

# UNHCR NEWSLETTER

## Separated Children in Europe Programme

June – July 2001

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\*\*\*This summary has been prepared from publicly available sources. It does not necessarily reflect UNHCR's views, nor can UNHCR vouch for its accuracy.

### News on Separated Children

**Austria.** “CLEARING-HOUSES”. Austria has decided to spend approximately 55% of the European Refugee Fund allocation for 2001 on separated children. A total of 5 so-called “Clearing Houses” (*Clearing-Stelle*) will be established within this year. These Clearing-Houses are intended to accommodate and assist separated children during the initial phase after arrival. This include:

- assistance in completing the social history
- examination whenever return is possible
- identification of appropriate protection needs.

UNHCR Vienna.

**Ireland.** “CHILDREN-FIRST” CONFERENCE IN DUBLIN. On 6 and 7 June 2001 another conference of the “Children-First” project, funded by EU Odysseus Programme, was held in Dublin, Ireland. The Children-First project aims to increase, through targeted training, the understanding concerning the best interests of the child by developing new working methods and best practices among Government Officials responsible for working with separated asylum seeking minors in Finland, Ireland, Lithuania and Poland. The conference held in Dublin focused on:

- international legal framework for separated children seeking asylum

- administrative structures, cross agency co-operation and processes/procedures for meeting the needs and rights of separated children asylum seekers
- reception of separated children
- psychological issues
- voluntary return, family reunification, family tracing.

Recommendations and conclusions are not available yet.

UNHCR Dublin

**France.** The French Daily newspaper *Liberation* highlights the need for French Government to take properly care of separated children entering the territory. The two-pages article includes information on the situation of separated children in France, such as :

- estimates show that between 1000 and 2000 separated children arrive each year in France,
- in 2000, according to the Minister of Interior 781 separated children have been admitted on French territory,
- only 205 asylum applications were lodged in 2000 at OFPRA (*Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides- Alien's office*) for separated children,
- 96% of separated children arrive by plane at Charles-de-Gaulle Airport,
- if less than 10 years, separated children are placed in hotels close to Roissy,

- if more than 10 years old separated children are placed in "Zapi3", the new "waiting zone" opened at the beginning of 2001,
- the access to the waiting zone is forbidden to the press and the associations.
- separated children are sent back to their country of origin without safeguards.
- according to Roissy police services, 530 separated children were detained and sent back in 2000,
- only 30 guardians have been appointed for separated children in 2000,
- 40% of separated children registered since January 2001 have disappeared; this is one of the main problem observed,
- Pr Odiles Diamant-Berger, doctor in Paris recognise the inadequacy of the age assessment method, wich does not take the ethnic specificity of the child into consideration. The margin of error can go up to 18 months.

<http://www.liberation.com/quotidien/semaine/20010716lunq.html>

**Belgium . A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SEPARATED CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM IN BELGIUM.**

Two Flemish NGOs, *Sociale Dienst voor Vreemdelingen (SDV)* and *protestants Sociaal Centrum (PSC)* funded by the European Refugee Fund, carry out activities with particular interest in assistance provided to separated children. In Antwerp, PSC assists twenty-one separated children originating mostly from Africa. They are being closely monitored by social workers on an individual basis. Together, they review homework at school and participate in leisure activities. In order to facilitate the understanding of different cultural backgrounds, the volunteers followed a training on intercultural communication. In September 2000, PSC brought together 60 professionals from various fields for a conference on the issue of separated children. Different aspects of the reception and counselling of separated children such as the asylum procedure, social network, reception structures, education and "what happened after 18?" were discussed. *For more information, please contact* Protestants Sociaal Centrum Lange Stuivenbergstraat 54 2060 Antwerps Belgium Tel: + 32 3 235 34 05 Fax: + 32 3 272 20 85 E-mail: [prosocc@yucom.be](mailto:prosocc@yucom.be) <http://european-refugee-fund.org>

**USA:** On 18-19 June the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University organized a conference called the "TransAtlantic Workshop on Unaccompanied/Separated Children" held in Washington DC, USA. There were around 50 participants from USA, Canada, United

Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium representing governments, NGOs, the UN and academia. UNHCR was represented by the Representatives in Canada and USA, a colleague from BO Washington and SCEP Co-ordinator.

The workshop was divided into the following main sessions: the nature of movement of separated children to Europe and North America; international and national legal frameworks concerning separated children and the best interests of the child principle; reception policies and practices; separated children in the immigration/asylum procedures; smuggling and trafficking of separated children; separated children and resettlement; and a concluding session on policy options.

Although the situation and treatment of separated children were similar in many ways, there were some notable differences between Europe and North America, such as the comparatively very high refugee status recognition rate in Canada (50-74% last 3 years); and the systematic detention of 'illegal' separated children arriving in the USA.

*UNHCR Brussels*

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## Refugee/Asylum Policy Update

**Germany : INDEPENDENT IMMIGRATION COMMISSION.** On 28 June the independent Immigration Commission (*Süssmuth Commission*) finalised its report on future German immigration policy. Special recommendations have been made to improve separated children's protection :

- 18 should be accepted as the age of majority according to international standards and those younger should be treated as children asylum seekers contrary to present policy where the age of majority in relation to asylum-seekers is 16.
- More « Clearing-Stellen » should be built in the country.
- Separated children should not be placed with adults.
- Migration officers dealing with separated children should get appropriate training.

The document is available in German and will be soon in English on [www.bmi.bund.de](http://www.bmi.bund.de).

## European Asylum Harmonisation

**Belgian EU Presidency :** Information on Belgian EU Presidency is available on [www.eu2001.be](http://www.eu2001.be)

**Draft Directive on Asylum Procedure :** The Official Journal of the European Communities has published the Economic and Social Committee's opinion on the draft Directive on asylum procedures. These Committee opinions are of a non-binding nature. They reflect the views of civil society, employers, unions and the self-employed sector. In this Opinion, your attention is drawn to the references to the role of UNHCR as well as the Committee's views on separated children and the Separated Children in Europe Programme. To get a copy, please go to : <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex>  
*UNHCR Brussels*

**Directive on Temporary Protection.** The EU adopted a directive Friday 20 July to temporarily protect refugees in the event of another massive crisis of displaced persons such as occurred during the 1999 Kosovo war. The Directive, which is binding on Member States, would in the event of another crisis "trigger an immediate protection mechanism" for refugees, the EU said in a statement, adding that refugees would also have access to funds from the European Refugee Fund. The Directive includes several specific provisions for separated children, such as :

- access to medical and other assistance in case of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence
- access to education under the same conditions as nationals
- the right to family reunification in the best interests of the child
- appointment of a guardian
- the placement of the child with adult relatives or a foster-family during the period of temporary protection.
- appropriate accommodation
- taking the views of the child into account in accordance with the age and maturity.

These rights would be valid for one year. It may be extended by 2 six-monthly periods subsequently. If the situation in a crisis country improves, the rights may be terminated earlier. Separated children could still be accorded permanent protection under the Geneva Convention, and would be able to apply for

asylum. The directive came into force on Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> July. It should be published most probably in September 2001 in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities :

<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/oj/>

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## Study

### UNHCR STUDY ON GOOD PRACTICES IN REFUGEE CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING.

UNHCR is conducting a study on good practices in refugee children's programming for the purpose of producing a practical guide for field staff. The guide will cover a wide range of issues, including the situation of separated children, and will draw on examples from all over the world. The aim is to share knowledge and experience of successful initiatives and lessons learned in order to help staff working on the ground. The emphasis will be on describing a particular project or situation in a couple of pages rather than extrapolating general principles. Therefore this guide will not duplicate the existing Statement of Good Practice on Separated Children but will be a supplement to documents such as this which contain generic principles.

### UNHCR would welcome feedback on the following:

1. **Suggestions of good practice** examples in terms of projects, strategies, situations involving refugee children (or which could be applied to refugee children). Readers are invited to send brief comments on why a particular project is proposed along with any readily available materials. Further information will be sought on select examples at a later stage.
2. Names of **contacts** in international, national and local organisations who may have suggestions.
3. **Frequently asked questions** which should be addressed in such a guide.

<p><b>Ideas and submissions should be sent to Asmita Naik at UNHCR Geneva; email: naik@unhcr.ch; tel:+41 22 739 8549; fax: +41 22 739 7371.</b></p>
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## Meetings

3-4 September Children First Closing Conference. On 3-4 September 2001 the Children First Project will hold its final concluding conference in Vilius, Lithuania. For more information, please visit <http://www.uvi.fi/cfproj/>

**UN SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN** : On 19-21 September 2001, for the first time in more than a decade, a global meeting of government leaders will be held in New York specifically to discuss how to build a world fit for children. Over three days, participants will review progress since the World Summit on Children in 1990 and try to agree on what needs to be done. To date, 66 heads of state and government have confirmed their attendance. From UNHCR the High Commissioner, Ruud Lubbers, will attend. For more information : <http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/>

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## Publications and Web-sites

**-Report on Unaccompanied Minors, Overview of Policies and Practices in IGC Participating States**, Secretariat of the Inter-Governmental Consultation on asylum, refugee and migration policies in Europe, North America and Australia, Geneva, July 1997. This report focuses on IGC participating states' policies and practices regarding separated children. It include chapters on policies and concepts, the international and national frameworks, the entry and determination procedures, the decisions and status granted, the abuses and prevention and data. To order, please contact IGC, Palais des Nations, CH-1210 Geneva 11. Email address: [admin@igc.ch](mailto:admin@igc.ch), price 16 USD.

**-Global Report on Child Soldiers 2001**. Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers report, June 2001. The use of child soldiers is waning in many parts of the world but more than 300,000 are still bearing arms, most of them in Africa and Asia, a report published on 12 June said. The document was prepared by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, which counts among its members, the human rights groups, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. To get a copy, go to : [http://www.child-soldiers.org/report2001/global\\_report\\_contents.html](http://www.child-soldiers.org/report2001/global_report_contents.html)

- **Growing Up Alone: childhood under siege** Childhood under siege is the third and final

report in UNICEF UK's Growing Up Alone campaign. Its agenda for action sets out how the rights of children growing up alone as a result of conflict can be protected and emphasises actions that should be taken by the UK Government to assist children whose childhood is under siege.

- PDF of report at

[www.unicef.org.uk/gettinginvolved/campaigns/GUA\\_conflict\\_report.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/gettinginvolved/campaigns/GUA_conflict_report.pdf)

- For further information about the campaign visit

[www.unicef.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.unicef.org.uk/campaigns) or

<http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=458&flag=report>

- For more information, contact:

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Web site: [www.unicef.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.unicef.org.uk/campaigns)

- Catherine Panter-Brick and Malcome T. Smith, **Abandoned Children** , Cambridge University Press, 2000. 231 p. £13.95.ISBN 0 521 77555 8. This book suggests a multidisciplinary approach for academics, policy-makers and practitioners concerned with children's wellbeing. The authors pose important questions about the social construction of abandonment and in so doing, challenge readers to understand better the meaning of child abandonment in context.

**FAMILY REUNIFICATION** : Netaid.org recently launched the Bringing Children Home initiative to help reunite 3,000 boys and girls from Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville and East Timor with their families. To find out more, please go to: [http://app.netaid.org/programs/BCH/index\\_html](http://app.netaid.org/programs/BCH/index_html)

Netaid.org partners in this new initiative are the International Rescue Committee (IRC) which will locate the children and bring them home; and TIME magazine which recently featured the story of a mother in Guinea who was reunited with her daughter. The Time story can be found at: <http://www.time.com/time/2001/refugees/cover.html>

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## Programme Update

- 18-19 June: The Senior Policy Officer attended the Transatlantic Workshop on

unaccompanied minors/separated children in Washington DC, USA.

- 25-27 June: The Senior Policy Officer attended a Retreat on refugee children in Geneva.
- 3-5 July: The Senior Policy Officer attended the Training of Trainers seminar organised by the Separated Children in Europe Programme for the 'southern and German' countries.
- 19 July: The Senior Policy Officer and Programme Assistant met the Head of Belgian Red Cross Tracing Unit, Nadia Terweduwe and Ute Möhring, Head of Red Cross Intra-Community Affairs Division in Brussels. The purpose of this meeting was to learn about the conclusions of an internal Red Cross meeting on separated children and to discuss future tracing activities.

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## Calendar

- 17-20 October : SCEP Steering Committee Meeting, UNHCR focal point meeting and Programme Seminar in Bratislava, Slovakia..
- 6-8 November third Training of Trainers in Romania for Central European countries and Baltic States.

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