]

FAITH ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

There is a consensus across religious traditions about the dignity of every child.[28] The fundamental principle of respect for human life is found in religions that believe all human beings, including children, deserve to be respected and treated with dignity, and forms the basis of faith-based motivations to support children on the move.[29]

Religious groups, institutions and practitioners have a long and proud history of protecting vulnerable migrants and families, persecuted individuals, and unaccompanied children. Under Canon Law in Medieval times, anyone who feared for their life could find sanctuary in the closest church.[30] In Europe, Belgian nuns rescued young Jews from the Nazis in the World War II,[31] and Hungarian refugees found shelter and assistance in churches in Austria and elsewhere during and after the 1956-57 crisis.[32]

Given this framework of compassion and a history of providing front-line support to vulnerable communities, it is no surprise that many governments, as well as local, national and international organizations have chosen to engage with faith actors as key partners in responding to the refugee and migration crisis in Europe and elsewhere in the world. In this section, we explore some of the ways in which religious leaders, faith communities, and FBOs are providing protection and spiritual support for children on the move, combatting xenophobia, helping to build peaceful societies and advocate for the rights of young refugees and migrants.

i. Faith actors' support to provide protection for children on the move

Faith actors contribute to enhancing child protection in multiple ways. In this section, they are outlined according to migration stages, i.e., along migration

routes and after arrival. Overall, safe and legal routes for displaced people, including children, are narrowing. For a long time, faith actors have been involved in campaigning for, organizing, and implementing sponsorship programmes for refugees. In Canada, FBOs have been a strongly involved in the private sponsorship system,[33] and similar initiatives have been established in other countries.

In 2016, an ecumenical initiative in Italy (see box 1) worked in collaboration with the government to grant a number of exceptional humanitarian visas to create a humanitarian corridor for refugees stranded in Lebanon and other countries to come to Italy. This initiative expanded to other European countries such as France, Belgium and Andorra.[34] Recently, the Community of Sant'Egidio signed an agreement with the German government to transfer refugee and migrant families from the Greek island of Samos to Germany[35] and inaugurated a new corridor from Lesvos to Italy—prioritising families and unaccompanied minors.[36]

Displaced people are often exposed to hardship along migration routes. Faith communities and FBOs are among the first to provide assistance, from the distribution of food to the provision of shelter and legal advice, especially to vulnerable groups like children.

All faiths share a tradition of providing sanctuary and assistance to strangers. This tradition lives in multiple forms today,[39] and is often characterised by a multi-religious configuration, as in the case of the City of Sanctuary UK movement.[40]

In Germany, Kirchenasyl, a highly organized network of churches[41], is ready to host refugees and migrants who risk of being deported. However, in recent years, this network has been under pressure from the German government with ongoing legal challenges, and shrinking numbers of people who have access to church asylum.[42]

All faiths share a tradition of providing sanctuary and assistance to strangers.

In Hungary, Catholic and Lutheran Bishops mobilised against the anti-refugee narrative by hosting families and individuals on the move, and providing legal advice, translation services, and assistance in finding work.[43] However, this help has been curtailed since Hungary passed a law in favour of detaining asylum seekers while their status is being determined.[44]

ii. Social inclusion and access to social services

Education is key to building peaceful societies. Faith actors play a significant role in education globally,[45] including providing education to children on the move in formal and informal contexts. Catch-up classes, language classes, and activities supported by volunteers from the faith community are often key to social inclusion and integration.[46] Faith actors, at times, associate schooling with peace building and with the prevention of trafficking and exploitation of children.[47] Jesuit Relief Services have highlighted the importance of providing education for refugee girls.[48]

However, there is also evidence that education from religious institutions has sometimes been influenced by politicisation and securitisation, and this highlights the need for teachers to receive training and support on issues such as countering extremism.[49]

Since the onset of the pandemic, online education and increased dependence on digital technologies by children have heightened the risk of online exploitation. Religions for Peace and ECPAT International have issued guidance for religious leaders on how to protect children from online sexual exploitation.[50]

Faith and Positive Change for Children offers guidance documents for religious leaders, faith communities and FBOs to help address challenges in the times of COVID-19— for example, adapting rituals, helping those at risk, and combating misinformation.[51] The World Council of Churches has issued guidance[52] that gives practical advice encouraging members to trust evidence-based guidance on COVID-19 safety, for example, following physical distancing and using technology to conduct religious services.

Box 2 - The Vaiz of Bursa, Turkey[53]

Turkey hosts 3.6 million refugees— the highest number of any country worldwide.[54] In Bursa, the government mobilises the Vaiz, a network of state preachers, to support displaced people. The Vaiz provides direct services, delivers welcoming messages to positively influence the local faith community, advocates with the Government to to let Syrians refugees access healthcare, school, and other social services,[55] and sponsors refugee children and youth events in the local community.[56]

More significantly, the state preachers have also used their influence to overcome bureaucratic and legal hurdles to the issuing of birth certificates and wedding registrations for displaced people who do not have the necessary paperwork.[57]

May countries had to divert and prioritise healthcare staff and resources to treat the sick and fight the spread of COVID-19. As a result, basic health services, including routine childhood immunization, were often temporarily suspended.[58] As these services resume, faith actors can play crucial roles in supporting immunization uptake and countering anti-vaccination narratives, including religious objections, as illustrated by numerous studies.[59]

Religious beliefs and practices can foster wellbeing and support the integration of refugee and migrant children on the move. A recent study found that young Coptic Christians in Italy highly valued their sense of belonging to their faith community, both in terms of the religious freedom in Italy and as cultural and religious identity.[60] Similarly, a study conducted in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK explained how religion can be beneficial to the social integration of Muslim migrants with their own faith/ethnic community and does not hamper integration with broader society.[61] A survey conducted among churches in 19 European countries in 2014-2015 revealed that one-third had between one in 20 and one in five young members with a migration background.[62]

Box 3 - Learning to Live Together: Arigatou Foundation, Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children, and Global Network of Religions for Children[63]

The Global Network of Religions for Children, the Arigatou Foundation and the Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children in collaboration with UNICEF, UNESCO, and education professionals and academics, including those from different religious traditions, developed a methodology to foster peaceful coexistence and mutual respect in interfaith and intercultural contexts. The methodology is used in both formal (e.g., schools) and informal (e.g., refugee camps) contexts and includes activities, interfaith prayers for peace, feedback mechanisms and learning modules on different themes.

In Greece, a similar programme named Learning to Play Together[64] has been developed using physical education and sports to engage young refugees and migrants who come from different geographic, cultural, religious and linguistic contexts.

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iii. Spiritual and psychosocial support for children on the move

Research indicates how spirituality can contribute to the resilience of children during and after their displacement.[66] Fostering resilience is particularly important for children who experience and are exposed to stress, risks and violence during their migration process—it includes developing a sense of belonging, acknowledging the importance of education and schooling, and connecting with the community.[67] Faith actors support this resilience through the provision of community, space, and resources for sustained and holistic care. Often, these spaces are designed to aid children in finding their place in society and their identity within the faith communities by offering them psychosocial and spiritual support. Another component in the building of children's identities is the ongoing incorporation of faith into psychosocial and resilience programs,[68] which provide coping strategies for children on the move.[69]

Recent research has focused on hosts, refugees and refugee hosts (i.e., refugees hosting other refugees). Research from University College London[65] examines the roles that members of local faith communities, faith leaders and FBOs can play in promoting social justice and social integration for refugees living in Cameroon, Greece, Malaysia, Mexico, and Lebanon. The study found that in Greece, members of refugee communities collect and distribute material support for other refugees, including baskets to break the fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

Box 5 - Ecumenical assistance for asylum seekers: Oekumenischer Seelsorgedienst für Asylsuchende (OeSA), Switzerland[70]

OeSA is an ecumenical organization reflecting a collaboration between the Methodist Church, the Reformed Church and the Catholic Church in Basel, Switzerland. OeSA offers several services to asylum seekers of any (or no) faith and any country of origin, including psychosocial and spiritual support during Refugee Status Determination (RSD). OeSA is also a place where asylum seekers can meet, take German lessons, attend music workshops, and where their children can attend activities organized twice a week.[71]

Volunteers working for this initiative are also "of different religious and cultural backgrounds [who can] easily share the motivating vision and the working style of the organization."[72] The sensitivity of OeSA workers towards faith-related issues has allowed them, for instance, to negotiate extra permits for Muslim asylum seekers who are staying in Registration and Procedure Centres (RPCs)[73] to stay in the mosque longer during Ramadan.

Working with the children's faith communities can help achieve integration and long-term wellbeing.[74] When building resilience and providing comprehensive psychological support for children on the move, it may be necessary for faith-based organizations and local faith communities to provide support to parents, caregivers and other adults in the children's lives. This is fundamental when responding to the needs of traumatised children.

iv. Faith actors' efforts to combat xenophobia and discrimination and to foster peaceful coexistence

The role of faith actors in the Global Compact for Refugees has been recognized within the plans of several anti-discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance measures and programs. Peer-to-peer workshops that bring together a particular group, for example, young people, new arrivals, or members of a faith community with a similar migration background can be used to strengthen such initiatives. In this way, relationships of trust create a safe environment to address issues such as religious prejudice, discrimination, and extremism—faith actors often become the main points of reference for displaced minors.[75]

Multi-religious initiatives can play a pivotal role in integration processes in countries of arrivals. The European Council of Religious Leaders and University of Winchester Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace analysed case studies featuring the cooperation of at least two organizations belonging to different religious traditions in Germany, Poland, Sweden (see box 8), and the UK. [83] The study counters the idea that faith actors only support communities of their own religious tradition, and outlines potential benefits of multi-religious cooperation in integration processes by achieving shared objectives through enhanced dialogue, and combating racism and radicalisation.[84]

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Box 6 - The work of Search for Common Ground against violent extremism among young returnees, Kyrgyzstan[76]

In Kyrgyzstan, youth radicalisation,[77] especially among labour migrants and returnees, is a key issue.[78] Search for Common Ground has been engaged in several programmes to prevent and combat violent extremism in the country. In 2016-2017, in partnership with the State Commission on Religious Affairsm (SCRA), the group implemented a project that used social media as a tool for deradicalization targeted and included young people, including returnees from Syria. An evaluation of the project suggested that, as a result, "youth participants, as well as grant recipients, expanded their knowledge about radicalisation, extremism, and fanaticism, and gained skills in critical thinking and problem-solving."[79]

In 2018, the youth-led project called #JashStan[80], supported by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, produced a reality television series turning violent and radical discourse into tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

In July 2020, Search for Common Ground announced that the European Union Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (EUIcSP) would support a two-year project,[81] which will draw on its research on the risks of radicalisation and violent extremism among Central Asian migrant workers in Russia. The project will engage religious and traditional leaders and include psychosocial support.[82]

Box 7 - Goda Grannar (Good Neighbours), Sweden

This multi-religious collaboration between the Stockholm Mosque, the Katarina parish and Islamic Relief started in 2015, as a makeshift shelter for transit migrants. It later became a much more multifaceted initiative, offering asylum seekers a wide range of services, from language cafés to counselling on issues such as employment, education and healthcare.[85] In particular, they support newly arrived families with young children to find preschool and activities to help them create a network in their new community.

After initial scepticism shown by some members of the local faith communities,[86] the collaboration has proved to be successful and has grown in numbers and even expanded to other districts and faith actors, such as the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Negashi Mosque.[87]

In addition to the more practical work on integration, members of different faith communities have started a dialogue about their religious beliefs, traditions and values through this project, which has led to improved social relationships.[88]

v. Faith actors and policy/advocacy

Faith actors are often part of networked organizations that allow them to have a strong impact within the international arena. For instance, Eurodiaconia is a European network of 52 churches and Christian NGOs[94] who are active in many areas, including migration and forced displacement. The network organizes events at the European level, and recently, published the report, Fostering Cooperation Between Local Authorities and Civil Society Actors in the Integration and Social Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees,[95] on the European Commission's European Web Site on Integration (EWSI), which consolidates information and good practices.

Eurodiaconia recommends strengthening multi-stakeholder platforms and using transparent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It also suggests promoting mutual knowledge exchange among all stakeholders involved, including migrants. In April 2020, 67 NGOs and FBOs (including the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Caritas, and HIAS Greece) signed a letter, urgently requesting the relocation of displaced children stranded in Greece to other EU member states.[96] In September 2020, a wide alliance (including Caritas Europe, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the European Council on Refugees and

Xenophobia and discrimination against refugees based on religion, nationality and ethnicity are on the rise across the region.[89] To combat stigma and discrimination, faith actors promote sensitisation and advocate against xenophobic mind-sets, as well as working to protect refugees directly from discriminatory experiences and attacks.[90] Public condemnation of xenophobic threats or attacks by religious leaders can have significant effects on faith communities and support efforts to eradicate, or, create further partnerships to counter the violence.[91]

Faith communities, particularly those that participate in interfaith initiatives can also be instrumental in reconciliation and healing following a conflict.[92] Local faith actors and interfaith councils can provide expertise within countries of origin to address root causes of conflict and displacement. They can help remove obstacles to return and address issues of reintegration in the country of origin—especially when tensions among religious and ethnic groups are still present.[93]

Exiles, the ICMC, the International Rescue Committee, the Red Cross, and the SHARE Network) released an advocacy statement to the European Commission on the situation of migrants and refugees in Europe.[97] The alliance asked for a more equitable sharing of responsibility in responding to the needs of people on the move and for safe and legal passages to Europe.[98]

Faith actors, at times, have been excluded from decision-making processes on migration at the policy level. Recently, however, governments and international organizations are more aware of the roles that faith actors play in responding to migration and forced displacement. In the 2018 Global Compacts on Refugees and on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration faith actors were included as relevant stakeholders.

Box 8 - "Faith Over Fear" movement supported by UNICEF and Religions for Peace[109]

UNICEF and Religions for Peace in 2017, launched the movement, Faith Over Fear—a global multi-religious advocacy initiative. Its aim is to spread positive messages about migration and faith to promote a welcoming culture towards displaced people among faith communities.

One example from Germany (provided by the WCC's Churches' Commitments to Children for this campaign) is a video[110] telling the story of a Christian retired couple from Bonn who met two Syrian Muslim refugees at a local church. As their friendship became stronger, the German couple decided to host the Syrians, several weeks before they had their first child. They ended up living together for over eight months and now feel that they belong to the same "extended family," celebrating Ramadan and Christmas together.[111]

The campaign also features a social media toolkit[112] to facilitate the engagement of religious leaders and faith communities who are willing to share their stories of choosing faith over fear.

A number of faith actors made recommendations during the development of the Compacts. The "Interfaith Conference on the Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees" brought together faith actors and policymakers and called for a greater acknowledgement of the roles played by FBOs.[99] The JLI published a policy brief[100] on Faith Actors and the Implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, outlining issues, examples and recommendations of burden and responsibility sharing, reception and admission, meeting needs and supporting communities, and durable solutions.

Faith actors are often part of networks making a strong impact in the international arena.

Since the Global Compacts were adopted, faith actors have released statements on the importance of following their principles and guidelines, and faith communities have been urged to act to assist migrants and refugees accordingly.[101] The 2019 Local Humanitarian Leadership forum in Beirut, Lebanon, emphasized that engaging local faith actors is in line with the commitments of the Global Compacts on Migration and on Refugees.[102] The forum emphasized the need to localize assistance to migrants and refugees by effectively engaging local faith actors.[103]

Faith actors are often involved in advocacy efforts on issues affecting children on the move. They organize themselves in coalitions and take part in multi-religious campaigns, such as campaigning against the detention of children due to their immigration status[104] or family separation,[105] and support the right to birth registration.[106] Faith actors use their influence to foster peaceful coexistence and combat violence in the name of religion through advocacy initiatives. They use statements to declare unity and speak out against xenophobia, such as the Athens Declaration, "United Against Violence in the Name of Religion—Supporting the Citizenship Rights of Christians, Muslims and Other Religious and Ethnic Groups in the Middle East." [107]

During the 2015-2016 refugee and migrant crisis in Europe, many religious leaders, faith actors and multi-faith alliances mobilised to push for a welcoming response and to fight against hostile populist reactions. For instance, in the UK, a multi-religious coalition of over 200 Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and Hindu religious leaders reacted to the refugee and migrant crisis by issuing an open letter[108] to the then Prime Minister, Theresa May. They urged the government to establish legal routes for refugees from Syria and other countries, especially for those who had family in the UK.

The study "Faith and Children's Rights", conducted by Arigatou International in collaboration with the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) and World Vision International, collected recommendations for action from religious leaders, child rights advocates, and children themselves. Participants demonstrated that the deepening of faith actors' understanding of children's rights may help communities to see the common ground between rights and religion, leading to the formation of fruitful partnerships. Such ideas can be incorporated into sermons and activities in religious communities. Faith actors can refer to legal agreements such as the Convention on the Rights of

the Child and use the power of its mandate as a tool to advance initiatives that support children and families in their communities.[113]

The expertise of faith actors can significantly strengthen policy concerning the criteria for resettlement and engagement with host communities to guarantee welcome and protection of unaccompanied or separated children. This will also ensure to put in place special measures to counter risky transit and post-arrival integration, including education and trauma healing. Such endeavours can assist in counteracting negative responses to resettlement and ensuring effective integration processes.[114]

Opportunities and Challenges

As this publication illustrates, engaging faith actors can result in more effective responses to the vulnerabilities of displaced children. To summarise, faith actors can contribute to:

- Assisting children on the move along migration routes. This includes performing or funding SAR operations, engaging in the creation and implementation of safe and legal routes, and providing basic services such as shelter, food and legal advice to children on the move and their families after arrival.

- Offering spiritual and psychosocial support that can enhance children's resilience to sustain their sense of belonging and support them through their migration process.

- Facilitating integration and social inclusion by enhancing access to social services (in particular education) and promoting empathy, welcoming practices and shared space between the host community and the newcomers.

- Fostering social cohesion and inter-religious dialogue to combat xenophobia and discrimination.

- Advocating for and influencing policy makers towards more inclusive response approaches to displaced children and their families.

Some challenges have also emerged from this review of faith actors' engagements in response to the displacement of children and their families. In particular:

Faith actors' support can be hampered by legal challenges. For example, the legal cases against Kirchenasyl (church asylum) in Germany and the increasing detention of asylum seekers in Hungary. They require help to combat the criminalisation of migrants' support.

Recognition of the plurality and nuanced nature of faith actors is critical.

Faith actors, especially faith communities, are often heterogeneous and complex entities, which can have internal tensions and challenges. These need to be identified, and, if possible, addressed through dialogue. Recognition of the plurality and nuanced nature of faith actors is critical to avoid stereotyping.

Some faith actors might lack institutional capacity required by common humanitarian standards to implement large-scale refugee response projects. When collaboration is established between international organizations and local and national faith actors that there can be opportunities for enhanced visibility, mutual understanding, finding points of complementarity, and capacity sharing.

Faith actors and their activities are not exempt from politicisation. For example, they can fuel anti-migrant sentiments to ensure the support of political actors. Their engagement can also be instrumental in achieving other actors' political agenda. To establish a long-term relationship of trust with key local faith actors, these factors need to be taken into consideration and addressed through in-depth knowledge of the local political context and trust building in the partnership.

PROMISING PRACTICE CASE STUDY #1: ECUMENICAL HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION, SERBIA

1. The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization's work with children and women on the move in Serbia

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO) is a development organization guided by Christian ethical values. A member of Act Alliance,[115] it was founded in 1993 in Novi Sad, Serbia, on the initiative of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The founding churches are the Slovak Evangelical A.B. church in Serbia, the Serbian Reformed Christian church, the Apostolic Exarchate for Greek Catholics in Serbia and Montenegro and the Evangelic Christian A.B. church in Serbia-Vojvodina. The ecumenical nature of the organization is unique in Serbia. It contributes to the expansion of its engagement, both in terms of areas and type of intervention as well as in geographical terms within Serbia. For EHO, respect for human rights and the dignity of all people is a core value.

EHO's work in Serbia is multifaceted. It ranges from fostering the inclusion and empowerment of marginalised groups such as the Roma community[116] and supporting children and the elderly[117] to peacebuilding work with young people from different ethnic and faith communities.[118] Since 2015, EHO has been assisting migrants and refugees in transit through Serbia.[119] Part of this engagement focused on children on the move and access to education in particular. A previous project[120] on social inclusion, now concluded, specifically addressed the needs of children on the move by supporting their inclusion in local schools through training local teachers in intercultural work to promote welcoming approaches and counter prejudice and discrimination. This previous project focussing on inclusion was financially supported by Swiss Church Aid (HEKS/EPER)[121] and implemented in partnership with the local government. Building on it, EHO started a new project in 2019 called "Empowerment of Refugee

Women and Children," financially supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which is the main focus of his case study.

2. The context: Children and youth on the move in Serbia

UNHCR data on Serbia reflecting mixed migration movements from January until 27 September 2020 shows that, after a sharp drop in arrivals between April and the beginning of June, the number of arrivals rose considerably. During the whole period, 1,129 unaccompanied minors—around 84% of which were male—entered the territory.[122] According to the latest data (September 2020) from UNHCR and the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (hereinafter Commissariat),[123] Serbia currently hosts almost 26,000 refugees, 197,000 IDPs, and around 1,900 people at risk of statelessness. The number of people living in some of the Asylum Centres (AC) and Reception and Transit Centres (RTC) around the country has been growing in the last months. For example, a UNHCR assessment of the sites from August 2020 reported that the Sombor RTC was operating at full capacity with 753 people (of which 10% were children).[124] The numbers rose to 854 by the end of August and to 1,141 at the end of September.[125]

Serbia is one of the countries in the Balkan region where the effects of restrictive policies on border crossings are more visible. In September 2020, the number of migrants and refugees who were pushed back from neighbouring states (3,115) was more significant than the number of arrivals, and the highest since UNHCR started monitoring them in 2016.[126] In September, the total number of migrants and refugees hosted in RTCs or ACs in the country was 5,064—526 were children, including 174 unaccompanied minors.[127] Numerous sources have identified a significant increase in violent border enforcement practices and pushback operations in the areas close to the borders to Hungary and Croatia, where EHO operates.[128]

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic until the beginning of November, Serbia had 55,676 confirmed cases and 861 deaths.[129] The COVID-19 crisis worsened the situation for many refugees and migrants. A 2020 report by Save the Children highlighted how physical distancing is virtually impossible in often overcrowded transit centres in the Western Balkans.[130] Due to further restrictions on freedom of movement, only a few NGOs were allowed to keep working inside RTCs and ACs.[131] New rules on sanitization and the use of masks were introduced in all centres.[132]

Children on the move, and especially unaccompanied minors, have faced and continue to face several obstacles to their right to education—from language barriers and lack of documents necessary for enrolment to adequately trained teachers.[133] However, in the last years, several efforts have been made to ensure access to education for children in RTCs and ACs centres in Serbia.[134] For instance, a transportation service for children living in a reception centre and attending a local school was organized by IOM Serbia in collaboration with the Commissariat and funded by the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis and the MADAD Fund.[135] Moreover, before the second lockdown began, several children living in RTCs and ACs—with the support of UNCHR Serbia—had either started going to school or received vouchers for the purchase of books and other school materials.[136]

3. EHO's "Empowerment of Refugee Women and Children" Program

Building on the social inclusion project described in Section 1, the program "Empowerment of Refugee Women and Children"[137] is currently implemented by EHO in the RTCs of Šid, near the border to Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Sombor, near the border to Hungary.

The geographical position of both camps plays an important role in terms of the number of people they host. For instance, currently, Hungary only allows five people per day to cross the border. While the RTC in Sombor only hosts male adults and male children who are related (the adults are either their fathers or uncles), Šid is a family centre hosting men, women and children. The amount of time that people spend in Šid and Sombor varies considerably depending on the possibilities of crossing into other countries, but mostly does not exceed four months.

The program's objective—which targets women and children refugees living in Šid and Sombor—is to provide support and help build life skills, and accompany them in their transition from one place to another. In particular, the work with children includes non-formal education (e.g., English, geography) and workshops through which they can narrate stories of their migration experiences. The children (currently around 90) aged 4-16 years, come mostly from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iran, as well as (in smaller numbers) from Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine, Algeria, Somalia, India, Morocco, Egypt, and Yemen.

The EHO team is composed of a psychologist working with women and three teachers (pedagogues) working with children in Šid, and one teacher working with children in Sombor. The program coordinator, Vedrana Bjelajac,[138] is an education expert who has been involved in the work of the organization since 2013 and also works on another EHO project with street children.[139]

3.1. Objectives of the Program

The main objectives of EHO's program "Empowerment of Refugee Women and Children" are to provide these target groups living in the Šid and Sombor camps with opportunities to build life skills and develop awareness to prepare for their future, including the next steps in the migratory journey. In particular, the activities focus on:

1. Empowering women through psychological support and through enhancing their working skills

2. Empowering children by addressing the tensions arising from the migratory experience and by providing them with support in education and creative expression.

3.2. Strategies

As mentioned in Section 2, EHO's program, "Empowerment of Refugee Women and Children," targets women and children in Šid and male children in Sombor.

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Educational work with children

In Šid, children attend regular local schools, thanks to the social inclusion program that EHO ran in previous years in collaboration with the local teachers and government (see Section 1). This program was not possible in Sombor due to opposition from local parents. As a result, differences are reflected in the educational activities targeting children in the two centres: in Šid, they focus on homework, as well as on workshops on different subjects, while in Sombor they are structured more as informal schooling. Educational activities include English, mathematics and geography classes, as well as a focus on journeys through cities that they visited during migration, and cities they plan to go. Drawing is also an important part of children's activities, as well as acting and other creative workshops, which are led by professional educational experts.

Practical activities with women in Šid include making objects such as candles for the new year or scarfs for the winter. A female professional psychologist leads them.

Both educational activities and workshops with children and women transcend their more obvious purpose in that they are also intended as an opportunity for participants to share their stories (if they wish to do so). They also enable children and women to develop awareness on their past experiences, current situation and future plans. Conversations are held in groups and often start with the questions: "Who am I? What do I want to do? Where do I want to go?" Conversations mostly take place in English. In every group of women or children, one or two can speak the language and translate for the others.

Here is a Personal Story in the words of one of the children participating in EHO's program:

"I am 12 years old. I grow up with 5 sisters and 3 brothers. I am from Syria and came in

Serbia through Albania. My dream is to go to Germany. I'm very happy and like the camp in Sombor. My best friend is also with me here in Sombor. Before all this situation related with migration, in Syria I went to school in the 4th grade, but I left school and I miss school, school misses me a lot. My wishes are to back to school and continue my learning. Because of that I like to go in Safe Corner at the RTCRs in Sombor and work with a teacher. At the Safe Corner me and other children have opportunity to learn math, language English, Serbia. Also we can play there and talked with teacher about our dreams. My dream is to become football player, because I like sport and football a lot."

The teachers and psychologist leading these activities are trained to take the aspect of participation and sharing of personal experiences into account—one of the requirements is, they can demonstrate particular empathy and understanding of a wide range of possible stories that children and women might share. The planning for monthly activities is a result of the outcomes of these conversations, i.e. focusing either on specific themes or on plans that came up in the participants' contributions.

3.3. The role of faith

The majority of children and women who take part in the program are Muslim. Faith is not explicitly a key focus (no religious texts are used), and the program does not offer direct spiritual support. However, EHO staff members are deeply aware of differences and requirements connected to religious beliefs and practices, for example, Ramadan, regular dietary requirements etc. In the words of Vedrana, the program coordinator:

> We don't want to tell them "in Serbia we do like this, we respect this…" no, it is important to respect and understand each other and not have walls between us. […] It's important to have good communication. If we don't have that we can't work. We need our beneficiaries to know that we respect them like human beings. That's the most important thing in our work.

While being inspired by Christian values, the work of EHO—be it with migrants and children, elderly, Roma or other communities—in general, is centred around the belief that every human being has equal rights and dignity and should be respected regardless of their religious affiliation.

3.4. Partnerships

The Commissariat is the authority in charge of managing Serbian RTCs in which the program is implemented. The Commissariat and EHO have a long-standing collaboration, since the beginning of the so-called "migration crisis" in 2015. ELCA is an established partner of EHO and is the only donor (since its inception) which supports the program "Empowerment of Refugee Women and Children." Their main concern is to make sure that educational and psychosocial assistance is provided to people on the move, and children in particular, no matter what the circumstances are. Every month, five personal stories are collected, and some of them are shared with the donor organization as part of the documentation about the program.

3.5. Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted the program in the following ways:

- All staff and people hosted in the centres have to wear masks, including children above age 6. When there is a positive case (or suspected) in the centre, the person is placed in isolation and a doctor checks on their situation regularly. During such situations, teachers have shorter working hours and meet with a smaller group of children. For example, this applies when a family arrives through Bosnia and is awaiting the result of the test.

- During the summer, workshops were conducted outdoors. Now, the Commissariat has identified rooms indoors where small groups of women and children (maximum of only five people) can meet and work with the EHO staff, always wearing masks (including children).

- Since schools are closed, children in Šid are given homework from their schoolteachers and supported by EHO staff.

- Some of the women's activities have been COVID-19-related, for example, making soaps and masks. The Commissariat has identified activities such as these as a "good practice example," featuring them on their official website.[140]

4. Challenges and lessons learned

In EHO's experience, advocacy activities are only possible at the local level and for specific projects. For instance, they are part of a program (in collaboration with other partners) involving street children in Novi Sad. However, advocacy is not part of the "Empowerment of Refugee Women and Children" program, since it does not reflect the donor's priorities.

The partnership with the Commissariat has become almost exclusive following the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, this means that there is a relationship of trust between the Commissariat and the EHO, which allows migrants and refugees to be supported even in these difficult conditions. On the other hand, since the Commissariat currently only collaborates with very few numbers of organizations, especially NGOs, it has been criticised as possibly lacking transparency about the situation in the centres.[141]

Initially, the program was to be implemented in Sombor and Subotica. However, the Commissariat changed the distribution of migrants and refugees in the different centres following the onset of the COVID-19 crisis so that now there are only male adults in Subotica. This adjustment meant that EHO had to alter their plans and implement the program in Šid and Sombor instead.

PROMISING PRACTICE CASE STUDY #2: APOSTOLI, GREECE

1. Apostoli's work in Greece and abroad

Apostoli[142] is a non-profit development organization affiliated with the Greek Orthodox Church operating throughout Greece. It was established by the Holy Archdiocese of Athens after the economic crisis of 2008 and focused primarily on humanitarian assistance and wider development issues. Among the many activities run by Apostoli, the main areas of intervention are mental health, welfare facilities, and education and support to children, refugees and migrants. For instance, they operate three after-school day care centres in Athens, central and northern Greece and an educational centre for refugees and migrants in Athens.[143] The organization also operated outside the Greek territory, having for instance provided humanitarian first aid assistance (food, clothes, medicines) in Kosovo and Libya in 2011.[144] This case study will focus on Estia, an accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors in Agios Dimitrios, Athens.

2. The context: Children and youth on the move in Greece

After the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015 and 2016, arrivals of refugees and migrants by land and sea to Greece dropped in 2017 but increased again in 2018 and 2019.[145] By the end of 2019, Greece had seen the highest level of arrivals since 2016—74,500 refugees and migrants, of which 30% were children.[146] The numbers dropped again in 2020, but the overall numbers in the country remain high. At the end of September 2020, there were around 121,000 refugees and migrants in Greece (including all those who entered and remained in Greece since 2015).[147]

The situation for children on the move in Greece in the past years has been challenging. As of December 2019, Reception and Identification Centres (RIC) operated well over their capacity and hosted close to 11,000 children.[148] Family reunification under the

Dublin regulation is extremely hard, with Germany declining 70% of requests from Greece in 2019.[149] The temporary emergency relocation plan signed in 2015 failed to provide safety for many children stranded in Greece. In fact, "out of a total of about 35,000 asylum seekers relocated from Greece and Italy, only 834 were unaccompanied children."[150] The UNHCR also recently urged the Greek government to investigate reports of several pushbacks of asylum seekers to Turkey, preventing people from applying for asylum in Greece.[151] Furthermore, following recent regulations established at the EU level, detaining children and families in pre-removal centres and police stations has become easier.[152] Several reports have highlighted the tensions within parts of Greek society, including hostile responses towards refugees and migrants; sometimes resulting in xenophobic attacks against them and those providing support.[153] These were often linked to the assumption that refugees were receiving more assistance than Greek nationals who had suffered from the economic crisis.[154]

In June 2020, Human Rights Watch urged Prime Minister Mitsotakis to end the detention of children and to address the lack of measures to protect children on the move from COVID-19 infection.[155] Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF started advocating and acting towards the urgent relocation of children living in precarious conditions on the Greek Islands and other EU countries.[156] In the spring of 2020, several EU states started welcoming small numbers of unaccompanied or separated children (UASC) under an initiative to relocate a total of 1,600.[157]

In July 2020, UNICEF estimated that there were 4,600 UASC in Greece, around 50% of which were living in dire conditions.[158] The fires in the Moria reception centre on the island of Lesvos in September 2020 left 12,000 people without accommodation. Most unaccompanied minors were transferred to centres with better conditions.[159] However, the situation remains critical with at least 1,000 UASC in Greece living in unsafe conditions and exposed to risks of exploitation.[160]

UNICEF, UNHCR and several NGOs are engaged in efforts to ensure access to education for children on the move in Greece. For instance, UNICEF partnered with the Akelius Foundation to provide online learning opportunities to refugee and migrant youth during the COVID-19 pandemic.[161] However, while most recognised refugee children are enrolled in public schools, a vast majority of unaccompanied children seeking asylum stranded on the Greek islands are left without formal education—the COVID-19 pandemic further threatens their chances to access it.[162]

3. Apostoli's "Estia"[163] Accommodation Facility for Unaccompanied Minors in Agios Dimitrios, Athens

In 2011, Apostoli opened an accommodation facility for unaccompanied minors called "Estia" (located in Agios Dimitrios, a suburb in the southern part of Athens) that can host up to 20 male youth aged 13-18. The initiative was in response to the lack of centres hosting children on the move in Greece (there were only four at the time) by the Archdiocese. The centre has since hosted over 450 young migrants and refugees. They arrive at Estia as part of the national referral scheme coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Welfare, either from registration centres on the islands or along the land borders, or after having lived on the street (or in precarious conditions) heard about the scheme through word of mouth.

Under normal circumstances (i.e., not during the COVID-19 crisis, see section 3.5), unaccompanied minors are free to go out for schooling and other activities. In terms of nationality, the group is very diverse. The most common country of origin is Afghanistan. Still, there are or have been boys from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Ghana, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and even from the Caribbean region. On average, they stay for one year and then move on to other accommodation schemes for adults after they turn 18 or relocate to other European countries through family reunification or other means.

The team working at Estia is hired through an official call published on Apostoli's website and in a national newspaper. It consists of a manager, a psychologist and two social workers; each of them is assigned ten unaccompanied minors. They take care of bureaucratic processes regarding the minors' access to services, provide social counselling, and support the young people's integration through a range of social and life skills activities. The psychologist works with the boys through group or individual sessions. Also part of the team is one person who is in charge of cleaning, four security staff, a Greek language teacher, an English language teacher, a science teacher and several volunteers for other languages. Apostoli has three in-house interpreters for Urdu, Arabic and Farsi. For other languages, Estia collaborates with METAdrasi,[164] a Greek NGO founded in 2009. A psychologist supervises Estia staff members with whom they have regular monthly meetings to discuss internal issues and specific challenges that arise while working with their current guests.

Initially, the European Refugee Fund (ERF) (75%) and the Greek state (25%) financial supported Estia. At present, the EU Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) (80%) and the Greek state (20%) financially support Estia.

3.1. Objectives of the Program

Estia's main objectives concern both the practical and psychosocial wellbeing of unaccompanied minors. They include the provision of targeted support, including the development of social skills, integration processes, and specific care, for particularly vulnerable cases. Apostoli, through this program, also aims to contribute to strengthening the Greek reception system for young refugees and migrants, foster intercultural and interfaith dialogue and create opportunities to counter tensions leading to discrimination and xenophobia.

3.2. Strategies

From access to education perspective, unaccompanied minors living in Estia are enrolled in public schools, either in secondary or professional schools. Being enrolled in conventional schools can be challenging due to language barriers, and because not all of them have had the chance to develop the required level of writing and reading skills in their native languages. Estia provides support for them in school curricula (Greek, English, science and other languages) through targeted courses led by teachers and volunteers. Some of the boys living in Estia also attend classes at the Educational Centre for the Refugees and Migrants run by Apostoli in Athens. The centre is open to children and adults, where they can attend preparatory courses to take Greek language certificates (national exams).

For Apostoli, psychosocial support is an essential part of the work in Estia. Since the vast majority of unaccompanied minors who arrive at the accommodation centre are not familiar with counselling methods, the procedures are explained to them, together with the rules and services included in the contract, which they have to sign upon arrival at the centre. In contrast with the psychological support offered by Apostoli in its mental health programs, in Estia most of the work is done in groups and through interactions and activities, although individual sessions are also possible.

Unaccompanied minors hosted in Estia take part in a variety of activities including sports, visits to museums and archaeological sites,[165] and day trips to adventure parks. Organizing fun and recreational (beyond educational activities) activities is crucial to building a relationship of trust between the staff and the boys. Birthday parties are organized to celebrate each boy's birthday. Most of the activities that the unaccompanied minors engage in are related to cultural or environmental issues such as cleaning beaches and reforestation initiatives—often in collaboration with local NGOs. These allow them to come into contact with local youth communities in general.

3.3 The role of faith

Orthodox Christian values drive Apostoli. As stated on their website, its goal is:

> To offer charity, care, relief of human pain, meaningful intervention and help in dealing with every social problem, to strengthen our youth, to improve the educational level, to protect the environment, to strengthen the Orthodox Mission, to help the pastoral work of our Orthodox Christian brothers, wherever they are, and mainly to relieve people who suffer regardless of colour, religion, or race.[166]

Although faith is not a primary focus of Estia's activities, religion is discussed within the framework of history and intercultural activities. For instance, Christian festivities like Christmas and Easter are explained and celebrated, and so are Ramadan and other non-Christian holidays. The religious practices and traditions of the unaccompanied minors—most of whom are Muslim—are respected and celebrated.

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Apostoli is part of a faith network, Churches Together for the Refugees and Migrants in Greece, that was initiated in response to the so-called "migration crisis." Though not formally institutionalised, the network meets regularly to discuss current challenges in Athens and Greece in general, avoid duplication and support each other's work. Other members of the network include local branches of the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Anglican Church (St. Paul's and the Swedish Parish), the Salvation Army, the German Evangelical Church, the Greek Evangelical Church, the Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, The Exarchate of the Armenian Catholics, CARITAS, the Alliance Relief of the Greek Evangelical Alliance, Mercy Corps, Samaritan's Purse International Disaster Relief, the United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG), the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and other Christian NGOs.

3.4 Partnerships

The network described in section 3.3 facilitates collaborations between Churches in responding to the needs of migrants and refugees. For example, Apostoli collaborated with the Lutheran Church on a volunteering exchange program that allowed young German graduates to teach the German language to unaccompanied minors living in Estia. Teaching the German language is particularly significant since many of them plan to reach Germany eventually—the final destination of their migratory journey. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to socialise with people of their age, or slightly older. Apostoli has benefitted from its international networks as well, having partnered with Finn Church Aid, the Church of Sweden and UNICEF in a previous project called "Quality play-based learning and non-formal education, enhanced psychosocial wellbeing and positive integration for refugee children aged 3-17 years in Greece."[167]

Apostoli partners with several local NGOs on the Estia project, including an organization, called Aei Ferein,[168] which specialises in emotional education for kids. While they have been expanding their activities considerably in the last few years, due to the long-standing collaboration they have with Apostoli, they offer their workshops in Estia for free.

3.5 Impact of COVID-19

While everyday life in the Estia accommodation centre has been affected heavily by the COVID-19 pandemic, fortunately, there have been no cases at the centre, so far. The team at Estia explained the situation and the new rules to the unaccompanied minors, who were ready to cooperate. Besides daily remote (online) schooling, the main activities during lockdown have been interactive games, Skype meetings with families and friends living in other centres and short walks to the park across the street from the centre.

4. Challenges and lessons learned

Apostoli serves communities of different faiths through Estia, the Educational Centre for the Refugees and Migrants, and several other programs such as their well-established soup kitchens and distributions of pharmaceutical and other essential goods. However, when it comes to the protection of children on the move, Apostoli has not established partnerships across different religious traditions, yet.

The national and international faith networks that Apostoli is involved in have proven key to overcoming financial challenges. During the transition between the ERF and AMIF, the Anglican Church in Greece, USPG and Christian Aid stepped in to keep the centre open.[169] Moreover, working on several projects with other FBOs like Finn Church Aid and Act Alliance has helped Apostoli gain international visibility and fostered its process of professionalization and capacity building, including sharing good practices and being exposed to international standards.

Some internal challenges had emerged within the Orthodox community when some members individually expressed their concerns that helping migrants and refugees was unfair to the established local communities who were suffering because of poverty and unemployment. Apostoli approached these concerns by making sure that support was and is provided to all without any discrimination—which is the main objective of Apostoli.

In the words of Dr. Vassi Leontari, Director of Programs and International Cooperation:

> *"There is this perception that the Orthodox Church is really conservative and we have restrictions, but it was crystal clear from the beginning from the Archbishop that we are here to help everyone because everyone is part of this new society. And it's a reality. It's here. We have to serve them, otherwise we'll have eternal social problems."*

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PROMISING PRACTICE CASE STUDY #3: CENTRAL COUNCIL OF MUSLIMS, GERMANY

1. The Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD)'s work with children and youth on the move in Germany

Founded in 1994, the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD)[170] is one of the most important Muslim organizations in the country. Its "Islamic Charta"[171]—Fundamental Declaration on the Relationship between Muslims, their State and their Society—states that ZMD:

> *Deplores the violation of human rights wherever and whenever this occurs. Thus, it is a partner in the fight against religious discrimination, xenophobia, racism, sexism, and violence [and that it] promotes an integration into society of the Muslim population, which will not be detrimental to their Islamic identity. Therefore it supports all efforts for a better minority command of the German language and for better access to German citizenship.[172]*

ZMD has been supporting refugees and unaccompanied children in particular, through a range of initiatives since 2015, including providing accommodation, counselling and spiritual support, translation services and German classes.[173] It also advocates for the rights of children on the move by calling for the German government to accept unaccompanied minors after the fires in the Moria camp in Greece.[174] Moreover, ZMD is engaged in several interfaith initiatives, for instance, through the program Weißt du, wer ich bin? (Do you know who I am?),[175] a collaboration with the Council of Christian Churches in Germany and the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

In 2016, ZMD was selected as one of 29 civil society organizations to implement the federal program, Menschen Stärken Menschen (People strengthen people). [176] Sponsored by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Menschen Stärken Menschen is a mentoring program

for migrants and refugees. ZMD then launched its Wir Sind Paten (We are mentors)[177] program within this framework and opened a subsidiary organization, Soziale Dienste und Jugendhilfe gGmbH (Social Services and Youth Welfare),[178] to implement it in ten German cities. Wir Sind Paten is the main focus of this case study.

2. The context: Children and youth on the move in Germany

Germany saw the arrival of 476,620 asylum seekers in 2015, out of which 22, 255 were unaccompanied minors.[179] In 2016, out of the 745,545 asylum seekers who arrived in the country, 35,939 were unaccompanied minors.[180] Between January-October 2020, asylum applications in Germany was close to 100,000, around half of which are children and youth under the age of 18 and 77% under the age of 30.[181] Syria remains the most common country of origin among asylum seekers and refugees in Germany, followed by Afghanistan and Iraq.[182] Germany is also the destination country of several migratory movements within Europe and beyond. In 2019, a total of 1,127,984 people arrived from Romania (16.7%), Poland (9%), Bulgaria (6.1%) and other countries.[183] Among the continually growing population of foreign nationals—over 11 million in recent years—in Germany over the past decade, 25% are children and youth under the age of 25.[184]

Between 2015 and 2017, the European Emergency Relocation Mechanism allowed for 35,000 asylum seekers to be relocated from Greece and Italy to other EU countries, of which only 823 were unaccompanied children - 139 of them were relocated to Germany.[185] In 2018, Germany received a further 25 unaccompanied children from Malta.[186] Under a European relocation scheme signed in the spring of 2020, Germany pledged to accept 920 unaccompanied children from Greece.[187] After the fire in the Moria refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesvos, Germany pledged to receive a further 150 unaccompanied minors.[188]

Once in Germany, migrants and refugees are expected (sometimes on voluntary basis, sometimes as a requirement) to take an integration course that includes German language classes as well as addressing historical, cultural and legal aspects of German society. Since 2015, over a million migrants have attended integration courses in Germany.[189] In 2020, despite the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 80,000 people were offered or requested to attend integration courses.[190]

In Germany the COVID-19 pandemic has hit migrant communities disproportionately, especially in terms of unemployment, rising by 27% compared to 20% for German nationals.[191] Integration processes have reportedly also been affected by the closure of schools and physical distancing: children, in particular, have had fewer chances to talk to native German speakers and insufficient support in their educational process.[192]

3. The Wir sind Paten Program

While the literal translation of "Wir sind Paten" is "we are mentors," this does not capture the non-hierarchical spirit of the initiative and the principle of "neighbourhood help" that lies behind it. In fact, "Wir Sind Paten" is much more than a mentorship program. One-to-one support on issues such as finding a place to live or a job, or learning German is just one of a range of activities the project has to offer. All activities are designed to present opportunities for local communities and newcomers to get to know each other and establish bonds. The program is implemented by Soziale Dienste und Jugendhilfe gGmbH in ten German cities: Berlin, Hamburg, Kiel, Schwerin, Rostock, Düsseldorf, Saarbrücken, Erfurt, Leipzig and Dresden.

For the first two years, the main focus of the Menschen stärken Menschen program was on refugees specifically, who were reached through reception centres and other local service providers as well as through word of mouth. Subsequently, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth decided to widen the scope of the program's framework to include migrant and local communities in the target group. While refugees were the main target of Wir sind Paten, their activities were inclusive and were open to anyone since the beginning.

Since 2016, the 29 civil society organizations implementing the Menschen Stärken Menschen program have activated over 100,000 mentorships in Germany,[193] out of which more than 9,000 are active mentorships of Wir sind Paten. Although there are no official numbers on the average age of the people taking part in the program (volunteers and the target group), many of them are 25 years old or younger, and often students.

3.1. Objectives of the Program

In the words of Nicolai von Skerst, Project Developer and Fundraiser at Soziale Dienste und Jugendhilfe gGmbH:

The overriding goal is of course to bring together both sides, [local] civil society and migrants and refugees and give them a safe space where they can meet and just get to know each other.

This is reflected in the main objectives outlined on the organization's website, which include promoting social cohesion through intercultural and inter-religious exchange, providing training and educational opportunities and "supporting Muslim families in culture-specific and social matters."[194]

3.2. Strategies

To attain these goals, Wir sind Paten's strategies are manifold. In all ten cities, tutoring and mentoring take place, while many other activities respond to the specific needs of the local communities. In general, activities are planned to attract people from both the local community (volunteers) and migrants and refugees.

Tutoring usually takes place in small groups of people (it can also be individual). It focuses on German, English, computer skills and other topics of choice, from basic to university level. Many of the volunteers are university students, and there are many children and young refugees and migrants among the participants.

These activities sometimes lead to a mentorship program between a member of the local community and a migrant or refugee—once they feel like they have built a relationship of trust. This is done by signing a simple form that is used by the Federal Ministry to quantify active mentorships. However, the form does not indicate specific activities of the mentorship program. It is instead, a flexible agreement that is built on the needs and availability of the people involved.

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Other activities of the Wir sind Paten program include seminars for asylum seekers on the application process and seminars for volunteers on intercultural competence. There is also a focus on fostering peaceful coexistence through workshops against xenophobia and hate speech,[195] training on the topic of racism and discrimination, combined visits to museums or memorials (especially in Eastern Germany) of the Holocaust like the Buchenwald Memorial,[196] and opportunities to discuss and reflect on the experience together.

Many activities are aimed at empowering the target group and Muslim communities in particular. Sometimes, certain undertakings turn into self-reliant and independent projects that are not sustained through the Meschen Stärken Menschen funding scheme. For instance, in Leipzig, a group of volunteers started offering translation services and support to a growing number of migrants and refugees who had to visit the doctor or go to an appointment with the local authorities; it later turned it into a separate project. In Leipzig and Dresden (and likely in Erfurt in 2021), a spin-off project of Wir sind Paten called "For Me, You and Everyone," provides support to Muslim women who want to start their own project according to their interests, which range from upcycling initiatives to organizing a reading group.

While ZMD is responsible for most of the advocacy and political work at the national level including through interfaith work (see section 3.4), (Soziale Dienste und Jugendhilfe gGmb with its ten offices across Germany managing the Wir Sind Paten program), it is also engaged in advocacy at the community or municipality level. Often, they are members of working groups on integration or other migration-related topics with local authorities and other civil society members and local networks.[197] Moreover, they take part in local interfaith and intercultural initiatives. In general, they work on social cohesion, building spaces for exchange and communication based on mutual trust, creating educational and work opportunities for disadvantaged communities, manages to mobilise community members and establish collaborations between ZMD and local authorities.

3.3 The role of faith

The place of faith in the activities of Wir sind Paten is, as Nicolai von Skerst puts it, "the same place that it has in the life of the people who participate in the program." Religion plays multiple roles in the program—not in a formal way. For instance, there is always a room where people can pray if they wish to do so. It is often a topic of conversation, together with cultural traditions, during a monthly event called "Contact Kitchen," where participants from the local, migrant and refugee community cook together. Moreover, mosque communities are often helpful in reaching out to the program's target group through their networks. Concerning Wir sind Paten staff's religious affiliation, while there is no clear data available, many of them are young Muslims, some of whom are refugees themselves. Owing to their German and Arabic cultural and linguistic skills, they can connect with other volunteers and with newcomers. Typically, each Wir sind Paten team in the ten different cities in Germany has one person in charge of the office, who usually belongs to the Muslim community.

Religion is very much the focus of ZMD's other activities, for example, through capacity-building provided to 6 mosques assisting refugees and other vulnerable groups in Sachsen, through a project to promote exchange among young Muslims and prevent religious extremism,[198] and through interfaith work (see section 3.4).

3.4 Partnerships

At the local level, Wir sind Paten staff are often part of working groups on migration-related topics (especially on integration) with local governments and other civil society actors at the city level. These working groups are vital in avoiding duplication, networking and establishing partnerships based on each organization's strength. For instance, as a result, Wir sind Paten collaborates with service providers like the job centre.

As previously mentioned, at the national level, ZMD is engaged in several multi-religious initiatives. For instance, ZMD members are involved in the JuMu Deutschland (Jews and Muslims Germany) initiative,[199] and they have collaborated with the Central Council of Jews and other religious actors on refugee responses.[200]

3.5 Impact of COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the physical distancing measures imposed by many German states (Länder), Wir sind Paten began offering online tutoring, support with asylum procedures and German language classes. Additionally, they introduced a new online service that provides support to people who need shopping assistance, collecting medicines from the doctor's or the pharmacy etc.[201] In response to the COVID-19 crisis, in Schwerin, the Wir sind Paten team conceived and implemented an initiative called "SANAD"—providing various solutions, such as tutoring for children and babysitting. In July 2020, the city of Schwerin awarded them the title of "Corona heroes" because of their engagement.[202]

4. Challenges and lessons learned

The initial plan of ZMD for the Wir sind Paten program was to open an office of the newly established Soziale Dienste und Jugendhilfe gGmbH in 13 cities. However, they encountered some issues in three of them. For example, in Magdeburg, it was hard for them to build a network of volunteers, participants and people who were supporting the program with the local authorities.

Another problem that people working on the program have encountered is the lack of interest in the media for Muslim welfare and success stories in this area. Although there have been some articles and some journalists have expressed the intention to write about Wir sind Paten, they still lack visibility due to shortage of resources on that front.

When it comes to funding, the future is uncertain for Wir sind Paten, because the Menschen Stärken Menschen funding scheme is linked to the national legislature; thus, it remains unsure if funding will be extended after the elections at the end of 2021. However, ZMD and Soziale Dienste und Jugendhilfe gGmbH are actively looking for alternative ways to support their activities and ensure the program's sustainability, including through local funding.

Finally, one challenge identified by Soziale Dienste und Jugendhilfe gGmbH was that of monitoring and quantifying the work in a way that would respond the Ministry's need to assess the results of the Menschen Stärken Menschen initiative, but also reflect the qualitative nature of their work. So far, the Ministry counts the signed mentorship agreements, sends a member of staff to conduct interviews with volunteers and participants, and receives one report per year from each implementing organization. Soziale Dienste und Jugendhilfe gGmbH has complemented this by conducting their own interviews with their most active participants and volunteers and disseminating them through their website and social media channels.

GLOSSARY

Migrants are people who left their habitual place of residence voluntarily or involuntarily. This definition includes people who cross international borders and those who stay in the same country, but it excludes unregistered people on the move. Migration-related data has several limitations since many countries are not able to provide consistent data about the entity and demographics of internal and international migration flows.[203] According to the IOM, currently, the global number of migrants reached an estimated 272 million in 2019, i.e. 3.5 per cent of the global population.[204]

Forcibly displaced people include all populations of concern to the UNHCR:

(a) Refugees: As defined by the 1951 Convention, a refugee is someone who:

- Has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion;

- Is outside their country of origin or habitual residence;

- Is unable or unwilling to access protection in their country of origin or residence, or to return there, because of fear of persecution;

- Is not explicitly excluded from refugee protection or whose refugee status has not ceased because of a change in circumstances.

(b) Asylum seekers are people who apply for refugee status or other forms of international protection.

(c) Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are forcibly displaced people who do not cross international borders while fleeing.

(d) Returnees are refugees or IDPs who return to their place of origin, or the place they had left at the time of their forced displacement.

(e) Stateless people do not have a nationality. A person can be born or become stateless because of loss of nationality, gaps in nationality laws or change in borders.

Children on the move: According to the Inter-Agency Working Group on Children on the Move, children on the move are:

"Those children moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement, while it may open up opportunities, might also place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect and violence."

Faith actors are a variety of individuals, groups and organizations, including but not limited to, local faith communities, religious leaders, and local, national and international FBOs. They often play important roles in responding to migration and forced displacement.

ANNEX 1 - LEGAL AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

General human rights legal framework for children on the move:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its two Optional Protocols (2000)

- Four conventions from the Geneva Conventions (1949) and their two Additional Protocols (1977)

- The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and its Protocol (1967)

Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (Inter-Agency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, 2004)[205]

These include:

- The principle of family unity or integrity of the family

- The best interests of the child

- The importance of engaging children and listening to their opinion

- The right of children to non-discrimination

- The special needs of girls

Guidelines on the Protection of Child Victims of Trafficking (UNICEF, 2006)[206]

This technical document includes general principles and guidance on:

- Identification

- Appointment of a guardian

- Registration and documentation

- Regularisation of legal status

- Interim care and protection

- Individual case assessment

- Implementation of durable (long-term) solutions to displacement

- Access to justice

- Cost of proceedings, financial assistance, reparation, compensation

- Research and data collection

Guidelines on International Protection No. 7: The application of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees to victims of trafficking and persons at risk of being trafficked (UNHCR, 2006)[207]

- Not all victims or potential victims of trafficking fall within the scope of the refugee definition

- Trafficking is a process comprising of several interrelated actions (see sections on the act, the means, the purpose)

- Smuggling[208] and trafficking are not the same thing

- Statelessness and trafficking

- Procedural issues

Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons (UNHCR, 2014)

- Criteria for determining statelessness

- Procedures for the determination of statelessness

- Status of stateless persons at the national level

Agenda for Action for Refugee and Migrant Children (UNICEF, 2017)[209]

- Press for action on the causes that uproot children from their homes

- Help uprooted children to stay in school and stay healthy

- Keep families together and give children legal status

- End the detention of refugee and migrant children by creating practical alternatives

- Combat xenophobia and discrimination

- Protect uprooted children from exploitation and violence

The Global Programme Framework on Children on the Move (UNICEF, 2017):[210]

This document provides a set of programming principles, policy asks and key interventions to:

- Protect child refugee and migrants, particularly UASC, from exploitation and violence

- End the detention of children on the move

- Protect children through supporting family unity/reunification and children's legal status

- Ensure children have access to education, healthcare and other services

- Address root causes of displacement

- Fight xenophobia, exclusion and discrimination in transit and host countries

It also outlines and summarises the main legal documents (laws principles and guidance) on which these are based.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are particularly relevant to children on the move[211]

- SDG 10: Target 10.7

  Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

- SDG 16: Target 16.2

  End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

The Global Compacts for Migration (IOM 2018)[212] and on Refugees (UNHCR 2018)[213]

A particularly influential set of policies for refugees and migrants are the Global Compacts; they are non-legally-binding agreements. In December 2018, member states following the principles outlined in the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,[214] agreed on two Global Compacts: the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Compact on Migration), and the Global Compact on Refugees (Compact on Refugees). The Compacts have a purpose of enhancing protection for people–including children. It particularly concentrates on vulnerable migrants and refugees, integration, combating xenophobia and supporting hosting communities through collaboration and cooperation between different actors. Concerning the rights of the child, the Global Compacts promote existing international legal obligations and uphold the principle of the best interests of the child at all times as a primary consideration in all situations concerning children in the context of international migration, including unaccompanied and separated children.[215]

In the build-up to the Global Compacts, UNICEF had published a report[216] to highlight specific child-protection-related issues to be addressed by the Compacts. In relation to the European context, these included:

- the need to establish standards to protect refugee children across all German federal states;[217]

- the need to refer and monitor UASC and to cooperate to end the detention of UASC in Greece;[218]

- the need to put in place adequate legislation to protect UASC, in particular, fostering their integration and combatting discrimination against them in Italy.[219]

EU-Specific legal framework and guidance documents:

- Common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the EU (Council of the European Union, 2004)[220]

  These Principles address key themes in integration policy and include the affirmation:

  "The practice of diverse cultures and religions is guaranteed under the Charter of Fundamental Rights and must be safeguarded, unless practices conflict with other inviolable European rights or with national law."[221]

- Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (Council of Europe, 2005)[222]

- The Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse or "Lanzarote Convention" (Council of Europe, 2007)[223]

- Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors (European Commission, 2010-2014)[224]

  This Action Plan presents a three-fold approach to the protection of unaccompanied minors:

  - Preventing trafficking and unsafe migration routes;

  - Ensuring adequate reception and procedures once in the EU; and

  - Identifying and supporting durable solutions for unaccompanied children.

- European Agenda on Migration (European Commission, 2015)[225]

  This agenda guides the challenges of the European policy response connected to migration (irregular migration, borders, asylum and legal migration). Regular Factsheets on financial support to EU states and on several migration-related issues (e.g., the EU-Turkey Statement) are published here.[226]

- 10th European Forum on the rights of the child: the protection of children in migration (European Commission, 2016)[227]

The Forum included sessions on identification and protection, reception, access to asylum procedures and procedural safeguards, and durable solutions including integration. It also included a side event on guardianship of UASC.

- European legal and policy framework on immigration detention of children (FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017) [228]

This comprehensive document provides an overview of national, EU and international laws around the detention of children on the move, as well as of procedural safeguards, rights in detention and oversight mechanisms.

- Communication on the protection of children in migration (European Commission, 2017)[229]

The Commission identified a number of priority areas that EU member states should focus on, including:[230]

  - Swift identification and protection upon arrival

  - Adequate reception conditions for children

  - Swift status determination and effective guardianship

  - Durable solutions and early integration measures

  - Addressing root causes and protecting children along migrant routes outside the EU

- Action Plan: Partnership on inclusion of migrants and refugees (Urban Agenda for the EU, 2017)[231]

Proposed actions:[232]

  - Recommendations on the protection of unaccompanied minors;

  - Towards more evidence-based integration policies in cities, setting the agenda, exploring comparable indicators and developing a toolbox for good practice transfer;

  - Improving access for cities to EU integration funding;

  - Establishment of an Academy on integration strategies;

  - Establishment of a European Migrant Advisory Board;

  - Establishment of Financial Blending Facilities for cities;

  - Improving desegregation policies in European cities;

  - Further reinforce the role of Microfinance, for instance through blending.

Further sources of information that are useful in understanding challenges for children on the move in Europe and Central Asia

The Protection of children in migration: Promising practices (European Commission):[233] The European Commission provides an online database of promising practices in protecting the rights of children on the move in Europe, e.g., regarding guardianship in Italy, fighting the exploitation of children in France, supporting UASC through mentoring in Sweden.

Practical Guide on the best interests of the child in asylum procedures (European Asylum Support Office, 2019):[234] This guide demonstrates how to ensure and attend to the best interest of the child in asylum procedures, including procedural safeguards and cooperation with child protection services, and identification of vulnerabilities and risks experienced by children on the move.

Climate Change and Migration: Legal and policy challenges and responses to environmentally induced migration. (Commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the LIBE Committee, 2020):[235] This document identifies key challenges in policy and legal frameworks in the area of climate change and migration. It provides information on the impact of climate change on displacement and mobility and on international initiatives and instruments on environmental migration. Chapter 5 specifically focuses on the European context, outlining tools and jurisprudence on climate change-related migration and forced displacement.

ANNEX 2 - COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Turkey

Turkey continues to host the largest refugee population in the world. In 2020, the number of Syrians registered under temporary protection remained stable at around 3.6 million, almost half of whom are children[236] and 46 percent of whom are women and girls. In addition, Turkey hosts approximately 330,000 international protection applicants and status holders from other countries. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the Temporary Protection Regulation continue to provide a strong legal framework for the legal stay, registration, documentation and access to rights and services for foreigners in Turkey. In line with the framework, the registration of Syrians under temporary protection and international protection applicants by the Ministry of Interior's Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) will continue, providing them with access to international protection in Turkey.

Currently, over 98% of Syrians under temporary protection live in urban and rural areas across Turkey's 81 provinces, with less than two percent residing in the seven remaining Temporary Accommodation Centres (TACs). The majority live in the southeast of Turkey, as well as metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Bursa, Izmir and Konya, mostly among members of the host community that often face similar needs and challenges. International protection applicants and status holders in Turkey include various nationalities, with the largest populations coming from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.

 In 2020, the Government of Turkey had to rapidly mobilize a national health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which also had profound and far-reaching socio-economic consequences on already vulnerable groups including refugees. Turkey reported its first positive case of COVID-19 on 11 March 2020, and the first loss of life on 17 March 2020. Like other countries responding to the pandemic, the number of positive cases in Turkey has continued to increase, with 349,519 cases and 9,371 deaths as of 20 October 2020.

The economic and social impact of COVID-19 in Turkey has been significant and the consequences of the pandemic are being felt across communities and sectors. Syrians under temporary protection, international protection applicants and status holders have been affected by a dramatic loss of livelihoods and income due to the pandemic. This was compounded by a lack of savings, causing households to struggle to meet the costs of basic needs such as food, rent,

hygiene and other daily expenses. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased vulnerabilities and needs amongst Syrians and others under international protection residing in Turkey whilst reducing the availability of services. To slow the spread of the virus, many public services that were already stretched due to the high level of demand had to be paused or reduced. Women from different communities, due to their typically informal or temporary employment and the nature of their work and unpaid care responsibilities, have often been the first and hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The reduction in service capacity and outreach has made it harder for service providers to identify and protect vulnerable individuals despite efforts to increase support through helplines and psychological counselling. Stress has also increased significantly amongst refugees due to the pandemic, exacerbating mental health issues, heightening the level of anxiety felt by women, men, girls and boys and requiring greater psychosocial support. Adverse social norms, coupled with a lack of livelihood opportunities, perpetuate a situation of risk for refugee women and girls, in particular, affecting their access to services and assistance, and many families regarding child marriage as the only way to secure a future for themselves and their children. The lack of livelihood opportunities is also increasing risks of families to engage their children in the labour force. As of the beginning of the 2020/21 school year, more than 750,000 Syrian children under temporary protection were enrolled in Turkish public schools[237] and over 33,000 students were attending tertiary education. However, more than 460,000 school-age children were still out-of-school and did not have any access to education opportunities. Out-of-school children are one of the most vulnerable groups in Turkey and face multiple child protection risks, including psychosocial distress, child labour, child marriage and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

The socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, discontinuation of face-to-face learning, lack of interaction with peers and a reported increase in the level of domestic violence are likely to result in reversed learning gains and loss of learning for vulnerable children, including refugees. Further negative effects on school enrolment, attendance and retention at all levels are also expected, likely resulting in the adoption of negative coping mechanisms affecting children, such as child labour (mostly for boys) and the exposure of girls to child marriages.

In February 2020, the Government of Turkey announced that Turkey would stop controlling flows of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers into the EU, resulting in an estimated 12,000 to 25,000 people gathering on the border with Greece. In response, Greece closed its borders and temporarily suspended asylum processes, which have contributed to an ensuing humanitarian crisis for stranded refugees and migrants that remained in makeshift camps on the Turkish side of the border in close vicinity to the town of Edirne. In March, following a meeting between Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, both parties reiterated their commitment to the EU-Turkey Statement, signed in 2016. Following these developments—further impacted by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey—the stranded refugees and migrants have been evacuated from the border region and returned to their previous places of residence, following a two-week quarantine. Few of those who managed to cross the border joined the thousands hosted in Greek refugee camps.[238]

Greece

By the end of 2019, Greece had seen the highest level of arrivals since 2016 with 74,500 refugees and migrants, over 30% of whom were children.[239] The difficult conditions of asylum seekers' reception in Greece at the end of 2019 had lasting consequences, exacerbated by the pandemic. Only 38% of the 5,463 unaccompanied children in Greece benefited from adequate care arrangements in 2019, leaving a significant proportion of children still awaiting care.[240] An estimated 42,500 refugee and migrant children, including approximately 5,300 unaccompanied or separated ones, were present in Greece as of 31 December 2019—a 44% increase, compared to the same period in 2018. This led to severe overcrowding, especially in Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) on the islands, where conditions were insufficient, and services were scarce. As of December 2019, RICs operated at over six times their capacity and hosted close to 11,000 children.[241] By March 2020, official RICs and their overflow areas are reported to have hosted approximately eight times their capacity.[242] As expected, these areas lack basic hygiene facilities and provide minimal medical care at best.

On 21 March 2020, UNICEF called for the immediate transfer of refugees and migrants including children from the Greek islands to the mainland.[243] One thousand and six hundred (1,600) unaccompanied children are being relocated from detention centres on the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos to other EU countries. This measure comes following continued criticism of detention centres in Greece for unaccompanied children and calls from advocacy organizations to take action So far, Luxembourg and Germany have received them, mostly between the ages 5-16, with nine more countries having joined the relocation efforts, and several other European cities making pledges to welcome the children.[244]

In May, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) reported that hundreds of unaccompanied children were being detained. However, on June 20th, the government announced an extension of the lockdown of overcrowded and unsanitary camps for another two weeks.[245] Detention facilities face new requirements and NGO activity in reception facilities and camps is restricted. Human Rights Watch released a letter on June 23 to Prime Minister Mitsotakis regarding the detention of unaccompanied children, expressing concern about the ability of the police detention facilities to protect children against COVID-19 infection.[246]

With asylum processes suspended, curfews implemented and restricted reporting on the Aegean Islands, conditions are dire. In July, it was reported that hundreds of people were violently pushed back from Greece to Turkey by Greek authorities or unidentified masked man. No health precautions were taken to prevent a potential spread of the virus among those in custody as people were moved to the Greek islands, "placed into large Coast Guard boats, and then forced into smaller inflatable rescue rafts with no motor and cast adrift near Turkish territorial waters."[247]

Italy

For refugees and asylum seekers in Italy, observing lockdown restrictions and respecting physical distancing measures has proven difficult, as they often face overcrowded living conditions, informal employment and rely on the government, NGO and FBO assistance. Refugees International reports that, in March, the government suspended interviews for refugee status determination (RSD) as well as hearings for appeals of rejected asylum requests due to court closures. While foreigners in Italy have a legally ensured right to access healthcare, many asylum-seekers refrain from using health services if undocumented or face discrimination and language barriers.[248] At the same time, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers

in the country may be able to attain regularisation, as the Italian government is looking for means to address agricultural labour shortages during the lockdown.[249]

Between January and August 2020, 16% of new arrivals to Italy were children, of which almost 80% were unaccompanied.[250] The number of unaccompanied minors who arrived in Italy in recent years is one of the highest in Europe. Too many of these children go missing after arrival. In 2016, a report by Save the Children on children who were victims of trafficking and exploitation by criminal organizations in Italy highlighted that, by the end of 2015, 6,135 unaccompanied children, primarily of Eritrean (1,571), Somali (1,459), Egyptian (1,325) and Afghan (649) origin were missing in the country.[251] There is a need for long-term support for those who access reception and integration processes in the country of arrival. A 2019 UNHCR-UNICEF-IOM report titled, At a crossroads: Unaccompanied and separated children in their transition to adulthood in Italy,[252] illustrated the needs of an estimated 60,000 UASC who had arrived in Italy between 2014 and 2018, including access to housing, education, employment and building social relationships.

Raffaela Milano, Director of Italy-Europe Programmes of Save the Children in Italy, made a statement regarding the impact of COVID-19 on victims and at-risk groups of trafficking:

"We need to step up the fight against child exploitation, with a particular focus on online exploitation, and intensify our work to support victims. A key aspect is [to provide] support for survivors who escape from exploitation. Many routes to re-integration for girls who had the courage to rebel against their exploiters are at risk because job placement opportunities, which are usually in sectors such as hotels or catering, have suddenly disappeared owing to COVID-19. We cannot fail to support the courage of these girls, who are exposed to serious risks of violence and retaliation."[253]

Malta

On April 9th, the Maltese government announced that the country would no longer be able to guarantee the rescue of migrants or allow their disembarkation during the coronavirus emergency.[254] The government has been reported to have commissioned private ships to return migrants and refugees to detention centres in Libya.[255] More than 400 people rescued in the Maltese SAR zone at the end of May were still held in tourist vessels chartered by the Maltese government and moored outside of Maltese territorial waters by early June.[256] Maltese officials further admitted to having coordinated return operations by carrying ships back to detention camps in Libya.[257] Additionally, NGOs and other actors in the region have been forced to suspend SAR operations in the Mediterranean Sea due to health and travel restrictions.[258]

France

The French government has extended protection for all children in the government's care until the end of the COVID-19 emergency, including UASCs and youth under 21, previously under the care of French child welfare services.[259] However, in France, concerns about access to water, sanitation and room to socially distance remain as migrants are being released from detention centres and moved to camps.[260] In April, French authorities in Calais and Dunkirk began to move people from the makeshift camps into accommodation centres. NGOs report that the centres can only accommodate 400 people in total while there are thought to be about 1,500 people sleeping rough in informal camps in northern France.[261] In Marseille, many unaccompanied children and youth on the move—whom authorities have failed to secure care and shelter before the pandemic—are now facing a heightened risk as public child protection services have halted under the health restrictions imposed by

the government. As a result, more unaccompanied migrant children might have been forced onto the streets or into unsanitary, overcrowded informal housing.[262]

Western Balkans

In the last 5 years, an estimated 200,000-300,000 migrant children have crossed this region, of which one-fourth were unaccompanied minors.[263] Displaced children in this region have often been exposed to violence (pushbacks, police violence) and dire conditions (overcrowded accommodation, living on the street).[264] In many cases, there is a lack of accommodation, social workers, guardians and resettlement possibilities for UASC.[265] Since the asylum systems in these countries are inadequate, NGOs have played a key role in providing services to displaced people, including legal advice. However, the rejection of asylum claims has been on the rise, e.g., in Croatia from 66% to 82% between 2016 and 2019.[266]

In this region, physical distancing has been hard to implement for displaced people living in camps and overcrowded centres.[267] In Bosnia, thousands of people have been forcefully moved into a large tent settlement with little room for distancing and inadequate access to water, heat, and power.[268] The security minister is reported to have suggested that migrants should be detained and deported from the country, rather than accommodated in camps—proposing a detention period of up to five years in order to establish the identity of migrants.[269] At the same time, UNICEF and its partners have facilitated Paediatric Units in two migrant and refugee reception facilities, offering medical check-ups and regular counselling to children and caregivers.[270]

Eastern Europe

In Bulgarian reception facilities, UNICEF has been providing support to ensure that asylum seekers and their families have access to essential health services during COVID-19. Frontline workers (including cultural mediators, social workers, and interpreters) received online training on safety and wellbeing. UNICEF partners received adequate personal protection equipment to carry out their work safely. [271]

As early as March, the Hungarian government indefinitely suspended access to border transit areas for asylum seekers, claiming a "certain link between coronavirus and illegal migrants."[272]

Portugal and Spain

Portugal saw a temporary regularisation of all pending residence application holders, which has resulted in calls for similar measures echoing across several EU member states.[273]

In Spain, most of the immigration detention facilities have been emptied and people have been moved into new housings with family members and communities—new arrivals are also housed with guaranteed access to local health and social services

UK and Ireland

Undocumented migrants in Ireland are eligible to apply for several governments benefits, including:

- The Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), a social welfare payment for workers and students laid off because of the pandemic—irrespective of immigration status;

- Urgent Needs Payment, a one-time payment to persons who do not have available resources to meet basic immediate needs; and

- The Exception Needs Payment with similar uses.[274]

According to a policy brief by the UN Migration Network Working Group on Alternatives to Immigration Detention, the government has confirmed "there are no plans in place to share any data we receive as part of an immigrant's application for a COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment with GNIB (Immigration Authorities) or the Department of Justice and Equality."[275]

In the UK, all National Health Services have been accessible and free for everyone regardless of their immigration status, including COVID-19 testing and treatment.[276] The authorities are also refraining from detaining nationals from 49 countries where deportation is currently not possible.[277] Over 350 migrants were released following a legal case, with further cases pending review.[278]

Germany

A German court ruled that COVID-19 protection was 'inadequate' for a pregnant woman and her husband in their refugee shelter after they appealed to the courts.[279] Following, at least 70 people in a reception facility near Bonn were reportedly tested positive for COVID-19.

ENDNOTES

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