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CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FORCED MIGRATION

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The Protection of Unaccompanied Minors in Europe: Revising the Existing Asylum Policies of the European Union

Abstract: Children, who are outside their country of origin and separated from their parents or other relatives are referred to unaccompanied minors. Although the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) of the European Union (EU) has ascertained that member states should not send asylum seekers to another country where they would not be safe, the member states often take restrictive measures to repatriate vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors and prevent their entries. Therefore, the paper argues that the existing prevailing asylum policies of the EU have failed to address the protection needs of unaccompanied minors. This fragmented protection is comprised of lapses in the family reunification process, negligence of their take-charge requests, prolonged detention and expulsions. Along with that understanding, the author concludes that the time has come for a timely revision of the EU asylum mechanisms. Moreover, the paper employs qualitative methodology to substantiate both dependent and independent variables. The cross-border movements of unaccompanied minors are viewed as the independent variable, while the EU's stance on unaccompanied minors is reflected as the dependent variable.

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Zaščita mladoletnikov brez spremstva v Evropi: pregled obstoječih azilnih politik v Evropski uniji

Izvleček: Otroci, ki so zunaj svoje matične države in ločeni od staršev ali drugih sorodnikov, se imenujejo mladoletni migranti brez spremstva. Čeprav Skupni evropski azilni sistem (CEAS) v Evropski uniji (EU) prepoveduje državam članicam vračanje prosilcev za azil v države, kjer niso varni, le-te pogosto sprejemajo restriktivne ukrepe premeščanja ranljivih skupin, vključno z mladoletnimi migranti brez spremstva ter tako preprečujejo njihov vstop v EU. Članek na podlagi omenjenega argumentira, da prakse azilnih politik EU ne upoštevajo potreb mladoletnih migrantov po celoviti zaščiti. Ta fragmentarna zaščita je pogosto posledica napak v procesu združevanja družine, zanemarjanja njihovih zahtev za prevzem odgovornosti, dejstva dolgotrajnega pridržanja in vračanja v druge države. Ob tem avtorica v članku ugotavlja, da je čas za revizijo azilnih mehanizmov EU, pri čemer uporablja kvalitativno metodologijo za utemeljitev tako odvisnih kot neodvisnih spremenljivk; čezmejna gibanja mladoletnikov brez spremstva obravnava kot neodvisno spremenljivko, medtem ko se stališča EU do mladoletnikov brez spremstva v analizi obravnavajo kot odvisna spremenljivka.

Ključne besede: mladoletniki brez spremstva, prosilci za azil, CEAS, združitev družine, zahteve za prevzem odgovornosti, pridržanje, izgoni

Introduction

Generally, 'asylum' is interpreted as a privilege that is conferred by the state. The inherent right of individuals to seek asylum was given a mere metric unit to measure it. It signifies that states have discretionary powers to accept or refuse the requests made by asylum seekers. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2022), an asylum seeker is an individual who has left their country of origin with the aim of seeking international protection against persecutions and whose protection claims are in the pending stage. Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1948) has recognised the right of people to seek asylum as a universal right of every individual as follows:

Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. The right may not be invoked in the case of persecution genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 1 of Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who fears prosecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. This convention is an advancement of the 1933 Convention Relating to the International Status of Refugees that can be named as the first international agreement, which forbids the removal of a refugee to a territory where he or she holds the risk of being exposed to persecution. In accordance with that purview, unaccompanied minors may not be able to articulate the well-founded fear due to their incapability to understand prevailing situations in their home countries.

In the opinion of the 'Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in Dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum', unaccompanied minors are persons who are under the age of eighteen and are separated from both parents (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Geneva 1997). As per the Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations 1989) they are not being cared for by an adult, law or custom. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (NYD) which was presented by the United Nations UN General Assembly in 2016 has also reiterated the importance of an organised asylum procedure and encloses a wide range of commitments to enrich the protection of unaccompanied minors (United Nations 2016). Unlike the 1951 convention (UNHCR 1951), the NYD indicates state responsibilities in protecting unaccompanied minors and provides specific support for them under international law:

> We recognise and will address, in accordance with our obligations under international law, the special needs of all people in vulnerable situations who are travelling within large movements of refugees and migrants, including women at risk, children, especially those who are unaccompanied or separated from their families. (United Nations 2016, Article 23)

European Union

When it comes to the context of Europe, it was highlighted in Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) that border, asylum, and immigration policies of the EU are governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility. The solidarity delineates the capability of distributing asylum seekers among the member countries and their loyalty towards the institutional norms. For instance, Dublin Regulation has assured the responsibility of the member states to examine asylum

applications based on the first point of entry of asylum seekers and grant them a refugee status. But, as the solidarity of the EU has been securitized, it has not yet implemented an effective protection mechanism for vulnerable groups like unaccompanied minors. Feller (2001, 584) views that these problems are predominantly caused by the lack of a shared international sense when it comes to unaccompanied minors. It is mainly derived from the conflicting status on EU Directives that has emerged between the member states and the EU. In this setup, Dreyer-Plum (2017, 6-7) has argued that the European asylum system is a highly fragmented system, which undermines the credibility of the EU as a sponsor of human rights and good governance.

In the case of relevant theories, which can be used to analyse this situation, the theory known as 'Securitization' provides a definite layout to analyse the security stances of the states on the protection seekers. Buzan and Waever (1998, 15) posit that the securitization theory is radically constructivist, which views that an issue can be securitized when it gets constructed into a threat. Hereby migration is perceived as a serious challenge to the long-standing paradigms of state identity and the transnational nature of the EU.

The Unaccompanied Minors in Europe

In line with the 'Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors' (2010-2014) formed by the EU Commission, the Council has set out a common approach for the protection of children based on the CRC (European Commission 2010). It deals with the fulfilment of the protection needs of any child irrespective of their immigration status or citizenship. CRC is the first international human rights treaty that brought a unique human rights approach for children. It was also ratified by all EU member states. Article 2 of the CRC places compulsions upon states to safeguard children against all

forms of discrimination or punishment. As these minors come from disrupted societies where poverty, violence, inequalities are deeply rooted, their right to enjoy international protection can be identified as one of the universal values. In this setup, the 'Executive Committee of the UNHCR' (UNHCR 2007) has categorized children as active subjects of rights as follows:

> *A rights-based approach, which recognises children as active subjects of rights, and according to which all interventions are consistent with State's obligations under relevant international law, including, as applicable, international refugee law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and acknowledgement that the CRC provides an important legal and normative framework for the protection of children.*

As mentioned by the committee, strengthening government liabilities in order to fulfil the children's right to protection ensures their fundamental right to live. The scope of the EU treaty provisions can be cited in the following manner.

> *In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.* (European Union 1957)

Moreover, the member states are bounded by well-established EU Directives, case laws of the the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), treaties of the Council of Europe and other region-

al agreements. As defined in Article 2(h) of the EU Council Directive 2003/9/EC (Council of the European Union 2003), unaccompanied minors are non-EU nationals or stateless persons below the age of 18 and unaccompanied by an adult responsible by law or custom. The term unaccompanied minor first emerged within the EU scope in 2000, in a study carried out by the European Parliament (EP) to examine how children's rights were being practised in multiple settings in Europe (Bernd 2017, 1). The 'Coordination and Cooperation in Integrated Child Protection System' was launched by the EU in 2015 to instigate a protective policy for unaccompanied minors (Coordination and Cooperation in Integrated Child Protection Systems 2015; European Commission Reflection Paper 2015). This aspect was anchored in the 'Common European Asylum System' (CEAS), which emerged in 1992 with the intent to reinforce the notion of intergovernmental cooperation on asylum policies. In other words, the commitment of EU member states to process asylum applications became prominent after signing the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Article K of the treaty assimilated the concept of asylum into EU's third pillar known as Justice and Home Affairs, as a 'matter of common interest' (European Union 1992). Under this treaty, a new institutional approach was introduced to allow the EU Council to work closely with the EU Commission in implementing asylum initiatives. Then the communique of the Treaty of Amsterdam titled 'Towards an Area of Freedom, Security and Justice' (AFSJ) brought new priorities to the field of asylum seeking, including minimum standards for asylum procedures that are obliged by the EU council and Commission (European Union 1997). In conjunction, Article 73K (b) of the Amsterdam treaty determines that temporary protection is required to be granted to asylum seekers through a definite burden sharing mechanism. This approach was further reinforced by the concept of solidarity, which is an overrid-

ing principle used in sharing the burden of asylum seekers among the EU member states. It is mainly aligned with the willingness of member states to share asylum seekers within the union (Council of the European Union 1995). From that perspective, Article 67 of the TFEU has introduced a common policy on asylum, immigration and external borders. This intertwines with the Preamble to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR), which demonstrates universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity (European Commission 2022a; European Parliament, Council of Europe and European Commission 2012). These collective identities have given the union the competence to act in the field of asylum, immigration and external border controls by performing their shared obligations. Wendt's (1995, 77-78) findings specify that the collective identity consists of interdependence, common perceptions and homogenization of polices. In this milieu, it is very clear that all EU member states are responsible for protecting the human rights of asylum seekers. But the rules and regulations that have been set out within the scope of CEAS meant to ensure the international protection of asylum seekers have now become more complex due to its legal provisions and the disinclination of member states to accommodate unaccompanied minors in their countries.

It has been reported that an estimated 9,300 unaccompanied minors had entered Europe between January and August 2021 (UNICEF 2022b). The lifting of COVID-19 regulations and Turkey's decision in 2020 to open its borders with Greece and Bulgaria led to an influx of unaccompanied minors from Northern, Sub-Saharan Africa and Syria to the countries like Greece, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Serbia. It showed a 95% increase compared to the same period in 2020 (European Parliamentary Research Service 2022). Furthermore, unaccompanied minors who had sought protection in the EU in 2021 later increased to 72%, which was mainly

followed by the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan (Reuters 2022). In this regard, Eurostat confirms that unaccompanied minors, who applied for asylum in 2020, rose to 23,255 (Reuters 2022). On the other hand, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has intensified the moves of the unaccompanied minors to EU states such as Slovakia, and Romania. The European Commission (2022b) has found out that 500 unaccompanied minors have arrived in Romania and to the Polish-Ukrainian border by May 2022.

Most likely, the prevalent burden of unaccompanied minors imposed on EU states is caused by the inefficiency of the CEAS in managing the inflows of asylum seekers. Dublin regulation (DR) was introduced in 1990 for the first time to lodge asylum claims effectively within the member states (Smythies and Ramazzotti 2013). The regulation was signed as a co-response to the implementation of the Schengen Agreement. Through further developments, DR II was announced in 2003 to make sure that the applicants are offered substantive examinations. Moving forward from both DR I and II, DR III was formed in 2013 with the goal of diminishing deficiencies faced by the member states. In Feller's (2001, 593) words, problems faced by refugees and asylum seekers are predominantly followed by the absence of a shared international sense of responsibilities. In relation to this, DR generally establishes the member state's responsibility to examine asylum applications based on the first point of entry. As per the Asylum Procedures Directive (The Council of the European Union 2005):

> *A country can be considered to be a first country of asylum for a particular applicant for asylum if: (a) s/he has been recognised in that country as a refugee and s/he can still avail him/herself of that protection; or (b) s/he otherwise enjoys sufficient protection in that country, including benefiting from the principle of non-refoulement.*

This arrangement has led to a rise in the share of these first countries. Again, the DR was contradicted with the ruling made by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in the case of the MA and Others v. Secretary of State (Court of Justice of the European Union 2013). The court concluded that for unaccompanied minors who have lodged more than one claim for international protection in two member states, the responsible member state is the country in which the minor is accommodated after having lodged an asylum application there.

Family Reunification and Take-Charge Requests

Family reunification of unaccompanied minors indicates bringing together a child and his or her previous care providers for the purpose of re-establishing long-term care. The right of individuals to enjoy family life without any disturbance has been documented as one of the basic human rights in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and CRC. In line with the CRC, a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will. At this point, DR III has demonstrated that the unaccompanied minors are only permitted to unify with family members who are legally settled within the member states but not with family members who seek asylum in other countries. This provision has restricted the possibility of unaccompanied minors settling with their family members.

Moreover, Article 2 (d) of the DR III defines that the father, mother or other adults are permissible to protect unaccompanied minors, but not their siblings. This confines the opportunities of unaccompanied minors to settle with their younger siblings who might be living in different EU member states. Therefore, it is very clear that the best interests of unaccompanied minors have been neglected by the EU asylum mechanisms in reunifying them with their families.

All state obligations regarding children, enshrined in the modern international refugee regime are primarily interlinked with their best interests. Generally, the best interest of children describes the well-being of children and is applied consistently with international legal norms. The assessment of the best interest of unaccompanied minors is a unique activity that is required to be undertaken in each asylum case in accordance with the procedural safeguards. In the words of the Committee on the Rights of the Children's (2013):

> ... *assessing and determining the best interests of the child require procedural guarantees. Furthermore, the justification of a decision must show that the right has been explicitly taken into account. In this regard, States parties shall explain how the right has been respected in the decision, that is, what has been considered to be in the child's best interests; what criteria it biased on; and how the child's interests have been weighed against other considerations, be they broad issues of policy or individual cases.*

In line with it, the NYD (United Nations 2016) for Refugees and Migrants assures to:

> ... *protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all refugee and migrant children, regardless of their status, and giving primary consideration at all times to the best interests of the child. This will apply particularly to unaccompanied children and those separated from their families; we will refer their care to the relevant national child protection authorities and other relevant authorities. We will comply with our obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

In other words, in the case of making any decision regarding unaccompanied minors by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative

bodies, the prime consideration needs to be given to the best interest of the child (United Nations 1989). Unlike Principle 2 of the 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the CRC fails to interpret the best interest of the child in a broader view. Nevertheless, both the declaration and convention have not exactly elaborated the term of 'best interest'. At this point, capacities in assessing the best interest of children differ from one country to another. The question then arises on how to define the best interest of children and what criterion needs to be considered in ascertaining said best interest. Despite CRC permitting the detaining of children only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest period, the detention of unaccompanied minors takes place in an atmosphere of enforcing decisions to repatriate them to their countries of origin. Hence, many of these detained minors run away due to their fear of being sent back to war zones where they came from. Conversely, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in the case of Rahimi v. Greece (Smyth 2013, 21) has endorsed that the best interests of children must be assessed before transferring them to another location. Most importantly, this case is the first time a court examined an unaccompanied minor who was released from a detention centre without assessing his best interest. The striking factor is that the capabilities and understandings of legal representatives who are appointed on behalf unaccompanied minors to exemplify their best interests may vary from one person to another. Legal representatives are legal advisors or professionals who deliver legal assistance to unaccompanied minors. For instance, a specific asylum act law functioned in Portugal to assure the competencies of legal representatives are in conformity with the measures adopted by the 'Portuguese Refugee Council' (CPR) (Delbos et al. 2012, 52). But the process is not being implemented effectively because

of the absence of competent staff (ibid). Reasoning from this fact, unaccompanied minors are not in a position to lodge their asylum applications on time as they cannot apply for asylum without a legal representative.

Furthermore, the legal representatives who are appointed to assess the best interest of unaccompanied minors must exercise their responsibilities until a relevant guardian is appointed for them. As stated in Article 2 (K) of the DR III (European Database of Asylum Law 2013), representatives are persons or organizations assigned by the shelter states to assist the minors. Particularly, volunteers, lawyers and even mayors in the member states act as the representatives of unaccompanied minors (European Commission 2015). In relation to that, Article 8 of the DR IV suggest appointing guardians for unaccompanied minors no later than twenty-four hours after making the application. These shorter deadlines would disrupt the efficacy of the procedure as well as the best interest of children (European Council on Refugees and Exiles 2016). A guardian is a person or organization appointed for an unaccompanied minor to ensure the overall security of the child, by projecting their best interests and exercising legal representations and procedures on behalf of the child (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2022). In line with the EU proceedings n. 2014/2171, guardians are often appointed several months after the minor's arrival. A relative, a person close to the child's family or different suitable persons are often named as guardians. They are informed of every action taken in relation to unaccompanied minors and permitted to be present during all planning and decision-making processes, including appeal hearings and all care arrangements (UNHCR 2017).

In addition, take-charge requests made by the EU states in support of unaccompanied minors are constantly expired due to the failures in the process of determining their best interests. Take-

charge requests refer to first application, which is being processed in a State where the Dublin III Regulation applies (International Protection Office 2022). A take-charge request is emanated when the applicant has not previously applied for asylum, but another member state is considered to be responsible based on a pre-determined criterion. In conformity with these applications, take-charge requests of unaccompanied minors, which are submitted to another country on the grounds that their legal residence and place of entry need to be justified through the applicant's close and fair links to that country.

Article 21 of the DR III asks member states to proceed by taking charge of requests within 3 months from the date of application. The receiving countries then need to give a decision for take-charge requests within two months from the date of request. Conversely, the reluctance and inabilities of the sheltering states to initiate these mechanisms have resulted in extended delays of transfer decisions. At the same time, unaccompanied minors who have received the acceptance for their take-charge requests are required to wait for extended periods of time until the arrangements are made by the receiving countries.

The refusal to take-charge requests is also driven by the inability of unaccompanied minors to produce sufficient proof on their countries of origin. The majority of these unaccompanied minors remain undetected within their host countries as they arrived from societies where their dates of birth are often not even recorded (Silverman 2016, 32). It was reported that one in four children under the age of 5 worldwide has never been officially registered (UNICEF 2019). As an example, in the countries like Afghanistan, it is difficult to obtain documentations on the biological age of minors because of the lack of bureaucratic and institutional resources. Validating the willingness of both children and their parents to

reunite is another challenge of this family reunification process. This concern was brought once by the case of Tuquabo-Tekle & Others v. the Netherland (ECtHR 2006b), which examined the inability of the government of the Netherlands to identify an unaccompanied minor's interest to rejoin her mother who has chosen to leave her behind in the country of origin and married a refugee living in the Netherlands. The ECtHR stated that it is questionable to what extent the interest of the mother can be assessed once she left her child following the death of her husband. The difficulty of meeting the deadlines of take-charge requests was also questioned in the case of VG Wiesbaden AZ. 4 L 478/19.WI. A (Administrative Court Wiesbaden 2019), which addressed the matter of a single mother from Afghanistan who moved to Germany with one child while leaving her second child in Greece. Though Greece made a take-charge request by considering the child's best interest, both take-charge requests and re-examination requests were rejected on account of the expiration of the deadlines. Hence, it is apparent that there is an imprecision in the EU asylum system regarding the protection of unaccompanied minors who were initially accompanied by an adult and then abandoned during the journey.

The absence of member states' concerns about effective family reunification of unaccompanied minors has also resulted in trafficking. Trafficking has been known as a serious violation of fundamental rights that involves practices such as abuses and deceptions of vulnerable persons. With this understanding, 'Claude Moraes' who was the former chair of the European Parliament (EP)'s Justice and Home Affairs Committee, once pointed out the need of having an organised care for unaccompanied minors once they arrived in Europe (Neslen 2017). The Anti-trafficking Directive (2011/36/EU) has highlighted the necessity of giving distinct attention to unaccompanied minors who are the victims of traf-

ficking. Article 13 (2) of the Anti-Trafficking Directive has advised EU member states to arrange initial support and protection for children who are vulnerable to trafficking (European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2011). Even so, the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) has observed that at least 10,000 refugee children have disappeared after arriving in Europe (As cited in Townsend 2016). Within this landscape, it has found out that at least 18,000 unaccompanied minors have disappeared after entering countries like Germany, Greece, and Italy (Einashe and Homolova 2021). Besides, the Inter -Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking (ICAT), (as cited in UNICEF 2022a) has confirmed that 28 % of victims of the global trafficking represent children. As mentioned by Einashe and Homolova, trafficked unaccompanied minors often become the targets of the sexual exploitation, forced begging and labour. For instance, it was revealed in 2019 that 60 Vietnamese children had disappeared from shelters in the Netherlands. The Dutch authorities assumed that they had been trafficked into Britain to work on cannabis farms and in nail salons (Einashe and Terlingen 2019). In 2020, the Austrian government also acknowledged the fact that approximately 4500 unaccompanied minors, who had applied for asylum in Austria last year, had disappeared and were transferred into the hands of traffickers (MacGregor 2022).

Detention

In the case of processing the asylum mechanisms of unaccompanied minors, detention can be reflected as the one of the common measures that is undertaken by the states. Article 19 of the CRC mentions that a detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort. In other words, it justifies the detention of children

in compliance with the law. Generally, unaccompanied minors frequently undergo detention once they are captured. These detention centres do not offer a specially designed or child friendly environment that could be beneficial to their growth and education. Pertaining to this concern, the ECtHR held in the cases of Rahimi v. Greece (European Database of Asylum Law 2011) and Abdullahi Elmi and Aweys Abudakar v. Malta (ECtHR 2016) that the inadequate hygiene and infrastructure facilities of detention centres undermine the human dignity of unaccompanied minors. However, states like Costa Rica (Global Detention Project 2015) and Ireland (Delbos et al. 2012, 30-31) have forbidden the detention of children for immigration purposes. As rendered in the case of Mubilanzila Mayeka and Kaniki Mitunga v. Belgium (ECtHR 2006a), known as Tabitha's case, the detention of unaccompanied minors in incongruous environments and repatriating them to their countries of origin violates the minor's right to a family life. In line with this, the court affirmed that exceptional care for unaccompanied minors in detention is highly required to assure their safety. Besides, unaccompanied minors are reluctant to share information on their parents or caregivers, especially when they are in the custody of government authorities. Furthermore, prolonged detentions have made a negative impact on the aged-out young minors. Particularly adolescent unaccompanied minors, who passed the age of 18, are regularly subjected to lengthy detentions or repatriations. Also, unaccompanied minors held in detention are often at a risk of post-traumatic stress disorder that negatively impacts their health and development. These unaccompanied minors stay for extended periods in camps, without being exposing to the cultural and social patterns of their host countries. They undergo serious physiological stages due to the loss of their identity and protection. Although paragraph 33 of the NYD asks to adopt alternatives to detention of

children, the international community has not yet proposed a progressive alternative for detention. Again, the court held in the cases of Rahimi v. Greece (ECtHR 2011b) and Abdullahi Elmi and Aweys Abudakar v. Malta (ECtHR 2016) that the hygiene and infrastructure facilities are a basic right of unaccompanied minors.

Expulsions and Returns

Article 19 of the CFR states that Non-refoulement prohibits sending asylum seekers to a country in which they would face serious risks caused by torture or inhuman degradation (As cited in the European Commission 2022). It is an exceptional limitation to exercise sovereign rights of states to repatriate aliens to their countries of origin. In this regard, as per the UN Convention Against Torture, expelling unaccompanied minors to their countries of origin where they are likely to be tortured can be named as a violation of human rights. (UNHCR 1984). Since the principle of Non-refoulement is not being upheld on the high seas or in international waters, there are issues related to the enactment of this principle. Nevertheless, the irrelevance of the provision to safeguard unaccompanied minors was questioned in the case of ECtHR-M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece (ECtHR 2011a). The case dealt with the removal of unaccompanied minors with Afghan citizenship from Greece and Belgium and then to the child's home country by exposing them to perilous environments. With this background, the expulsion of unaccompanied minors is a practice of states that compel children to leave a country, even without any reasonable examination of their protection claims. The court rule given by the ECtHRn the case of Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy case (ECtHR 2012), elaborated further that the maritime interceptions of unaccompanied minors on the high seas infringe the IV additional protocol pertaining to the prohibition of collec-

tive expulsions. These expulsions of asylum seekers are frequently prompted by maritime interceptions of states, which are aimed at preventing their arrival. This reality was also acknowledged by Violeta Moreno-Lax's (2008, 333), which stated that the expulsion too includes the rejections unaccompanied minors at the borders. Regarding the return of unaccompanied minors, the EU Returns Directive (European Parliament 2020, Article 10(2)) indicates that before making a return decision for an unaccompanied minor, the receiving country needs to confirm that the child would be returned to a family member, a nominated guardian or would undertake adequate reception facilities. Despite these commonly accepted rules, member states have launched different mechanisms, which question the collective stance of the EU.

The Way Forward

In 2016, the EU Commission proposed to revise the existing Dublin procedures to address deficiencies that exist in the Dublin applications (European Commission 2020). From that point of view, DR IV was drafted to introduce a well-organized reception procedure. The proposal intends to 'create a fairer, more efficient, and suitable mechanism in processing asylum applications among the member states (European Commission 2016). The judgement made by The Supreme Court (2015) in the case of TN, MA (Afghanistan) (Appellants) v. Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent) assured the importance of assessing the best interest of unaccompanied minors before tracing their family links. Tracing is a process of searching for the child's primary or usual caregivers and other family members in accordance with the best interest of the child. This also refers to the search for missing children, whose parents are looking for them. After these tracing activities, states need to decide whether unaccompanied minors

need to return to their countries of origin or to another third country. However, this provision might be incompatible with Article 3(3) of the DR IV that permits states to review the admissibility of the applicants to grant protection prior to the assessment of their family links (European Council on Refugees and Exiles 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the protection of unaccompanied minors should be positioned in the EU asylum system as these are under-aged individuals who leave their home countries in search of safety and shelter. Since these minors come from disrupted societies where poverty, violence, inequalities are deeply rooted, their right to enjoy international protection needs to be identified by sovereign states as a key universal norm. Since a separate legal mechanism or declaration on the asylum claims of unaccompanied minors has not yet been formulated by the EU, their freedom to seek asylum has been jeopardised across Europe. For that, states must adopt relevant legal provisions in respect of their rights and claims. Although universal discourses on the protection of unaccompanied minors are merely predicated as special recognition, an unresolved question remains on the commitment of EU member states to facilitate effective sharing of unaccompanied minors among the member states.

The limited power that derives from EU international mechanisms and procedures does not overcome the above-discussed challenges faced by unaccompanied minors. It is also evident that a conflicting status has emerged between the member state's asylum policies and the EU asylum law, which is mainly followed by interpretive inconsistencies. Therefore, it is unclear whether member states are truly bound by the shared EU norms and values. With this in mind, the protection of unaccompanied minors is required to be the first and foremost concern of member states

since the international human rights law upholds the protection of children as an inalienable human right.

The reluctance of member states to agree upon a common strategy to process take-charge requests and assess the best interest of unaccompanied minors has often resulted in the separation of them from their families. Therefore, comprehensive actions are required in order to share unaccompanied minors among the member states effectively and exercise their jurisdiction in complying with the international law. In conjunction, an authoritative body that monitors or reports the issues of unaccompanied minors needs to function within the existing EU asylum system.

In dealing with the family reunification of unaccompanied minors, it is essential to first broaden the scope of family members by allowing unaccompanied minors to unify even with their siblings in an extended manner. Along with existing regulations, take-charge requests of unaccompanied minors, which are submitted to another country on the grounds of their legal residence and place of their entry, should be justified through the applicant's connection to that country.

The lack of safety for unaccompanied minors at the borders where they are denied entry is mainly caused by the absence of a child-centred strategy. Subsequently, protection gaps in the treatment of unaccompanied minors need to be addressed by the relevant state and legislative authorities by developing the clauses related to child protection. States should give the utmost attention to widening child-specific forms and manifestations in determining their status. Creating an independent body to formulate a common criterion to measure the best interests of children and provide legal assistance on national asylum policies would be more beneficial to address the protection needs of unaccompanied minors. Its focus must be laid on an effective and sustainable child protection system that includes a better reception system, emergency response

mechanisms, secured accommodation systems, inter-state collaborations, proper coordination between governments and law enforcement agencies, and an efficient information sharing arrangement regarding unaccompanied minors across the territories. All those procedures must also stem from understanding the inability to make a definite benchmark on the eligible age for unaccompanied minors that is highly dependent on social, political and psychological factors. Finally, this paper concludes that the EU should review its asylum policies concerning unaccompanied minors in order to establish efficient and effective protection for them.

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Consultation with Children on the Move – Lessons Learned in Creating a Child-friendly Research Process

Abstract: In order to respond to the growing needs of migrant families with children, and especially unaccompanied children, who were travelling on the Western Balkan route, social workers and other field workers and child protection officers had to acquire new knowledge and develop specific competencies in a relatively short period of time. Although Serbia is mainly a country of transit, migrant children, who have been staying in Serbia for a longer period of time, have experienced challenges in access to services due to language barriers, overstretched capacities and insufficient coordination. The aim of the paper is to describe and reflect on the process used to develop a design, which ensures migrant children are consulted throughout the process and are the co-creators of a social work curriculum responding to their vulnerabilities. In order to gain insights on the views of children on the move regarding competencies of the workforce in both the government and NGO institutions, a consultation process was introduced with both unaccompanied and accompanied children in Serbia. The methodology of consultations was designed as interactive and safe for children

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to express their views and experiences. Results indicate that children should be key participants in the co-creation of knowledge in matters that concern them, and it is necessary to develop, test and evaluate the ways in which we can best understand their experiences, points of view and perspectives and incorporate them into knowledge for action.

Keywords: consultation with children, visual techniques, migrant children, participatory methods, co-creation of knowledge

Konzultacije z otroki na poti – izkušnje, pridobljene pri ustvarjanju otrokom prijaznega raziskovalnega procesa

Izvleček: Odziv na potrebe migrantskih družin z otroki, predvsem pa otrok brez spremstva na zahodno balkanski begunski poti, je od socialnih delavcev, terenskih delavcev ter uradnikov za zaščito otrok v Srbiji zahteval pridobitev novih znanj in razvoj specifičnih kompetenc v relativno kratkem času. Čeprav je Srbija večinoma tranzitna država, so otroci migranti, ki v državi ostajajo dlje časa, imeli težave z dostopom do storitev zaradi jezikovnih ovir, omejenih kapacitet državnih organov in pomanjkljive koordinacije programov. Namen članka je opisati in reflektirati proces razvoja pristopa, ki bi zagotavljal vključenost migrantskih otrok v proces obravnave kot soustvarjalcev kurikuluma socialnega dela in se tako odzival na njihove ranljivosti. Z namenom pridobitve vpogleda v mnenja otrok glede kompetenc zaposlenih v državnih in nevladnih institucijah so bila v Srbiji izvedena posvetovanja z mladoletnimi migranti. Metodologija posvetovanja je bila zasnovana kot interaktivna metoda, ki je spodbujala izražanje otrokovih pogledov in izkušenj. Rezultati so potrdili, da bi morali biti otroci ključni udeleženci pri soustvarjanju znanja o zadevah, ki se jih tičejo; zato bi bilo treba razvijati, testirati in ovrednotiti načine, na katere lahko najbolje

razumemo njihove izkušnje, stališča in poglede ter jih tako vključimo v odziv in delovanje.

Ključne besede: posvetovanje z otroki, vizualne tehnike, otroci migranti, participativne metode, soustvarjanje znanja

Introduction

The principle of the best interests of the child (UN CRC 1989), as a substantive right, fundamental and interpretative legal principle and a rule of procedure in the context of child migration, is a particularly sensitive and complex issue. On an individual level, it is necessary to consider the situation of each individual child: the culture to which the child belongs, their previous experiences, available support and other aspects that shape the child's perspective. Furthermore, the principle of best interest applies to all children without discrimination, both individually, and as a group, which poses new challenges in understanding and realizing the best interest of particularly vulnerable groups of children, such as children in migration. There are only a small number of studies that document experiences of children in migration told by their own voices (Oh 2012, 383). Such research is important since children play a central role in developing the knowledge on the issues that affect them with the assumption that children themselves are valid sources of data with the ability to communicate information about their own lives (Crivello et al. 2009, 67; Ebrahim 2010, 292; Smith 2011, 15).

However, there is a growing interest in research that is child-oriented and participatory, striving to place children at the centre of the process, with the awareness that participation can be more or less active. This has particularly been the case in qualitative research methods that are designed to examine children's experiences and perspectives, especially about children in vulnerable

situations (Crivello et al. 2009, 70; Due et al. 2014, 215). In a process of wider re-evaluation of research with children (Lewis et al. 2004, 194; Christensen and James 2008, 24), visual participatory methods have become increasingly used. Researchers and practitioners across a range of disciplines employ them as means of exploring children's and youth's experiences, relationships, and lifestyles (Hart 1992, 39; Barker and Weller 2003, 223; Thompson 2008, 12).

In this paper, we discuss our experiences in designing and implementing a child-friendly, participatory consultation methodology concerning children's experiences of migration on the Balkan route. As children from the sample spoke little or no domicile language or English, the research design included both visual techniques to facilitate communication and interpreters who also acted as cultural mediators.

In order to gain insights on the views of children on the move about required competencies of the workforce from both the government and NGO institutions, a consultation process was organized with unaccompanied and accompanied children in Serbia. The purpose of the consultation was to adequately capture child perspectives and their experiences during the journey; identify who and what helped them on the road and in what way, which settings were they placed in Serbia and in which ways they exercise their rights.

This paper discusses and reflects on researchers' experiences on designing and implementing the consultation process, to build on the existing scientific knowledge on both successful and less useful approaches in conceptualizing consultation with children that have refugee or migrant experiences. The consultation was organized from February to April 2019 in Serbia, as part of a needs assessment in the process of developing a new curriculum "Protection of Children in Migration" at the University of Belgrade, for

both social work students and practitioners in the field of migration. The aim of the course is to build skills to design adequate intervention and ensure quality protection services for children affected by migration and displacement, with an additional focus on gender dynamics, gender inequality and GBV also in the context of migration and forced displacement. The starting principle in the development of the new curriculum was the co-creation of knowledge through participatory process that included consultation with children and youth affected by migration, frontline practitioners and experts in the field of Child Migration and Gender Studies, relevant state authorities and institutions and the UN and other relevant agencies. Co-creation of knowledge calls for common and newly emerged issues and engagement of end users to participate actively (Ruoslahti 2018, 129), in order to generate ideas for new products and services and to anticipate future needs (Wilenius 2008, 71). Sharing of knowledge sheds light on the need for new competencies from professionals (Pirinen 2015, 324), and implies end users as active participants with clear roles, common ways to work, and open communication with stakeholders.

When children are the end users in the process of knowledge co-creation, additional methodological, ethical and organizational issues need to be considered, so that their involvement genuinely moves beyond tokenism.

Consultation Process with Children in Migration

For the purposes of this paper, we understand child participation as a process in which children have relevant information, the opportunity to express their opinion, to be heard and respected, as well as to be involved in activities and to initiate activities related to issues that concern them (Avramović 2014, 18) with varying degrees of adult support. During the consultation process children

present their views, needs and preferences and are listened to, which creates the foundation for higher levels of child participation in order to: make choices, decisions and initiatives. Besides that, it includes an explanation of the ways in which their views will influence further processes on topics that matter to them, i.e. receiving feedback on the outcome of the process.

In this way, consultation with children provides pathways of seeking their views as guidance to action (Clark 2005, 490). The advantage of this definition is that the consultations are focused on a clear goal and that listening to children provides insights that are relevant for reviewing existing policies and practices, while also making decisions to improve them.

Groups of children, as well as individual children, often have different experiences and attitudes towards specific issues that need to be taken into account (Christensen 2008a, 30). The consultation process involves the child as an equal interlocutor, not only as the respondent.

With his/her perspective, the child contributes to the consultation framework itself (the topic in focus, questions, consultation techniques, etc.). Children can and should contribute to the choice of issues, which are to be addressed (such as decisions about their access to health care, education, housing or asylum claim as well as interventions undertaken by the government or NGOs), the choice of consulting techniques and their piloting, data collection and analysis, and reporting on consultations (Kellet 2005, 13). It is important that children receive feedback on their participation and the extent to which their opinions influenced decision-making.

Different tools such as mapping and guided tours are used in consultations so that the child can show the adult the environment, which is important and in which the child resides, to indicate the child's attitude towards the environment, his/hers assessment of

the environment and ideas for its improvement. Visual methods are being used creatively in diverse social and cultural contexts. Studies about migrant children views have been done in the following areas (Moskal 2010, 17): on health and illness (Geissler 1998b; Ross et al. 2009, 612; Fernandez et al. 2015, 157), poverty (Sime 2008, 68), tourism (Gamradt 1995, 745), identity (Cowan 1999, 101), identity and consumption (Croghan et al. 2008, 347), time (Christensen and James 2008b, 12), and place and belonging (Orellana 1999, 73). The aims of the research and theoretical background are usually reasons for different methods of collecting visual data (Bagnoli 2009, 560), which can include drawings (Geissler 1998a; Guillemin 2004, 272; van Blerk and Ansell 2006, 456; Fernandez et al. 2015, 151; Liamputtong and Fernandez 2015, 24), maps and diagrams (Bromley and Mackie 2009, 149; Moskal 2010, 29; Copeland and Agosto 2012, 515), and photographs and videos (Radley and Taylor 2003, 150; Tinkler 2008, 261; Marshall 2013, 64; Due et al. 2014, 217). According to some authors (Nieuwenhuys 1996, 52; Mitchell 2006, 63) visual methods are said to be "child-centred" in the sense that they may be familiar, yet enjoyable for the child, but also diminish power imbalances between the researcher and participants. These methods help build trust, enhance children's agency, contribute to the co-creation of knowledge, reflect on the position of the researcher and are useful in bringing out the complexities of child experience.

Children's migration reconsiders and, in a way, opposes the idea of children as innately local beings in the past two decades of researching child's agency (Mitchell 2006, 70). It also presents how children's everyday lives are shaped by structures and constraints originating beyond the local scale. Children's agency can be seen as a process that is "too often local, concrete and conflated into an acceptable focus for research, in opposition to a global, abstract or structuralist perspective that is viewed with suspicion as it is

too 'distant' from real children" (Ansell 2009, 194). Participatory research with child migrants seems to undermine the dualism of the global and local (Massey 2005) as the transnational social spaces in which they live continue to shape their social relations, cultural practices, and identifications (Moskal 2015, 147).

Method

Co-creation of knowledge and building of expertise for the protection of children affected by migration and forced displacement", developed by the Centre for Research in Social Policy and Social Work and Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Belgrade, supported by UNICEF.

The advantage of focus groups and group interviews is that they open up space for interactions and active participation in a common construction of meaning, which is significant when we seek to determine the views of the children as a group. Children are encouraged to discover new options in dialogue with their peers' perspectives, reflect on different points of view, revealing topics in common as well as specific experiences that are unique to them. (Moskal 2017, 8).

Special attention was devoted to a series of issues to ensure ethical and meaningful participation of these vulnerable children. Consultations were carried out by facilitators who were trained in research techniques with children and had master degrees in social work. Five of them conducted the consultations in pairs. Additional criteria for selecting facilitators for consultations was that they had knowledge and experience in research techniques with children and that they have been working prior with children in migration. In doing research with children, team members need to have skills and experience in working with children (Alderson and Morrow 2020). During the consultations, facilitators worked with

children they hadn't previously met or interacted with from other roles (e.g. as a professional helper, animator, activist).

After each consultation, facilitators filled in a report according to the themes, which were predefined by the leading researchers. The defined themes were: organization of consultations (communication with gate-keepers, transportation, recruiting process); relation and communication with interpreters; communication with children during consultations (their motivation, map creation process, questions that were unclear to children, and how the challenges were met); consultation setting (room where the consultations were done, specific events during consultations, presence of other people during the consultation, non-verbal communication); recommendations and further needs. In this way, the leading researchers had a meaningful insight and feedback about the field process. On the other hand, facilitators had an opportunity for a written debriefing. This material is analysed and incorporated into findings.

Description of the Consultation Process

Before the consultation scheduling process, a meeting was held with the facilitators and interpreters. The aim was to explain the methodology in detail (e.g. purpose, and aim of consultation, ethical issues, use of maps and supporting materials), and possible solutions to challenges in communication with children. During the process of scheduling consultations, there were differences in approach depending on whether the children travelled unaccompanied or accompanied. Unaccompanied children were under the guardianship of the Centre for Social Work (CSW), so the first step was to obtain the consent of the legal guardians. Upon that, further agreements and communication were transferred to individual guardians, employees of the Commissariat for Refugees and Mi-

gration (in charge of managing the asylum and reception centres in Serbia), and care workers in the social protection institutions, depending on children's accommodation. All children who were travelling with their parents, as well as parents received informed consents in their native language.

Translation was an integral part of the consultation with participants who speak little or no domicile language. There was a lack of debate on the role that interpreters have in the cross-language consultation and research process. It seems as a misconception that interpreters are technicians with the role of direct translation of content (Wong and Poon 2010, 153). Still, language is an important part of conceptualizing beliefs, culture, values and meanings, not just a tool to convey concepts (Temple and Edwards 2002, 6).

The role of interpreters was carefully considered in these consultations, adopting the principle of "interpreters as collaborators", so due diligence was necessary in selecting the interpreters for this research. Various research (Miller et al. 2005, 38; Gartley and Due 2015, 34; Fenning and Denov 2021, 53) discuss the triadic relationship in the context of both research and mental health practice, stating the importance and a positive practice when interpreters have a role of collaborators in the process. Several criteria were taken into account: language they spoke (preference was given to those interpreters who speak more than one language / dialect of children), experience in working with children (these were interpreters with many years of experience in working with children in migration), skills regarding cultural mediation (we tried to involve interpreters who, also knew the culture of the countries where children came from, either by originating from the same country / region, or by having studied the cultural norms of the countries of origins of children) and avoiding conflicts of interest and double or multiple relationships, (so

translators who had previously worked with consulted children were not involved). Finally, two interpreters were involved in the research, one female and one male. At the preparatory meeting, the dynamics of work with children, the control of the process and the distribution of power were agreed upon with interpreters. Special attention was given to the power dynamics between interpreters and facilitators acknowledging the dangers of power dynamic shifting from facilitators to interpreters, as a spontaneous attempt of children to talk directly to the person speaking their language. It was agreed that the facilitators are those who control and steer the process, taking responsibility for the methodology and ethical considerations (Vara and Patel 2012, 82). Both interpreters and facilitators were encouraged to share any concerns on the power dynamic, if they had one, firstly among themselves and, if necessary, with the research team, who had the ultimate responsibility to maintain the fragile balance in the power dynamic in this context.

The role of gatekeepers in doing research (especially) with vulnerable children has been widely discussed (Neil 2005, 48; Heath et al. 2013, 404; McFadyen and Rakin 2016, 2). Gatekeepers are viewed as persons with a key role to ensure researchers gain access to the participants in the research, as well as persons whose influence can be crucial to the smooth running of the research process (McFadyen and Rankin 2016, 4). On the other hand, gatekeepers are sometimes those who delay, deny or limit access to participants, which is why different approaches are implemented to address these issues (Neil 2005, 54).

One of the dilemmas faced was how to recruit children for consultations regarding gender and age (Punch 2002, 327). The research team and facilitators made sure that the children participating in the individual consultations were all of a similar age.

Regarding gender, unaccompanied minors were all male, and in the groups of younger children travelling with families, one group was organized with only boys and the other only with girls in order to make sure that both girls and boys would feel as comfortable as possible in order to share their views freely.

Sample of Children

Consultations included 14 children – 9 unaccompanied minors (all boys) and 5 children travelling with parents (3 girls and 2 boys). The age range of children was 10-18 years, with children travelling with parents being in the age range of 10-14 and unaccompanied children were mostly in the age range of 14-18. The sample was convenient, and recruitment of children was done with the help of government institutions and non-government organizations (NGOs) working in the field. Unaccompanied children were accommodated in a government institution for placement of unaccompanied minors (2 boys), a shelter run by an NGO (4 boys) and an asylum centre run by the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migrants (3 boys). Selection criteria intended to capture differences in children's perspectives who are accommodated in different types of placements. Children travelling with parents were all placed in an asylum centre.

All 14 children were residing in Belgrade. Government appointed guardians of unaccompanied minors were informed and their consent was obtained before contacting children. After obtaining consent of the guardians, caretakers of children were contacted and informed about the purpose of research and they provided information to children before meeting facilitators. Facilitators then explained the purpose and course of research, after which written consent was obtained. Upon arriving at the consultation and before the written consent, children were once again informed about

the purpose and topics of research. After ensuring that children fully understood how and why the consultations were done, a written consent was given to them for signing in order to obtain a full consent not just an "assent".

Children travelling with parents were consulted in the asylum centre, where facilitators and an interpreter met with their parents. Parents were given space to ask questions about the research, and after all their concerns were addressed, they were asked to sign a consent for their children to participate, and to inform children about their participation. Facilitators and interpreters also explained the purpose and topics of the consultation to the children at the beginning of the consultation process. After ensuring that children were fully informed, they were also asked to sign a consent for participating.

Introducing the Visual Techniques

The consultation method was designed to be interactive and to provide children a safe place to express their views and opinions. The method consisted of both a specially designed setting as well as visual techniques involving three maps that were used during consultations – Support Map, Road Map and Support Team Map. First, the Support Map was used so that children could describe what kind of help is needed for children who are travelling. Second, the Road Map was used by children to mark important spots during their journey when they needed help, containing figurines, transportation vehicles, emoticons for expressing feelings in these spots and clouds made of paper to describe events. All these figurines, small toys and emoticons were used in order to help children express themselves; they could use them on the maps or while explaining some of their experience. Third, the Support Team Map was used to mark helpers who children met while travelling and

who helped them, or were in a particular position to help them.

At the end of consultations, children described and explained the characteristics of good helpers they encountered on their journey. This was done by children writing the various characteristics on a piece of paper and attaching them to a wooden block. After that, children were asked to arrange the blocks in order of most important to least important traits, explaining while they were arranging them what those traits meant to them and why they arranged them in that order.

Results

The results presented in this chapter are derived from the analysis of results of consultations, including reports that facilitators wrote after each consultation process. During the preparation and implementation of consultations with children, several important topics were highlighted, as discussed below.

Preparing the Research Team for Consultations. The facilitators emphasized the importance of asking younger children as short questions as possible, to give simple instructions, and they have been encouraged to look for more examples in the parts that are more interesting to children and to skip questions that are difficult for children to answer even after repeated attempts to clarify them. Flexibility of facilitators is important not only due to differences of children's capacity to take part in some topics as per their understanding and activation capacity but also due to ethical consideration regarding their traumatic experiences. Most of the children have severe experiences and difficult memories of their migrant journeys and their well-being in the consultation process should be the main priority for the facilitators.

Collaboration with Gate-keepers. In scheduling consultations with unaccompanied children, the following gate-keepers were

identified: legal guardians and professionals working in the institutions providing accommodation (care workers of the social protection institutions). The first and second consultations were done with children accommodated in the social protection institutions (one governmental and one run by NGO). In both cases, upon obtaining the consent from guardians, the details of recruiting children for the research were communicated with care workers. They seemed cooperative, and did recruit the children for participation. However, the assessment of children's availability and motivation to participate was performed much better by the NGO run institution as opposed to the government led one. This was visible in a couple of aspects of children's participation. Firstly, transportation of children to the faculty was organized by the NGO led shelter and not organized by the government led one. This resulted in children from the government led shelter getting lost and being late to the consultations, which influenced the atmosphere, their motivation and the time they had to participate. On the other hand, children from the NGO led shelter were much more comfortable, it took them less time to relax as they had a person of trust taking them to the faculty and waiting for them to finish to then take them back. Not having organized transportation led to a sample shedding as two boys from the government led shelter withdrew from participation due to other obligations.

Secondly, language barrier posed a significant obstacle in communication with children from the government led shelter. Namely, the research team was informed by the care worker that the children coming to consultations spoke Serbian language, which is why interpreters were not present during their consultations. On the other hand, the care worker from an NGO led shelter was clear about the need for an interpreter to be present. This is why it is useful to have an interpreter available and present when working

with children whose mother tongue is different from the facilitators, regardless of the assessment of the gatekeepers on the necessity of the interpreters.

Based on this experience, before the last consultations, the facilitators and the interpreter arranged a meeting with the boys in the asylum centre for informed consent, with the presence of their legal guardian and made an agreement that the boys inform facilitators if they try to leave the country.

Two rounds of consultations were conducted with children travelling accompanied by parents/caregivers, and here we encountered several gatekeepers from the institution providing the accommodation and the parents of children. As a result of communication with the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of Serbia, responsible for all asylum and reception centres in Serbia, it was implied that a number of documents about the research (including ethical approval) were sent to them in advance. Upon obtaining this consent, a care worker was assigned to provide support in recruitment of families and children. Two separate groups of consultations – one with the girls and one with the boys was done. During the negotiations with the parents, the mothers expressed concern regarding the gender of the facilitator for consultations with girls. However, they felt much more comfortable when it was explained to them that two women will be performing consultations with the girls. In both cases, on the day of the consultation, we received information that the families had changed their minds about participation. Then the parents were invited to come and see the room and the materials that would be used use for the consultations; they were familiarized with the consultation in detail and with the importance of hearing the voice of children. Eventually, they felt comfortable enough and agreed that their children should participate. This leads to the conclusion that prolonging the con-

sultations for days after the initial meeting with the parents and caretakers increases the possibility of sample shedding.

Use of the Maps and Supporting Materials and Tools. Different children had different reactions to the use of maps. Younger children were very happy and active in using all three maps, other tools and building blocks to communicate their experiences and views.

However, unaccompanied boys, mostly in their teenage years, used maps to a lesser extent to communicate their views. At one occasion, boys openly stated that they did not want to use the maps, and that they preferred to communicate by words. In the other two consultations, the boys' initial reaction was the same. However, as they felt more comfortable, they began to use the maps as a support tool in explaining specific events in places of their journey. Thus, they predominantly used a road map, which helped them recall at which points on the road some specific event occurred.

On the other hand, using blocks to construct an "ideal helper" was something that all the children gladly used. The reasons for this could be that it provided space for them to discuss their individual answers with other children in the group in order to come to a consensus between all of them. It can also be because it didn't infantilize them, on the contrary, it gave them an opportunity to suggest, based on their experience, what should be the ideal helpers' characteristics and traits.

The facilitators were instructed that they should not insist on using the maps and supportive tools (figures, clouds, emoticons) but that they should always be available if they want to use them. This was based on the principle of participation of children in research; it provided them with the choice to use the additional aids to communicate their experiences, which eventually almost all of them did use. It is also in line with other au-

thors' observations on the use of visual methods – it mustn't be assumed that all children will be comfortable with using them, and they shouldn't be pressured into it (Punch 2002, 323; Alderson and Morrow 2020).

Atmosphere at the consultations. The research team paid particular attention to the atmosphere at the consultations regarding the place of consultation and additional aids (sweets, juices, food). The team decided to conduct consultations with unaccompanied children at the premises of the Faculty of Political Sciences in an adequately equipped space, in order to move children out of their environment with the hope it would support them to express their opinions more freely. This is considered to be a positive practice in research; finding a more neutral space for children to present their views can facilitate them feeling more comfortable (Involve 2016) and not feeling pressured to give the 'correct' answers to research questions if the research is done in a setting where they live or go to school (Punch 2002, 324; Berman et al. 2016, 7). The impressions of the researchers in this process were that unaccompanied boys did feel pride, respect and appreciation by being invited at the Faculty, as it is an institution which was not available to them beforehand, and is usually the institution, which children don't have access to, but is considered valued.

Regarding the children travelling with families, consultations were conducted in the asylum centre, since those children were young and it seemed that moving them with the means we had at our disposal would be invasive for both the children and the parents. During all sessions it was significant to ensure that other conditions were adjusted to the age of the children. Thus, lunch was provided to the unaccompanied children after the consultations at the faculty, and snacks and sweets were provided to chil-

dren travelling with their parents. Facilitators stated in their notes that this helped children feel more comfortable, and in the case of unaccompanied minors, it helped them finish the consultations on a positive note.

Cooperation with Interpreters

Interpreters were supported in their decisions on when it is important to explain the cultural context of the child's statement to the facilitators in addition to the translation of what the child said. Also, interpreters had and used opportunities to explain certain issues to children in more detail, when they deemed it important, checking with facilitators whether it was acceptable, as well as the reasons why they found it advisable.

With such established rules, and the selection of interpreters who have many years of experience in working with children in migration, communication with children went smoothly. Facilitators state that the interpreter and his sensitivity and familiarity with the culture contributed to parents' confidence and consent.

In the translation process, an additional challenge was encountered when the children spoke different languages in the same group, because that demanded double translation. This was a situation in two consultation groups, in both situations one interpreter knew both languages, so there was no need for the presence of two interpreters. Double translation did slow down the process and affected the group dynamic. However, these challenges are easier to overcome with established relationships with interpreters as collaborators.

Discussion

Lessons learned from this consultation process suggest several directions and issues in organizing consultation with children from vulnerable groups, especially with different languages and cultural backgrounds.

1. Before conducting consultation with children, a detailed preparation of all those who will be involved in this process is vital. This can be performed through a meeting or a short training, with a mandatory open space for everyone to share their doubts and to resolve them. In addition, it would be useful for facilitators to share experiences with each other – a short debriefing after each consultation. This has proven to be a good practice, as the facilitators knew and shared their experiences and challenges mutually. Facilitators should be prepared for possible changes and adjustments of questions in accordance with the specific characteristics of children (such as age and understanding).

2. During cooperation with gatekeepers, it is critical to follow the procedures of the organization / institution, particularly if it is necessary to seek permissions and consents for children's participation through them. Simultaneously, boundaries need to be clearly established. From this experience, it turned out to be important that e.g., the guardian was present in the room during the explanation of the purpose and asking for consent from the unaccompanied boys, but the guardian should not attend the consultations themselves, unless the child explicitly asks for his/her presence. Also, the support of care workers and professionals from the asylum centres in the recruitment of families with children was important and useful, but their presence at the consultations should be restricted unless the child explicitly asks for their presence.

3. It can be important, whenever possible, to make facilitators be the ones who discuss and negotiate the aims and manner of in-

volvement directly with children, including those who travel with parents. This helps in conveying clear and child-friendly messages, which may arise if care workers from the accommodation facilities explain the process, and in identifying support needs of children for meaningful participation (e.g., transportation issues, presence of interpreters, amount of time their participation requires).

4. It is highly desirable that facilitators are persons who are trained in research methods, and are not employed in any of the government or nongovernment institutions that deal directly or indirectly with migrant children, in order to keep their neutral position. If that is not possible, additional training has to be organized where the research neutrality and objectivity is addressed.

5. When scheduling consultations with children travelling with a parent/caregiver, it is very important that the consultations take place on the same day or no later than the following day after obtaining parents' consent. In this way, the shedding of the sample and the withdrawal of the parents could be prevented. Whenever possible, a cultural mediator from the same country/region should be involved to translate information to parents, but also to provide a safe context where all the questions that parents might have can be addressed.

6. When visual or other aids are used, it is necessary to use them flexibly and follow the preferences of children. In this process, the maps were available to the children, while the facilitators were instructed to use them when and if children wanted to. Visual aids need to be considered as an asset to the consultation process, without pressure for children.

7. Collaborative position of the interpreter in consultations with children in migration is highly recommended. Serving also as cultural mediators, they should be capable of decoding the process and influence cultural patterns, when it makes sense. It is crucial to negotiate the relationship with interpreters before involving chil-

dren. In order to clarify roles and responsibilities, a meeting/short training where both interpreters and facilitators are prepared to work collaboratively is recommendable.

8. Whenever possible and appropriate to the aim, research with unaccompanied children accommodated in institutions or collective centres should be conducted outside these facilities. This can help children to move aside from their environment, to remove concerns they may have about the possibility that someone whom they depend on finds out what they shared. Particular efforts are needed to ensure that children participating in group discussions speak the same language so that not too much time (and content) is wasted on double/triple translation. Presence of an interpreter is important, even if it is communicated to the research team that children speak the domicile language well enough. It seems better to ask the interpreter to leave the consultations when the children confirm that they feel comfortable enough to communicate in the domicile language.

9. Child safeguarding procedures need to be incorporated and all parties have to be introduced and familiarized with them. Furthermore, all persons involved have to be familiar with the steps that need to be taken if the child experiences distress during the consultations. In this case, a list with the available NGOs and institutions which provide child protection in Serbia was available to facilitators, who were instructed to provide appropriate information to children and to make referral if it is appropriate.

Conclusion

This consultation brought to light some important methodological considerations regarding suitable approaches with migrant children. Visual techniques as a consultation and research method may be particularly well suited to working with, rather than "on" younger children, and also facilitate communication for adoles-

cents, if they are used flexibly. Two issues seem to be of particular importance when discussing migrant children's participation in visual research: setting and ethics. Findings indicate that setting in a (relatively) neutral place that is warm and welcoming, together with refreshments and food, contribute to the atmosphere, and it opens up the space for children to express their views. When it comes to ethical issues in explaining the aim and purpose of the research to caregivers and children asking for both written and oral consent, it seems that flexibility is essential for this kind of research. Informed consent requires a tangible atmosphere of cooperation and where children are considered as counsellors and advisors if their meaningful and productive participation in the co-construction of knowledge is expected. The approach that truly informs and includes them as equals made a difference both in their willingness to participate and the possibility to express their views and feelings.

Involvement of interpreters who were trained, prepared and familiar with the goal and purpose of the consultations, opened up possibilities to contextualize the answers and to include cultural factors as part of the experience of migrant children. Most of the research treats interpreters as staff and not part of the team. That comes from a stance and belief that interpreters should be objective and focused exclusively on the content of the questions and disregard their human side as one who empathizes with the children's experiences and who can elaborate their answers from the perspective of cultural mediators.

This consultation process created a possibility to conceptualize migrant children as equals and associates with adults. That is a significant shift from previous research in the area, which was framed around a child's vulnerability, helplessness, and their role as victims. Conventional wisdom on research methods with children also highlights their vulnerability to persuasion, adverse influence, and harm

in research (Moskal, 2010, 19). With ethical sensitivity and supportive visual participatory method, this research transcends traditional approaches and demonstrates that visual methods can elucidate children's understanding of their everyday experiences and allow young people to express themselves. Inputs from children during the consultation process have been implemented in curriculum development. Students and professionals can learn from real case scenarios, insights, advice and recommendations of children.

Limitations of these consultations is about the sampling that was rather convenient, as the process did not have enough resources in terms of time and management to include children of different age, gender and status and are represented in the population of migrant children in Serbia. It is noted that children spoke about their experiences in other countries stating both the good and bad experiences while they said that in Serbia everything is fine and works well. It is possible that trying to focus only on positive aspects is the children's strategy to survive and it would be certainly useful to ask about children's experiences in Serbia from another country to maintain objective results. One more limitation comes from the lack of feedback to the children who participated in this study about the ways their experiences and views were implemented into the curricula for students and professionals. This is due to the fact that when the process of creating the curricula was completed all the children have left the country.

Funding

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Researchers' Reflections on Focus Groups with Unaccompanied Migrant Youths

Abstract: One of the main objectives of the research project "Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue to Promote a Culture of Peace among Young People and Unaccompanied Migrant Minors in Barcelona and Melilla" (RTI2018-095259-B-I00, MCIU/AEI/FEDER, EU), was to make the situation of migrant minors in Barcelona and Melilla visible. Five focus groups were held with unaccompanied minors from fostering centres in Barcelona, and two with minors living on the streets in the same city. The purpose of this article is how the researchers' reflections, as a component of the analysis of the focus groups, yielded emerging categories that doubtlessly both complemented and influenced the analytical process, such as: the impressions of participants' private feelings; the influence of

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authority figures present during the interviews, mainly educators; the difficulty of talking about and sharing some experiences, especially those regarding the migration process; participants' relationships and previous knowledge of each other; their emotions and non-verbal language; communication and linguistic issues; and interview participation. These topics were identified as factors that needed to be taken into account in the final conclusions and as aspects to reflect on when evaluating techniques used during research with unaccompanied minors.

Keywords: unaccompanied minors, Barcelona, focus groups, researchers' impressions

Refleksije raziskovalcev o fokusnih skupinah z mladimi migranti brez spremstva

Izvleček: Eden glavnih ciljev raziskovalnega projekta »Medkulturni in medverski dialog za spodbujanje kulture miru med mladimi in mladoletnimi migranti brez spremstva v Barceloni in Melilli« je bil osvetliti položaj mladoletnih migrantov v Barceloni in Melilli. Izvedenih je bilo pet fokusnih skupin z mladoletniki brez spremstva iz rejniških centrov v Barceloni ter dve z mladoletniki, živečih na ulicah tega mesta. Namen članka je pojasniti, kako razmišljanja raziskovalcev, kot sestavni del analize fokusnih skupin, vplivajo na vznik kategorij ter tako nedvomno dopolnjujejo in določajo analitični proces vključno z: vtisi zasebnih občutkov udeležencev, vplivom avtoritete prisotnih med intervjuji, predvsem vzgojiteljev, zadržanostjo glede določenih tem in do deljenja izkušenj, zlasti tistih, povezanih s procesom migracij, medsebojnimi odnosi in predhodnim poznavanjem udeležencev, njihovimi čustvi in neverbalno komunikacijo, komunikacijskimi in jezikovnimi izzivi ter sodelovanjem v intervjuju. Te teme so opredeljene kot dejavniki, ki jih je treba upoštevati pri končnih sklepih, in kot vidiki, o katerih je

treba razmisliti pri ocenjevanju metod, uporabljenih v raziskavah z mladoletniki brez spremstva.

Ključne besede: mladoletni migranti brez spremstva, Barcelona, fokusne skupine, vtisi raziskovalcev

Introduction

This article forms a part of a wider RDI research project (RTI2018-095259-B-I00, MCIU/AEI/FEDER, EU), whose principal overall objective is to make the situation and experiences of migrant minors in Barcelona and Melilla visible (Vilà et al. 2020). Seven focus groups were held with young people who had migrated unaccompanied by adults. Focus groups are a qualitative research technique that enables participants to interact and develop a discussion in a friendly and relaxed setting (López 2016), where varying points of view can be compared and contrasted, thus giving rise to a new discourse on the situation being studied (Martín 1997). Focus groups also allow us to gather more information with less interviewer intervention (Mayorga and Tójar 2004). In this part of the research, this then becomes the methodological core of the article's discussions.

Qualitative research is an action of interpretation produced through interaction with the social world (de la Cuesta 2011). The knowledge yielded by a qualitative study is constructed by means of the decisions and interactions taking place during the research process (Mruck and Breuer 2011). Throughout this process, a key factor is the attitude of the researcher (Folgueiras et al. 2022), who needs to have a particular intellectual, affective, ethical and philosophical approach that will enable her or him to overcome the main obstacles that she or he will come across (Ayala 2017; Kumar 2012; Wilson 2012). Acknowledging the constructed nature of knowledge involves critically examining how we, as researchers,

actively affect our interactions with participants and the study as a whole. It is reflexivity that enables us to make this critical assessment (de la Cuesta 2011). Researchers can become aware of their practice through turning it into a written product, which will then also feed back into the research process (Finlay and Gough 2003). Thus in this study, the researchers' impressions were recorded in the form of reflexive narratives that were then analysed jointly with the focus group transcripts. This process yielded emerging categories, also of a reflexive character, which undoubtedly both complemented and further conditioned the interview analyses. The categories gave form to content and topics that the researchers perceived and defined as the focus groups unfolded, and which complemented the words of the youths themselves: specifically, emotions transmitted either individually or collectively and factors that may have influenced development of the groups as a data-gathering approach.

This article, then, centres on the researchers' impressions and other factors identified while carrying out the focus groups in Barcelona; factors which, in particular, are relevant to the dialogical practice of interviews and/or focus groups in complex contexts.

Method

A qualitative descriptive-comprehensive study was performed using the interview as the technique to gather the opinions of minors who had migrated unaccompanied to Barcelona. Seven focus groups were held, with a total of 42 participants; five took place in centres belonging to the Directorate General for Child and Adolescent Care (*Dirección General de Atención a la Infancia y la Adolescencia*, DGAIA), and two were carried out with youth who were not catered for by the DGAIA. The focus groups held in the DGAIA facilities took place in two reception centres, two emergency social

care centres and one supervised flat. Only one of the groups included participants from different African countries, both of these in the DGAIA centres. Mainly Moroccan youth participated in the remaining groups.

The interviews and the research project in general were carried out with the approval of the Bioethics Committee of the University of Barcelona. Also, at the time of conducting the interviews, an informed consent document was given, read and explained to the young people, which stipulated the conditions under which the interview would be conducted. Among these conditions it is worth mentioning that they would not receive any type of economic compensation; that the information provided would be used exclusively for academic and research purposes; the explanation of the purposes of the project and the opportunity to ask questions and clarify doubts regarding the interview and the project in general; the possibility of ending the interview and abandoning the project when deemed convenient without having to give reasons and/or explanations; and that the principal investigator and the research team would be responsible for any consequences that might affect them as a result of their participation in the interviews.

Four researchers participated in the interviews with the young people, three of them with long experience in the development of research on interculturality and inter-religious dialogue. The categorization of the interviews was carried out in pairs of researchers to ensure consensus and the analysis of the results was carried out jointly with the entire team of researchers (10 in total). Previously, the researchers did not know the participants, the results obtained were part of a single group interview or focus group. The decision was made to do this type of interview because of the language difficulty, since most of the young people

in the centres are recent arrivals and speak very little Spanish or even English or French. It was also decided that they would be accompanied by their educators, since they knew them and there was already a pre-established link that would allow for dealing with complex issues.

Each group transcript was complemented by the interviewers' accounts, taking the form of free narratives reflecting on the experience of research and written after completing the group process.

The system of analytical categories for the focus groups and researchers' reflections are comprised of five general dimensions, namely: the migration process; the young people's needs; the resources available to them; their competencies, perceptions and expectations; and lastly, an emerging category encompassing the researchers' impressions and other factors. The present article centres on this last dimension of impressions, further subdivided into the categories shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Analytical categories

Ref.	Category
E1	Migration processes and private feelings. Harshness and silence.
E2	Meaning and significance of the educator's presence: authority, focus group conditions.
E2.1	Settings.
E2.2	Relationships among the youth and prior knowledge of each other.
E3	Emotions during the interview. Atmosphere.
E4	Ease/difficulty in conducting the interviews.
E4.1	Communication issues.

A literal transcript of the focus groups and researchers' impressions was made, and the resulting data was analysed descriptively using Nvivo v.12 PRO software.

Results

The results encompassed a number of categories (Table 1). Firstly, the researchers recorded their impressions relating to the migration process and participants' private feelings, harshness and silences. Perceptions regarding authority figures, the conditions in which each focus group took place, and the meanings of the educators' presences during the interviews also emerged. Two further categories were defined relating to the physical setting of the interviews and the relationships among participants and their prior knowledge of each other. The last categories referred to researchers' emotions during the focus groups; the ease and/or difficulty of carrying them out; and communication issues emerging during the process.

Migration and Private Feelings, Harshness and Silence

Broaching certain topics and asking certain questions in the focus groups led researchers to note that "there are really dramatic stories. There are questions that are hard for them to answer, and you see that because there's a lot of non-verbal communication. There are things that are really hard for us to capture on an audio recording" (e.1, bcn2, ref1).

When asked about their migration projects and journeys, the young people's expressions, silences and the briefness of their responses afforded a glimpse of how difficult they were both to remember and, even more so, to verbalise:

I feel that I'm intruding on a private, painful, really vulnerable area. I see this in the scarceness of their words and their grim looks. The first questions are the most delicate and personal: the migration process. Their eyes speak volumes and show the how hard these processes have been, still undigested, their gazes meet, they all understand, open wounds. We

*don't have the courage go any further into questions that
might give words to these looks that conceal experiences we
feel were really hard and still unhealed. We don't go any fur-
ther.* (e.1, bcn1, ref1)

Thus, the harshness of these experiences, and of the migra-
tion process in particular, was also perceived through the dif-
ficulty the researchers had in being able to or wanting to go
further into them. As they commented: "It's difficult to tackle
life experiences, and especially the migration processes they've
had, since they tell us of extremely harsh situations that have
affected them deeply, so following on with further questions
after some of these answers would feel extremely cold" (e.1,
bcn1, ref3). Therefore, while it was necessary to enquire into
these topics, the researchers could not persist with any deeper
questioning out of respect for the young people, their emotions
and their privacy. As one explained after facilitating a group of
youths not catered for by the DGAIA:

*Personally, I felt very comfortable with the group, but at the
same time I didn't dare ask certain questions because I felt I
was invading a private area they didn't want to bring to light.*
(e.1, bcn7, ref1)

How to ask questions in order to explore young people's inti-
mate and maybe traumatising experiences, is a question we can
ask ourselves for future research. In this way, we will be able to
manage the pain of the recreated experience and turn it into a
thread that allows us to extract more information sensitively.

Authority and the Conditions of the Focus Group, the Meaning and Sense of the Educator's Presence

Normally, when arriving to carry out a focus group, the researchers would be received by a member of the centre staff, who would then accompany them and introduce them to the young people taking part. Once everyone was present the interview started. That is to say, this was the first time that the researchers had direct contact with the participants.

As usual at the beginning of any interview, participants were less forthcoming, but as the questions progressed, they began to engage more and speak with more confidence: "At the beginning the kids were a bit inhibited, but by the middle of the interview they were a bit more relaxed and opened up more." (e.2, bcn1, ref2)

While the group experience was different in each centre, at least two overall situations were identifiable. In the first, the young people seemed to be comfortable and at ease in the centre. One such was the supervised flat:

They were all happy with the flat, they knew they were privileged. They've all passed through other centres, which they call prisons. The educator (older and Moroccan) is present and they're aware of that. They refer constantly to this. (e.2, bcn3, ref3)

During other encounters, however, the situation was quite different. The young people were noticeably ill at ease and it was much more difficult to develop dialogue among them. These two distinct situations were clearly explained by one of the researchers who had facilitated a range of different types of groups:

[…] [Y]esterday, they came out with a lot of ideas, like that they helped and supported each other, and you could really see that

they were like a family; today, though, here in the room at least, they were a set of isolated individuals. Maybe there were two who seemed to be more like friends or mates, but the rest were isolated individuals. Most were Moroccan: out of eight young people, five Moroccans and three boys from the Gambia. The boys from the Gambia seemed to be friends but they all said their own thing, and several times their experiences didn't coincide and this led to little arguments. One said one thing and the other said, "But what are you talking about, brother, it's not like that." They were a bit like, sensitive. (e.2, bcn4, ref2)

One common aspect of most of the interviews was the presence of an educator or a staff member during the group discussion. In some cases this was constant, i.e. the person was present for the entire time the group lasted; while in others he or she was only there at the beginning and then left. This situation undoubtedly affected participation, and was perceived as such by the researchers undertaking focus groups in one emergency social care centre and in the reception centres:

The whole time the interview lasted there were centre staff present, which may have influenced the kids' initial attitudes, since they were a bit nervous and anxious, answering with shorter responses. (e.2, bcn1, ref2)

The young people were much less participative. I think that having educators in the room really influenced them in this sense. (e.2, bcn3, ref1)

The fact that the educators were there didn't help a lot, in fact there was a moment when one even intervened, saying that all opinions were valid and they could say whatever they were thinking. They were inhibited. (e.2, bcn4, ref2)

The presence of the educator, apart from influencing the participation of some of the young people, especially hindered discussion of topics relating to the centre itself, its characteristics and how they felt in it:

At the beginning they had difficulty letting go and speaking, but as the interview went on and particularly after the guy in charge and the other person who received us left, they started to say and explain more things, especially to do with the characteristics of the centre, its rules, what they were and weren't allowed to do, and how they felt about that. (e.2, bcn1, ref3)

When the educators leave the kids talk more and open up about what's lacking at the centre, their anxiety about their lack of future, getting papers, prohibitions, strict rules, the prison they feel they're living in, and so on. (e.2, bcn1, ref1)

While the educator's presence could make the young people feel uncomfortable and hence affect their participation, in two cases a closer, more trusting relationship was observed between participants and educator. This arose in the centres where researchers felt that the youth were most at ease. In one reception centre, where the educator was present but seated outside the discussion circle, the researcher's perception was the following:

In general, we observed that the kids were fine in the centre, with clear ideas about their future, receiving different kinds of training and giving us positive feedback on their experience in the centre. The relationship with the educator was also seen to be good, a close, respectful relationship, with trust between them. (e.2, bcn5, ref3)

This situation, also observed in one other group, allows us to glimpse that, luckily, in some cases the educator is seen as a sup-

portive figure. Her presence did not inhibit the youths during the interview, as this extract from the supervised flat illustrates:

Researcher: Do you feel you're getting help in the flat?

Answer: Yes.

Researcher: Yes?

Answer: With the educators we have, sure.

Researcher: Really?

Educator: You can tell the truth, eh? Even though I'm here (laughter). Seriously, even though I'm here you can tell the truth, right? (laughter)

In this case, we can also interpret the "good relationship" between an educator and the participant as an obstacle by itself, because it might as well illustrate the opposite, that the participant is inhibited and just spells out what the educator forces this participant to say.

Settings

It is well known that the setting is essential for creating a favourable atmosphere and a relaxed dialogue among participants and researchers. Thus, another factor influencing the focus groups was the physical space where the interviews took place. It is important to note that they were carried out during the pandemic, which involved other factors such as social distancing and the use of facemasks:

And then when I went into the centre, it seemed to me it was an environment that was a little more hostile. It seemed a colder environment than the one we were in yesterday. The centre [yesterday] was like being at home. We went to an area that was like a café, where we sat on sofas, etc., with a little table in the middle where we put the audio recorder, and participation was really relaxed. (e.2.1, bcn3, ref1)

Something else that might have had an influence was that the acoustics weren't very good. There was background noise (like some kind of heating) that made it difficult to hear properly, and on top of that we were all wearing masks. (e2.1, bcn5, ref1)

Thus, it is clear that the friendliest, most welcoming settings facilitated the best possible development of the interviews. In contrast, when the groups were held in more impersonal, less welcoming places, with distracting factors such as background noise, the interview was more difficult to carry out.

Relationships and Prior Knowledge among the Young People

The relationships between the young people taking part were another important feature of the groups. In this area, different situations were encountered. One the one hand, in some groups a close relationship among the participants was noted, with interviewees helping and supporting each other. There were affectionate, familiar ties between group members. On the other hand, there were also groups where this comradely relationship was much less evident.

These diverse group dynamics and different ways of relating to each other may partly be due to the characteristics of the young people, who, although they were in the same focus group, had come from different centres and therefore, apart from not sharing their daily lives, had also experienced distinct situations. This also underscores the complexity of defining and homogenizing their experiential journeys:

The kids were isolated from each other. There were five who came from the CRAE and five from reception centres with experiences that were completely different and even opposite. I mean, really what tended to happen was that every time I asked a question, apart from downplaying it – because they thought it was stupid and really

obvious – when one answered, what another would do was constantly argue against what the first one had said. (e.2.2, bcn4, ref1)

In contrast, in another group from a reception centre,
it was clear they had good relationships among them, but at the same time it didn't seem like a really close relationship. They helped each other, but they never once referred to each other as brothers, more as friends or as people they lived with and respected. (e.2.2, bcn5, ref1)

Amongst the participants who were not under the aegis of the DGAIA, the researcher was able to observe that they not only supported each other, but that they had also travelled part of their migratory journey and lived their lives in Spain together, and that therefore they had shared experiences for some time. This was "a group of two boys and two girls. The two boys were always together and the two girls too. They'd known each other since they were in the centres in Melilla, and from there on they'd been together" (e.2.2, bcn7, ref1). Thus, they explained that "they'd had and still have quite the parallel lives" (e.2.2, bcn7, ref2).

Emotions during the Interviews

Emotions also played an important role in the encounters. Similarly to other impressions recorded by researchers, many such feelings were expressed through non-verbal language and in the attitudes shown as the interview unfolded.

As we have already noted, one of the first impressions was of differences in terms of participation. Likewise, some participants were seen to be more relaxed while others tenser:

There were four kids who participated more than the others. One of them practically didn't speak, since he was new in the centre and

didn't speak much Spanish. There was one boy in particular who laughed a lot during the interview. It seemed to be a nervous laugh, which distracted the other kids at some points. (e.3, bcn1, ref1)

In this same group, the researchers observed that "when they were talking about unpleasant memories, the replies were shorter and it wasn't something they liked to have recorded on audio. Once one of the kids, who was telling his story, wanted to stop and said that he didn't want to keep talking about it" (e.3, bcn1, ref2). As noted above, certain aspects of their lives were associated with harsh experiences and memories, which was shown less in what was said than in the silences or the briefness of their responses, while at the same time indicating that these were parts of their life stories that they preferred not to touch on. In these situations, the researchers chose not to pressure participants or go any further into those areas where they expressed their discomfort, directly or indirectly: "In this context, while they're questions that have to be asked, we think it's not necessary to keep pressuring them or to go into any great depth" (e.3, bcn1, ref2).

A similar experience was reported by one of the researchers who facilitated a group of youths outside the care of the DGAIA; she commented that

the look in their eyes when I asked some questions went deep into my heart and my whole body. My first impulse would normally have been to get up and give them a hug. My feeling was of the lack of affectionate contact they have, made worse by the pandemic. There's a really big emotional block that one of the educators also mentioned to me. (e.3, bcn7, ref1)

In addition, "Some questions gave rise to more feelings of unease and anger, particularly relating to documentation and the rules for

getting papers" (e.3, bcn1, ref2). It was essential for the young people's future in Spain to obtain and regularise their documentation, and this was a factor creating a feeling of impotence and uncertainty amongst them. Researchers observed

> *very different levels, but the only one who had reached the age of 18 was the most reluctant to answer our questions and was obviously the most ill at ease. He's negative and shows that he's deeply worried about his immediate future, outside the system that protects minors. He creases the informed consent form he has in his hands, without noticing that he's doing it. His words are always the hardest.* (e.3, bcn3, ref1)

The researchers also observed emotions of satisfaction and positive evaluations among the young people participating, also with regard to the overall development of the discussions: "In general the feedback was good [...] In fact, they came up with really positive evaluations" (e.3, bcn2, ref1). In another case, it was observed that they were "very polite. There was only one who understood Spanish with difficulty. They were very respectful to me and amongst each other" (e.3, bcn7, ref1). Also, their "tenacity in achieving their objectives" was clearly noted (e.3, bcn7, ref1).

Ease and/or Difficulty of the Interview

Broaching certain topics and asking certain questions was easier in some cases, more difficult in others. An important factor was the young people's participation. In groups in which they were motivated to take part, the interview ran more smoothly overall. As one researcher who facilitated an interview in a reception centre explained, the youth were "really nice, actually. Pretty participative group. There were even some who raised their hands" (e.4, bcn2, ref1).

Some questions facilitated participation and were in general better understood: "Talking about their education, what they like to do, what they do well and what they hoped for the future was easier for them, as they seemed to be clearer about those topics" (e.4, bcn1, ref1). Thus, enabling them to express their ideas, reflect on them and go into greater depth was very positively valued both in general and in the context of particular questions.

On the other hand, as we commented above, the content of some questions caused more difficulty; for example those related to the migration process, since they called up memories and experiences that participants preferred not to touch on. This is illustrated by the following extract from one of the groups held in the supervised flat:

Researcher: What were your reasons for leaving? People have mentioned economic causes, some cultural ... Were there any other reasons?

Answer: Not many people will reply to that question.

Researcher: Why not?

Answer: I don't know why, but they won't answer.

Researcher: Is it an uncomfortable question?

Answer: I don't know. (e.4, bcn3, ref1)

There were also questions that presented greater difficulty, due less to the subjects they broached than the way they were formulated or how the dimensions and areas aimed at were conceived: "On several occasions they didn't understand the question very well, not so much because of the language, but because of the way it was framed or what we were asking about" (e.4, bcn5, ref1). Hence, linguistic, cultural and generational differences were factors that showed themselves indirectly, through lack of understanding of the question or criticism of it. This was noted by one of the researchers carrying out interviews in the emergency care centre and the reception centres:

Some questions were more difficult to ask and explain, like for example those about spiritual needs. Others were more difficult to explain, and the way some others were framed seemed a bit absurd at the time. Specifically the question "Do you need money?" got the rather obvious reply, "Who doesn't need money?" and laughs all round. (e.4, bcn1, ref1)

I've just come out of a focus group [...], and, as for impressions, well, there's a phrase one of the kids said that's stayed with me. He said, "What weird questions you're asking," which made me rethink the technique even [...] of the focus group, the type of questions, etc. (e.4, bcn4, ref1)

Communication Issues

Lastly, there were further clear difficulties in the area of communication. These were essentially due to two closely related factors: participation and linguistic comprehension, in this case of Spanish: "As the interview went on, some started participating more, but it was hard for those who spoke less Spanish to participate. Even when we directly addressed them, they were reticent and unsure of themselves" (e.4.1, bcn5, ref1).

These communication issues were also visible in their body language. This was shown very markedly in one of the focus groups held in a reception centre. The researcher involved explained:

And maybe on a physical level [...], they were all sitting on chairs, but there were some with their arms crossed, their legs crossed, who practically wouldn't participate. They had quite a lot of problems with the language, specially compared to those from the CRAE that they were with in the reception centre. You could see that the ones from the reception centre were uncomfortable and their experience was really, really recent – obvi-

ously – and that meant that their answers were more abrupt and it was much more difficult to understand what they wanted to say. (e.4.1, bcn4, ref1)

Conclusions

Another category was the difficulty of speaking and sharing some experiences, especially those related to the migration process. This emotional impact of the migration process is confirmed by prior studies among young people migrating to Europe, the USA, and Australia, amongst other destinations (Lopez-Reillo 2011; Menjívar and Perreira 2017; Miller, Irizarry and Bowden 2013; Perazzo and Zuppiroli 2018). Thus we can affirm that, regardless of the individual migration process and life story, the real common denominator amongst these young people is that they have lived through extremely harsh and difficult experiences in the course of their journey, which have affected them emotionally, including when they have reached their country of destination or been taken into a reception centre. The strength of this impact can be perceived not so much in their speech, but mainly through non-verbal language: their gestures, their tone of voice and manner of speaking, their silences and gazes; different ways in which the harshness of these experiences is expressed.

The conditions in which the focus groups were carried out were broadly similar: researchers arrived at the centre, introduced themselves to the young people who were to participate, and then carried out the interviews in a room where they could all sit and see each other's faces. One common factor was the presence of the educators during the interviews. When the researchers reflected on the impact of their interactions with the participants (Finlay and Gough 2003), they noted that the presence of the educators

affected the course of the focus group and became a source of authority present during all interviews. In some interviews, this factor affected participation or the content of what was said; in others this was not the case, since there was a visible relationship of trust and mutual respect between the youths and the educator that did not hinder their self-expression. Both situations were found across the different types of centres.

The conditions and characteristics of the setting in which the groups were held were also factors that researchers registered. In some cases, the setting was more appropriate, since a larger and more welcoming room was used and the interview unfolded with greater ease, while in others there were factors hindering the interview, such as background noise, excessive heat and the use of facemasks, amongst others.

Regarding the relationships and previous knowledge amongst the youths taking part, it was observed that relations among them were closer and more familiar in some groups and more distant in others. The length of time participants had spent in the centre and the experiences they had shared may have influenced relationships among them. Apart from this, the differing relations amongst themselves and with their educators also arose from and made visible the wide disparity between the different types of centres and services.

Addressing a harsh and devastating reality such as immigration requires an exercise of conducting interviews with groups of people who have gone through similar situations. This will allow us to not fall into the formulation of questions with answers that do not allow us to weave a thread worthy of being analysed in depth. As researchers, the challenge is to see the critical side of the meta-level of the study and to be able to build around it a new way of approaching the reflexive methodology we have ventured into in this article.

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METTE LIND KUSK[1]

"I've Fought for My Future but Suddenly, I Can Get Rejected": Young Refugees' Future Orientations

Abstract: In Denmark, restrictive integration politics position young refugees holding a temporary residence permit in a difficult dilemma when they finish lower secondary education and begin to orient themselves towards their future. If they aim for further education, they can improve their chances of secure employment long-term. However, this will also postpone their chances of achieving a permanent residence permit. If they aim for employment, they may improve their economic situation here and now, as well as their chances of living up to the requirements for achieving a permanent residence permit, but this entails a precarious position at the job market and compromises with regards to their educational aspirations.

Through the story of Adnan, a 23-year-old man with a refugee background holding a temporary residence permit, the article explores how participation in upper secondary education is experienced in a context of exile, prolonged uncertainty, and shifting experiences of (un)belonging at school and in society at large. Employing concepts of belonging and discussing ideas of proper youth transitions, the article adds to our understanding of how participation in education is affected by experiences of (un)belonging at different levels.

Keywords: young refugees, politics of belonging, psychological belonging, education, temporality, transitions

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»Boril sem se za svojo prihodnost, a me lahko nenadoma zavrnejo«: pogled mladih beguncev v prihodnost

Izvleček: Na Danskem restriktivna integracijska politika mlade begunce z dovoljenjem za začasno prebivanje, ki končajo nižjo sekundarno izobrazbo in se začnejo usmerjati v svojo prihodnost, postavlja v težko dilemo. Če si prizadevajo za nadaljnje izobraževanje, si lahko izboljšajo možnosti za dolgoročno varno zaposlitev, vendar s tem odložijo možnost pridobitve stalnega prebivališča. Če si prizadevajo za zaposlitev, si lahko izboljšajo svoj ekonomski položaj kot tudi možnosti za pridobitev dovoljenja za stalno prebivanje, vendar jim to prinaša večjo negotovost na trgu dela in od njih terja kompromise glede njihovih izobraževalnih želja.

Skozi zgodbo o Adnanu, 23-letnem beguncu z dovoljenjem za začasno prebivanje, članek raziskuje, kako je moč doživljati srednješolsko izobraževanje v kontekstu izgnanstva, dolgotrajne negotovosti in spremenljivih izkušenj (ne)pripadnosti šoli in družbi nasploh. Z uporabo konceptov pripadnosti (*belonging*) in razpravo o odraščanju mladih članek prispeva k razumevanju medsebojnega vpliva in povezav med izobraževanjem in izkušnjami (ne)pripadnosti na različnih ravneh.

Ključne besede: mladi begunci, politika pripadnosti, psihološka pripadnost, izobraževanje, začasnost, prehodi

Introduction

It's hard, you don't know... I don't know if I'm here in Denmark in ten years. It's really... I have to say difficult. Now I've been here for five years, I've studied, I've worked, I have fought for my future, but suddenly, I can get rejected (...). Actually, people [with a temporary permit] are worried about this, and I think a lot of people lose energy to work, due to those things. Because they don't have any hope. When people don't have any hope, they can't fight for anything at all.
Adnan, age 23

Individuals who are granted asylum or family reunification in Denmark[2] inevitably face many years of temporary protection, where they only know that they have the right to stay in the country one or two years ahead in time. Like Adnan describes in the above quote, to live with such outspoken uncertainty about the basic premises of one's future can be difficult. It challenges one's ability to stay hopeful when working towards establishing a life in exile.

During recent years, immigration policies in Denmark have become increasingly restrictive, and temporality and repatriation have become explicit, political goals since the so-called 'paradigm-shift' in 2019 (Shapiro and Jørgensen 2021, 173). In more tangible terms, this means that individuals who have been granted asylum have to apply for renewal of their temporary residence permit every one or two years (rather than prior to 2019, when temporary residence permits were typically given for four or five years at a time). While this change in frequency may seem like a symbolic, bureaucratic exercise at first glance, the fact that hundreds of Syrians had their applications rejected, peaking in spring 2021 (Bendixen 2021, 1), makes it clear that the protection granted is indeed meant to be temporary. When Adnan describes how people worry and lose energy due to the fact that they do not know for how long they will enjoy protection in Denmark, it should be seen in light of these events.

A recent change in the legal landscape surrounding individuals with a temporary residence permit in Denmark is that, in addition to several other requirements, three and a half years of full-time employment is required to apply for permanent residency status, and since 2016 education has no longer been considered equivalent to employment (DRC 2021). This puts individuals who have

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[2] I use the terms 'young refugees' or 'individuals with a refugee background' to cover individuals who have been granted asylum in Denmark as well as individuals who have come to Denmark through family reunification.

come to Denmark as big kids or teenagers[3] in a disadvantaged position. Individuals in this stage of life will often have many years of education ahead of them. Regardless of whether they have attended school in their countries of origin before flight, young refugees have a lot to catch up on with regards to learning a new language, and their educational aspirations are often high (Lynnebakke and Pastoor 2020, 3-4). Furthermore, getting an education is considered a central element in a 'proper' transition process for the youth in Denmark in their movement from childhood towards adulthood (i.e. Frederiksen and Dalsgaard 2014, 2-3).

However, the employment requirement creates a dilemma once young refugees graduate lower secondary school: Should they aim for further education, improving their chances of secure employment in the long term and realizing their educational aspirations, knowing that this will postpone their possibilities for applying for a permanent residence permit? Or should they aim for employment as unskilled labourers, improving their economic situation here and now as well as their chances of living up to the requirements of achieving a permanent residence permit, knowing that this entails a precarious position at the job market as well as a compromise with regards to their educational aspirations? Once the choice to go on with upper secondary education (or higher education) is made, this dilemma does not entirely disappear. Doubts about one's choice or considerations about leaving when experi-

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[3] In this study, I focus on individuals who arrived to Denmark when they were between 12 and 22 years old. For children who come to Denmark as refugees or through family reunification before they turn ten, there is an opportunity to apply for permanent residence status when they turn 18 without fulfilling the employment criteria. But for children who are granted asylum after their tenth birthday, three and a half years of full-time employment is required (Danish Immigration Services 2022).

encing exclusion or facing academic challenges may be enhanced due to the uncertainty built into a temporary residence permit.

This article explores how participation in upper secondary education is experienced in a context of prolonged temporality, and it considers the connections between experiences of (un)belonging on different levels and varying degrees of motivation for and doubts about education. Based on a qualitative, ethnographic study carried out in a Danish municipality in spring 2021, this article seeks to answer the following research question: how is participation in and motivation for upper secondary education affected by temporality and experiences of (un)belonging at different levels?

The above question is explored through the story of Adnan, who is one of the 13 young refugees who participated in this study. Through Adnan's narrations it will be shown how motivation for participating in education varies across time, depending on experiences of psychological (un)belonging in educational settings and in relation to what Yuval-Davis terms the politics of belonging (Moensted 2020, 271-273; Yuval-Davis 2006, 198-99).

Young Refugees, (un)Belonging and Education

In refugee and migration studies, several scholars have dealt with the concept of belonging (see for example Larsen 2022, 2018; Moensted 2020; Verdasco 2019; Katartzi 2017; Wernesjö 2015). To experience a sense of belonging to groups and places outside the immediate family is considered a critical and essential human need that is particularly outspoken during youth (Moensted 2020, 270-271). To focus on belonging allows for a recognition of people's interconnectedness as well as their active work towards creating and upholding connections to people, places, and identities (ibid.). In the following, I highlight the central points from recent studies on migrants, refugees, and belonging carried out in a Scandinavian context.

In her work, Birgitte Romme Larsen (2022, 1-2) unfolds ethnic minority families' everyday strategies, in the form of the quotidian management of time and money, to ensure the next generation's future belonging in Denmark. To focus on the families' practices and descriptions of their everyday actions allows for an analysis that centres on their own perspectives on life in Denmark. This, Larsen argues, offers an alternative to the much-used, and much criticized, integration perspective, which often entails an implicit majority perspective, conceptual unclarity, and a tendency to spur divisional thinking in categories of 'us' and 'them' (Larsen 2022, 2; see Rytter 2019 for a more detailed critique). Another study that deals with belonging and refugees is Andrea Verdasco's (2019) ethnographic study on unaccompanied minors. Verdasco shows how temporary relations with volunteers, peers, and others, what Verdasco terms 'anchoring points', enable her interlocutors, who occupy extremely insecure positions in changing institutional settings, to develop much needed communities of belonging. Verdasco highlights individuals' agency and ability to create a sense of belonging to the immediate surroundings despite living with protracted temporariness and legal uncertainty regarding their national belonging (ibid.). Moreover, she emphasizes how the sense of belonging, though temporary and shifting, supports the minors during the difficult and long-drawn process of applying for asylum and waiting for answers. In the Swedish context, Ulrika Wernesjö (2015) shows how young refugees placed in collective housing in a rural village are challenged in their attempts to create a sense of belonging to their surrounding neighbours, as they experience social exclusion and othering in the village. Additionally, Wernesjö shows how the young refugees' sense of belonging to Swedish society is conditional on their acceptance by young Swedes (ibid.).

The above research considers the interplay between belonging on different levels: to immediate others, as well as to more abstract institutions such as the nation-state. The literature agrees that the sense of belonging is essential for young individuals living in exile, but the dynamics between (un)belonging at different levels is not explored sufficiently. This article contributes to the emerging field of research on the role of (un)belonging in the lives of young refugees by focusing attention on the dynamics of (un)belonging at different levels in the context of upper secondary education in Denmark. As shown by Lynnebakke and Pastoor (2020, 2-3), a supportive environment is important for young refugees' educational aspirations, wherefore a combined focus on experiences of belonging and educational processes is argued to be relevant. The authors show how study participants turned more indifferent about school and education in periods marked by great uncertainty about the future – for example during the asylum-seeking process (ibid.). In a Danish context, the temporality built into the residence permit could have a similar effect as it creates a comparable uncertainty about the future.

Further, the Scandinavian research project Coming of Age in Exile (CAGE) shows how children and youth with a refugee background achieve upper secondary education to a lesser extent than the majority population (Dunlavy 2020, 25-27). The tendency is clear in all participating countries – Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, but most outspoken in the latter, which is also characterized by having the most restrictive immigration policies. While close to 80 percent of the majority youth in Denmark have graduated from upper secondary school when they turn 25, this only applies for 37 percent of young people with a refugee background if they arrived to Denmark at the ages of 15-17 (ibid.). There is a correspondence between age upon arrival and educational achievements: The older upon arrival, the less is the likelihood of achiev-

ing upper secondary education. The gap between majority youth and refugee youth is smaller when it comes to higher education (ibid.). The drop-out rate from upper secondary education among young individuals with a refugee background is almost three times as big as that of the majority youth. At the same time, CAGE shows that there is a correspondence between the achievement of upper secondary education and employment on a permanent basis at the age of 30 (CAGE 2021, 11-13). This emphasizes the importance of upper secondary education as a prerequisite for obtaining a stable position in the labour market in a Danish context. In this sense, the lack of upper secondary education among young refugees increases risks of extensive social marginalization and add to the likelihood of being in precarious positions long-term. However, there is a lack of qualitative research about how upper secondary education is experienced and handled by young refugees. This article provides a move towards filling this gap.

To clarify the concept of belonging, I lean towards Yuval-Davis' (2006, 199-206) distinction between 'psychological, emotional belonging' and 'politics of belonging'. The former refers to the experience of emotional attachment and a personal, intimate feeling of being at home and being safe, for example in the class room and during breaks when attending school. The latter is about specific political projects that construct belonging in particular ways to particular collectives, for example in terms of the legal status of refugees in the host country. In this article, both concepts are relevant when seeking to understand how Adnan, and others like him, works towards experiencing psychological belonging with peers and teachers in the educational contexts he engages with, how experiences of psychological (un)belonging changes over time, and how the politics of belonging, in the form of his temporary residence permit and recurrent applications for renewal, affect participation in education.

Methodology

A broader, qualitative interview-study underpins this article. It was carried out independently by the author, supported by the Research Program for Everyday Life Studies and Extended Education, VIA University College. The overall research question of the study was: How do individuals aged approximately 15-25, with a refugee background, experience everyday life and future possibilities in Denmark in a context of protracted temporality, and which role do social workers, teachers and other professionals play in their navigation? Thus, the overall interest was to develop an understanding of the social consequences of the current political focus on temporality and repatriation for young refugees, as well as various professionals' involvement in supporting young refugees' social navigation in everyday life and in relation to their futures[4].

The fieldwork was carried out in spring 2021. Three days of participant observation in a school for recently arrived foreigners in the age of 14-22 provided a platform for inviting pupils with a refugee background to participate in interviews. The days at the school provided a chance to talk informally with pupils during breaks, with staff after school, and it provided me with a common reference point in later interviews. Besides recruiting participants at the school, a youth consultant put me in touch with former students. Being aware of the possible biases involved when relying on a gatekeeper (O'Reilly 2006), this also allowed me to talk to individuals with a more long-term experience with life in Denmark who had engaged in upper secondary education, further education, and various forms of employment. The interview material consists of

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[4] As shown elsewhere, restrictions and prolonged temporality create a grave sense of insecurity, which can undermine a social workers ability to offer relevant support to and add to the precarity experienced by young refugees (Kusk and Jessen 2022, 20-24).

13 transcribed, semi-structured interviews, lasting 30-150 minutes, with young individuals with a refugee background who held a temporary residence permit at the time of the interview. As is shown in the overview below (Table 1), study participants were between 12 and 22 years of age upon arrival to Denmark, and they have lived in Denmark between three and 16 years.

Table 1. Overview of study participants

	Gender	Occupation	Age at the time of interview	Age upon arrival to DK	Number of years in DK	Household
1	Male	Fulltime employment (upper secondary education on hold)	31	21	10	Partner and one child
2	Female	Upper secondary education	29	22	7	Partner and three children
3	Male	Jobseeking (graduated higher education)	32	16	16	Alone
4	Male	Jobseeking (graduated higher education)	31	15	16	Alone / part-time with four children
5	Female	School for recently arrived immigrants	21	17	3½	Partner and one child
6	Male	School for recently arrived immigrants	18	13	5	Parents and siblings
7	Female	School for recently arrived immigrants	24	20	4	Alone
8	Female	School for recently arrived immigrants	18	14	4	Parents and siblings
9	Female	Higher education	28	17	11	Partner
10	Female	Upper secondary education	18	12	6	Parents and siblings
11	Female	Higher education	30	14	16	One child / husband abroad
12	Female	Fulltime employment (graduated higher education)	24	15	9	Parents and siblings
13	Male	Upper secondary education	23	17	6	Partner

Nine participants had finished or were in progress with upper secondary education. During the interviews, participants were asked to elaborate on their experiences since arrival to Denmark, and topics covered everyday life and social relations, experiences with education and/or employment, knowledge about one's legal status and rights, experiences with teachers and social workers, as well as their future orientations and the role of the temporary residence permit.

A limitation of the study is that each participant has only been interviewed once. It would strengthen the 'thickness' (i.e. Geertz 1973) and depth of the narratives if follow-up interviews were made or if a more longitudinal research design (i.e. Neale 2020) was employed. This could have provided an opportunity to follow participants over time and to trace experiences of (un)belonging as they play out. This would strengthen the more snapshot-character of a single-interview research design. However, the quality of the interviews was strengthened in a number of ways. Participants were encouraged to provide detailed examples of their past experiences; space was left for participants to add their own topics and questions were formulated to be as open-ended as possible; interviews were conducted in places preferred by the participants (in the local library, at school, in their homes, or during a walk); thorough introduction and debriefing as well as updates on the project with possibilities for inputs has been offered continuously.

The analysis unfolded below is a biographically structured case-analysis (Brøndum 2018) in which Adnan's narrative of his educational trajectory unfolds over three themes. The three themes are: the process of settling down in exile; the role of peers and teachers; and the role of the temporary residence permit. Even though these themes are recurring across the overall in-

terview material, structuring the analysis biographically around Adnan's story makes it possible to unfold how experiences of (un)belonging are narratively connected by Adnan with his motivation for continuing his upper secondary education. Thus, to structure the analysis biographically allows the subjective experiences, interpretations, and narrations of an individual to be unfolded in detail, which adds to our understanding of how events are interpreted and how they inform particular choices made by the individual (i.e. Brøndum 2018, 116-17), in this case related to education. In this sense, the analysis is inspired by ideas within a narrative analysis first developed by Paul Ricoeur (1984). Furthermore, by dwelling on one individual's narrative makes it possible to show the dynamic and interacting character of experiences of (un)belonging and motivation for education.

To Settle Down and to Plan: From Psychological Unbelonging to a Sense of Belonging

Adnan is a 23-year old man. He came to Denmark in 2016 through family reunification together with his four younger siblings. Adnan has been living in Denmark a little more than five years when we meet for the interview. When Adnan arrived to Denmark, he immediately started school. He joined a class in a school for newly arrived foreigners in the ages between 14-22. In one year, he completed the 9th grade. He explains how hard it was, but also how it felt as a necessity:

> Adnan: I had to study, I had to learn. The first six months, I cried every day. It was too hard on me. [...] You know, in the beginning, when you come to a new country [upon flight], you are so happy, because you've left that...
> I: Insecurity?

Adnan: Yes, that insecurity which was the reason you fled. But after a while, you fall down. Deep down. Because you don't have any friends, it is not your language, so sometimes I thought, 'what am I doing here, I would rather go back' even though I knew it wouldn't be safe. So yeah, that took six months for me, but I spent them well. Learning the language.

Adnan describes here how he interprets the sadness he experienced during the first months as caused by the lack of friends and the lack of language skills. To feel alone, unable to speak the language, created a sense of psychological unbelonging in him. This resonates with findings from other studies focusing on the importance of psychological belonging felt by young refugees (Verdasco 2019; Wernesjö 2015). In spite of this sense of unbelonging, Adnan managed to spend this time learning Danish. After the first six months, he began to meet more friends, his teachers motivated him, and he found a spare time job to save up for a driver's license. After graduating 9th grade, he was motivated to continue in 10th grade[5]. However, after a while he found it too difficult:

After six or seven months, I thought 'Adnan, stop! I won't go any further'. One of my teachers [from 9th grade] called me every day, 'Adnan, you skipped class again, why?', 'but it is difficult'... [...] So I began to work full-time for a while, I needed an income. And I began to consider what would be better for my future. What do I like, what don't I like, what am I good at, what am I bad at, what can I manage? Yes. So, I realized that I wanted to be a mechanic. I love cars, since I was little, and I was good at it, and I've worked with it before. Why not?

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[5] 10th grade is the last grade of lower secondary school. It is not mandatory to complete before commencing upper secondary school.

Even though he found himself more at home in 10th grade socially, the school work challenged Adnan, and he spent some time thinking about his future. As Moensted shows, individuals attach their own biography to how they come to participate in a program and make it a marker of belonging (Moensted 2020, 272). Likewise, Adnan adds meaning to his choice of becoming a mechanic to a long-term passion for cars, which becomes a marker of belonging and identity. After improving his grades in the required classes, which did not feel as tiresome as 10th grade, Adnan began his training.

I: Were you happier about school then?

Adnan: Yes, I was motivated now. I had a plan, a route to follow, before I had no clue. I began straight on the basic course two because I had prior experience. And I got a nice grade, I got 12 [the highest grade possible].

The grade added to Adnan's motivation and his feeling of psychological belonging; the school seemed like the right place for him.

Peers and Teachers: Sources of (un)Belonging

I: How was the change, from the first school you attended in Denmark to this school for car mechanics? Has it been challenging?

Adnan: Alright, let me... let me be honest, I sometimes get such a negative feeling. I was young then, 18 or 20, and in that age, you need friends, it means a lot... I didn't [have friends in school]. [...] If you don't approach them [peers], they don't approach you, so it wasn't easy.

Adnan expresses here the essential need for experiencing belonging with peers when you are young, and how he found it difficult to create friendships at school. That friendships with majority peers and a sense of psychological belonging is experienced as

an essential need, yet a need that is difficult to achieve in exile for young refugees, resonates with Wernesjö's study (2015). Adnan's strategy was to be patient and observe how his peers, most of them majority Danes, interact before daring to approach them. Gradually, he made friends in his class and thus, he was able to affect his own sense of psychological belonging in the school setting.

Another source of psychological (un)belonging, which Adnan describes as central for his motivation to carry on with his training, are the teachers:

> Adnan: In the school for mechanics, they [the teachers] were really… it was not fun, it was really hard. When you are on the talent level, you can't ask about things. I couldn't get any help from the teachers, and I understand that. But when your Danish peers who are on the same level and supposed not to ask questions either – if he asks and get help from a teacher, then I can too, right? But when I've asked, they have told me 'no, I can't answer'.
> I: You felt you were being treated differently?
> Adnan: Yes. It was actually hard in school sometimes. And I would begin to question everything. Why am I doing this? I could just stay at home and get my educational support, why should I do anything with my life, for society, why this, why that. I could just become someone who sat at home and received economic benefits. Just study upper secondary school for four or five years…

Adnan narrates about a critical point in his educational trajectory, where he was on the brink of quitting the program because the teachers did not support him as he felt they supported his peers. He describes how he experienced a lack of motivation and a sense of indifference due to the teacher's unwillingness to help him. This highlights how educational aspirations and motivations varies over time and depend partly on a supportive environment (Lynne-

bakke and Pastor 2020, 2-3, 7). Adnan experienced the teachers' attitudes as unjust:

> *Adnan: They [the teachers] didn't motivate you. I had been in the country for three years, and then they didn't help me [...].*
> *I: And was it because you hadn't been here for so long that you needed help?*
> *Adnan: It was with language. As a mechanic, I know everything about cars. But it was a bit difficult. [...] For example, if I showed him [the teacher] a picture and asked 'what is the name for this in Danish?', then he would answer 'I don't know'...*

However, Adnan describes a turning point that enabled him to overcome the sense injustice and demotivation. The arrival of a new teacher with a different approach was central in this regard:

> *Adnan: But I didn't stop, I told myself, one or two people shouldn't make me think negatively about everything. And a new teacher came who motivated me a lot [...] I began to love school because of him. He really motivated me and he helped me a lot with everything. How I could find an internship, and how it works with salary, he showed me everything [...] all those things that I didn't know about. I had to start an internship in a mechanic's workshop but I didn't even have a CV, I had no clue about how it all worked...*

Here, Adnan highlights the importance of getting support to figure out the practicalities and the requirements connected to the internship. Upon meeting a supportive teacher and finding a mechanics workshop where he could do his internship, his motivation for education raises again. To apply for internships involves many things majority youth take for granted, which individuals who are new in Denmark do not have a chance of knowing:

I: So getting support to find a place for the apprenticeship is actually important?

Adnan: It is VERY important. Young people who commence education can't see the road ahead of them. So, it is very important that they can get help. For example, with me, I might have dropped out, dropped becoming a mechanic if I hadn't found a place for my internship. I know people like me who has done that, and I asked them why. And it was because they couldn't find an internship. They got a place through the school, if you say no to that, you have to find a place yourself. But one of them didn't have a driver's license, what should he do? He can't get up at 5AM every morning to work and get home at 7PM.

To know how to write a CV, how to apply for internships, and how to convince them about your personal and professional skills often requires support and explications or translations of knowledge that is tacit in character (i.e. Polanyi and Mukerji 2014, 349-350). Tacit knowledge addresses how to act in the world, and which steps to take in order to have an activity 'work' (ibid.). In this sense, it contrasts with the formal knowledge required to become, for example, a mechanic, which is explicated and has to be demonstrated in tests or exams. Despite its implicit and informal character, tacit knowledge is of great importance. Regardless of how well Adnan demonstrated his mastering of the formal knowledge, tacit knowledge needed to be explicated for him to move forward with the program, and the supportive teacher becomes central in this regard.

In this sense, through the interaction with a supportive teacher and the gradual development of friendships, Adnan experiences psychological belonging in the school, and he describes how he is highly motivated. However, the politics of belonging create

an ambiguous awareness of unbelonging on a national, societal level, which will be unfolded below.

Temporary Protection for an Indeterminate Period of Time: Political Constructions of Unbelonging

In the quote introducing this article, Adnan expresses how challenging it is to live with a temporary residence permit for an indeterminate period of time, when you work towards future goals through participation in education. The temporary character of the protection offered to refugees in Denmark relates to what Yuval-Davis (2006, 204-208) terms the politics of belonging. Through the temporary residence permit and the requirements for permanent residency, individuals who are granted protection in Denmark as refugees or through family reunification are constructed as a group who do not belong to the society and the state at large with the rights, recognition, and security that comes with it. The deliberate creation of unbelonging on the political, national level through the explicit discursive and practical focus on temporality and repatriation forms a general backdrop for young refugees' lives in Denmark. Adnan elaborates on how the temporary residence permit challenges his ability to stay motivated throughout his studies:

What happens after two years? We don't know. We will only know when we receive something in E-Boks[6] from the Danish authorities, that we are approved for two more years [...] I can study for ten years if you motivate me. But if you don't motivate me, then I won't do anything. Then I don't have anything to fight for, any hope.

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[6] E-Boks is the electronic postbox Danish authorities use for written communication.

Adnan emphasizes how the lack of future security in relation to very basic questions – where can I live in two years and with whom? – discourages his efforts to stay hopeful and motivated. Even though he still has a clear idea about what he hopes his future looks like in five years, this future scenario is closely related to what he fears his future could look like:

I: What do you hope your life looks like in five years?

Adnan: Education – I'll have my own mechanic's workshop. In five years, I have been in Denmark ten years, so I have applied for a permanent residency. And then I've married my girlfriend [laughs].
I: Yeah, so that would be the best-case scenario?
Adnan: Yes. And the worst would be if I were back in [country of origin], where I don't know where I would be, if I would be put in jail, sent to war, I don't know... it's been so long [...]. In five years, you change as person, I'm different now and I wouldn't be able to take it.

Adnan cannot eliminate the worst-case scenario as long as he lives with a temporary residence permit. Other study participants explain how their studies have been interrupted due to the frequent and protracted process of applying for renewal of the residence-permit, and how the stress and fear connected with not knowing what answer one will receive undermines their well-being and their ability to participate in everyday study activities as well as social activities. Others, who have lived with a temporary residence permit around 15 years, emphasize how it creates a basic sense of exclusion from mainstream society despite feeling Danish. Others again try to find employment and struggle to keep their positions, adding to the precarity they experience in everyday life.

Discussion: Possibilities for Proper Youth Transitions?

In the introduction to the anthology on youth and temporality, Frederiksen and Dalsgaard (2014, 3) write:

Youth is often temporally defined as a transitory period between childhood and adulthood, and hence, young people are often forced to reckon with the future in relation to their present social position (cf. Cole and Durham 2008). Ideas of proper and improper transition dominate much thinking about youth.

Young people are expected to be in a *proper* transition that is future oriented and progressing towards adulthood. An important, related point is that societal ideals of what constitutes a proper, or an improper, transition may be challenging to live up to for particular groups. Expectations of how young people orient themselves towards the future may, as is the case in Recife in Brazil, be influenced by middle-class lifestyles, which make it challenging for youth from low-income families to move forward as expected (ibid.).

In Denmark, young people's education is a highly prioritized political goal. Education is viewed as a central part of a 'proper' transition from childhood to adulthood in this context, whereas dropping out of school early is considered an improper or failed transition. The lack of education is in general viewed as problematic. The Ministry of Children and Teaching (2022) has stated that by 2030, 90 percent of all 25-year-olds should have achieved upper secondary education. This goal underlines the centrality of education in relation to young people's transitions in a Danish context.

For young refugees in Denmark, however, it may be challenging to live up to this ideal of a proper transition through the achievement of upper secondary education due to a number of factors highlighted in the analysis, which will be discussed

here. To settle down in exile is, as shown through Adnan's narrations, a process that can be marked by initial relief followed by 'exile stress' (i.e. Lynnebakke and Pastoor 2020, 2). As Adnan describes, he experienced an overwhelming sense of psychological unbelonging due to language barriers and the lack of social networks and friends during the first six months he lived in Denmark. The experience of unbelonging may affect motivation for and the ability to engage in education. However, in Adnan's case, he managed to focus on language despite feeling 'deep down', and this enabled him to develop new relations and enhance his sense of psychological belonging. This underlines how psychological (un)belonging is a dynamic process, which changes over time as new friends are made and language barriers are gradually overcome with strong support from teachers. This carves out new space for hope for the future and motivation for education. In this sense, challenges and future hope can co-exist and take up varying degrees of space during the period of resettlement (i.e. Lynnebakke and Pastoor 2020, 11).

Critical Stages in Education, Tacit Knowledge, and (un)Supportive Teachers

When entering an ordinary, upper secondary educational program, as Adnan has chosen to do, particular challenges may come about at certain moments for recently arrived refugee youth. Being relatively new in Denmark and not having an elaborate social network to support them, can put them in a disadvantaged position compared to their peers. What may seem self-evident for majority youth, may prove challenging for recently arrived refugees.

To find an internship was highlighted by several participants in the study as being a critical stage in their educational trajectory. They described the process as challenging and foreign to

them, while also vital to be able to move on with their studies. In Adnan's case, a teacher from within the educational system provided support and articulated the tacit knowledge about internships. When provided, such support can enhance the experience of psychological belonging and of being in the right place, capable of living up to the requirements in the program. On the contrary, teachers who are approached but refuse to answer questions that arise among this group of students can be a source of demotivation and add to experiences of psychological unbelonging to a degree that makes dropping out seem like the best option.

As Qvortrup and Lykkegaard (2022, 31) show in their literature review of drop out research in the context of higher education, the decision to drop out is rarely made spontaneously on the basis of a single event. Rather, it is a processual decision and often the outcome of prolonged decision making, accumulation of problems, and a conflation of personal, financial, and other drivers (ibid.). For young refugees, failure to find an internship – which is often difficult for majority students as well – may be experienced as an accumulating factor if coinciding with experiences of unbelonging in class caused by teachers or peers, or with experiences of exclusion from society due to the temporary residence permit. Qvortrup and Lykkegaard (2022, 42) highlight three loci or levels of particular influence when decisions to drop out are made: the social (peers, study groups etc.), the institutional (classes, teaching, teachers etc.), and the psychological (individual motivation). When we seek to understand dropout and participation in upper secondary education among young refugees holding a temporary residence permit, I suggest adding a political-legal locus, considering the role of the rules and politics young refugees are subjected to.

Conflicting Requirements: The Politics of Belonging and Proper Youth Transitions

While there are political ambitions and strong encouragements to ensure that young individuals engage in education, young refugees living with a temporary residence permit face a conflicting message: whereas engagement in education spur an orientation towards long-term future goals and requires expectations of predictability, the temporary residence permit reminds people that they are supposed to be in Denmark temporarily, that they should not plan more than one or two years ahead in time, and that repatriation, not inclusion in society, is the political end-goal.

Further, the fact that three and a half years of full-time employment is required to apply for a permanent residence permit creates an incentive to work rather than engage in upper secondary education. This challenges the young refugees' possibilities for living up to ideals of proper youth transitions and creates a dilemma between seeking to achieve one's educational aspirations and moving closer to a sense of future security. In this sense, what may be experienced as an almost naturalized flow of timely progress and educational achievements for majority youth in their late teens and early 20s[7], may be experienced very differently for young refugees.

Political intentions notwithstanding, to discuss the possible effects of the current immigration policies in Denmark is relevant. The results from this study show that the current focus on temporality and repatriation risks undermining otherwise resourceful and motivated young individuals' participation in upper secondary education, their daily well-being, and their motivation for and ability to take part in society at large. When young individuals like

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[7] This is not to indicate that majority youth do not experience educational challenges. The point is to highlight the explicit incentive not to engage in education that the employment criteria creates for young refugees.

Adnan move on with upper secondary education, it often becomes a moving on *despite;* despite political incentives to find employment, and despite a feeling that the requirements are unjust. To experience everyday psychological belonging may then become even more vital to counter the politically imposed exclusion.

Concluding Remarks

This article has shed light on the research question stated in the introduction: how is participation in and motivation for upper secondary education affected by temporality and experiences of (un)belonging on different levels?

Through Adnan's narrative, this article has aimed to unfold how (un)belonging in institutional educational settings interact with experiences of (un)belonging to the state and society at large, and how these experiences in turn affect young refugees' future orientations and motivation for education. The article thus provides a contribution to understanding why young refugees to a much lesser extent than majority youth achieve upper secondary education. In Adnan's narrations, there is a close link between experiences of belonging and motivation (and unbelonging and a lack of motivation) for participating in education, and his experiences highlight how both vary across time. Both the affective dimensions of psychological (un)belonging as well as the politics of belonging are experienced as important in relation to educational motivation and participation.

To understand the interplay between belonging on different levels and educational motivation and achievements better, more qualitative research is needed. A longitudinal research design to follow recently arrived refugee youth who enter upper secondary school would provide a relevant approach to the central questions that need answers if more individuals with a refugee background should be able to achieve upper secondary education: what makes educational achievements

possible, what challenges these achievements, what makes individuals leave, and what can be done to offer better support?

Acknowledgements

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Protection or Dissuasion? Experiences of Unaccompanied Children with the Border Regime in France

Abstract: In France, public institutions have the obligation to protect children in danger, regardless of their nationality. However, this obligation towards unaccompanied minors, which is clearly established by the Law, is obstructed by institutional practices, in particular in border areas where police and public actors repress foreigners in transit, whether by pushing them back at the Italian border, or by blocking and dispersing them at the Franco-British border.

This tension between the social and the repressive attitude of public institutions is typical of the border regime, which filters migrants in order to protect the desirable ones, and to remove from the territory the undesirables. In this paper, we argue that the experience of this tension by unaccompanied minors deeply impacts their life trajectories, as access to litigation and appeal procedures is often difficult, or ineffective, and because they experience this as unfair treatments. By combining a legal consciousness approach with ethnographic data, we highlight the effects the border regime has on the unaccompanied minors' perception of these institutions, and of their rights. This paper compares two borders: Calais

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and the Franco-British border, and the area of the Franco-Italian border between Ventimiglia and Nice.

Keywords: transit migration, unaccompanied minors, Calais (FR), border regime, life course analysis, political ethnography, child centred approach

Zaščita ali odvračanje? Izkušnje otrok brez spremstva z mejnim režimom v Franciji

Izvleček: Francoske javne ustanove so dolžne poskrbeti za zaščito otrok v nevarnosti ne glede na njihovo državljanstvo. Kot je moč opaziti, to zakonsko obveznost do mladoletnih migrantov brez spremstva ovirajo institucionalne prakse, zlasti na obmejnih območjih, kjer policija in javni akterji omejujejo prebežnike, bodisi tako, da jim zavračajo vstop ob italijanski meji ali jih zaustavljajo in jih skušajo prepoditi, kar se dogaja ob francosko-britanski meji. Disonanca med socialno in represivno držo javnih institucij je značilna za mejni režim, ki migrante filtrira, da bi zaščitil tiste zaželene in z ozemlja odstranil tiste nezaželene. V tem prispevku dokazujemo, da izkušnja omenjene disonance na strani mladoletnih migrantov brez spremstva globoko vpliva na njihove življenjske poti, saj je dostop do sodnih in pritožbenih postopkov pogosto otežkočen ali neučinkovit, pri čemer mladoletniki to doživljajo kot nepošteno obravnavo. S kombinacijo koncepta pravne zavesti in etnografskih podatkov poudarjamo učinke, ki jih ima mejni režim na njihovo dojemanje institucij in pravic. Članek primerja dve meji: Calais in francosko-britansko mejo ter območje francosko-italijanske meje med Ventimiglio in Nico.

Ključne besede: tranzitne migracije, mladoletni migranti brez spremstva, Calais, mejni režim, analiza življenjskega toka, politična etnografija, otrokosrediščni pristop

Introduction

In France, public institutions have the obligation to take charge of and protect children in danger without the condition of nationality. This obligation, which aims to guarantee 'the best interest of the child', nevertheless comes up against a set of police and institutional practices (Sedmak et al. 2018), particularly at the borders of Europe: some public actors here exercise repression towards foreigners in transit, whether by pushback to Italy in the Maritimes Alps, or by blocking and dispersing them at the Franco-British border.

We thus observe a tension between the social and the repressive nature of the State, which is all the more acute as these practices can be carried out by actors such as the police, public prosecutors ore judges, who are responsible for both missions, i.e. sheltering vulnerable people, and removing from the territory those without a legal status. In this research[3], our main hypothesis is that the experience of this tension by unaccompanied foreign minors (UAMs)[4] impacts their choices and their life course, and this all the more strongly as access to restorative justice is very often difficult, late or inoperative.

By combining a theoretical approach stemming from the Law and Society scholarship (Calavita 2010) with a qualitative survey through observations and interviews based on political ethnography (Schatz 2009), our focus is to highlight, on the one hand, the state policy towards unaccompanied foreign minors through the

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[3] This work was conducted as part of the MiCREATE program (https://www.micreate.eu/) between 2019 and 2022.

[4] We use here the terms of 'foreign minors', 'unaccompanied minors' (or UAMs), and young exiles, to refer to foreign children who left their country of origin to search for protection in Europe, and who are not accompanied by an adult nor administratively stabilized on a territory.

practices of some of its actors at the borders (in particular, police officers and social workers), and on the other hand, to account for a 'border effect', in the (non)access to protection, as well as in the perception that unaccompanied foreign minors have of the institutions supposed to protect them.

Two border spaces are mirrored here: Calais and the Franco-British border, and the Franco-Italian border between Ventimiglia and Nice. If Calais remains an external border of the Schengen area, in the case of the Italian border, the border regime is deployed in the opposite direction to the idea of free movement of people within the Schengen area. Indeed, first the placement of France under a state of emergency in 2015, and then the law of the 30th of October 2017 strengthening internal security and the fight against terrorism, have endorsed this return of border controls within the Schengen area (Donadio 2021). The legislator thus normalizes a provision intended to be exceptional, which produces a shift in the law from fighting the terrorist threat to fighting irregular immigration (Lazaridis 2015; Huysmans 2006).

The French-British border is an external border to Schengen, but its particularity lies in its externalization under the Touquet Agreement of 2003, which moved the British border into French territory. The UK border forces control access to the UK from French ports and railway stations together with their French counterparts, making this territory a double barrier for anyone wishing to reach the UK by land or sea. However, the police activity is not limited to the crossing points as it was for the previous border: it is mobile and is deployed everywhere on and around the border territory, to track down, block, and remove those who should never have been allowed to enter (de Genova and Peutz 2010; Atoui 2020).

This comparison is not an upstream decision by the researchers, but rather was suggested to us through fieldwork: indeed, in many accounts from unaccompanied minors encountered in Calais and living in the Jungles there while waiting to reach England (Agier et al. 2019; Palmas 2021), their prior experience of crossing the French-Italian border came back strongly, as a fundamental step in the construction of their relationship with the police, with French institutions, with the norms governing their protection as children, and with the knowledge of their rights.

Through a description of the legal measures in force and a comparison of several personal and legal experiences of foreign minors, we propose to shed light on the complex relationship between measures to protect minors and measures to dissuade foreigners from entering and settling on French territory, by adopting a child-centred approach (Gornik 2020).

In this contribution, we will first review (1) the legal benchmarks concerning foreign minors in France, as well as our theoretical approach and the data on which we have relied; then (2) we will focus on what the border control system does to the access to the rights of unaccompanied minors in the territories we've studied, and in particular on the gap between legal theory and practice in terms of the protection of this public; the following part (3) will focus on the complex relationship that foreign minors have with the law, and on the impact that difficulties in accessing their rights can have on their migratory pathways (homelessness, risk-taking, non-take up).

Being a Foreign Minor at the Border: The French Legislative Context, the Theoretical Approach, and the Fieldwork

France guarantees all the rights provided for in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child from the 6th of September 1990[5] to any minor on its territory without discrimination regarding their origin, nationality or administrative status[6]. Thus, a foreigner who declares himself to be a minor should be considered as a child and not as a foreigner by the French authorities, which means that he or she cannot a priori be the object of either an administrative detention measure or removal.

Young exiles, when they declare themselves to be minors, should be protected within the framework of the French child protection system, which is dependent on the departments. However, a 'regime of suspicion' (Lendaro 2020) weighs on the declarations of minority of young exiles whose rights are regularly questioned at the borders and on French territory (CNCDH 2021; UNICEF 2016). In this regard, a rich body of literature on children on the move and borders exists (Venken et al. 2022; Vacchiano 2014; Orsini et al. 2022; Uzureau at al. 2022). Nevertheless, if critical border studies have already provided evidences on the effects of the violence of borders (de Genova 2002; Jones 2016),

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[5] The International Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by France in 1990, recalls that any child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment is entitled to special protection by the State in which he or she finds himself or herself (article 20.1), regardless of his or her national origin (article 2.1).
[6] Article 2 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and article L 112-3 of the Social Action and Family Code.

there is less research on the legal consciousness[7] these UAMs develop, after experiencing the tension between the public duty to protect minors, and the authorities' desire to repress illegal immigration (Abrego 2019; Galli 2020; Lendaro and Roland 2022). Our paper is a contribution to the study of this issue.

Our starting point is that the violence of borders is also a matter of violent legislative measures, as the legislator often produces 'derogatory filters referring these young people to their status as foreigners', rather than to that of minors, thereby giving precedence to their migration situation over their status as children in need of protection (Jacob 2017, 283). In addition to these filters, there is a policy of dissuasion and harassment of the migratory presence at the two borders studied. Conducted by law enforcement, this policy is characterized by the suspension of the rule of law in favour of a right of exception (Agamben 1998), which leads to the denial of the rights of the child at risk: it is less about registering people in a judicial procedure than about pushback (Italian border) or harassment through police control operations or mass expulsions of people to exhaust bodies (Calais) (Guenebeaud and Lendaro 2020) and dissuade them from settling in France (Lendaro, forthcoming). These practices of harassment and pushback are characterized by the relative indistinctness of the individuals who are subjected to them: the minority of a young person, even when invoked by him or her, is often denied at the borders by the absence of any possibility of asserting it at the time of an identity check or, for example, the expulsion from a camp.

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[7] Legal consciousness studies are concerned with understanding the ways in which the law is mobilized and understood by ordinary citizens. Legal consciousnesses are about the way they see the law, and the way they use it as an explanatory factor and/or as a tool for action in different life situations (Merry 1986; Silbey 2005).

All of these restrictive normative devices, and the police and institutional practices that translate them into practice, constitute what we call here the 'border regime' (Tsianos and Karakayali 2010): it is a useful concept to describe and analyse the exceptional and discriminatory treatment of exiled persons in border territories, including minors. This treatment is based on the idea of suspicion that guides the sorting operations between a minority of foreigners who can be tolerated or even protected (compassion), and a majority of undesirables (Agier 2011), whom the public and police institutions try to banish, lock up, expel, and when this is not possible, harass in order to dissuade them from remaining in the territory (repression). The violence exerted by this border regime on people in transit goes far beyond the powers of the state in terms of legitimate violence and use of force (Jones 2016), and it has concrete consequences on the lives of exiles: it is the 'politics of exhaustion' (Ansems de Vries and Welander 2021) that is imprinted on bodies and minds through physical suffering inflicted during identity checks, through the trauma of detention, by the illness and weakening of the bodies that try to survive in the camps while being voluntarily deprived by national and local institutions of basic services (water, health care), by the stress caused by the fear of being robbed and violated during the operations of expulsion from the land, by the impossibility of asking for and obtaining redress in court for the abuses and violence suffered.

In the border regime, the institutional devices of evaluation of the age of the person must be considered as biopolitical tools: indeed, emblematic of the tension between compassion and repression, when they lead to the official recognition of minority they allow the person to 'live', while a refusal of minority allows the others to 'die' (Foucault 2008). Therefore, in this contribution, we will also

consider age as a 'norm of chronological organization of biographical itineraries' (Rennes 2016, 43): these life courses are, as we will see, largely influenced by the success of the tests that rule on the differentiated value of people's lives according to age (Fassin 2018; Fassin and d'Halluin 2005).

This theoretical grounding, which considers age as both a social construct and an instrument of biopolitical government, combines heuristically with the law and society approach (Calavita 2010; Ewick and Silbey 1998): this initially Anglo-Saxon and resolutely interdisciplinary (sociology, law, political science, anthropology) stream of research adopts a vision of 'law' opposed to the theoretical abstraction of legal texts, to focus instead on what law becomes concretely when individuals and/or groups make use of it or refer to it or associated principles (e.g. legality). The focus is therefore on the ways in which the law manifests itself in practice, according to the usefulness, value or intelligibility that actors attribute to it, as well as on the more or less strategic and conscious uses they make of it every day.

The fieldwork, conducted in Calais, a small French town only a few kilometres from Dover (UK), includes observations of life in the camps and of interactions between young people and adults (police, social workers, volunteer lawyers), in the Jungles, in the court, in the police stations, and in the two homes for minors in the department; this immersive observation protocol was completed by biographical interviews of young people, many of whom crossed the French-Italian border before arriving in Northern France and Calais. This contribution is therefore based on a qualitative study inspired by political ethnography (47 comprehensive interviews, observations, collective discussions, press review, legal watch), carried out in a social context characterized by a high degree of inter-knowledge between those interviewed and observed (Schatz

2009), which is mainly interested in the experiences of exiled minors (27 biographical interviews) and of the actors who accompany them (20 interviews with educators, lawyers, magistrates, and militants). This was possible thanks to the constant presence of one of the authors in Calais since 2016, as a socio-legal advisor to minors within an association. He used his own resources (for instance, his skills in Arabic language, his knowledge of the Calais environment, his legal expertise, especially on issues related to minors) to build relationships and connect with young people living in the Jungle. He maintained his work as a legal advisor whilst conducting fieldwork: this 'children' rights-centred-approach' was fundamental in creating a trusting relationship with the interviewees (Roland 2022). In opposition to the classic approach of a researcher who infiltrates the field as an external observer, here the working legal advisor becomes the researcher. His existing position gives him a privileged access to the field and the interviewees. This way, legal files and pieces of information related to their administrative procedures add insights to the data collected.

Since the young people's stories are frequently crossed by the experience of crossing the Franco-Italian border, a complementary survey was conducted in Ventimiglia, Menton and Nice (2020-2022): more recent and still on-going, this survey includes 3 interviews with specialized lawyers to which 9 interviews with associative volunteers are added, as well as numerous informal discussions with activists involved at the French-Italian border, who have been a valuable source of information, especially on the issue of expulsions of minors at the border, where the author conducted several observation sessions of pushback practices by the border police in Menton-Garavan station.

A 'Children Blind' Police

The police presence at the French-British border and the French-Italian border is not equivalent in size or age. Thus, the Calais system is a precursor in its approach to securing the border, and the policy of dispersing exiles has been in place since the closure of the Sangatte reception centre in 2002 (Agier et al. 2019). The aim is to prevent people from crossing into the UK and to make life so hard for them that they are driven to self-deportation and leaving on their own (Guenebeaud and Lendaro 2020). Certain practices have also been deployed identically on the Franco-Italian border since 2015, such as manhunts into the hinterland of Nice and controls via racial profiling of those who resemble 'migrants' in the police imagination (Bachellerie 2020); or denial of minority (Uzureau et al. 2022). The French-British border policy is characterised by containment and dissuasion. Police violence, camp evictions and administrative detentions embody this policy. Containment practices are also found at the French-Italian border, especially on the Italian side as the French side mainly focuses on pushback (Anafé 2019).

However, even if the minority status should protect unaccompanied foreign minors from arbitrary police action, the practices observed at the borders are far from this ideal of protection: in many situations, not only minority but also human dignity are not considered. Hunting precedes and prevents any dialogue (Chamayou 2012). The use of violence, very often outside of any legal framework, is a technique prized by police officers in the exercise of their function (Jones 2016). This violence is constructed in the absence of verbal interactions and formal procedures, as illustrated by what happened to this young Sudanese minor encountered in Calais:

*(When he takes off his hood, I notice a bandage on his temple).
"It's the dougar[8]", he says, "I was in a truck on the highway, the
police saw me. They told me to get out, and when I got out, a
policeman hit me hard on the temple with his baton and then he
let me go. I came back to the camp with a friend and the associ-
ations took me to the hospital".* (Field diary 3 December 2020)

These assaults on the body, which are intolerable in today's
society (Fassin and Bourdelais 2005), can happen to all exiles
in transit, regardless of their age. The principle that underpins
these police operations is to indistinct individuals. The follow-
ing excerpt, recounted by Ilyès, a 14-year-old Sudanese boy,
clearly illustrates the primacy of immigration repression by the
police over their mission to care for children in danger, even
though the young man should be presumed to be a minor be-
cause of his extremely youthful appearance on the one hand,
and because of the certificate issued by an association at the
Italian border on the other:

*Participant (P): And when I got out of there, I took a train back
to Ventimiglia. There, I found an association. They asked me my
name, my age, they registered and gave me a paper, and I ar-
rived at the French border.*
Researcher (R): What was written on the paper?
P: I don't know, it was written in their language.

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[8] "Dougar" is a Sudanese word for traffic jams, in this case of trucks on
the ring road leading to the Eurotunnel, offering an opportunity to get on
trailers to try to cross into England without using smugglers. Extreme-
ly dangerous because they take place on the highway, several Dougars
have resulted in serious injuries and deaths of people hit by other cars or
crushed by the vehicle they wanted to get on. In addition, these attempt-
ed crossings often lead to a brutal police response that includes highway
chases and massive use of gas and flash balls to deter would-be crossers.

[...]And so the paper, the French policemen saw it. When I arrived at the border, the policemen made me get off the train, and they put me in a place with adults.

[...]They sent me there at 8pm and I came out at 8am the next day. [...] P: It was surrounded by very high barbed wire. And you can't get out. It was raining. [...] I asked the people there what I was doing there. They told me that we were there so that they could send us back to Italy. There was a Tunisian who spoke French. He saw the Italian sheet I had and showed it to the police. Thanks to that, they transferred me to another place. They gave me food and drink. I stayed there for 2-3 hours, and then they brought a car and transferred me to Nice. [...]

R: Did you understand why France put you in this place at night? [...]

P: No, I didn't understand anything. From the moment I got off the train, the police didn't talk to me. They put you in a car and take you to the police station, you wake up, and the Tunisian helped me. (Ilyès, 14)

The police avoid any interaction that could lead to a claim of right to protection. Police officers are helped in this by the language difficulties and the ignorance of the minors regarding their rights, even though, according to the procedure, it is up to the police to remind the young people of their rights in the case of supposed minority or asylum application. Minority, which protects against detention and refoulement, opens up a right to protection that only seems to function as a right-to-be-claimed when the minor is able to assert it, to express or even prove his minority. In this case, Ilyes is 'saved' by a Tunisian adult who is aware of the law, especially concerning minors, and who masters the linguistic factor in order to assert Ilyes' right to remain on

French soil and to be taken care of. Minority status does not protect individuals as long as they do not manage to claim it, and to force its recognition.

Furthermore, the police have great latitude in defining the age of the person they are dealing with. Especially since the vast majority of young people who enter France by land at the Italian borders and/or who are present in Calais, are unable to present valid identity documents. It is therefore easy for the authorities to deny the youth's alleged minority. They usually claim that the person has never declared himself a minor (ignoring any documents that he or she might present, or even falsifying his or her declarations) to justify the legality of a refoulement procedure or the confinement of a minor. Indeed, at the Italian border, this situation can lead to a refusal of entry to French territory and the forced return of the person to Italy. The absence of witnesses and lawyers on the spot makes access to restorative justice practically impossible; also, and in a complementary manner, the sanctions that could be taken against police officers who behave abusively are then not taken.

In Calais, the risk of deprivation of liberty in an administrative detention centre is very high for minors. Thus, according to the legal team at the Coquelles Administrative Detention Centre, 67 people claiming to be minors were placed in the detention centre in 2019 (Cimade 2020). Contrary to legal theory, and contrary to the declarations of intent of elected officials and national and international child protection bodies, on these border territories minority does not protect young people. And these violent and disrespectful practices of fundamental rights are not without effects on the perception that minors have, both of institutions and of their rights as children.

The Effects of the Border Regime on Unaccompanied Minors

While some young people have a well-defined migration project, such as joining a family member in a European country, others have vaguer migration projects (Etiemble and Zanna 2013). In both cases, these projects are impacted by the interactions with the institutions previously encountered and according to the resources that they can mobilize. The border harassment policies put in place by the authorities have important effects on the young people who are subjected to them, effects that can be immediate but also long term as they can impact their life courses.

The Immediate Effects of the Border Regime

The first effect of the border regime on these young people is an increase in risk-taking in order to cross the border, caused by attempts to evade the police. The young people are very often in transit on these territories (Lendaro and Roland 2022) and try to get on trucks, trains or cross the Channel in a boat. At the French-Italian border, risk-taking in order to enter French territory involves crossing the mountains or walking along the railroad tracks or the highway. Several young people have died in the course of their attempts[9]. Thus, crossing the border is a physical and psychological experience, which can mark both the body through injuries during attempts to cross or illnesses related to poor living conditions, as well as the mind, through trauma related to the awareness of having come close to death or having seen a friend die.

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[9] See the work of Maël Galisson who documents, for example, the deaths on the Franco-British border. Among these obituaries, there are many minors: https://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/1519092/Deaths-at-border-FranceBelgiumUK/

Also, minors who have already experienced the border know the need to not look like minors or migrants when crossing, in order not to be stopped by the police:

> *When you cross a border, you have to wear clean clothes so the police don't think you're a refugee or something and they'll let you through.* (Bilal, 16)

Concealment or passing techniques are recurrent (Butler 1993, Brigden 2016). The idea that the police can protect them does not make sense to them since these young people have seen law enforcement violate other migrants before, at several stages of their journey. This attitude results from a cumulative effect of prior interactions with authorities (Scheel 2017), at the French-Italian border, in Calais, and even elsewhere in Europe:

> *The first time, you give your real name and age. But after a while, you understand how it works in France, so you never give your real name again' (laughs)!* (Ayman, 17)

These young people are even aware that their minority can make them a target for malicious people. This sometimes leads them to age themselves:

> *Me, I faced problems because of my age. And most people, I don't tell them my real age. [...] I've met a lot of people who I haven't told my real age so they don't try to manipulate me or do other things that I can't talk about now.* (Mehdi, 17)

We can see here how dangerous this lie is for the young person, because while it is of course aimed at protecting oneself, the adolescent is placed outside the protective legal framework of minority, including in his or her interactions with the authorities. The harshness and violence of life in transit is also apparent (Hess

2012): young people must not only keep their distance from the police, but also know that it is illusory to count on their protection vis-à-vis other potential threats linked to trafficking and child exploitation. The feeling of insecurity is therefore permanent, and goes together with the fear of being identified and therefore deported, which is constantly present in the testimonies of the exiled minors we met.

These short-term effects sometimes extend beyond the border. The concealment continues even in interaction with peers or associations.

The Long-term Consequences of the Border Regime

By metonymy, the experience of violence, danger and precariousness leads minors to distrust all the actors in the field whom they associate with the public institutions of the country in which they find themselves, such as social workers responsible for providing shelter, or even associations and volunteer groups that have nothing to do with the institutions. Often, for example, not only does the young person not know that he or she has the right to be sheltered, but when he or she learns about it, mistrust prevails. Many young people who arrive via the Mediterranean imagine that this offer of emergency shelter is offset by the formalization of a care procedure and is accompanied by a restriction on their mobility. Living in the camps with other young exiles also informally circulates information and experiences, amplifying the mistrust and fear of being not only protected as a minor but also locked up and possibly expelled from the country:

> *They were telling me to go to Saint-Omer [home for unaccompanied minors][...] But me, why didn't I want to go there? You know? Because there were people who said "don't go to Saint-Omer, they'll take your fingerprints, and then they won't give you any papers, and they'll deport you.* (Youssef, 16)

The fear of being trapped is constant, even when protection by the Child Welfare Office (ASE) seems likely or is even proposed. This case is emblematic of the long-term effects on the perception of institutions and the effectiveness of their own rights as children, because the ASE is only responsible for the sheltering and protection of minors. In spite of this, the young people in transit are wary of it, also because the services offered by the ASE at the borders have not been thought of taking into account their specific situation and their needs; faced with the waiting, the lack of activity in the hostels, and the rules of daily life that are sometimes misunderstood, a large part of the minors who could claim to be taken care of by the ASE either do not do so, or leave the emergency system as soon as they have had a bit of rest, and end up attempting or retrying the dangerous passage to England:

All the little Sudanese who are in tents at the Rue des Huttes, there are quite a few who... they want to go to England, England, England. There is one who confined himself to us, he had a great time, he stayed for a month and a half, but it was impossible to interview him [to formalize his request for care as a minor]. (Educator in an emergency shelter, Pas-de-Calais)

Thus, we see that young people who want to go to the United Kingdom use the shelter as a temporary place of rest. However, it is out of the question for them to take more formal steps involving a lasting relationship with an authority in France. Their experiences before and during Calais mean that they very often construct themselves at a distance from the law (Ewick and Silbey 1998).

The idea that there is a differentiated law for minors, supposedly more protective than for adults, does not make sense because this is not what minors experience on a daily basis in both border areas. On the contrary, the racist management of the border

by the authorities feeds the vision that these minors have of an ineffective law, which does not take age into account. One of the consequences is the increasing number of attempts to informally cross the border to escape France. For instance, repression practices against illegal migrants undermines the protection that France should grant to exiled minors, and at the same time, it paradoxically fails to deter children as most of them eventually manage cross the border to the UK. It only gives more credence to the discourse of the exiled adults present at the Jungles, who insist on the absence of desirable prospects in France. The experience of the peers is thus crucial in understanding what is at stake in the decisions, hesitations, and non-take up (van Oorschot 1998) of many young people, even though they could be taken care of.

Being a Minor in a Border Zone: Between Lack of Resources, Exhaustion and Inclusion

In order to make progress in their migratory journey, exiles rely on a range of resources to cope with the dangers of the trip, including community or local solidarity. Some young people also have family and financial support that has made the journey easier, particularly in border areas, by paying for the services of smugglers, for example, or by relying on the experience accumulated by their relatives (Lendaro and Roland 2022).

Others lack the resources mentioned above. When they arrive in Calais, they face a closed border and harsh living conditions. Some of them feel that they are not able to continue their journey. At the same time, they meet a well-established associative support network, which tries to signpost them to institutional care actors (Agier 2019). This lack of resources and living conditions make them more receptive to institutional support that provides immediate safety and coverage of basic needs (shelter, hygiene and

food). The weight of uncertainty thus works in favour of accepting institutional protection.

Exhaustion is another factor that immobilizes these young people after a long and difficult journey. In Calais, the conditions of (over)living in the Jungles are particularly exhausting and the experience of illness or injury sometimes pushes young people to give up their migration project to the United Kingdom and turn to ASE care:

> *There are young people that we spot quite quickly, because they are young, isolated, because they are vulnerable, with whom we have a connection, and that six months later, they are the ones who come looking for us to say, I want to leave, I want to be taken into care by child protection. [...] They want to leave in another strategy, and unfortunately, it's often... it's a little bit traumatic element, it's police violence, a trip to the hospital, a conflict, a big blow of fatigue, which comes from particularly difficult living conditions, you know? Enough is enough.* (Théo, educator for minors in the Calais Jungles)

In contrast to the difficulties young people may encounter in their interactions with institutions at the border, encounters with solidarity and reception networks can anchor young people in the territory outside of the institutional care situation (Grzymala-Kazlowska 2016). The example of Youssef is very telling here: he is housed with a Calais family who met him alone on the street one winter evening. The accommodation offered to him by this family is unconditional. Youssef often returns to sleep there, and little by little he no longer attempts to cross into the UK. He began to occupy a central place in the family, acting as a big brother to the younger children of the family that was hosting him. His social circle evolved: from the youngsters of the Jungles, he began to frequent the youngsters of

the neighbourhood where he is hosted. He finally decided to stay in France but refused to be taken in charge by the Child Welfare Office (ASE). This would mean having to leave his family to be housed in a shelter. While his schooling and administrative procedures are long and complex, Youssef does not give up.

> Before, I didn't really have any hope because I would talk to the Sudanese guys and they would say 'you know, France doesn't give you papers'. [...]. But little by little, I saw that there were people who were succeeding. I told myself that they were talking nonsense. And so I decided to stay in France. I found a great family, and that was that. (Youssef, 17)

His case is exemplary in that, beyond the administrative difficulties and in spite of the institutions, this young person chooses to stabilize in France because he has found a social environment that offers him security, affection, social ties, and a place within a group. This social anchoring thus pushes him to give up transit, giving the feeling that he has reached the end of his journey. It also provides a form of protection against administrative setbacks. This is a powerful explanatory factor for the mechanisms that can contribute to the long-term stabilization of minors in transit.

Conclusions

With this contribution, we wanted to highlight the effects the border regime has on the unaccompanied minors' perception of institutions, and of their rights. We hypothesized that the minors' experience of the tension between compassion for some, and repression for most, typical of the border regime, impacts their (non) choices, and their life course.

First of all, a distressing observation can be made common to all the borders studied here: that of a considerable gap between the

law as it is written, which is very protective for any young foreigner declaring himself to be a minor, and the law in practice, which is much less so. Protection and dissuasion coexist, creating anguishing uncertainties for young foreigners and their supporters, not to mention the fact that an institutional decision leading to the non-recognition of minority is often experienced as one injustice too many, so unbearable for a young person who has already suffered other forms of violence, that it can plunge him or her into deep distress.

Another point concerns the effects of police interventions at both borders: they are violent to the point of being traumatic, and so marked by suspicion towards minors that they induce, in the long term, a generalized distrust that young people feel towards any adult they associate with a French public institution. In addition, abusive practices by the police are rarely or never sanctioned, whether it be violent police behaviour in Calais (destruction of exiles' tents, failure to take into account declared minority status, etc.) or the immediate pushback of minors at the French-Italian border. As such, minors feel a deep distrust also toward the justice system, as they learn rapidly that the possibility to formally denounce, to punish and to correct this violent and illegal behaviours is not realistic: in sum, they learn, through their experiences and those of their peers, that in front of an abusive State, no restorative justice is available for them, even if they are UAMs.

A third point: whether or not the young exiles wish to be cared for by French institutions in the border zone, a constant that dominates everywhere and for everyone is that of boredom and the feeling of existential immobility expressed by the exiled minors. These are sometimes mitigated by support networks, whether community-based or not, which facilitate the passage of valuable

information, help young people keep themselves busy, and feel accompanied in their never-ending search for accommodation, an internship, or a job: this can result in a form of social anchoring in a territory, which becomes protective for the young person, even in the absence of a legal status as a minor.

Also, we must note the lack of political will to make the law really effective in the area of child protection: the few resources allocated to this area are not inevitable, but rather the result of political decisions aimed at doing the bare minimum to maintain the illusion of respect for international and national law in this area, while at the same time aspiring to dissuade young people from coming to and staying in France. It must be said, and it must stop. Finally, we suggest seriously considering the need of UAMs not only to be protected and believed by authorities, but also them having access to an effective restorative justice, which is able to determine the responsibilities of the illegal use of force by the police, and to punish them.

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Jelena Mazaj[1], Ruta Grigaliunaite[2]

Child Agency and Integration of Unaccompanied Minors in Sicily

Abstract: The paper presents a normative framework concerning unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in Italy, as well as best practices and reveals the findings of the Horizon 2020 MiCREATE project's research, carried out in Sicily from September 2020 until April 2021. The aim of the research was to better understand (1) the legal and social framework of the established reception system in Italy in order to to protect and support unaccompanied minors and (2) their perception of this system, as the final beneficiaries

The research revealed that even if the Italian legislation generally address the rights of the unaccompanied minors and provides a comprehensive framework for protecting UAMs, several protection gaps exist. For example, the Italian guardianship model is reliant on volunteers and suffers significant bureaucratic delays; accommodation for unaccompanied minors is poorly managed through private contracting arrangements that show evidence of corruption and children, after being wrongly assessed to be over 18 years old, often become homeless.

Keywords: reception system, integration, unaccompanied minors, Sicily

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Agencija za otroke in integracija mladoletnikov brez spremstva na Siciliji

Izvleček: Članek predstavlja normativni okvir in dobre prakse postopanja z mladoletnimi migranti brez spremstva v Italiji ter opisuje izsledke raziskave projekta Obzorje 2020 MiCREATE, ki je potekala na Siciliji od septembra 2020 do aprila 2021. Cilj raziskave je bil razumeti (1) pravni in družbeni okvir sistema za zaščito ter podporo mladoletnikom brez spremstva in (2) njihovo doživljanje tega sistema z vidika končnih uporabnikov storitev.

Raziskava je razkrila, da kljub temu da italijanska zakonodaja na splošno priznava pravice mladoletnih migrantov brez spremstva in zagotavlja celovit okvir za njihovo zaščito, v tej zaščiti obstaja več vrzeli. Posebno problematično je dejstvo, da je italijanski model skrbništva odvisen od prostovoljcev in se sooča z znatnimi birokratskimi zamudami, da je nastanitev za mladoletnike brez spremstva upravljana prek zasebnih pogodbenih dogovorov, ki so izpostavljeni korupciji, da so otroci, za katere se domneva, da so starejši od 18 let, pogosto izpostavljeni brezdomstvu, in tako naprej.

Ključne besede: sprejemni sistem, integracija, mladoletniki brez spremstva, Sicilija

Introduction

Italy has remained one of the main reception countries for unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in Europe, receiving minors both from the Mediterranean route and the Balkan one. In Sicily, according to the monitoring report on UAMs in Italy (as of June 2019) and data retrieved from the General Directorate of Immigration and Integration Policy under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 4,758 UAMs were hosted, which accounts for 42 per cent of the total UAMs in Italy. The reasons for fleeing their home countries are often recurrent: the search for better living conditions for one's future and personal security, escape from conflict, persecution, extreme poverty and hunger (Ambrosetti and Paparusso 2018, 151-171). The absence of adult references in many cases produces serious consequences linked to the fate of the child as they risk becoming victims of violence, abuse, exploitation and mistreatment, as well as entering the prostitution business among others.

Reception system of the UAMs in Italy is characterised by a normative framework that, in its continuous evolutions, has been particularly advanced and protective of minors that arrive in Italy unaccompanied by adult caregivers. In addition, there have been different examples of separate initiatives, mainly run by the non-governmental organisations, to support migrant children in transition. Despite the advanced normative framework and different laws in favour of protection and support to UAMs, they are sporadic and not consistently coordinated at the national level. Despite good practices, there are still several integration challenges and different gaps between the policy and practice in the protection of UAMs in Italy, which also encourage secondary migration of UAMs.

This article presents findings linked to the current situation of the UAMs in Italy, which were collected based on desk-based research, participant observation and interviews with minors and professionals in Sicilian reception centres.

Normative Framework Concerning Unaccompanied Minors

The protection of unaccompanied minors in Italy mainly derives from the transposition of the International and European standards and Regulations, while taking into account national rules and a number of laws that address the rights of unaccompanied minors: from the so-called Martelli Law n. 39 of 1990 to the Bossi-Fini Law n. 189 of 2002 regarding immigration and asylum.

In March 2017, Italy became the first European country to legislate a comprehensive framework concerning the protection and treatment of unaccompanied minors, focusing on the best interests of the child– with the 'Provisions on protective measures for unaccompanied foreign minors', often referred to as the Zampa Law n. 47 of 2017. This law establishes a protection system and safeguarding of UAMs in an articulation of competences between the central and peripheral administration, seeking to ensure greater uniformity in the application of the provisions throughout the territory of Italy. This legislation defines an unaccompanied foreign minor thusly: 'an unaccompanied foreign minor present in the territory of the State means a minor who does not have Italian or European Union citizenship and who is located, for any reason, in the territory of the State or who is otherwise subject to Italian jurisdiction, without assistance and representation from parents or other adults legally responsible for him or her according to the laws in force in the Italian legal system' (Zampa Law 2017, Article 2). From a legal perspective, foreign minors hold the same rights

and are entitled to receive the same treatment as national Italian minors. Indeed, they are protected primarily as minors without any form of legal guardianship, and only later, if they have applied for protection, as beneficiaries of international protection.

The mentioned Zampa Law (2017) recognises these minors as vulnerable subjects with rights. They can directly apply for a residence permit at their local police station, even without the appointment of a legal guardian. The 'right to be listened' is also established for unaccompanied foreign minors in the administrative and judicial proceedings that concern them, while the right to legal assistance is guaranteed and comes at the expense of the State (idem.). The Law consolidates the principle according to which the setting up of reception services includes services specifically targeted to the requirements of minors: specialised centres for rescue and protection with trained personnel and respective of the standards established by the Decree of the Minister of the Interior (Zampa Law 2017, Article 12).

This Law also reshapes the identification procedure for minors in a harmonised manner throughout the territory of Italy: this is the fundamental step for the assessment of age, on which in turn depends the possibility of applying protection measures for minors (Zampa Law 2017, Article 5).

In addition, local authorities have the task of raising awareness and training the carers who are able to accommodate unaccompanied minors. In fact, the law favours the placement of the minor within households (including an active search for family members of the minor within the Italian territory) rather than placing them in a host community. Each Juvenile Court has a list of voluntary guardians available to assist one or more unaccompanied foreign minors (Zampa Law 2017, Article 11). With regard to long-term assistance measures, the rule reiterates the possibility of requesting the minor to be assigned to social services up to the age of 21 years

old for those minors who have embarked on a path of integration, but who require prolonged assistance and support when they reach the age of majority (Zampa Law 2017, Article 13).

Within the process of integration, UAMs are registered in the national healthcare system and have the right to access preventive treatments (e.g., vaccinations). Once a guardian (a person whose duty is the support of the minor throughout the path of inclusion in the host community, including bureaucratic proceedings) is identified, the State guarantees the right to education. The host community or the foster family will be involved in finding a school and proceed with the enrolment process, including language courses. This is crucial, as a sufficient level of Italian is necessary in order to renew their permits of stay, take up an employment and feel like a part of the host society. However, scholars note that, despite the increase of interest regarding educational programmes for foreigners, far too little attention is paid to educational programs specifically addressed to unaccompanied minors in school settings (Augelli, Lombi and Triani 2018, 144-158).

Overall, the Italian normative framework concerning UAMs fully incorporates International and European standards, is comprehensive and includes innovative points to better support unaccompanied minors in Italy.

Italian Good Practices in the Field of Reception and Integration of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors

In regards to the social framework in Italy supporting migrant children in transition, there is also a series of good practices in favour of the reception and integration of unaccompanied foreign minors alongside the normative framework. The best practices presented in this section demonstrate the willingness and motivation of different entities (strongly promoted by the non-governmental field) to foster

processes of integration of unaccompanied minors, the social cohesion, the protection of their rights, and the path towards independence. Some of them are presented below and underline that there is a wide range of different initiatives linked to the development of social and professional skills, integration practices or other issues.

The *Ciclofficina* project[3] (literally meaning bike workshop), promoted by the Municipality of Udine and the Association '*Nuovi Cittadini Onlus*', started in 2015, is a space equipped for the ordinary maintenance of bicycles, with services open to all citizens in the community. It has allowed UAMs to acquire basic skills in bicycle mechanics as well as skills related to broader topics, such as sustainability and road safety.

Notably, there is the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) and the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI), with a time frame of three years, for 'The dissemination, practice and implementation of sporting activities for foreign minors hosted in the national reception system': it is aimed at promoting the social inclusion of UAMs through sport. Its purpose is the local dissemination of sports activities by asking municipal governments and sports clubs to involve UAMs (Accorinti 2014, 128).

In the field of education, on the 11th of December 2017 the Minister of Education, University and Research and the Ombudsman for children and adolescents have signed the guidelines for the right to education of students who live out of their family of origin,[4] in order to guarantee 'equal education oppor-

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[3] More information is available at: http://www.euroformrfs.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Report-_-Buone-pratiche-di-volontariato-FAMI-Milano-_IntroFloro-1.pdf

[4] More information is available at: https://www.garanteinfanzia.org/sites/default/files/Protocollo%20Intesa%20Garante%20infanzia_Miur.pdf

tunities for minors'. The guidelines include concrete indications and suggestions, at all levels, from the governance among different institutions to the classrooms. Both parties commit to the promotion of initiatives aimed at the protection of minors and, above all, the guarantee of the right to education and well-being of unaccompanied minors, minors outside families and minors belonging to ethnic minorities (Rom, Sinti and Caminanti). The agreement promotes the training of actors involved in children's education and the dissemination at school of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Specific for Sicily, another good practice worth mentioning is the Protocol of Palermo.[5] It is an agreement between the Municipality of Palermo and Palermo Civil Court, Juvenile Court, Prosecutor's Office at the Juvenile Court, Police Headquarters, University of Palermo, Provincial Health Department, Sicilian Regional School Office and the Ombudsman for children and adolescents aimed at protecting vulnerable categories, in particular unaccompanied foreign minors through the establishment of individualised projects of guidance, the institution of a system of volunteer guardians, the institution of a technical table in order to individuate and to solve issues linked to the identification of the minor and the ascertainment of the minor's age. It has been signed also in other municipalities, such as Naples, Bari and Cagliari.

Particularly important is to mention the role of voluntary guardians, introduced by the Zampa Law (2017, Article 11). These are private citizens, appointed by the Juvenile Court, who not only have the legal representation of the minor in all the procedures that con-

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[5] More information is available at: https://www.comune.palermo.it/js/server/uploads/_30012017104927.pdf

cern them, but are also adult figures of reference, attentive to the relationship with the child, who must promote their best interests. A Protocol Agreement has been signed between the Family Court of Catania and the Ombudsman for children and adolescents of the Region of Sicily[6], for the establishment of the voluntary guardian list, the selection, the training and continuous competence development of such guardians, the establishment of a reference space for the voluntary guardians in order to support the coordination and territorial synergies. In Palermo, in support of the volunteer guardians in their new role, a monitoring and support system has been established. This system provides guidance and advice to the volunteers on how to protect and support children as they move towards social inclusion and make the transition to adulthood.

Among NGOs best practices, the project 'Ragazzi Harraga' (1st and 2nd editions)[7] – Social Inclusion Processes for unaccompanied minors in the City of Palermo is worthy of mention. The project, coordinated by CIAI (tr. Centro Italiano Aiuti all'Infanzia Onlus) in partnership with the Municipality of Palermo and other local associations and NGOs, is aimed at improving the reception system of unaccompanied minors by promoting models ensuring the protection of children's rights in Italy. It promoted models supporting social inclusion, which took into account the potential, the interests and the expectations of unaccompanied minors in order to facilitate an autonomous and responsible passage to adulthood by involving the Region of Sicily. The project proposed a social inclusion model, which took into account interests and perspectives of minors who are alone in Sicily. The inter-

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[6] More information is available at: https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/osservatori/allegati/approf._2_-_tutori_volontari_per_minori_stranieri_non_accompagnati_def.pdf

[7] More information is available at: https://ciai.it/progetto/harraga-2/

vention was based on three dimensions: 1) the social dimension, through the creation of a platform with social folders for each minor featuring all the information concerning their identities, the reception procedures, the inclusion strategies and the hard, soft and transversal skills they have developed; 2) the professional dimension, through the development of an active policy for labour market integration; 3) the housing dimension, by setting up temporary and affordable housing solutions featuring low-cost accommodation for unaccompanied minors in tourist hostels. As a matter of fact, the project (1st edition) has facilitated the job placement of many of the minors involved through the activation of 30 curricular three-month internships with a grant of 300 Euros, and 50 curricular one-month internships. Taking this success into consideration, the representatives of the third sector, in collaboration with other local actors, created a follow-up '*Ragazzi Harraga 2*'[8], which continued the journey of '*Ragazzi Harraga*' (2017-2019) aimed at consolidating and evolving best practices in the reception of migrant minors according to what has now become the "Harraga Model", a system of innovative pathways to autonomy that embraces social inclusion, training, guidance and job placement for lone migrant minors in the delicate transition to majority.

It is important to underline the fact that in the Sicilian case, the best practices are developed in strong collaboration with the third sector.

All these good practices are aimed at finding solutions for gaps and difficulties in the existing reception system of minors.

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[8] More information is available at: https://sostienici.ciai.it/prodotto/ragazzi-harraga-2/.

Protection Gaps and Difficulties in the Italian Reception System

Due to the complexity of the situation "that does not take into account the minors' needs and vulnerability – the boys' subjectivity shows their desire to question the constraints and the labelling that consign them to an existence of extreme suffering and marginality" (Sanò 2017), there are, unfortunately, several protection gaps in Italy, which do not permit UAMs to benefit fully from their rights and encourage, among other trends, secondary migration.

Young people often transit through Italy to the UK and France due to the lack of support and long bureaucratic procedures, language factors and desire to be reunited with family members. Jennifer Allsopp in the Research Brief on Unaccompanied minors states that Dublin III procedures are not working effectively and children, who should be able to access legal transfers from Italy to the UK or France, often do not have this opportunity and turn to smugglers instead (Allsopp 2017, 3). According to her 2017 research brief, which at the time of the research stated that 'as few as 20 reunions of unaccompanied children from Italy with their family members elsewhere in Europe have been completed [...], despite it being likely that several thousand children are eligible' (ibid.).

Hundreds of unaccompanied children who enter Europe in the South spend months in inadequate facilities and are lacking proper protection. The standards of the reception and hosting facilities are often poor and many UAMs prefer to escape or to continue their journey to Northern Europe. In such cases, they become 'invisible' and exposed to a variety of risks. The research, conducted by Catarci and Rocchi provides a following testimony by one of the Egyptian UAMs who described his experience in the reception centre in Sicily, from which he escaped earlier:

[...] then I go to another centre close to Syracuse. I stayed there for one year. First the fingerprints. In Sicily. Nothing. No Speaking. Not doing anything. Only eating and sleeping. There is nothing, no school. One year. Sleeping, eating, playing. One year like that. Afterwards, I took all my clothes and ran away with my friends. Social workers are not all good. 10% good. Small. Sicily is not good. Important to speak Italian and no school to attend. Food is not good. [...] No clothes. Ugly room, not cleaning. (Catarci and Rocchi 2017, 117)

A prolonged stay in these reception centres has extremely negative consequences on minors, mainly because services aimed at social inclusion and at the autonomy of minors, such as training and work placement paths and legal support activities, are not provided. Moreover, these centres have large dimensions, which do not allow the operators to follow the children in an individualised way or to create that family environment to which all the children, according to the Italian law, are entitled. Furthermore, the situation of minors hosted in structures of first and second reception centres is problematic, since they are located far from urban centres, isolated and with little access to services. The number of operators employed in the centres is often lower than the minimum standards. In many cases, they have neither the qualification required by the current legislation, nor sufficient skills and experience. Many structures lack cultural mediators, with the consequences being that the operators are not able to communicate adequately with the children (Catarci and Rocchi 2017, 123). Another problem is the Municipalities' delay in payments, whereby the reception centres often receive the funds with delays of more than a year and therefore they face serious difficulties in covering the costs related to the functioning of the centre. Partly due to delays in payment and due to the decrease in arriv-

als in 2018, many reception centres have been forced to close: some minors have been transferred over and over again from one centre to another, increasingly raising their level of stress. As it has been stressed, in many cases the failure to comply with the standards set by the law is hardly verified and sanctioned by the competent institutions. In fact, both Municipalities and Prefectures often do not ensure appropriate monitoring of the centres.

As anticipated, the MiCREATE results show that a significant number of UAMs suffer from acculturative stress that originates from attempts to integrate the differences between the culture of origin and the dominant culture and is often accompanied by a number of stressful psychosocial experiences.

Research on UAMs and acculturation stress (Rania et al. 2014, 302-307) provides a number of statements by UAMs of different origins who describe their feelings during and after migration:

'Being alone without knowing anyone'. (N., Senegalese, 18 years old)
'Just get used to being alone'. (X., Albanian, 20 years old)
'This was the first time that I remained without my family'. (E., Egyptian, 20 years old)
'No, I do not think that here is like Albania, because there are so many things. I miss my family'. (M., Albanian, 19 years old)

Furthermore, a number of these UAMs also need to urgently find any kind of employment in order to send money home or pay off the debt for their journey to Europe. Therefore, they tend to accept illegal, dangerous and underpaid jobs, and often become the victims of sexual exploitation, forced labour, prostitution, and are forced to perform illegal jobs (Ferrara et al. 2016, 322).

Catarci and Rocchi's research showed that there is a noticeable difference between young migrants who have turned 18 years old and those who are still under 18 years old. The minors under 18

years old seemed more enthusiastic and didn't think much about what was waiting for them outside of the protection system. Those who already turned 18 years old were worried about their future and the uncertain conditions, without any help or protection (Catarci and Rocchi 2017, 122).

However, it is evident that experiences of UAMs in Italy depend on the type and location of reception centres. Research on health challenges in reception centres showed that most of the interviewed UAMs had lived in multiple types of accommodation facilities in remote villages and towns and hence had very little possibility to access any activities that would improve their integration. However, those who live in 'multiple occupancy rooms' in big cities like Catania described them as 'good enough' and stated that there they had opportunities to attend language lessons and different training (Blitz 2017, 12). Other research shows that UAMs in different reception centres voiced complaints about inadequate, minimal and sometimes rotten food, inadequate hygiene supplies, poor health care access, minimal clothing and mistreatment by the workers. Furthermore, there is the existence of an informal communications network where information is exchanged and is much more effective than the institutional channels; the minors have 'their personal knowledge' about reception centres (Sanò 2017, 130-132).

Therefore, different authors state that some of the notable challenges, mentioned by many minors, are: loneliness, difficulties with learning the language, inability to find a job due to being minors, the inability to undergo any educational or employment programme due to the fact that many centres are located in remote rural areas, inadequate, minimal and sometimes rotten food, inadequate hygiene supplies, poor health care access, minimal clothing and mistreatment by the workers.

Reception Facilities in Sicily: The Insights of the MiCREATE Project

The field research started in September 2020, and in its first phase the research team (composed of a researcher and intercultural mediator) mainly focused on contacting agencies and institutions who should respond to UAMs' needs. With selected 44 reception centres in the South, West and central Sicily (Naro, Marsala, Mazzarino) the research team organised an introductory meeting in each of the centres aimed at presenting the research to social workers and UAMs. However, the team was forced to suspend the activities so as to comply with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) containment measures applied at the local and national level, which strongly restricted mobility, making travelling from one destination to another practically impossible. Access to reception facilities was forbidden so as to prevent contamination, so the research team resumed activities with online meetings through relevant online platforms.

Following the MiCREATE methodology,[9] with the focus on the best interest of the child and a child-centred approach, interviews were conducted with social workers working in the reception centres (12 online interviews) and migrant boys (33 interviews) in March and April 2021. These interviews were organised to collect information and testimonies about the specific life experiences faced by migrant children in transition in Sicily, including their current situation, understanding of well-being (what they consider important in their current condition), their perceptions, their values, their attitudes and opinions regarding the different aspects of their life in transition: legal residence, education and social protection. The key findings of the research are presented below:

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[9] More information about the methodology is available at: https://www.micreate.eu/index.php/about-common/

In general, all research participants had a positive opinion about their experience in the reception centres. They said they are happy about the place they live in. However, if we closely analysed their answers, we noticed their satisfaction is connected to their past experiences and comparisons to Libyan detention camps or poor family houses. This sense of well-being shouldn't be compared to their previous circumstances.

Research results show that the majority of UAMs are not aware of the institutions responsible to guarantee their well-being. Interview respondents (29) do not have any idea of what lawyers do, only 6 of them said they had talked to a lawyer who explained and informed them about the procedure they should follow and provided them with basic information. Only 4 out of 29 children can count on a "real" guardian, who is not the mayor or the centre manager, as they have spent more time in the reception system and are aware of the role of guardians. Just a few of them have visited some medical institutions, but have never met a social worker or other institutional professionals. The centres are left alone managing the UAMs path.

UAMs live their lives inside the centre, their relationships are with those from among their travel mates and their room-mates. They create an atypical relationship with professionals; on the one hand, it is similar to a parent-child relationship, especially with female social workers (who are often called mothers). On the other hand, it is characterised by several expectations towards the community manager, the only person who is in charge of all the things concerning UAMs (providing information about legal issues, pocket money, education and training, moral support) and has a pivotal role. This kind of relationship, even though it is strong from a human point of view, is dysfunctional and inefficient regarding any legal aspects. UAMs are not aware of the procedures they need to deal with, as the manager does it all.

Respondents said they were often surprised and they wondered about bureaucratic processes.

I don't know how long I am supposed to stay here. I want to study and have my documents so that I can work to help my family. I don't know what to do, because I don't have any information about the procedure. They keep telling me that I need to wait... what am I waiting for? The lawyer keeps telling me 'wait and see...wait and see'...

Another clear aspect resulting from interviews is the lack of integration with the local community, as well as of integration support services; as one of the UAMs pointed out "I am not happy because I don't do anything, I don't work out, I don't play football. I have always been playing football since I lived in Guinea, I do nothing here".

In addition, a series of obstacles that prevent children from obtaining a residence permit have been highlighted by the research participants. In some police stations, filing an asylum application takes a lot of time and some Police Headquarters do not issue permits for minors when the minor has no passport, and this is the case for the majority of UAMs arriving in Italy. As a result, children often remain for months without any residence permit, which makes it very difficult for them to enrol in the National Health Service and to begin any social inclusion programme such as attending vocational training courses or internships. Research participants noted that it is also very stressful from a psychological point of view.

In the most isolated centres, the right to education is not granted even if at least 30% of respondents said they are willing to finish middle school. However, the situation appears critical when thinking about their future learning path since the municipalities where the centres are located do not have any vocational centre migrant

children would like to attend, therefore they are forced to register to courses they are not interested in and which make the time they spend in the centre even more complicated and frustrating.

Most of the research participants describe their overall experience of reception as *'eating and sleeping'* – many of them are hosted in the centres, located in remote areas, where they cannot undergo any educational or employment programme, including Italian courses.

Finally, when children hosted in the Italian reception facilities come to the age of majority, every support measure ceases. At that age, children rarely have a contract of employment and generally still have to complete their school and training path, therefore they cannot be independent. The abrupt interruption of any reception and support intervention generally interrupts the evidence of the inclusion path undertaken. Many of these young adults end up living on the street. The problem, already present, has been worsened by the introduction of the so-called 'Security Decree', which deleted the humanitarian protection, hence minors turning 18 years old without humanitarian protection will be condemned to social exclusion.

Conclusions and Limitations

The research revealed that most of the reception centres pay attention only to the basic needs, not taking into the consideration the right to be heard or other participatory rights. Listening to UAMs and creating an individual learning path for each one of them is not a part of the procedures of the centres, therefore migrant children are mainly ignored and pushed to adhere to a "one size fits all" integration and inclusion programmes, which have been imposed upon them. Such a course of action facilitates the management procedures, since the personnel working in the centres are already aware of the bureaucratic and institutional ob-

stacles and issues that might emerge if all the subjects involved in the reception procedure participate in the decision-making process, therefore they prefer a standardised and simpler alternative.

All in all, the best interests of the child as the first guiding principle of the protection system for minors is not taken into account very much, as expressed by the participants of the research. Children are barely consulted about the matters concerning their own life, they do suffer from social exclusion, also due to their legal status, low levels and inadequate education and employment opportunities.

The field research conducted within the scope of the MiCRE-ATE project must continue research on the gaps in the application of the child-centred approach within the reception system, and provide further recommendations to support migrant children in transition.

We tried to make this research as comprehensive as possible, however, it is subject to several limitations. Firstly, although the online technology supported an implementation of the interviews during the period of the pandemic, we need to state that it was also an obstacle, as face to face meeting would help in creating a more personal contact with these children and to get more specific answers to the research questions. Secondly, during the interview they were accompanied by a social worker from the reception centre. In such cases, we think that a feeling of fear or 'of saying something bad' had a place in this situation. Implementing interviews without them would provide a more detailed picture. Additionally, the language barrier also brings some misunderstanding in the communication process. In particular, this research was implemented in collaboration with a cultural mediator. A translation from the children's native language to Italian or back challenged every dynamic of the ongoing work. Thus, it is important to under-

line the role of a mediator/researcher, who knows the child's native language, as well as time are both essential for research activities, as there is a need to create a comfortable and trustful environment between the researcher and the child.

Finally, this work concentrates on a particular Sicilian framework, and in the case of other local/regional conditions, future studies are needed to validate the outcomes of the present work.

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Applying intercultural principles in practice during teaching: languages of instruction and use in multicultural classes

Abstract: Since 2015, Greek schools have seen a sharp increase in the number of students from refugee backgrounds, especially in areas near large refugee hospitality centres. Multilingual and multicultural classes multiplied in numbers, hosting students with widely different educational histories and almost zero command of the official language of instruction. This manuscript presents three observed science lessons at a multicultural junior high school in Athens, in a class of fourteen (N) refugee and migrant students, none of whom were native speakers of English or Greek. The students were observed as to their language of choice for note-keeping and writing, the use of code-switching and translanguaging, as well the use of the first language in the classroom. According to this study, most students chose to use their own 'working' language, which is the language most readily available to them in that moment, in order to negotiate new scientific knowledge. This 'working' language consists mainly of English speech and text, but with many elements of code-switching to Greek and students' first

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languages, showing and highlighting the need for encouraging students to use intermediate language tools, rather than the strictly monolingual official language of instruction.

The ultimate goal is the effective inclusion and healthy coexistence of all culturally linguistically diverse students within the classroom.

Keywords: multicultural education. refugee education, translanguaging, code-switching, multilingual classes, intercultural education

Uporaba medkulturnih načel v praksi pri poučevanju: učni jeziki in uporaba v večkulturnem razredu

Izvleček: Od leta 2015 je v grških šolah število učencev beguncev, zlasti na območjih v bližini velikih begunskih centrov, močno naraslo. Večjezični in večkulturni razredi so se množili, vključevali so učence z zelo različno zgodovino izobraževanja in skoraj brez znanja uradnega učnega jezika. Ta članek opisuje tri ure naravoslovja na multikulturni nižji srednji šoli v Atenah v razredu štirinajstih dijakov beguncev in migrantov, med katerimi nihče ni bil materni govorec angleščine ali grščine. Učence smo opazovali glede uporabe jezika, ki so ga izbrali za zapisovanje in pisanje, uporabe preklapljanja kod in prevajanja ter uporabe prvega jezika v razredu. Kot smo opazili, se je večina dijakov odločila za uporabo lastnega "delovnega" jezika, ki jim je bil v danem trenutku najlažje dostopen za učenje novih znanstvenih spoznanj. Ta "delovni" jezik je bil sestavljen predvsem iz angleškega govora in besedila, vendar dopolnjen s številnimi elementi preklapljanja med kodi grščine in maternega jezika učencev; to kaže na potrebo po spodbujanju učencev k uporabi vmesnih jezikovnih orodij namesto strogo enojezičnega uradnega jezika pouka.

Ključne besede: večkulturna vzgoja, izobraževanje beguncev, prevajanje jezikov, preklapljanje kod, večjezični pouk, medkulturna vzgoja

Introduction

Since 2015, when the Greek refugee crisis started, areas near Refugee Hospitality Centres (refugee camps) suddenly registered high numbers of students from refugee/migrant backgrounds with low Greek language skills. Secondary education, in particular, was ill-prepared to accommodate students with such linguistic and cultural diversity and widely different educational histories. Learning new academic content in a language they could barely understand, became a very challenging task (Dryden-Peterson 2015, 8).

Formal education attempted to respond to the newly arising needs by re-activating the previously established Reception Classes. These are similar in concept to the 'sheltered ESL classes' mentioned by Curtin (2005, 25) and Knoblcock and Youngquist (2016, 3), where the host language (Greek) is taught intensively for 15 hours per week in mainstream schools, until refugee/migrant students are ready to fully enter mainstream education (Palaiologou et al. 2021, 324). Greek language skills assessment tests, issued by the Ministry of Education, are carried out at the beginning of each academic year, diagnosing the need for joining a Reception Class, although maximum duration for attendance is set as three years, with most students becoming fluent enough to join the mainstream class after one year. Other structures, such as Intercultural Education Schools, already established in Greece since 1989, were also re-activated with sharply increased student influxes. Even though Intercultural schools aim at promoting the integration of non-Greek speaking students into the Greek education system and society, in practice, they host mostly non-native speakers. These schools attempt, through adaptation of pedagogical strategies and materials, to teach the full mainstream Greek curriculum to students, whose Greek may be very basic and, in some cases, non-existent. Obviously, language of instruction and

language use in class pose many issues. Intercultural schools host dozens of different nationalities of students from various socio-cultural backgrounds, including, for example, refugee students from camps, unaccompanied minors, children of newly arrived economic migrants, children of diplomats or returnees from the Greek diaspora. Also, many schools in central urban areas have a high percentage of non-native speakers among their students. Multilingual schools are an important vehicle for host language learning though socialization among peers of different nationalities and locals, as friendship seems to be an important route to social inclusion and integration (Palaiologou and Prekate 2022, 5).

This article investigates the comparative use in class of mother languages, of second or third languages of instruction (such as English and French) and of intermediate languages, constructed by students themselves through translanguaging and code-switching processes during a multilingual class. Translanguaging allows the mixture of elements, modes and features from different languages, prioritizing communication facilitation over language accuracy and boundaries (García 2009, 140). Translanguaging intervenes at the level of word structure, borrowing grammatical and syntactical rules from one language and applying it to another (for example, conjugating Greek verbs with English subfixes). Code-switching, on the other hand, is a simpler form of conflation where two languages are used within a sentence, but words remain largely intact. Both strategies aim at making communication among multilinguals more effective. These phenomena are widespread at multicultural schools' multilingual environments, bringing positive effects to communication, but also sometimes difficulties. The construction of intermediate languages treats languages not as independent entities, but as mutually interacting systems in education and becomes an evolving step stemming from multilingualism.

The current study involves observation of science lessons at a multicultural junior high school and the frequency of mother language, host language (Greek) and third language (English) use during the lessons. During the lessons observed, students were free to use the host or third language on their worksheets (they were also allowed to keep notes in their mother language, although they could not be corrected by the teacher). In a sample (N) of 14 students from over 8 nationalities, their worksheets were analyzed and grouped according to the language(s) used: English only, Greek only, Greek terminology only (with explanations in English), Greek terminology only (with no explanations). The main findings show that most students use English extensively as a working language. Even though learning Greek terms is within the lessons' teaching aims, there are students who find this very difficult and prefer to resort to a more familiar language (English). The common use of English is confirmed in the third type of observation concerning the translation of science terms from English to mother language: most students could not find an accurate corresponding term in their mother language and stated that they 'didn't need to', as they have been used to 'think in English'. This paper begins with a brief theoretical background on translanguaging and code-switching in teaching and learning, followed by detailed descriptions of three observations of science lessons from a multicultural class, one biology lesson on the characteristics of life, another biology class on the description and functions of the cell, and one science class on terminology of properties of materials. The Discussion section follows with the relative frequency of host and third language (English) uses, as well as translation to mother language, as observed during the lessons. The Conclusions section emphasizes the crucial role that translanguaging and code-switching play in facilitating non-native speakers' learning

and socialization. Translanguaging and code switching could be used to enrich intercultural practices in multilingual classes and support culturally-linguistically diverse students in order to include them within the classroom's context.

Research shows that children learn better in their mother language (Cummings 2014, 5) and parental engagement is more likely when educational materials are in their mother tongue (Tudjman 2019, 6). Mother language use at schools is also included in EU educational guidelines (Androulakis 2019, 16), although in Greece, the official language of instruction in mainstream formal education is Greek. Intercultural schools' operation framework requires that teaching staff are hired according to their command of the mother language of student majority. However, in present day multilingual schools, there is no single 'majority' mother language and it would not be feasible to cater for all linguistic needs, which include, for example, Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish, Dari, Urdu, Georgian, Chinese, Russian, French, Albanian, Swahili, Turkish, South African English, as well as many topical dialects. Additionally, many teachers see mother language use as hindrance to students' academic progress (Argidag 2019, 9) and prefer to deliver entire lessons in new academic topics in Greek. There are many examples in the literature where researchers, teachers and policy makers advocate for the use of mother language (and culture) in mainstream education (Vižintin 2019, 125). However, approaches differ among educators at different schools that host a variety of mother languages, with some allowing mother language use among peers, while others actively discourage the use of mother language or third languages (such as English).

It is interesting to note that many students at multicultural schools ultimately become not only bilingual but multilingual, with English (rather than Greek) being the most prominent second language. The reasons are: a) Many students come from Eng-

lish-speaking international backgrounds, either from international schools in other countries, or as refugee students in intermediate countries, where English was used as a 'survival' language, b) English is the language teenagers use for communication in social media, c) English is the main language of socialization among peers of different ethnic groups, d) English is the most spoken language in the EU and students who aspire to relocate to other European countries invest in mastering English.

However, other languages are constantly present: peer-teaching takes place either in the mother language, third languages (French for some African students, or Turkish, for refugee students who have prior schooling experience in Turkey before coming to Greece) and in an 'intermediate language', that is, a main 'background' language, such as English or Arabic, upon which elements of other languages are superimposed, either at the level of the sentence or at the level of the word (code-switching and translanguaging). Peer teaching can also take place in neighbouring languages (such as Sorani and Farsi) (Androulakis 2019, 21), during a process called 'inter-comprehension', which utilizes similarities between neighbouring languages to decode messages and assist comprehension of an unknown language. The purpose of this article is to investigate the functionality of these intermediate languages as learning strategies.

Theoretical Background: Translanguaging and Code-switching in Teaching and Learning

Although very few people would identify as multilingual (Edwards 2013, 20), as language forms an integral part of identity, multilingualism is found in an increasing number of people in modern multicultural societies and affects several sectors of public and private life: the media, social services, commerce, education (Tsolakidou 2009, 6) and communication within one's home and family: second generation immigrant children talk with their parents in their mother tongue, but use a second language with their siblings or even a third language, when they contact their friends through social media.

Bi/multilingualism was traditionally determined by socio/political factors, like political union of two separate ethnic states or colonization of one country by another. However, in modern societies, these bounds are no longer as influential (Edwards 2013, 6): there may be families or individuals within a highly monolingual state or area, with multilingual competences out of choice, professional requirements or necessity. Today, it is more the complex population movements, often to multiple countries, for financial, career, survival or political reasons that shape the terrain of multilingualism, bringing together many individuals from multiple cultural and linguistic backgrounds. When students from such different backgrounds come together in a single educational environment many interesting multilingual processes and realities emerge.

At the school of our study, there were students from over 40 nationalities, with varied linguistic backgrounds, like the bilingual refugee Afghan students (in two mother languages, Farsi and Dari) who become rapidly trilingual in Greek, or Spanish speaking children of the Greek diaspora in Latin America. Some

Syrian refugee students' writing skills were better in Turkish than in their mother language, as they spent crucial schooling years as refugees in Turkey, before coming to Greece. These are examples of students who have developed different capacities and skills in different languages, according to functionality and need. Monolingual interactions occur between multilingual students when they socialize with classmates of the same nationality. Arab students, for example, all speak Arabic to each other during breaks, Bangladeshi students speak Bangla, etc. However, the phenomenon of translanguaging arises when nationalities mix during socializing: Syrians and Afghans can communicate in English, with Arabic or Turkish language elements interfering. The Chinese and Ukrainians communicate in English. Interestingly, most students rarely use Greek, except for the occasional slang phrases.

Translanguaging is a process that mixes linguistic elements in a way that goes beyond the parallel coexistence of different monolingual systems, by mixing elements of different languages at the level of the sentence and at the level of the word. It diffuses the partitions between monolingual systems, linguistically and socio-linguistically (Tsolakidou 2015, 391). The purity of a mother language is no longer kept intact and language interaction is taking place through the transference of linguistic elements from one language to another. 'Greeklish' is a typical example of translanguaging among Greek native youths who often possess a high command of English language and are exposed daily to English through online activities (music, videos, gaming, etc.). In translanguaging, official, named languages are recognized and used, but no longer dictate the use of minoritized languages (Tsolakidou 2016, 12-13). Translanguaging allows the freedom of using a repertoire of practices and a variety of elements

from different minoritized languages, in order to communicate effectively. It is the unitary system of language that the speaker constructs to serve everyday life communication needs. Students from marginalized minorities (as well as their parents) are often ambivalent about the use of the mother tongue in school (Skourtou 2011, 13), but translanguaging, as a tool of dynamic multilingualism, helps them progress academically and develop a multilingual cognitive capital that is very important in modern day multicultural societies, where the monolithic, monolingual model is no longer viable (Garcia and Sylvan 2011, 385). Despite all this, translanguaging is generally misunderstood or even ignored, as teachers are not properly trained in how to use it and see it as a 'wrong' form of language.

Translanguaging uses languages as a communicative continuum, mitigating the differences between different language systems. As a coherent language system that the speaker constructs for himself, it becomes almost an invented 'intermediate language' that multilingual speakers use consciously or unconsciously. Many minority languages can coexist in parallel in a multilingual educational community, such as an Intercultural school, but it is only through translanguaging that equal interaction between the two is achieved. Multilingualism is a prerequisite for translanguaging, but it is not certain that translanguaging will occur even in the most diverse multilingual communities – although Garcia and Lin (2016, 119) argue that it is practically impossible for multilinguals to live/work together without using translanguaging, as translanguaging is a dynamic process of diffusion among multilingual systems. Conversely, one cannot use translanguaging without having at least two different language systems. For example, bilingualism is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for translanguaging.

Method: Examples of Translanguaging in a Multilingual Science Class

This study involves observation of three Science lessons at the 2nd year of a multicultural Junior High School and the uses of translanguaging and code-switching were noted. Fourteen (14) students from the class were chosen for the analysis of this work, as they were present in all three observed lessons and came from various ethnicities, such as Romania, China, Georgia, Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon, Ghana, Morocco, etc. and a variety of socio-economic backgrounds (refugee families in camps, refugee families in hostels, unaccompanied minor refugees, children of economic migrants, Greek returnees from the Greek diaspora, etc.). Their Greek language skills varied greatly, but none of the students spoke Greek or English as their mother languages. Teachers continuously adapted their resources in both English and Greek and allowed students the flexibility to use either English or Greek to master the new academic content, while improving their language skills.

The participants all attended the same class and were present during all three lessons. More students attended the class at any given time, but the analysis involved the class-notes of those present during all three lessons. There was no other selection criterion for the observation (only criterion was the uninterrupted attendance during all three lessons), but a specific class was chosen through personal contact and communication with the teacher, who was experienced in multilingual science teaching. The teacher recommended the second year of junior high school for research observation purposes, as it is a year when many new scientific concepts are introduced and students have acquired some basic Greek language skills. The research took place under the umbrella of the Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe (MiCREATE) project, which was run by the Hellenic Open

University as a partner, co-ordinated by coordinator Science and Research Centre, Koper in Slovenia and funded by the European Union HORIZON 2020 framework. The MiCREATE research team was granted entrance to all educational structures for the aims of researching education for refugees and migrants. Individual parental consent in this case was not required, as there was no communication or interaction by the observant teacher with the students, only passive lesson observation, although students were informed beforehand that another teacher/researcher would be observing the lesson for the purposes of academic research on multilingual class language use. Field notes were taken to transcribe some oral examples of translanguaging and code-switching, but no recording was allowed. Students' worksheets provided most of the field material for analysis, backed by the observer's field notes and discussion with the teacher afterwards. The observation mainly focused on the way students and teacher 'switched' languages (mostly between English and Greek). The students had lived in Greece from six months to two years, most of them attended intercultural (and some mainstream) primary schools and were aged 12-14.

Results

A summary of observations regarding use of code-switching and translanguaging during the Science lessons are the following:

A Biology Revision Class Example

During a revision lesson in Biology regarding the seven characteristics of life, students were given a worksheet to write the key terms in either English or Greek (or both, if they wished) (Appendix I). The terms required were: 'eat', 'breathe', 'grow', 'reproduce', 'excrete', 'react', 'common origin' and students were given the option to express themselves in either language. As a result,

one (1) student answered in Greek with full description, four (4) students answered only using Greek terms, four (4) students wrote with both English and Greek terms, and five (5) students in English only. A sample of each answer type is shown in Appendix I. Students stated that having the option to answer either in English or Greek was helpful to them. It should be noted that some students were not fluent in English and spoken Greek was more accessible to them than English terms. However, Greek orthography was very challenging for all participants.

A Biology Class on the Cell

In this example, students were given a class worksheet with a cell diagram to fill in the blanks the names of the different organelles and their functions. Again, students had the option of using either English or Greek in the functions' description, although the organelles' names should also be written in Greek (Appendix II). The teacher taught the entire lesson in both languages. As a result, two (2) students wrote only in Greek (including the functions), four (4) students wrote only in Greek (but only the names, they did not write anything about functions) and eight (8) students, used both languages (including English to describe the functions). It seems therefore that the majority of students finds Greek difficult as a working academic language, although terminology is more readily acquired, if a combination of methods is used (e.g. translation to English or mother language, linking to prior knowledge, explanatory diagrams, etc.). Therefore, the organelles' names were memorized in Greek as required, but most students chose English as the language to explain and keep notes about their functions. Since most scientific terminology is of Greek origin, this made it easier for students to approach, as the following sample dialogue shows:

Teacher: This is a κύτταρο*. What's inside? In κύτταρο? Look... Mitochondria... Μιτοχόνδρια... You see same word! What do they do? Yes... Produce energy... Energy? Ενέργεια. Παράγουν ενέργεια**. See same word again!
Student: Kyria, έτσι***, sosto?
Teacher: Ναι, very good, μπράβο****!

*transl. Cell.
**transl. They produce energy.
***transl. Miss, like this, right?
****transl. Yes, very good, well done.

This is not the only example where terminology of new concepts is introduced in Greek, but explanation of concepts takes place in whatever language students have greater fluency in (or find more accessible), including sign language! Here's how an Arabic-speaking student explains to a Farsi-speaking student what to do in an exercise on electricity:

Here, you have two φορτία*. Draw δυνάμεις**, draw, samanah***, OK? La, la****, not this. Look, δυνάμεις. Έλκονε, απωθούνε***** [uses his hands to show the directions of attractive and repulsive forces].

*transl. Electrical charges.
**transl. Forces.
***transl. Draw forces, draw, draw.
****transl. OK? No, no.
****transl. Look, forces. Attract, repel [wrongly pronounced Greek].

In this case, the student did not have the term for 'attract' or 'repel' in his mother language, or even in English. So, he chose the corresponding Greek terms, as he memorized them (mispronounced).

The terms, though, had the correct meaning, as he used his hands to show the meaning of attraction and repulsion between electrical charges. This is an example of a student who begins to learn new scientific concepts directly in the second language.

Mother Tongue Use on Physical Concepts

In a Chemistry lesson, three new physical concepts on material properties were introduced ('density', 'hardness', 'fragility') and the terms and explanations were given in both English and Greek. Students kept notes in whatever language they wished, including their mother tongue. Then, students were asked in what language they kept notes in and (additionally to previous examples) were also asked to comment on mother language terms, translation to mother language and related meanings (shown in Appendix III). Only one student reported resorting to translation to mother language (Romanian) and all students preferred to keep notes in English, as they found the new terms in Greek ('πυκνότητα','σκληρότητα', 'ευθραυστότητα') especially difficult. Some of the students' comments about mother language use were the following:

(A) 'Density'

Students were asked to write the word 'density' in their mother tongue, as they understood the word 'density' from the relevant lesson and the corresponding English term 'density'.

In the first line, the Romanian speaking student easily understood the term 'density', as the corresponding term in her mother tongue was is similar to English ('densitate') and she had already been taught the physical concept in her mother language.

In Arabic (third line in the Worksheet), the student could not find an example for the corresponding Arabic word and had not been taught the concept of 'density' in his mother language. Nev-

ertheless, the translation of the term in his mother tongue helped him understand this new scientific concept.

In the fourth line, the term is given in Georgian. The student mentioned that the same term used has other meanings, such as when a body is "solid" and "compact".

In the sixth line, the term is given in Pashto (ﻰﻟﺍﻮﻧﮐ) and the student commented that its meaning is the same as the English word 'density', but the student spoke fluent English.

The student on the fifth line (Swahili) was unable to give a corresponding term in his language.

(B) 'Hardness'

The term "hardness" in English has many meanings, but in physical science it means the ability of a material to carve other materials. Students commented on the respective terms in their mother languages:

Romanian (first line): "*It also means 'harshness'*".

Arabic (third line). The student gave an example where this word is used to describe hard or soft meat. This example is accurate, as it relates to the ability of meat to be carved from other materials (e.g. a knife).

Georgian (fourth line). The student gave two different synonyms.

Panjabi (sixth line). The student gave as an example for non-hardness the material '*chalk*' (correct, it is easily carved), but also suggested '*glass*', because it breaks easily (wrong, this is the property of fragility). Therefore, students who think in their mother tongue exhibit similar types of confusion between related natural concepts, just like Greek students.

(C) 'Fragility'

Romanian (first line): The term is similar to the English ('*fragilitate*') and the student was able to mention that it also has metaphorical meanings. She mentioned that it may be used both for a fragile material, e.g. porcelain, and for a fragile character, e.g. a girl who cries easily. Here there are cultural similarities in the use of terms in Western societies.

Bangla (second line): the term given (ভঙ্গুরতা), as the student mentioned, has no metaphorical meaning – it is used only for materials that break easily.

Arabic (third line): the student translated through the use of a phrase "*what breaks easily*", although, he claimed that there is a one-word term in Arabic, which means fragility of materials (هشاشه). Apparently, the student had not been taught the term in his mother tongue. In this case, the translation into mother language would probably not be helpful, as the term in the mother language was unknown and no relevant associations had been formed.

Georgian (fourth line): The student mentioned that in her mother tongue this term is not used metaphorically, only for materials that break easily.

In the final discussion, students were asked whether they used translation to their mother languages to understand the newly introduced concepts (in English and Greek). All students, with the exception of the Romanian student, said that, if they understand the context, they do not use translation of terms into their mother tongue, but prefer to think directly in English. It would be particularly difficult for them to understand the terms if the explanations were given only in Greek. The Romanian student, on the other hand, used translation very often for possible reasons: the similarity of terms in Romanian and English (terms often had a common Latin root) and the fact that she had already been taught the

physical terms in the mother tongue at her school in Romania. It should be noted that the terms given by the students in their mother tongue may not be the accurate names of the corresponding scientific concepts, but the names that students found most related to the concepts, as they understood them.

Summarizing the results of code-switching in teaching new scientific concepts to multicultural students:

Table 1. Code-switching in science writings in a multicultural class

	All notes in Greek	Only terms in Greek	Both English and Greek/ English only	Mother tongue use (examined in Chemistry lesson)
Biology: Characteristics of life	1	4	9	
Biology: The Cell	2	4	8	
Chemistry: Properties of materials			13	1

Discussion and Suggestions

Taking the above results into consideration, we observe that multilingual students, whose mother tongue is neither Greek nor English, use English extensively as a 'working' language to define and explain new scientific concepts. Students effectively learnt new terminology in Greek. However, as most students speak only basic Greek, introducing new scientific concepts entirely in Greek would be unrealistic for them. When students are given a degree of flexibility about which language to use, they seem to advance both in content and language knowledge. For example, at the biology lesson on the cell, all students were finally able to name the organelles in Greek and comprehend their functions. Some students noted in Greek only, whereas others in Greek and English. Only very occasionally would students use their mother tongues, mostly during peer-teaching, or for terminol-

ogy translation, if English translation did not provide any associations. Language choice should not be hindered, as students use whatever language is most available to them to reach their cognitive goal. Allowing students to use whatever language is most accessible to them is compatible with the bottom-up approach in CLIL terminology learning, where students mentally construct concept maps that link new and previous knowledge (Silva and Albuquerque 2016, 187). Translanguaging can boost the self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy of minority students, and give them a sense of belonging, by offering more options on expressing themselves in a monolingual world (Tsolakidou and Skourtou 2020, 232).

Teachers should be specially trained to teach multilingual classes, with methods that incorporate code-switching/translanguaging. Poor quality, teacher-centred, lecture-led, inflexible instruction is often due to lack of appropriate training of teachers that does not allow for any use of intermediate languages/mother languages. Lack of training means that often teachers ignore the linguistic and academic capital of diverse students, often neglecting basic principles of intercultural education (Papadopoulou et al. 2020, 205). Didactic practices could be modified by allowing students to process the material taught in their own language or in another working language; by giving extra time to students to do translation through apps; by letting students to take extra notes in the language of their choice; by encouraging students to talk with each other doing necessary translation and/or comparing how they have been taught in their own countries (for example, arithmetic division is taught in a different layout in Arabic countries); by utilizing students' prior knowledge; by simplifying new knowledge, so that it is not heavily language loaded; and by changing negative stereotypes about ethnic students' prior learning that expect them to underachieve (Kidd et al. 2008, 327).

These examples defy the deficit model that sees minority language speakers as inadequate learners because they have not mastered the dominant language (Reyes 2010, 424). Appropriate use of translanguaging allows speakers to draw from a broader repertoire of linguistic elements, which interact with each other through variations in grammar and syntax, without criticizing the student who uses them. It is a paradox to promote multilingualism, while criticizing translanguaging and many teachers holding dualistic beliefs about language miss the advantages of its use in class (Granstrom 2019, 244). It is a stage of intermediate language, which includes a changing relationship between linguistic varieties, helps to acquire multilingualism, while strengthening minority identities. Multilingualism is a term confined to language use, whereas translanguaging is a wider concept, encompassing a changing relationship to language varieties and language creation, and its usefulness becomes apparent in the introduction of new academic content to students that are non-native speakers of the language of instruction.

Conclusions

Good practices in teaching multilingual science classes were mentioned, drawn from three didactic paradigms at a multilingual Junior High School, where many students from refugee backgrounds attend. None of the students were native speakers of Greek or English. The results indicated the importance of allowing students to use a 'working' language of their choice in their note-taking and speech production. It was found that students think and communicate in whichever language system best suits them in understanding and expressing themselves. That 'working' language was not necessarily their mother language, but rather, in most cases, English, with many elements of

code-switching and translanguaging between English, Greek and mother languages. Translanguaging, often unknown and misunderstood, was found to be adopted by students often in an attempt to mitigate the differences between different language systems. In the three didactic examples, translanguaging, code-switching and mother language use were found to assist the acquisition of new scientific concepts, learning new terminology in Greek and facilitate peer-teaching. The need for teacher training was discussed in working with translanguaging and code-switching, so that the practices are not rejected as "wrong" language forms, but used to realize students' potential, by assisting minority students to communicate effectively in their everyday lives. Translanguaging and code-switching strategies could be used in more creative ways, such as drama play and poetry and could even be analyzed during language lessons to deepen language understanding. Students could learn to discern their own use of code-switching in a metacognitive way, as stepping-stone to mastering a new language and as a tool for communicating with other non-fluent speakers, when they themselves have mastered the target language. Further research could explore the use of these practices within the school context of a broader sample of culturally-linguistically diverse students.

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Appendix I

Foto 1. The seven characteristics of life, in Greek only (with descriptions)
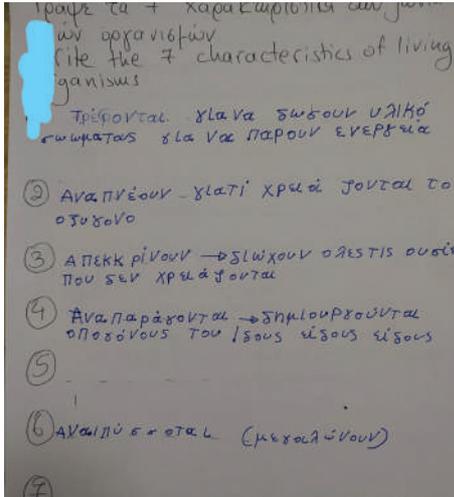
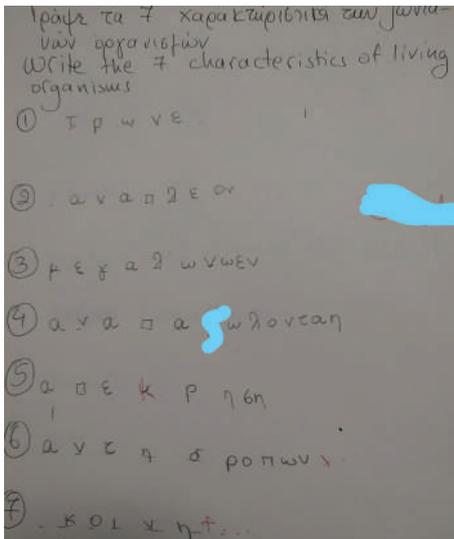

Foto 2. Terms only, in Greek only
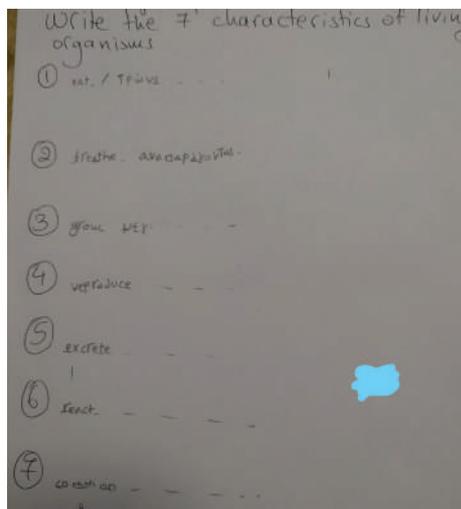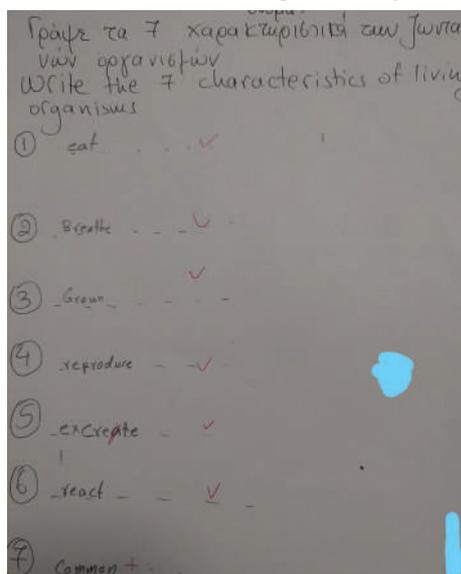
Foto 3. Terms in English and Greek

Foto 4. Terms, in English only

Appendix II
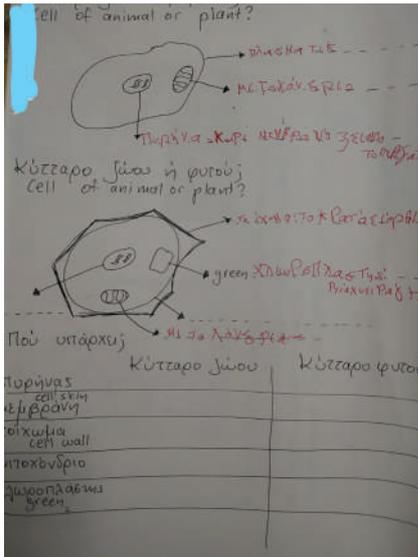
Foto 5. The cell, in Greek only (with descriptions)

Foto 6. Terms, in Greek
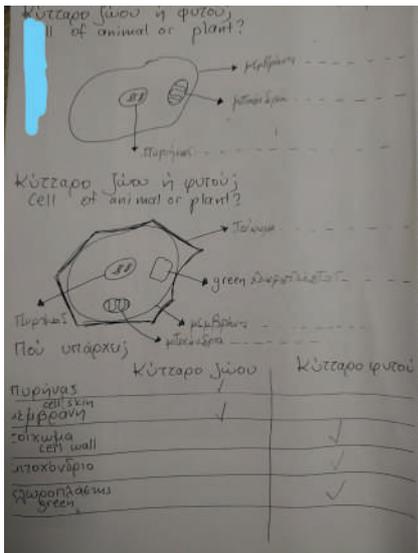
Foto 7. The cell, English descriptions only
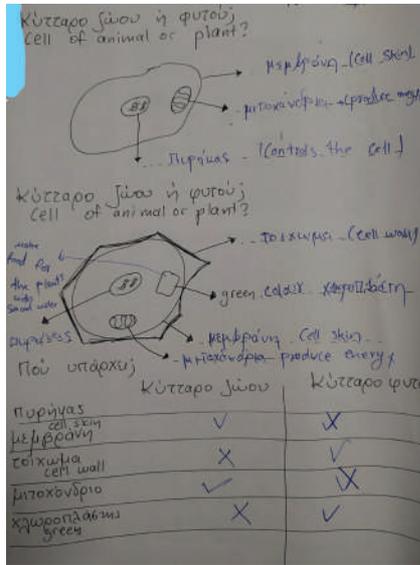
Appendix III

Foto 8. Terms, in various languages