

Report Series

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FORCED TO FLEE

Series Introduction

Context

Migration across borders is rarely direct and never certain. Many displaced persons end up stuck in transit countries locations that are not the destination but where they must subsist, for a number of weeks, months or even years at a time. In any case, transit countries are the fabric of a migratory journey, with their laws and humanitarian ecosystems momentarily holding equal or greater weight to that of a migrant's destination country. Within these transit environments, there are specific adolescent risks that will vary from those to be experienced by adults and younger children. They move through a susceptible stage of life as well as experiencing displacement, legal insecurity and heartland protection gaps, lending to the development of their unique need profile. These environments show the strength of adolescents as well as the urgent need for mechanisms safeguarding their rights. The work of NGOs is one such crucial mechanism.

Adolescent migrants are often overlooked in humanitarian policy. Too old to be considered as "children" within certain protection ecosystems and too young to be considered as completely independent adults they fall into a grey area of support. This age bracket is most vulnerable to exploitation, gender violence, trafficking, child labor, early adolescent pregnancy and recruitment into military forces – alongside more general exposure to psychological harms. While their potential is constricted by their precarious circumstances, adolescents possess agency and aspirations that, when supported, can enable them and their societies to flourish. The relationship between NGOs and adolescent migrants is therefore pivotal, and greatly influences their

experiences of active migratory transit. This implies an urgent call for these humanitarian actors to actively address and accept adolescent perspectives in decision-making processes and design interventions that are not only protective but also empowering.

Methodology

The following papers in this research series will explore this relationship. The first will work to establish the role of NGOs, through framing them within the migratory social protection ecosystems they operate, and characterizing the needs of adolescent minors in active irregular transit (AMTs). The second will examine how actively NGOs fulfil their roles to AMTs, investigating the extent to which this crucial relationship is genuinely 'live' and formed with intention. The third identifies and assesses the challenges facing the catalysis of active engagement, and the development of a constructive relationship. Lifting the analysis of the prior papers, and recontextualizing the AMT-NGO relationship in an alternative transitory environment, the fourth and final paper analyses this relationship in Kenya.

Grounded in a case study of France, the first three papers are underpinned by ethnographic-style fieldnotes recorded during a three-month period between October and December 2024, of volunteer work with an NGO providing non-food items (NFI) in Calais. These notes were not recorded with the intention of informing the following research, and thus offer mixed levels of value. Additionally drawn on, are a range of structured and semi-structured interviews, conducted with a range of current

and former NGO workers, from both population-focused ('specialist') and broad-mandate organisations operating along the Northern French migration corridor. Further crucial interviews were held with young people with lived experience of irregular migration as adolescent minors. The names of participants and, where relevant, their corresponding NGO, are omitted unless otherwise requested by interviewees. Alongside this, papers two and three were further informed by a web-page-based language and service analysis of NGOs working in Calais, Lyon, Oise, Toulouse, and Paris. Extensive secondary research and engagement with existing literature complimented this and built the foundation for the fourth paper.

Whilst the developmental stage of adolescence stretches beyond the arbitrary imposition of minority age, the following papers address solely adolescent minors and define this as ages 15 to 18. This approach has been adopted as despite not differing greatly in personal disposition, the legal landscape in which adolescent migrants operate, once of majority age, dramatically changes and their relationship with NGOs becomes invariably differentiated, worthy of, but necessitating separate, study.

France was selected as the case study in which to root the foundational analysis of the AMT-NGO relationship. Alongside the high quality and volume of data available and amenable to collection through primary research, this was motivated by the country's transitory landscape. Positioned at the convergence of multiple UK-bound irregular migration corridors, Northern France serves as somewhat of a control case study - as the vast majority of migrants in the region remain in transit, which is reflected in the character and nature of NGOs - and crucially their

relationships with migrants - in the region. A study of France, and Northern France especially, therefore isolates the of transit-framed relationship between NGO-adolescent minors. Kenya and France offer two insightful case studies of the AMT-NGO relationship. Kenya, being a de facto country of asylum, is both a destination and transit for the displaced individuals moving within the East and Horn of Africa. The migrants from South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and the Great Lakes region typically enter Kenya in transit to third countries or get resettled elsewhere. Due to the semi-permanence of transitory settlement in Kenyan camps and urban settings, AMTs often experience systemic challenges such as overcrowded schools, limited access to health and psychosocial services and heightened vulnerability to early marriage and pregnancy, child labor and dangerous migration routes, in such a way that those in hyper-mobile transitory contexts, such as Calais, may not experience.

End-Goals

Placing these two case studies alongside each other, draws attention to both the global dimensions of the issue and the way that context drives outcomes. In Kenya, policy exists but is unevenly applied, and young people are thus opened up to systemic gaps in coverage. In Calais, the absence of appropriate protection system for young people similarly exposes them to vulnerabilities. Both settings necessitate the formation of deeply dependent and nuanced relationships between AMTs and NGOs, though in a dramatically divergent manner.

This research therefore endeavors to bring together these facts by examining two distinct iterations of the AMT-NGO relationship that so greatly influences the experiences of young irregular migrants. This research hopes to identify gaps, raise the voices of young people and contribute to improved-responsive protection mechanisms. The goal is not simply to prevent harm but to create paths for migrant children to thrive, even in the suspended state of transit.

