



Federal Office
for Migration
and Refugees



Conference Report: Unaccompanied Minors in Germany and Europe

Conference organized by the German National Contact Point
for the European Migration Network (EMN)

on 14 June 2018 in Berlin



Co-financed by the
European Union





Foreword

On 14 June 2018, the German National Contact Point for the European Migration Network (EMN) and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) collaborated to host the conference “Unaccompanied Minors in Germany and Europe”. The conference was held bilingually in German and English, simultaneous interpretation was provided.

A total of 90 participants from Germany as well as from 15 EU Member States and Switzerland took part in the conference in Berlin, among them were representatives from EU institutions, ministries, and agencies as well as non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, and international organisations.

The year 2018 also marks the ten-year anniversary of the establishment of the EMN, which the Belgian National Contact Point of the EMN used as an opportunity to produce an anniversary video featuring the work and reception of the EMN. This video, which was also shown at the start of the event, can be viewed with subtitles in various languages under the following link.

At www.emn-germany.de, the presentations given at the conference as well as the EMN study on “Unaccompanied Minors in Germany – Challenges and Measures After Clarification of Residence Status”, which was published in May 2018 are available for download.

If you are interested in regularly receiving information on the work of the German National Contact Point (including new publications and events), please write an e-mail to EMN_NCP-DE@bamf.bund.de and we will include you in our e-mail mailing list.

We hope you enjoy reading.

The German National Contact Point for the EMN



The European Migration Network

The European Migration Network (EMN) was launched by the European Commission in 2003 on behalf of the European Council in order to satisfy the need of a regular exchange of reliable information in the field of migration and asylum at the European level. Since 2008, Council Decision 2008/381/ EC forms the permanent legal basis of the EMN and National Contact Points have been established in the EU Member States (with the exception of Denmark, which has observer status) plus Norway.

The EMN's role is to meet the information needs of European Union institutions, Member States' authorities and institutions as well as the wider public by providing up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum, with a view to supporting policymaking in these areas. The National Contact Point for Germany is located at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Nuremberg. Its main task is to implement the annual work programme of the EMN. This includes the drafting of the annual policy report "Migration, Integration, Asylum" and of up to four topic specific studies, as well as answering Ad-Hoc Queries launched by other National Contact Points or the European Commission. The German National Contact Point also carries out visibility activities and networking in several forums, e.g. through the organisation of conferences or the participation in conferences in Germany and abroad. Furthermore, the National Contact Points in each country set up national networks consisting of organisations, institutions and individuals working in the field of migration and asylum.

In general, the National Contact Points do not conduct primary research but collect, analyse and present existing data. Exceptions might occur when existing data and information are not sufficient. EMN studies are elaborated in accordance with uniform specifications valid for all EU Member States plus Norway in order to achieve comparable EU-wide results. Furthermore, the EMN has produced a Glossary, which ensures the application of comparable terms and definitions in all national reports and is available on the national and international EMN websites.

Upon completion of national reports, the European Commission drafts a synthesis report with the support of a service provider. This report summarises the most significant results of the individual national reports. In addition, topic-based policy briefs, so-called EMN Informs, are produced in order to present and compare selected

topics in a concise manner. The EMN Bulletin, which is published quarterly, informs about current developments in the EU and the Member States. With the work programme of 2014, the Return Expert Group (REG) was created to address issues around voluntary return, reintegration and forced return.

All EMN publications are available on the website of the European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs. The national studies of the German National Contact Point as well as the synthesis reports, Informs and the Glossary are also available on the national website: www.emn-germany.de

Program

- 9:30** • Opening Remarks
Renate Leistner-Rocca
Head of the Research Centre Migration, Integration and Asylum,
Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)
- 9:40** • Opening Speech I
Michael Tetzlaff
Head of Directorate M (Migration, Refugees, European Harmonization),
Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community
- 9:55** • Opening Speech II
Isabela Atanasiu
Legal Officer, Unit C.3 (Asylum),
Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs European Commission
- 10:45** • **Panel I:**
**Arriving in Times of Changing Immigration Policy - Accommodation
and Care Arrangements for Unaccompanied Minors since 2015**
- Chair
Dr. Axel Kreienbrink,
EMN/Research Centre, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
- Unaccompanied Minors in Germany - Main Findings of the EMN Study 2018
Julian Tangermann
EMN/Research Centre, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
- Developments and Challenges in Youth Welfare since 2015
Antje Steinbüchel
Team leader, Land Youth Welfare Office Rhineland /
Federal Working Group of the Land Youth Welfare Offices
- Legal Developments and their Effects on Working with
and for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees
Ulrike Schwarz
BumF e.V. - Federal Association for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees
- The Situation of Unaccompanied Minors in Italy
Dr. Martha Matscher
Vice-Prefect, Immigration and Asylum Policies Italian Ministry of Interior

13:30 • Panel II:
Deradicalisation and Prevention Work with Unaccompanied Minors

Chair

Milena Uhlmann

Research Centre, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

Specific Vulnerabilities of Unaccompanied Minors

Alexander Gesing

Counselling Network ‚Anschluss‘, IFAK e.V.

Pilot projects of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
in the Context of Refugees and Radicalisation

Florian Endres

Head of the Advice Centre on Radicalisation, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

Handling Radicalisation Cases within the German Youth Welfare System

Dr. Michael Kiefer

Institute for Islamic Theology (IIT), Osnabrück University

15:15 • Panel III:
Adulthood – and then? Perspectives in Germany and in the Country of Origin

Chair

Paula Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik

EMN/Research Centre, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

Perspectives to Remain through Vocational Training and Integration?
Challenges and Chances in the Case of Insecure Residence Status

Kirsten Eichler

GGUA e.V. - Association for the Support of Asylum Seekers

Experiences from Return Counselling with Unaccompanied Minors and Young Adults

Marion Lich

Head of the Office for Return Assistance City of Munich

The Swedish Perspective on Return and Reintegration of UM and Young Adults

Kjell-Terje Torvik

Quality Department (formerly: EURLO, International Affairs Department),
Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket)

16:30 • Closing remarks
Corinna Wicher
Head of Directorate for International Tasks and Administration of EU-Funds,
Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

Unaccompanied Minors in Germany and Europe

Opening Remarks

In her opening remarks, Renate Leistner-Rocca, director of the Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, emphasised the importance of European exchange on issues of migration and asylum policy and also in regards to especially vulnerable groups of persons such as unaccompanied minors. Even though unaccompanied minors were a topic of discussion in politics, municipalities, non-governmental organisations, and academia for some time, but due to the high number of arrivals i.a. of unaccompanied minors in the years 2015 and 2016 they had especially been in the spotlight.



Renate Leistner-Rocca, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, emphasises the importance of working closely with all actors on national and international levels.

The goal of the conference, Leistner-Rocca pointed out, was to take a look at the last few years and to determine how politics and practice have adapted to the changed situation and which challenges might exist in the future. At the same time, the aim was to also examine issues surrounding the prospects of unaccompanied minors when entering adulthood, whether this be remaining in Europe or returning to their countries of origin. Furthermore, findings concerning radicalisation tendencies among young refugees and potential prevention measures were also to be discussed.

Opening Speech I

In his opening speech, Michael Tetzlaff, Head of Directorate at the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, stated that the administration in Germany had not sufficiently been prepared for the dramatic increase in asylum-related migration in the years 2015 and 2016, both in regards to the migration of refugees in general and in regards to unaccompanied minors in particular. The challenge had been to consider each individual case and meet individual needs. This had, however, been especially difficult in the past few years and only achievable through extraordinary efforts made by all actors involved.



Michael Tetzlaff, Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, emphasised that the focus of efforts working with unaccompanied minors in Germany remains on integration from the very start, since the majority of minors would remain in Germany at least until they reach adulthood.

” We must hold ourselves to the standard of doing justice to every single person.“

Michael Tetzlaff (BMI)

Focus on integration

Tetzlaff subsequently described the concrete arrangements for accommodating and caring for unaccompanied minors, for integration and return as well as for asylum procedures. “The significance of child welfare,” Tetzlaff emphasised, “is reflected in the laws applying to them”. Legally speaking, unaccompanied minors are subject to the laws of the German Child and Youth Welfare Act (Kinder- und Jugendhilferecht) and are accommodated, cared for, and counselled just like any other non-adult person in Germany until they reach adulthood. Their care therefore is not predominantly dependent on the decision regarding their legal residency status.

When their asylum applications are rejected, unaccompanied minors are obliged to leave the country just as adults are, but in practice they generally are not removed. This is because the authorities responsible for removing them must first make sure “that the minor can be transferred to the custody of a family member, a guardian, or suitable reception facility in the country of return,” and it is almost impossible to meet this requirement. Instances of minors leaving the country voluntarily or with support are also relatively rare: “A total of 385 unaccompanied minors left the country voluntarily with the repatriation support of the REAG/GARP programme from 2013 to 2017,” according to Tetzlaff. The majority of unaccompanied minors therefore would remain in Germany at least until they reach adulthood, which is why the focus were on the integration of these children and juveniles from the very start.

Family unification and age assessment

Tetzlaff then addressed two regulations from the point of view of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, which he judged to be controversial in the political and public arena: family reunification for unaccompanied minors with subsidiary protection status as well as age assessment.

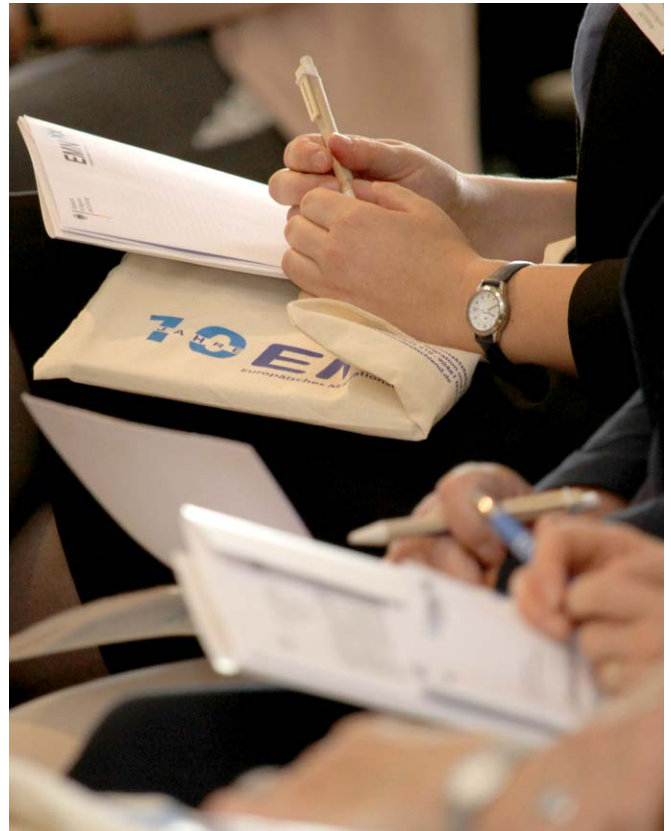
In regards to the first point, family reunification with persons entitled to subsidiary protection will be allowed again starting 1 August 2018, but with a limit of 1,000 family members per month. Some would consider this to be insufficient and others would think it goes too far, according to Tetzlaff. As far as age assessment is concerned, the debate has recently been shaped by a few “extraordinary criminal cases” in Germany, where in the course of the investigation it came to the fore that the culprits had been considered unaccompanied minors when they were not minors at all. However, authorities would need to have clarity about age, since unaccompanied minors are granted certain privileges not provided to adults, and

this also consumes resources. It is for this reason that the youth welfare offices have been required to assess the age during the preliminary taking into care since 2015. “Practices do, however, vary widely in this regard between the Länder,” Tetzlaff pointed out. The new Federal Government therefore would plan to further harmonize the process.

Tetzlaff concluded his presentation with a personal remark: “The political discourse about asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors has changed considerably over the past few years and public opinion is subject to fluctuation. Discourse in media and politics often only focuses on the extreme.”

” It is therefore important to always try not only to see things from a single perspective, but to broaden your horizon, as this is the only way to pass justified judgements and make proper decisions. The European Migration Network makes an important contribution to this: Treating highly politicized topics with academic rigour, you broaden our horizons. You give us an overview, in the truest sense of the word, of refugee policy in Germany and in the other Member States. For this, I would like to thank you.“

Michael Tetzlaff



Opening Speech II

In her opening speech, Isabela Atanasiu, legal officer with the Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission, reported on the work of the European Union (EU) concerning unaccompanied minors. She started by presenting a few key figures. According to these figures, fewer unaccompanied minors entered the EU as asylum applicants in 2017 than in the two years previously (2017: 31,400; 2016: 63,200; 2015: 95,200). On average, however, there are still twice as many as there were in prior years. With over 10,000 asylum applicants in 2017, Italy had the highest number of applications from unaccompanied minors within the EU, before Germany (approx. 9,100) and Greece (approx. 2,500). However, there is a lack of reliable statistical data on unaccompanied minors who do not apply for asylum.

Collaboration across borders for better protection of minor refugees

Atanasiu then went into the details of the memorandum of the European Commission to the European Parliament and the European Council from April 2017 enacted under the title “Protection of Minor Migrants” (COM(2017) 2011 final). Inter alia, the memorandum contained recommendations on how children can be protected along migration routes and on how the identity of minors can be quickly established through measures such as unified data exchange across borders and better tracking, as well as clarification of family relations. Recommendations for suitable reception and quick initiation of asylum processes as well as measures to avoid detaining children were also discussed in the document. Likewise, the memorandum also addressed the establishment of permanent solutions, focussing on inclusive school education, support in transitioning to adulthood, and social integration through mixed, non-segregated accommodations.

” National integration efforts are extremely important, since this subject is not yet fully developed on European level.“

Isabela Atanasiu



Isabela Atanasiu, European Commission, emphasised that the European Commission is not currently seeking to harmonize age assessment practices, but that invasive age assessment processes must be saved as a last resort.

The memorandum lists measures to be taken in each of these fields by Member States according to the Commission. The Commission has since performed reviews of the implementation of the recommendations put forth in the memorandum. Monitoring carried out by the Commission mainly includes regular meetings of experts, whose results were documented in protocols available to the public. This, as well as developments and measures taken beyond what was specified in the memorandum, are also published on a website of the European Commission.

Concerning the debate on age assessment, Atanasiu emphasised that the Commission had decided against harmonizing the age assessment practices in the Member States. In the opinion of the European Commission, it makes sense for Member States to test and gather experience with different types of assessment procedures. The Commission believes that the most controversial invasive methods used in some Member States, however, should only be used as a last resort at the end of an otherwise fruitless age assessment process. Atanasiu also made reference to the practical guide for age assessment published by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in March 2018, which describes various methods.



The panel participants from left to right: Antje Steinbüchel (Land Youth Welfare Office Rhineland), Ulrike Schwarz (Federal Association for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees, BumF e. V.), Dr. Martha Matscher (Ministry of the Interior, Italy), and chair Dr. Axel Kreienbrink (Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees).

Panel I: Arriving in Times of Changing Immigration Policy

Accommodation and Care Arrangements for Unaccompanied Minors since 2015

Unaccompanied Minors in Germany - Key Findings from the EMN-Study 2018

The first panel was opened by Julian Tangermann, research associate of the German EMN Contact Point and co-author of the EMN-study on unaccompanied minors in Germany. He presented some of the key findings of the study. The study focuses on the phase after the legal residency status has been clarified, so after a suspension of removal or a residence permit has been issued, or after an application for asylum has been denied. The study deals with the topics of taking into care, care arrangements, as well as integration into school, training, and issues of return, disappearance, and family reunification.

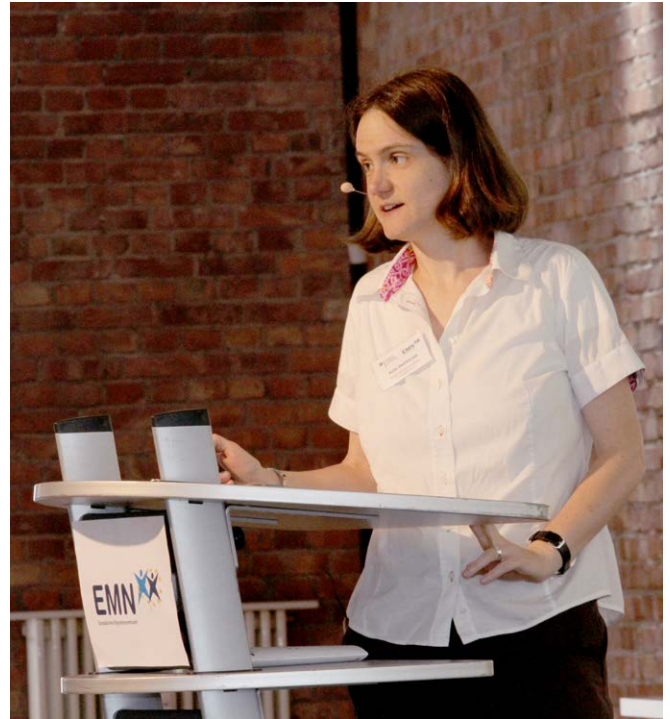
Developments and Challenges in Youth Welfare since 2015

Antje Steinbüchel, team leader at the Land Youth Welfare Office Rhineland, then addressed some key developments in the distribution, accommodation, and care of unaccompanied minors over the past few years. According to her, the enactment of a nationwide distribution mechanism on 1 November 2015 has been decisive. Up to that point, the arrival location principle had been in use, according to which the youth welfare office responsible for taking care of an unaccompanied minor was the youth welfare office in whose area of responsibility the unaccompanied minor first arrived. The arrival of unaccompanied minors was thus not evenly distributed across the Federal Republic and the approximately 600 youth wel-

fare offices, but rather was concentrated in a few Länder and municipalities. This system only worked for as long as the number of arrivals was relatively low. Starting in 2009, however, the yearly number of arrivals increased continuously. In the year 2011, around 3,482 unaccompanied minors were taken into care, while as many as 6,584 were taken into care in 2013 and 11,642 in 2014. This meant that the youth welfare offices and municipalities that were accepting most of the young refugees were ultimately overwhelmed.

New distribution procedure has proven its worth

According to Steinbüchel, the new distribution procedure introduced in 2015 came at the “most chaotic time ever”, when refugee migration to Germany in general was at its peak. Many youth welfare offices had to quickly adapt and find ways to accommodate and care for unaccompanied minors last-minute, while also implementing the organisation of distribution. This initially caused complications and called for a great deal of improvisation. At the time, there were also many who were critical, who saw redistribution as detrimental to the well-being of the children. Steinbüchel is of the opinion, however, that the distribution system has ultimately proven effective and some of the fears have not come to pass or have not come to pass to the extent initially feared. For one thing, only a portion of the unaccompanied minors are being distributed to different Länder as of now. Furthermore, the system of distributing unaccompanied minors across Germany made it possible to make full use of the capacities of the youth welfare offices, medical services, schools,

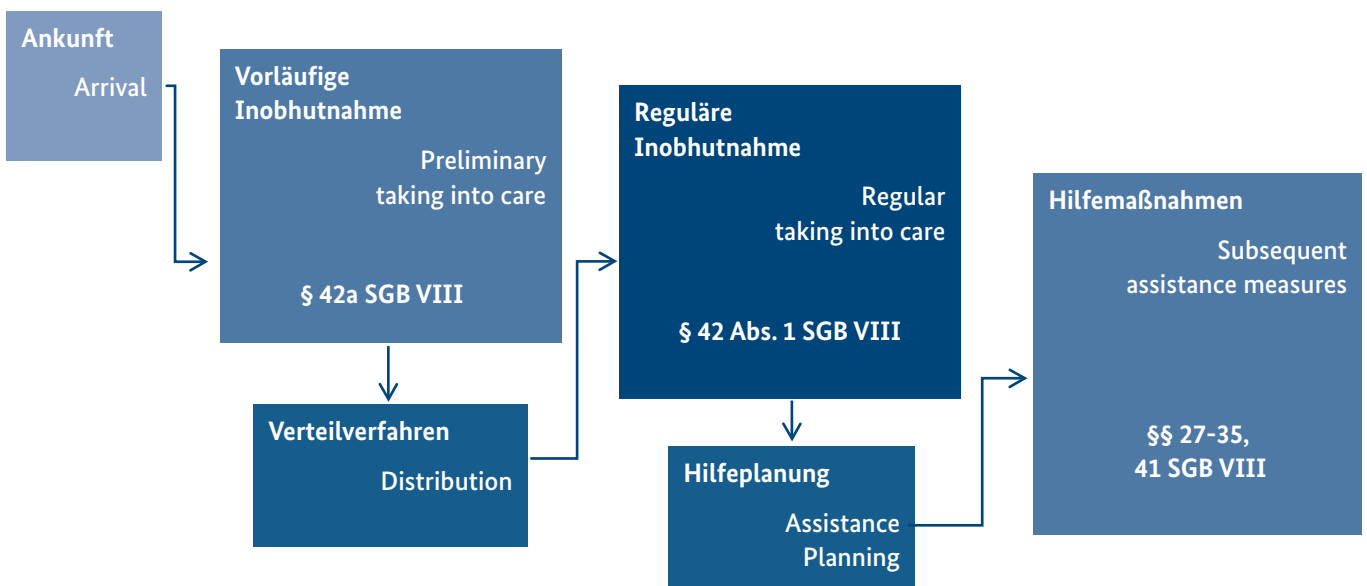


Antje Steinbüchel, team leader, Land Youth Welfare Office Rhineland.

” Thanks to the mammoth efforts made by the 600 youth welfare offices in Germany, we made it at the end.”

Antje Steinbüchel

and associations. The system is now stable and could also handle a similarly steep increase as was seen in 2015 and 2016 without a problem: “The system would work smoothly,” according to Steinbüchel.



The process of arrival, taking into care, and youth welfare measures for unaccompanied minors. Source: BAMF.

Legal Developments and their Effects on Working with and for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees

Ulrike Schwarz from the Federal Association for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees (BumF) e.V. highlighted the sheer number of new legal regulations affecting unaccompanied minors over the past few years as a major challenge. Since 2015 there have been 20 legislative procedures relating to unaccompanied minors and of which 16 new laws have been enacted as a result. This had made the legal situation very confusing for those working with unaccompanied minors and also having a problematic effect for pedagogical work, according to Schwarz.



Ulrike Schwarz, Federal Association for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees (BumF) e.V.

” Limiting family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection poses a great challenge and makes pedagogical work more difficult.”

Ulrike Schwarz

Concerning the discussion surrounding age assessment, Schwarz advocates for a term change to “age estimation”, since an age cannot be “assessed” from the viewpoint of youth welfare. The new practical guide from EASO (mentioned by Isabela Atanaisiu) also emphasises that an age cannot be solidly assessed and a range of two years should be assumed when estimating the age.

New legal regulations make pedagogical work more difficult

In regards to the largely suspended family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, which also involves the reunification of parents with unaccompanied minors, Schwarz highlighted the challenges for pedagogical work with children and juveniles. The children and young people would continue to maintain direct contact with their family members via social media. Combined with the limited possibility to be reunited with their parents, increasingly more young people would express the desire to return to their family’s country of origin - even when there were war and crisis situations in the region of origin.

The Situation of Unaccompanied Minors in Italy

Dr. Martha Matscher, Vice-Prefect in the Italian Ministry of the Interior, broadened the view on the situation of unaccompanied minors in Italy as well as the phenomenon of the high disappearance rates and the onward-travel from Italy to other Member States. In many cases, applicants are entitled to reunification with family members in other Member States, but the processes and arrangements between Member States can sometimes take months to complete. It is almost impossible to explain to young people that they need to remain at a location in Italy for an extended period of time so that they can then be reunited with their family in a coordinated way in the desired target State as part of a family reunification process. Many of the children and juveniles will thus start travelling there themselves, especially to Great Britain, Sweden, Germany, or the Netherlands. There is therefore a need for a more flexible system of continued migration and distribution within the EU that also allows for “spontaneous” onward journeys to family members or contact persons. What makes this even more important is that, in the current system, it is easier for unaccompanied minors to fall victim to criminal organisations that will make promises to them and then force them into prostitution or the organ trade.

” The administrative channels under the Dublin III Regulation are far too complicated, long, and intricate. Many unaccompanied minors will start travelling to their destination themselves in the meantime.”

Dr. Martha Matscher

More flexible system for continued distribution is necessary

The exceptionally high number of new unaccompanied minors arriving in Italy in recent years has led to the establishment of a new reception system. One change concerns the role of the municipalities, which until now were solely responsible for the admission. The two-stage system provides for the unaccompanied minors to be distributed to the communities after initial admission for up to 30 days. The municipalities agree to admit unaccompanied minors on a voluntary basis (the so-called SPRAR system - reception system for asylum seekers and refugees). The new two-stage system would have to be further established and efforts would be made on an ongoing basis to expand capacities in both stages. The guiding principle, according to Matscher, is: "increasing the number of places in the first and second admission and harmonising the standards for the admission of unaccompanied minors throughout the country". In total, more than 13,000 unaccompanied minors lived in reception facilities in Italy in mid-2018.

Age assessment has already been standardised across Italy with a multi-disciplinary process that must be attended by a medical doctor, a social worker, a legal guardian, and a psychologist and after which a report must be sent to the youth welfare office. A member of the conference audience called for the peculiarities associated with the circumstances of displacement and flight be taken into account in the process of age assessment. Children and juveniles may look many years older than they actually are as a result of the stress from sometimes many years spent on the road. Only after they have arrived and been able to rest for a while will it be visibly obvious that they are indeed children and juveniles.



Participants in the conference.



Dr. Martha Matscher, Vice-Prefect, Immigration and Asylum Policies Italian Ministry of Interior.

In the discussion that followed, Steinbüchel brought up the importance of close coordination within Europe and exchange of information, since many youth welfare office workers did not know, for example, who they could contact in other Member States when they have questions about possible family members there. As a whole, the presenters agreed that closer coordination on a European level were essential, especially in regards to distribution and family reunification. A participant from the audience reiterated the need for a general opening of family reunification and a faster processing of applications for family reunification with unaccompanied minors, since she had observed in her own work that unaccompanied minors become increasingly desperate when dealing with the limitation.

The representatives from Germany also handled a question from the audience on the draft Children and Juvenile Support Act (Kinder- und Jugendstärkungsgesetz – KJSG). The bill had been passed by the Bundestag in June 2017, but it had not been possible to definitively enact it within the remaining legislative period. The presenters assumed that the law would not go into force in its current form and would at least have to be modified, since it was set to go into force on 1 January 2018, among other things, and the new law would therefore need to go into force retroactively, which was seen as improbable. Modification and reassessment was seen as the more probable option. However, currently there would be no new information and developments on this.

Martha Matscher was also asked by the audience to explain in more detail the practice in Italy, which provides that the managers of reception facilities also act as temporary guardians of unaccompanied minors. Due to the high number of unaccompanied minors, it is sometimes a lengthy process in Italy to appoint a guardian. In order to counter this process, the new law stipulates that until a guardian is appointed, the heads of the reception facilities will assist the minor in applying for a residence permit or international protection.



Dr. Axel Kreienbrink, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, led the discussion.



The panel participants from left to right: Alexander Gesing (IFAK e.V.), Florian Endres (Advice Centre on Radicalisation, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees), Dr. Michael Kiefer (Osnabrück University), and chair Milena Uhlmann (Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees).

Panel II: Deradicalisation and Prevention Work with Unaccompanied Minors

Specific Vulnerabilities of Unaccompanied Minors

Alexander Gesing of the Counselling Network ‚Anschluss‘ of the Association for Multicultural Child and Youth Assistance (IFAK) e.V. from North Rhine-Westphalia spoke in favour of a differentiated perspective on unaccompanied minors, especially when it comes to radicalisation of these minors. They would not only be vulnerable, but they would come to Germany with motivations, skills, and interests.

Gesing then introduced the work of the counselling network, which takes a systemic approach to helping people who are seeking advice. Relatives, teachers, and social workers would often be the ones to seek advice. Persons from the social circle of the potentially radicalised person that come to seek advice are often unsure or unaware of when behaviour patterns indicate pious living and when they indicate radicalisation or when Islam and Islamism is involved, respectively. The counselling centres constantly work on raising awareness in this regard. Here it

would be important to note that only a small share of the refugees for whom concerns of possible radicalisation might arise are actually Islamist radicalised.

” There is a great deal of uncertainty in social work when it comes to issues of religion and radicalisation.”

Alexander Gesing

Gesing identified multiple influencing factors that could constitute grounds for radicalisation, including occurrences related to the country of origin, to the phase of displacement and flight, and to the time since arrival, with only a fraction of these factors, however, being specific to the context of displacement. Influencing factors could include family conflicts, separation from the family, socialisation, mental illnesses, experiences while fleeing, lack of social relationships, long periods of waiting for a decision in an asylum procedure or the family reunification, as well as the search for meaning and identity associated with young people. Discourse in the media can also convey general distrust and unsettle people; as can a

feeling of never really settling in and being accepted. This gives recruiters from the Islamist scene starting points for establishing contact with young people. They draw them in by providing simple answers that help ground young refugees in a complex world and at the same time erode their process of settling in in Germany.

If indications of radicalisation are confirmed, the classic approach to deradicalisation called for in social work is to strengthen other social relationships with people such as the person's parents, siblings, teachers, and social workers or in the context of a sports club for example. This can, however, be very difficult in the case of unaccompanied minors in particular, since they sometimes have no social circle in Germany to begin with.

The "Anschluss" counselling network is developing new strategies for deradicalisation work with refugees

The new pilot project "Anschluss" financed by the Advice Centre on Radicalisation at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees addresses these challenges and develops new strategies. One strategy would be to start early and work preventively. To this end, religious radicalisation would, however, also have to be a topic discussed during the course of pedagogical training. Specialised expertise must also be applied to case work and religious belief must be discussed in youth groups, possibly even with the engagement of external expertise as well. Social workers sometimes shy away from the topic of religion. Young migrants must also be empowered to form and develop a "transcultural identity" and they must be supported and bolstered in their search for identity.



Alexander Gesing, Counselling Network „Anschluss“, Association for Multicultural Child and Youth Assistance (IFAK) e.V.

Pilot projects of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in the Context of Refugees and Radicalisation

Florian Endres, Head of the Advice Centre on Radicalisation of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees then introduced the work of the advice centre. With its counselling hotline, it generally serves as the first point of contact for family and friends or other concerned persons from the social circle of the people who are thought to become radicalised. In an initial conversation, the advice centre determines what the situation is and, in cases that radicalisation has taken place or in which the situation needs to be further clarified, forwards the case to one of nine advice centres mostly run by civil society actors spread across the Federal territory. As a central development, Endres pointed to the reduction in the age of people, due to whom contact is sought with the advice centre as a main development. While the average age used to be 20 years, it is now at below 18 years of age. A second observation concerns the origin of the radicalised persons. It is by no means a problem that is limited to refugee or migration experiences. Rather, about 50% of the counselling cases involve people who have converted to Islam. The cases being worked on are also generally concentrated in a few Länder where the Islamist scene is active. Further, a psychological abnormality is also identified for seven to eight per cent of the cases processed.

” Radicalisation isn't just an urban phenomenon. It can also occur in more rural areas.”

Florian Endres

The issue of radicalised unaccompanied minors as a whole is becoming more central, also because, for example, Salafist actors are specifically targeting this group when promoting their groupings and interpretations.

The Advice Centre on Radicalisation is the first point of contact nationwide for concerns regarding possible radicalisation

Following the attacks in Ansbach and Würzburg in 2016, there was a dramatic increase in the calls received by the counselling hotline. Of the total of around 4,000 calls received by the advice centre's hotline in 2012, about 500 concerned refugees, of which 267 involved unaccompanied minors. Half of those were then referred to the network to take further care. Even here, a local review often reveals that radicalisation is not involved, but rather

pious living that is interpreted as radicalisation by those in the person's social circle out of ignorance or uncertainty.



Florian Endres, Head of the Advice Centre on Radicalisation, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

Handling Radicalisation Cases within the German Youth Welfare System

The topic of radicalisation is accompanied by a series of misunderstandings, as Dr. Michael Kiefer from the Institute for Islamic Theology at Osnabrück University confirmed at the beginning of his presentation. At the fundamental level, “radicalisation” would be a product of a societal negotiation process. It is clearly identified in cases of criminal offences or blatant rejection of constitutional principles. But otherwise, radicalisation is also defined by “where the centre is formed in a society”. During the course of this negotiation process, there would generally be a series of misinterpretations and misjudgements on various levels.

At the same time, it also remains very difficult to bring clarity to the issue. For instance, if a pupil has videos on his or her phone in Urdu, there might not be a responsible person at the school who speaks Urdu and can properly assess the content of the videos in case of doubt. School social work also plays an important role - as a reliable social contact point for example - but here too there continue to be challenges. Understaffing and a lack of resources make it difficult to ensure the sustained availability of social workers at numerous schools. Furthermore, many social workers at schools are not trained to recognise radicalisation tendencies. In the individual case, it is also important to clarify whether or not mental illness is the problem instead of religious radicalisation. It isn't always easy to tell the two apart. Dr. Kiefer calls all this an “obstacle course of barriers” in deradicalisation work, as is also the case in other areas of youth work. It is there-

fore important to establish reliable communication structures between the various actors in the municipality, ensure that social workers obtain the proper qualifications, and keep track of responsibilities through case management so that the case is monitored sufficiently from beginning to end.

” A good headmaster won't immediately go to the national security agency, but rather will first try to resolve the issue internally, for example with school social work or turning to one of the advice centres.”

Dr. Michael Kiefer

The growing number of rejected asylum applicants and the lack of prospects for the affected persons arising from this would also offer fertile ground for radicalisation tendencies to thrive. “The radicalisers from the radical Islamist scene aren't stupid,” Dr. Kiefer pointed out, “they are good at identifying young people in such situations and reaching them.” From a deradicalisation and prevention perspective, it would therefore make sense to oppose the planned AnKER-centres that are to accommodate asylum applicants awaiting a decision, since they would essentially provide breeding grounds for radicalisation, according to Dr. Kiefer.

In subsequent discussion with the audience, the focus of youth and prevention work on young refugees was criticised. The specified risk factors offering optimal conditions for radicalisation would ultimately mostly be identical to the influencing factors that could also be observed in young people growing up in Germany. The risk is that the label of “deradicalisation work within the context of refugee migration” may have a stigmatising



Dr. Michael Kiefer, Institute for Islamic Theology (IIT), Osnabrück University.

effect, which could fuel general scaremongering, according to a participant from the audience. She instead suggested associating deradicalisation work generally with the structures of the child and youth welfare system and to strengthen it that way. Gesing backed this up - he too would prefer that the youth welfare system, especially with respect to the work with refugees, be better financed and staffed. This would make pedagogical work possible in the first place, so that better infrastructure for youth welfare could also have a preventative effect, even though youth welfare generally would not operate under this label. The podium debaters emphasised that the phenomenon and work described here within the refugee context were only a small part of the prevention and deradicalisation work being done and that a good 50% of all cases of “radicalisation” reported to the advice centre involved converts.

At the end of the panel discussion, there was another appeal by a participant. Her current observations would indicate that established work on establishing social relations to and for young refugees has been unravelled by budget cuts in past years, meaning that reception facili-



Participants in the conference.

ties were closed and residents redistributed elsewhere, for whom the familiar social environment and local structures provided security and reliability. Social workers at the new location then would have to start all over again from the beginning at a time when they already would feel as if they had been left high and dry and many of them would simply leave the welfare organisations out of frustration. Even “the voluntary workers who have helped out for years gradually experience burnout,” according to the participant.



The panel participants from left to right: Marion Lich (Office for Return Assistance of the City of Munich), Kjell-Terje Torvik (Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket)), Kirsten Eichler (Association for the Support of Asylum Seekers, GGUA e. V.), and chair Paula Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik (German EMN Contact Point)

Panel III: Adulthood – and then?

Perspectives in Germany and in the Country of Origin

Perspectives to Remain through Vocational Training and Integration? Challenges and Chances in the Case of Insecure Residence Status

Kirsten Eichler of the Association for Support of Asylum Seekers (GGUA) e.V., opened the third panel and gave a legal overview of prospects to remain once adulthood is reached. The question of residency prospects is especially pivotal for those previously considered unaccompanied minors whose application for asylum is rejected or who never even submitted an application for asylum and have now reached adulthood, since this means there is no longer an obstacle precluding removal that is in place for unaccompanied minors.

Various options for securing residency

According to Eichler, there are five options for securing residency next to the asylum procedure:

- a residence permit for well-integrated juveniles and young adults (Section 25a of the Residence Act),
- a residence permit with sustained integration (Section 25b of the Residence Act),
- a residence permit in cases of hardship (Section 23a of the Residence Act),
- a suspension of removal (pursuant to Section 60 Subs. 2 of the Residence Act) or residence permit due to obstacles to departure (Section 25 Subs. 5 of the Residence Act), or
- a suspension of removal for vocational training (pursuant to Section 60a Subs. 2 fourth and following sentences of the Residence Act) and a subsequent residence permit (Section 18a Subs. 1a of the Residence Act).

Eichler then explained the requirements for granting each of the options and provided a more detailed explanation of the opportunities and challenges offered by the rather new regulation creating the suspension of removal for vocational training. One positive aspect that should be highlighted, according to Eichler, is that the suspension of removal for vocational training offers the opportunity to obtain permanent residence and does not require any prior stay period. The regulation would, however, contain numerous vague legal terms that would have in part led to differing legal interpretations between the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI) and the Länder as well as differing case-by-case decisions of the administrative and higher administrative courts, according to Eichler.

Experiences from Return Counselling with Unaccompanied Minors and Young Adults

Marion Lich, Head of the Office for Return Assistance of the City of Munich, then described her experiences with unaccompanied minors and young adults during return counselling. The public and political discussion would concentrate mostly on the two options of integration or removal, but voluntary return would also be an option.

While the Office for Return Assistance only deals with about two to five unaccompanied minors per year, 10-15 per cent of all counselling cases involve former unaccompanied minors that have now entered adulthood. Relatives often urge them to return to their country of origin. The office then works to make this possible and offer support through various services. It would thus have been made possible in some cases for young returnees to start their own business, take up or continue studies, go to school, or complete vocational training. The office would even help with continued treatment of illnesses in the country of origin when necessary. Also, it can be arranged for further qualifications to be obtained before leaving Germany or for language courses for children who do not or no longer speak the language of the country of origin. It would also be important that there are organisations in the country of origin that support the reintegration and that can remain in contact with the return counselling centres in Germany.

” Successful voluntary return requires independent counselling and sufficient time.”

Marion Lich



Kirsten Eichler, Association for the Support of Asylum Seekers (GGUA) e.V.

What is often underestimated during the return process is the culture shock experienced once the person returns. The years of living in Germany have an especially strong influence on the young returnees and the living conditions in the country of origin are sometimes very different. Another problem arises among young people who return to their supposed country of origin, but have grown up in another country themselves. This would affect young Afghans in particular, since many of them were born and grew up in Iran, but are not allowed to return there. Afghanistan is therefore a foreign country to them, which exceeds a thorough preparation. According to Lich, these and other pitfalls necessitate independent return counselling centres that can provide advice without a fixed end result, take time for preparation, and develop individual as well as professional support packages. Lich therefore argued against the idea currently being discussed in Germany of transferring the responsibility of return counselling for voluntary return to the foreigners authorities. The foreigners authorities are generally not able to advise without predetermined conclusion.



Marion Lich, Head of the Office for Return Assistance City of Munich.

The Swedish Perspective on Return and Reintegration of Unaccompanied Minors and Young Adults

Kjell-Terje Torvik from the Quality Department of the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) agreed with Marion Lich in his presentation and reported on his experience as a European Return Liaison Officer in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, he coordinated the measures taken by organisations and agencies accompanying persons being returned. Preparation of the persons being returned and collaboration of all actors involved would be central factors for a successful return and reintegration. Those, who have only had a few days of time to make arrangements for return often experience more difficulties upon arrival than those persons who have been able to prepare for return or have been prepared for return through programs and counselling centres. Many of the voluntary returnees who received support would become self-employed and start small businesses.

” In order for return to be successful, there already needs to be a plan B set up in Sweden.”

Kjell-Terje Torvik



Kjell-Terje Torvik, Quality Department, Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket).

Experiences with return to Afghanistan

Moreover, the Afghan government would have also explicitly requested that returnees be prepared and that they be given tools to ease reintegration. It has been problematic, however, that support services would vary widely within the EU - with some returnees receiving in-kind support and others receiving several thousands of euros of support in cash. This would cause for confusion upon arrival and would be incomprehensible for returnees. Torvik advocated for support services ideally to be harmonised on the EU-level.

Closing Remarks

In her closing remarks, Corinna Wicher, Head of the Directorate for International Tasks and Administration of EU-Funds within the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, thanked the presenters for their talks and the guests in the audience for their lively participation in the discussion rounds.

” As the conference and the exchange have shown, three terms come to the fore: 1. Resources: We need enough people who can provide counselling, 2. Time: We need time for counselling, 3. Professionalism: We need qualification measures for all involved. And finally we need an infrastructure that facilitates the exchange of information between various actors in order to share good practices, challenges, and spaces in which we can still improve.”

Corinna Wicher

The German National Contact Point for the EMN, by organizing this conference, had facilitated such an exchange.



Corinna Wicher, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, took stock of the conference.

If you would like to receive further information about the content of the EMN and opportunities for exchange within the context of the network, please visit the website at www.emn-germany.de and/or send an e-mail to EMN_NCP-DE@bamf.bund.de to subscribe to the newsletter of the German National Contact Point.

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