



# CHILD-FRIENDLY INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN IN MIGRATION



**What do  
children think?**



**Building a Europe  
for and with children**  
**Construire une Europe  
pour et avec les enfants**



# CHILD-FRIENDLY INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN IN MIGRATION: WHAT DO CHILDREN THINK?

**Study prepared by  
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## INTRODUCTION

1. Children are rights bearers regardless of their immigration status. In the context of migration, children must first and foremost be treated as children. The best interests of the child must govern every decision taken concerning a child, regardless of their legal status. The child has the right to be informed in a child-friendly way of their rights and the procedures affecting them. [The Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of the Child \(2016-2021\)](#) identified the participation of all children as a priority area for action. [The Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe \(2017-2019\)](#) was adopted to strengthen action focusing on ensuring access to rights and child-friendly procedures, providing effective protection and enhancing the integration of children who would remain in Europe.

2. Children must be empowered to make informed choices and participate in processes concerning them along their migration or asylum journey. States should inform children of their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.<sup>1</sup> Information should be given in a manner that is adapted to the age and maturity of the child, in a language which they can understand and which is gender and culture sensitive.<sup>2</sup>

3. But what do children affected by migration think about the information they receive? Are states informing children affected by migration in a child-friendly manner about their rights and the procedures affecting them?

4. In order to answer the question “What do children think?” the Council of Europe held a number of consultations with children affected by migration in Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece and Hungary to gather the views and recommendations of children affected by migration about the information they receive in relation to immigration and asylum. Some of these views and recommendations were shared during the Council of Europe roundtable on child-friendly information for children in migration which took place in Strasbourg on 29-30 November 2017 in the context of the Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children (2017-2019)<sup>3</sup>. This is a study of the findings and recommendations made by children who took part in the workshops. This study contributes to the work of the Children’s Rights Division on a handbook on promoting child-friendly information for refugee and migrant children.

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1. See also: *Rahimi v Greece* No. 8687/08 ECHR (2011), UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No 6 (2005), Para 24 and 25.

2. Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Guidelines on child-friendly justice, adopted on 17 November 2010, see also: Lanzarote Committee Special Report Protecting children affected by the refugee crisis from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, adopted 3 March 2017, recommendation 15.

3. Child-friendly information for children in migration, Round-table conference report, 2018, Child-participation audio-sound bites, Children’s recommendations on child-friendly information for children in migration Video.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE WORKSHOPS

5. During the workshops that led to the current findings, the facilitators used a number of different tools adapted to the specificities of the child participants. For the purposes of the consultations, the facilitators familiarised the participants with the concept of child-friendly information and their right to access such information before seeking to collect the children's views on their experiences of access to relevant information. The children were encouraged to contribute their views and recommendations through a variety of methods including by making posters, writing letters to their little brother or sister and recording audio sound-bites.

6. The consultations were implemented by experienced facilitators according to a methodology proposal provided by the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe. Children were invited to speak up and share their experiences, knowledge and insight. Access to information was focused on specific topics, most likely to affect children in migration namely: violence, detention, asylum, the Dublin procedure, the age assessment procedure, guardianship and family reunification. It should be noted that while many participants were under the international protection framework, some fell under the national migration frameworks. Thus, their residence status and procedures affecting them varied considerably from one group to the other.

7. The service providers were also called to give their input on their experiences in implementing the workshops and whether they faced difficulties doing so. It appears that in some cases (CY, DE, GR), reaching out to girls and having girls participate in the workshops that took place was difficult to achieve, for a number of reasons. In Germany, no unaccompanied girls were resident in the district where the workshops took place therefore no girls participated in the workshops. In Greece, some girls requested that a girls only workshop take place and did not participate in a mixed workshop. While there is a gender balance between unaccompanied boys and girls present in Cyprus, the facilitators did not receive the authorisation from the girls' guardians in time to run a workshop for the girls present there.

8. Communication with the children was reported as a challenge. It would have been rather hard for children who could not speak the language of the host country to participate in the workshops that took place. In Germany, language was not an issue since the children had already been there for a considerable amount of time and thus could speak German fluently. In Cyprus, the language barrier was eliminated through the use of translators (Arabic and Somali).

9. In several states the facilitators experienced challenges when organising the workshops because they were not granted the requisite permission to access facilities where unaccompanied children were being accommodated in the state, therefore participation in the workshops was limited or had to be modified at the last minute.

10. Apart from the practical issues mentioned above, certain aspects in relation to the substance of the workshops presented challenges. Primarily, conveying the exact meaning of the right to child-friendly information appeared to be a challenge to some extent. While children had a good grasp of the significance of human rights in general, the right to information was not so familiar to them. Facilitators took a constructive approach during the workshops to facilitate the discussion and make sure that all participants could understand that they have a right to information.

11. For the purposes of the present report the names of the children cited have been changed to protect their identities.

## CHILDREN'S VIEWS ABOUT THE INFORMATION THEY RECEIVED

12. Before delving into each topic separately it should be noted that, in relation to the general framework of human rights, children were generally well aware of the differences in child-protection standards between their country of origin and their host country in relation to human rights in general but also children's rights and the role of the child in the decision-making process.



## A. Violence

13. Children demonstrated a satisfactory level of knowledge and information in relation to violence, both corporal and verbal. Children seemed aware of the fact that they have the right to not be subject to violence in Europe and that, if they were a victim of violence, there are mechanisms and routes to follow to seek redress. For example some children said they know that they can speak to their guardian or a teacher if they had a problem or go straight to the police. (CY, FR, DE)

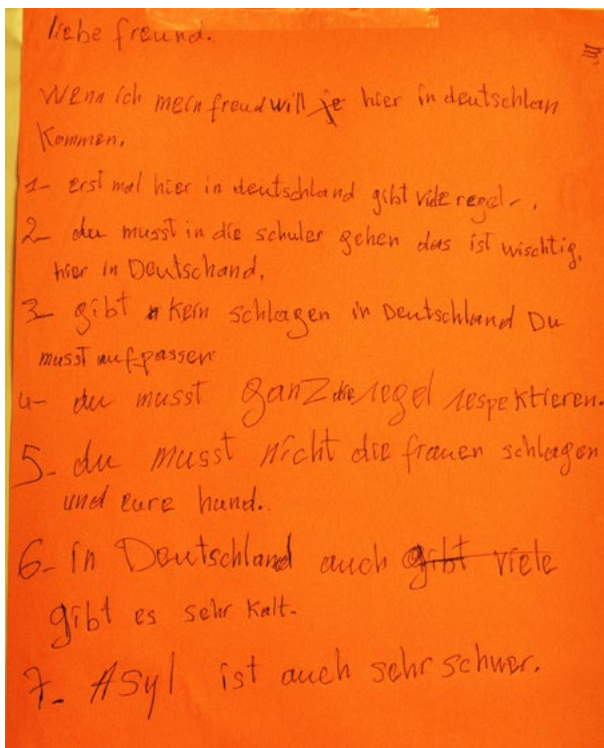
*"When you arrive here, you need to go to the police or to give your finger prints, and then you need to wait for an ID. Then you go to school. Some teachers are trying. Here, parents are not allowed to hit their children. Teachers not either."*

Muhannad, 13.

14. In two cases (FR, DE) children made specific mention of the fact that in Europe neither parents nor teachers are allowed to hit the children as a means of punishment or discipline; they contrasted this with the situation in their home country.

15. In the course of the workshops hate speech was mentioned and discussed as a form of violence directed at them. Some children expressed feeling unable to defend themselves in such instances due to their limited language skills. The possibility of online reporting as a mechanism to address the issues was mentioned (DE).

16. Some children spoke about having suffered violence at the hands of the police in different member states. They mentioned that they had not received information about where to get help or effective remedies available in cases of police violence.



Dear Friend,

If you my friend want to come to Germany:

1. First of all, here in Germany there are many rules.
2. You must go to school, this is important here in Germany.
3. There is no beating here in Germany, you must watch out.
4. You must respect all the rules.
5. You must not hit your wife or your dog.
6. In Germany it is much colder.
7. Asylum is also very difficult.

*A letter written by the children to their friends and siblings informing them about children's rights, women's rights and the laws and regulations in Europe*

## B. Detention

17. Administrative detention had been a reality for a number of children who participated in the workshops. For some they were detained in a Council of Europe member state during their journey to the host country, or pending Dublin transfer or in a non-member state. For the most part children reported having been detained while in transit, either in third countries such as Libya or in a member state in their attempt to cross the borders and reach their final destination. Children expressed frustration about administrative detention, which in their minds was not justified because they had not participated in a criminal activity (CY, FR, DE, GR, HU). Of the children who had experienced detention, some spoke about administrative detention as prison or as a punishment



and did not seem to have received information about the reasons for their detention, children reported not being told where to go on release or informed of their rights once they were released from detention.

*"it needs to change that children not go to jail, it happens that little children, teenagers they go to jail, three months, six months and after when they go outside they don't know where to go... and after when the children don't know where to go, some people come and they say come with me come with me and some kill and they don't know where they go".*

*Shine, 13, was held in immigration detention for two months on his way to his destination country.*

18. In contrast, during the discussions, children appeared to have a very good grasp of the legal system in the host country in relation to criminal activities that could result in loss of freedom (CY, DE).

## C. Asylum

19. As mentioned previously, some groups of children who participated in the workshops were not under the asylum framework and thus had little to no information about the procedure for international protection or the rationale behind the structure and framework relating to asylum (FR).

20. The children who were under the asylum framework gave similar feedback in relation to the asylum process and their interaction with the different stakeholders involved. Overall, children expressed satisfaction about the amount and quality of information they had received in the host country where the workshop took place (CY, DE), though there could have been significant improvement in the timing and manner of dissemination (GR, HU).

21. During the workshops, which for the majority of participants took place months after their arrival, children appeared to have good knowledge and accurate information about the asylum procedure itself as well as the persons involved and their respective roles. Information was received from both state and private actors. However, it was evident that the information available when the workshops took place was very different than the information they had received prior to embarking on their journey or received during transit.

*"I encourage you NOT to come to Europe because the travel from Africa to Europe is too difficult. We have been through very difficult things. If you can find another possibility to stay in your home country and stay with your family, this is very important. I would say that it is difficult to get asylum in Europe."*

*Abdul, 18.*

22. Prior to arriving in the host country and/or during the journey, smugglers were the main source of information for most children. However, the information received during this time was found to be flawed and inaccurate. Upon arrival in the host country, information was made accessible by public servants in different capacities (police officers, social workers, guardians, educators) and private actors (aid workers and NGO workers). Children expressed frustration over the disparity of information they had received at different stages of their journey. Children also reported receiving information through interpreters who did not speak their native language or a common language but only a similar language; this was identified as a barrier to good communication.

## D. The "Dublin" system

23. Children who had been affected by the Dublin procedure<sup>4</sup> appeared to be well informed of the process. In Cyprus, children received information orally and in writing in their mother tongue, from state agents, their guardian (see heading F below) and officers of the shelter where they reside. The participants explained that the procedure was somewhat confusing and abstract for them to understand at the beginning, which led to feelings of frustration and anger.

24. In some of the workshops children reported having been transferred from one state to another under the Dublin regulation; they reported that this experience was stressful, the police in both the sending and receiving states were not kind, in some cases children were victims of violence at the hands of the police and state authorities transferring them. These children reported that on arrival in the receiving state they did not receive any information about their rights or the procedures affecting them and they were just told to go away by the police.

4. Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the member state responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the member states by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast).

## E. Age assessment

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25. Few child participants reported having been subject to formal age assessment procedures. In general children demonstrated variable knowledge of the procedure of age assessment including its aims and purpose. Some children expressed their frustration at having to go through this procedure either because they felt offended, since in their understanding they were told that they were lying about their age, or disadvantaged because the lack of documentation from their home countries which led the state to conduct an age assessment was a factor outside of their control.

*"The first day when I came to France I lived in the street for a week. I was found by the Red Cross and then I was put in a shelter and I had some age assessment interviews and then I was driven to a hotel. I spent a month in another town then I was sent to another association, now I live in an apartment with other children."*

*Souleymane, 16.*

## F. Guardian

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26. In general children appeared to have little or no information about the concept of a guardian and/or their role *vis-à-vis* the children. In addition, the situation and available information varied greatly among the children in the states where the consultations took place.

27. In the case of France, children had no personal contact with their guardian, whom they referred to as their "father in France". The facilitator explained that this was due to the fact that all direct responsibility for the unaccompanied child is exercised by the nominated structure where the child resides<sup>5</sup>.

28. In the case of Cyprus, children have personal contact with their guardian, whom they meet soon after their arrival<sup>6</sup> and were very familiar with them as a person. Children have meetings with their guardian and are aware of their role, authority and responsibility towards them as well as the fact that the shelter officers can transfer information to their guardian on their behalf.

29. Similarly, in Germany children were very well aware about the role and responsibilities of the guardian and had personal contact with them. However, they felt that they were not heard by their guardian and to a certain extent uninvolved in the decision-making process.

30. In the case of Greece, the children had never met their guardian and had little knowledge of the role and functions of a guardian. They did however, have satisfactory information and direct contact with the person or entity exercising *de facto* responsibility for decisions regarding their well-being.

31. In the case of Hungary the majority of the children who took part in the workshop were accompanied by their families in Hungary and had not been referred to guardianship services. Only one unaccompanied child took part in the workshops; the subject of guardianship was not discussed at length.

## G. Family reunion

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32. Family reunification was for most children, for those channelled through the asylum framework, a major concern prior to their departure from their country of origin. Prior to departing and beginning the journey to the host country they had received certain information on the procedures to be followed upon arrival and the timeframe. This information was, for the most part, not accurate or completely misguided; children reported having received information in their country of origin and from smugglers about the rules relating to family reunification in host states that they later discovered to be inaccurate.

*"What they tell you in Iraq is not true, for example that after 4-6 months you will be able to bring your family."*

*Soran, 15.*

33. In the host country, the children identified a number of stakeholders from whom they had received information. These were state agencies (CY), non-governmental organisations (CY, DE, GR, HU), school and

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5. The President of the Conseil départemental du Bas-Rhin is the tutor/guardian of all unaccompanied minors on the territory.

6. The guardian of unaccompanied children in Cyprus is the Director of the Social Welfare Services. The Director has delegated power to several Social Welfare Services Officer to act as guardians of unaccompanied children residing in the territory of the Republic of Cyprus.

educational institutions (CY, DE, GR, HU), on the internet and through social media (CY, GR) and to a lesser extent other people with whom they had come into contact during their stay in the host country.

34. In the case of France, children had no information regarding the family reunification procedure under the international protection framework due to the fact that the participants in the workshops were not under the asylum framework and thus not affected by this procedure.



*"Respect my voice and opinion and fast communication, Family Reunification"*

*Khaled, 17.*

### **CHILDREN'S VIEWS ABOUT THE INFORMATION THEY WOULD HAVE LIKED TO RECEIVE**

35. As mentioned previously, at the time the workshops were held, the children had already been in the host state for variable amounts of time, ranging from a few months to two years. As a result children had at that time received information. However, in discussing their past experiences regarding the time immediately after their arrival, they mentioned a number of situations that could be considered as problematic and insufficient in safeguarding the right to access child-friendly information.

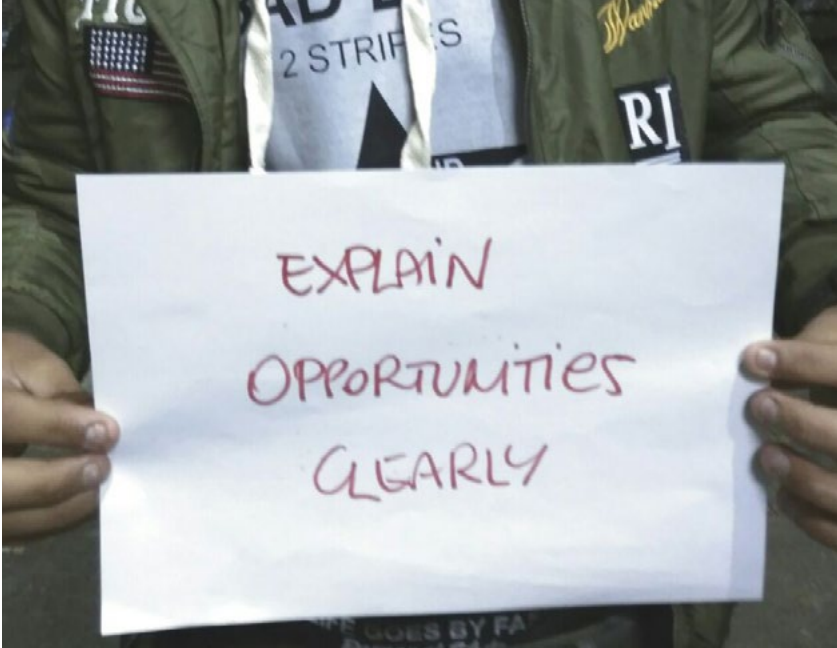
36. In certain cases, children did not receive any information immediately upon arrival, some accompanied child participants reported that they had not received any information directly from authorities because only their parents were informed; other accompanied children reported that they were informed only because they spoke English and so had been acting as unofficial interpreters for their parents. Some children reported moving from one setting to another without information until the initial registration was completed (GR, HU). The information received, though eventually sufficient and satisfactory, was fragmented and not accessible in one central point of access (GR). In such instances, children followed the instructions of other migrants and refugees encountered on the route or their peers hoping to reach a positive resolution; this led to feelings of stress and fear.

*"We didn't find any info, we just follow the people, we didn't know where we are going until we reach Schisto [Refugee camp in Greece] camp and register our names"*

*Ayzan, 15.*

37. A commonly shared view is that while they had received ample information on the legal procedures related to asylum, age assessment and family reunification, little was given in relation to social rights and integration. Children wanted to know more about the opportunities they had to meet local youth, interact with the local community, make use of their skills, access education, employment or vocational training and

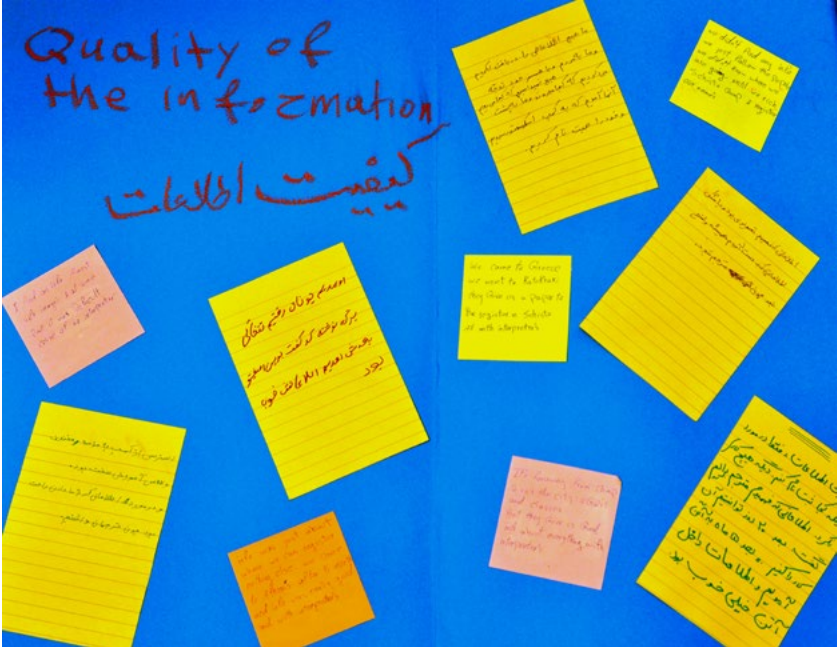
feel like empowered members of the community (FR, GR, HU). Many children mentioned the important role of NGOs in informing them about their rights and the procedures affecting them.



“Explain opportunities clearly”  
Rida, 16

**CHILDREN’S VIEWS ABOUT THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION**

38. A number of methods and tools of conveying information to the children was identified by the children themselves. Each method was rated based on quality of information and quantity of information.

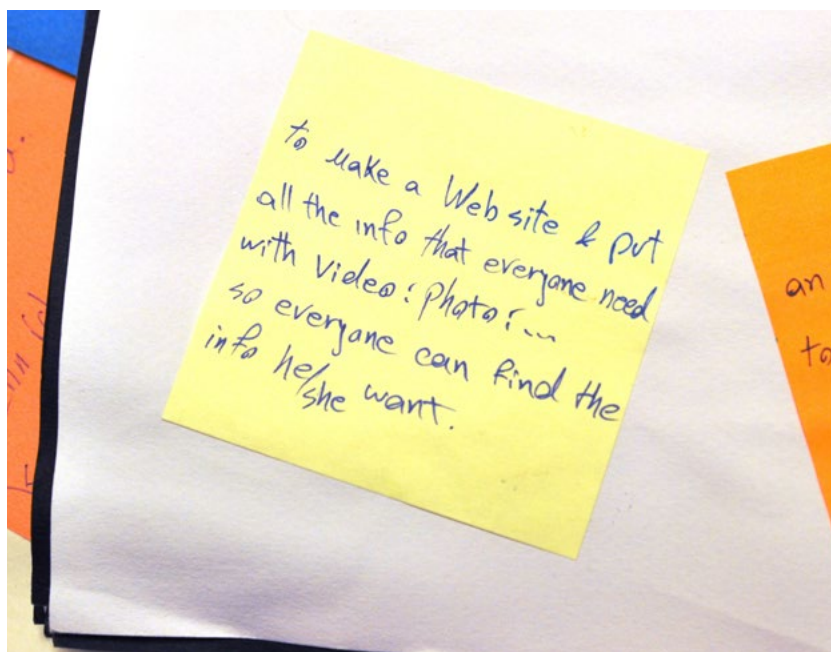


Notes from a workshop in Greece.

39. One-to-one meetings with a person responsible in a professional capacity was identified as a positive practice in transferring information. One-to-one meetings gave the children the space to build rapport with the professional with whom they came into contact, and gave them the opportunity to ask questions and clarify whatever was unclear. It should be noted, and the children pointed out that, the role of the professional



is crucial. Their demeanour, body language, tone of voice and active listening skills are pivotal in making sure that all information was understood.

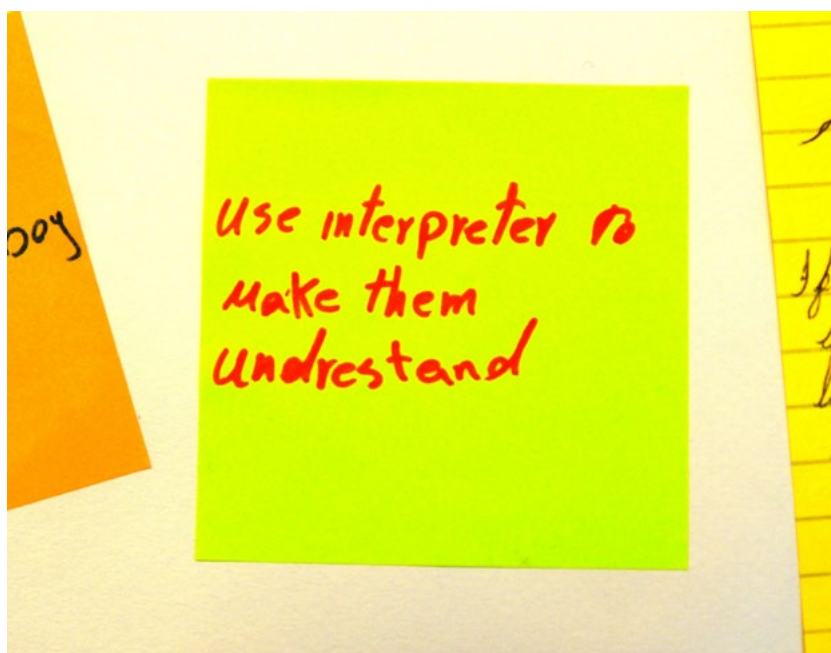


Notes from a workshop in Greece.

40. Written informative material, while widely used and given significance for the quality of information provided, was identified as a weak means of disseminating information. It was pointed out that, even if the material is in the native language of the child, it is not uncommon that children have little to no literacy skills even in their native language and thus cannot access the written information therein. Alternatively, animated informative material (videos and leaflets with pictures instead of text) were identified as good practice to make access to information fun and accessible to everyone, regardless of their literacy skills.

*"Boy or girl who can't speak the local language it's better to speak with them with symbols and also treat them in friendly way so that they can express themselves without any hesitation it's better to be in touch with them about what they want."*

Ahmed, 14.



Notes from a workshop in Greece.

41. The use of interpreters and translators was also pointed out by the children as a good practice. Having an adult who speaks their language was not only helpful but also reassuring. It was however, pointed out that the use of translators and interpreters should be carefully assessed as it may cause difficulties. For instance, for children coming from minority groups of a country, it would be better to use a translator/interpreter of their minority language instead of the main/official language of the country, as it is highly likely that the children would not speak or understand that language as well as their minority/local language. Additionally, the different dialects and accents of each language should be taken into account. An example of that would be Arabic. An Arabic speaking child from Iraq speaks a significantly different Arabic dialect from an Arabic speaker from Morocco.

42. Cultural and peer mediators were also identified as useful for transferring information and easy integration into the host country. Cultural mediators are a source of comfort and familiarity, as they speak their language, are aware of the child's culture and the culture of the host country and can smooth out or prevent entirely any misunderstanding that may arise due to differences in language and culture.



*"Peer mediation and support"*

Diara, 15.

## CHILDREN'S RECOMMENDATIONS

43. The children participating in the workshops, despite the onerous conditions and hardship they had faced, were more than willing to give recommendations on how to improve the existing situation for other children.

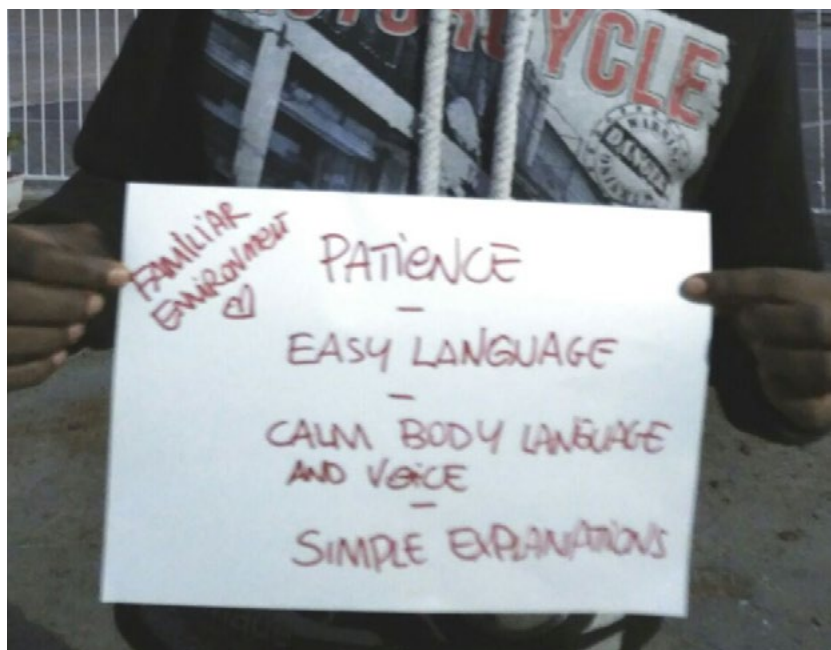
### I. Recommendations to professionals

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44. Children placed great importance on the role of the professionals that they came across and whom they had to work. As a result of their experiences with a number of professionals from different fields and different levels of expertise, they gave the following recommendations:

- A. Be patient; use clear and simple language, with examples to make your point clear and avoid miscommunication;
- B. Be mindful of body language and tone of voice, especially when talking about sensitive subjects; children pick up on the discomfort or stress of the professional which in turn stresses them as well;
- C. Listen to children and take their views into account;
- D. Include the family members in any procedure; the family left behind can give motivation, guidance or frustration to a child, Keep them informed and involved;

- E. Simplify procedures and make them less time-consuming; the waiting period has a great impact on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of children;
- F. Inform children about the future to alleviate feelings of stress and uncertainty.



*"Familiar environment, patience, easy language, calm body language and voice, simple explanations"*

Abdirahman, 16.

## II. Recommendations on materials, communication methods and tools

45. Apart from the qualities and skills of the professionals, the children had a number of recommendations in relation to tools that can be used and how they can be used efficiently.
- A. Use information leaflets and material with animations and/or pictures to explain procedures; this is an easy way to ensure that even children who cannot read and write will get all the information they need despite the limitations language imposes and will mitigate illiteracy;
  - B. Provide access to helplines with information in their native language. Ideally these should be freely accessible and give information about NGOs and support organisations;
  - C. Inform children of their rights through information technology including through apps, websites and community groups to reach out to children and provide access to accurate information. This should be coupled with improved access to wifi for children along their journey: in transit, in reception centres and in detention;
  - D. Communicate with children through translators and interpreters to, having due regard to the difficulties that this may create (e.g. children mentioned that the interpreter at the asylum service was from a conflicting part of the country which made them feel uneasy and made it difficult for them to trust the translator);
  - E. Use peer to peer methods of transferring information. Children tend to listen to and follow their peers; a fellow child can be a comforting, reassuring and trustworthy presence.

*"The best way is to show the photos or use the interpreters and it depends whether you are talking to the boy or the girl. If it's a girl it's easier for us to talk to them, if it's a boy it's a little bit difficult."*

*Amina, 16 (quote from an audio recording)*



### III. Difficult topics

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46. The experiences of the facilitators in relation to tackling difficult topics with the children varied. Some groups were completely unwilling to discuss these and collectively resorted to simply stating that their journey was difficult. Other groups were more willing to share both the stories and means of addressing the issues. Children talked about needing information about where to seek help and how to remedy situations such as police violence.

47. When discussing difficult topics children primarily spoke about needing to be given space and to feel safe; the relationship of trust with the professional is important.

48. During the workshops, the discussions became emotionally charged at times when the facilitators attempted to talk about difficult and sensitive topics including violence. In one group, the children refused entirely to talk about information in connection to violence or their journey to Europe (DE).

49. It is the adult's role to create a safe environment where the child will feel comfortable to speak up and give an account of what has happened to them. It is important to take into account that this takes time and children should not be pressured to talk about difficult experiences when they are not ready.

*"Sometimes we just need time to forget what we went through before talking about it"*

*Amara, 14.*

### CONCLUSIONS

50. The children who participated in these workshops were generally very open and glad to share their experiences. The children were very interested to understand how their recommendations will be taken into account by the Council of Europe. Some children expressed feeling grateful that adults were asking to know their opinions and at having the opportunity to share their views about their experiences in Europe. In general the children took the workshops very seriously, reflecting about the messages they wanted to share with decision-makers to improve the provision of information and procedures for other children who may find themselves in similar situations in member states.

51. Overall, the children were very active during the workshops, giving their opinions, and being creative when making the materials to contribute to the roundtable and to the work on child-friendly information. In general the children enjoyed having the opportunity to suggest answers and creative solutions to the difficulties faced by refugee and migrant children in Europe.

## SUMMARY OF CHILD PARTICIPATION WORKSHOPS

State	Dates Workshops took place	Number of participants	Age range of participants	Gender balance (M/F)	Languages spoken during workshops
Cyprus (CY)	10/11/2017 11/11/2017	15	13-17	15M/0F	English, Somali, Arabic
France (FR)	07/11/2017 08/11/2017	13	13-19	13M/0F	French, English
Germany (DE)	14/11/2017 16/11/2017	16	13-18	16M/0F	German, French, English, Arabic
Greece (GR)	01/12/2017 08/12/2017 12/12/2017	33	13-19	24M/9F	Farsi, English, Greek
Hungary (HU)	24/11/2017	10	12-18	8M/2F	Hungarian, English, Pashto, Arabic
<b>Totals</b>	-	<b>87</b>	<b>12-19</b>	<b>76M/11F</b>	

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.