

Supplementary written evidence submitted by UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency (CHA0053)

1. I would like to thank you and the Home Affairs Select Committee once again for inviting my colleague Vincent Cochetel and me to give evidence to the committee's inquiry on the channel crossings.
2. Throughout our testimony, we indicated several points where we would write to the committee with further information.
3. Please find details in response to these points below:

(Further to Q249) Smugglers and social media use

4. Facilitated by UNHCR, the 'Telling the Real Story'¹ initiative aims to communicate with communities about the dangers of onward irregular movement. By reaching out to people on the move, in their native languages, through social media, community leaders, volunteers and diaspora, 'Telling the Real Story' aims to combat misinformation about the journey towards Europe and inform people about other options available to them.
5. As UNHCR stated in oral evidence, children are being targeted through various means (people-to-people, social media posts, WhatsApp) with a "go now, pay later" pitch appearing on the East/Horn of Africa routes to allow separated children and other people with no financial resources to move without realizing the consequences for their families (such as having to sell their homes) until much later in the journey when they are held for ransom.²
6. In **Somalia (Somaliland)**, colleagues working as part of 'Telling the Real Story' received information from school principals that smugglers were targeting school going children, a break from past practice where they targeted desperate parents. In addition to approaching students in their last year of high school or college, it was reported that smugglers were using other students to recruit their peers. Schemes such as 'go now pay later' are used to entice students using falsified stories of successful students who have been trafficked to Europe and are already furthering their education there. Children in education in IDP camps are particularly vulnerable due to the already desperate situation they are in. Such schemes started targeting children in 2018³.
7. Similar schemes are used in **Eastern Sudan** with initiatives like "Travel now for free and work when you arrive in Libya", "Get three friends to pay and you travel for free", and "Collect five people and you can all travel free and work on arrival" being reported with smugglers using children to "recruit" or recommend a particular smuggler. For instance, a child in a refugee camp would receive a call from a friend that has left saying that they are in Europe and the smuggler they used is to be trusted. UNHCR also received disturbing reports from our colleagues in Eastern Sudan of the presence of smugglers in the reception centre at Shagarab where smugglers come and go and openly advertise their services.
8. In **Ethiopia**, smugglers are targeting children who they know have close relatives in Europe and are eligible for family reunification. Children are required to have a guardian when approaching embassies and reportedly smugglers approach these children claiming to have been assigned as guardians by their parents or are family friends. Eventually, they would then lure the children out of Addis Ababa with promise of getting additional documentation before trafficking them towards Europe. These children with relatives in Europe are especially targeted given an assumption from smugglers that their families are more likely to pay ransom fees.

¹ <https://www.tellingtherealstory.org/en/>

² This report has some information on the various modalities of payments to smugglers (see page vii) - <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/global-initiative-human-smuggling-from-the-horn-of-africa-may-2017-web.pdf>; See also this news article has some information about young people going on the go now, pay later scheme and being convinced by smugglers to move and also about the high profile arrests in Ethiopia - <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/africa/inside-the-smuggler-s-warehouse-africa-s-21st-century-slave-trade-1.4224073>; This article too has information about children being enticed to move on the go now, pay later basis - <https://time.com/5510517/facebook-smuggling-libya-ransoms/>; and in this report on page 3 and elsewhere there is reference to children from East Africa being only asked to pay once in Libya and being subjected to violence - http://www.mixedmigrationhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/REACH_ITA_Report_MMP_MHub_Youth-on-the-move_Final.pdf

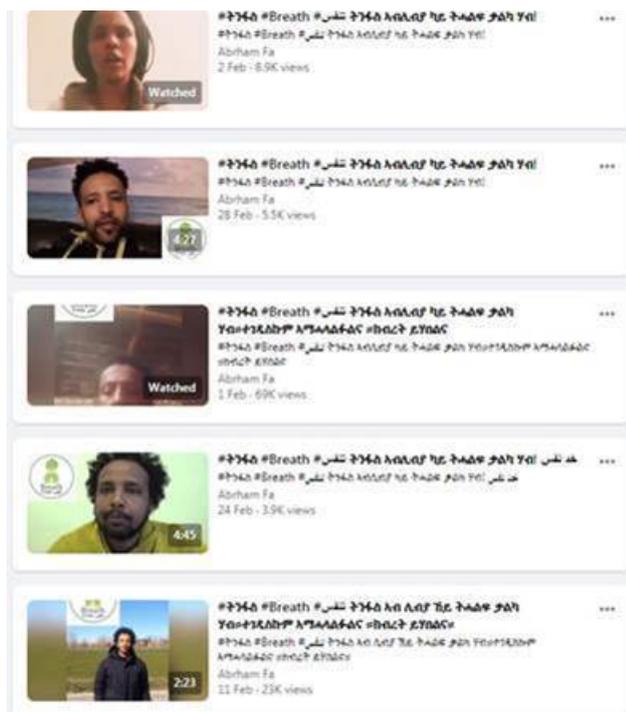
³ <https://radioergo.org/en/2018/10/30/hargeisa-smugglers-reveal-insights-into-the-sordid-business-of-human-trafficking-of-somali-migrants/>

9. In Addis Ababa, UNHCR has received reports from members of the community that sometimes smugglers themselves attend 'Telling the Real Story' public awareness-raising sessions with the aim of familiarizing themselves with the content and messages used. Smugglers then modify their tactics accordingly to counter these messages. Additionally, there are reports of smugglers targeting such meetings and openly criticizing the facilitator of the session claiming that the sessions are part of a "European agenda", challenging the authenticity of the awareness raising material.
10. At the Endabaguna reception centre for unaccompanied or separated Eritrean refugee children located close to the four refugee camps in Shire (Ethiopia), smugglers have forced the local NGO manager from IHS to systematically erase images of people dying at sea on paintings displayed on walls (as an awareness raising tool on the dangers of going to Libya). An example is included below:



11. In **Eritrea**, the diaspora has informed UNHCR of Eritrean smugglers advertising their services on social media and targeting parents in Eritrea persuading them that their children would have a better life in Europe. This triggered an unprecedented "Breath" campaign by the Eritrean diaspora to discourage Eritreans from Eritrea from listening to smugglers' false narratives.
12. These are a sample of screenshots from Facebook of Eritrean diaspora talking about the #Breath campaign. The messages focus on informing Eritreans not to take the risk of traveling to Libya. They say, "let us give our testimony/messages so that lives won't be lost in Libya and let us share these messages."⁴

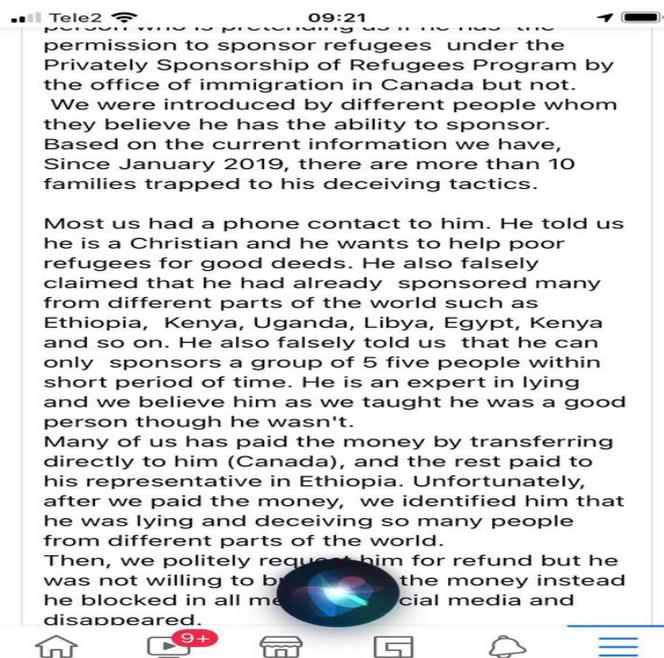
⁴ See also <https://www.facebook.com/abrham.fa/videos/2838305712880028>



13. On **social media**, UNHCR had been contacted by Eritrean traffickers in **Libya** claiming that the testimonies provided by UNHCR ('Telling the Real Story' project) "defamed" them and that they were "better than Libyan traffickers" and had higher success rates in terms of the number of persons trafficked to Europe.
14. In 2014, UNHCR started a social media monitoring project in various languages to better understand the dynamics among smuggling rings and their engagement with local/refugee and diaspora populations. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, UNHCR had to stop this successful project and hand over to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in January 2017. EASO ceased this reporting after it was found to be in breach of EU data protections laws in September 2019⁵. UNHCR would like to resume this project if and when funding can be secured.
15. Some of the EASO reports referred to Facebook posts by smugglers advertising imminent departures of boats from **Libya** for children and families.
16. These extracts are taken from EASO Social media reports from February and July 2019, attached as annexes to this submission.
17. *Extracts: EASO Social Media Monitoring Report No.74 11-17 July 2019
Central Mediterranean Route
A user announces the imminent departure of two boats from Libya, with 130 migrants/asylum seekers (including 12 children) on-board. Another user announces the departure of a trip from Libya on Tuesday, 16 July. A third user announces the departure of a trip from Libya on Thursday, 18 July.*
18. *EASO Social media Monitoring report No. 1, 20-26 February 2019
Central Mediterranean Route
A user advertises trips from Libya to Italy for Sudanese nationals. He states that further communication takes place in a WhatsApp group. Another user announces the departure of a trip from Libya to Italy on Wednesday, 26 June. A prominent user announces the imminent departure of a trip for families and for Libyan nationals exclusively.*
19. UNHCR no longer systematically collects social media posts related to offers made by human traffickers/smugglers targeting refugee children or others. However, it has been noted that such posts do not stay up long on social media platforms and are quickly removed. Many are then recycled using

⁵ <https://euobserver.com/investigations/146856>

other social media accounts. Whenever UNHCR discovers a case, we communicate them to the competent law enforcement authorities. Often these social media adverts/posts are referred to us by users of the multilingual 'Telling the Real Story' platform. We have observed the efforts of the Eritrean community to unmask smugglers and traffickers on social media. See screenshots below.



20. In the post below an Eritrean female refugee who had crossed the Mediterranean Sea courageously posted pictures of a man she identifies as a trafficker alongside pictures of part of her and her son's bodies with torture scars that she reports were inflicted by the trafficker. In the post, she says the man in the picture kidnapped her and her son, torturing and sexually abused them. In a response the man allegedly threatened to post sexually explicit photographs of her unless she agreed to marry him. To avert future harm, she has been seeking the help from the Eritrean community to identify the man and hand him to authorities.



(Further to Q259) Comparative grant rates UK and France

21. It is important to consider that average asylum grant rates in different countries can be difficult to compare because the most common nationalities claiming asylum will differ between countries, and within the same nationality, different ethnic and religious communities may claim in different countries. For example the average first instance grant rate in France (23%) is brought down by a higher number of asylum claims from Albania, Georgia, Guinea and Bangladesh – all countries which have similarly low recognition rates in the UK and the EU as a whole but represent fewer claims proportionally in the UK. There remain however significant differences. That said, there is no indication that most asylum seekers know of, or are guided by grant rates when deciding where to seek asylum, and the tables below show that in several cases countries with a lower grant rate receive a larger number of applicants.

22. The tables below show the asylum grant rate at first instance and on appeal for nationalities reported to be prominent amongst those crossing the Channel⁶. Note that for most of the nationalities listed below, the differences in the grant rate between France and the UK at first instance reduce after appeals are considered.

Iran Grant Rate 2019 – first instance decisions				
	Positive decisions	Rejections	Total	Grant rate % (positive / rejections)
France	108	380	488	22
United Kingdom	2771	1353	4124	67
EU-28	7570	11145	18715	40

⁶ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2333/documents/22962/default/> . For the tables show EU level data are from Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYDCFSTA_custom_89413/default/table?lang=en , UK data are from Home Office Statistics. France data on first instance decisions are from the 'Office Français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides' (Ofpra): https://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rapport_dactivite_2019.pdf and France data on second instance decisions are from the National Court of Asylum (Cour Nationale du Droit d'Asile - CNDA): <http://www.cnda.fr/content/download/168271/1684126/version/3/file/RA2019-CNDA.pdf>. Positive decisions include refugee recognition as well as grants of subsidiary and humanitarian protection.

Iraq Grant Rate 2019 – first instance decisions				
	Positive decisions	Rejections	Total	Grant rate % (positive / rejections)
France	709	410	1119	65
United Kingdom	882	2134	3016	29
EU-28	13595	19290	32885	41

Syria Grant Rate 2019 – first instance decisions				
	Positive decisions	Rejections	Total	Grant rate % (positive / rejections)
France	2473	579	3052	81
United Kingdom	717	72	789	91
EU-28	59625	10135	69760	85

Eritrea Grant Rate 2019 – first instance decisions				
	Positive decisions	Rejections	Total	Grant rate % (positive / rejections)
France	1156	255	1411	82
United Kingdom	1794	274	2068	87
EU-28	9,135	2,005	11,140	82

Sudan Grant Rate 2019 – first instance decisions				
	Positive decisions	Rejections	Total	Grant rate % (positive / rejections)
France	2596	1470	3983	66
United Kingdom	1640	280	1920	85
EU-28	4385	2655	7040	62

Pakistan Grant Rate 2019 - first instance decisions				
	Positive decisions	Rejections	Total	Grant rate % (positive / rejections)
France	65	1997	2062	3
United Kingdom	501	834	1335	38
EU-28	3,085	21,935	25,020	12

Afghanistan Grant Rate 2019 – first instance decisions				
	Positive decisions	Rejections	Total	Grant rate % (positive / rejections)
France	4532	3134	7666	59
United Kingdom	1172	623	1795	65
EU-28	19,410	16,305	35,720	54

Total Grant Rate 2019 – first instance decisions				
	Positive decisions	Rejections	Total	Grant rate % (positive / rejections)
France	22295	73105	95400	23
United Kingdom	15080	13,495	28,575	53
EU-28	221,030	348,660	569,690	39

(Further to Q264) Statistics relating to age disputed cases

23. In the year to June 2020 Home Office figures show⁷:

- There were 2,868 asylum claims from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- The Home Office disputed the age of 515 asylum-seekers claiming to be children.
- The Home Office concluded 555 age disputes.
 - Of these 217 individuals were found to be over 18 years of and 338 under 18.

24. Taken together these data suggest that the vast majority of those claiming asylum as children are, in fact, children - with around 93% of those claiming to be children having their age accepted.⁸

25. UNHCR hopes that the above information is of use to the committee in its inquiry. Should you require any more information on this or any other issue, please do contact our office and we will be happy to be of assistance.

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⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/910552/age-disputes-datasets-jun-2020.xlsx

⁸ It is important to recognise that this figure is an estimate. The above data sets cannot be directly compared because they are not subsets. Asylum claims, initiation and conclusion of age assessments may be counted in different quarters.