



FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN IN THE EU: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Call for papers for the final Conference of the Jean Monnet Module MARS

Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna | Pisa
The Conference will be held on 11th July 2022 h. 9:30 – 18:30

*“There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children.
There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected,
that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want
and that they can grow up in peace.”
-- Kofi Annan.*

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Final Conference *Fundamental Rights of Migrant Children in the EU: Current Challenges and Opportunities* will convene in Pisa (Italy) on 11th July 2022. This event is planned to be held in person, subject to any development in the covid-19 health emergency. Remote connection is also available.

The Final Conference is organized within the framework of the three-year [Jean Monnet Module MARS](#) “Migration, Asylum and Rights of Minors”, and represents its concluding event. The Module aimed to spread the knowledge of EU law on the protection of migrant children’s rights through different types of teaching activities and events, both for students and professionals. In fact, despite many studies devoted to migration and asylum issues, the protection of migrant and refugee children’s rights deserves a broader investigation in the academic fields, both in research activities and in training courses for students and professionals. In the same vein, this Final Conference aims to shed light on the persisting and emerging challenges to the full respect, promotion and exercise of migrant children’s rights in the EU as well as to highlight opportunities to promote their full, human rights-based inclusion in host societies.

THE OVERARCHING THEME OF THE FINAL CONFERENCE

The best interests of the child, their rights and protection shall be of primary concern under every circumstance, as well as the alleviation of children’s vulnerabilities. Not only are children considered as vulnerable *per se*, in light of their age and maturity, but there are further elements that could exacerbate their inherent vulnerability, such as their health status, gender identity and sexual orientation, nationality and statelessness, migration status, and whether they are together with, or separated from, their family. In particular, migrant children are at heightened risk of both physical and mental harm, potentially disrupting their early development and integration, and the conditions in their country of origin, transfer or destination might aggravate their vulnerability. Children are alarmingly over-represented in the number of refugees worldwide, almost making up [half](#) (46% or 26.4 million) of the world’s refugees in 2020. In the context of the EU, a number of multifaceted challenges give cause of severe concern in relation to

the compliance with, and fulfilment of, the rights and the protection of migrant children. The conference serves as an opportunity for participants at early or advanced stage of their career to reflect upon some persisting and emerging threats to migrant children's rights in, and at the external borders of, the EU. These challenges will be at the core of 4 (four) panels, each introduced by a Keynote speaker.

PANEL 1 – MIGRANT CHILDREN STRANDED AT THE EU BORDER.

In [2020](#), Frontex detected more than 15.000 children crossing the EU external borders irregularly, of which more than 5.000 unaccompanied. In addition, around 30.000 migrant children are supposed to reside irregularly in the EU, representing 6% of the total number of irregulars. [Save the Children](#) denounced the systematic abuses committed against unaccompanied minors travelling to Europe, victims of “unprecedented violence”. On their way to Europe, migrant children see their legitimate right to asylum constrained, their family separated and are unlawfully rejected at borders, exposing them to irreparable harm. The illegal push-backs persistently carried out at the external borders of the EU have been repeatedly condemned by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). In *M.A. and Others v. Lithuania*, concerning the prohibition to entry the Lithuanian territory and the automatic expulsion of international protection-seekers back to Belarus, the Court found Lithuania responsible for torture, inhuman and degrading treatment. In *M.K. and Others v Poland*, the Court found the automatic expulsion of migrants without an individual evaluation of their protection claim to be in open breach of the European Convention. Lastly, in November 2021, the ECtHR condemned Croatia for illegal refoulement of migrants and for the death of a six-year-old Afghan girl (who was hit by a train after allegedly being denied the opportunity to seek asylum) in the case *M.H. et al v. Croatia*. Currently, children stranded at the borders are [instrumentalized](#) for political purposes and propaganda in disregard with the Union's founding values, principles and objectives.

⇒ This panel welcomes proposals that investigate the conditions of migrant children stranded within the EU and at its external borders, with particular emphasis on the role that (supra)national policies play in endangering their rights as well as the legal implications on their protection. Case-studies that shed light on these dynamics are encouraged as well as analyses that focus on gender and minority groups among others.

PANEL 2 – MIGRANT CHILDREN'S VULNERABILITY TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

According to U.N. Secretary-General Antonio [Guterres](#) the covid-19 pandemic is turning into a broad child rights crisis, where their well-being and development has been counteracted by the pandemic's health-related impacts as well as by the social and economic impacts of prevention measures - such as lockdowns, home containment and school closures – that have disrupted children's routines and social support, while also placing new stressors on parents and caregivers. Moreover, potential long-term effects of covid-19 include the worsening of [societal inequalities](#), which disproportionately affected children's rights, particularly health, development, education, and adequate standard of living, among others. Migrant children may not exercise core rights, including healthcare and education, and have access to essential services, such as housing, food, water, sanitation and hygiene. Temporary suspensions of registration and age assessment have hampered children's access to international protection procedures, including family reunification. In some cases, the restrictions or the measures related to covid-19 have affected the access to the EU members States' territory of migrants and international protection-seekers, including minors, and the enjoyment of their fundamental rights. This state of affairs contradicts the EU Strategy on the rights of the child, launched by the European Commission in March 2021, where every

child in Europe and across the world “should enjoy the same rights and be able to live free of discrimination, recrimination or intimidation of any kind”.

⇒ This panel welcomes proposals aimed at analysing the multiple impacts of covid-19 on migrant children in the EU and on their vulnerability from multiple perspectives and to investigate the role that child-specific responses should play in managing migration during pandemic times. Contributions presenting best practices, case-studies and lessons learned are also welcome.

PANEL 3 – MIGRANT CHILDREN’S INTEGRATION IN THE EU.

According to UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM, some [43% of migrant children](#) arrived in Southern Europe in 2020 via the Central Mediterranean route cited economic reasons as the primary motivation for leaving their country of origin, followed by limited access to basic services, being subject to or threatened with personal violence, and the presence of conflict or war. Among the reasons related to safety and security, children mentioned violent family disputes as well as the lack of freedom of expression or democracy. Among their most pressing needs, the children reported clothes (46%), legal assistance (19%), ability to contact family (7%), and medical and psychosocial support (7%). Migrant children residing in the EU encounter many obstacles to integration and well-being, including rights’ abuses, discrimination, lack of access to essential services, participation and citizenship. The integration of migrant children is at the center of some recent documents at the EU level, like the Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-2024) and the Child Guarantee, as well as of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), which stimulates specific policies related to, among others, social inclusion, education, health, participation. New challenges have to be faced by the EU regarding the protection and integration of migrant children fleeing war in Ukraine.

⇒ This panel aims to explore the current challenges to migrant children’s integration in the EU, the role that its policy on children’s rights and inclusion can play in tackling such obstacles and whether the current migration and asylum policy is able to satisfy their immediate needs, what prevents this to happen and what needs to be done. Presentations of best practices, lessons learned and gender-based case-studies are also welcome, as well as analysis of the integration in the EU member States of migrant children fleeing war in Ukraine.

PANEL 4 – MIGRANT CHILDREN, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change, in its multiple forms and manifestations, may lead to serious violations of human rights, including the right to life, health and to an adequate standard of living, among many others. Climate change can impair the right to education, effective remedy and limits freedom of expression and information. It impinges the right to private and family life, as well as the right to self-determination and development and the right to a healthy environment, where recognised. *Inter alia*, climate change increases vulnerability, limiting the opportunity for migration as an adaptation strategy, especially for children. Recent [data](#) suggest that over half a billion children live in areas at very high risk of flooding, 115 million are at high or very high risk of tropical cyclones, and nearly 160 million are exposed to high or extremely high drought severity. Environmental damage is of particular concern in relation to the rights of children, who will [inherit](#) a world damaged by the environment. According to the 2017 [OHCHR](#) report, (un)accompanied migrant children are among the most vulnerable to climate change and to disaster-displacement. In this context, the evacuation from areas affected by sudden environmental disasters to places without safe accommodation may result in increased exposure to sexual harassment and violence, exploitation and trafficking. In the event of large-scale disasters or other emergencies,

children may find themselves separated from their families, drastically increasing their risk of trauma and violence. Climate change makes no exception and both the EU and its population will be affected by higher temperature, sea level-rise and drought. The environmental actions set forth by the European Commission in the Green Deal constitute a unique opportunity to protect present and future generations from climate change, however, they do not take migration considerations into account.

⇒ This panel welcomes proposals that advance the knowledge on the link between migrant children's fundamental rights and climate change in the context of the EU from different perspectives, including but not limited to legal and political studies, socio-anthropological, pedagogic and psychological studies, leveraging related theories, promoting relevant case-studies and unveiling opportunities. Analyses that focus on gender and minority groups, such as stateless children, indigenous children, children with disability among others are particularly welcome.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Each participant can submit only 1 (one) abstract to this conference. Joint submissions are possible. The abstracts will be assessed by the scientific committee set up in the framework of the summer school "Economic, social and cultural rights of migrant children in the European Union" (22-30 June 2022), whose decision is final. The deadline for the submission of abstracts is **June 18, 2022**. Please, send all documentation in a word file to Chiara Scissa at chiara.scissa@santannapisa.it.

The following information must be included:

- An abstract, not exceeding 300 words.
- A short biography (max 100 words) in the abstract itself, which includes the name, affiliation and contact details of each author.
- The panel for which the paper should be considered.
- The CV (max 3 pages), including a list of relevant publications, of each author.
- Whether the author(s) would like their abstract to be considered for the publication in an edited book to be published in the framework of the MARS Jean Monnet Module

All participants will be informed of the result of their submission by **June 25, 2022**.

FINANCES

A reimbursement of maximum **200 euros** is provided to selected speakers to support them in the coverage of travel and accommodation expenses for the participation to the conference. The reimbursement will be provided upon the delivery of expenses documents.

PUBLICATION

After the conference, all speakers will receive further details regarding the possibility to publish their full papers in an edited book to be published in the framework of the Jean Monnet Module MARS. Full papers will be reviewed by the scientific committee, whose decision regarding the acceptance or rejection to publication is final.

For more information, please contact Francesca Biondi Dal Monte (francesca.biondi@santannapisa.it) and Chiara Scissa at chiara.scissa@santannapisa.it