



When
Children Who
Have Fled Tell
Their Stories

ARRIVED IN GERMANY

A Study by World Vision Deutschland and the Hoffnungsträger Foundation



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Christoph Waffenschmidt
CEO "World Vision Deutschland"

No one leaves their home, family, parents, siblings or friends voluntarily if they are not forced to do so. People flee because they can no longer bear the terror of bombing, torture, death and the atrocities of war; because they are discriminated against and oppressed; because they are being politically persecuted or because they live in economic and social misery or can no longer cope with the climatic conditions.

The hopelessness and desperation of the many people who leave their homes behind and embark on a dangerous flight to attain better prospects for the future for themselves and their families start in their countries of origin. But the situation is also extremely difficult in the receiving countries, such as Jordan, Turkey or Lebanon. The life situations of most people who have fled are characterised by a serious lack of prospects.

Those who suffer most from hunger, poverty and persecution are the weakest in our world society: the children. As an international children's charity, we are committed to the well-being of the most vulnerable. Children on the run need special help and support; they need security and hope for the future when they arrive in a new country. With this study, we are staying true to our aspiration that we also pursue in the World Vision Children's studies: we want to give children a voice. Accompanied minors who have fled also need representation; we all want to stand up to ensure that their concerns are heard. That is why children who have fled were questioned for this study. In cooperation with effective partners, we have presented the children's perspectives in detail. The hopes, wishes and dreams of these children outlined in the study should point the political decision-makers at regional and national level in the right direction and should help them to ensure that future decisions are taken in the interests and for the good of the children.

Thank you for your interest. Enjoy reading our study!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chr. Waffenschmidt".





Marcus Witzke

Director of "Hoffnungsträger Stiftung" Foundation

"Strangers become friends." These three words describe what we at the "Hoffnungsträger Stiftung" aspire to for those people who have fled to Germany from war and terrorism in their home countries and are seeking a permanent abode. With our work, we are helping this heartfelt desire to become reality. We use innovative ideas to support the integration of displaced people in Germany. The central element of this is integrated living, with locals and people who have fled under one roof, with learning and play opportunities for children, offers for language learning, training and employment for adults. Our activities for people who have fled are based on a broad local network of voluntary commitment.

There were 250,000 children among the people on the run who came to Germany last year. They are especially vulnerable and in need of protection and require particular help. Against this background, it is very important for us to know as much as possible about them. What fates have they suffered? What are their needs? What are their aspirations? How do they see their futures? In what sort of society do they want to live? This study asked these questions and provides answers. These answers offer important foundations for specific actions. This is essential if the integration of so many young people is to succeed. There is something unique in each of the children who have fled. We must discover and nurture these individual talents. Every child is a new hope.

We hope that as a result of this study, the focus will move to children who had to leave their homes with their families and to their individual needs. Furthermore, the study should lead to tangible improvements for the children so that they can develop their prospects for themselves and for the benefit of society as a whole.



Stefanie Graf

Founder and CEO of "Children for Tomorrow"

Since 1998, I have been committed to the psychological healing of refugee children through my foundation "Children for Tomorrow". The fates of these young refugees move me in a very special way. They are fleeing Syria, Afghanistan or the Balkan countries. They are fleeing bombs and the severest poverty and have been traumatised by the war in their home countries and their escape, often lasting months. However, their mental scars are mostly not visible at first sight and are then, unfortunately, often overlooked.

The therapists from "Children for Tomorrow" enable these children to work through their traumas by offering them various forms of therapy. During my regular visits to our Foundation House on the site of Hamburg-Eppendorf University Hospital, I speak to children who have experienced terrible things. When they talk about their flight, I am devastated because it is barely conceivable how they continue to live with these memories. But I also see many positive developments in them and observe how they gain trust and confidence over time.

In the last few months, more refugees have arrived in Germany than for many decades. At least one third of the people coming to Germany are children, many of whom need therapeutic help while finding their feet in a new country. For this reason, "Children for Tomorrow" was happy to support the "World Vision Institute" and "Hoffnungsträger Stiftung" in conducting their study "Arrived in Germany". The various portraits in this study evoke memories of encounters that I have had myself with children who have fled their homes in my work at the foundation.

Thanks to the academics involved, we will hopefully be able to use this study to draw attention to the problems and needs of these children and to give them back hope for a healthy and peaceful future.

Listening to Children with Experiences of Displacement

Thoughts of children seeking protection and their perspectives on the past, present and future

Children have a “right to today”. Janusz Korczak made this demand after the First World War, in which many children died or were made orphans or refugees. It is still highly appropriate today. Children are the victims of violence and war, of hunger and marginalisation, of discrimination and destroyed schools, of expulsion and flight. It is families with children seeking refuge and hoping for a better life that set out for Germany.

→ **But too little attention is paid to children, their experiences, their fears and hopes, their potential and their rights, when the focus here in Germany is on meeting the challenges of the major refugee movements of the present day.**

For this study, we listened to children who had fled with their families. We made a very conscious decision to focus on accompanied minors who have been displaced, because they go through the standard asylum system with their parent/guardian, which is why they often remain “invisible” as regards their own needs and their specific situation. We gave accompanied children who had fled a space where they could tell their stories and asked them to talk about their memories of their countries of origin, their experiences during their journey and on arrival in Germany, and their lives here, their concerns, but also their hopes and desires. The children presented here come from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Kosovo, Serbia and Syria. They therefore represent the countries from which people have set out on the always difficult, often life-threatening journey to Germany. And they represent the diversity of experiences of flight and arrival.

Those responsible for this study come from various academic disciplines and areas of work. This was important to us in order to focus on the complexity of being a child and a child’s everyday life under the conditions experienced while on the run. Our aim is to raise awareness of the specific viewpoint of children and their needs among those responsible for looking after and integrating people who have fled: in politics at local, federal state and national level, in medical, social and educational services, and in civil society.

In view of the vulnerability of children, many challenges are regarded in a different light from previously, for example concerning the organisation of initial reception centres, education and care provisions, medical care, protected spaces and privacy. We want to encourage you to see these spaces, the bureaucratic procedures and coping with everyday life through the eyes of a child.

→ **No matter where children live – adults must ensure that everything is done in line with their “right to today”. With this in mind, children must be able to satisfy their needs, with an immediate right to well-being. This has been an undisputed humanitarian maxim of civil society since the formulation of children’s rights in the face of the cruelty of war, flight and expulsion.**



The Reason for the Study and an Introduction to the Subject Matter

Giving Children Who Have Fled a Space Where They Can Tell Their Stories

The Global, European and National Situation

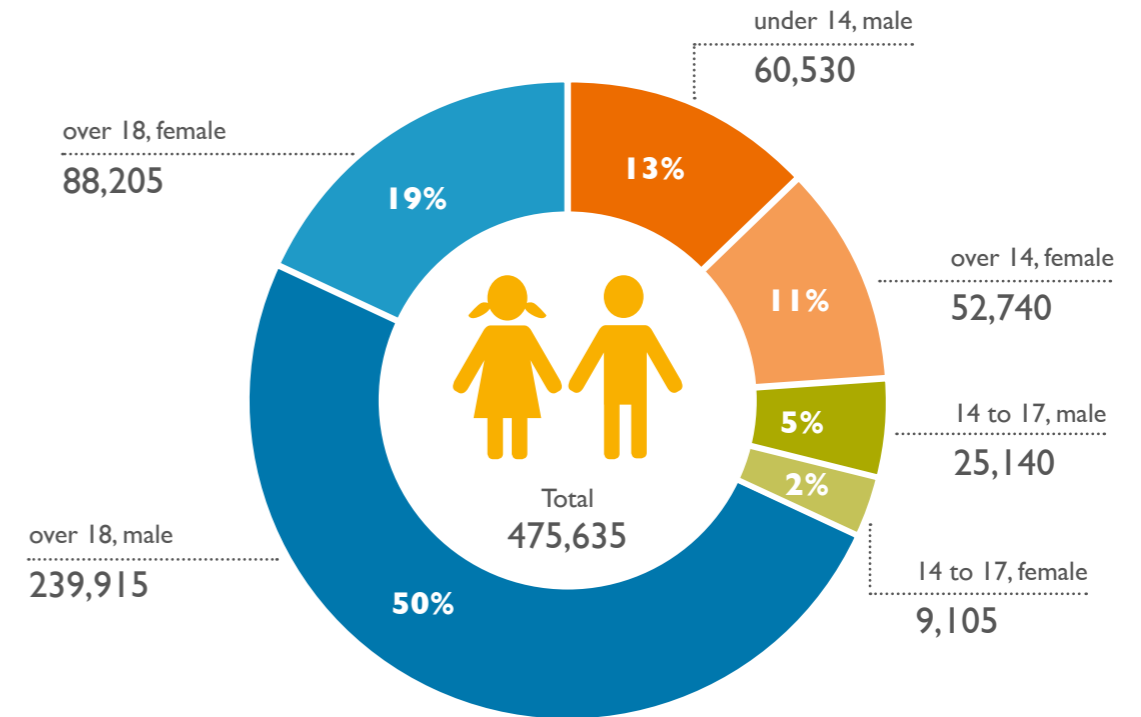
The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees' record of asylum applications made in Germany in 2015 shows a 150% rise over the previous year. Given this urgent need, we decided to use this study to focus on children who have fled their home countries with their parents for various reasons and come to Germany. Migration is not a new phenomenon, and can have very different triggers and causes. The graphs on the right illustrate the situation of people on the run from a European and German perspective.

→ It must be stressed, however, that due to the great flexibility and dynamism of the phenomenon of mass movement, it is very difficult to cite exact figures about people on the run. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, UNHCR, points out that the figures change on a daily basis. Getting accurate numbers is, therefore, a challenge.

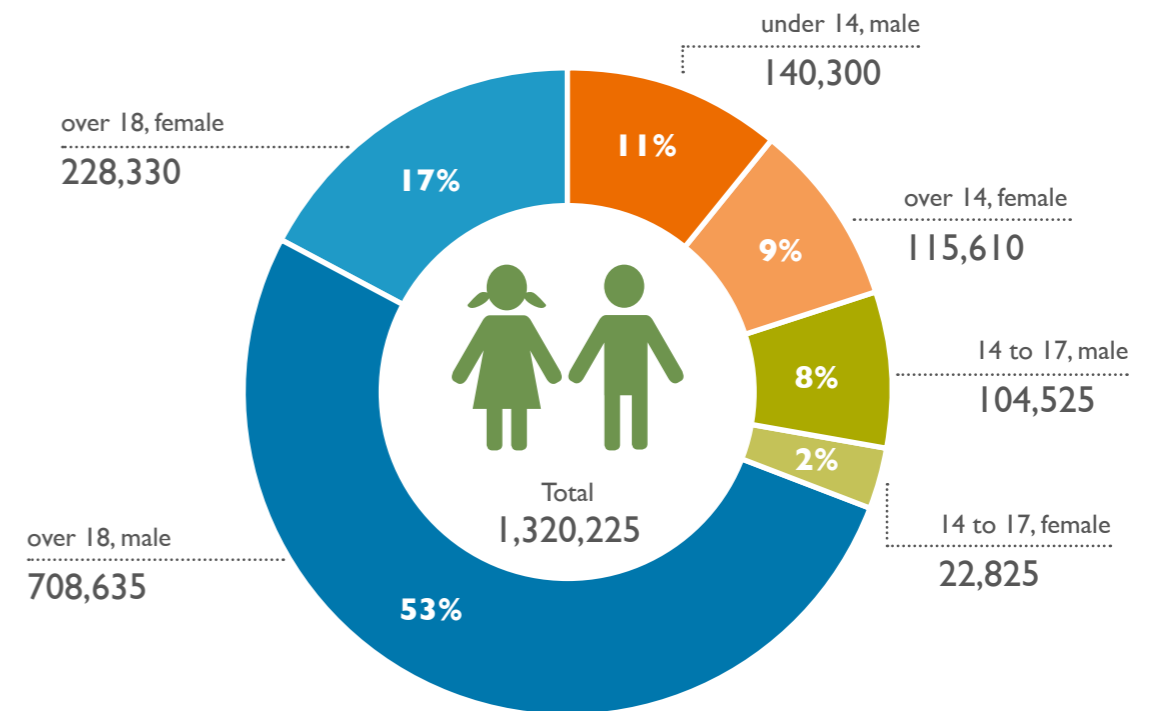
Added to this is the large discrepancy between the number of asylum applications made in Europe and Germany and the number of people actually fleeing who are in Germany but have not yet applied for asylum. The Federal Ministry of the Interior states: "The number of actual entries of asylum-seekers in Germany was much higher in November 2015 because it is sometimes possible to delay formal applications for asylum."¹ UNICEF estimates that about a quarter of a million children and adolescents are seeking protection against war, persecution and need in Germany.²

The UNHCR noted that the worldwide number of people on the run was above 20 million for the first time since 1992; added to this are around 34 million internally displaced persons, who are fleeing danger within their country. The UN assumes that around half of all people on the run in the world are under 18 years of age, so can be termed children in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.³

Asylum Applications in Germany in 2015^{4*}



Asylum Applications in the EU 28 Countries in 2015^{4*}



*Percentages have been rounded; as a result, there may be minor deviations in the total.



The Right to Asylum

Just under one third of the people who applied for asylum in Germany in 2015 were minors.⁴ They were children with their families and unaccompanied adolescents who are reliant on protection, care, respect for their dignity and integrity and integration for the purposes of participating in the processes of society, and who come here with the hope of a peaceful and free life. Behind every individual or family who has made their way to Germany there is an individual story against the backdrop of their belonging, religion, ownership and context of the country from which they had to flee.

Two maxims are key for children who have fled and come to Germany. The first is the human right to asylum: "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution" (Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Since 2010, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has also applied without reservation as a second maxim to minors in Germany. This proclaims "appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights" (Article 22). According to this, the best interests of the child are a primary consideration for all actions of a state (Article 3). To exercise these rights, however, children and their families must first of all reach a safe place. But, for people from crisis areas, the means to access them are very difficult and can be achieved only by circuitous routes. Children

in particular suffer as a result of the long, dangerous and difficult journeys. Families are often separated. But who is granted asylum in the end, and what does it mean to seek asylum in Germany as a child with your family?

According to the Geneva Convention on Refugees, the international law and humanitarian basis for the granting of asylum is the existence of political persecution. According to this, belonging to a specific social group can be a reason for persecution. Families often leave their country for the benefit of their children (cf. Krappmann 2014⁵). The European Directive laying down the standards for the reception of applicants for international protection also names minors as a group in need of protection, whose well-being must be respected and who should have competent representatives at their side during the process. But in Germany, a child's specific reasons for flight are practically ignored in the asylum process.

In Germany, the right to asylum of people suffering political persecution has constitutional status in the form of Article 16a. Whether someone is recognised as being politically persecuted depends on which group people belong to, from which region or country they come or what means of protection are available there, the extent to which their reason for flight can be subsumed in the legislation, which route they took and how they can represent their story. But in particular, it depends on

the legal situation and the processes that apply in the receiving country. The latter is a central aspect if we look, for example, at the political and legal definition of "safe countries of origin" and the associated evaluations in Germany. Just as relevant in central Europe, following the "Dublin III Regulation", is access to the European asylum system via other member states. In this case, Germany declares itself to be not responsible for the asylum claim. In the autumn of 2015, this regulation was set aside in the Federal Republic of Germany only for people fleeing Syria and blanket use was made of the sovereignty clause.

To ensure the well-being of children, in Germany all children are actually entitled to assistance according to Social Code Book VIII. But children's and youth welfare services mostly only consider unaccompanied minors who have fled and are in Germany without parents or guardians. The lives of children accompanied by their families are much more shaped by residency and asylum law and, under the Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act, they receive benefits below the German minimum subsistence level. Children who travel with a close family network find themselves in the middle of this often confusing legal situation. The well-being of children and the consequences for them are mostly overlooked in the rapid legal changes.

Our View of Children Who Have Fled

It is always the individual stories, experiences, motivations and hopes that play a central role in people's flight. However, by calling people refugees there is a great risk of addressing the issue in a one-sided way. People who have fled always bring resources, strengths and skills with them and recognising and respecting them contribute to integrity. People who have fled should not, therefore, be seen purely as victims. This is also reflected in the name: with the word "refugee", a person is reduced to his story, his skills and strengths to the status of a person who has fled. In our study, therefore, we talk about children who have fled, whose perspectives on what they have experienced must be collected and understood. In our opinion, this perspective is necessary to raise people's awareness of their unique lives, hopes and stories in contrast to the perception of a "mass" flight to Europe.

→ The word "refugee" reduces a person and his story, abilities and strengths to his status as a person who has fled. The -ee ending in "refugee" is associated with weakness and passivity. We have therefore decided not to use the term "refugee children" and refer to the children and their families as people who have fled.



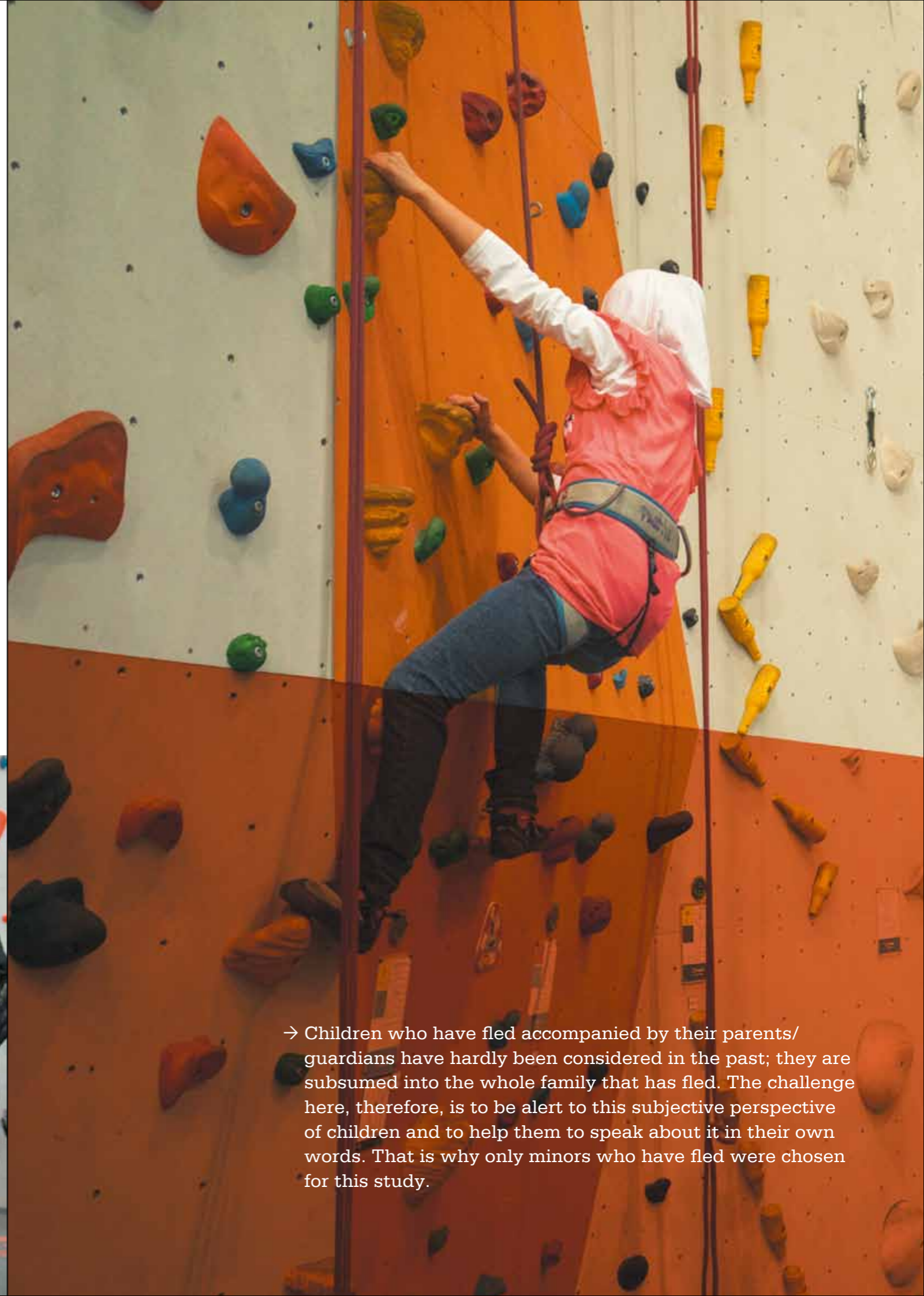
Making national, ethnic or religious affiliation subjects that can be disregarded is something that particularly affects children. They usually have even fewer means of intervention than adults and can barely discuss those individual reasons and, in spite of the recognition of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, they are often deprived of the rights to which they are entitled. This means that the fading out of individual stories affects the next generation to a particular degree. Accompanied children who have fled have hardly been considered in the past; they are subsumed into the whole family that has taken flight, although they are by far the majority of minors who have fled. The UNICEF study “*In erster Linie Kinder*” [Children First of All] rightly points out that far too little attention and consideration is given to the perspectives of children in asylum procedures.⁷ Accompanied and unaccompanied minors who have fled are especially vulnerable because of the social conditions of war, hunger, flight and the unpredictability of routes and channels; they are thus in particularly great need of protection. The challenge here, therefore, is to be alert to this subjective perspective of children and to help them to speak about it in their own words.

We believe it is evident that children with experience of displacement should be allowed to talk about it, that they can explain their circumstances and what hopes and dreams they harbour for the future.

→ Children who have fled their homes need space and people there who will listen to them. It is about giving them a voice.

This can help available resources to be properly established, accessed and supported. This study is therefore based on the World Vision Children’s studies that have already examined the subjective well-being of six- to eleven-year-old children in Germany three times. It is the aim of the World Vision Children’s studies to give children the chance, within the meaning of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to express their opinion and detail their views. This study is designed to give a very specific group of children the opportunity to make their voices heard, i.e. those children who have fled to Germany from many different countries where war, poverty or other dangers prevail.

Reaching the heights (right): The children test their limits on the climbing wall.
Agreements are important (below): A “getting to know you day” in the climbing centre in Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg.



→ Children who have fled accompanied by their parents/guardians have hardly been considered in the past; they are subsumed into the whole family that has fled. The challenge here, therefore, is to be alert to this subjective perspective of children and to help them to speak about it in their own words. That is why only minors who have fled were chosen for this study.



Implementation of the Study

Selection of the Children and Interview Methods

This study has been carried out by the World Vision Institute, a research unit of the international children's charity World Vision. The study received academic support from interdisciplinary cooperation with Goethe University Frankfurt and Hamburg-Eppendorf University Hospital. The Hoffnungsträger Stiftung gave the study financial support and offered outstanding access to the Aktion Integration association, which has been supporting people who have fled through voluntary work over many years in Ludwigsburg. The foundation set up by Steffi Graf, "Children for Tomorrow" operates the refugees' outpatients department at Hamburg-Eppendorf University Hospital and thus also offered valuable access to the field of research. We were able to access the children who were willing to take part in an interview with us both through the "Aktion Integration" association and via the refugees' outpatients department.

The choice of the children was supposed to illustrate to a certain extent the great heterogeneity of the group of children who have fled to Germany. High-quality interviews were conducted with the children and turned into case studies that could be read as portraits of the children over the course of the study. The study makes no claim to be representative, but clearly captures the special features of the individual fates of the children and their view of the experience of flight they have gained, as well as of their hopes and dreams for the future.

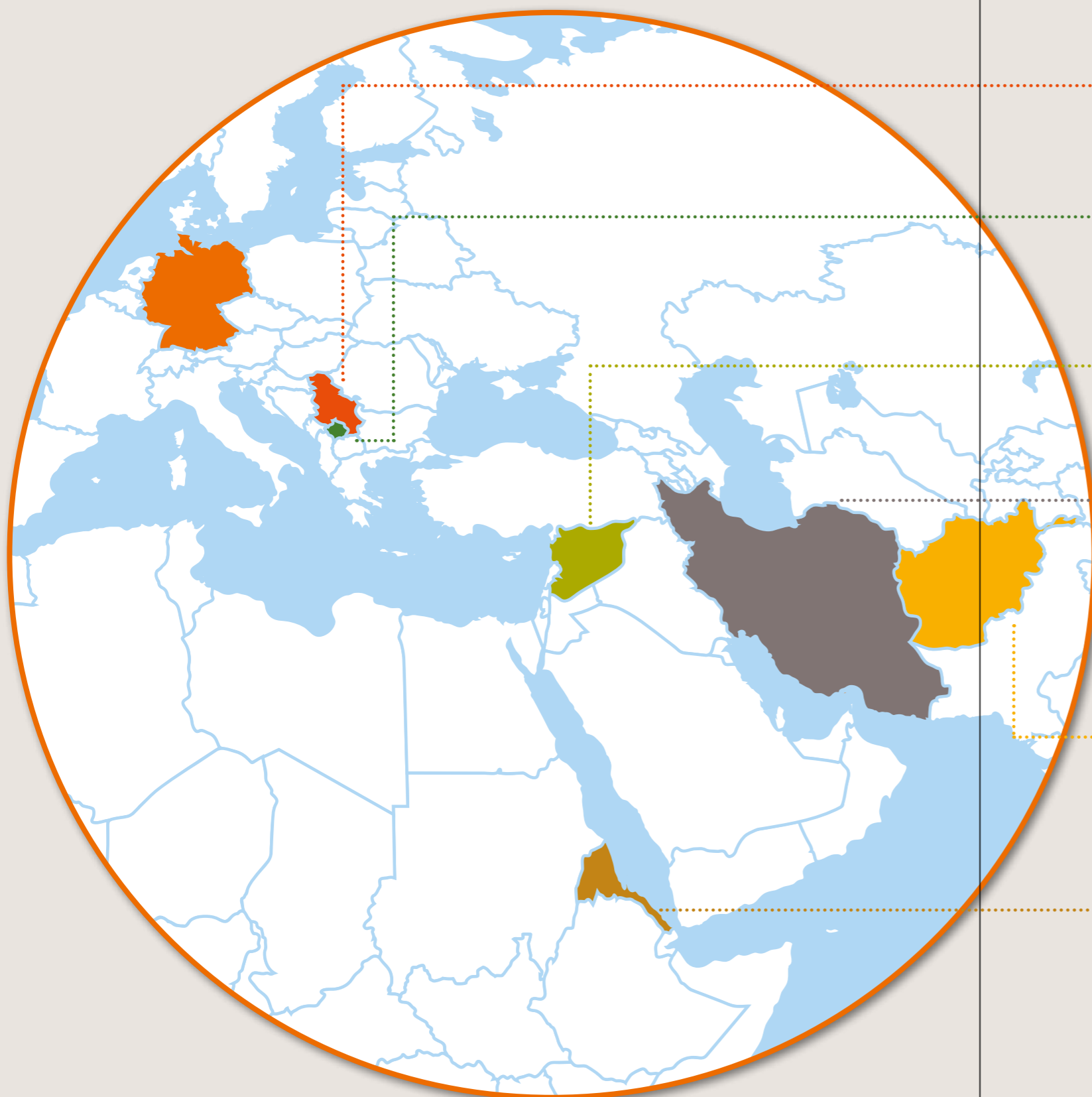
We decided to interview children between the ages of 10 and 13 because experience from childhood research shows that children of this age find it easier to tell the stories of their lives, have a degree of insight and can look back on their life. In addition to age, the following criteria were important for the choice: The accompanied status of the children, their countries of origin, the family and housing situation, and the residency status or the status of the family's asylum process.

Before the interviews, there was a "getting to know each other" day with the children and the research team. This was supposed to give the children the opportunity to establish their first contact with the researchers and form a basis of trust. These "getting to know each other" days were supported by professional educationalists. Because of the wintry weather, the children were also partly given warm shoes or coats on these days. Due to language barriers, interpreters were also present on the "getting to know each other days". The photos of the children that appear in the brochure have been pixelated and made anonymous for child protection reasons.

The intention of the interviews was to ask the children about their past, present and future. Particular regard was paid to the possible sensitivity of the children with regard to their past experiences and things that happened during their journey. Attention was paid to any possible traumatization of the children. Where necessary, interviews were conducted by a native speaker. After the end of the interviews, the children were given a voucher for a clothing store as a thank you, as well as a card from the "Nummer gegen Kummer" [a helpline] so that they could talk to someone in confidence if necessary. In the refugees' outpatients department in Hamburg, the children were supported by trauma therapists to ensure that the children could talk about mental stress after the interview.



Country of Origin of the Children



● **Serbia** is officially considered a safe country of origin, which means that people who have fled from Serbia do not have a right to asylum in Germany in principle. The decline in the Serbian industrial sector is one of the factors that have exacerbated the economic crisis in the country. Around 25% of the population live below the national poverty line; it is mainly minorities such as the Roma that are affected by this. The Roma are still subject to severe discrimination, social exclusion, as well as physical attacks.⁷ → *Bojan*

● The situation in **Kosovo** is characterised by unemployment, poverty and a lack of opportunities. Around 30% of the population lives on less than €1.70 per day. Although the long-term internal conflicts between the Kosovo-Albanian majority and the Kosovo-Serbian minority have eased, minorities in the poor country still have hardly any prospects. They suffer severely from discrimination and oppression. It is mainly the Roma who are affected by this.⁸ → *Jakob, Edgar and Marlon*

● In **Syria** the population has been enduring a civil war since 2011. People are fleeing both the Assad regime and the radical rebel groups, especially the terrorist organisation “Islamic State” (IS). Currently, more than half of the 22 million Syrians have taken flight. Most Syrians flee to nearby cities in neighbouring countries: Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq. For almost two years, there has been an existential shortage of humanitarian aid – which is also known in Europe. In Germany, people who fled Syria were the biggest group of asylum seekers in 2015.⁹ → *Kabira*

● In **Iran**, because of Iranian nuclear and missile programmes, the situation is dominated by international tension and ongoing sanctions that also have a negative impact on the economic situation in the country. However, the key reason for flight in most cases is the grim human rights situation. People’s freedom in Iran is curtailed in many respects with the aim of religious and ideological conformity. Members of ethnic and religious minorities are not infrequently victims of criminal persecution with unfair trials. The right to freedom of speech is severely restricted and the Islamic moral police monitors the dress regulations, among other things.¹⁰ → *Shirin*

● There has been more-or-less constant war in **Afghanistan** for many years, but the security situation has deteriorated drastically again since 2014. The increasing withdrawal of foreign troops has led to the reinvigoration of the Taliban regime, which had been toppled. The Taliban attacks and ethnic conflicts are forcing the population to flee. The population of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has no freedom of speech and it fears arbitrary detention, torture and gender-specific violence.¹¹ → *Ellaha and Samir*

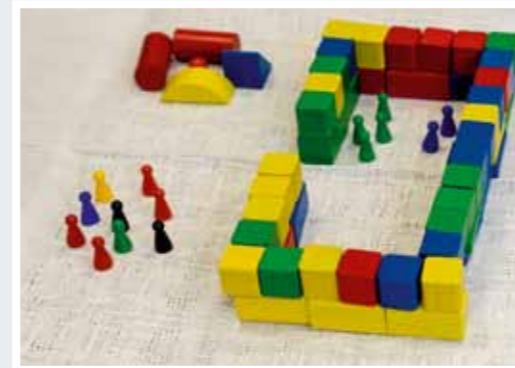
● A repressive military regime has been in power in **Eritrea** since 1993. The government is sealing itself off from the outside world and refuses to allow UN rapporteurs to enter the country. In Eritrea a comprehensive system of informers has been set up and fear of arbitrary arrests, years of detention in labour camps or tiny cells, torture and executions without a trial characterise everyday life for the Eritrean population. Religious minorities and politically active people in particular are persecuted, but people who refuse to do military service are also a target of the regime.¹² → *Josephina*

The Methods Used

Network Method

(cf. World Vision Children's study 2007, 2010 and 2013)

In the network method, the children have building blocks and toy figures to build up their socio-spatial networks in three dimensions. Questions designed to guide the children are: Where do children spend time every day? What do they do there? And who do they spend their time with? Which people are important to them? What do they say and how do they express it? What differences are there from their country of origin?



The playful structure of the network performs several important functions in the course of the interview. On the one hand, it allows the children to start in a relaxed manner. Instead of the "question and answer game" that is often perceived as examining, they can use materials that are familiar to them and tell a story "by the way". On the other hand, it enables visualisation of the network and with the aid of building blocks and figures, constant changes and adjustments can be made. The visibility and materiality make it easier for children to decide whether they have forgotten something or they need to make corrections. Very often, it is only while setting things up that it emerges which contacts really are relevant, which places still exist and which activities the children pursue.



Lifeline Method

(cf. Klasen/Bayer 2009)

The Lifeline Method was originally a clinical-therapeutic method with which children who had already been confronted by violent experiences could be questioned. The children were asked to report about their lives using a lifeline, extending from their birth to the future, with smileys for the joyful, happy experiences and stones for the painful and sad experiences in their lives.

Memory Method

(cf. Bertelsmann study "Children. Poverty. Family." 2015)

At the end of the interview, the children were asked to choose cards from a Memory game. The question on the choice of the cards was: What do you want for a good life in the future? The simple pictorial language and often schematic representation does not overtax children; moreover, they are often familiar with this type of game and the cards give them food for thought and are a trigger for their stories. The cards were spread out in front of the child and he or she had enough time to look at them and make a choice.



The various materials and methods were presented to the children and it was then left up to them to decide which materials and so which method they wanted to start with. The children were not told to work with all of the materials, but almost all of the children decided to lay the lifeline first of all, and then to set up their environment with the building blocks. Finally, the children were presented with memory cards with various pictures on them. The children were asked to use the symbols to explain what a "good life" means to them and what they wish for themselves for a good future.

Extract from an interview conducted by Katharina Gerarts with Josephina

I would like to start our conversation. I hope that's okay for you.

→ Yes, that's fine.

Okay. Thank you. I hope you want to tell us lots.

→ Yes.

We want to write a book about children who have come to Germany, but were born somewhere else. At the moment, there are lots of discussions here about the people who have fled; maybe you have heard something about it.

→ Yes.

Okay. So I have two ideas of what we could do. Firstly, there is this long ribbon here.

That is supposed to be your life, your thirteen years. There are smileys that you can use to mark the happy events in your life. And you can also put down stones.

→ I'll take the smileys.

That's what most children say. So, the stones stand for the not-so-nice events. For example, I would put a stone down for when my granddad died. That made me very sad.

→ I have no idea what my granddad looked like, but yes, that's a good idea, too.

That was just an example. For the other game we need this base. And we have building blocks here. You can use them to build the places that are important to you. For example, what places in your everyday life are important? Where do you go? Or where are people who are important to you? I have these little figures for that that you can put in place.

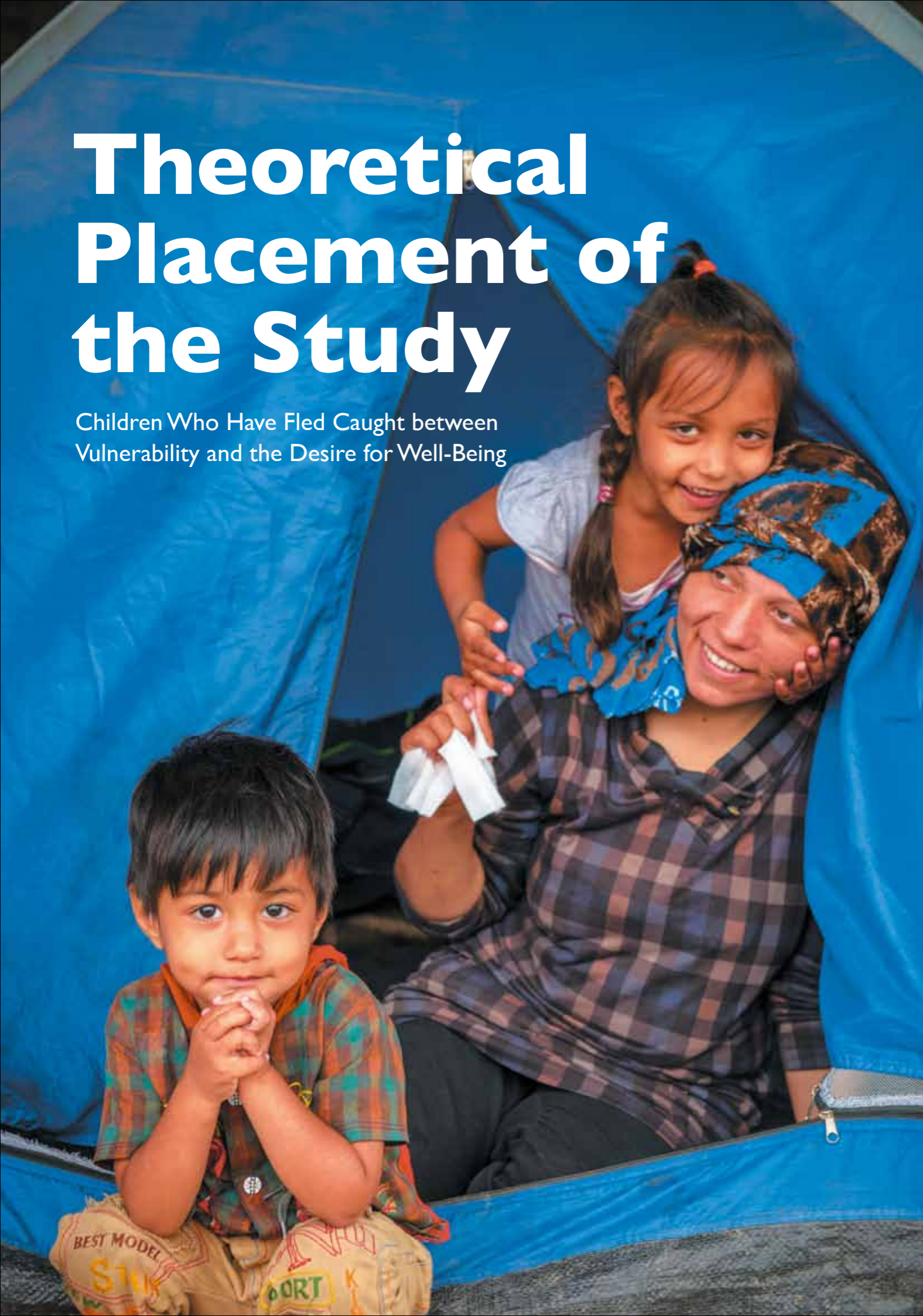
→ I'll start with the smileys.

Okay. Then I would say that we put a smiley at the start of your life because it's wonderful that you were born. Where were you born?

→ I was born in Massaua. On the Red Sea. I was born at home, at eight in the evening.

Theoretical Placement of the Study

Children Who Have Fled Caught between Vulnerability and the Desire for Well-Being



The study aims to make the experiences, impressions and individual fates of children who have fled visible. The interdisciplinary access and the interdisciplinary composition of the research team make achieving this complex objective possible. The starting point of the study is the observation that children are rarely considered in discussions and analyses of the situation of people taking flight, the causes of the flight movements and the challenges in organising migration. Children are affected to a particular degree – as childhood research has always pointed out – by the general claims of not being perceived as a subject defined by national, ethnic or religious affiliations.

Children usually have less scope than adults to intervene in their living conditions and can barely discuss the individual reasons for leaving home. They are still being denied the “right to rights” (Hannah Arendt), in spite of recognition of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This means that fading out of individual stories affects the next generation to a particular degree. It is mainly children who have fled accompanied by their parents/guardians that have hardly been considered in the past; they are subsumed into the whole family that has fled. Childhood studies offer the potential to provide help here – at least in research. Against the background of the theoretical direction and the methodological experience of questioning children, it is possible to describe and analyse the subjective perspectives of children and to help the children find the words for their experiences.

For this, this study combines two concepts based on childhood theory, i.e. that of the well-being of children on the one hand and the vulnerability and defencelessness of children on the other. Whereas the multi-dimensionally designed concept of well-being, which considers security, education, relationship quality and networks as well as psycho-social health, focuses on the resources of children (World Vision 2013; BELLA study 2011), the focus on vulnerability assumes that the life phase of childhood is marked by diverse dependencies and risks of harming the integrity of children.

Consequently, childhood theory is fundamentally about the development of the relationship between children’s resources, their abilities to act and make decisions. So it is also about autonomy and their vulnerability because they are particularly dependent on caring and competent adults and appropriate overall conditions. All over the world, probably, children belong to the especially vulnerable

groups due to their “place” in the relationship between the generations, but especially in times and areas of crisis as they depend on amenable adults and appropriate social general conditions because they need to be provided and cared for, protected and given education and a voice. This is particularly the case for children fleeing danger and following their flight story.

In this tension between knowledge of the principal resources of children and their reliance and vulnerability, how children organise their world under such extreme conditions of a flight and how they try to make sense of the events must be clarified. How they view the adults who are important to them and what they experience as helpful and supportive to them and their families must be examined. Starting from Korczak’s phrase that children have a “right to today”, their view of the provision and the facilities in Germany, such as at school, is important.

Starting from this framework of childhood theory and aimed at the research interest in the experiences and perceptions of children who have fled, the survey and the methodological design of the interviews described above are based on the following research questions:

- How do the children make sense of the “old” and the “new” world as well as the time of their flight?
- How do they understand the reactions of others, for example their parents? What approaches to understanding are possible for them?
- How do they make sense of their everyday lives and the familiar and the unknown, new routines?
- What ideas do they have of other people’s expectations of them and how do they face up to the demands at school, for example?
- What ideas and expectations do children have in respect of Germany as a country of immigration?

During evaluation it became clear that we could not deal with all of the questions in detail, but that the children’s main focuses became obvious in the interviews. This methodological openness is at the heart of the high-quality approach. For example, the interviews show the enormous role that children attach to school: they use their experience of school in their countries of origin to be able to explain the key reasons for flight from their point of view, whereas school in Germany is an important place of arrival for them.

Therefore, it must also be about the reasons for flight suggested by the children and for successful integration from their point of view.

Following the Memories and Stories of Children with Experience of Flight

To date, there have been few studies that deal with the experiences of children who have fled. This is also shown by the UNICEF study “In erster Linie Kinder” from 2014, in which the first empirical findings were published and which drew attention to the specific situation of children. This study forms an important empirical basis and it also refers to the systematically justified need not to reduce the situation of children with experience of flight to this, but to take a broad view of children. This study based on childhood theory follows on from this.

Another high-quality study is the dissertation by Franziska Eisenhuth (2015), who asked about how children position themselves and are positioned by others within the general frame of the Capabilities Approach. The empirical survey for this work was carried out several years ago, in other words long before the current, urgent situation. But Eisenhuth’s analytical categories offer further-reaching connecting points for current empirical research approaches that aim to reconstruct the experiences and scope for action of children who have fled. In her results, Eisenhuth clearly demonstrated the limited development and positioning options with which children with uncertain residency status are confronted here in Germany. She reconstructs what children experience as a restriction on participation, consumption, mobility and freedom. She also identifies the contradictory positioning of children and the experiences of being ethnically different. The interpretations that relate to the approach to the interview sequences in which the children interviewed by Eisenhuth discuss their ideas of the future are impressive.

Events in the near future, such as possible deportation, or plans further ahead, such as school-leaving qualifications or a vocational qualification, are very relevant in the interviews and prove that “the right of a child to today” also corresponds with his or her need for future plans. The concept of well-being could be added here because having the ability to choose in the here and now and to be able to relate it to the future, as well as a feeling of security, are central to the degree of well-being. This was shown recently by the findings of the global comparative study

“Children’s Worlds” (Rees et al. 2015)¹³ on the subjective well-being of children in 15 countries, including such diverse countries as Nepal, Ethiopia, Norway and Israel. Security and choice are of great importance to children between the ages of eight and twelve in practically all countries and in various circles within the countries.

Linking to the results of the UNICEF study, Eisenhuth’s dissertation and the international findings from the “Children’s Worlds” study, there was a childhood theoretical approach to the subjective experiences of children who have fled and on the autobiographical (literary) processing of experiences of flight. Starting from this and in relation to the conceptual framing of vulnerability and well-being, the following dimensions were developed for the survey and evaluation:

- Memories and losses
- Family and friends (relationships and encounters)
- Education and language
- Security and protection
- Healthcare, social and material provision
- Privacy and self-determination

These specified dimensions can also be assigned to the general dimensions of child well-being, such as education, health, family and security. All of the dimensions resonated – with varying degrees of importance – in the interviewed children’s stories. The children’s feelings play a central role in them all. They help to open the eyes, in particular to the interaction of vulnerability and well-being of children who have fled in Germany.

Gaining trust (top): Julian Storck and Study Leader Katharina Gerarts with a participant.
Food unites (bottom): Relaxed mood over a shared lunch.



The Children's Stories

Their View of Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

The names of the interviewed children and the towns within Germany have been changed for reasons of child protection. "Status" refers to the status at the time of publication of this study.



Name: Jakob

Age: 10

Country of origin: Kosovo

Family: Mother, father, brother Marlon and baby sister

Status: Tolerated

Jakob looks at the world through wide-awake eyes. After a few conversations with him you find it hard to believe that the boy is only ten years old; he seems so grown up at times. His story might be one reason for this. Poverty, flight and a new start – that's a lot (too much maybe) for many a child.

Just under a year ago, Jakob came to Germany from Kosovo with his family. It was mainly material need that forced the family to leave the country and seek their luck elsewhere. His dad didn't have any work in Kosovo, says Jakob. The family didn't have money to buy clothes and other everyday things. There wasn't even enough for school so Jakob often didn't have the materials he needed. Jakob gets to the heart of the matter: "Kosovo has no money and that's not nice." His father still hasn't got a job in Germany. But the family can still afford the most important things, exercise books for school, for example, because they are supported by social services.

How important school and learning are to Jakob becomes very clear over the course of the conversation. The ten-year-old is the only one of the boys from the Balkan states who was interviewed who is in Year 4 of a normal primary school. His German is also quite acceptable. "I WANT to learn German," Jakob clearly states – and everyone feels how much he wants to master the language of his new home. He is helped in this by the fact that he has many German friends. "My friends are learning me what is German (sic)," Jakob explains happily. He is very grateful that

they correct him when he says "Blaum" instead of "Baum" (tree). Jakob is generally a very ambitious boy. He prefers to learn alone, to do things on his own. He really enjoys writing. He sometimes finds arithmetic hard. But luckily his mother is there and he willingly lets her help him from time to time.

I sleep with stress, you know?

Jakob knows exactly why he is learning: he wants to be a teacher one day. The boy from Kosovo can't say exactly why but he likes the idea of teaching children things one day. The ten-year-old sees himself in Germany in future with this wish. "Here in Germany, I will make a house (sic)," he says. Jakob then answers the question of what he wants for a happy life very firmly: "I make papers in Germany (sic)." He would like to stay here so much to build a future with his family and to live together in a lovely house. In his dreams, Jakob is surrounded by lots of fruit trees. Because if they grew in his own garden, he says, he wouldn't have to spend any money on fruit – and could even feed his family.

But instead of cherishing his dreams like other children, Jakob is dominated by a great fear: that he and his family will soon be deported to Kosovo. The thoughts upset him so much that he can hardly sleep at night. "Not a bit of stress, but lots and lots," he says. An acquaintance told him that the police prefer to come at night to collect the family and send them back to their country of origin just as they are.



Name: Kabira

Age: 10

Country of origin: Syria

Family: Mother, father (separated), one younger sister, one younger brother, one older sister, Mother's new partner

Status: Recognised entitlement to asylum

The door bell has rung, Kabira runs to the door and shakes the new arrival by the hand. She is looking forward to the conversation and has chosen the big living room for it. It is the centre of family life: Kabira's little brother is lolling on the sofa, engrossed in a game on his tablet; her older sister is asleep, snuggled in a blanket. Her mother shoos the two younger siblings from the room; then Kabira starts to talk.

The ten-year-old girl comes from Syria and lived in Damascus with her family.

There is very little good to tell about Syria, Kabira says. She talks about loud, dancing people, demonstrators stamping pictures of the German Chancellor into the dirt. The only thing that Kabira likes to remember is the mountain in the middle of Damascus. There is a castle there, with gates and towers; Kabira probably means the Citadel of Damascus.

"Does this place still even exist," she asks herself wistfully? She knows from television that there is war in Syria and bombs are falling. Damascus has been destroyed. "I saw our old house on television; it had fallen down," says the young Syrian. Her aunt and uncle's house was also destroyed. Her uncle died, her aunt was seriously injured and is now blind. Kabira hardly recognised her; she was so bandaged up after the attack. The family seems to have been well off in Syria; she talks about several houses that belonged to them. Her grandparents are living in the ruined city to this day.

**At night
I dreamed of
drowning.**

The family's flight to Germany was dangerous and difficult; Kabira only gives a fragmented account of what exactly happened. What is certain is that her mother fled in a fishing boat with her and her three siblings. The boat nearly capsized. The ten-year-old talks about water getting ever deeper. A big ship rescued them, maybe the Italian coast-guard? Kabira implies that not everyone on board survived the shipwreck. After that she had nightmares, and thought she was drowning. She now has fewer bad dreams.

There were also problems further on in the journey. A young woman was very ill, Kabira's mother and other people in flight fanned her to give her air, gave her food and medicine. They didn't want to take her to hospital because then they would have been registered in Italy. But their goal was Germany. The woman died; the adults wrapped her scantily in cloths and buried her in a cellar on the journey.

Kabira's father had already fled to Germany. The ten-year-old animatedly talks about the first time she saw him again in Italy to where her exhausted mother had summoned him. They were all very hungry and their father bought chicken for them. From Italy, they travelled to Germany by train, initially to the reception centre in Ellwangen. Kabira talks about further stations in Obertürkheim, Wertheim, Neuenstadt am Kocher and the home for people who

have fled in Stuttgart-Mühlhausen. She had to make new friends with every move. The family now seems to have arrived; for two, three months they have been living in their own flat in a small suburb of Stuttgart, and Kabira has made new friends again.

The flat on the first floor of the austere house is directly opposite the local pharmacy, on the main road through the little town. Kabira lives here together with her mother and siblings. Her older sister's boyfriend is also occasionally there, he is Kabira's cousin. Her sister goes to the vocational school in Stuttgart. Kabira attends Year 3 of a primary school. She repeated Year 2 twice, learning German in the process. Her younger sister is in Year 2 and her brother goes to pre-school. The school is very near. Kabira walks for just under 10 minutes to get there, past the church and up the hill. She likes going to school, but she doesn't like getting up early at all. Her mother often has to wake her up several times.

Kabira's mother is heavily pregnant; the baby could be born as early as next week. There is a new man in her mother's life; Kabira only mentions her step-father in passing. Her father now has a flat of his own near Heidelberg. At the weekend Kabira visits him there occasionally and sometimes her father comes to visit them.

The family is Muslim. Yes, they would pray, but they have only been to the mosque once since arriving in Germany two years ago, but not again. When Kabira talks about her new home, she sounds a little disappointed. In Syria people said that Germany is a beautiful country without stupid people. She believed that for a long time. But it has now become clear to her that there is "no country without stupid people". Nevertheless, Kabira wants to stay in Germany. She likes the tall mountains here. For the future, she would like an enormous house with lots of space for the whole family. But she is unsure whether that will ever come true. The ten-year-old has already understood that even in Germany not everyone can afford everything.



Name: Shirin
Age: 11
Country of origin: Iran
Family: Mother
Status: Recognised entitlement to asylum

Shirin's nails are painted pink with black half-moons; she has wrapped a thick strand of hair around her dark plait. In her grey skinny jeans and the black and white spotted bomber jacket the girl with the jet black hair and the olive skin is hard to distinguish from other teenagers. Only someone who gets to know Shirin better over time learns that she has fled.

But she actually comes from Iran, and Germany has only been her home for three years. Shirin and her mother came to Heidelberg first of all, lived in refugee accommodation in Philippsburg for a while and then moved into shared accommodation in Wertheim. For a few months, Shirin and her mother have been living in their own flat. German friends helped them to find the two-bedroom flat. After the cramped conditions of the other accommodation, Shirin is very much enjoying having a room of her very own.

To adults, three years may seem a short time, but to Shirin it is a quarter of her life. Memories of her home country

are fading at the same speed with which the young girl is integrating in the once-foreign country. She moves around confidently, has a monthly ticket for the local public transport and catches the bus to school every day. The route to school takes Shirin via the railway station every time. She laughs when she talks about the temptations there: chemist shop, 1 Euro shop and doughnut shop. Shirin would love to spend her pocket money on clothes, cosmetics and sweets. Her mother's not happy about that. "I have to agree with my Mum about what I spend my money on."

One of her favourite places in her new home is the public library. She borrows books and films from here. Shirin can hardly wait until she is finally twelve. Then she can finally watch "real" teenagers' films. The time will come in January 2016. She will invite her friends to the ice rink; then they'll have a sleepover in her flat. Not far from the library is another important place for Shirin: the town centre with its shops – a popular meeting place for young girls. The eleven-year-old loves ambling through the streets with her friends and looking in the shop windows.

In Iran you're not allowed to be a Christian.

Just like Shirin, her mother goes to school in the daytime and is learning German. She will soon sit an important exam that she needs for naturalisation one day. Shirin is proud that her mother can speak so well already and is learning more every day. However, Shirin says that her mother is still embarrassed to speak the foreign language. She, too, had to learn German first of all. Thanks to the preparation period she is only in Year 4 of primary school and not – as her age would suggest – Year 6. The time has been well spent – Shirin's accent is hardly noticeable. Only if you really pay attention to every word will you notice that she sometimes forgets an article and doesn't conjugate every verb correctly.

Shirin likes going to school, she is a good pupil and had only As, Bs and Cs. She likes art lessons best of all; she likes creating little masterpieces with paint and paper. All in all, her talents are artistic: Shirin also plays the piano and is teaching herself to dance. Step by step, she is following her path: in the autumn Shirin wants to go to grammar school; her teacher has already been informed of her plans.

After school, Shirin catches the bus home where her mother cooks for her. They mostly eat Persian dishes; they are one of the few memories of the country that they left three years ago. Connections there are rare. Shirin misses her family in Iran: her grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins. They are holding out in the unsafe country; their situation is uncertain. They Skype with each other only occasionally.

But Shirin is not lonely. She has many friends – of the same age and younger – with whom she goes to school. "If I had to list them all we'd still be sitting here tomorrow," she grins self-consciously. She is particularly close friends with two girls. One lives in Cologne. They got to know each other in a reception centre in Germany. Maybe it was the strangeness that brought the two together. Another good

friend lives very close by. They spend a lot of time together at the playground near her flat. A few boys hang around there, too. They used to play with each other, but for some time now they have tended to annoy and tease each other. "There are nice boys like my cousin, but most boys are annoying," Shirin says. She still obviously prefers girls.

Three years ago, Shirin celebrated Christmas in Germany for the first time. That was banned in Iran, because she and her mother belonged to the Christian minority there. Shirin makes an unambiguous gesture with her finger towards her throat when she is talking about the danger threatening people of different faiths in the strictly Muslim country. "In Iran you're not allowed to be a Christian," she says. "Christians must die. We are Christians." Even she, the child, had problems in the strictly Islamic country because her headscarf had slipped and you could see her hairline. This incident obviously strengthened her mother's desire to flee. However serious this decision was, Shirin can hardly remember the journey. "I don't know how we got here any more." Her mother hardly ever speaks about the journey. She wants to tell Shirin everything only when she is older.

When asked about her wishes, Shirin would like to have her family from Iran around her. However, a dog is at the very top of her wish list. But it doesn't seem to be the right time for it yet. Her mother said they can think about it only when she is older and more independent. That is why Shirin's other wishes are extremely pragmatic: she likes to eat strawberries, dipped in chocolate and garnished with cream, are there a few for her? And she wants to join the youth fire brigade. Looking far ahead, Shirin would like a big house, here in Germany, with a pool for parties at night. A good job would be great, maybe she could be a fashion designer one day? It's quite a while before that can happen. Shirin would like a watch for her path there: "Otherwise you always arrive too late in life."





Name: Edgar

Age: 12

Country of origin: Kosovo

Family: Mother, two older brothers, one older sister, father dead

Status: Tolerated

Edgar has a lovely smile. But he tries not to make it too wide and boyish because he does not want to look too childish under any circumstances. His size alone makes him look older: at 1.60 metres he towers over many children of the same age. The twelve-year-old also pays a great deal of attention to his appearance. Edgar has combed his straight black hair in a precise side parting. His clothes – tight jeans, denim jacket, trainers – are the latest fashion.

Edgar comes from Kosovo. Together with his mother, his two brothers who are almost grown-up and his sister who is two years older than him he lives in shared accommodation for people who have fled in a town near Stuttgart. The five live in a 25 square metre room. This is where all of family life takes place: sleeping, eating, studying, playing. They share a bathroom and kitchen with three other families. Each family has its own room off the shared corridor. Edgar doesn't really like to say how comfortable he feels in the accommodation. Maybe he doesn't like to say that he doesn't find it great.

Edgar has been living in the shared accommodation for three months. The family has "tolerated" status, which is extended on a six-monthly basis – or not. Edgar's mother worries a great deal about that. At home in Kosovo, things were not good for the family. Their house was destroyed during the

Kosovo war at the end of the 1990s. After that, the family struggled to get by. Sometimes they had a roof over their heads; often they had to sleep on the streets. During this difficult time, Edgar and his older sister were born. Their father died two years after Edgar's birth.

Since then, their mother has been left to fend for herself and her four children. The war, the destroyed house, the death of her husband have all left severe mental scars. Even in Kosovo she needed a doctor, says Edgar. But anyone who can't pay – like Edgar's family – is unlucky and can't receive any treatment.

At some point, the family decided that at least the older sons, then 15 and 16 years old, should try to flee to a better life. They set off as unaccompanied minor refugees and actually managed to get to Germany. They found refuge in Munich. From there, they contacted the family who had stayed behind. An acquaintance drove Edgar, his mother and his sister to Hungary. There began the long, exhausting train journey to Germany. The three were initially housed in the regional reception centre in Karlsruhe. By great luck, the older brothers found the rest of the family. There were tears of joy when they saw each other again.

From Karlsruhe, the journey for the family from Kosovo continued. First of all, they lived in a transitional residential home, then they moved into the shared accommodation in which they currently live. There, Edgar's mother

My life
is here
now.

finally received the medical assistance she needed. The doctors diagnosed severe depression because of the traumatic experiences. Edgar is happy that his mother is now being looked after. Here in Germany there are enough tablets and doctors who can take care of her, the young boy says with relief. Their mother had to keep going to hospital for a few weeks. During this time, the two older brothers were father and mother to Edgar and his fourteen-year-old sister. In the holidays, Edgar also occasionally visits an aunt in Dortmund.

For six months, Edgar has been attending preparatory class 2, where he learns German. Unlike in Kosovo, children aren't beaten by teachers here, he says. In Kosovo, the teacher beat him because he hadn't done his homework or didn't behave as the teacher wanted him to. It's very different in Germany: Here, the teachers talk with Edgar, ask him how he is and whether he needs help with learning. He likes that.

Edgar feels very much at home in Germany; he has settled well in his new home. Edgar is very independent because his mother is often in hospital. He is familiar with the

neighbourhood, walking or cycling around freely. In the afternoons, he likes to play basketball with his new friends from the shared accommodation. He also loves to play football. In school, he goes to the special football classes and he kicks a ball around outside the house with other children in the afternoon.

If there's any money left over, Edgar likes to go to one of the big supermarkets nearby and buy an energy drink or a pretzel. His teachers have told him that energy drinks aren't healthy. But Edgar likes them too much to give them up. Occasionally, he accompanies his mother to the town centre because she has to go to the doctor or they want to go to the Turkish supermarket. There is meat there that they can eat as Muslims. Often, Edgar goes shopping on his own because his mother is too tired.

He knows that there is no certainty that he will be able to stay in Germany in the longer term. But Edgar does not want to go back to Kosovo at all. He says that he's forgotten most things from his old home anyway. His life is here now – here in Germany.





Name: Farid and Samir
Age: 10 and 12
Country of origin: Afghanistan
Family: Father, mother, younger sister, younger brother
Status: Recognised entitlement to asylum

Farid and Samir are regular visitors to the refugees' outpatients department on the site of Hamburg's University Hospital. Every few weeks, the brothers come here to meet psychotherapists, to paint and play together. Farid and Samir were born in Afghanistan ten and twelve years ago. There has been war there for many years. Life in the state ruled by the Taliban militia and the flight to Germany have left traces in the children's minds. "I am frightened," says Samir, "which is why I come to the outpatients department."

Their father accompanies the brothers. Farid and Samir speak German well and translate their father's questions. He is worried that they may be out and about for more than two hours and have to validate another ticket. Money is tight; the parents don't work. Previously, in Afghanistan, their father had a job and money. He bought presents for his children or gave them a few coins that Farid saved assiduously. Once, their father actually bought Samir a bike, Farid says without any envy. For him, preferential treatment for the older brother is normal. The first-born enjoys a special status in Afghanistan.

This tradition is continuing here in Germany: Samir is the only one who invites friends on his birthday and who celebrates this day. This is especially noticeable because Farid, Samir and their two younger siblings all have their birthdays on 1 January. A coincidence? No, because in Afghanistan it is not necessarily usual to register children immediately after birth. So a birthday is recorded at some point when you have to go to hospital or when your first passport is being issued. For reasons of simplicity, the first day of the year is often recorded.

The Afghan family came to Hamburg two years ago. To this day, the brothers talk little about their earlier lives in Afghanistan. Farid remembers that it was dangerous there, but he cannot say precisely what led to their flight. He always responds to questions about his old life with the same words: "I don't know." His brother Samir also answers in monosyllables. On their journey they ran through the woods, nothing more can be learned from them. Their lives in the ruined country, the flight to Germany – the children seem to have banished memories of these experiences.

**Hamburg
is good
to us.**

Farid and Samir feel very much at home here in Hamburg; you can feel that they are happy and grateful to be safe. First of all, the family of six lived in two different reception centres. Two years ago, they moved into shared accommodation. Here, Farid and Samir share a room with their seven-year-old sister Zohra. The youngest brother, Nika, four years old, sleeps with their parents. Other families also live in the house; they use the kitchen together.

Farid is happy that they can cook for themselves again. "Mum's cooking tastes better than the food in the reception centre," he says. He goes to the shopping centre nearby with his mother to buy food. KIK, TEDI, Edeka and Kaufhof – the Afghan boy is very familiar with the German shops locally. But they don't want to stay here long; their father is currently trying to find a flat for the family.

Will a new home mean another change of school for Farid? His current school is his third since his arrival in Germany. Every morning, Farid and Samir cycle together to their comprehensive school. Farid is in Year 5; his favourite subjects are PE and maths. On Mondays and Fridays, he has coaching in one of the houses in the neighbourhood. The brothers went to school in Afghanistan, too, but then it became dangerous. Samir says that a man stopped their father when the children were there. Was the Taliban threatening him? At the time, their parents agreed not to send Samir and Farid to school any more. Their father continued their education at home. They have forgotten a lot of that again, Samir says in a quiet voice. Now he can read German better than Afghani.

Both children enjoy being able to move about outside freely and without fear. Farid likes to play hide and seek or

catch with his friends, he cycles or plays football in front of the house. The slim and sporty boy remembers the snow that was lying on his last birthday and how nice it was to play in it. He has lots of friends; some live in the houses in the neighbourhood. He knows others from school. In the afternoon or at the weekend Farid sometimes watches KIKA, a children's TV channel. He especially likes cartoons with Garfield, Coconut the Dragon and Chloe's Closet.

His brother Samir plays football in a club – but not in a fixed position. He is sometimes a forward, sometimes in midfield. Samir only discovered his passion for football in Germany. Hardly surprising, because carefree playing is scarcely possible in Afghanistan. If Samir doesn't have training, he kicks a ball around with his friend in the local park. It's five minutes away by bike. Sometimes he also plays with his friends and siblings in front of the house.

Samir remembers the Stadtpark, an enormous green space in the centre of the city with playgrounds, a natural swimming pool and crazy golf. He has been there with his family a few times. It's a shame that that's not possible more often, he says regretfully. But unfortunately it takes 40 minutes on the underground from his home to the park. Samir likes the funfair on Heiligengeistfeld at least as much as the Stadtpark. His eyes light up when he talks about the booths and carousels in this carefree glittering world; a trip there is like a party for him every time.





Name: Bojan

Age: 10

Country of origin: Serbia

Family: Mother, father, one younger sister

Status: At the time of publication of the study, Bojan had returned to Serbia with his family.

Bojan is so excited on the day of his interview that he runs down the stairs two at a time. The little Serb can hardly wait to answer the interviewer's questions and finally get his hands on the photo album of the "getting to know each other" day. He carefully leafs through the pages; the pictures are bringing back the lovely moments of that special day.

Bojan lives in shared accommodation for people who have fled in Esslingen, not far from Stuttgart. The grey prefabricated building has three front doors. Dirt and rain have left traces on the window panes; there are no curtains. The building looks depressing and that's not just because of the drizzle. Half a dozen bikes are piled up against the wall. The parking spaces in front of the block are deserted; no one here has a car. The road ends in front of the house, there are only fields behind it.

A few adults huddle together, freezing, by the entrances. Bojan shouts something in Serbian to a woman; it's his mother. No, she doesn't worry about him; she trusts him, he says. But she wants to know where he's going and when he'll be home. A little girl is jumping around between the adults' legs. It is Bojan's younger sister.

Bojan has been living with her and his parents in Germany for a year now. Twelve months earlier they got into a bus that brought them to Germany via Hungary and Austria. Bojan finds this journey hardly worth mentioning –

probably because he didn't experience it as traumatic, but as a new start. He even found something good about living in tents in the first days after arrival in Germany: he could play with other children and there were free drinks all day long.

We've got to go back because of the Syrians.

If they stand at the windows in their flats, Bojan and the other people who have fled can look out on an estate of single family dwellings, two stones' throws away and newly built. It is the Germany for which they came here, within reach – and yet so far away. Since so many Syrians have been seeking a future in Germany, their chances of staying are falling, says Bojan. As EU accession candidates, Serbia, just like Kosovo and Montenegro, are considered safe countries of origin. "At some point we will have to go back," he believes.

But it is not so far and Bojan intends to do everything to lead a better life than that of his parents. He is a Roma and thus belongs to a minority whose members are considered second-class citizens in Serbia. The cycle of poverty is the order of the day for them: no education, no work, no money. This means that he has no opportunities in his home country. In Serbia the family did not have the means for regular school attendance; Bojan had no pens or exercise books. Friends sometimes helped him or he just didn't go to school. In Serbia they had hardly any

clothes. So what does it matter that his new winter coat from Germany is too big and his trousers too short? In Serbia he lived in a wooden hut, more shed than house, a single room that the family shared with relatives, with no running water and no heating. If they didn't want to freeze, their father had to set off and gather wood. "I didn't have a good house," says Bojan.

The misery that would be waiting for him back in his Serbian home makes the austere block of flats seem luxurious: "In Serbia I had nothing, here I have everything," is how Bojan summarises his situation. By this, he means the spacious room that the family of four shares, central heating and hot water.

Bojan also has good memories of Serbia. He talks about nature, a lake where they went swimming, and the mountains. Lots of music was played in Serbia; music reminds him of his old home. Bojan would love to play an instrument himself, for example the trumpet. Otherwise, his wishes are modest: he would love a remote-controlled car or a mobile phone.

Even though the prospects of asylum in Germany are slim, the family intends to fight for it. Learn German and integrate, that's the only way, says Bojan's mother. Every day, he walks half an hour to school. He is a good pupil, he says. Bojan is still attending a preparatory class. But soon he wants to move to a normal class, like his friend Jakob.

Jakob lives just one hall down and the boys often go to the playground near their accommodation. Sometimes they kick a football around on the field next door or watch TV – what boys of that age do. Bojan has lots of friends. They also live in the block or go to school with him. He reels off a long list of German names. He also mentions the names of his friends in Serbia, Darbo and Ninko, whom he misses.

His friends can be topped by only one person: Bojan's idol Jackie Chan. Just like the young Serb, Jackie Chan once fled with his parents, from China to Hong Kong for a better life. Chan worked hard and achieved world fame and wealth. Maybe Bojan's dream will come true – to be allowed to stay in Germany and live in their own house.



Name: Josephina
Age: 13
Country of origin: Eritrea
Family: Mother, two younger brothers
Status: Recognised entitlement to asylum

Thirteen-year-old Josephina looks sporty in her jogging trousers, the burgundy hoodie and her white Nike trainers. However, she finds wearing make-up and painting her nails – things that other girls her age do – annoying. Her mother isn't happy about this. She would like her daughter with the slender figure to be a bit more feminine.

Josephina comes from Eritrea in the north east of Africa. She was born and christened in the city of Massaua on the Red Sea. She can thank her father, as she says, that she has the Roman Catholic faith and is not a member of the Christian Orthodox church like her mother. In Eritrea's capital, Asmara, Josephina attended the only school that still teaches Italian. That was important to her parents. Until the Second World War, Eritrea was an Italian colony and to this day Italian is an important everyday language in the African country.

Josephina had almost finished primary school when her mother packed their things, boarded an aeroplane with her and her two brothers – now six and twelve – and left Eritrea, which is plagued by political unrest. Their goal was Germany, where some of her mother's siblings were already living. Josephina knows very little about the reasons for the flight. Her mother has told her that there is a dictator in power in Eritrea and her family had to leave the country for that reason. The persecution of Christians probably also influenced the decision to flee.

The family arrived in Germany four years ago now. Josephina remembers the time in the reception centre in Gießen well. The food was strange. But they had no money or any means of cooking to be able to make Eritrean food themselves. So the family mostly ate mashed potatoes. Today, four years later, Josephina has got used to spaghetti and fish fingers.



We are almost real Germans.

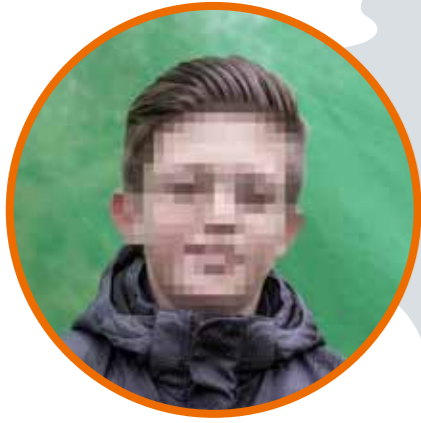
The family has recognised asylum status and lives in a small town in Hesse. Social services pay for their flat. Josephina speaks perfect German, as well as English and Tigrigna, one of the two main languages in Eritrea, as well as still a tiny bit of Italian. She attends Year 7 of a comprehensive school. She enjoys lots of subjects. She gets on well with her teachers, and that makes her proud. She also gets on well with most of her classmates; they accept the foreign girl.

Nevertheless, Josephina has been insulted because of her skin colour. Being called "chocolate" was the most innocuous. At least this name can be twisted and made positive because chocolate is a sweet delicacy. When a boy in her class swore at her because of her origin and appearance, Josephina got help from her class teacher. This talk makes her sad and despondent, but Josephina doesn't let it get her down.

Overall, she feels at home in Germany. But she isn't certain whether she will live in Germany in future – or wants to – or whether she will return to Eritrea one day. Ultimately, she knows that this is not a decision that she will make, but adults, specifically her mother and the German authorities. She certainly has some dear friends and relatives in Germany. Only last year, her godchild was born. But she misses her relatives in Eritrea just as much. Family is very, very important to Josephina. She has regular contact with her grandmother and other relatives. In Eritrea, her family cannot access the internet, meaning that they can only communicate by telephone. She misses her grandmother most of all. Her dearest wish would be for them to visit her in Germany.

As an older sister, Josephina cares a lot about her brother who is seven years younger than her. She sees her other brother, only one year younger, much more as a rival. That is a remnant of early childhood, she says. She wasn't two when her brother was born and took her place with their mother. She is still bothered about that. Josephina has no contact with her father. When asked why he didn't accompany the family to Germany, she answers that her parents are single. She won't say any more about this subject.

For the future, Josephina wants a house of her own. She wants to discover the world and travel to New Zealand, America or Australia. Four years ago, her first long journey brought her to Germany. Who knows what destination Josephina will choose next time?



Name: Marlon
Age: 11
Country of origin: Kosovo
Family: Mother, father, younger brother Jakob and younger sister
Status: Tolerated

His father was so happy when he was born eleven years ago, Marlon says happily. Pride can be heard in his voice. His birthday was always an occasion for boisterous family parties with lots of dancing and entertainment. But the joyous mood of the festivities rapidly faded in rough everyday life in Kosovo.

Marlon can barely remember his father ever having a permanent job. The rest of the family was mostly unemployed, too. Thinking about his father sitting around at home every day without any prospects still makes Marlon sad. He often felt the consequences of unemployment himself. He was beaten by his teacher because his father couldn't buy him any exercise books or pens.

Without hope for a better life and fearing for the future of their children, the family decided to leave Kosovo. His uncle and grandfather stayed behind. With his parents, little brother and baby sister, Marlon set off on the road to Germany. The family covered long stretches on foot; sometimes they treated themselves to a bus or a train. In Hungary, they walked a long way along a "water". To this day, the cries of his sister during the long walk echo in Marlon's ears. She was only a few months old at the time.

Marlon has been living in Germany with his family for a year. After a few weeks in the reception centre, the family moved into shared accommodation. A former barracks building is their new home, together with more than a

**I want
to stay.
But there's
no chance.**

hundred other people. Marlon's family share a room with a second family. They use the bathroom and kitchen with four other families. The cramped conditions force Marlon to do his homework on the floor. He shares his bed with his brother; his parents sleep in a second bed with his little sister. Nevertheless, Marlon is satisfied with what he's got. "Yes, you know, it's great."

And Marlon's assessment of other aspects of life in Germany is also positive. "Yes! School, the country is beautiful, everything!" he says. The teachers don't beat him and his father can buy everything that he needs for school from his state benefits. This seems to be a great relief to Marlon, because he can now study without fear – which he now does with dedication. He does his homework every day and practises German assiduously. The only thing that bothers Marlon is the large number of children in his class. He doesn't find it easy to learn together with thirty other pupils. Marlon currently attends a preliminary course that is preparing him to attend standard lessons. His school is a half-hour walk away.

In his spare time, Marlon likes to play football or basketball with his friends. There is a basketball court right in front of his accommodation. Sometimes, he goes to the local supermarket with his brother or they stroll through the residential area that is very near the accommodation. Half of Marlon's friends live with him in the shared accommodation; the other half is scattered throughout the small Baden-Württemberg town that is his new home. But he has never visited the other boys.

Marlon also meets friends and neighbours' children at the children's church service offered by the local free church congregation and that he regularly attends.

Together, they have parties, watch films or play table football. Marlon proudly reports that he and his friend won their last match. At moments like this, he appears happy and satisfied, even though he is not totally relaxed.

He reveals the reason for this just a little later. He fears being deported. From school friends and television, he knows that people from Kosovo have no chance of staying in Germany in the longer term. Only people who have fled Syria are granted asylum. That is not why he is sad; he would rather learn the German language, hope for connections and prospects and not think too much about what is ahead. It's very hard to believe him really; on the contrary, the uncertain future bothers Marlon much more than he would care to admit.

Marlon has many wishes and hopes for the future. He would love to fly in a plane or a hot-air balloon. He has seen them hundreds of times, but he has never flown in one so far. He would also love to go on a boat trip or a family holiday if there was enough money. But ahead of all of this is his dream of a house in Germany – and thus longer-term prospects for him, his siblings and parents in a country in which he started a second life one year ago.





Evaluation of the Interviews

Needs, Hopes, Dreams – The Children's Views
of their Past and Present Homes

On the basis of the portraits of the children interviewed, it is clear that their backgrounds and stories are very different. The reasons for fleeing with their families range from the illness of individual family members and a lack of healthcare, experiences of marginalisation, poverty and material need to war, violence and persecution. The children speak about the reasons for flight from their point of view and that is highly individual on the one hand but, on the other, their reports reveal wishes and hopes as well as needs that are expressed in a similar way by all the children interviewed. As already shown in the introduction, childhood research has raised awareness that children should not be subsumed in the decisions, interests and approaches of the family as a whole, but that we should take notice of their specific viewpoints.

What does that mean? To evaluate the children's stories, we will bring the dimensions of childhood well-being introduced in the introduction together with the specific stories and experiences of the children who have fled. Childhood well-being, which can be arranged and sorted by the criteria of family and friends, education, security, health and material provision, has different connotations and focuses for children with experience of flight. They will be presented in detail below to illustrate the special needs of the selected group of children.

Family and friends (relationships and encounters)

Family and friends form a central dimension in children's everyday lives. Good relationships make a major contribution to well-being, just as much as a lack of them makes children especially vulnerable. In the interviews, the children talk at length and mostly happily about their family or individual family members, for example those they haven't seen since their flight. It quickly becomes clear that the family is the first and most important place for the accompanied children who have fled. It offers the children **support and security** as well as familiar structures with reliable attachment figures. But the children differentiate between the family that they experienced before taking flight and the family with which they are growing up in Germany. There are many reasons for this: sometimes the family in Germany is no longer complete, the father is missing or there is hardly any contact with grandparents in the country of origin.

As with children with no experience of flight, they use photographs of celebrations or special events to remember. If they still have photos after their flight, they give the children points of reference for their memories, but they also create space to discuss losses. For example, twelve-year-old Edgar said:

"For my birthday in Kosovo, my mother bought a big cake and invited all my friends. I still have a photo as a reminder."

The happy memories of big parties in the country of origin are consequently overshadowed by **losses of family members and disruptions to relationships**. Many of the children lost contact with family members because of or during the flight. For example, Marlon's uncle and granddad stayed in Kosovo when he and his family set off towards a better future. And Josephina very much misses her grandma who still lives in Eritrea: "I would love to see my grandma more often and I wish that she could come to Germany soon. But we do speak on the phone now and then."

These quotes imply the dimension of being a geographically scattered family whose family members only have limited scope to change anything about it. Thus, Josephina's desire for her grandmother and stable contact with her corresponds to the fundamental socio-political issues of the importance to successful integration of the subsequent immigration of family members.

Losses and interrupted relationships are thus subjects addressed by the children in the interviews, and this is particularly serious when it is not clear where a close family member actually is. Maybe some children avoid discussing a permanent loss. Shirin from Iran lives alone with her mother in Germany and the two of them seem to have fled on their own. But she doesn't want to say where her father is and what happened to him. Whether he is still alive or was a victim of the persecution of Christians in Iran or whether her parents have separated and the child doesn't want to talk about it remains unclear.

Families are often separated by flight and then reunited later. Edgar talks about exactly this experience:

"My older brothers went away from Kosovo on their own first of all. When they got to Germany they phoned us and then the rest of the family set off. We all cried when we saw each other again because for a time it looked as though we couldn't find my brothers. That made my mother, my sister and me very sad."

Kabira's father also set off from Syria on his own first. Only later did her mother travel with the children, following their father. They all met up again in Italy and were

happy – but the flight and its experiences changed Kabira's parents and they have now separated.

The memories of family members in the country of origin, the flight undertaken with the family, the subsequent arrival in Germany – these are all memories that inevitably connect the children to their family, that will live on as collective family memories and that will be discussed with the family. On the one hand, memories can represent what was "good" about their familiar home country and their dear relatives, but they also reveal the reasons for the flight and displacement. How the situation in the country of origin was experienced, to whom in the family the children assign the initiative for flight, whether they organised the flight together or separately, father first and then mother with the children, what uncertainties they experienced on the journey, all of these contribute to children's views of family and is part of their experience in Germany.

In addition to family, friendships with other children are important in the stories. This includes the experience of the loss of **friends and friendships** as a result of the flight or after it. Josephina says: "When we got on the aeroplane to Germany, the worst thing for me was that I had to leave my friend behind in Eritrea. I loved her so much; we played together every day. Now I have no contact with her; that's such a pity!"

Children who move house within a country also have these experiences and they also suffer from the possible loss of a close friendship. So this does not per se have to be seen as a particular stress for children who have fled. Nevertheless, the question remains as to what resources children can access, whether they can cope with sad feelings, and how the risk that they find no way of integrating their experiences and the significant people in their home countries into their self can be countered.

But new friendships are made as a result of the flight. Shirin met a girl in the reception centre in Karlsruhe who is still her friend. "We write to each other because my friend lives in Cologne now and we can't see each other very often."



Jakob stresses how important his new friends are to his life in Germany: "If I don't say something right, for example 'Blaum' instead of 'Baum', my friends help me and say what the word should really be. That's really great! I also like to play football with my friends; my friends are very important to me!"

Therefore, as much as losses, be they of people, familiar everyday routines, the familiar landscape and language, are part of the experience of children who have fled, their everyday life after their arrival in Germany can be marked by productive and supportive new relationship experiences, after the first phase of uncertainty. The opportunities for **new friendships** are portrayed in detail and vividly in the children's stories. Arrival in the new environment, familiarisation and ultimately the integration of children newly arrived in Germany is made easier and encouraged by new alliances with children of the same age and through new, growing friendships. From the children's point of view, these relationships can be interpreted as the first gestures of arrival, caring and the associated sigh of relief. These gestures by children, but also by caring and compassionate adults, are as central for children just as much as for adults.

By being given access to society and not being shut away in separate accommodation, children and their parents are given the opportunity to build up social networks and thus

I would love to see my grandma more often and I wish that she could come to Germany soon. But we do speak on the phone now and then.

participate in society with an interchange of give and take. The institutions in which children are housed with their families are in principle the rooms that either contribute to or have a preventive effect on how children experience family and what good opportunities they have to make alliances and friendships.

Education and language

It is obvious that flight confronts children with language confusion. At the latest when they arrive in Germany, they realise that their native language is no longer the natural choice for communication. Sometimes even young children try to overcome linguistic barriers with English words or phrases. They thus experience language as an entrance to the new world and this challenge was literally put into words in the interviews, especially by the older children. Just like the political discussions on integration by learning the language, the children we interviewed seize on this argument and connect it with education and their own educational efforts.

Children who have fled are educated in school. Overall, it is generally appreciated and the children see their resources for well-being and for familiarisation with Germany in the school or in individual teachers. Overall, the children's biographies are distilled at school and with their experiences there. Because in the interviews, the causes of flight and the reasons for wanting to stay in Germany

are bound to experiences at school. The comparison between their experience of school in the country of origin and school in Germany is developed here. When individual children talk about the reasons for fleeing, they attach it to the **blows or discrimination** from teachers that they experienced. This makes school a place where violence and discrimination were experienced and the most important reasons for fleeing. Bajan says that he was marginalised at school. He and his family are Roma, a group of people who are disadvantaged and discriminated against in Serbia. This presented him and his family with great disadvantages in their home country: "My parents couldn't buy me any books or pens for school. That's why I got into trouble with my teachers and was actually beaten."

Shirin from Iran had similar experiences. As Christians, she and her mother belonged to a minority. In the interview, she unambiguously states that in the short or long term it would have cost her and her mother their lives because Christians are persecuted in Iran. "I always had to wear a headscarf at school. Once, I got into real trouble because my headscarf slipped and some of my hair could be seen. I wasn't allowed to go to school for a few days."

We rarely hear about these experiences in reports because the focus is more on institutions tailored to adults when the right to asylum due to state persecution is being

In school some of the children call me 'chocolate' – because of the colour of my skin.

considered. If we also include the child's systematic worlds of experience and sense in the consideration, there are definitely perspectives that are relevant to everyday life. In terms of participation in the German educational system, in the interviews the children mainly report on their positive experiences with teachers. For example, Edgar expresses his gratitude and surprise that the teachers are so friendly to him. "In Kosovo I was beaten if I didn't give the right answer or didn't have an exercise book with me for the lesson. It's very different here: the teacher asks me how I am and how I'm settling in. I find that so nice; I've never known anything like that!"

However, the limits to access to education in the countries of origin are not the only aspects that the interviewed children told us about. It is clear that all of the children are grateful for the opportunity that they are given in Germany: to be able to go to school here, to be able to learn the **new language** and to make new friends through school who can help them to cope in the new environment. Jakob says: "I already go to a proper school, not a preparatory class like the other children in the refugees' home. I really want to learn German; I want to do it all on my own. I'm also really interested in maths! I want to be a teacher one day and teach the children things. I think that's great!"



This quote could be used to discuss how most federal states deal with integration classes and ask questions about alternatives. But something else becomes clear here: the future prospects of a child attached to school, language learning and education. It is possible that in the process it will become clear how children experience their new environment and whether the experiences they undergo here, the encounters and the care will open up plans for the future. The possibility to connect one's own past and the experience in the here and now to the need for future prospects can also be seen in Jakob's report.

But school in Germany also causes problems for the children in our study. Josephina talks about racist experiences:

"In school some of the children call me 'chocolate' – because of the colour of my skin. That's just about OK because chocolate is yummy. But once one of them swore at me really badly because of my skin colour; I don't understand what that's about. My teacher always says, 'In one ear and straight out through the other.' I'm trying to do that."

At least Josephina's teacher reacts, although we have to ask how teachers can be given more support and made better able to protect children from such experiences and to act in an anti-discriminatory way themselves. It is a difficult everyday experience for children in Germany to have a different skin colour or to speak a different language. These experiences of discrimination and marginalisation are rarely mentioned in our interviews, which does not mean that they don't exist.

Overall, the children we interviewed are aware of the opportunity that access to the education system gives them. They have great hopes of acquiring skills and knowledge and they want to use them to secure their futures. Shirin from Iran says:

"I want a really good job one day; maybe I'll be a fashion designer, I'm not sure yet; maybe I'll have another idea when I'm older. It is important to me to work when I'm grown up, which is why I want to go to grammar school next year; my teacher agrees."

There was war in Kosovo. A bomb fell on our house; it was totally destroyed. After that we didn't have a house any more and often slept on the streets.

Moreover, attending school also enables an experience of normality. This offers stability and security, because everyday routines are ruptured during the flight.

Security and protection

When children's well-being is impaired and they feel that they are particularly vulnerable, this is often due to a lack of security. A lack of security and protection is almost always a reason for flight. Children are also well aware of this or will have developed a feeling for this in the situations they have experienced, even if they can't explicitly put it into words. These dimensions also include unsettling observations among close relatives or reactions of parents in which their own uncertainty is expressed. But in our interviews, other aspects after arrival in Germany are added to this, and they are directly linked to uncertain residency status. Ten-year-old Jakob from Kosovo very impressively reports his worries and fears: "I heard from an acquaintance that the police come at night. People who aren't allowed to stay in Germany are collected at night and sent back. I can't sleep well because of this, you know? I have lots of stress and fear."

The quote illustrates that children pick up and process any piece of information pertaining to their uncertain situation. If there are no transparent and clear processes and associated information, whether at a reception centre, in shared accommodation or at the local authority, this can lead to great uncertainty, as can be seen in Jakob's case.

Children need a feeling of security for their well-being and in view of their elementary reliance on protection and care. This also makes it possible for them to develop their potentials and to get used to the new environment and to take steps towards a new life as new arrivals without fear or worries. Leaving children and their families with a feeling of **uncertainty and lack of prospects** puts an enormous strain on mental and social development. **Existential fears** threaten the whole family.

The status of waiting, the physical and mental persistence, for example for recognition as an asylum seeker, in reception centres, in corridors, before departures or at the borders,



generates emotions, sometimes monotony and can be an expression of social coldness.

If we think of a child's urge to move and need for security, other questions about these imposed forms of waiting are raised. Shirin from Iran also reports of experiences of uncertainty in the reception centre: "There was a girl there; she was funny, almost crazy. She was always hitting me and crying."

In the reception centre, Shirin had no one other than her mother to whom she could turn with this problem. This experience of Shirin's clearly illustrates how few opportunities people on the run have of deciding on the people with whom they have to live. In the large accommodation centres in particular, people who have fled form a sort of artificial community, whose dynamics also have an impact on the children. The rather unregulated structures of shared accommodation, with their cramped living conditions and little opportunity for withdrawal and privacy, therefore makes it an unsuitable place for children to stay in. Children need safe and regulated structures as well as safe accommodation in the "best interest of the child".

Healthcare, social and material provision

An analysis of the importance of security and protection has already indicated the dimension of healthcare, social and material provision that is so central to the children who have fled. The deadly terror such as that experienced

by children in flight is especially threatening to psychosocial health. This is where psychotherapy is especially important.

"When we travelled over the sea in the little ship, it rocked all over the place and slowly filled with water. I was very frightened. At some point, an enormous ship came and collected us all up; we had to climb high and ever higher," says ten-year-old Kabira from Syria in her interview. At the "getting to know each other" day before the interviews, she kept pointing to ships sailing past on the Rhine and said: "We sailed over the sea in a boat like that. I had nightmares for a long time, but they're slowly getting better."

Kabira's stories show that the mental health of children who have fled is fragile. Farid and Samir, the Afghan brothers from Hamburg, regularly attend the refugees' outpatients department where **traumatic disorders** are treated. Many of the children we interviewed have undergone experiences that can damage mental health and that require treatment with specialist staff. War-like conflicts, witnessing death and violence and the risk of not surviving are the experiences of some of the children interviewed.

But, as already mentioned, the **permanent uncertainty and fear** of having no prospect of staying, being collected unexpectedly and sent back to the country of origin can cause **mental damage** among the children who have fled, as can worries about their

parents and their stability. Edgar's stories are in this vein, when he reports that his mother suffered a serious mental illness as a result of the experiences of the Kosovo war: "In Kosovo, my mother was very ill; she was frightened for me and my brothers and sisters and was always thinking about the bombs. But we had no money in Kosovo; we couldn't afford a doctor. My mother gets tablets here in Germany and she's much better."

Access to the healthcare system, general healthcare provision, plays an essential role for the children and the families who have fled. What is central for childhood research is precisely how children have gained their knowledge and how they try to sort out their observations, what they have heard and the medical care of their mother, for example, that they have experienced and make sense of it. Now that his mother is receiving medical care, Edgar is also better because he no longer has to worry so much about his mother. These forms of relief are important for children and they are part of comprehensive provision aimed at families.

But in the case of Edgar in particular, it can be seen that the children who have fled often assume great responsibility for their parents and put themselves in the role of a caring parent (parentification). This is particularly the case

if they learn the new language more quickly and better because they are then used for interpreting activities. If, as in Edgar's case, the father is dead, the children are sometimes given responsibilities that the remaining parent cannot manage alone. "When my mother was in hospital for weeks at a time, my older brothers looked after me and my sister. I always did the shopping because my mum wasn't there. I also do that when mum is too tired to go shopping," says Edgar.

Here it can be seen that not only are trauma-therapy treatments needed for **healthy physical and mental development** of children with experience of flight, but that some families also need close-knit support from social workers so that the children can remain children and are not overburdened with jobs that are really the preserve of adults.

In addition to healthcare provision, material provision and the existing material resources of a child and a family are also important. Flight usually also means heavy material losses; many children are also clear about this:

"There was war in Kosovo. A bomb fell on our house; it was totally destroyed. After that we didn't have a house any more and often slept on the streets."

Here, Edgar is reporting on a very **radical material shortage in their daily life**. But Marlon, Jakob and Bojan also say that there was a lack of material equipment in their countries of origin, whether firewood, books and pens for school or clothing. All of the children interviewed fall below the poverty line in Germany and little will change in this material situation for a long time. Kabira and her family were able to save only a little of their luggage on their flight from Syria to Germany via the Mediterranean Sea. Few people who have fled have possession and are thus greatly **dependent on material donations**; that is also very important to the children. Marlon reports that he and his family have no table in the accommodation where he can do his homework: "I just do my homework on the floor; I can do that. But here in Germany, my father can at least buy me the materials that I need for school."

For most of the children interviewed, the experiences they have had with **food** are also key.

"When we finally arrived in Italy on the ship, my siblings, my mother and I were so hungry! We then met my dad again and he bought a chicken for us, we shovelled it into our mouths with our hands, we were that hungry," Kabira says. Josephina remembers very well how unfamiliar she found the food in the reception centre in Gießen; she remembers mashed potatoes every day.

Shirin from Iran had similar experiences:

"We were very happy when we had our own kitchen again; since then my mother has been cooking Iranian food again; that's just what I like best."

Access to food and the means to prepare familiar dishes is decisive for the **identity of the children who have fled** and their families. Sticking to familiar food, preparing dishes in a familiar way, seems to help the children and their parents to make sense both of events that occurred where they used to live and during the situations in flight as well as the shared experiences with familiar attachment figures, their observations, fears and finally the situation after arrival in Germany. The **autonomy** associated with

When we travelled over the sea in the little ship, it rocked all over the place and slowly filled with water. I was very frightened.

the opportunity to be able to prepare familiar food gives security.

Material and social provision also manifests itself for children in the matter of where and how they live.

The domestic environment on the stations of flight also takes up lots of space in the interviews. From other studies, it is known how much the living environment helps to determine the feeling of safety, development opportunities and the activity radius of children. This clearly stands out in the interviews. Shirin from Iran, for example, is overjoyed that she and her mother now have a flat of their own and no longer have to share a kitchen and bathroom with others: "It is so lovely to have a room of my own; here, I can decide for myself how I arrange things."

At the same time, in the interviews we note reluctance to question or criticise the unfamiliar living conditions. As with Edgar, for example, who doesn't give a proper answer to the question of whether he likes the flat in the shared accommodation, because on the one hand he is happy to have a roof over his head, but on the other still feels uncomfortable with his current accommodation.

Privacy and self-determination

One visual example of the importance children attach to self-determined scope for themselves and relatives in their everyday lives is whether the families can prepare their own meals. Fleeing and applying for asylum mean a high degree of dependency and extremely little scope for self-determination in everyday routines. Children just as much as adults experience this and it may be especially difficult for them to see – in the process of waiting, suffering and the uncertain future – any sense that would make the situation more bearable.

The need for and the ability to achieve autonomy in principle plays a central role in many studies on children's well-being. But it runs through our interviews like a common theme through the children's stories and is relevant to all of the dimensions that have unfolded. Dependency on external decisions affects the whole family that has fled, but especially the children. Because, in the order of the generation, children are in an imbalance of powers that is not in their favour. If the parents are then also dependent on external decision-makers, on information and a lack of



self-determination, this affects the children even more. This can be seen in Jakob's stories of his fear of deportation when he is sleeping or in Josephina, who doesn't really know whether she will be able to return to Eritrea with her family.

Children as bearers of hope

However, autonomy and self-determination give prospects; they give security in actions, feelings and thoughts.

With the motto of this year's Universal Children's Day, UNICEF and Deutsche Kinderhilfswerk have got to the heart of the needs of children with experience of flight: **"Giving Children a Home!"**, it is called. Children who have fled violence and terrorism, poverty and discrimination with their families need the prospect of a home and security, need to feel that they are protected,

“My parents couldn't buy me any books or pens for school. That's why I got into trouble with my teachers and was actually beaten.”

that they are being helped, that the available resources and skills are being built up and will result in their best possible development. In Germany, we have the necessary funds and the logistical means to treat children who have fled and their families appropriately according to their status and to understand their stories as people who have fled, but also to welcome them, give them a home and enable them to have a shared future. Children with experience of flight should not be seen as pure victims; children are independent players and subjects who bring resources, creativity, self-will and future dreams with them. This study is concerned with using this in a form of inclusion that means mutual give-and-take and sees diversity in Germany as an asset. In this way **children become bearers of hope** – for our society and for the international society.

Recommendations for Action for Politics, Lobbying and Practice

Securing the “Child's Right to Today” and Ensuring Participation for Children



These recommendations for action result from the findings that we were able to make from the interviews with children who had fled, and from the orientation to well-being and the vulnerability of children. They have been worded sufficiently abstractly because they all touch areas of action for children with experience of flight.

1. **According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the well-being of children should be the driver of all political decisions:** the well-being of the child must have priority in all decisions that affect children that have fled their homes. This means that children who have fled – irrespective of whether they are accompanied or not – must always be entitled to provision within the meaning of the “best interest of the child”. However, the youth welfare services must take on a guardian position and ensure that decisions affecting children who have fled are always taken in the best interest of the child,
2. **Establishing and supporting coordinated networks of care and securing participation focused on the needs of children:** politics, the administration, lobbyists and specialists in their fields each tried to manage the challenges in their own ways. But the care of children and their families demands a fundamentally coordinated strategy. The well-being of children must be understood in multiple dimensions, which is why offerings and activities must be better coordinated. Networks must be built for this that bring single activities into contact with each other, share examples of best practice and strategically contribute to the needs of children who have fled being considered.
3. **Considering the security and protection needs of children wherever they may be living:** the interviews show how much uncertainty impairs everyday life for children and their well-being. What is needed is the fast and cooperative creation of firm everyday routines from day one, secure living, playing and recreational rooms, reliable offerings and qualified professional and volunteer adults. Unannounced deportations of families are thus unreasonable from the perspective of the children.
4. **Ensuring the cohesion of children:** From the point of view of children, protection of the family as enshrined in the German Basic Law is decisive. Families and family connections in everyday life are central to well-being, mental health and integration. Bringing families together must, therefore, be supported and actively promoted from the children’s point of view. Children experience security, trust and protection thanks to reliable relationships.
5. **Affording families who have fled their homes access to inclusive living in the interests of participation in society:** Prospects for families who have fled their homes can come about in integrated residential projects. Here, it is possible to address the needs of parents and children. In the “HoffnungsOrten” in Leonberg and “Hoffnungshäuser” throughout Germany, families who have fled their homes and local families come together. Specific offerings for adults and children create the scope for cohesion and participation and give the newly-arrived families the feeling that they are welcome.¹⁴

6. **Creating scope for participation and freeing children from passivity from the outset:** for their well-being, children need educational and leisure offerings out of school; they want to contribute and be effective. No matter what origins the children have – from the very start, they should have opportunities for pleasant living environments. Offerings alongside school and pre-school help with real-world experience and enable children to learn about themselves and others and to build up self-confidence. In return, children must be able to be children and not be abused for adult-oriented concerns. Concepts such as the “Child-Friendly Spaces” of World Vision have proved their worth in crisis regions and are also suitable in Germany to give children opportunities for play and development.
7. **Securing access to education on arrival:** School and pre-school education must be made available to newly-arrived children from the start in the form of nationwide and appropriate offerings. Teachers and pre-school staff must be made aware of such children’s needs and given support and extra skills to cope with them with suitable offers of further training. In this connection, the German language must be appreciated just as much as the children’s original language.
8. **Securing psychosocial and healthcare provision bureaucratically, transferring good practices:** Children who have fled need a low-threshold and uncomplicated access to the health system. A health card should therefore be made available from the start. Physical and mental well-being must be ensured in a non-bureaucratic way. Our interviews show that many children have undergone traumatic experiences. Treatment for mental scars, as in the refugees’ outpatients department of the “Children for Tomorrow” Foundation in Hamburg for example, must be made possible quickly and over the long term.
9. **Initiating and evaluating pilot projects to support children and transferring them to other locations if they have good results:** Good examples include the voluntary organisation “Jugendliche ohne Grenzen” (Young People without Borders). Language camps for newly-arrived children, such as those in Aachen or Osnabrück, early low-threshold leisure offerings such as those at “FreiZeit für Flüchtlingskinder” (Free Time for Refugee Children) or sponsorship programmes for children who have fled, such as “Schlüsselmenschen” (Key People) in Freiburg. Such offerings, starting from the needs of the children, must be transferred to other locations after a positive evaluation.
10. **Encourage research, including participative research, that is focused on incorporating the children’s points of view:** The interviews conducted in this study with children who have fled their homes show that children can formulate their needs, wishes, fears and dreams very well and that it is worthwhile creating talking rooms where children can speak up. Research that takes children seriously and develops their prospects is worthwhile in order to be able to make decisions at the practical and political level that are in the “best interest of the child”. For this reason, research budgets must be made available to specifically examine the perspectives of children and to evaluate examples of best practice and bring about reproduction on a wide scale.



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- 1 Cf. <http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2015/12/asylantraege-november-2015.html> [As of 01.03.2016].
- 2 Cf. <https://www.unicef.de/fl%C3%BCchtlingskinder> [As of 01.03.2016]
- 3 Cf. <https://www.uno-fluechtlingshilfe.de/fluechtlinge/themen/fluechtlingskinder.html> [As of 01.03.2016]
- 4 Cf. Asylum seekers and first-time asylum seekers according to nationality, age and sex. Annually collated data (rounded) at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database> [As of 08.03.2016]
- 5 Cf. <http://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/25-jahre-kinderrechtskonvention-kommentar-lothar-krappmann-kinderrechte-fuer-alle-kinder-im-land.html> [As of 01.03.2016]
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- 13 The international comparative study conducted since 2013 "Children's Worlds. The international survey of children's wellbeing", funded by the Jacobs Foundation, Zürich, is based on a survey of children between the ages of 8 and 12 on the basis of a multidimensional concept and is a result of this further development (<http://www.isciweb.org>).
- 14 www.hoffnungstraeger.de

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Project management of the study:

Dr Katharina Gerarts, World Vision Institut

Project team:

Prof. Sabine Andresen, Goethe University Frankfurt

Dr Franziska Eisenhuth

Dr Fionna Klasen, Hamburg-Eppendorf University Hospital

Silvia Huber, World Vision Institut

Bilsena Ibrahimović, Goethe University Frankfurt

Anita Lechler, Hoffnungsträger Stiftung

Constanze Löffler, Medizintexte

Prof. Ulrike Ravens-Sieberer, Hamburg-Eppendorf University Hospital

Julian Storck, World Vision Institut

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World Vision Deutschland e.V.
Am Zollstock 2-4, D-61381 Friedrichsdorf
info@worldvision.de, www.worldvision.de