

Written Input:

**OHCHR Report on the implementation of human rights with regards to young people–
Human Rights Council Resolution 35/14**

Executive Summary

This submission outlines the results of the Refugee Rights Data Project's (RRDP) independent research on the situation for young people in displacement across various research locations in Europe throughout 2017. The submission provides evidence on the main challenges faced by young people in displacement in the realisation of their human rights. We will cover the following topics:

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1. About RRDP

- 1.1.** The Refugee Rights Data Project is a human rights organisation and registered UK charity founded in late 2015 in response to the humanitarian crisis experienced by refugees and displaced people in Europe. The organisation is run by professionals from a range of different sectors, and its advisory group and board of trustees include academics and researchers, human rights specialists, media and communications experts, asylum workers, NGO managers, refugees, policy analysts and students.
- 1.2.** The organisation is independent of any political ideology, economic interest or religion. We believe in the indivisibility of human rights and are united by our aim to defend the rights of some of the world's most vulnerable individuals.

2. Objectives

- 2.1.** The objective of the current research is to provide information relating to the lived experiences of young refugees in Europe. This data will help policy-makers better understand the situation facing young people in Europe in order to uphold the human rights of those in displacement.

3. Background information

- 3.1.** The submission is based on our findings from research carried out in France (Calais and Paris), Greece (Chios) and Italy (Ventimiglia) in 2017.
- 3.2.** Research in Calais, France was carried out between 19-22 October 2017. The study is based on a survey of 233 individuals in their native language, approximately 33% of the estimated 700 refugees and displaced people thought to be residing in the Calais area.

- 3.3.** Research in Ventimiglia, on the French-Italian border, was carried out between 21-24 August 2017. The data is based on 150 surveys conducted in Amharic, Arabic, English, Persian and Tigrinya. Based on the estimated population in Ventimiglia at the time of the study, our research sample represents approximately 20% of the refugee population in the town.
- 3.4.** Research in Chios, Greece was carried out between 11-18 May 2017. RRDП’s researchers, alongside two researchers from our partner organisation, conducted 300 surveys in Arabic, Dari, English, Kurdish and Pashto. Interviews were semi-structured. Based on the estimated population in Chios at the time of the study, our research sample represents between 8-13% of the refugee population on the Island.
- 3.5.** Research in Paris, France was carried out between 18-22 January 2017, conducting 342 surveys in the city’s La Chapelle district in Amharic, Arabic, Dari, English and Kurdish.
- 3.6.** The research findings presented in this report are largely based on responses from displaced youth, with the majority of respondents under 26 years old. The report also details data related to minors only (17 years and under), made up of age-disaggregated data from each of our research studies described above, unless otherwise specified.

4. Age Group

- 4.1.** While our research was open to refugees and displaced people of all ages, the body of respondents in each research location was composed of a large majority of young people, making our research findings of high relevance to the OHCHR Report on the implementation of human rights with regards to young people.
- 4.2.** In Calais, 40.7% of the respondents said they were minors (17 and under), with the youngest respondent being as young as 12 years old. 41.9% were aged between 18 and 25. 14.3% were aged between 26 and 35.
- 4.3.** In Ventimiglia, Italy, the largest group represented in our sample was 18 to 25 year-olds (63.9%). The average age of respondents was 22 years, while a whole 17.4% of respondents were minors. All of the respondents were male, as the small number of women and girls thought to be in Ventimiglia at the time of the study were difficult to reach, with fears that many young women and girls are at increased risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking.
- 4.4.** In Chios, Greece, 47% of respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years old. The average age was 27.2 years old, while 10% of respondents were minors.
- 4.5.** In Paris, 68.1% of respondents were aged 25 or under – 15.2% were under 18 and 52.9% were aged between 18 and 25.

5. Length of time spent in displacement

- 5.1.** In Calais, 64% of respondents had been in Europe for six months to more than two years. 29.1% had been in France for six months or longer.
- 5.2.** In Ventimiglia, 73.1% of respondents had been in Ventimiglia for one to three months. 89% were there alone, unaccompanied by friends or family.
- 5.3.** The average time the minors we spoke to had spent in Chios was 2.1 months.
- 5.4.** In Paris, most individuals surveyed told us they had been living in Paris for up to eight months.

6. Experience of violence and mistreatment

- 6.1.** In Calais, 91.8% of respondents had experienced police violence. Of these respondents, 50.5% said that the violence had taken the form of physical violence while 23.1% described

it as verbal abuse and 90.1% tear gas or pepper spray. Among minors, this figure was even higher, with 93.6% having experienced some form of police violence. 40.4% of respondents had experienced citizen violence, including both verbal and physical abuse.

- 6.2.** In Ventimiglia, 40.4% of respondents had experienced police violence by Italian Police, while a larger proportion, 53.1%, had experienced violence by French police at the border. 39.5% of these had been subject to physical violence. Some 73.8% had been arrested since arriving in Europe and reported that they were often released several hours walk away from Ventimiglia. 52.8% of respondents had experienced violence by Italian citizens. Of those, 91.8% said they had been subject to verbal abuse, with many citing that they were often subject to racial verbal abuse.
- 6.3.** During our research in Chios, Greece, 24% reported that they had experienced police violence in Chios, 78.9% of these said they had been subject to verbal abuse and 73.2% physical violence. 21.7% of respondents had experienced violence by Greek citizens in Chios. A whole 39% of respondents had witnessed someone die in Chios, with 87% citing suicide as the reason for the death. We found that 13.3% of minors had experienced police violence on the island. 13.8% had experienced citizen violence and 23.3% violence from other refugees.
- 6.4.** Of those surveyed in Paris, 59.6% told us they had been asked to move by police from where they were sleeping. Some 53.9% described this incident as 'violent'. 30.4% of respondents had experienced tear gas one to four times since they arrived in the city. In total, 36.5% had experienced other forms of police violence – 16.1% physical violence, 20.2% verbal abuse and 0.29% sexual violence – while 9.1% had experienced violence by citizens. Of the minors surveyed in Paris, 50% had been asked by police to move from where they were sleeping, without being given a secure alternative. 57.7% described this incident as 'violent' and had been 'scared' when it happened. 30.8% of minors reported having some of their belongings taken including sleeping bags, mobile phones and clothes.

7. Health and safety

- 7.1.** In Calais, 90.4% of respondents said they 'didn't feel safe' or 'didn't feel safe at all'. This figure was higher among minors (94.6%). 52% of respondents reported having experienced health problems in France, 55.9% believed that their health concern was as a result of the unhealthy living environment, while 36.4% said it had been brought on by tear gas or other forms of police violence. In addition, a whole 21.2% of those with health issues self-declared that these issues were mental health issues rather than a physical ailment.
- 7.2.** In Ventimiglia, 71% of respondents surveyed said that they 'didn't feel safe at all'. When asked about the biggest risks faced by people passing through Ventimiglia, 74.8% cited dangers related to border-crossings, followed by 63% citing the risk of not getting enough food or water. 82.1% of respondents reported that they do not have enough water to drink, while 58.6% said they do not have access to food every day. Alarming, 42.9% of respondents knew of at least one refugee who had died in Italy or at the French border. 70% said the person in question had died by falling down a cliff or mountain. Some 60.1% said that they had experienced health problems since arriving in Italy, with 17.1% describing their health problem as a mental health issue rather than a physical ailment.
- 7.3.** In Chios, Greece, 85.3% of respondents said they 'never feel safe' or 'don't feel very safe' (73.3% of minors). Living conditions were generally unsanitary and dirty, while 71.3% said they had experienced health problems since arriving on the island. Worryingly, 31% described their health problems as a mental health issue. 71.5% of respondents reported that they had

been unable to access medical care in Chios. 36.7% of minors had experienced health problems in Chios, while only 18.2% had been able to access medical care.

- 7.4. In Paris, 53.3% reported a current health problem, while many stated that they were unable to access adequate medical care. 11.7% of respondents had heard about another refugee dying in Paris, with 45% reporting that the death occurred due to the cold conditions experienced when sleeping on the streets. 42.2% of the minors we surveyed in Paris reported that they were experiencing health problems – again largely due to the cold weather conditions.

8. Access to education and information

- 8.1. In Calais, 84.7% of respondents were lacking access to information about their rights and opportunities to change their current situation. 82.4% of minors said they did not have access to this information. 88.5% of respondents said they did not have access to information about European immigration and asylum rules.
- 8.2. During RRDP's research in Ventimiglia, Italy, 92.1% of respondents reported that they did not have access to information about their rights and opportunities to change their situation, while only 13.1% had access to information about European asylum law and immigration rules.
- 8.3. 67% of the respondents we spoke to in Chios did not have access to any form of education in Chios, while 86% said they did not have access to information about their rights and opportunities. 78.3% did not have access to information about European asylum law and immigration rules. Of the minors we spoke to in Chios, Greece, only 16.7% had access to information about their rights and opportunities, while just 20% had access to information about European asylum law and immigration rules.
- 8.4. Our research conducted in Paris revealed an alarming absence of asylum information for displaced people on the streets, which reportedly left many respondents feeling 'confused'. One 16-year old boy said he had applied for reunification with his family in the UK where he has two sisters and two brothers but had not had a response and was feeling very confused.

9. Conclusion: A summary of the biggest risks and concerns

- a. These research findings shine a light on the extent of the challenges faced by displaced minors and young people in Europe and identify several cases of discrimination against young people in the exercise of their human rights, including lack of access to education and information, the experience of violence and inadequate living conditions.
- b. **Health and safety:** Across research locations, our reports highlight a lack of health and safety for young people in displacement, with many telling researchers they 'never feel safe' and reporting untreated health conditions. These appear to be a result of the largely inadequate living conditions across the locations we visited, although this is especially pronounced in Paris and Calais where many young people are destitute on the streets or hiding away from police in surrounding forest. In Chios, Greece, our research showed an alarming number of minors and young people reporting mental health issues, coupled with various safety concerns.
- c. **The absence of information and support:** The research highlights the lack of information and support for refugee youth, including access to family reunion processes and other legal mechanisms. Due to the alarming lack of protection and tracking mechanisms in place, minors and young people are exposed to heightened risks of sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking.

- d. **Violence:** Respondents in Calais and Paris in France, as well as in Chios, Greece and Ventimiglia, Italy, reported chronic police violence, including tear gas and beatings. These young people also faced citizen violence which included both verbal and physical violence.
- e. **Sample testimonies:** A few examples of what the respondents told us about the situation for young people in displacement across research locations:
 - *“There is nothing I haven’t experience with regards to police violence...There are no human rights here”* 19-year-old Eritrean youth, Calais, 2017.
 - *“The police beat me with a baton and they hit my legs to make us get down the mountain. Then they put me in jail for 24 hours without food, water or medical attention”* 14-year-old Sudanese boy, Ventimiglia, 2017.
 - *“I got rejected and they say they will deport me. But even to get deported I need to wait for another 3 months. I’m so sick and tired of waiting. I’m considering of killing myself instead.”* Afghan male youth, Chios, 2017.
 - *“I live in a [state sponsored accommodation] but it is very dirty. I share the room with three other people but we are all getting allergies and itchiness because of the dirt”* Sudanese male youth, Paris, 2017.

10. Recommendations

- a. Based on these research findings, it is evident that more needs to be done to ensure that the human rights of young people in displacement are upheld in Europe.
- b. In order to address the situation in northern France and Paris, there is an urgent need to provide more humane standards and protection systems. The severity of the situation means that medical staff, social workers and legal experts are urgently needed; rather than the current state response centred around violent actions by special police forces. To resolve the situation and ensure these vulnerable young people are protected, more decisive action could also be taken by the British government. A large number of the respondents in our research reported that they have family in the UK, suggesting they may be eligible for reunification under the Dublin Regulation. Moreover, it is also clear that many vulnerable minors on the streets in Calais and Paris could be granted protection in the UK under the ‘Dubs’ scheme. The small numbers of transfers allowed under the ‘Dubs’ scheme is particularly worrying in light of the violence faced by minors in and around Calais and Paris.
- c. Similarly, more should be done to uphold the human rights of displaced young people at the French-Italian border town of Ventimiglia. Increased resources and services need to be allocated to ensure that the standards at this transit point are urgently improved, while both the French and Italian Governments must take immediate action to address reports of violence, detentions and push-backs at the border. Unaccompanied minors, in particular, are in need of a protection framework and further investigation into sex trafficking of young women and girls must be immediately prioritised.
- d. The situation in Chios, Greece is a situation at breaking point with young people likely to suffer from the lack of education opportunities, humane living conditions, and legal support. Accelerated transfers of vulnerable minors and young people in displacement from the islands to mainland Greece and a strengthened system for processing asylum applications for minors are of utmost importance.
- e. Overall, effective and long-lasting policy action by national and European Union decision makers is urgently needed to secure the human rights of displaced young people in Europe. Human rights must be at the centre of any policy initiatives to ensure that young people are

given the protection and opportunity expected by international standards. Such high-level engagement will help to successfully unlock the situation in which young people are currently trapped, facing sub-par humanitarian standards and daily violations of their human rights.