



Separated Children in Europe Programme Children's participation

Report of three participation workshops with Separated children in Italy, Sweden and The Netherlands.

April 2004

1 Background

Workshops with separated children were run in three countries as part of the work of the Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP) in 2003. This programme is made up of a network of NGOs across 28 countries in Europe, and UNHCR colleagues. The workshops were part of series of activities to build capacity within the network of NGOs and to empower young separated children, and were funded by the European Refugee Fund. As part of this process, a guidance pack was developed for participating NGOs.

The work with separated children was aimed to build their capacity to develop a collective analysis of the situation of separated children in Europe. It was also an aim to provide ideas from separated children for the SCEP network to use to lobby at a national and international level to improve the situation for separated children in Europe.

Three participation activities were undertaken in three of the Network Countries: By Save the Children Sweden in Sweden, Save the Children Italia in Italy and Defence for Children International (DCI) in the Netherlands. Each country used slightly different approaches to the activities, which allows for interesting comparisons of methods.

Save the Children Italia

Save the Children in Italy worked in partnership with Cooperativa Il Progetto, an agency that runs an accommodation centre for separated children in Central Italy. The project involved separated children and care workers from 3 accommodation centres, and occurred in July 03. Twelve children (all male)

attended all the phases of the project: all Albanian adolescents except for one Moroccan younger child. Twelve further children attended at least one stage of the project, and seven of these were Moroccan. Children were involved in the planning of the project. The project started with training of 15 care – workers on the UN Convention on the rights of the child, children’s participation and the laws relating to separated children. This was followed by two training meetings (over a weekend) involving both children and care workers. Two young Italian experts in graffiti art trained the children and they practiced on a wall of the accommodation centre. The training sessions were accompanied by informal socialising, eating together and football matches. The consultation meeting took place at a 5-day residential held at an annual International Anti-racism Meeting. They stayed at a campsite and were given a wall to produce their graffiti art. Five care-workers took part in the meeting.

The children had decided to discuss the condition of separated children in Italy, and in particular the problems related to residence permit, work and returns. The consultation started with the children writing their thoughts on sheets of papers and posting them in a box. Then they discussed the issues chosen. The consultation was recorded on Video.

Defence of Children International – Netherlands.

In the Netherlands the consultation with separated children took place between September and November 2003. The main goal was to raise awareness by the separated children about the right to participate as laid down in article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The central questions were what would you like to show of yourself to others? What message would you like to give to other people living in the Netherlands? The aim of the project was to talk about the subject of participation. During the residential 15 youngsters participated and came from a range of different countries including: Somalia, Nigeria, Togo, Angola, China, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Ethiopia. During other workshops 6 additional youngsters participated (including young men from Egypt and India). Although at the initial meeting 18 young people came, they were only boys: four girls attended the weekend residential and following meetings. The ages of the young people ranged from 15 to 20. The consultation took place over a series of meetings – early ones to bond and describe the project, leading up to a two day residential in the province Zeeland, near the woodland and sea. During this residential, activities such as sports, street dance, and rapping took place. The young people drew cards with messages on them. The sessions were videoed. Further meetings took place in Amsterdam after this residential including a discussion forum with Dutch young people, attending the Children’s Rights festival, making a magazine on the subject of “giving your opinion” and producing a rap song on the radio.

Save the Children, Sweden

The Swedish consultation took place in November 2003 and focused on the Gothenburg region of Sweden. Two drama facilitators and two volunteers formed a planning group with three separated children. They decided on

working methods and to make a film during the workshop. A filmmaker was contracted and included in the planning group. Separated children were recruited through their legal guardians and personal contacts. Overall thirteen separated children were involved, 9 of whom went on the residential workshop (6 boys and 3 girls). They were aged between 15 and 18 years and came from a range of countries including: Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran, Congo and Iraq. One information meeting was arranged where the young people could sign up for the workshop. The workshop was held during a weekend in Marstrand outside Gothenburg, at a residential venue by the sea. The young people were recruited from the Gothenburg region. The workshop consisted of a combination of creative methods such as a journalist for a day-session (groups pretended to be journalists interviewing separated children, then changing questions and answering each others'), drama, role plays, painting etc, around the themes identity and reception, attitudes met, and treatment – by whom and in what ways? It also included time for socialising, games and exploring the surroundings.

A film was made to show the views of the young people and to document the workshop. It will be used in advocacy of Save the Children Sweden towards both national and local decision makers. There have been requests from Swedish national TV to broadcast parts of the film in a news programme for children and young people, and to interview some of the participating young people. NGOs and others have also expressed an interest in the film. After the film was finished a viewing was arranged for the young people to watch and make comments.

A newly published book about Save the Children's work in Sweden includes an article about the workshop and interviews with two of the young people.

2 Issues that young people raised and discussed

Nearly all the young people in the discussions chose to talk about identity and their reception in the host country. Some issues were different across the different countries also depending on the different circumstances of the young people. For example, in Italy they were migrants rather than asylum seekers/ refugees, and their key concern was the need for work permits and status. The following outlines some of the key concerns as expressed by the young people themselves.

Italy

Issues that came up were:

- they want to work, in order to help their families and to build their future
 - they want:
 - a residence permit that allows them to work
 - to go to school or vocational training courses for not too long, so that they are able to start working soon
- they want to stay legally

- they want a residence permit not only whilst they are under age but they want to be able to get a residence permit for employment or study reasons when they reach the age of 18
- they fear repatriation and, when they reach the age of 18, expulsion
- they are worried about their future and the chances to complete their projects
- they are homesick and they want to go to their country of origin and visit their families
 - they want a residence permit that allows them to go to their country of origin and afterwards come back to Italy
- they want to live honestly even though it is possible to earn more money doing illegal activities
- that there is no racism anymore and that all people have the same rights

Some of the messages from the young people in Italy were:

- We call for our rights, like everyone. Why all this racism against foreigners? We are all human beings and rights apply to us.
- Why is our residence permit “for minors” and we are prohibited from working? We foreigners need to work, to help our families and build our future.
- The first thing I want to do is the residence permit and then to find a house and a job. I want to go to Albania three times a year.
- To the European Commission: I think that the law on children when they come of age should be changed. I just think that a child that proves that he followed a serious project (school, vocational training, work...) has the right to have a chance to stay in Italy to work. Therefore I call for residence permits “for minors” to be automatically changed in residence permits “for employment reason” when the child reach 18 years. Yours sincerely.
- I want to be free; I want to have a residence permit. Although you earn more money doing illegal activities, I want to live honestly.

Netherlands

Issues raised by the separated children in the Netherlands were:

- they want peace and freedom
- respect / love
- equality
- fear and peace

- feeling unaccepted
- importance of friendship
- more knowledge of the Netherlands
- what Dutch people think of separated children
- contact with Dutch youngsters

Some of the messages from the young people in the Netherlands were:

| | |
|--|---|
| OU VA LE MONDE, OU VA LA TERRE? NOUS SOMMES TOUS LES MEMMES PERSONNES AVEC LA MEME SANG. LA NATIONALITÉ, LA RACE ET COULEUR DE LA PEAU NE SONT PAS IMPORTANTES. | [Where is the world going Where is the earth going? We are all the same person With the same blood. Nationality Race, and colour of skin Are not important.] |
|--|---|

Everyone is equal,
with the same value(s).

I live in a world no one knows.
Everyone hates me,
But nobody who knows me.

Love is very important in the life of people
Everybody needs it in their hearts.
With love we can live in a safe world,
...care for each other
...achieve the unachievable
Love brings respect to each other.
It will make a better place of the world.

Sweden

In Sweden the separated children chose to discuss identity and perceptions, attitudes and treatment that they received when arriving in Sweden. Key issues were that adults tended to forget, or didn't understand that they are dealing with children and that they need special support, time and more explanation. They found workers at the migration board and in reception centres were suspicious of them, and that some legal guardians were untrained or un-interested.

The messages from the group to decision makers, asylum and migration officers, and other staff who get in contact with separated children were:

- Improve the asylum interview so that it does not feel like a police investigation. Don't rush. Take breaks. Offer something to eat and drink.
- Explain really well why the interview is being conducted and how it is going to be used. It is difficult to be asked questions that you don't know the purpose of.
- Ask in a nice way, why the child/young person has come here. Not in a suspicious way. Remember that they often have been forced to flee because of war and other dangers in their home country.
- Be patient and be nice. Remember that they are frightened and under pressure in the interview and because of that they can say the wrong thing or not remember properly.
- Every child/young person must have one adult that is close – for real.
- Show that you trust the child/young person.
- Care about the child/young person, and talk a lot to her/him. Don't forget that it is a child and not an adult you are dealing with.
- Find out who he or she is. Remember that he/she does not always know where his/her parents, sisters and brothers are.
- The legal guardian ('good man' literally translated from Swedish) must be good for real, show interest and be supportive.
- Use good and properly trained translators.
- Don't let the child/young person wait too long for a residence permit.
- The child/young person must get to start school and learn the language as soon as possible. Then you learn more about society and get to meet friends.

3 Outcomes for children

The participatory workshops aimed, not only to give a platform for the children's views, but to empower them to speak out themselves, and to develop a collective analysis of their own situation. Two of the workshops recorded outcomes for children as part of the evaluation, and feedback from facilitators suggested that the separated children involved in the process:

- Felt important
- Felt that someone cared about them
- Felt listened to
- Learned how to be with other people

- Broadened horizons (for example the first visit to the beach, exploring new places within the host country, camping)
- Enjoyed themselves
- Could tell their friends about it
- Had the opportunity to meet other children in a similar situation to themselves
- Made new friendships – and they had kept in contact with each other in between sessions and since the end of the project.
- Some had an opportunity to rap on radio
- They have the opportunity for further participation at regional/ national level - In the Netherlands the children attended a children's rights festival (November) and in Italy there is another regional event where the video is to be presented.
- They have raised expectations
- Care workers are more aware of need to give responsibility to children
- Are contributing to /creating their own magazine in the Netherlands.

One project (Italy) did ask the children themselves what they had learnt from being involved in the project. Eight young people attended an evaluation meeting.

| | Agree strongly | Agree a little | Neutral | Disagree a little | Disagree strongly |
|--|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Learnt new things about other separated children | 8 | | | | |
| More confident in talking to other children and young people | 8 | | | | |
| Changed my mind about something during the workshop | 8 | | | | |
| More confident about talking to adults | 8 | | | | |
| More confident to talk [in host language] | 6 | | | | 2 |
| There is nothing I can do about my situation | 6 | | | | 2 |
| Know more about rights | 6 | 2 | | | |
| Know more about being a refugee | 2 | 1 | | | 5 |

As can be seen from the table above, all of the young people who answered felt they had learnt new things about other separated children, were more confident about talking to other children and adults, and had changed their mind about something during the workshop. Most felt more confident in speaking Italian, and knew more about their rights. Unfortunately they still felt relatively powerless in their situation.

They also identified other new skills that they had learnt: to draw, to create graffiti on walls, to be with other people, to appreciate other people, to sleep in a campsite, to deal with and resolve conflict (especially with other groups of young people). The facilitators also observed that the young people were

using the techniques gained in the workshops in other situations, for example using the writing techniques they had gained and writing rap songs. Another boy started to volunteer in an association collecting educational materials for a school in Burkina Faso.

The Dutch children identified learning from their workshop experiences including:

- that they could say what they wanted and to express themselves in the Netherlands
- to express their ideas
- to work in small groups
- to lead discussions
- to arrive on time
- to co-operate in decision making
- to rap
- how to relate to and to communicate with Dutch people
- learnt about children's rights, right to education and to contact their parents

4 Lessons from the events: what worked well

1 Peer facilitation / participation. Young people were engaged in the process of the project. In Italy, a small steering group was set up in one accommodation centre, two young Italians were brought in to teach graffiti skills, and a separated child ran some warming-up activities. In the Netherlands, this happened spontaneously – one young person interviewed other young people for their reasons for being at the event and this approach continued with evaluation interviews. Some young people took on facilitation roles and young people chose the activities. In Sweden young people were involved in several planning group meetings at the outset and chose the activities of the project,. In both Sweden and Holland, young people interpreted and explained for each other when they didn't understand the host language.

2 Allowing time for the groups to bond. Both in Italy and the Netherlands, several meetings were held before the residential, allowing for informal activities such as eating together, going to the cinema, and on trips, which facilitated the bonding. Unfortunately Sweden only had time for one preparatory meeting with all the young people, and this may have led to some children not feeling confident enough to attend the residential. In some of the groups, some young people already knew each other.

3 Residential settings. All three workshops involved residential settings: two over a weekend and one on a longer 5 day event. This is a good way of allowing the groups to bond informally, gives them a treat away from home, something to talk to friends about, informs them about the host country, and is fun. However, in Sweden, it appears to have prevented several children from attending especially some girls, and those boys who did not know anyone in the group, as they lacked the confidence to come.

4 *Using videos* – All three countries used video / filmmaking and the young people responded well to being videoed and watching themselves, and taking control of the camera. This has produced useful materials for organisations to use for promoting the needs and messages of the young people. Two videos were shown at the SCEP network meeting in November 03. There are confidentiality issues on using a video however. The Albanian young people in Italy did not want the video shown in their home town, and in Sweden, keeping in contact with the young people in order to ask their consent to use the finalised film material has been difficult and time consuming.

5 *Informal approach is very important with plenty of time for activities* such as football, drama, walks, cinema trips, meal times. Residentials work well in providing informal time together. These help bonding but also it was found that more interesting discussions happened during the informal sessions. A *Flexibility to change agenda where necessary* is important, so that informal and spontaneous events can continue.

6 *Explaining what it is about.* All three workshop facilitators spent a lot of time explaining the role of the organisations, what they wanted to do and why.

7 Making an extra effort to *recruit and involve girls* by using contacts and drawing on peer support / friendship networks. It seems that all three countries found it hard to recruit girls, and overall fewer girls participated than boys. (This will partially reflect the gender make up of separated children)

8 Working in *partnership with organisations closely linked with separated children* – who know them personally, have good contacts and can support the young people in the future.

9 Linking to *other activities* to give a bigger voice and meeting others. For example, joining the Anti Racism Meeting in Italy and the Children's Rights Festival in The Netherlands

10 *Calling to remind young people* the day before. Young people tend to have very busy lives and often don't keep diaries. The Dutch facilitators found it useful to call the young people the day before any meeting to remind them. This was less of an issue for those young people in accommodation centres where the consultation occurred on site.

11 Allowing time for separated children to *meet with host country children* – and to facilitate this. In the Netherlands an evening of discussion was arranged with a group of Dutch children. In Italy, at the anti-racism there were opportunities for the young people to meet with others. However, there was some conflict with different groups, which may need to be anticipated and dealt with at the time. In Sweden some of the young people expressed a lack of opportunities to meet with Swedish young people in daily life. When asked they said that they did not think the workshop would be a good opportunity to do it. It had more to do with access to activities like football teams etc.

12 *Being sensitive to different religious events* The Dutch facilitators found that some of the follow-up events after the consultation were during Ramadan, which meant that the young people felt tired, and it restricted what they could do. In Sweden the workshop itself took part during Ramadan, but it did not affect the workshop activities much. Three young people were given food at special times, and they thought it worked well (maybe because of the times being dependent on the time of daylight, and daylight in Sweden at that time of year is only between approximately 10am and 3pm).

5 What didn't work well?

1 Not having enough preparation time

It is easy to underestimate the amount of preparation time needed for this kind of event. Lack of preparation time led to several problems. In one case it meant that the young people did not have sufficient time to bond, and short timescales also meant choosing more expensive venues than would otherwise have been available.

2 Other agencies can be barriers to participation

It took more time than anticipated to get other agencies involved in the project and this restricted the young people available to participate. One accommodation centre/ social services department prevented four young people from continuing to participate in the project – using their permit status as a reason for not letting them travel. The lack of an overall co-ordination of legal guardians meant it was hard to recruit young people to the project as they had to be approached individually.

Linking to other activities and organised events is positive, but can mean that you have less control over what happens. For example it was not possible to show the video made at the anti-racism meeting due to lack of organisation.

3 Evaluating a long time after the event:

Only one country was able to get the group together to evaluate the consultation, and this was several months after the event, which meant memories faded. The others, whilst informally monitoring as they went along, attempted to arrange meetings but found it difficult to get the young people together again.

Other issues

There was a big difference within the groups of young people, especially according to how long they have been in the country. Those who had been here for longer (6 months +) tended to be more confident, politicised and aware of their rights than those who were recent arrivals.

It was raised that the workshops may not have reached the most vulnerable children. What about those not in accommodation, who have no legal guardians or have been trafficked for example? It was found difficult to reach

under 15 year olds as they are in schools and in foster care, where carers have a more protective attitude towards them.

Boundaries of participation was an interesting issue. For example in the Netherlands, children were asked to choose the kind of activities they wanted to do as part of getting to know each other and socialising. The children chose to go to the cinema – the workers weren't keen on this as it did not actually offer much opportunity for discussing and getting to know each other (compared to bowling or other games for example). However, this was resolved by ensuring that they went for a meal/ drink before to chat. Subsequently, they offered a range of different options to the children to choose from.

Adult role - both in Italy and the Netherlands the facilitators found that they had individual advocacy for young people to do – especially help with legal procedures. This was important for the young people and was easy for the partner agencies to do as they have information/ advocacy roles. However, this need was not high. The facilitators in the Italian case study were carers from the young people's accommodation centre. One young person said in the evaluation that they didn't like the carers. However, one positive outcome from the event was an observed better relationship between the carers and the young people, and hopefully this will continue in the accommodation centre. The carers understood that they should give the young people more choices and responsibilities and there were suggestions that they were changing some of the ways they were working with the children in the accommodation. Some workers were quite moved by the materials that the young people were producing and found it an emotional event.

Language In all three cases the events used the host language. This was because most of the young people had a good grasp of the host language, although they were encouraged to write and speak in their own language if they needed to. In the mixed group it was clear that some had better understanding of host language than the others but that they translated for each other. The facilitators could speak English to some (an Indian young man for example) and some French with the others.

6 Conclusion

Three workshop events took place with a total of 58 separated children from 15 to 20 years of age. The events varied, but included a series of preparative meetings and a residential, with follow up meetings. All of the workshops produced a video which have been subsequently used to disseminate messages of the young people. The NGOs involved have learnt from the experience, and there is some evidence of agencies working closely with the children in one case of changing their practice towards the children. The young participants gained a range of positive experiences, although it is hard to assess to what extent they have formed a collective analysis of their situation. The NGO network has had an opportunity to see the videos and discuss the issues of children's participation in their work, and the ideas raised by the separated children.

