

Developing Monitoring Mechanisms for Returned Minors



Each year thousands of children are sent back from the EU to countries from which they fled, alone or together with their families. Some may go back to safe havens, but for the most part we don't know if they return to places where they are able to continue their development.

Yet, all EU-countries have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), requiring that states act in the best interest of the child. By signing this agreement, they attest "that every child has the right to grow up and to develop physically and spiritually in a healthy and normal way, free and with dignity."

So when children are sent back to their home countries, we need to know if they are ok!

Need for Evaluation

In reality, returnees are rarely monitored and there is limited contact between countries of origin and countries of destination. This makes it difficult for host countries to make well-informed decisions regarding return.

The Best Interest of the Child

For children this is even more pressing, because the best interest of the child has to be taken into account in all decision-making. Research in Kosovo indicates that returned minors do face problems. Recent reports by UNICEF and the Kosovo Health Foundation (March 2012) and by ECRE and Save the Children (December 2011) have called for monitoring mechanisms that incorporate the best interest of the child.

To know the impact of return policies and to make them CRC-proof, there is a need to monitor returned children more systematically.

Monitoring Returned Minors

The Monitoring Returned Minors (MRM) research project develops a monitoring instrument that contributes to more sustainable and safer return of minors. The project was initiated by HIT Foundation, on behalf of the European Commission, and started in November 2012. MRM is executed in close collaboration with Nidos, Micado Migration, the University of Groningen and local researchers. The outcomes will be presented in the European Parliament in February 2014.

HOW DO WE KNOW THEY ARE OK?

MRM aims to answer the following questions:

How = Which method(s) can we use to find out? Fact finding, face-to-face interviews, self-assessments, other?

we = Who wants to know? Politicians, policymakers, return organisations, national governments, EU, UNHCR?

know = How do we measure OK? What are objective indicators for each criterion in each situation?

they = Who is the target group? What is their age, ethnicity, rural or urban environment, how long were they abroad, etc.

OK? = Which criteria do we apply? Are they the same in each country or situation?

Project Goals

The MRM research project:

- **develops and tests an online monitoring tool that can identify whether an individual case of return has been in the best interest of the child; the tool can be used to set up similar structures in other countries;**
- **experiments with offering basic support to correct the situation in case monitoring reveals shortcomings during the project;**
- **advises on standards to be used to increase structural learning and make better-informed decisions in future return cases in the best interest of the child coming from EU member states.**

Practice

The MRM research project is interviewing 150 minors that have returned to Kosovo & Albania after 2010 and that have been back for at least one year. It includes both unaccompanied and accompanied minors; Albanians and Roma; children up to 14 as well as adolescents between 15 and 18. They returned from several European countries, including Germany, France, Sweden and the Netherlands.

The questionnaires are based on a set of 14 criteria developed by the University of Groningen (Kalverboer & Zijlstra, 2006). They developed the Best Interest of the Child Questionnaire (BIC-Q) and the Best Interest of the Child Self assessment (BIC-S) to monitor the development of children in the asylum procedure in the Netherlands.

MRM researches in practice what is needed to apply the questionnaire once minors have returned. It looks specifically at how the child is doing in relation to its peers in the home country.

Partners

- **HIT Foundation** develops innovative solutions to tackle complex challenges at the crossroads of labour and migration. Through action research and practical experiments, HIT provides new input to advance policy and practice in the Netherlands and across borders. www.hitfoundation.eu
- **Nidos** is the independent guardianship and (family) supervision agency in the Netherlands. Nidos carries out the guardianship task for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, pursuant to the law. www.nidos.nl
- **Micado Migration** is a German consultancy specialized in migration and its consequences, both in countries of origin and in destination countries. www.micado-migration.de

THE BIC-Q CRITERIA

Family

1. Adequate physical health
2. Safe direct physical environment
3. Affective atmosphere
4. Supportive, flexible childrearing structure
5. Adequate examples by parents
6. Interest
7. Continuity in upbringing conditions, future perspective

Society

1. Safe wider physical environment
2. Respect
3. Social network
4. Education
5. Contact with peers
6. Adequate examples in society
7. Stability in life circumstances, future perspective

More Info?

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