

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND THEIR TRANSITION INTO ADULTHOOD – PROJECT CISOTRA

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Abstract:

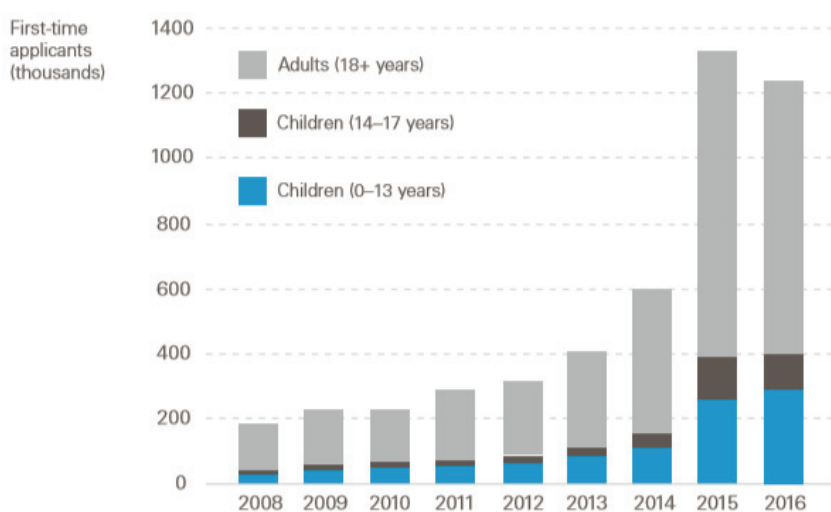
Child migration is a global reality. As of 2015, 31 million children were living outside their country of birth. Reception conditions as well as access to the asylum and other protection procedures differ between countries and further progress is needed to ensure that unaccompanied children's rights are respected in EU member states. Ensuring better transition of young migrants into adulthood is challenge for most countries, as currently there is a gap at the interface between the support systems for minors and the general and migrant specific education and social support systems for adults. The project CiSoTRA aims to develop and implement innovative methodology that will bridge the current gap in the support of unaccompanied minors in transition to young adulthood.

Keywords: unaccompanied minors and young adults, model for better social inclusion, education & employment and social skills, project CiSoTRA

1. CHILD MIGRATION IS A GLOBAL REALITY

Millions of children are on the move across international borders – fleeing violence and conflict, disaster or poverty, in pursuit of a better life. Hundreds of thousands move on their own. When they encounter few opportunities to move legally, children resort to dangerous routes and engage smugglers to help them cross borders. Serious gaps in the laws, policies and services meant to protect children on the move further leave them bereft of protection and care (United Nations, 2016). Deprived, unprotected, and often alone, children on the move can become easy prey for traffickers and others who abuse and exploit them. As of 2015, 31 million children were living outside their country of birth. While most of them moved in a regular fashion to relocate in a different country with their families, this number also includes 10 million child refugees and 1 million asylum seekers who fled armed conflict, violence and persecution (UNICEF, 2017).

Picture 1: Number of asylum seekers in 32 European countries, by age, 2008–2016



In 2016, over **1.2 million people applied for asylum** in 32 European countries – more than three times as many as in 2013.

Child asylum seekers



2008



2016

For children, this trend was even more dramatic. Their **numbers increased almost tenfold** compared to 2008 and **fourfold** compared to 2013.



2008



2016

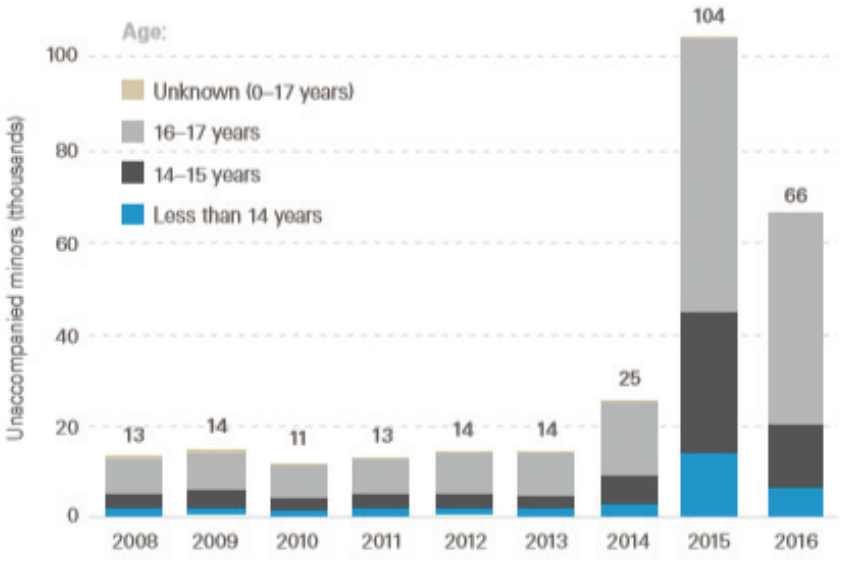
The share of children among asylum seekers increased by almost half, from **one in five** in 2008 to **one in three** in 2016.

Note: The 32 countries include European Union countries (EU 28) and the four countries of the European Free Association (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland). Data includes first-time applicants only.

Source: UNICEF, 2017.

According to the report “A child is a child” (UNICEF, 2017), unaccompanied children are one of the imminent social problems in Europe. They are a highly vulnerable group of more than 170.000, who applied for asylum in Europe in 2015 and 2016.

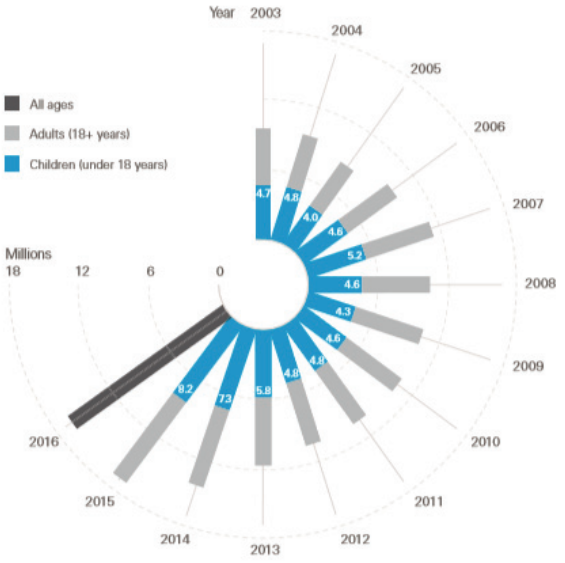
Picture 2: Number of unaccompanied minors among asylum seekers in 32 European countries, by age, 2008–2016



Note: The 32 countries include European Union countries (EU 28) and the four countries of the European Free Association (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland). Data includes first-time applicants only.
Source: UNICEF, 2017.

Since 1990, the number of international child migrants has grown along with the global population, with the share of migrants among the world’s children remaining stable. Movements related to conflict, meanwhile, have spiked. The overall number of refugees – children and adults under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – increased from 10.4 million at the end of 2011 to 16.5 million in 2016. While in 2005 about 1 in 350 children was a refugee, in 2015 the ratio came to nearly 1 in 200 children. Half the world’s refugees were children.

Picture 3: Number of refugees, by age, 2003–2016



Source: UNICEF, 2017 and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016.

In resolution 2136 (2016) the Council of Europe called for comprehensive efforts of the member states to mitigate the plight of refugee minors in Europe, which are among the most vulnerable groups among the refugees. "Child friendly information, education and empowerment...are far from being systematically guaranteed." (ibid. p. 1), the Council claims.

2. RECEPTION CONDITIONS

Reception conditions as well as access to the asylum and other protection procedures differ between countries and further progress is needed to ensure that unaccompanied children's rights are respected in EU member states. Therefore making sure that all potential transitions of this group (integration to host country, transfer to other country, safe return to country of origin when possible) are successful, is of critical importance for the well-being and human rights of the young migrants as well as for the social and economic benefit of the host countries and the countries of origin. Unsuccessful transitions increase the danger of radicalisation, social deprivation, continuing dependence, underused human potential, delinquency and violence.

In many countries (especially with high % of unaccompanied minors, where system is 'under stress') the systems for unaccompanied minors (under 18) do not work well (eg. they are granted Guardian very late, one guardian takes care for too many children; or in some cases they do not even have guardian. Professionals that work with them do not have enough competencies and skills; lack of appropriate services & mediators etc.

After the age of 18, the unaccompanied "minors" enter adult status and are no longer entitled to the often quite comprehensive support minors are entitled to. The status of their residence suddenly becomes uncertain for those without an affirmed status as refugees or persons granted asylum. In many cases, socio-pedagogic support is provided only as an exception or dependent on an in-transparent multitude of initiatives and volunteer support, and education and qualification systems are not designed to provide such specific support. Transition into adulthood, if not adequately managed bears the risk of individual traumatisation and social exclusion as young adults with no family or other specific support systems find themselves often unprepared and overburdened by the challenges of planning their general future, by orienting themselves in the civic life in their host country, by planning their education and career and by having to manage their overall life situation.

3. TRANSITION OF YOUNG MIGRANTS INTO ADULTHOOD

Ensuring better transition of young migrants into adulthood is a challenge for most countries, as currently there is a gap at the interface between the support systems for minors and the general and migrant specific education and social support systems for adults. As different legal, administrative and organisational systems are responsible for minors vs. the general adult migrant population, mostly there is no managed transition between the support of minors and the adult status.

There are several initiatives and good practices that focus on promotion of better inclusion of unaccompanied migrants, and for transition into adulthood (eg. Life projects), but no consistent model of managing the transition with a view on securing the full rights of the individual and to effectuate the full non-discriminatory integration into society has been developed.

4. SUPPORT OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS IN TRANSITION TO YOUNG ADULTHOOD – PROJECT CISOTRA

The project CiSoTRA aims to develop and implement innovative methodology that will bridge the current gap in the support of unaccompanied minors in transition to young adulthood. This will be done through several activities that will be held in 3-year period (2018- 2020) in 5 countries: Slovenia, Italy, Germany, Greece, Turkey. One of the outputs of the project is also development of the model for better social inclusion – an inclusive approach to support young migrants and to strengthen the links between various interfaces/organisations that are involved in the support for young migrants (learning communities among different actors).

First part of our paper will discuss current situation on unaccompanied minor migrants; and their transition into adulthood in Slovenia, Italy, Germany, Greece, Turkey (through some statistical data, national documents, policies and good practices in the area). The second part will focus on research

conducted in frame of the activities CiSoTRA in project countries in 2018. Research will present results (evaluations) of interviews with key informants; national seminar; general trainings for key professionals working with unaccompanied minors and/or young adults, Workshops for unaccompanied minor migrants (up to 18 years), Workshops for young adult migrants (in transition from minors; 18 – 25 years).

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