

Presentation UAM's Niger

Overview

- Currently **254** unaccompanied minors in Niger, who were evacuated from Libya under the ETM
- 85% Eritreans, 14% Somalis and 1% Ethiopian
- 80% boys and 20% girls
- Majority is between 16-17 years, but we have some 14 and 15 year olds
- So far only **9 departed for resettlement** and 3 more are scheduled for departure. The majority arrived between December and February which means they already spent several months in Niger and they are in urgent need of resettlement

Main Profile

- Most unaccompanied minors left their country of origin 1-2 years ago, they spent significant time in Ethiopia or Sudan on transit. Almost all spent at least one year in Libya in the hands of different smugglers or kidnappers under horrible conditions
- Treatment of smugglers in Libya: kidnapping, Starvation, beatings, pouring water, family being called while they are beaten, SGBV. Many were captured on the sea and taken back to Libya
- Majority severely traumatized, anxious due to transit situation, pressure from family

Challenges:

I can continue talking to you about numbers and statistics and give you general information, but that would not give you a clear picture of the challenges we are facing in finding durable solutions for these refugee children. The challenge is that we don't always have enough Resettlement places for them while other pathways, such as family reunification, may take very long.

I regularly go and visit the centers where the unaccompanied children stay. The last time I went to a center where 85 Eritrean boys aged 14-17 years are living. I was met outside by Samuel, a 14 year old boy. He is one of the youngest children we have. He showed me a baby kitten that he had rescued a few days ago. He looks at me and says: "Can I take her with me to Germany?"

Because that's what he hopes for. That he will go to Germany, where his sister lives. He also has a brother in the Netherlands. And that's really all he needs right now. A safe place with

family support. But at the back of my mind, I know that we have reached the ceiling for submissions to Germany. I know, that he might not be able to go there and that currently his only way out of Niger might be going to another resettlement country that offered to take minors.

But I can't tell him that! It's not my job to give these children hopes that may be failed but to protect them from more harm and distress. So all I can do is smile and say: "let's see", while hoping that we will find a way.

Samuel is not an exception. We have many refugee children who have family members like siblings, aunts/uncles and cousins in European and other countries. But we don't have enough places to resettle them to the country where they have family links, even though that would be in their best interest. After all they have been through, they need to be close to a family member who they trust and who can provide them with emotional support and guidance. Family reunification is not possible in most cases because they are not nuclear family members and the process takes a long time. Time that Samuel and other refugee children don't have because they are in urgent need of a safe and stable home to recover from their traumatic experiences.

The children start to think that they may be unwanted. Delays in the processing of their cases are perceived as rejection. They tell me: "last night a plane with adults left for a resettlement country, why does no one take children?" "We have been here for six months, why does no one want us? What is wrong with us?"

Again a question I cannot answer, because all I can think about is how many things are right with these children. They are so strong though they cannot go back to their countries of origin and their families. They survived torture, starvation, beatings and other horrible things at their young age. They have seen many people die along the way, among them their friends and family members! But they are alive and they know that they just got another chance in life and they are ready to make the best out of it. They are full of hopes and dreams and can't wait to start a new life in a safe country. They are ready to go back to school, study and work hard to make something out of this chance they have been given.

They are very skilled. Among them are artists, athletes and musicians who built their own instruments out of recycled materials. And after all, let's not forget that they are still children who can get super excited over winning a football match.

But the one thing that amazes me the most every day is the fact that they still have so much compassion and care for others around them, yet human beings have done horrible things to them in the past. When I ask them where they want to go, they usually tell me, that they want to go to a country where their human rights are respected and where they can be with their families. That's all they ask for!

So when they ask me why no one wants them, I can really not give them an answer. Can you?

And can you tell me how I will explain to Samuel that he cannot go with his Kitten to Germany to be with his sister? Because I can't and I hope something will change so I don't have to!