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# FACT SHEET CHILD MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



# include **YOUTH**



CENTRE FOR  
CHILDREN'S  
RIGHTS



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- UNESCO Chair in
- Children, Youth and Civic Engagement
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This report gives a summary of the group specific findings from the working groups with child migrants, refugees and unaccompanied minors, held in Austria, Belgium and Germany. In total, we spoke with 18 young people, aged between 9 and 17 years, 12 of them were male, 6 were female. The young people came from different countries, inside and outside Europe: Afghanistan, Greece, Iraq, Indonesia, Morocco, Russia, Spain, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Syria.

## Understanding Violence

Violence is an abstract, rather general concept for participants. They often needed specific examples to understand the concept, especially in case of sexual abuse. This may also be due to a **language barrier**. Moreover, the concept of violence is not known in every language. However, after some explanations and discussions about the concept of violence, some of them could name many **different forms of violence**, including structural violence. Participants also mentioned swearing and hitting as forms of violence. In particular swearing is a kind of violence children and young people experience often in school.

**“In the cities where the Taliban rule girls don’t go to school. For me it’s also violence, if girls are not allowed to go to school.” (Austria)**

**“When for example a family has no house... no playground or something” (Germany)**

**“Today someone said a swearword because she didn’t make something at the climbing pole” (Germany)**

The understanding of harm and violence by child migrants and refugees is frequently **influenced by their experiences in their country of origin**. Many participants have seen and/or experienced issues such as war, terrorism, mafia (e.g. organ trafficking), racism (e.g. against refugees from neighbouring countries, against members of political or religious parties), poverty (e.g. not having any food, orphans, refugees who resort to violence to survive), at school (e.g. swearing, pupils bring knives with them, this is admitted depending on the political or religious party to which they belong), discrimination based on gender (e.g. the perception that depending on what you wear as a girl you whether or not provoke violence), etc. In this perspective, they feel safe(r) in Europe and don’t easily interpret (non-) behaviours in their ‘new home-country’ as violence. Rather they indicated problems in their country of origin as forms of violence.

**“Terrorism. It’s also a big problem of the world. We need to stop this terrorism but how can we do this? This terrorism is for politicians or presidents.” (Belgium)**

**“The mafia, especially in Syria, kidnaps important organs like the heart, euh organ trafficking. Poor people don’t have money. Also there is racism. You can’t have a shop if you are in that party or in this party.“ (Belgium)**

**“In Morocco no job and euhm...poverty, dirty everywhere, garbage, orphans, no mom, no dad, alone. Also stealing to eat. Bad school. People don’t have enough food. This is why Moroccans rob, for eating, to survive. Other people flee to Morocco. There is violence because they steal. Sleeping on the ground/outside.” (Belgium)**

**“In Afghanistan children are forced to fight and to work by the Taliban, that’s violence” (Austria)**

**Racism** was explicitly and unanimously seen as a form of violence.

**“Racism. It’s a big problem in this world, especially for ...euh... people from Africa or from Latin America. They have ...euh... lot of violence.” (Belgium)**

**“In the school also racism. If someone is ... euh how can I say this? ... hit you at any time and he is from that or this party, it’s okay, you can’t say anything.” (Belgium)**

**Deportation** was identified as **political violence** in their host countries:

**“Politics for example. There are a lot of deportations at the moment. This is violence.” (Austria)**

**“Violence can happen during deportation, but also the fact to be deported is violence.” (Austria)**

**Corporal Punishment** was perceived by some unaccompanied minor refugees as normal part of parental educational behaviour. For some children it was the right of parents to discipline their children in case of misbehaviour.

**“Smacking by parents is normal in Afghanistan” (Austria)**

**“No, if it is the father or the mother, it is something different. It is not violence. It is ok.” Austria)**

## **Support by service providers and institutions**

Especially refugee children and unaccompanied refugee minors are very often traumatized, feel distressed and are hardly able to trust anyone. **Parents** and, sometimes also friends and the police, were very important for child migrants and refugees. They were considered as the most important persons they would go to first for help and support. Often, parents and friends were the only persons to whom they can/dare to rely on. For unaccompanied minors, e.g. friends and sometimes **single professionals**, such as teachers, social pedagogues in care facilities became the most important persons. In case of domestic violence, siblings and further family members are primarily important for children and young people. This is based on the idea that family problems have to be solved within the family.

**“He doesn’t really need police, because those family problems. [...] That’s something different” (Germany)**

**“Talk and give you hope about the things you believe in. They can support you in everything. They accept you.” (Belgium)**

**“But you can talk with your friends and family. Your family you know better. And your friends know you.”**

**“Family and friends, they are a medicine.” (Belgium)**

For physical violence, the young people, especially the boys, preferred to **solve the problem themselves, together with friends**. In this way they seemed to want to avoid honour-related violence.

**“I prefer not to. Friends more because they are closer. (...) that there is a risk that families start fighting among themselves, take revenge. (...) Yes, I save him and then family comes. (...) Yes, actually we protect each other.” (Belgium)**

If children and young persons were **living in residential care facilities**, e.g. waiting for the asylum decision (sometimes for a long time) they claimed that they often feel bored and have limited access to leisure activities. From their point of views this inactivity might increase the risk of violence between children.

**“I would like to have more activities and excursions. Than there would maybe be less fighting.” (Austria)**

The **police** were seen as an important source of help and support related to all forms of violence. Besides guarding compliance with the law, the police was seen as a guide through the system. This could explain why child migrants and refugees stressed the importance of the attitude of the police.

**“Let me explain. People from the police they should act like they are your friends and not only follow the rules. They look bad. Or they just say that they are going to open a case, have to go to an psychologist,... You cannot say one small thing. It’s important that the policemen has to listen and give his opinion without the law what he thinks you should do.” (Belgium)**

**“The police and the care giver helped me that I could go to school, and they bought me clothes. We went together. The care givers helped me with my interview for the asylum application.” (Austria)**

**“When I came to Austria, the police helped me. They took me to an institution where I could live and got something to eat. They took me there in a car and they didn’t talk. That was helpful to me, that they gave me space, were quiet and didn’t force a conversation. At school my teacher helped me to get better grades. Each afternoon we repeated everything we learned in class.” (Austria)**

Children and young people also mentioned health care professionals, because they recognize physical violence and can look after wounds.

**Teachers** plays an essential role for violence experienced in school. Young migrants and refugees mentioned teacher’s possibility to punish by detention, inform parents or impose an expulsion from school.

A certain group of child migrants and refugees took **a dual attitude to politics**. They considered politicians as the fundamental origin of violence. On the other hand, however, politics was seen as the core solution for ending violence.

**“You can try with politics, but I don’t think you will get a response.”**

**“Politics is the problem, but it can also be the solution.”**

**“You can protect people by making law.” (Belgium)**

## **Communication and attitudes**

Language is a fundamental barrier. Giving the opportunity by service providers or institutions of **translation** or the assistance of an **interpreter** was seen as an important tool for disclosure.

**“Translation. Look for an interpreter. Look for a friend who can translate.” (Belgium)**

**“Then it is hard to explain and so on [...] He needs an interpreter.” (Germany)**

**Language classes** (in schools and offers outside the schools) were also perceived essential to empower them to raise their voices and claim for their rights.

Child migrants and refugees saw several ways how children can learn to **get information or help** if they're experiencing violence. But, at the same time, they stressed the limits of (written) information. Often, it was just one direction communication. There was some suspicion, too.

**“Because many children don't know what violence is. Euh ... so maybe having someone to explain what, but actually no because he or she gives their own perspective of violence to the children. So the children must develop themselves and think what is better.” (Belgium)**

**Gender issues** were at play as well in communicating about experiences of violence. Especially boys indicated that it is not easy for them and that they would keep it to themselves more than they would disclose it.

**“We don't talk about this.” (Belgium)**

## **Trustful relationships**

For children and young people it is important that they could **trust** the people they talked to.

### **“Children must think, I can tell my teacher” (Germany)**

However, professionals were not always immediately trusted. Participants sometimes adopted a wait-and-see or even suspicious attitude. However, there was a **belief that trust can come and will grow**. Time, space, patience and making contact in different ways (e.g. going for a walk) played an important role in this. The idea of becoming/beings friends played a key role in gaining confidence.

**“A: First, become and be friends.**

**B: She will get more confident.**

**A: So be closer to her.**

**B: Yes.**

**A: So she can feel warm. So she can open up and she can trust you.” (Belgium)**

Especially for **unaccompanied refugee minors** trustful relationships are of utmost importance, since they are separated from their loved ones. In this sense, it is significant to create positive feelings and experiences of success. Some participants reported positive examples.

**“That she motivated me. She said that she believes in me and that she believes that I can do better. That made me strong. She said, you can do it.” (Austria)**

In case children are **traumatized** e.g. due to their flight, professionals will need a lot of time, knowledge, sensitivity and patience to build up trustful relationships. A training in trauma pedagogical conversation would be helpful.

It turned out that for all children it is crucial to strengthen their self-esteem, self-perception, self-control and self-empowerment. In doing so, this can significantly contribute to the prevention of violence.

## **Take action**

Children and young people are looking for intervention. No matter whom they ask for help, they want them to take action (e.g. by asking why people hurt others, inform people which could intervene, or punishment).

Child migrants and refugees were aware of the fact that solving problems **takes time**. Both, child and adult would need to respect this and have patience. Nevertheless, giving time doesn't mean doing nothing. There must still be some kind of involvement and support. An immediate result is not required.

**"Give it time, she is going to grow and she is going to understand what is good for her and what is bad." (Belgium)**

On the other hand some children strongly raised the issue that in some cases of violence adults have to find quick solutions, make clear decisions and finally have to take over accountability and end the abusive situation.

## **Children's rights**

In order for children and young people to come in contact with service providers or institutions to disclose or to ask for response to violence, **information about their rights** was of paramount importance. Also the parents should be involved, since they're often the most likely person to trust, to disclose and/or to ask for help.

**"So, she should be informed of her rights. With this comes the other one that she knows what's around her. If she gets the information, she knows her rights, she knows what's around her. Talk with her mother maybe because that is her closest person that understands her because she knows the culture and what is happening." (Belgium)**

In their advice to professionals, child migrants and refugees especially valued the importance of:

- **Listening**

“I think just listening. Tell what you can do. Give advice and solutions.” (Belgium)

“They should be patient and talk to the child. Listen.” (Austria)

“Participation can be complicated. Others don’t always accept this.”

“For example, because it doesn’t fit with their opinion.” (Belgium)

“They has to ask: why did you hit the children?” (Refugee, Germany)

- **Respect**

“Have respect and listen.” (Belgium)

“Respect the other cultures.” (Austria)

“She was nice and respectful. We had both respect for each other. Respect is very important.” (Austria)

“Talk in a clam way and not to talk badly behind someone’s back.” (Austria)

- **Awareness**

“Open your eyes and look around. And being aware of what is happening around you. People don’t look around, because they only discriminate.” (Belgium)

and

- **Fairness / non-discrimination**

“It is important, that the rules have to apply to everyone (in a care facility).” (Austria)

“Treat everyone equally and see everyone with the same eye (Saying in Afghanistan).” (Austria)

“I think if she goes to a school where there are people from other countries. She can get confident with it because she sees that she’s not alone. So she sees other people, cultures, languages, appearances,... It’s like an OKAN-school because here we have a lot of cultures. We have a lot of different languages, appearances.” (Belgium)

