

Separated Children in Europe Programme

Goals and Achievements

The Separated Children in Europe Programme

Every year high numbers of separated children arrive in European countries. It is widely recognised that separated children (see definition below) have many specific and particular vulnerabilities. Many may have witnessed or experienced extreme violence and rights violations as a result of conflict or social and political upheaval and the hardships, deprivations and dangers of their flight into exile may further add to this trauma. Some have been trafficked into or across

Europe for the purposes of exploitation often in the commercial sex industry or in other forms of harmful and unregulated labour. By definition all separated children lack a responsible adult to care for, and to protect them, and to act as an advocate in the promotion of their best interests. Their vulnerabilities are often exacerbated because of language and cultural differences, racism and discrimination and the challenges of navigating a complex immigration system.



However despite these apparent vulnerabilities the responses towards many separated children in Europe are often inadequate. This may be because of a lack of available resources or because governments, agencies and professionals do not have a sufficient level of knowledge or skill to work effectively with this group of children. It may be because of values and attitudes that give precedence to the importance of border control and migration management over the rights and best interests of children. Or it may be because societies feel that they should 'look after their own children' before diverting resources towards child migrants. For many separated children arrival in Europe is not the end of their troubles; it is the beginning of them.

All European member States have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child which obliges the States to give special protection and assistance to separated children. However the treatment separated children receive upon and after arrival varies extremely between and within the EU member States. There is a need to harmonize the protection these children are entitled to, particularly in the present climate of restrictive asylum and immigration practices.

The Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP) was established in 1997 as a collaboration between Save the Children and UNHCR, and seeks to realise the rights of all separated children entering or travelling across Europe: that they will be protected; that their well-being and development will be promoted; that they will have opportunities to develop their full potential and that they will participate in a meaningful way in the development of policies and practices that impact upon their lives. SCEP aims to achieve these goals through research, policy analysis and advocacy at the national and regional levels. All the work of SCEP is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Statement of Good Practice. As from the 1st of January 2013 Defence for Children-the Netherlands has taken over the coordination of the SCEP Network.

A great strength of SCEP is the European network that consists of 31 NGO's from 30 different European countries working for and with separated children in the form of service delivery, counselling, monitoring and/or advocacy activities. The existence of such a network is crucial if the issues that affect separated children in Europe are to be addressed effectively at both national and European level. The network enables the exchange of information and experience on lobbying, provides a link with those giving direct support to individual children and assists in the gathering of information. Not least, SCEP aims to share good practices within the NGO Network by having biannual network meetings and an on-going exchange of information and experiences through for example biannual newsletters.

In the case of a 15-year-old Afghan boy (S.), who wanted to reunite with his family in the Netherlands but was held in a detention centre in Greece, the contact between the organizations in the SCEP Network proved to be of great value.

The mother and two siblings of S. had, after a procedure of many years, received a residence permit in the Netherlands. Because of this, it would be possible for Greece to send the boy to the Netherlands on the basis of article 6 of the Dublin II Regulation. The family did however not know where exactly in Greece the boy was or how to contact him.

The family and their lawyer asked the Dutch SCEP partner for help. They were able to forward the request to the partner in Greece, who found the lawyer who was assisting S. at the detention centre within a day. Procedures were started and only 3 months later, S. was reunited with his family in the Netherlands after having been separated for years.

This case is only one of many that prove the great value of the SCEP Network not only for advocacy and research, but for making a difference in individual cases of separated children.

A commitment to the full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is fundamental to the work of SCEP. The CRC has been ratified by all countries within the Council of Europe and European Union. SCEP believes that all the articles the CRC are applicable to all separated children and must be the framework for all decisions affecting them.

Separated Children

Separated children are children under the age of eighteen who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents, or their previous legal/customary primary caregiver. Some children are completely alone, while others may be living with extended family members.

All such children are separated children and entitled to international protection under a broad range of international and regional instruments. Separated children may be seeking asylum because of fear of persecution or the lack of protection due to human rights violations, armed conflict or disturbances in their own country. They may be the victims of trafficking for sexual or other exploitation, or they may have travelled to Europe to escape conditions of serious deprivation.

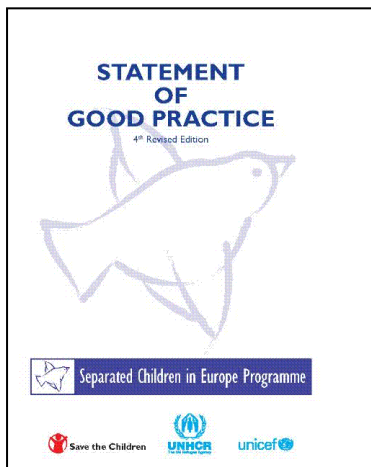


Workshop with separated children in Cyprus

Programme Achievements

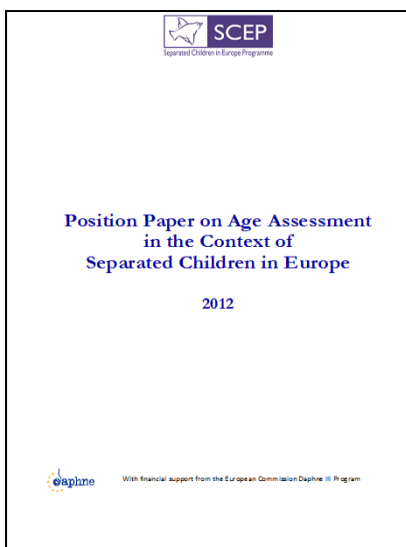
Statement of Good Practice

The **Statement of Good Practice** has been drawn up by SCEP in order to provide a straightforward account of the policies and practices required to implement and protect the rights of separated children in Europe. The Statement is principally informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and two other documents: UNCRC General Comment No 6, on the Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside Their Country of Origin, 2005 and UNHCR's Guidelines on Policies and Procedures in dealing with Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum of February, 1997.



The fourth edition of the SCEP Statement of Good Practice has been published in 2009. It should be stressed that this is a living document, which reflects the dynamic progression of human rights protection and issues particularly affecting separated children. The Statement of Good Practice is not merely an exhaustive listing of standards and good practice, but rather a framework for action and advocacy that may continue to be built upon in the future. In this regard it is likely that new emerging issues will need to be addressed in future revisions of the Statement of Good Practice.

The Statement of Good Practice has been translated into 22 different languages and also a leaflet for children was made.



Position Papers

Over the years, the Separated Children in Europe Programme has published several position papers on varying topics, the most recent one being the **Position Paper on Age Assessment (2012)**. This Paper represents the position of the SCEP on age assessment in the context of separated children in Europe, and is based on reviews of policy and practice regarding age assessment in 16 European countries.

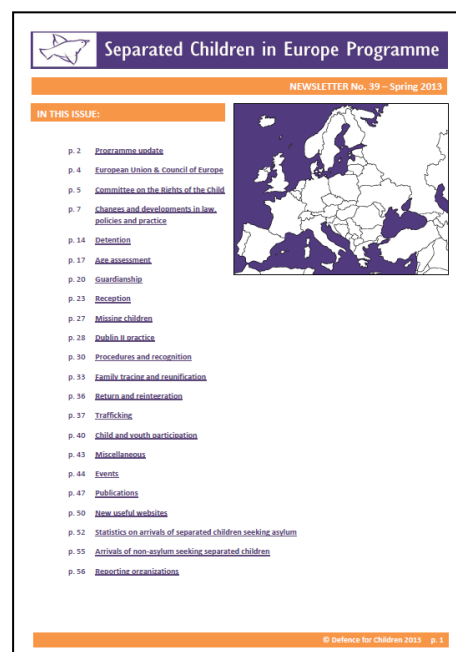
Through this Position Paper, SCEP aims to provide concrete recommendations to States and other relevant stakeholders on

how to ensure full respect of the rights that separated children are entitled to, when doubts concerning their age may arise. This Paper forms the basis for SCEP's advocacy around age assessment in Europe.

SCEP Newsletter

The **SCEP Newsletter** is published twice a year (spring and autumn) and contains information on the activities of the SCEP network, developments in policy and legislation of the European Union and Council of Europe, and updates on the situation of separated children in the various European countries. These updates are organised in 10 topics, such as detention, guardianship, trafficking and return and are provided by the NGO's who are part of the network in cooperation with UNHCR focal points. The newsletter also provides statistical data on the arrivals of separated children in Europe and contains information on events and publications from all over Europe.

The SCEP Newsletter is an important tool to inform stakeholders, practitioners and policy workers across Europe about the situation of separated children. The Newsletter is widely disseminated throughout Europe by all the partners in the network and all the newsletters are also made available on the SCEP website.



Programme Objectives and request for funding

In the following paragraphs the activities of SCEP are described to defend the rights of separated children in Europe. SCEP needs funding to establish the goals set for the upcoming years and seeks the support of sponsors. Upon request a detailed budget calculation on the different activities can be provided.

Continue to be the link for separated children in need of support

The great strength of the SCEP Network is the representation of SCEP members in 30 countries in Europe. Because of this wide representation it is possible to quickly seek the support in another member state. With one phone call a trustworthy contact person is found in every EU member State. This has made a difference in the lives of the separated children seeking for family reunification in another European country (see the example above) and in multiple other cases. The exchange of good and bad practices during the SCEP Network meetings provided input for advocacy on national and European level.

SCEP aims to remain the European NGO-network to defend the rights of separated children by having at least one Network meetings every year with all members.

Position Statements

In order to be able to influence national and European policy in an effective manner, SCEPT aims to write position statements about all 15 topics in the Statement of Good Practice. Examples of these topics are the appointment of a guardian, detention, family tracing, and the access to the Best Interests Determination process.

The SCEPT Network plans to write five statements in small working groups during each of their meetings.



Network Meeting Cyprus June 2013

Revision Statement of Good Practice

As was stated above, the last revision of the Statement of Good Practice dates from 2009. Since then, policy and practice in the context of separated children has changed in many ways on both national as well as European level and therefore a revision of the Statement is required. Also, a link to the UNHCR/UNICEF Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child (publication expected in November 2013) should be provided for in this revision.

New Website and Newsletter

An important way to keep the network and other stakeholders informed about practice, policy and legislation in relation to separated children, is the development of a new and improved website and newsletter. The new website will contain all the information about the programme, its goals and achievements, as well as information about projects, jurisprudence and the various NGO's participating in the network. Also, an electronic version of the newsletter will be incorporated on the website.

Country Assessments

SCEPT aims to write country assessments in every SCEPT country on the situation of separated children. The last country assessments that have been conducted date from 2003, therefore it would be very valuable for information sharing and advocacy work to get updates from all countries on how the situation of separated children has changed over the years.

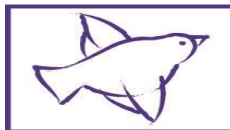
Such a project could include a questionnaire that each partner in the network fills out, in order to get information on the same topics from each country. SCEPT could also work with (former) separated children to have them assess the situation in their country of residence. The programme coordinator

would work on a report together with SCEPT partners and the Steering Committee in which all the assessments are gathered in one European report.

Visibility of sponsor

As a sponsor of the SCEPT work there are possibilities to give visibility to the funding. For instance by adding the logo of the sponsor on the SCEPT website and publications financed by the sponsor and reference to the sponsorship of SCEPT in the communication tools of the sponsor. Requests in relation to the visibility of the sponsor can be done in consultation with the SCEPT Coordinator and Steering Committee.

Contact details



Separated Children in Europe Programme

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