

CHILD-FRIENDLY INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN IN MIGRATION



**Roundtable
Conference report**

**Strasbourg
29-30 November 2017**



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



French edition:
*Des informations adaptées aux enfants
en situation de migration
Table ronde - Rapport de conférence*

The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe. All requests concerning the reproduction or translation of all or part of this document should be addressed to the Directorate of Communication (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int). All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the Directorate General of Democracy.

Cover photo: Council of Europe/Sandro Weltin

Cover and layout: Documents and Publications
Production Department (SPDP), Council of Europe

This publication has not been copy-
edited by the SPDP Editorial Unit to correct
typographical and grammatical errors.

© Council of Europe, February 2018
Printed at the Council of Europe

CHILD-FRIENDLY INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN IN MIGRATION

” No one puts their children
on a boat unless the water
is safer than the land”

Warsan Shire

**Roundtable
Conference report
Council of Europe, Strasbourg,
29-30 November 2017**

Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
CHILDREN'S VOICES	5
RECOMMENDATIONS	6
COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION TO PREVENT VIOLENCE, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, RISK OF TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING	6
INFORMING CHILDREN OF THEIR RIGHTS IN ASYLUM PROCEDURES IN A CHILD-FRIENDLY WAY	7
COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT ACCESS TO LEGAL ROUTES TO AND THROUGH EUROPE	7
CHILD-FRIENDLY INFORMATION IN HOST STATES	8
RECOMMENDATIONS	9

INTRODUCTION

1. All children are full bearers of rights regardless of their immigration status, as such they have the right to information that is adapted to their age and maturity, given in a language which they can understand and which is gender and culture sensitive.¹ Children must be empowered to make informed choices and participate in processes concerning them along their migration or asylum journey.² States should undertake to inform children of their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (Article 42).³
2. Statistics suggest that more than one in three migrants and asylum-seekers crossing between Greece and Turkey is a child. The large majority of migrant and asylum-seeking children are boys. However, the situation for girls is particularly worrying due to the risk of abuse, exploitation and harmful practices, such as the risk of early and forced marriage, as well as the inadequacy and shortage of not just child-sensitive, but also gender-sensitive reception centres and accommodation. Children in the context of migration too often face barriers in access to information. The information they receive is often ill-adapted or incomprehensible to them.⁴
3. The Council of Europe is determined to support member States to mainstream good practices and communications methods or tools used to enhance access to rights and procedures for children on the move and otherwise affected by migration throughout Europe. [The Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2016-2021\)](#) was adopted to guide States in their actions to protect children from all forms of violence, ensure their access to justice, health and social services, strengthen the participation of children, including by developing child-friendly and age-appropriate materials. In light of the particular vulnerability of refugee and migrant children, [The Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe \(2017-2019\)](#) includes a set of priority measures focusing on ensuring access to rights and child-friendly procedures, providing effective protection and enhancing the integration of children who remain in Europe.
4. In this context, the Council of Europe held a Roundtable which sought to explore the notion of child-friendly information in the context of migration and to share examples of good practices and recommendations on how to mainstream the use of child-friendly information in this context.
5. The Roundtable gathered a total of 68 participants, including 20 representatives from government and local authorities, child-protection authorities, border and asylum officials, Ombudspersons for children, from 11 countries, civil society actors and 10 children who had participated in child consultations. At the Roundtable, children and young persons participated alongside experts and presented their own messages and thoughts on the issues under discussion. During the debates participants and experts exchanged and shared examples of good and promising practices and recommendations about how to communicate with children in the context of migration in a child-friendly way.

CHILDREN'S VOICES

6. Children who have experienced migration reported that they had not received information about the difficulties of the journey and integration in the host country before leaving their home. During the journey they had not received information apart from what the smugglers told them. They did not know where they were, who the authorities were, whom they could trust where to find help or how to access their rights to education, accommodation or health care. Children reported that this led to feelings of stress, isolation and abandonment.
7. Receiving information immediately upon arrival was identified as important. However, children also said that they were overwhelmed on arrival and could not remember or take in everything that they were told. Children reported that they did not use social media during the journey because they could not access internet connections or charge their phones but that once in the host country social media was important for exchanging information with friends who were already in that country or elsewhere in Europe. Peer-to-peer information was identified as important because children felt they could trust those who have had similar experiences.

1. [Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Guidelines on child-friendly justice, adopted on 17 November 2010](#), guideline 2.
2. [Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18, CM/Rec \(2012\)2](#).
3. See also: ECtHR [Rahimi v Greece No. 8687/08 \(2011\)](#), UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No 6 (2005), Para 24 and 25, [European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights 1996 \(ETS No. 160\)](#) Article 3, [Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2011 \(ETS No 210\)](#) Article 19, [Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings \(CETS 197\)](#) Article 12.1.d, [Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Guidelines on child-friendly justice \(2010\)](#), guideline 2, Directive 2013/32/EU, Article 25.
4. [Thematic Report on migrant and refugee children Prepared by the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on migration and refugees, SG/Inf\(2017\)13, 10 March 2017](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Children and young people recommend that:
 - i. information should be provided by professionals who are specialised in the protection of migrant and refugee children, with the help of interpreters who speak their mother-tongue;
 - ii. information leaflets should be used as a complementary means of communicating information already provided by professionals verbally;
 - iii. information should be given promptly and as an on-going process at each stage of the procedure, the child should be informed of what is happening to them, where they are being transferred and why they are undergoing a given procedure, the possible consequences of the procedure and what to expect;
 - iv. accurate peer-to-peer information provided on social media should be used to communicate with children who have arrived in Europe, it should be supported by professionals providing accurate information to young people who can spread it on social media;
 - v. children should be informed about the different roles of the relevant authorities.

COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION TO PREVENT VIOLENCE, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, RISK OF TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING

9. Lack of information about procedures and rights puts unaccompanied and separated children at heightened risk of disappearing and using smugglers to reach and move through Europe. Experts shared that less than half the children in Italy had considered the risks they'd face before leaving. This reality exposes far too many children to dangerous journeys, risks of trafficking, all forms of violence, including sexual violence and abuse at the hands of smugglers, authorities and other refugees/migrants, including peers, encountered on the journey. These children are also exposed to greater risks of early and forced marriage.
10. Experts stressed that lack of access to information was a serious protection gap for child victims of violence, including child victims of sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking. Experts emphasised that child victims of trafficking, abuse and exploitation are often not aware of their rights to protection or how to access help. It is therefore vital that information covers not only the rights and protections available to children but also how to access their rights.
11. Experts recalled that children are not aware of the differences between authorities that it is vital to inform children about the different roles of child-protection authorities, the police, legal advisers and other professionals who may come into contact with child victims, including during age assessment procedures.
12. Experts warned that insensitive methods to inform children at risk of becoming victims of sexual abuse or exploitation may result in their stigmatization and make them more vulnerable to victimisation, therefore professionals should be trained and sensitised to these risks. It is equally important to inform children about risks of sexual exploitation, rape, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases and risks posed by traffickers and smugglers. Information was identified as the key to unlocking access to the wider child-protection matrix. The importance of ensuring that all laws on protection against gender violence apply to girls and LGBTI children regardless of their migration status, including education and prevention activities, was also highlighted.
13. Examples of promising practices identified included:
 - ▶ information desks and Protection support hubs,
 - ▶ information sharing in reception centres,
 - ▶ use of leaflets and videos to communicate with children,
 - ▶ use of games to educate children about where to access help,
 - ▶ use of mobile child-friendly spaces,
 - ▶ visiting reception centres to inform children about child protection mechanisms.

INFORMING CHILDREN OF THEIR RIGHTS IN ASYLUM PROCEDURES IN A CHILD-FRIENDLY WAY

14. As soon as a child is registered as an asylum-seeker they should receive information about a whole host of rights: to a guardian, to information and to receive legal assistance, to special protection and assistance if they have been a victim of torture, to social protection and access to health and social services, not to be punished for illegal border crossings, to an effective remedy, to have their asylum claim considered on child specific grounds if relevant. However, access to these rights are limited by serious information gaps. The consequences of not providing the right information to children in a child-friendly way can result in asylum claims being rejected, missing time-limits, children not attending status determination interviews, misinformation, missing documentation. It is vital that States provide appropriate information in a child-friendly manner in order to simplify as far as possible the complex nature of asylum procedures.

15. Experts recalled during this session that greater awareness and sensitivity to child specific needs does not necessarily take more time and resources but that it is an obligation to inform children of their rights and the procedures affecting them in accordance with the principle of the best interests of the child. This obligation applies at all times and at all stages of the asylum procedure. Increasing sources of free legal advice and access to interpreters will improve access to procedures and address literacy or computer literacy problems faced by many children.

16. Unaccompanied and separated and accompanied children all have the right to information about their right to claim asylum and their rights during asylum procedures as well as the right to participate in these procedures. In the context of asylum, children not only need to clearly understand their rights, the different procedures and actors involved but they also need professional advice about how to exercise their rights and the likely timeline and outcomes of any procedure engaged (including asylum claims, "Dublin procedures", family reunification procedures and relocation procedures). Access to procedures may be further hampered by physical barriers such as travel restrictions placed on the child within the host State children must be informed about ways to overcome these barriers to access their rights.

17. Children, in particular girls, may have difficulty communicating, including understanding information and giving information about their international protection needs, with authorities via an interpreter from their culture of origin. This may be due to lack of trust towards interpreters from their country of origin and misunderstanding about the interpreter's role or the confidentiality of the information given.

18. Good practices identified included:

- ▶ the use in Italy of videos to inform children about access to international protection,
- ▶ co-ordination between NGOs, authorities and other stakeholders in hotspots and reception centres,
- ▶ peer to peer information and intercultural mediation including in the child's mother tongue.

COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT ACCESS TO LEGAL ROUTES TO AND THROUGH EUROPE

19. Separated and unaccompanied children may not stop their journey in the first Council of Europe State they reach. Child appropriate and age appropriate information needs to be provided if possible before the child leaves their country of origin and then along the entire journey by a wide range of actors. Experts explored child-friendly information in the context of legal routes to and through Europe particularly regarding family reunification, family reunion, relocation, resettlement, including vulnerable persons resettlement schemes, sponsorship, Dubs transfers and Dublin transfers.

20. During this session the following points were raised: children need information about legal routes, but so too do their parents and guardians, in the host country and the country of origin. Giving accurate and consistent information to the child and the diaspora will increase the trust the child places in the legal route being proposed and may counter the misinformation circulating along migration routes. Information must be accurate and the legal routes need to be efficient so that the child will choose to take a legal route over irregular routes.

21. Information provided in hotspots is important and continuity of information, including consistency of information as children are transferred to reception centres improves the viability of the information in the view of the child. Cultural mediators are a good way of communicating with children at disembarkation points, in hotspots and in reception centres as they wait for relocation procedures and other legal routes to move through Europe.

22. Creating a relationship of trust between the child and the authorities reduces the number of children going missing or putting themselves at risk by absconding and improves access to child protection services for children who are in procedures such as relocation and family reunification. At the same time children ask for realistic information about safe and legal routes including the time-frames and likely outcomes of procedures, irregular routes are often perceived as more effective than legal routes that are not efficiently utilised by States. Children sometimes declare that they are adults because they misunderstand the procedures and believe that if they are registered as children this will “interrupt” their journey.

23. Good practices shared include:

- ▶ information leaflets and posters in a uniform format used across 5 States along the “Balkans route” with information adapted to each State,
- ▶ use of cultural mediators to communicate with children in Pozzallo Hotspot,
- ▶ informing children of their rights under Dublin III and family reunification procedures in countries of origin and European States.

CHILD-FRIENDLY INFORMATION IN HOST STATES

24. Once they have arrived in the host State, refugee and migrant children are still in need of accurate child-friendly information to ensure proper access to their rights and procedures. At this stage of their journey, children need information about guardianship, age assessment procedures and access to education, health and social services. It is also important for the child to understand the durable solutions for integration available. Child-friendly information may be communicated by many different professionals and stakeholders through a range of methods.

25. During the discussions experts reported that children want to have a realistic idea about procedures in host States, including “painful” procedures such as the possibility of forced return, children also wanted to understand what was happening to them during any given procedure. Children require information to help them manage their expectations including realistic waiting times, life in the arrival country and prospects in the long term.

26. Comprehensive information about rights, access to services and access to complaints mechanisms is needed in a wide variety of formats and in a viable format that the child can trust more than they trust the information given by members of their community or by smugglers.

27. Children want to be informed about their rights as children but also their future, what rights they will have once they reach the age of majority and how their access to rights will change once they are adults.

28. Authorities and professionals working with children in host societies need to take their views into account and ensure that the child can participate in the procedures affecting them. Guardians are a contact point for children to obtain information and to be able to participate in the procedures affecting them. Information communicated to children may be confused by relationships of hierarchy, culture, gender or collectivism.

29. Access to a stable residence status either as a refugee or through a residence permit were repeatedly highlighted as the key to safety and integration. Peer to peer support continues to be an important way for children to access rights and services in host States.

30. Good practices shared include:

- ▶ Ombudsman and NGO cooperation to visit children in many settings to inform them of their rights,
- ▶ individual interviews with specialised legal advisers to inform children of their rights,
- ▶ opening a dialogue with children in migration to ensure that guardians respond to their needs, and
- ▶ individual integration plans with concrete solutions adapted and implemented on the basis of the individual needs of the unaccompanied child.

RECOMMENDATIONS

31. The following recommendations were made in the course of the Roundtable:

A. Trust

- i. professionals should build a relationship of trust when communicating with children in migration, this should include informing the child of the existence and extent of any relationship of confidentiality between the child and the professional;
- ii. intercultural mediators may be helpful to reinforce trust and facilitate disclosure for the child.

B. Accurate and consistent information

- i. information should be accurate and consistent among professionals, the community and not change during a given procedure;
- ii. the family and community should also be informed so that it does not contradict the information given by authorities and professionals, children may rely on their community to help them understand information received;
- iii. information should cover rights, access to services, complaints mechanisms, helplines, social rights, access to school and health care, life after 18, duration of procedures and likely outcomes of procedures and information about the country where they are;
- iv. where a child is transferred between States, they should be informed about the transfer procedure and information sharing between States should take place in the best interests of the child, in accordance with data protection rules, to ensure the reception place prepared for the child on arrival is gender, age and culture appropriate.

C. Information not just on rights but also on reality

- i. Information about the risks and dangers present on the routes to Europe and the legal routes to Europe should be available to children in their country of origin to prevent and protect them from becoming victims of trafficking and violence on the journey to Europe;
- ii. information should be accurate and reflect realities, including difficulties they may encounter in Europe, barriers in access to rights and effective remedies available;
- iii. information should be combined with advice about the likely prospects of any given procedure and the consequences of a procedure to ensure that the child understands the procedure, the likely duration, the evidence required and the possible outcomes of the procedure.

D. Two-way communication/ participation

- i. the authorities and professionals communicating with children should always ensure that the child understands the language spoken by the interpreter, the role of the interpreter and that confidentiality will be respected by the interpreter and the authority/professional;
- ii. information should be given in the context of an exchange with the child, the professional informing the child should always ensure they follow-up on any disclosure made by a child of sexual abuse and or exploitation, protection needs, or any other vulnerability identified during an interview;
- iii. professionals should pay attention to their body language, respond honestly to the child's questions and keep in mind that the child may interpret information through a culture or gender prism that is different to that of the professional.

E. Pay attention to the particularly vulnerable situation of girls, as well as other situations of vulnerability

- i. information materials should be adapted to gender in their content and distribution methods, taking into account the specific vulnerabilities of girls to trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation;
- ii. when using interpreters, special attention should be paid to children who may be afraid to disclose sensitive information, related to sexual abuse, sexual orientation and gender identity, or international protection needs via an interpreter from the same culture for fear of reprisals from the community;
- iii. information about the right to asylum must include gender specific protection needs and gender specific grounds for asylum claims, including the fact that girls children may apply for asylum as individuals, independently of their family unit if they have a specific international protection need.

F. Access to remedies

- i. information, including about where to find help if the child is victim of sexual abuse and exploitation, should be given to the child at appropriate times throughout their interaction with authorities;
- ii. such information should be given in a variety of formats not only written or only spoken;
- iii. professionals should co-ordinate to ensure children have access to effective remedies where they have been a victim of a violation of their rights.

G. Prompt information and on-going information

- i. children should receive key contact information including victim-support helplines as a matter of urgency and also as an on-going process;
- ii. children should also receive more detailed information at each stage of any procedure they undergo.

H. Information support materials and tools

- i. child-friendly materials should be developed with the participation of children, using gender and culture neutral images, bright colours and spoken words in the mother tongue of the child;
- ii. materials such as leaflets should be used to complement information communicated in an interview with the child and should contain practical details including contact information where the child may seek more information, help and support;
- iii. information should be given in a trustworthy format using simple language, a combination of printed material, internet and mobile phone platforms, individual interviews, group question and answer sessions and peer to peer education, professionals may have to give information repeatedly;
- iv. vocabulary and methods used to communicate must be adapted to the child's individual needs, taking into account their individual vulnerabilities, including their gender, culture, age, if they have been victims of sexual or gender based violence and also the child's individual desire for their integration pathway/ life project.

The findings and recommendations made during this roundtable will serve as the basis for drafting a handbook for professionals on promoting child-friendly information for children in migration on access to rights and procedures. The handbook will be illustrated with examples of good and promising practices to empower States to provide child-friendly and appropriate information to children on the move in Europe.

www.coe.int

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.