

London Churches Refugee Fund

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Demolishing the Calais camp, Shattering Children's Hopes

The French authorities plan to demolish the Jungle where over 10,000 refugees are gathered. As this will start to happen probably before the end of October, anxiety has risen especially for the 1,022 unaccompanied children, which is 90% of all the children in the camp. During the last partial camp clearance in February, 129 children went missing.

These figures come from the report No Place for Children published this month by the British Red Cross. The report aims to galvanise both the UK and the French governments to provide protection for these children. Given the continuing vulnerability of these unaccompanied children, one as young as 8 years old, the report highlights

- the risks of failing to provide protection
- the failure to respond to the legal rights of the children, including the Dubs Amendment, introduced by Lord Alf Dubs to the 2015 Immigration Bill and adopted in May 2016
- the cumbersome process for transferring children with a claim from France to the UK

Risks

The appalling conditions of the camp leave children malnourished, exposed to disease and vulnerable to exploitation. Older children look after younger children with no appropriate adult support. There are only 50 available places in nearby Centres.

The death of 3 children attempting to make their way to the UK reveals the desperation, too, of children giving up hope. These children had right to family reunion but got tired of waiting

Legal failure

The report states that 178 children have the right to claim family reunion in the UK, based on the European-wide Dublin III agreement. The work for their claims has been done by volunteer lawyers including those from Citizens UK and Help Refugees. No child had been granted this right by March this year; now 72 have. The Dubs Amendment went beyond those with clear family reunion rights, to champion some of 88,000 unaccompanied refugee children in Europe. The Amendment was agreed by MPs in May, but of the 200 children in Calais with eligibility to come to the UK '*(Yet) not one child has been transferred to the UK yet under the Dubs Amendment*' (No Place for Children p.3)

Bureaucracy and delay

According to the report, there are 5 steps in the procedure for a child making a legal claim in France for transfer to the UK, and this process takes 11 months. The UK government is accused of dragging its feet over responding, even of officials claiming 'misplaced' requests from the French authorities (*The Observer 09.10.2016*). The Observer also states that lawyers reckon that the process need take only 'several weeks'.

Both governments have acknowledged the priority of these children. They are being watched to see that they fulfil their responsibilities in this humanitarian disaster.

In a global context, *'one in every 45 children in the world today is on the move. They may be labelled "refugees", "displaced" or "migrant". But first and foremost children are children. No matter where they come from, no matter who they are. Period'* (Uprooted, UNICEF report)

John Murphy