

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: [Syrian refugee crisis](#): follow-up, HC 796.

Tuesday 14 March 2017

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Dr Lisa Cameron; Mr Nigel Evans; Pauline Latham; Jeremy Lefroy; Mr Ivan Lewis; Wendy Morton; Paul Scully.

Questions 90 - 162

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Lord Dubs, House of Lords; Beth Gardiner-Smith, Child Refugees Organiser, Safe Passage UK.

II: Michael Bochenek, Senior Counsel, Children's Rights, Human Rights Watch; Melanie Teff, Senior Humanitarian Advocacy and Policy Adviser, Unicef UK.



Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Lord Dubs and Beth Gardiner-Smith.

Q90 Chair: Good morning, everyone. One of the things we are trying to do as a Committee is to follow up our earlier reports, and our first published report of this Parliament was on the issue of the Syria refugee crisis. This is the second follow-up session that we have done, and we are delighted to welcome by our first panel of witnesses this morning, Lord Dubs and Beth. Thank you very much indeed for being here with here with us.

The public session is for about an hour and a half this morning. We are going to spend 45 minutes with our first panel and then 45 minutes with the second panel. We have nine questions that we want to deal with, so the maths is roughly five minutes per question, if we can manage to stick to that. I will ask the first question, and in responding do introduce yourselves. Do you think the Government have gone back on a commitment that they made to you on child refugees, Lord Dubs?

Lord Dubs: Yes, I think they have. When Section 67 of the Immigration Act went through, the then Minister, James Brokenshire actually spoke to me on the phone and said that the Government proposed to accept the letter and the spirit of the amendment, which I thought was a pretty firm commitment. It started very slowly because of the situation in Calais. It started too slowly to my mind, and then the Government did two things: they announced their eligibility criteria for France and they pretty well stopped a lot of the children from being able to come.

To remind you, the eligibility criteria said very young children or women who the French authorities said were subject to sexual attacks and sexual harassment, and for the rest only children from Syria and Sudan, thereby excluding Eritrea, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and so on. We thought that was pretty bad and then more recently the Government said that, having taken 200 under that process, they were going to stop the whole thing at the end of March, by which time there would be 350. I can give you the reasons why I think the Government are wrong and the excuses they gave for that.

Chair: Yes, please do.

Lord Dubs: I thought that was a breach of what Parliament decided. At the time they said two things, basically. One is that they want to stop the scheme because the scheme encouraged trafficking, to which I would say emphatically it does not. Where there are legal paths to safety, traffickers do not get a way in, but we know from elsewhere, particularly in Calais and so on, that the traffickers do best when there are no legal paths to safety. The second and perhaps even more important point was about local authorities. The Government said that local authorities were no longer able to provide foster places. There is a grave



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misunderstanding on the part of the Home Office if they actually believe that, because I have spoken to local authority leaders who say they are open to taking more, they are happy to take more, indeed, up and down the country. I am not saying all local authorities can, and they do have financial difficulties, but in principle local authorities have said that they can do more. On both counts, the Government are wrong.

Q91 Wendy Morton: Good morning, Lord Dubs, and thank you for coming to our Committee today. We have talked a little bit about the figure of 350. Do you acknowledge, though, that the figure of 350 is an additional figure for capacity for local authorities, on top of the 5,000 that they welcome every year through existing schemes and through presentations at our own borders?

Lord Dubs: Yes, it was always intended to be an additional scheme. That was the basis of the amendment to the Immigration Act but at that time we understood from Save the Children that there were up to 95,000 unaccompanied child refugees in Europe and the idea was we should take some of them—not all of them, by any means. Indeed, the original amendment had the figure of 3,000, which was based on what our share might be of a then lower total estimate of 25,000. The estimate then went up, but the 3,000 figure had to be dropped when the amendment went to the Commons and there was financial privilege attached and the Government chose not to waive financial privilege. Therefore, we had drop the 3,000 figure. But the 350—

Wendy Morton: That is on top of.

Lord Dubs: I think the 3,000 figure was still a figure people understood as having been in the original amendment. I do not think the 350 was anywhere near the commitment that Parliament felt was being made at the time, nor indeed the commitment that the Government at the time—

Q92 Wendy Morton: But it was on top of the 5,000 that generally speaking we accept each year.

Lord Dubs: The ones we accept each year were not necessarily from Europe. Emphatically, there was a difference between those we take from Europe, which was the subject of my amendment, and those that we take from the region. Indeed, of the ones under the amendment, in addition to the 350, some would have come illegally. In Calais, I spoke to some Afghan boys and I took their details back to give the Home Office because they all seemed to qualify, and by the following week three of them had got over on the back of a truck, which is very dangerous indeed.

Q93 Chair: On 9 February, the Home Secretary said that the Home Office meets with you on a regular basis, along with children's charities. Can you tell us, in those meetings, whether you have been given any assurances about the numbers that the UK Government would take?



Lord Dubs: I met Theresa May twice when she was the Home Secretary in the course of the passing of the amendment. I have met other Lords and Ministers as well, and then more recently I have been having fairly regular meetings with Baroness Williams, who is the Home Office Minister in the Lords. I have also had meetings with other Ministers to do with a possible amendment to the Children's Bill, where the Government actually improved on the amendment I had put down there, so I have had meetings.

As regards to figures, we have discussed the figures with Ministers, and I have asked why there was so little progress and what was happening, and clearly there were difficulties between our authorities and the French authorities as well. I am not in a position to know who was most at fault; at one time the French were most at fault and at another time the British were, but there was a lack of access to the refugees in Calais. There is better access to the refugees in the camps in Greece, for example.

Q94 **Pauline Latham:** Thank you for coming Lord Dubs. Is it your understanding that the option of resettling unaccompanied children in the UK through the Immigration Act provisions is now closed? Do you think there is any prospect of more children, beyond the 350, still coming to the UK under your amendment, bearing in mind that, as Wendy Morton said, we are already taking about 5,000 additional children anyway?

Lord Dubs: It is my understanding that the Government have said the scheme is closed; it is my belief the scheme should not be closed, and all I can say is that there is a lot of pressure outside of Parliament that we should continue to press the Government.

This is what I think should happen: the Government should keep the scheme open but accept children under Section 67 at the speed with which local authorities can provide places, so that it moves seamlessly, so there is no pressure to find places where the local authorities feel they cannot. As local authorities come forward with places—and they need to be asked again about this—then we should accept them but keep the scheme going. That would be in the spirit of the amendment, and it would also be in the interests of children.

Q95 **Pauline Latham:** How many children would you estimate on top of the 350 would still be eligible to come to the UK, under the terms of your amendment? In other words, children that arrived in Europe before the EU-Turkey deal on 20 March last year.

Lord Dubs: I cannot give precise estimates but we think there are roughly 10,000 children in the camps in Greece but some of them are with families; we think there are about 2,500 unaccompanied children. There is a much larger number of children in Italy, but they are a bit scattered in Italy and they are not so easy to pin down. Of course, there are still a few in France who have worked their way from where the French relocated them back to the Channel coast, which is quite alarming. I cannot say all 2,500 in Greece will be eligible—there might



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be other considerations—but certainly 2,500 is the figure we are working to.

Beth Gardiner-Smith: We have done an assessment and it is by no means a comprehensive assessment of the shelters in Greece but from that assessment we believe that roughly half of the 2,500 unaccompanied children in Greece would have family elsewhere in Europe. Therefore, it would not necessarily be in their best interests to transfer to the UK. That still leaves well over 1,000 unaccompanied children, many of whom do not have access to the accommodation shelters and are therefore sleeping rough and in informal camps and in serious vulnerability.

Q96 **Pauline Latham:** Could you tell me what your definition of “children” is? What are the ages of these unaccompanied children?

Lord Dubs: They are up to 18.

Q97 **Pauline Latham:** So although technically they are children, they are actually mainly teenagers that are unaccompanied and mainly boys.

Lord Dubs: If I can go back one step, we had the children coming under Section 67 but we also had what we call the Dublin III children, and that is a European-wide agreement—I am sure you are aware of this—whereby if children have family members, they can be reunited with their family members. That, of course, might mean that their family members are in Sweden, Germany or whatever; it is in whatever country they have, but there are the Dublin III children as well.

As far as the ages are concerned, my understanding is that when the original controversy arose because of apparently older Afghan boys, they were Dublin III; they were not under Section 67. I defended it by saying that if one of them was 19 instead of 17, that is okay; the world does not come to an end. However, it did affect public opinion, and one of the things I was very keen on was that public opinion should be on our side in all this, because that makes it acceptable in local communities. It was not good for public opinion to have the accusation that they were all older.

In fact, the ones that came under Section 67 were all much younger and girls and so on, but the original thing was not a successful public relations thing.

Q98 **Pauline Latham:** But “much younger” could mean anything. Do you mean three and four year olds or are you talking 10 year olds or 15 year olds?

Beth Gardiner-Smith: As I understand it, the youngest unaccompanied child—and there are a few of them transferred from Calais in that demolition process—was eight-years-old, unaccompanied in the camp. There are very young children who were in the camp.

Q99 **Pauline Latham:** But was that unusual; it was not the norm?



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Beth Gardiner-Smith: It certainly is not the average age of unaccompanied children in Europe. It is obviously quite a harrowing journey that they undertake to get to Europe, so for a child arriving here at eight years old, we would seriously question how they got here and it is likely to be through trafficking and people smugglers. It is not the average age profile, but children are children until they are 18; that is what we have in UK law. There are varying degrees of vulnerability to do with mental health issues and to do with trauma, all of which would recommend them for the Section 67 scheme. If they are highly vulnerable as a 17 year old, we would still consider that to be a good case for them to be transferred to the UK.

Lord Dubs: Typically we are talking about older than eight; we are probably talking about 12, 14 and 16 year olds.

Q100 **Paul Scully:** Lord Dubs, thank you very much for coming to the Committee today. You said in answer to Mrs Latham's question that you considered the Dubs arrangement closed.

Lord Dubs: I do not; the Government consider the scheme closed.

Q101 **Paul Scully:** Looking at what Amber Rudd, the Home Secretary, said, she specifically said in answer to the Urgent Question, "I repeat that the Dubs amendment that is in place is not closed". Can you go into a little bit more detail about why you believe that the opposite is the case?

Lord Dubs: That was said at some point in early March, I think.

Paul Scully: 9 February.

Lord Dubs: My understanding is that the scheme was going to be closed at the end of March, by which a further 150, mainly from Greece, would have been taken on top of the 200. The Government then said 350 and that would be closed. That is my understanding

Q102 **Wendy Morton:** I do not need to follow up. I was just seeking clarification on that specific issue of age and the point that Lord Dubs made about exceptions; it is helpful to get the indication that 12, 14 and 16 is the more typical age profile.

Lord Dubs: It is very difficult, if they are very young, to have made their way half way across the world so they have got to have been a bit older just to physically manage it.

Q103 **Chair:** You mentioned your own contacts with local authority leaders; do you have a sense of the sorts of numbers that local authorities are prepared to take?

Lord Dubs: Not easily. I have to say I have been in touch with COSLA in Scotland. I have had some word from them and also from the politicians in Scotland who are more optimistic about the numbers than the officials—not surprisingly—I have been told, from some of the London local authorities, and second-hand I have also heard from others. We are



talking about a small number per local authority but it adds up. I have to say that Hammersmith Council, which is where I live when I am in London—I know them quite well—have certainly stepped up to the mark and are very much willing to take more. The leader of the council has assured me that he is happy to do that.

Q104 Mr Lewis: Can I thank you for coming this morning and also thank you for remembering, literally, where you came from? One of the criticisms of politicians is they park their life stories and their histories when they becomes political figures, and it is very important that your commitment to this is not just as a politician but as somebody who personally is in this country because we had a particular view on the way we should treat refugees. We should not let that pass this morning without acknowledging that and thanking you for the service you have done to our country.

On a very specific question, the FT has suggested that the reason for the Government's shift in position is that public opinion has changed. Back in the spring, there was a great deal of public support and sympathy, particularly in relation to child refugees, for some of the reasons we all know, in terms of the horrendous imagery. There is a sense that that public opinion has shifted and now the Government believe there is a greater political cost in taking these refugees than not taking these refugees. What is your judgment about whether that is the Government's view—that public opinion has shifted—and do you believe that it has shifted?

Lord Dubs: First of all, thank you for what you said at the beginning. Public opinion, in so far as I can judge it, is still on the side of our taking child refugees. Why do I say that? I say it on the basis of a large number of emails and letters I have had, mostly in favour, very few opposed. I say it on the basis that, when I go to local areas and speak about this, I get the sense that there is quite a lot of support. I would have thought that, given the sensitivity of anything to do with immigration at all, if there was a lot of hostility, it would have hit me quite hard; people would have told me.

That is the feeling I have, and all the people I have spoken to say that they also feel the same thing. These may be the sort of people I mix with. They may not be the most objective judges, but can I say bluntly that I am confident that public opinion still believes it is good that we take unaccompanied child refugees?

Q105 Mr Lewis: There is a substantive issue and we have focused on that so far, but there is also a question of the relationship between the Executive and Parliament and we reach decisions and conclusions in different ways sometimes. This was quite unusual because it was based on verbal assurances that Ministers gave, particularly to you but also repeated in the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

What has been subsequently said is that you and others misunderstood



the assurance that was given about this particular category of unaccompanied child refugees. How do you feel about that assertion? In your own mind, were the assurances you were given, both privately and in public, absolutely clear in terms of the Government accepting the 3,000 figure in the context of unaccompanied children? Is there any room for ambiguity?

Lord Dubs: There is room for ambiguity as regards the 3,000 figure, simply because it had to be dropped because of the financial privilege from the amendment, so we did not have a figure. On the other hand, in my earlier discussions with Government Ministers, there was no sense that they were going to stop at that point. Of course they wanted the scheme not to last indefinitely but I have to say I was quite surprised, as well as being dismayed when the figure became 350.

May I repeat that James Brokenshire—a decent man; he has gone to Northern Ireland, of course—assured me on the phone that the Government would accept the letter and spirit of the amendment? I heard that repeated on the floor of the Lords, and no doubt in the Commons, and I took that to mean that they would not arbitrarily close it down so quickly, so I was quite shocked. Nearer the time, I was getting hints that they were trying to find a way of bringing it to an end.

Can I expand on this a little bit? When I disagree with the Government—politically, of course, I am bound to be in that position—at least I normally understand why the Government are doing what they are doing, even if I do not agree with it, on a whole range of issues. In this case, I can honestly say I do not understand why they have done it. We are talking about fairly small numbers. We know that if we take children, then fewer of them get trafficked. At the time when the jungle was going, the more they felt they could come legally, the less they came on the back of a truck. I honestly do not understand, in my heart of hearts, why the Government have decided to close it down in this way. They could have easily kept it going for a bit longer and taken a few more.

Q106 **Dr Cameron:** Thank you, Lord Dubs, for coming to the Committee this morning. When we reported on the Syrian crisis in January 2016, we recognised that many of the unaccompanied children in Europe were not from Syria. Of the 750 children who came to the UK from Calais during the jungle clearance, only 10 were from Syria. Does this indicate the Government are right to be concentrating on children in the region of Syria through the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme?

Lord Dubs: Yes, it is right that more of the children and others in the jungle—I went there twice—were from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and so on. In Greece, there are more Syrians because of the nature of the geographical proximity. My feeling is that there is a need to look after unaccompanied child refugees, and Syrians play a large part in that, but they are not the only part in it.

Q107 **Dr Cameron:** Sometimes we can get a bit hung up on age. I know as a



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mother of two children, whether they were aged 8, 10, 12 or 14, I would not want them to be unaccompanied in Europe. Children are vulnerable as children, whatever age.

As Chair of the disability all-party group, I am also interested in resettlement of children but particularly vulnerable disabled children. The *Independent* has reported that UNHCR has been requested to temporarily limit requests from people with disabilities as part of the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme. Do you have any knowledge of how children with disabilities are being processed under the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme?

Lord Dubs: I am afraid very little. I saw that article, I am aware of it and I am dismayed at the thought that we cannot take at least some of the disabled children, because I thought our approach to taking people from the region, including children, was because of their vulnerability, and here are some very vulnerable ones. I wonder if Beth can throw more light on that.

Beth Gardiner-Smith: We do not deal with children in the region, and it is a UNHCR-led programme. However, our take on it is that that scheme was for children at risk, and that should have been a vulnerability-led scheme. Therefore, children should not be ruled out simply for having a disability because of a capacity issue. That commitment was cast-iron: that it would be 3,000 children at risk who would be transferred, so it is deeply disappointing if that is the case.

Lord Dubs: If I could just add, we were told by people working in Calais and elsewhere that when they do get to safety, say in this country, they will be shocked and traumatised by their experiences, but that may not be visible or obvious. Inside, they may be in turmoil about the experience. There was one Syrian boy who had seen his father killed in front of him in Damascus.

We are aware of that, and of course, even if they are not as handicapped as the ones you have described, that requires a lot of help and support. Of course, that does put a responsibility on local authorities; the local authorities I have spoken to fully understand that and accept that. Of course it also means, when they are fostered, that for the first time in years they get a loving home and a loving environment. They will be vulnerable and this may show more when they get to safety than in the camps where they had to put on a tough exterior.

Q108 **Dr Cameron:** I have to say that when we visited camps in Lebanon and Jordan, some of the children were so traumatised that we were told they could not speak for weeks, even months, and required intensive mental health support so that is also something that we understand.

Do you know how many children with disabilities have come to the UK from Europe in light of your amendment? It is something that I asked Amber Rudd on the floor of the House and was guaranteed that she would write to me, but I have yet to hear a response.



Lord Dubs: I do not know. Do we know?

Beth Gardiner-Smith: We do not know.

Q109 **Dr Cameron:** So it may be that vulnerable children with disabilities are falling through the gaps in terms of the system at this point in time. We need to get the figures.

Lord Dubs: Judging by that article in the *Independent*, yes, they may well be.

Q110 **Pauline Latham:** You just mentioned about children getting to Italy but they would only feel safe when they came to this country. I have great difficulty understanding that, because I did not think Italy was an unsafe place to be. I wonder whether you could acknowledge whether rescuing 10,000-plus children from war-torn Syria, is much more akin to the Kindertransport than bringing children from our peaceful allies in mainland Europe. Italy is a peaceful country. People from this country would not go on holiday every year if they did not feel it was peaceful, so why is it you feel that the children who are in Italy cannot be safe until they get to England and that the only safe place in the whole of Europe is to come here? I just do not understand that rationale.

Lord Dubs: Can I deal with that? First of all, I have never said we should take them all. Indeed, the 3,000 figure in the recent amendment could be seen in the context of 95,000 unaccompanied children.

Pauline Latham: That was not the question, to be fair. I am asking why it is that Italy cannot be seen as a safe place, or Greece—maybe you think that as well—when thousands and thousands of people from this country go on holiday to these European countries.

Chair: These are unaccompanied children you are talking about.

Q111 **Pauline Latham:** But why are they only safe when they come to Britain? It is the only safe place in the whole of Europe, is it?

Lord Dubs: No, I am sure they are safe when they go to Sweden. I am sure they are safe when they go to Germany and other countries.

Pauline Latham: But not Italy or Greece, you are saying.

Lord Dubs: I can speak about Greece with more authority, because I went to the camps in Greece in early January, and so I could see the people there and meet them. The difficulty is that, even in Italy, it is alleged by Interpol at the time that about 10,000 of the unaccompanied children just disappeared, wherever they are. There are very few in camps in Italy; they are just adrift in Italy. Italy is a wonderful country, of course, but if you are on your own and you are a child and you are vulnerable to criminality, being taken into prostitution and so on, it is pretty difficult. All I felt was that we should play our part in finding safety. I daresay the majority will stay in Italy anyway, but we felt we should take at least some of them, and Greece, Italy and France were the obvious places.



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Q112 **Chair:** Is part of the issue particularly with Greece, but also Italy, the sheer numbers of children that are in those countries? It is not about saying, "Take them all here because they are not safe in Italy"; it is saying that the sheer volume of numbers in Greece and Italy merits us taking a small proportion; 3,000 is actually quite a small proportion of the total.

Lord Dubs: In the camps in Greece, the situation is pretty desperate. The temperature was -12° on an industrial estate or in warehouses where there is no proper heating. It is a pretty desperate situation for anybody, and to be an unaccompanied child in that situation is pretty awful, even though Greece can be a wonderful country for holiday-goers, as can Italy. There is a balance. I am sure that some of them will find safety in France, some of them will find safety in Italy and some of them will find safety in Greece, but in Greece, in particular, the Greek authorities are under such pressure and they are finding it very difficult to cope with it all, and they are not getting as much international help as perhaps they should.

Beth Gardiner-Smith: We know that roughly 25,000 unaccompanied child refugees arrived into Italy last year. Of those, only just over 2,000 of them made it into the formal care system in Italy. That means the vast majority of the children do not have access to care and are then trafficked on through or taken by the people smugglers to find somewhere that will give them accommodation and safe protection. They are at huge risk of traffickers and exploitation in that process.

There are just under 5,000 unaccompanied children in care currently in the UK; Italy is currently dealing with 14,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and child refugees in their country. Last year, Britain had 4% of the unaccompanied children arrive in the UK, largely through spontaneous means, so it is a tiny fraction of the larger issue. It is certainly not all of the children but it is really an issue of access to care and protection. Most of these children do not have access to that when they arrive in Europe and therefore, they are trafficked through or smuggled through.

Q113 **Wendy Morton:** In terms of schemes, I know the focus of this morning is very much around the Dubs scheme. I touched on the 5,000 that regularly come through other schemes. I wondered what your thoughts are on MENA—the Middle East and North Africa scheme—which settles about 3,000 children. Is that something that you welcome because that is separate to Dubs and to Dublin?

Lord Dubs: Of course I do. I welcome that and I welcome the 20,000 scheme. They are all positive and they are all good. I would like the 20,000 scheme to be a bit larger but these are all positive ways that people can find safety. I do not think one is at the expense of the other; they add up to a decent policy but on a smaller scale than I would like.

Q114 **Mr Evans:** Good morning. How much do you think the photograph of



that absolutely tragic four-year-old child was a game-changer in public opinion getting behind wanting to see more child refugees being admitted here?

Lord Dubs: I think it was. I have had it quoted so many times by people who say they were shocked. Yes, I think it made a difference. In addition to that, of course, we saw pictures on our television screens of boats in the Mediterranean and of people sinking and so on, and what it did was awaken a humanitarian instinct in our people. People felt they had to do something, and along came the child refugee issue and they said, "Right, this is one way in which we can get involved in this". People felt badly about what was happening in the pictures from the Mediterranean and felt that we as a country could do something.

Q115 **Mr Evans:** Yes, it was appalling and it moved so many people, and of course that is the photograph we saw; there are so many thousands of other incidents where we do not see the photographs where we know it is happening on a daily basis.

Lord Dubs: That is right, and I think that has been an important factor in public opinion staying on this side. Even though public opinion may not generally be sympathetic to increased immigration, on this that has helped to inform public opinion and get public opinion staying in support.

Q116 **Mr Evans:** What was your reaction when the Home Secretary says that, if we go along with the Dubs Amendment, it is actually acting as a pull factor, enticing more people to make those journeys?

Lord Dubs: There is very little hard evidence that it will do that. After all, the Government said that the cut-off point was 20 March and the children had to be in Europe before 20 March to qualify. There might be something in it, but I do not think there is that much in the argument. These are more spontaneous movements for safety and so on, aided and abetted by traffickers, quite often.

Q117 **Mr Evans:** Do you think enough is being done to tackle the problem of traffickers?

Lord Dubs: It is not, but it is extremely difficult; everybody has tried. For example, I was on one of our Select Committees in the Lords and we looked at Operation Sophia. As you will know, Operation Sophia was clearly intended to catch traffickers; it did nothing of the sort. Because our navies could not go into Libyan territorial waters, it meant the traffickers had a field day, because all they did was push unsafe boats outside Libyan territorial waters and then get them to phone up and get them picked up by a western navy. Operation Sophia saved a lot of lives, but it did not catch any traffickers, and we can only do that if we can get some agreement with the Libyan Government, if there is one Libyan Government, to do something in Libya itself, because the traffickers are operating in the safety of Libya.

Q118 **Mr Evans:** Do you think it is more effective for us to spend our aid



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money on support for these youngsters in the region, or indeed those who have made the torturous journey, to actually support them in the countries where they first land, as opposed to bringing them to the United Kingdom?

Lord Dubs: As members of this Committee, you will know better than I do, but my understanding is that there are technical reasons why aid money should not be used in Europe but it certainly can be used in the region.

Q119 **Mr Evans:** Do you think that is more effective, though, to spend the money there, ensuring that they do not make torturous journeys?

Lord Dubs: I know we are a generous donor in terms of support within the region, and I think that is a very good thing. I hope our money is being spent effectively there, but there are still other issues when they get to Europe.

Q120 **Mr Evans:** My final question, Lord Dubs: are we doing enough?

Lord Dubs: I do not think so. We are a rich country and as long as public opinion stays with us in terms of doing this, we could be doing a lot more and as long as local authorities are willing to help, yes, we can do more.

Q121 **Wendy Morton:** We have mentioned different schemes this morning, and I mentioned MENA in my supplementary to the previous question. I wanted to ask both of you, if the Government take no more children through Dubs, what you think the consequences would be, bearing in mind there are other schemes still open.

Lord Dubs: There is not much to help in the camps in Greece and there is not much to help in Italy, where the children are on the whole spread over Italy and heaven knows where they are and who is providing the safety, if anybody. I fear that they will stay in Greece. The situation is pretty bad. There is an EU relocation scheme, which works after a fashion, but I was told about one young man who was offered relocation to Bulgaria, but he apparently said there was no point in going to Bulgaria because he would be leaving a camp in Greece for a camp in Bulgaria, and there were no job opportunities there either. They will just stay there, and as many as possible will drift away and try to get out.

It is quite difficult getting out of Greece. Some have got to Serbia where the conditions are as bad as anywhere, I understand, although I have not been there, and they will try to make it to Serbia. Most of the borders are now closed and there are very few ways out. It is easier to move from Italy, and I guess they will just move along and try to find somewhere, and some will get to the Channel coast.

Beth Gardiner-Smith: Just to add to what Lord Dubs has said, in France, we are seeing the consequences already of the closure of this scheme and the failure to properly implement-



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Wendy Morton: Sorry, the closure of which scheme?

Beth Gardiner-Smith: Of Section 67, of the Dubs scheme, and to properly implement Dublin. Yesterday we found out that another unaccompanied child had died. He is the fifth child now to have died trying to reach the UK. He died trying to climb on the back of lorry on a busy motorway. This is the consequence of closing down safe and legal routes to protection for these children. They will find other means. They do not feel safe where they are currently, they have no access to formal accommodation and care, and therefore they will take crazy risks because they are children, they are teenagers, they do not always make the most rational decisions and that is what they will do. You will see more children falling into the hands of traffickers and illegal smugglers and more children dying.

Q122 **Wendy Morton:** Just to come back on that point, clearly no one wants to hear the tragic stories that you have just shared with us this morning, and clearly those children, those teenagers, are moving across Europe for a better life, and I do not blame anyone for wanting to improve their outlook and their livelihood, but do you not think it would be better to go back to source and help at source, and try to mitigate some of that risk of trafficking and the movement as well, rather than coming up with more and more schemes? It worries me that those schemes encourage them.

Beth Gardiner-Smith: I think we can do both. I am optimistic about the capacity we have as a country to help. We have done so before in the past; we helped 10,000 children from Europe in the 1930s; Alf was one of them. It is not an either/or. The children are here now in Europe. They are vulnerable. They are at risk. We know they are there, and we know often where these children are, and we have a handle on them right now, but if we do not offer them safe and legal routes to protection or if we do not offer them places in the care system, they will simply disappear. That is what happened last year when Europol said 10,000 children went missing, and it will happen again if these routes are not available.

Q123 **Wendy Morton:** Just finally, we talked about finding a safe place for these children in the UK. We know that some of our local authorities are really taking the brunt of this, particularly in the south-east, where the children first come into the UK. Do you feel that where extra capacity is found within the UK, there should be a priority to at least help those local authorities that are dealing with these high numbers, to help them to move some of those children around the UK first, to try to alleviate some of the pressure off those authorities that we know are struggling in some cases?

Lord Dubs: I am sure you are all aware that the situation in Kent is very tough, and I do not think any of the Section 67 children should go to Kent. Indeed, the Government have a relocation scheme and it is important that some of the pressure on Kent should be lessened, and other local authorities should step up to the mark. That should be part of



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the process, but it should not be at the expense of the Section 67 children who are still somewhere in Europe—or at least some of them—but, yes, we have to be sensitive to pressures on local authorities.

Q124 **Paul Scully:** Beth, can I just ask about the example that you cited of that child? Do we know that he was eligible for the Dubs scheme?

Beth Gardiner-Smith: We believe he could have been under the revised criteria for Section 67 that has been published on Friday. He was a child that was transferred out of the Calais Jungle. From what we know, he was transferred into one of the centres, he was from Afghanistan and not under the age of 15, and therefore told he was not eligible at the time for Alf's amendment. Now they have revised the criteria and we believe he probably would have been.

Q125 **Paul Scully:** He had been in France—

Beth Gardiner-Smith: He had been in the Calais Jungle.

Paul Scully: Before the cut-off date.

Beth Gardiner-Smith: Exactly.

Q126 **Paul Scully:** Right, fair enough. Lord Dubs, you talked about Hammersmith and Fulham Council. Have Hammersmith come forward with that? You have obviously had the conversation with them and they say they believe they have the capacity for more. Have they made that case to the Home Office themselves?

Lord Dubs: Yes, I have seen letters from the leader of Hammersmith to the Home Office about this, and indeed other councils are willing as well. I know Ealing are happy to.

Q127 **Paul Scully:** So this is not just part of informal conversations. These are formal representations that have been made.

Lord Dubs: Certainly from Hammersmith, but my understanding from others as well is that they have gone public and said they are willing to do it. Whether they have all written to the Home Office I do not know, but I do know that Hammersmith have.

Q128 **Paul Scully:** Do you know if that was done before the announcement or after the announcement?

Chair: Which announcement?

Paul Scully: The announcement about the 350 children that the Home Secretary made.

Lord Dubs: There is a lot of discussion as to the nature of the Home Office consultation, frankly, and it is the subject of a judicial review going on in the High Court at the moment as to how well the Home Office did the consultation, and one can be a bit critical. It was done in such a low-key manner, and local authorities might have responded better if there had been a more passionate plea from the Home Office. Be that as



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it may, my understanding is that Hammersmith offered all along and they redoubled their efforts when the scheme was closed. I think I have the sequence of events right.

Chair: Just for our information, the leader of Hammersmith was one of a number of local government witnesses who gave evidence to the Home Affairs Committee on this issue on 22 February.

Paul Scully: Okay, so that was after the announcement was made.

Chair: Yes.

Lord Dubs: I am pretty certain that at least some of the local authorities have said absolutely in a straightforward manner that they are willing to take some. They would not take large numbers because it would not be reasonable to expect them to.

Q129 **Paul Scully:** You said yourself about the vulnerable nature of the children coming across and the things they would have seen and the trauma that they would have suffered, and that they would need specialist care, so it is clear that we need to have that capacity before setting a figure, as it were, and making sure that happens.

Lord Dubs: Yes.

Q130 **Paul Scully:** Coming back to the pull factors that Mr Evans was talking about, I was in Greece last year; you would have had similar conversations about the fact that when the boats are coming across and a navy cutter or whoever it is cuts them off, often they will deliberately upturn their boat and effectively tip them out into the water so that they get plucked out. It occurred to me in the conversations that I was having with some of the people that I met in the hotspots in Lesbos that their expectations were raised. Do you not think that there could be a case that when you were saying that the Dubs amendment had a specific cut-off date that they had to be here, and therefore you did not think it was necessarily a pull factor, that message of the exact details of that case might not be getting through to people on the other side of Europe who are being fed stories by human traffickers? They have unrealistic expectations that they would be able to leave Lesbos to go to Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway—not often the UK, as it happens, as you will know, but those other countries—but then they have found that they were stuck in Athens, Lesbos and some of the borders with Macedonia, because they could not get out of Greece.

Lord Dubs: 20 March was the Government's date; it was not a date that came from me or came from the amendment.

Paul Scully: No, for sure.

Lord Dubs: It was intended to lessen the eligibility for the scheme so that others would not come along. Honestly, I do not know. There is a view that Britain is a great country, which it is, but there is a view among these people that it is good. I have talked to people, for example in the



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jungle and said, "Why do you want to come to England? What about claiming asylum in France?", which they are perfectly entitled to do. Quite a few of them did; we do not have the figures but quite a few decided in the end that they would do that. I asked some of them if they had been approached in the early days in the jungle by officials who would tell them what their rights were under the Geneva Convention and so on and they said no, they had not been. That is a problem. If nobody tells them what it is, then the people traffickers will say, "Your only way out is to England". We urged all along they should give more information, which eventually they did to the people in the jungle, and that should be happening in other camps as well.

Q131 Paul Scully: Can I briefly ask finally if are you aware of any work that is being done in Calais to avoid trafficking that may be specifically UK-funded or supported?

Lord Dubs: I am not sure. No, I am not aware of any.

Beth Gardiner-Smith: We only know that £90 million was spent in the last two years on Calais but that was spent on the wall and on defence, and there was only one official ever appointed to work in France on Dublin and Dubs cases. The imbalance of the spending is pretty clear.

Q132 Dr Cameron: You recently travelled to Greece. What did you find there? Was assistance being provided to children to apply for Dubs or Dublin transfer to the UK, was there evidence of aid money and did you find any child specialists working there? It is a long question.

Chair: You got all four questions into one.

Lord Dubs: Certainly at the British Embassy, there is one woman whose job is specifically to work on this but of course it is only one woman—great person but there should be more. What were the other questions?

Dr Cameron: What did you find in Greece? Did you see evidence of UK aid money providing support? What assistance was being provided for children to apply for Dubs or Dublin transfers?

Lord Dubs: There was some UK aid money but it was limited. There was some accommodation provided there, and I think it is for 550 of the children but we know that there are several thousand there, and that is time limited to one year, so there is a problem there. What approach do they make? The Greek authorities are of course talking to children, but at the point I was there none had come from Greece under the scheme. When the Government said they were going to bring 150 in the month of March, I am not sure how well that is working yet; do we know?

Beth Gardiner-Smith: We are not aware of any children so far having been transferred from Greece.

Dr Cameron: None at all.

Beth Gardiner-Smith: None at all.



Q133 **Chair:** Final word, Alf, please.

Lord Dubs: I just wanted to say thank you. I have really appreciated having a chance to be here and I appreciate the interest the Committee is showing and I am delighted you are doing it. Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you very much both of you. Please feel free to stay if you wish to hear the second panel, if I can invite our second panel to join us.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Michael Bochenek and Melanie Teff.

Q134 **Chair:** Good morning and welcome. We have 45 minutes with you and we have six areas that we are seeking to cover. You heard the first evidence session and my colleague, Nigel Evans, made an important point around the strength of the UK's investment in the region. The UK is second only to the US in terms of the support for refugees and IDPs in Syria and in the region. Clearly we have also been talking this morning about legal routes for refugees to come to the UK. In terms of the refugee crisis in Syria, what keeps you up at night? What are the gaps in the system that should be of greatest concern to us as the International Development Committee? Please do introduce yourselves when you answer for the first time.

Melanie Teff: I am Melanie Teff. I am with Unicef UK, as senior humanitarian and migration advocacy and policy adviser. With regard to the funding, it is certainly true that the UK funding, both in regions of origin and also some of the funding in Europe for refugee children, has been extremely important. It is making a difference in terms of improving physical conditions and, focusing on Europe at this point, it is providing more shelter places for unaccompanied children, it is ensuring that children have better access to education and it is ensuring that better protection mechanisms for children are being developed. There are still big gaps. We have been talking a bit about Greece and Italy this morning, and it is clear that the child protection systems in these countries are really overwhelmed by the numbers who have arrived.

What I would look at is, on the one hand, the physical conditions in accommodation and services, where there have been some improvements but there are still big problems, and then, secondly, about processing children's cases and finding solutions for children. That is the second side of the equation. On the first side, I will give the example of Greece, where there has been some progress. Looking at the situation of unaccompanied children, Unicef estimates that there are about 2,100 unaccompanied refugee and migrant children in Greece as at mid-February. There is now a situation where more than half of them have a place in an official unaccompanied children shelter. That means there are still over 1,000 children who do not have a place in a shelter,



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and what happens with those children who are not in a shelter is that they may be waiting in effectively a detention centre—while it may be called protective custody in a police station, that is detention—or in a reception and identification centre, many of which are closed centres.

As well as that, a recent mapping by Unicef indicated that about 600 children were in squats around Athens, with an average time of stay there of eight months and those are children who are waiting for a place in an unaccompanied children's shelter. Obviously, many of these children have serious vulnerabilities and acute medical needs; a lot of them have mental health needs because of what they have gone through in their countries of origin or on the journeys. Another area where there are gaps in services is access to mental health services and medical care. There is no specialised medical personnel in the children shelters, not nurses even, and there is no disabled access in the centres. I heard your concerns about the issues for disabled children, and that is certainly a big issue.

In Italy, as we heard, there are many children out of the official system, and one of the reasons they are out of the official system is my second point. I will move on quickly.

Chair: You are answering almost every single question in your first answer, which might mean we are finished quite soon, so carry on.

Melanie Teff: The second point was about the processing of the cases, and that is why many children are out of the system in Italy. They drop out of the system because they realise that it just takes too long for their asylum case to be dealt with. Having their asylum case dealt with is the gateway to having their family reunion case dealt with or their relocation case dealt with, and so as a result of the delays in the system, children give up. The system for family reunion can take a year. That is hard enough for an adult; it is almost impossible for a child waiting for a year, and so it is unsurprising that many of them drop out of the system.

Chair: Thank you for that answer. We will explore some of those specifics in subsequent questions.

Michael Bochenek: I am Michael Bochenek from Human Rights Watch. I would just add on some of these points with respect to France. Certainly my colleagues and I have seen a lack of access to information, a lack of real information about how to apply for asylum, a lack of guardians and all of these things are, again, in France, reasons why children who are relocated from Calais, as well as those who have more recently arrived, have chosen to leave the system and seek their own means of moving onward. This is a very big factor, of course not just in Italy but also in France and certainly in Greece where the system is fragile at best.

Another issue with respect to Greece that we have concerns about that we have not mentioned is the effect of recent proposed legislation that



would change the asylum law and would have the effect of having many more people remain for much longer on the islands or wherever they are. That is children as well as adults. It would mean lengthy admissibility procedures, in effect more detention centres, the fast-tracking of asylum procedures, and limiting the right to appeal, all of this in the context of a very flawed, EU-Turkey agreement that could result in many people being sent back to Turkey, in situations where they are not receiving the sort of support or indeed the kinds of access to registration, to work or to education that will allow them to have a stable, secure place in Turkey.

That last point gets to the question about the region and assistance within the region, which of course has been, in broad terms, very generous from the UK as well as from the European Union and other countries. The big flaw, and what keeps me up at night about the very large numbers in the region, is precisely the lack of stability and the lack of access to status. There are very restrictive residency requirements in Lebanon, Jordan or Turkey, restrictions on access to work authorisation for adults that push children into child labour—sometimes very dangerous forms of child labour—consequences for education and also formal restrictions in access to education in at least Lebanon, if not all three countries.

These are the kinds of things that ideally the UK, as well as other Governments, would be pushing for change on: loosening registration requirements, ensuring that not only money is spent effectively on education but also that there be effective access to education. We know that most refugees stay close to their homes. We know that most refugees intend to go back at some point. The numbers in Lebanon, in Turkey and in Jordan are enormous, and they far outweigh the numbers that have come to Europe and far outweigh the very limited numbers that have come legally or otherwise to the United Kingdom. Making sure that they have not just a safe but also a dignified and secure life while they are there is crucial and is something that the UK could certainly encourage.

Chair: Thank you for that. We visited Lebanon and Jordan as part of our education inquiry in November and December just gone. Obviously, as you rightly say, the scale of the numbers in both countries and in Turkey is enormous. We were impressed in many ways with how the Lebanese and Jordanian Governments and people have responded, but your point is a very good one: even more needs to be done, in particular on access to jobs.

Q135 Dr Cameron: Have conditions for unaccompanied children in France improved at all since October, when it was taking 10 to 11 months to process children under the Dublin Regulation?

Michael Bochenek: On the one hand, certainly France moved very quickly to organise temporary accommodation centres—these are called CAOMIEs, if you have been following this—and this effort was laudable. They placed large numbers of children—nearly 2,000—in those centres.



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When my colleagues and I visited, we saw varying conditions. These were certainly expected to be temporary, and so one expects that some are better than others and some are staffed better than others; some have professional staffing and in others, frankly, it is whoever they can get.

Things that I would consider basic when dealing with this kind of population would include things like interpreters available in some way, which was almost universally not the case. Aid workers were communicating often through crude gestures with many of the children, which of course impeded the ability to get information to the children about their prospects in France. They are in France, France has an obligation towards those children, and what we saw was of course that they were not getting the information they needed about their possibilities there, both for these very practical reasons but also because of a seeming policy—certainly a practice—of choosing not to hold any French process until the UK process ended with the apparent idea that as many children would go to the UK as possible. Then and only then would they start the process of assigning guardians and of putting people into what is actually quite a complicated system. It is maybe not quite as lengthy as Italy's, but is certainly quite lengthy and quite discouraging for any child, as you can imagine.

Q136 Dr Cameron: From what you describe, you can understand why children would begin to feel very hopeless in that situation. Do you know how many children are still in reception centres in France and what is your assessment of their wellbeing?

Michael Bochenek: Those who are there have their basic needs provided for in the sense they are getting shelter, they are getting food and they are in a safe place. There are many fewer than the 1,900 that were originally transferred. I do not have the precise numbers. Many have left. We have not got good numbers from the French authorities on this, but anecdotally different centre directors tell us they have some number—four or five—leaving every couple of days. Anecdotally we also know that many children have made their way back to Calais or to Dunkirk, to the areas around the Channel, with the idea that, of course, they did not know what was going on, and not only did they not get any information but they were not given any reasons, as far as they were concerned, to stay and so they have taken matters into their own hands.

Q137 Dr Cameron: When you say they are leaving, what are they leaving to? Do we know? Are they disappearing? Where are they going? What is happening to these children?

Michael Bochenek: They fall into this category of missing children that we hear about in Europe quite a bit. They have hopped the walls, they have walked out of the centres, they have not returned to where they were staying and then they have walked or got lifts or somehow made their way up to the areas that I mentioned, where they are often hiding in the forest. I hear from colleagues and from others who work with kids



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that many are sleeping during the day and hiding in the forest at night in order to avoid detection. If they are found in Paris or even in Calais, not only are there bans in Calais on giving aid to children and adults who are found in this situation, but also we know that the French police have taken sleeping bags and have taken the articles of clothing from people who they find. All of this is in an effort, which is not only incredibly misguided but also incredibly cruel, to discourage children and adults from taking such approaches.

Q138 Dr Cameron: From what you described, are many children returning to Calais? Given the response that you are describing, why are they returning to Calais? What are their hopes for being in Calais?

Michael Bochenek: What children have told me, either in those circumstances or who are considering it, is that they see no future in France; their experience of the French state is that the police beat them and nobody gives them information. Therefore, they have given up on any official prospect or any official way of regularising their status. They are simply seeking an informal means of making it to UK.

I have heard, of course, the discussion about the potential pull factor. The biggest pull factor is of course that it is the UK; it is English. There is a perception among many people that this is the place to be and in fact many people have, if not close family members, some family members or some community in the UK and not in France. Given the lack of support in France and their treatment in general, particularly by the French police, to me it is not surprising that they are choosing these routes, however dangerous they are and however unwise. There must be a better solution, and this is the choice they are making.

Q139 Pauline Latham: Of the children that you have met or come into contact with who have come to the UK from France, how do you say that they are settling in and being supported in this country?

Melanie Teff: The local authorities of course have a duty to refugee children under the Children Act, as they do to any child who is in their area, for accommodation.

Q140 Pauline Latham: Which obviously France does not have.

Melanie Teff: They have the duty in theory, but in many areas we are seeing that children are clearly slipping through the net in France in terms of the child protection services they are receiving. Once they have reached the UK, it depends on where the child is as to the level of services they are receiving. Local authorities are trying to provide the right services but there are shortages in some key areas. There are three areas that we have noted. One is access to quality legal advice, which is very important once the children are going through their asylum applications when they are here. A second area has been in the issue of mental health care—getting access to good and prompt mental health support when needed. The third is, for some of the over-16s, it has been hard to access education in some areas. Under-16s have all found a



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school place immediately, but there has been a problem in some areas for some of the over-16s.

Q141 Pauline Latham: How would you say this compares with other EU countries? I am not talking about France, because clearly you think they have totally failed, but what about places like Sweden, Germany, Denmark or other countries who have taken refugees?

Melanie Teff: Michael has some of the numbers on Sweden and Germany, and one of the things we are also looking at in terms of the numbers that countries are receiving; while the UK does take quite a number every year, it is not anywhere like the numbers that Sweden has been receiving.

Michael Bochenek: What we talking about in Germany and Sweden, for example, is tens of thousands per year.

Pauline Latham: Of unaccompanied children.

Michael Bochenek: Of unaccompanied children. The system in Sweden, which received quite a large number, 80,000 or 90,000—I do not remember the precise number—in 2015, was under considerable strain, and yet when I was there last year, at a time when they had been dealing with a lot of these arrivals, there was no question but that, for the most part, the system in Sweden is very good. It probably is the standard in Europe and elsewhere. Children are assigned a guardian immediately. In the aftermath of the large arrival numbers, there may have been difficulties in terms of finding appropriate people for those and ensuring that guardians were not assigned to too many children, but these are people who have responsibility for introducing children to culture and introducing them to how you do things like manage money and go shopping for things.

Unaccompanied children who come to Sweden want to buy fruit because they are used to having a lot of fruit; that is expensive in Sweden, so they have to learn to manage their money so they do not spend all of their allowance on fruit, which I think is an incredible problem to have. In any event, there is quite a lot of assistance in this regard with a real plan for transition to independence at the older ages, i.e. 15 and 16, not age-based but rather maturity-based, and a transition through early adulthood so that people have not only the legal status they need to operate securely but also the skills to operate and a sense of integration, the language skills and a sense of a career track. It is quite a good system.

Q142 Pauline Latham: You talk about guardians; how many children typically would a guardian be helping? Would they be living with them?

Michael Bochenek: That was under some revision. They would not be living with them. These are independent officials, so, depending on their age and situation, some children would be living in foster families but many—particularly the older children—would be in more organised



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homes, and dormitory-type settings in some cases. The type of facility would really depend. They would move through different types of facilities on to independent apartments shared amongst several children with somebody coming in on a weekly or daily basis, depending on how long they had been there. The guardian was somebody who was not a government official, so someone who was outside of any official process, but was there to give them the support and advice that they needed.

The better approach was to have no more than four or five and, as I mentioned, at the time of the large influx, we know that there were some guardians who had frankly too many, something in the range of 10 or even more.

Q143 **Pauline Latham:** You talked there about Sweden. What about Germany? They took a huge number as well.

Michael Bochenek: Germany I know less about directly, but they have a similar process in general and have mobilised quite a lot of resources in terms of finding placements for children around the country and really sharing the burden in a way that ensures that no one municipality or local entity is taking on too many. There were some challenges with that, only in the sense that, because many children had relatives of some sort, or friends or community members in other areas, there was sometimes a bit of a question about why they had to be sent to Munich, for example, if they had relatives in Hamburg or the like. In principle, this set up is quite generous and certainly, while under strain during the last couple of years, it is still quite a good one.

Melanie Teff: We hope that the transfer scheme here, once it is hopefully extended beyond just England to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, will help to relieve the burden off some of the local authorities here and assist with some of the service problems that we have seen.

Q144 **Pauline Latham:** Has that not happened to date? It has just been England.

Melanie Teff: So far yes.

Q145 **Pauline Latham:** So Scotland have not had any.

Melanie Teff: No, not as yet. They have received some Dubs children, but not internal transfers.

Q146 **Chair:** On Sweden, I am aware, obviously, of the long-standing generosity of the Swedes with regard to asylum-seekers and refugees, but there has, as I understand it, been a tightening in their policy and their law more recently. Has that had an impact on what you have just described in terms of opportunities for unaccompanied children?

Michael Bochenek: As I understand it, it has not, in a technical sense, had an effect on their status. Unfortunately, at the time that many of the children were beginning to go through this system, when I was interviewing them, they had heard comments by politicians saying that



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they were going to restrict numbers, they were going to deport large numbers and, as I understand it from the Government, the intent was never to affect unaccompanied children, but many children took it this way. This goes to an important point that unless there is secure status for children that is processed reasonably quickly, children will have these kinds of fears that they too will be deported, will be worried about their future and will not be able to benefit from whatever services are available. That goes to the status even in the UK; the fact that many children are not receiving long-term status but are receiving only temporary protection right now creates tremendous psychological pressure on them and is quite unfortunate.

Q147 Mr Lewis: In relation to Greece and Italy, I am very interested to know how DFID money is being used in terms of supporting unaccompanied children and whether you have any experience of seeing at first-hand how that money is being used effectively. What is the position now with moving children from police cells into more appropriate accommodation?

Melanie Teff: I can certainly speak to how the DFID money is being spent in Greece and in fact also in Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia. There were some DFID funds given to Unicef, and those have been used for four main areas of work. One is child protection, and that has included setting up child and family support hubs. They are known as Blue Dot centres, run with UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross along the Balkan route, and they are where families and children can go and get legal assistance, be referred for mental health assistance and also just be child-friendly spaces where children can play with qualified supervisors. That has been one really important area of work, as well as giving technical advice to those Governments to try to improve the reception of those children in the centres, and also just in terms of how their social workers and their reception centre staff are dealing with this big influx.

Another area has been in healthcare and nutritional status for children, particularly for young children. A third area is education, and providing some informal education for those children who are out of school and working with the authorities to enable integration of children into the formal education system; there has been quite a bit of progress on that in Greece, in fact. Fourthly, there is work on water sanitation and hygiene facilities in reception centres, and also basic supplies like warm clothing; we saw those awful photos from Serbia of people in -15° conditions, so giving out warm clothing in those situations.

In terms of the shelters, I was saying that in Greece, we are now at the situation where there are about 1,000 unaccompanied children who are waiting for a shelter place. That is better than it was before but it is obviously still very concerning, so you still have some children who are in protective custody, as you mentioned, in police stations and some children who are stuck in the reception and identification centres, many of which are closed centres.



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I was in Greece a couple of months ago and, just while I was there on the islands, there was a riot in one of the centres and children were present in that centre, and in another centre there was a fire and a child died. It just shows there are still many problems in the conditions, particularly on the islands in Greece where the centres are very overcrowded.

Q148 Mr Lewis: Do you have any knowledge as to whether DFID is working with the Foreign Office to apply some pressure to the Greek Government in terms of moving children as soon as possible from inappropriate accommodation? Do we know whether there are any diplomatic representations being made?

Melanie Teff: I do not have information about the conversations happening. I do know that the agencies such as Unicef do co-ordinate regularly with the Greek Government and advocate for children to be in appropriate shelters and not in detention. It is really important that funding continues for alternatives to detention; as long as there is a shortage of shelters, there is going to be a risk that children are going to be kept in detention.

Q149 Mr Lewis: Is there an argument for DFID potentially switching some of its resource? You have listed some of the areas in which DFID is contributing. We do not know outcomes but you have talked about that under four headings. Would there be an argument for saying that maybe DFID should consider how it can add the most value in terms of alternative accommodation?

Melanie Teff: It is important that the people on the ground are talking quite regularly with DFID and discussing where the funding is best to go. We do not have any criticism of the way DFID is directing its funding.

Q150 Mr Lewis: You were not sure about Italy. Do either of you have any knowledge about what is happening in Italy, specifically in relation to DFID support?

Melanie Teff: I do not have any information about DFID funding in Italy, I am afraid. I have some information about the situation in Italy, where the authorities have a longer-standing organisation for refugee children. However, they have been very overwhelmed, and recently 91% of the children arriving in Italy have been unaccompanied children. Obviously, that is huge for them to deal with. One of the biggest problems in Italy is the numbers of children who have dropped out of the system; we are talking about 6,000 or 7,000 children who have dropped out of the system, and they are sleeping in train stations very often. Now that there are more deportations from Switzerland and France, many of them are in transit camps near the border.

We also have a lot of reports to us of children being involved in child prostitution and labour exploitation in Italy, sometimes to fund the journeys, which is one of the reasons we think it is really important to have safe and legal routes, to avoid children being exploited in that way.



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Q151 **Mr Lewis:** In terms of the number of unaccompanied Syrian refugee children, do you know the figures for Italy and Greece?

Melanie Teff: In Greece in 2016, it was that 26% of unaccompanied children were Syrian, so that is 26% of about 2,100. In Italy, it is small numbers of Syrians. The European Commission statistics were 218 unaccompanied Syrian children. In Italy last year, in 2016, there were 3,806 unaccompanied Eritrean children, and of course many of them are likely to be eligible for asylum.

Q152 **Paul Scully:** I was speaking to someone from an NGO in Slovenia last year, and they were talking about the situation in their country where they have 200,000 people going through fields, effectively, to get through to other parts of Europe. With a population of 2 million that is a substantial chunk. You also mentioned the conditions in Serbia; I wonder if you can talk about the Balkan route and the conditions there.

Melanie Teff: Of course the situation we are seeing now, with the border closures in March last year, is that people are trapped in countries that they were intending to pass through. It is quite a different situation, and there have been a lot of tensions growing because of the fact that people have become stranded. In Serbia, as at mid-February, Unicef estimates there are about 7,900 refugees and migrants, including 3,103 children, and there are a number of official reception sites in Serbia—16 official reception sites—but according to the European Commission, as many as 1,200 people are staying in unofficial sites in very poor conditions. It comes back to the problem of the lack of trust in the system that many people have: that because the processes take so long, people end up dropping out of their official system and that results in them staying in very dangerous conditions; it reached -15° just a month or two ago, which was obviously of major concern. The DFID funds were being spent on dealing with shelter and warm clothing and improving the conditions in the official sites and providing essential services. The situation would certainly have been worse without the DFID funding.

Q153 **Mr Lewis:** Are you finding there is any sense of improvement at the moment?

Melanie Teff: There may be improvement in some of the conditions. The trouble is that as time goes on, people become more frustrated, tensions rise and people give up on the system and start moving on their own and risking their lives with smugglers and traffickers.

Michael Bochenek: With regard to Serbia in particular, of course we have also seen the phenomenon of violent pushbacks from Hungary, with a lot of people ending up being stranded with no place to go, not in these official shelters but sleeping rough wherever they can find space. This is not from Human Rights Watch research but we are hearing from the UNHCR as well as others that there are something like 30 cases a day of pushbacks from the Hungarian border, including children as young as 12 or 13. Also, because of the cold in January in particular, people are dying



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because of the cold. It is quite a difficult situation, made worse by Hungary's policies of a very violent reaction to asylum-seekers at the border.

You of course are also aware of the new Hungarian legislation that allows the automatic detention of asylum seekers within Hungary if they have actually made it into Hungarian territory. We are talking about asylum seekers who are children aged 14 and above, as well as adults, who are automatically allowed now to be detained in so-called transit zones, which are of course places of detention, as well as allowing summary returns from anywhere within Hungary to the Serbian border.

The *New York Times* has an editorial this morning that describes the situation and describes Hungary's flagrant refusal to abide by any of the international principles that apply here, including those in respect to the protection of children, and says that Hungary is playing the European Union and I think that is quite accurate.

Q154 Paul Scully: When they closed the border with Greece and Macedonia, a colleague of mine visited the camps there and was pretty shocked about what they saw. Do you know the up-to-date situation in terms of what is happening in the camps around that area?

Melanie Teff: I do not. I am aware that in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia there are two transit centres, as at the end of 2016, and we were told there were about 300 refugees and migrants there, about half of them children, again stuck, but I do not have details about the conditions, I am afraid.

Q155 Pauline Latham: What are other EU countries doing to help child refugees? Are they sending money and personnel out there to help where there is urgent need, and how do you see the UK's contribution compared to that of its neighbours?

Michael Bochenek: I cannot speak as to the technical assistance that other countries are giving to some of the places we have talked about, but certainly there is much more of an acceptance of the idea that other countries will take on unaccompanied children in larger numbers. We have an unfortunate situation where the UK is taking, as we have heard with respect to the humanitarian provision of Section 67, a very modest number as compared with the tens of thousands we have been seeing in countries such as Sweden and Germany. Even France, which we have rightly criticised for its implementation of some of these protection measures—a failure to provide regular reception centres inside the regular child protection system, a failure to provide guardians on a timely basis, a lack of information about asylum and other procedures for staying within the country legally—have taken on quite a large number of children, whereas of course the UK have a relatively modest number in comparison.

Q156 Pauline Latham: But what about personnel and money? There are



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many more; it is not just Sweden, Germany and France. There are many more EU countries. What are they doing? Are they sending people? Are they sending money? What is happening with their help?

Melanie Teff: Some of them are sending secondments to EASO, the European Asylum Support Office, as the UK do as well, so that is one area in which—

Q157 **Pauline Latham:** Where is that based?

Melanie Teff: I do not know where it is based; it has staffing in Greece, Italy and all the countries that are dealing with large numbers of people. I am not sure where the base is; it is probably Brussels. In terms of funding, the UK is certainly one of the countries that is providing a higher level of funding.

Q158 **Pauline Latham:** What would you say that the EU is doing—not European countries, but the EU—and is it doing enough to address the refugee situation?

Melanie Teff: In terms of humanitarian funding the EU has ECHO, the European Commission's humanitarian funds, and that has been very important; that has been the key source of funds, in fact, for the refugee migrant crisis in Europe. The EU has a relocation scheme, which the UK has chosen not to participate in, and that scheme has been important, although it has not lived up to its full expectations so far. As at the beginning of February, there were nearly 12,000 people who had been relocated from Greece and Italy to other EU member states. Of those numbers, however, only 249 were unaccompanied children, so there has been a real shortfall in numbers of places for unaccompanied children; 248 of those were from Greece and one was from Italy. There was also the European resettlement scheme but that is not dealing with inside Europe.

Q159 **Pauline Latham:** How much was the ECHO funding?

Melanie Teff: In 2016 they announced €83 million of humanitarian funding for Greece. There was also €22 million for the Western Balkans.

Q160 **Pauline Latham:** Was there nothing for France or Italy?

Melanie Teff: I am not aware of the amounts for France and Italy. I am afraid I do not have those figures, but I do not think so.

Q161 **Paul Scully:** I went to Lesbos with the Council of Europe migration committee last year, and we had some Greek representatives and people from the EU Commission when we looked at the Moria hotspot and these sorts of areas, and there seemed to be a real disjoint from the discussion they were having there about funding actually getting through. I got the sense that there was a humanitarian fund, as you said, and the fund that was tackling migration, but the two did not really connect, when actually the subjects seem to be pretty inseparable. I wondered if you had any view on how that funding was going because Greece obviously is a



European country that really is not in the best shape to be taking on this problem. Have you seen anything improving at all over the last year, or any sense of that?

Melanie Teff: Certainly my colleagues in Unicef Greece do see that there has been some progress in co-ordination with the Greek authorities and in improving some of the conditions in some of the places. However, most people would agree that there are still some problems with the operation in making sure that there is an equal standard across the country for refugees and migrants.

Q162 **Paul Scully:** I agree with you, but I was more meaning about the funding that was actually there available for them, because, as I say, the EU were basically saying, "There is money; you have not drawn it down yet," and the Greeks were saying, "We have not got any money". There seemed to be a problem and a barrier there.

Melanie Teff: I am afraid I do not have any information about that; I am sorry.

Michael Bochenek: This is not directly on that last question, but in general it is not surprising that there would be potential disconnects between funding streams in that we also have a backdrop of a policy framework that is in many ways against the kinds of protection that we are asking for. We have talked about the flawed EU-Turkey deal but we also have a stalled relocation or redistribution process for asylum seekers overall. There was an initial target of 160,000 to be redistributed from Greece and from other places where they were concentrated—here we are talking about adults, primarily, but of course some children—but only 5% of that target had been met at the end of last year.

On children, there is an EU action plan on unaccompanied children that technically expired in 2014, so it has never been renewed, it has never been updated, and so there really is no overarching policy framework that guides the EU overall, or potentially its member states, in terms of how they direct their assistance. For that reason, I would not be at all surprised to see this kind of disconnect and that would also go along with some of the political declarations we saw coming out of Malta in January, which speak about migration control and have very little attention paid to protection of unaccompanied children, of other vulnerable refugee populations and the like.

Chair: Thank you. On that slightly gloomy note, that brings the session to a close. Thank you both very much indeed for your evidence here today.