

Södertörns University | School of Natural Science
Bachelor Thesis | Spring Term 2013
Development and International Cooperation

A Case Study on Unaccompanied asylum- seeking children in Sweden

Migration Patterns and Reasons

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Abstract

The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) has increased significantly in Sweden since the summer of 2006. Due to Sweden's high rate of asylum application approvals, it has become a main destination country. Concurrently, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have decreased in other more traditional European destination countries, such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway. The majority of the UASC come from Afghanistan and Somalia. There is insufficient knowledge regarding these children's reasons and patterns for the migration to Sweden. This is a case study based on semi-structured interviews with key informants that have been strategically chosen for this study. The Migration System theory, which is based on key mechanisms of the globalization theory, is used in this study. Restricted asylum regulations in Western countries have created a "migratory industry" with human smugglers, which facilitate and expand the irregular migration. The migratory industry greatly influences the children's choice of destination. Without the assistance of human smugglers, a migration would be impossible for these children. The conclusion of this study demonstrates the importance of informal social networks that are the reason behind the increase of UASC in Sweden.

Keywords: Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), migration patterns, migration reasons, informal social networks

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Problem	4
Research Objectives	5
Research Questions	5
Definitions	5
Delimitations	6
Migration trends.....	7
Background.....	10
Theory	12
Theoretical Framework.....	12
Push-and-Pull Theory.....	13
Globalization.....	14
The Migration Systems Theory.....	15
The migration-asylum nexus.....	15
The “Migratory industry”	17
Summary	18
Methodology.....	18
Method	18
The key informants	19
Criticism of the method	20
Material	21
Result.....	21
Country Analysis.....	21
Sweden.....	21
Afghanistan	23
Somalia.....	24
The interviews.....	26
Analysis	33
Conclusion.....	39
Reference.....	42
Appendix	47

Introduction

The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) has increased significantly in Sweden since the summer of 2006, with the numbers still rising. In 2004, there were 388 UASC in Sweden, and by 2012, the number increased to 3,578. This is an 800 per cent increase. The majority of UASC in Sweden are young males between the ages of 15 and 17 from Afghanistan and Somalia. While Sweden receives the highest number of asylum applications from unaccompanied children in Europe, the overall number of UASC has declined in other European countries receiving high numbers of UASC such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands.¹

There are various issues associated with the increased number of UASC in Sweden. According to children's rights organizations, there are many concerns regarding the delayed asylum process and how it affects the psychological health of these children. Additionally, questions have been raised if the Swedish asylum process is indeed done in accordance to the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC)². One measure has been to shorten the asylum-process. However, this has in turn led to a shortage of accommodations in the municipalities for the increased number of children that have received residence as a result of the shorter asylum processes.³ Furthermore, the disappearance of some UASC is a widespread problem in Europe. Research shows that the disappearance of these children is most likely to occur shortly after being known by authorities or after a negative decision on his/her asylum claim.⁴

Problem

The existence of UASC is certainly not a new phenomenon. Children are always affected by conflicts within their own country. The factors behind the sudden increase of UASC in Sweden after 2006 are quite unknown. Significant problems lie in the lack of knowledge regarding these children's reasons for their migration to

¹ Migrationsverket 2013a

² UNCEF 2013a

³ Rädda Barnen 2013

⁴ Hanicilova & Knauder 2011: 13

Sweden. This has led to preconceptions and misunderstandings regarding these children, which has resulted in subsequent challenges in handling issues associated with the large increase in numbers. Some difficulties include their psychological health, their disappearances, and overall well-being.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to increase the understanding of the UASC patterns and reasons for the migration to Sweden. The aim is also to examine the processes and actors behind the migration.

Research Questions

- What are the reasons for the increase of UASC from Afghanistan and Somalia since the year 2006?
- Are the factors for the increase to be found in the receiving country Sweden, in the two countries Afghanistan and Somalia, or in the process in between?

Definitions

A refugee is a person who is outside of his/her country of origin, and who is unable to return due to fear of persecution based on nationality, religion, race, membership of a specific group, or political beliefs.⁵ By 2006 147 United Nations member states have signed the Convention and the Protocol (1967). By signing the states agree to protect refugees and respect the *non-refoulement* principal, so that the refugee will not be sent back to the country where he/she is at risk of facing persecution.⁶

⁵ UN Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951

⁶ Castle & Miller 2009: 188-189

An asylum-seeker⁷ is a person who has crossed international borders in order to seek protection. Unlike a refugee an asylum-seeker's claims for refugee status has not been decided.

According to the EG- directive (2005/85/EG) an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child is an individual younger than 18 years old when he/she arrives to EU member states without accompaniment by a legal guardian.⁸

Delimitations

This study concerns unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and examines the reasons and patterns of their migration. Issues such as the reception of these children by Swedish institutions, the integration process and their psychological well-being will not be examined in this study.

The term 'child' in this study may be confusing since the study refers to teenagers between the ages of 15 to 17, and not children that are younger. However, the term *child* is used throughout this study in accordance to the EG- directive definition. The focus is on UASC between the ages of 15 to 17, because it is this particular age group in the UASC bracket that has significantly increased in Sweden.

There is a significant difference in the number of children from the two respective countries addressed here. In 2012 the total number of UASC from Afghanistan was at 1,940, and the number of children from Somalia was 452.⁹ This study puts emphasis on UASC that enters the Swedish borders illegally.

⁷ UN Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951

⁸ Europa 2010

⁹ Migrationsverket 2013f

Migration trends

The arrival of new groups of asylum-seekers, the increase of unaccompanied children, and the resettlement programs indicate that Sweden is one of the main destination countries in the world.¹⁰

General global asylum trends show that Europe received 355,500 asylum claims in 2012. The countries receiving the most applicants in Europe were the Nordic countries. Among those countries Sweden was with 70 per cent of the total of the asylum applications the main destination country of all Nordic countries.¹¹ Among the five largest recipients of new asylum applications in the world, Sweden ranked number four. The largest recipient, however, was the United States of America, followed by Germany and France. The United Kingdom holds the fifth place.¹²

In 2012, the countries from which the largest amount of asylum-seeking individuals came from was Afghanistan, followed by the Syrian Arab Republic, Serbia (and Kosovo), China and Pakistan.¹³ The number of Afghan asylum-seekers was highest in Germany (7,500 applications) followed by Sweden (4,800). The top three nationalities of asylum applications in Sweden 2012 were Afghanistan, Somalia and Syrian Arab Republic.¹⁴

The largest group of asylum-seekers comes from Afghanistan. In the beginning of the period 2000 to 2011, not many Afghans came to Sweden. However, the largest increase occurred in 2011 with 4,122 Afghans seeking asylum in Sweden, the majority was unaccompanied children.¹⁵ The large increase of Somali immigrants occurred after 2007 with 3 349 Somalis seeking asylum in Sweden, and three years later came 5 553 asylum-seeking Somalis.¹⁶

¹⁰ UNHCR 2012: 7

¹¹ UNHCR 2012: 2

¹² UNHCR 2012: 7

¹³ *ibid.* 2012: 3

¹⁴ *ibid.* 2012: 16-18

¹⁵ Migrationsverket 2013c

¹⁶ *ibid.* 2013d

Other asylum-seeking children in Sweden come from Eritrea, Algeria, Morocco, Syria, Albania, and Iraq. Some of the UASC belongs to the category “others” due to the uncertainty of where they originate.¹⁷ The largest group of UASC between 2006 and 2008 came from Iraq, followed by Somalia and Afghanistan. The number of Iraqis has since decreased significantly whereas the numbers have increased from the two latter ones.¹⁸ However, the study does not examine these children’s reasons due to the delimitation of this study. During 2012, there were 3,578 unaccompanied children who applied for asylum in Sweden. Approximately 82 per cent of these children received *permanent* residence.¹⁹ Sweden receives the most asylum applications from unaccompanied children, and is the country that approves the most applications in Europe. After Sweden, Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom (UK), and Norway received the most asylum application from USAC. Germany received 2,096 applications in 2012, compared to Sweden 3,578. Belgium received 1 001 applications, the UK 997, and Norway 964.²⁰ These numbers show that Sweden is the main destination country in Europe at present comparing to other more traditional European destination countries.

In the majority of the European countries, UASC are typically granted temporary residence until they turn 18 years old. After that they have to apply for residence they are considered adults and evaluated as such.²¹

It has become much easier for UASC to be reunited with their families in Sweden since 2012. A family reunification previously required proof of identity and kinship with family members in the format such as identification documents. However, since 2012 identification documents are no longer needed since kinship is confirmed based on DNA-analysis. In countries where war, conflict and instabilities occur, legal documents may get destroyed, be withheld or not issued and therefore, through the

¹⁷ Migrationsverket 2013f

¹⁸ Migrationsverket 2012: 3

¹⁹ *ibid.* 2013a

²⁰ *ibid.* 2013f

²¹ Nandy & Shaw 2008; Parliamentary Assemblée 2011: 15

possibility to prove kinship through a blood test has facilitated the process for families to be reunited in Sweden.²²

The European countries that are covered by the Dublin II Regulation²³ decide which European country will be responsible to examine the asylum seekers application. According to the Regulation the deportations is based on if the asylum seeker has: 1) already visa or residence permit in another European country covered by the Regulation or, 2) traveled illegally through a European country or, 3) already applied for asylum in a European country or, 4) his/her family has residence permit is in a country covered by the Regulation. All asylum seekers who are older than 14 will be fingerprinted in the first European country they apply for asylum. The fingerprints will be saved in a database (EURODAC). In the database, authorities can see the country in which the applicant has applied for asylum in.²⁴

Greece is the main transit country for the asylum-seekers journey to the Schengen countries. Greece's ability to control its external border is another factor that creates uncertainty about the future migration to Sweden. During 2012 Germany and France urged Greece to strengthen their border controls.²⁵

The economical crisis in Greece generates the increased migration to Sweden. When UASC (from Afghanistan and Somalia) first reach Europe, they usually reach Greece first because of the geographical location of the country (in the south of Europe and close to Turkey -most UASC go through Turkey to reach Europe by boat). However, Greece is not an attractive country to stay in because it is known for its lack of protection and care for immigrants, its poor asylum system, hostile attitude and its economical problems. It is well known that Greece is not able to provide protection for UASC. Therefore, when having reached Greece, they continue to search for better locations. The European Court of Human Rights²⁶ decided in 2011 that deportations to Greece should be stopped because of Greece's inability to meet these children's

²² EMN 2011:5, Migrationsverket 2012: 6

²³ Europa 2013

²⁴ Migrationsverket 2007

²⁵ Migrationsverket 2012: 7

²⁶ ECHR 2013

basic rights. Therefore, UASC that have been fingerprinted in Greece will be overlooked.

Background

Scholars question whether there have been significant changes in patterns of displacement over the past years despite the increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees.²⁷ Contemporary migration flows in the world, whether voluntary or forced, can be explained with ethnic and civil conflicts, state failure, and persecution. Migration flows are a consequence of a globalized world, with technological- and infrastructure progress, and a greater awareness of opportunities somewhere else, also reduction of national borders in some places are explanations to migration.²⁸

The number of asylum seekers and refugees has increased globally during the last 20 years despite a relative decline in the middle of the 1990s. As a consequence asylum has become a great political issue in many developed countries. For example, right-wing politicians in some Western countries, points out growing crime rates, terrorism and overstretched welfare systems as a result of the increasing number of asylum seekers. This has led to stricter border controls, detention of asylum seekers and deportation of illegal immigrants. The success of right wing politics in Europe can be associated with the fear of mass influx of immigrants from conflict- ridden and poor regions.²⁹

Two international conflicts shaped the refugee regulations: World War II and the Cold War. The economic globalization, the social transformation, migration, and increased inequality conflicts³⁰ have transformed the immigration and refugee regulations fundamentally over the last 30 years, from a more welcoming approach to strict refugee councils, to keep out asylum seekers.³¹ The United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) states the number of persons of concern peaked at 32.9 million in 2006, mostly due to the enhanced responsibility for the

²⁷ Newman & van Selm 2003: 3

²⁸ *ibid.* 2003: 4

²⁹ Castle & Miller 2009: 188; Keely 2001: 6

³⁰ Keely 2001, *in* Castle & Miller 2009: 191

³¹ Castle & Miller 2009: 193

UNHCR. The UNHCR listed 2006 the countries from where the refugees flee from as Afghanistan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia.³²

The historical aspects of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Europe and Sweden are categorized from the World War II to the present. During the World War II the Jewish children and “non-Aryan” children were removed from Germany and other occupied countries. Around 12,000 children were transported out of Germany with the parent’s permission. These evacuations are known as the “Kindertransport”.³³ Sweden was one of the receiving countries. After the war, the United Nations helped displaced children to reunite with their families. During the war period 1939-1945 approximately 70 000 Finnish children were transported from Finland to Sweden due to the Russian invasion 1939 this is called “the world’s largest children’s movement”.³⁴ During these periods, Sweden was neutral and therefore a safe region considering the circumstances. And because of its geographical location (close to Finland and Germany) it was the easiest possibility to transport children to Sweden. Between the years 1958 to 1996 exists limited, uncertain or no statistics at all regarding unaccompanied children in Sweden. During the years 1996 to 2008 the statics show that there has been a slow increase to 2003, whereas the number of UASC in Sweden increased rapidly after 2006.³⁵

Migration is a result of structures on different levels between society and individuals.³⁶ International migration is rarely spontaneous; why a person decides to migrate is based on personal history, resources, and collaboration with networks in the receiving country. And to what extend the migration, between the sending and receiving country, is institutionalized.³⁷

The UNHCR has made two studies that explain how UASC migrate from one country to another; it would be impossible without the assistance of smugglers. Smugglers are people working transnationally in an organized network. They are

³² UNHCR statistics, *in* Castle & Miller 2009: 190

³³ Lomfors 1996: 19, *in* Hessle 2009:8

³⁴ Lagnebro 1994, *in* Hessle 2009: 10-11

³⁵ Hessle 2009:15

³⁶ GCIM, 2005 *in* Hessle 2009:31-33

³⁷ Tamas & Palme 2006, *in* Hessle 2009: 31-33

linked between continents and share the common interest – profit.³⁸ They gather children and young people that are fleeing to Western countries. The interviewed children, in the studies, say it is easy to get in contact with smugglers in Afghanistan, and describes the contact similar to a travel agency, where you get information about the trip.³⁹

The majority of the unaccompanied Afghan children migrated to Europe without a clear idea of a destination country. Some of them have never even heard about Sweden prior to their arrival in Europe.⁴⁰ Along their journey to Europe they gather information from other migrants or smugglers of where they should go. In some cases, their parents have discussed the destination with the smugglers in advance, but without informing the children.⁴¹

Theory

Theoretical Framework

The Migration System Theory is used to explain why the number of UASC has increased in Sweden since the year 2006. Any migratory movement can be seen as the result of interacting macro (society)-, micro (individual)-, and meso- structures. Meso-structures are certain individuals, groups or institutions that take on the task of mediating between migrants and political- or economic institutions, for example the human smugglers.⁴² The “migratory industry” consists of the people working and making a profit of facilitating the migration.

The Globalization theory is explanatory to the Migration system theory, which is primarily based on globalization factors. To be able to understand how the current asylum system operates the Migration-asylum nexus gives background explanations to the current situation. Globalization’s key indicators and mechanisms are explanatory to the macro-, micro-, and meso-structures.

³⁸ UNHCR 2010a: 21

³⁹ UNHCR 2010b: 44

⁴⁰ UNHCR 2010a: 22

⁴¹ *ibid.* 2010a: 22

⁴² Castle & Miller 2009:30

These two theories will be discussed in more detail later, but will start with the basic theory of migration in general - The push-and-pull theory.

Push-and-Pull Theory

This theory gives explanations to why people choose to leave their current residence (push-factor) and why they choose a specific destination (pull-factor). The push factors include low living standards, war, low economic opportunities, political repression etc. The pull factors include good economic opportunities, political freedom etc. Fundamental to migration theories is the notion that there are push and pull factors in all migratory movements. However, the basic criteria for this type of theory lies in the assumption that people have a choice; they calculate relative costs and benefits of leaving their current residence for a specific destination.⁴³ For that reason this type of theory cannot explain the UASC reasons for coming to Sweden, since many of them do not know the destination country in advance. It also excludes other *in between* factors that can affect a person's decision of migration, such as people or situations that influence the choice of the destination country.

Hence, only focusing on push or pull factors will give a simplified and a misleading picture. A wide range of conditions in sending, receiving and the *in between* areas influences the UASC's migration decisions. The conditions are not static but it is a process of constant change. They are linked to global factors and to the way these factors interact with local historical and cultural patterns.⁴⁴ Therefore, this theory does not explain specifically why the number has increased in Sweden.

Scholars commonly use the Push-and-Pull theory since it simply establishes that there are push and pull factors in all migratory movements. The main criticism of this theory is the lack of the factors *in-between* that affect migration decisions and movements.

⁴³ Castle & Miller 2009:22

⁴⁴ *ibid.* 2009: 26

The Push-and-Pull theory is not applied in this study because of its simplification and failure to explain UASC reasons to migrate. However, this study recognizes the existence of push- and pull-factors in all migratory movements.

Globalization

A new paradigm emerged from the late 1970s: the globalization theory. This theory has been widely accepted and used by scholars in the international migration research.⁴⁵ Historical patterns of migration are reshaped into new forms and new flows evolve in response to economic-, political- and cultural changes, and violent conflicts. Yet, it is possible to discern some trends, such as the globalization-, the acceleration-, and the growing politicization of migration. These trends indicate that more and more countries are being affected by a growing number of immigrants, and that there is a need of an enhanced global governance and international cooperation concerning migration.⁴⁶

The characteristics of globalization are an increase in cross-border flows of all types, such as finance and trade, media and environmental pollution, and - people. New information-, communication technologies and the development of the infrastructure are key mechanisms of globalization.⁴⁷ The cultural capital suggests that electronic communications facilitate the spreading of knowledge of migration routes and work opportunities. This has led to the mobility of the world's excluded who are desperate to migrate in hope for a better life elsewhere. The social capital is the informal networks that facilitate the migration such as the people that are making a living of organizing migratory movements.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 2009: 51

⁴⁶ *ibid.* 2009: 9-12

⁴⁷ *ibid.* 2009: 51

⁴⁸ *ibid.* 2009: 56

The Migration Systems Theory

Any migratory movement can be explained by connecting macro- and micro-structures. Macro-structures are societal factors, international relations, laws, structures and practices created by states, in both the sending and receiving countries. Micro-structures are informal social networks that are created by the migrants themselves to facilitate the migration and settlement. The role of cultural capital, such as the information and knowledge of other countries as well as the capabilities for organizing travel, are vital resources for individuals and groups in starting and sustaining migratory movements. Social capital includes personal relationships, family and household patterns, friendship and community ties. The family and the community are fundamental networks in a migration. In critical situations, families may decide to send away one family member to secure their survival, either for work or protection. In many cases the migration decisions of sending one family member are made by the elders, and especially by men in patriarchal cultures. Usually young people and women are expected to obey. Family networks often make migration possible by providing the financial, cultural and social capitals.

The macro- and micro-structures are compiled into meso-structures.⁴⁹ The meso-structures are usually based on certain individuals, groups or institutions that mediate between migrants and political- or economic institutions, such as the people working in the “migratory industry”.⁵⁰

The migration-asylum nexus

The migration dynamics regarding refugees and asylum-seekers are different from other types of migrants. Refugees and asylum-seekers are fleeing conflict, human rights abuse, persecution and violence in their country of origin. Many of them remain in the neighboring countries, which are in many cases unstable themselves. To be able to continue migrating to more secure regions one needs financial

⁴⁹ *ibid.* 2009: 28

⁵⁰ *ibid.* 2009: 29

resources, human capital (such as education) and a social connection to the destination country.⁵¹

The concept of “mixed motivations”, such as fleeing violence, and poverty, has made it difficult for Western policymakers to distinguish the economically motivated migrants from refugees.⁵² Economic migrants and refugees have previously been in different categories, and treated in separate policy sectors.

Irregular migration (intent to illegally crossing nation borders) is discussed in the context of border control and security. Asylum, on the other hand, is a legal process and characterized by institutional and international legal norms to protect the displaced person. Irregular migration and asylum can overlap each other in the sense that the person in need of protection takes the irregular path to reach Europe. And the person that wants to migrate to Europe but is not in need of protection can take the asylum path as an alternative to migrate to Europe.

The economically motivated migrants and refugees have been converged to one channel - the asylum channel. The refugees were “transformed” into asylum-seekers that now had to arrive independently and prove their claims. And for the economic migrants, the asylum route was the only legal way into Europe. The convergence of these two channels has made it difficult to distinguish economic migrants from refugees, since they use the same route. Economic migrants and refugees were both channeled into the asylum category in the early 1990s. However, it appears that they are now being channeled into an illegal category.⁵³ The perception that evolved in the beginning of the 1990s is that a majority of the people that are seeking asylum are “bogus”, economic migrants, seeking work and not refuge.⁵⁴

This causes problems like dangerous journeys that put human lives at risk, illegal border crossing, criminal acts as human smuggling and trafficking. It also leads to,

⁵¹ Zolberg & Benda 2001: 62

⁵² Castle & Miller 2009: 34

⁵³ Koser 2001: 92

⁵⁴ *ibid.* 2001: 88

for example, the increase of policy restrictions that prevent countries to provide protection to those in need.⁵⁵

The “Migratory industry”

Restricted asylum policies (macro-structure) have confused the distinction, not only between economic migrants and political refugees, but also between legal and illegal migrants. It is argued that restricted asylum policies have led to the growth of the “migratory industry”.⁵⁶

The migratory industry consists of people organizing migratory movements for a living. These people can be travel agents, labor recruiters, brokers, interpreters, housing agents, immigration lawyers, and human smugglers.⁵⁷ However, in this context, the emphasis is on human smugglers since they are a central aspect of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children’s journey. These smugglers can vary from a few individuals to highly structured transnational criminal organizations (TCO).⁵⁸

It is important to distinguish human smuggling from trafficking. According to the UNHCR the immigrants that are being smuggled are moved illegally for profit, while trafficking is based on the purpose of exploitation.⁵⁹ It is difficult to count the number of people that are being smuggled and the people being trafficked due to the underground criminal nature of the activity. People that are migrating with the assistance of smugglers are economic migrants, but also people fleeing from conflict and persecution in their country of origin to seek protection in another place, legal refugees unable to seek for asylum due to the restrictive asylum policies.⁶⁰ It is a dangerous journey to travel with smugglers, especially if you are a child. Many asylum-seekers (referred as illegal immigrants that are being smuggled) face risks such as imprisonment, deportation and in some cases death, whereas smugglers are rarely arrested.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Papadopoulou 2005: 2

⁵⁶ *ibid.* 2001: 89-90

⁵⁷ Castle & Miller 2009: 201

⁵⁸ *ibid.* 2009: 201

⁵⁹ *ibid.* 2009: 202

⁶⁰ *ibid.* 2009: 203

⁶¹ *ibid.* 2009: 204

The link between smuggling and asylum; on one hand, the human smuggling organization is seen as a criminal network, characterized by the illegal transportation of economic migrants. On the other hand, smugglers are seen as the only possible way for people seeking asylum in industrialized countries.⁶² The link between smuggling and asylum concludes that it is much more difficult for people to seek asylum in industrialized countries without the assistance of smugglers.

Summary

The Globalization theory emphasizes the increase of information about migration routes, work opportunities, and the notion of “a better life elsewhere”. The theory gives information about the “migratory industry”. The globalization makes it easier to transfer money, products, and people across borders. More specifically, the Migration System theory is built on the globalization theory explains the importance of family and community networks. It also explains the smugglers essential part in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children’s migration. These in between factors play a crucial part in unaccompanied children’s journey. The migration-asylum nexus gives further explanations on why the phenomenon of sending children, has developed. The difficulty for adult’s to seek asylum in Western countries has lead to the fact that parents send their children because they are more likely to receive protection.

Methodology

Method

This is a qualitative study that is based on an inductive perspective since the focus is on the process, the meaning and the understanding of the UASC ‘s migration to Sweden. Less structured interview have been used in this study. The interviews are not controlled by a number of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the wording nor the order of questions is determined in advance.

⁶² Newman & van Selm 2003: 22-23

The key informants

The key informants have been strategically chosen since they represent valuable insight for the topic.

Katrin Nyman works at the Swedish Migration Board in Stockholm. She has been working for 14 years to identify issues, and raise awareness about UASC. The last 4-5 years, she has been working exclusively with UASC that have arrived in Sweden.

Katarina Munier works at the Swedish Social Board in Stockholm. She has held many positions which are the following: she has worked as a municipal social welfare officer, as a family law secretary, as well as the Head of Children and Family in Rinkeby, Stockholm. She has also worked in central Stockholm City with guidelines and training of newly hired social workers. Since 2008, she has worked at the Social Board as an investigator at the Department of Knowledge Management.

Johnny Samuelsson is a legal guardian (trustee) to UASC in Sweden. Legal Guardians hold responsibility for the child's economy and social situation, (i.e education and housing) in addition to ensuring that the legal and medical rights of the child are provided.

“*Ahmad*” is a former unaccompanied asylum-seeking child from Afghanistan who arrived in Stockholm, Sweden in 2007. He prefers to be anonymous, and will be referred to as “Ahmad” in this study.

Interview guide structure

To be able to examine the reasons for the UASC migration, the structure of the interview guide is divided into three parts: 1) the country of origin, 2) Sweden or/and Europe, 3) and the in-between factors/process such as globalization factors and the migratory that facilitate the travel.

The purpose of the interview is to open a discussion rather than follow a strict template. Additional interviews have been done with some of the key informants since the initial interview was insufficient.

Criticism of the method

Interviews are a good way to collect information.⁶³ The main advantage by using semi-structured interviews instead of following a strict template is that it increases the opportunities for interesting and significant information to be brought up during the interview that otherwise not would be given due to the interviewer's preconceptions.⁶⁴ Interviews have been done with people working with these children since their perspectives gives a holistic picture of UASC in Sweden. It is essential to fill the knowledge gaps since there is limited research about these children in the professions that work with UASC.

However, since there are knowledge gaps regarding these children's reasons for migration the interviews may give limited data. Regarding the UASC, it is problematic to be certain since the facts and figures are unclear because of the irregular nature of the phenomenon. The key informants have mentioned that their statements are mainly based on their own beliefs and perceptions that are based on their experiences in their work with these children. Furthermore, the key informants are in such positions that they are reluctant to speculate, since this topic is a sensitive political issue.

It has to be taken into account that the study is based on a few expert interviews. The former UASC "Ahmad" possesses the most valuable information because he has first hand experiences on the migration of an UASC. However, the results have to be considered as indicative.

Since the topic about unaccompanied children is a sensitive political issue, the informants has received a copy of their answers from the interview, to ensure them about what will be used in the thesis.

⁶³ Merriam 1988: 100

⁶⁴ Olsson & Sörensen 2007: 80

Material

The study consists of collected data and information from the Swedish Migration Board's website. It has contributed to an overview over the current situation about UASC in Sweden, such as facts and statistics. The study is based on relevant information, reports, studies, statistics etc. about the topic on organization websites, such as, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) website. The study takes the sensitivity of the topic into account, which may result in limited data. There is limited previous work regarding UASC migration patterns and reasons to Sweden.

The result is based on primary data from the different interviews and also secondary data from reports and studies on the topic (in the first part of the result).

The study consists of a preponderance of previous studies and reports on the Afghan unaccompanied children, and less about Somali children. Still, the number of Afghan children in Sweden is superior the number of children from Somalia (which is second largest group).

Result

The result section of this study consists of two parts. The first part deals with the countries historical background. The second part of the result section consists of the submitted interview answers. By connecting this empirical background with the submitted interview-answers makes it possible to draw out the main factors behind the increased number of UASC.

Country Analysis

Sweden

Sweden ratified the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) 1990 without any reservations,⁶⁵ and it came into force the same year. Successively, several measures have been taken to bring the Swedish law compatible with the CRC. Throughout the entire process regarding the child, the principle regarding the best

⁶⁵ Riksdagen, prop. 1989/90:107

interest of the child (BIC) must be respected. According to the CRC, a person under the age of 18 is considered a child and, therefore must be given particular attention due to the child's vulnerable nature. According to the Swedish Aliens Act (2005:716)⁶⁶ the Migration Board has to pay particular consideration to the BIC. The Migration Board has practiced special priority rules since 2006.⁶⁷ This means that the UASC that entries Sweden and applies for residence must be handled with the highest priority and their cases must be treated within three months. This was in order to respect the principle of the BIC. According to the CRC⁶⁸, the child should not be discriminated in any way. Because of that the UASC that arrive to Sweden have the same rights as the rest of the children in the country.

In Sweden, family reunification is a high priority. According to the CRC, children have the right to be reunited with their family. While processing the child's asylum application, the search for the family is a priority. If the family is located in a safe region, the child will be sent to reunite with their family. However, if the family is located in an unstable region, there is a high possibility for the child to be reunited with its family in Sweden.⁶⁹ In 2012, the Migration Court made it easier for families to reunite in Sweden. This means that family members without valid ID documents can still prove their identity and kinship through DNA analysis.⁷⁰

The legal concept "particular distressing circumstances" was initiated in 2006. This concept means that asylum-seekers can be granted a residence permit even if there is no need for protection based on the situation in their country of origin, but based on their personal reasons. The Swedish Migration Board has been more generous, in certain cases, than what the legislation states.⁷¹ UASC that have received residence permit based on this concept cannot reunite with their family in Sweden.⁷²

The geographical position of Sweden means that there are no external (Schengen) borders. Migration to Sweden has usually been through member states. People that

⁶⁶ Riksdagen 2013

⁶⁷ EMN 2009: 15-16

⁶⁸ UNICEF 2013b

⁶⁹ Migrationsverket 2013h

⁷⁰ EMN 2011: 5

⁷¹ *ibid.* 2011: 12

⁷² Migrationsverket 2013g

have been refused to enter Swedish borders have occurred mainly at international airports and not at the Swedish borders.⁷³ This means that the risk of entering Sweden through neighboring countries is minimal.

Sweden has been one of the main destination countries throughout a ten-year period (2002- 2011). The highest number of application, during this period, was in 2007. The lowest number was in 2005. Aside from being a main destination country for protection, Sweden also engages in resettlement programs.⁷⁴

Overall, UASC are granted protection in a much higher proportion than adults. In 2012, the protection rate for all applicants was 34 per cent, for UASC the rate was 65 per cent. Afghanistan and Somalia, the two largest groups, received protection at 78 – and 76 per cent.⁷⁵

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries, and the situation in the country is the most complex humanitarian crisis in the world. The situation in Afghanistan is built on political insecurity and increased military occupation. It is a complex range of illegal and legal armed forces, and organized criminal groups that play a significant part. The criminalized economy is primarily based on narcotic and human smuggling.⁷⁶

Children are vulnerable and exposed to all sorts of violence. They are being killed, exploited and mistreated. Forced recruitment of children by armed forces is common in all regions in the country. Children risk being used as suicide bombers, exploited sexually, used as child labor, and exposed to trafficking. Many children have been captured by law enforcement for their association with armed forces.

⁷³ EMN 2011: 29

⁷⁴ *ibid.* 2011: 32

⁷⁵ EMN 2012: 22

⁷⁶ Utrikesdepartementet 2007a

Some underlying causes for Afghans migration to Sweden are the worsened living conditions in Iran. New restrictions have made it harder for Afghans to stay in Iran. For instance, Iranian employers get punished for hiring illegal Afghans. Additionally, restrictions in certain parts of Iran have made it harder for Afghans to move freely.⁷⁷

Afghanistan has ratified the Convention on Refugees 1951 and its protocol 1967, in 2005. Afghanistan accepted the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) 1994. According to United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 68 per cent of the population is below 25 years old. And less than one per cent reach higher education.⁷⁸ Life expectancy in Afghanistan is 49 years old (2011).⁷⁹

Over the past 30 years, Afghanistan has suffered from instability that has affected the education system in the country. Recently, schools have been targets of attacks.⁸⁰

During a ten-year period, Sweden has provided aid and personnel to empower the Afghan state and the judicial system, thus the country can become independent. Sweden has also provided aid to improve the infrastructure and encourage the respect of human rights. Afghanistan is the country that has received the most aid from Sweden.⁸¹

Somalia

Somalia is one of the world's poorest countries. The civil war has resulted in over a million internal displaced persons, and the same amount of internationally displaced people seeking refuge in other countries. Assaults on civilians carried out by a range of actors, including the private militias, militias belonging to government officials, the National Security Service (NSA), Transitional Federal Government (TFG) armed forces, police, Ethiopian troops and groups belonging to Islamic armed opposition Al-Shabaab.

⁷⁷ Koepke 2011

⁷⁸ UNDP 2013

⁷⁹ Worldbank 2013

⁸⁰ Boland 2010: 11-12

⁸¹ Säkerhetspolitik 2013a

During the last 18 years, Somalia has not had a central government and the situation is considered being the worst in Africa. Sweden is one of the countries that receive most refugees from Somalia. Many of the Somalis claim that they are threatened by the islamist militia Al-Shabaab for refusing to join them, or by belonging to another political organization. Others lack the protection from clans.

The CRC has been signed but not ratified. Children in Somalia often belong to gangs of criminals and are being used in armed forces. The Islamic movement uses children to perform murder on people that belongs to other political groups etc.⁸²

Around 70 per cent of the population in Somalia is under the age of 30,⁸³ and life expectancy is 51 years.⁸⁴

Since 1991, Sweden has given humanitarian aid to Somalia. Due to the weak and shattered situation, Sweden puts emphasis on engaging the population and the local Institutions in action. As a part from the humanitarian aid that is provided, Sweden gives support in conflict prevention. A peace settlement 2004 resulted in the transitional Institutions, which Sweden supports.⁸⁵ Due to the new possibilities for family reunification based on DNA-analysis in Sweden 2012. Somalis continues to increase and be one of the main groups of asylum seekers.⁸⁶

Summery

Sweden receives the most asylum applications from unaccompanied children in Europe. The Swedish laws on the rights of children are based on the CRC. The most important is the principle on the best interest of the child. No child should be discriminated and therefore, all children are entitled education- and healthcare. Family reunification is a high priority in Sweden. Since 2012, DNA-analysis made it easier for families to reunite in Sweden since legal documents are no longer necessary. An individual under the age of 18 is considered a child, and therefore must be treated with particular attention. In Sweden, it is more likely to receive a

⁸² Utrikesdepartementet 2007b

⁸³ UNDP 2012

⁸⁴ Worldbank 2013

⁸⁵ Säkerhetspolitik 2013b

⁸⁶ EMN 2011:5

permanent residence, compared to other countries in Europe. The concept of “particular distressing circumstances” means that an asylum-seeker can receive a residence permit without needing protection due to the situation in the country but based on personal reasons. The location of Sweden makes it easy to enter the country since it does not have any external border control. The short asylum process in Sweden (three to four months) is attractive for UASC.

Both Afghanistan and Somalia are two of the world’s poorest countries that have experienced pro-longed war, insecurity and the lack of a legal justice system. Children in these countries are exposed to violence, exploitation and criminal activities. The low life expectancy and the high number of young people under 30 years seem to be an important factor that young people move in the hope of a “better life elsewhere”. In Afghanistan, smugglers are a big part of the criminalized economy and therefore children have easy access to smugglers. Restricted legislations in Iran have made it more difficult for Afghans to reside in Iran. Therefore have forced Afghans to seek residence elsewhere.

The interviews

The key informants in this study agree that the main factors that force a child to leave are war, persecution and organized violence. Some answered that it is often a combination of the situation in the country and poverty.

According to Katrina Munier from the Social Board and Katrin Nyman from the Migration Board, children that originate from countries such as Afghanistan and Somalia where war and conflict flare up on a regular basis lack basic activities, like education- and healthcare systems. There is no opportunity to establish themselves in the community. This makes it impossible for children to grow up in dignified circumstances. Because of this, young males want to live in the West where they can enjoy higher life qualities and also to be able to financially support their family. According to “Ahmad”, it is common that young males decide themselves to leave and go to Europe. Sometimes even without their parent’s permission.

There are many young people who want to go to Europe. If parents forbid it, they can just leave the house and go without saying goodbye. It has happened many times. They just want to go from there. There are no opportunities in Afghanistan as there are here. (“Ahmad”. Translated by the author).

There are disagreements among the key informants regarding whether a child have a part in the migration decision-making. It seems that the general perception is based on the notion that children have no part in the decision-making process. They are seen as silent objects that are being moved from one place to another. However, “Ahmad” talks out of experience, claiming that young males in Afghanistan often pushes towards a migration, in the hope of a better life in Europe.

Whether there are “mixed motives” for the migration, such as financial motives, and refuge, is inevitable in many cases. “Ahmad” compares the Swedish economy to the Afghan economy. The great difference makes young people want to come to Western countries to be able to financially provide for the family. From a traditional perspective, it is common that the eldest son travel abroad to earn a living. Johnny Samuelsson, the legal guardian emphasizes the cultural- and historical point of view. In these countries, it is usually the eldest son who is expected to provide for the family. Therefore, the expectations on the eldest son may be a reason to seek asylum in the West.

This is partly about an assignment trip to support dependents and partly to escape war and conflict. The causes are not purely; they are intertwined in many cases. It could be very well that they must leave the country, but also has a maintenance obligation to their family. (Johnny Samuelsson. Translated by the author).

The key informants agree that one of the main reasons for an UASC to seek asylum in Sweden is the possibility to receive a *permanent* residence. According to “Ahmad”, Sweden accepts many children that are in the need of protection. A contributing factor is the short asylum process (three to four months). Sweden does not give permanent residence to adults to the same extent. In several European countries the majority of these children receive temporary residence until they turn 18

years old. When they have turned 18 years old, they will be evaluated as adults and have to continuously apply for permission to stay.

Family reunification is a high priority, whether in their country of origin or in Sweden. According to Katrin Nyman family reunifications is not possible in the country of origin if there is an ongoing war. Therefore, the children have the right to be reunited with their family in Sweden. Conversely, some of the key informants argued that the statistics regarding family reunification in Sweden is relatively small. For instance, “Ahmad” states that the elderly rather stay in their country of origin due to their lack of adaptability to new cultures and lifestyles while children can adapt to new environments faster.

Sweden also receives an increased group of UASC from countries such as Algeria and Morocco. However, unlike Somalia and Afghanistan, these countries are more stable, and not in the same acute situation. Therefore, their asylum applications are considered being based on economical motives. These children do not receive residence permit in the same proportion.

In the past, many adults got permanent residence during the internal armed conflict in Somalia. Today the situation is not the same. Now there is a risk that you get rejected if your individual reasons are not strong enough as an adult. And it might be an incentive to send children, younger children who do not risk being seen and evaluated as adults. The idea might be to secure the possibility for a residence permit for family members later on. If a child receives state protection on individual reasons, they have the right to bring their relatives. It is relatively common that the family apply when the children received a residence permit. (Katrin Nyman, the Migration Board. Translated by the author.)

When children reach Europe, they usually reach Greece first. According to “Ahmad”, since Greece do not fulfill the standards of providing protection for the UASC; other European countries are overlooking the fingerprints that have been taken in Greece. Which means that children do not need to be sent back to the first European country that they have applied for asylum in.

Everybody has fingerprints in Greece. I have fingerprints in Greece. In Sweden, you do not think about the fingerprints that have been taken in Greece because Greece is a poor country. (“Ahmad”. Translated by the author).

In Greece the children decide the destination country. A child cannot travel without the assistance of smugglers. Smugglers make up a large transnational organization that makes a profit by illegally transport migrants and refugees to Western countries. They know all the routes, the laws, and how to falsify passports and ID-cards. However, to reach a destination country is expensive. According to “Ahmad” the former UASC, to reach Sweden costs the most.

Smugglers in Greece know that you will receive a residence permit in Sweden; therefore they will raise the price to 6 000 euro. That is a lot of money to reach Sweden from Greece. They will fix the passports and ID-cards, they know how to fix that. After the child arrives to Sweden, the child will call and say that he has arrived. You leave your money to someone there, and you give the smugglers a code. (“Ahmad” the former UASC. Translated by the author.)

According to “Ahmad”, Sweden is a less recognized country compared to countries such as the UK, Germany and the Netherlands that are more traditional destination countries in Europe. The majority of the UASC do not know anything about Sweden before they arrive in Europe. According to “Ahmad”, in recent years, informal social networks have recognized Sweden for generously approving asylum applications and permanent residences. The reason for the sudden wave in 2006 may be the increased knowledge about the Swedish asylum system among the immigrants and the smugglers. Katarina Munier also believes that the UASC first receives knowledge about Sweden when they arrive in Europe.

They said that I should go to Sweden. Everyone knows that you will receive a residence permit in Sweden. That is why all the young people want to come here. While you are in Greece, you decide where you should go. Everyone says go to Sweden. (“Ahmad” the former UASC. Translated by the author.)

According to Katrin Nyman there is limited information about the smugglers besides from the children’s stories. The migration journey is generally the roughest, and the

majority of the children shares bad experiences from the journey. However, the risk of getting caught as a smuggler is very small. According to Katarina Munier more recently it has been noticed that children usually get involved in different criminal acts, often to be able to pay the smugglers for their assistance. Johnny Samuelsson also believe that some of these children have been smuggled to Sweden on credit. If there would be a shortage of money then they would need to perform various types of crimes, such as selling drugs or prostitution, in order to pay off the debt. According to Johnny Samuelsson, regarding the UASC from Somalia, their migration routes goes through clan areas. These clans require money from the refugees to pass through. Money shortage puts immigrants in vulnerable situations where there is a risk of exploitation. Children and women are particularly exposed. However, “Ahmad” opposes this notion. He believes that a smuggler would never assist a migrant with the risk of not receiving payment. To secure the migration and to make sure that everything goes well, the money is given to the smuggler after the child has arrived. The child will call a person that holds the payment after the arrival, and a code will be given the smuggler to be able to receive the money.

In Afghanistan, a large number of people make a living in the smuggling industry. But a majority of them are scammers with the purpose to scam people their money. The difficulty to distinguish scammers to real smugglers have led to people seeking smugglers in the neighboring Pakistan, where the chance of getting in contact with real smugglers are higher.

The children who arrive in Sweden come in “waves”. They usually come during the second half of the year, from July to the end of the year. The reasons are uncertain, however, speculations regarding the warmer climate and smuggling routes may provide explanations. “Ahmad” confirms the speculations; the warmer climate facilitates the migration, since some routes require waking by foot, and spending the night outdoors. During the summer period, there is a smaller risk of getting caught at national borders by hiding among European tourists on different transportations, especially on the boat the goes from Turkey to Greece.

Social networks provide valuable information that facilitates the migration. Johnny Samuelsson argues that “rumors” created by the informal social networks provide a

false perception of the Swedish legislation because every asylum case is considered individually. Yet, children from countries such as Afghanistan and Somalia, generally get their applications approved due to the situation in the country combined with individual reasons.

According to Johnny Samuelsson his perception of these children is that they are adequate and strong individuals. They are considered as children due to their young age. Yet, the majority of them carry a great responsibility to financially provide for their family. This notion puts a great pressure on them to succeed with the migration purpose - receiving a residence permit in a European country where the life standard is high. It is recognized that children who receive a residence permit in Sweden are likely to send their study grants to their families. Some Swedish institutions dislike the fact that they are sending their study grants to the family. Johnny Samuelsson emphasizes the lack of understanding among Swedish institutions regarding these children's reality. "Ahmad" argues that the general European perception of the definition of the child differs from the one in Afghanistan, and other countries outside of Europe. A 17-year-old boy in Afghanistan is not considered a child, though in Europe, he is.

According to Katarina Munier from the Social Board, the increase of the UASC 2006 put a sudden pressure on all the municipalities in Sweden to receive these children and arrange accommodation and other support for them.

According to Katarina Munier, it requires more knowledge about the cultural encounter, the migration experiences, and the traumatization of these children.

I can say that the greater the variation in ethnic- and cultural background, religion, norms and values, traditions and the ways of living together, does not stand out particularly clearly in the social work competence and operational development. (Katarina Munier. Translated by the author.)

There is a lack of knowledge of why people leave their country of origin, and in this case, why these children are sent or forced to leave their country. It requires knowledge of 1) how it is like to grow up in societies characterized by wars, threats

and violence, poverty, and 2) without the access to healthcare and education, and functioning legal system. And also 3) one needs to know how it is to be on the run. For these children have not only had difficulties in their country of origin, but also during the escape.

According to Katarina Munier, it is important to understand that these children are a heterogeneous group of individuals. They come from countries where there are other ways of living, other institutions, other laws, others belief systems and behaviors, manners, and all that is culture. It is also different if you come from rural areas or from the big city, the level of education the person has, socioeconomic status, etc. It is important to meet each person as a unique individual and not have preconceived ideas about him/her just because the person is coming from a certain country.

Summery

There is a belief among Swedish institutions and professionals that children are not a part of the decision-making process. According to “Ahmad”, the majority of UASC from Afghanistan that arrives to Sweden have an obligation to provide for their families. Johnny Samuelsson confirms this by stating that the majority of the UASC send their study grants to their families after they receive a residence permit.

The view on the definition of the child seems to differ from Western countries to third world nations. The CRC defines the child as under the age of 18. However, in Afghanistan, a person that is 16-17 years old is considered to be an adult.

There seem to be a misperception on smugglers as well. Smugglers are seen as perpetrators that exploit asylum-seekers on different ways. However, without the assistance of smugglers the migration would be impossible. They not only provide fake passports and ID cards, but also stories to tell Swedish Institutions to raise the chance of a residence permit. Informal social networks like smugglers, co-migrants, relatives and friends that spreads “rumors” regarding the Swedish asylum- and migration legislation, is a significant factor to migration to Sweden. According to “Ahmad”, the payment for the assistance by the smugglers is an advanced system. Smugglers do not receive payment until the child has arrived safely to the destination

country. The smugglers want a good reputation so they can receive more “clients” that want to come to Europe.

Analysis

Migration is a result of macro- and microstructures on different levels. An individual’s reason to migrate is based on personal history, resources and collaboration with networks in the receiving country. Additionally to what extend the migration to the destination country is institutionalized.⁸⁷ Meso-structures give explanations to the significance of the migratory industry.⁸⁸

- What are the reasons for the increase of UASC from Afghanistan and Somalia since the year 2006 in Sweden?

The globalization process is a contributing factor that provides the social- and cultural capital that makes it easier for people to move across continents. The development of the infrastructure, as well as the information- and communication technology has made it possible for unaccompanied children to immigrate to Europe.⁸⁹ The information- and communication technology has created the notion of “a better life elsewhere” among third world nationals. Additionally facilitated the migration by increasing the knowledge regarding Western national laws, border controls and routes.

On macro level, the number of asylum seekers and refugees has increased globally during the last 20 years. As a consequence Western countries have made it more difficult for third world nationals to apply for residence, with stricter legislations and border controls.⁹⁰ As it becomes more difficult for adults to apply for residence permit in Western countries, a strategy may be to send their children. According to “Ahmad”, one reason for parents to send off their children to Western countries to apply for residence is because they are more adaptable to new environments than adults. According to the CRC, an individual under the age of 18 is a child and

⁸⁷ Castle & Miller 2009: 28, Tamas & Palme 2006, *in* Hessle 2009: 31-33

⁸⁸ Castle & Miller 2009: 29

⁸⁹ *ibid.* 2009: 51

⁹⁰ *ibid.* 2009: 188; Keely 2001: 6

therefore must be given particular attention due to its vulnerable situation.⁹¹

Financially motivated migration and political flight is closely related, hence the formation of the term "mixed motives". The migration-asylum nexus gives explanations to the difficulties to discern the UASC motives for applying for asylum in Sweden. The reasons why unaccompanied children apply for asylum in Sweden are usually a combination of conflict in their country, and poverty. Therefore, it is difficult for the Swedish Migration Board to distinguish what the actual reasons are for their applications. The children, who come from conflict-ridden areas, as in this case Afghanistan and Somalia, are usually granted their asylum applications in a much larger proportion because of the situation in their country. The applications from children who come from countries such as Algeria and Morocco, where the situation is more stable, are considered by the Migration Board to be mainly based on financial motives. Therefore they are not granted their applications to the same extent that the children from conflict-ridden countries are.

Factors that causes a migration to Sweden may be the reasons such as neighboring Iran has made it more difficult for Afghans to remain in the country because of stricter regulations. Causes such as Greece's poor asylum system and its inability to provide protection for the unaccompanied children has led to fingerprints that have been taken in Greece are being overlooked which means that children will not be sent back to the first country (Greece) they reached in Europe.⁹² This is a contributing factor for the increase of UASC in Sweden, according to "Ahmad".

Majority of the Afghan and Somalis children are receiving residence permit based on their individual asylum claims and on the situation in their country. According to Katrin Nyman the best interest of the child principle is mainly based on the belief that a child should be with his/her family. If a family reunification is not possible in the UASC's country of origin due to conflict, war, fear or threat, the child will receive a residence permit in Sweden and be able to be reunited with his/her family in Sweden. According to "Ahmad", permanent residence and the possibility for a family reunification are the two most attractive reasons to come to Sweden.

⁹¹ UNICEF 2013b

⁹² Migrationsverket 2007, Europa 2009

Sweden has not been a popular destination country until the year 2006. Immigrants have previously been more interested to seek asylum in more traditional destination countries in Europe such as the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom. This may depend on their social networks in these countries, or that they already know of these countries. But since these countries have made it more complicated for the UASC to receive a residence permit they have been forced to seek more promising locations. There is a lack of knowledge and experience about unaccompanied children, as the large number of UASC is a relatively new phenomenon in Sweden. As the number increases each year, the focus has been put on the reception of these children. Hence, little attention has been given to their reasons of why they immigrate to Sweden.

At the micro level, the general view among professionals in Sweden is that these children do not have any part in the decision to migrate. Based on the interview responses with the professionals in this study, no one thought it was the child's choice to migrate. But according to "Ahmad", the majority of the UASC have an important part in decision to immigrate to Europe. In Afghanistan and Somalia, the life expectancy is low, and the number of young people is high,⁹³ which has resulted in many children themselves deciding to migrate. The notion of a better life elsewhere is created by the easy access to information- and communication technology. According to "Ahmad", young people do not see a future for themselves in Afghanistan. They want to go to Western countries to be able to make a life for themselves and to be able to financially support their families.

In some cultures, the eldest son has the responsibility and the obligation to support the rest of the family. This may be a factor as to why so many unaccompanied children choose to immigrate to Western countries, and in this case Sweden. According to Johnny Samuelsson some parents may decide to send the eldest son to Europe to financially secure the families survival. This may be the main reason why the unaccompanied children send their study grants to their families as soon as they receive a residence permit.

⁹³ Worldbank 2013; UNDP 2012

Age perception seems to be different where in the world one is located. According to "Ahmad" a 17-year-old young male in Afghanistan is considered an adult. But in Europe, he is perceived as a child that, under the CRC, requires special attention. Johnny Samuelson perceives these children as very strong and adequate individuals. The use of the term "child" can lead to preconceptions such that they are victims, treated as silent objects that are forced to obey adults' decisions. This may be the reason why the professionals in this study do not seem to contemplate that the decision to migrate may originate from the child.

The social informal networks that consist of human smugglers, co-migrants, friends and families create rumors and reputations about Western countries that seem to have a great impact on the UASC's choice of destination. Many of the UASC do not know their final destination before they reach Europe. According to "Ahmad" after arriving in Europe one decides the destination country. According to rumors Sweden seems to be the best country to seek residence in. According to "Ahmad" to reach Sweden assisted by smugglers, cost the most due to Sweden's generous asylum approvals. The rumors do not only say what country one should apply for residence in, but sometimes it provides a story to tell the Swedish institutions, how to act and how to respond, that will simplify and speed up the asylum process and guarantee a permanent residence. These stories are often based on what others have said to receive a residence permit. According to "Ahmad", after receiving a residence permit in Sweden, one may call friends or family members and recommend them to go with a specific smuggler (if their assistance and journey was good) and persuade them to come to Sweden.

On meso level, the migratory industry consists of people making a living on transporting immigrants to Western countries. The perception of this type of business differs depending on which point of view one has. On one hand, smugglers are seen as perpetrators with the purpose of exploiting immigrants in different ways. On the other hand, a migration without the assistance of smugglers would be impossible.⁹⁴ In Afghanistan, the criminalized economy is primarily based on human smuggling and

⁹⁴ UNHCR 2010b: 44

narcotics.⁹⁵ Smugglers in Afghanistan are well organized as travel agencies, where people can receive information about the trip. According to “Ahmad” a majority of people makes a living in smuggling people, whether scammers or real ones.

The migratory industry makes a profit by providing job opportunities for people in poorer countries. According to “Ahmad”, like any other business, the smugglers want a good reputation in order to continue working and make a living. In order to make a profit by smuggling people, one need to be able to make the trip as comfortable and fast as possible. When the immigrant reaches the destination country, the smugglers are able to receive the payment. Furthermore, the smugglers will receive more clients through good recommendations. How well a migration assisted by smugglers goes, depends on the migrant’s financial- and human capital, and social connection to the destination country.⁹⁶

The second research question is based on the location of the factors that contribute to the increase of UASC in Sweden.

- Are the factors for the increase to be found in the receiving country Sweden, in the two countries Afghanistan and Somalia, or in the process between?

The Push-and-Pull theory states that there exists push and pull factors in all migratory movements. However, unlike other types of people movements, the unaccompanied children’s reason for the migration cannot be found exclusively in either the sending or the receiving country. The reasons are overlapping each other and can only be explained by applying the Migration system theory by connecting macro-, micro-and meso structures. Therefore, it would not be enough to use the Push-and-pull theory in this study. A range of factors, not located in the sending- nor the receiving country, has influenced these children's journey to Sweden.

One of the main arguments is that many times, Sweden was not the first-choice of the final destination country. The informal social networks that influences these children’s choice of destination country is an in between factor that cannot be

⁹⁵ Utrikesdepartementet 2007a

⁹⁶ Zolberg & Benda 2001: 62

explained by this theory. Another argument is the stricter regulations regarding Afghans residence in Iran also generate the migration to more promising locations. As well as Greece's weak border controls and poor asylum system facilitates the immigration to Sweden.

By applying the Migration system theory has made it possible to distinguish the main factors for the immigration to Sweden. The macro-structures provide explanations such as the development of information- and communication technology, which has facilitated the communication among people, and increases the knowledge about countries border controls and legislations. The migration-asylum nexus explains the composition of economic migrants and asylum-seekers into one category of migrants. This has also increased the irregular migration, since the majority of children enter Swedish borders illegally through neighbor states. The micro-structures gives explanations on the importance of the social informal networks that provides the immigrants information about Western countries. The meso-structures explain the growth of the migratory industry and human smugglers.

Conclusion

In this section, the factors behind the increased number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are divided into under macro-, micro-and meso categories in paragraph format.

On macro level:

Globally:

- Stricter asylum legislations in Western countries - Difficult for third world nationals to seek residence permit. One strategy may be to send children since children are given protection due to their young age and vulnerability.
- The CRC – The Conventions on the Right of the Child states that a person younger than 18 years old entails special rights due to their young age and vulnerability.
- Stricter legislations in Iran have made it more difficult for Afghans to stay there. Therefore trigger a migration to more promising locations.
- Poor asylum reception of UASC in Greece has resulted in the fingerprints made in Greece are being overlooked and ignored. Which has facilitated the onward migration to Sweden.
- Countries in Europe such as the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Norway have made it more difficult for the UASC to receive a permanent residence permit. The majority of the UASC that arrive in these countries receives humanitarian protection until they turn 18 years old, thereafter they have to apply for residence permit as adults.

Sweden:

- Not a traditional destination country before the year 2006.
- Lack of knowledge and experience of UASC.
- Family reunification - DNA analysis (2012)
- *Permanent* residence permit for UASC.
- A large percentage of UASC from Afghanistan and Somalia receive residence permit.

- Short asylum process - three to four months.

Afghanistan and Somalia:

- Conflict-ridden regions.
- Growing smuggling business.
- Desire for a better life
- Obligation to provide for the family.
- Forced to leave for personal reasons/problems/threat/violence/fear.
- Forced to leave to be able to reunite with/bring your family to Sweden

On micro level:

- Social informal networks.
- Reputations/rumors/tips/recommendations.

The UASC in Sweden:

- Silent objects – They have no part in the decision to migrate.
- The victimization – General believes exploited by adults, smugglers, and workers etc.
- The age perception/The term “child” – They are younger than 18 therefore they are considered children.
- The lack of knowledge and experience of UASC in Sweden lead to preconceived beliefs.

On meso level:

The migratory industry:

- Smuggling routes are institutionalized.
- Expanded smuggling-business

Migration flows are indeed a consequence of a globalized world. All the factors mentioned above have contributed to the migration to Sweden, but the informal social networks with the help of the technology has contributed to the spreading of the information. The cultural capital with the development of technology and infrastructure creates a greater awareness of opportunities somewhere else. The people behind the informal social networks and the so-called “Migratory industry” are the main factor for the increasing number of unaccompanied children in Sweden. It is they who have the knowledge of national laws and border controls. Additionally, it is they who have the important contacts in the receiving country. The vital social capital that is necessary for a migration consists of everyone who shares the knowledge among others. It may be the unaccompanied child that has received a residence permit, who calls his/her friend at home and suggests the smuggler who is the best to travel with. There is Internet websites and NGO’s that stands for the freedom of movement. They share all important facts and information that is important for migrants to know while they are on the move and when they have arrived. They also share the contacts that they can be in touch with if they have come across any problem with the institutions.

One can certainly say that more research is needed with a focus on the informal social networks and the migratory industry.

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Key Informants

Katarina Munier – The Social Board 30.04.2013

Katrin Nyman – The Migration Board 23.04.2013

Johnny Samuelson – Legal guardian 24.05.2013

“Ahmad” - (Former UASC from Afghanistan) 22.04.2013 and 29.05.2013

Appendix

Interview guide

1. Informanten

- Vilken befattning (titel) har du?
- Vilka arbetsuppgifter innefattar din befattning?
- Vad är dina/era erfarenheter ang. ensamkommande barn i Sverige? Hur länge har du själv haft erfarenhet i jobbet av detta fenomen?

2. Ensamkommande asylsökande barn

- Varifrån kommer de och vilka är dem?
- Varför kommer dem? Vilka orsaker?
- *Varför kommer de just ifrån Afghanistan, Somalia och Syrien?*
- *De ensamkommande barnen – delar majoriteten samma typ av bakgrund, erfarenheter?*
- *Är det en jämn ström?*

3. Resan hit till Sverige

- Hur tar de sig hit? Människosmugglare, transitländer?
- Hur lång tid kan en resa ta, fr. ex. Afghanistan?
- På vilket sätt påverkar globaliseringen ökningen av ensamkommande barn?
- Är det en skillnad, för ensamkommande, att resa inom EU och utan för EU?
- Är det på något vis lättare för barn att ta sig över nationella/kontinentala gränser idag än vad det var förr? Vad är skillnaden nu och då?

4. Sverige

- Varför har ensamkommande barn ökat i Sverige?
- Varför har antalet generellt minskat i Europa?
- Vad kan ses som attraktivt för dessa barn i Sverige?
- Vid vilken tidpunkt skedde en kraftig ökning av ensamkommande barn i Sverige och varför?
- Hur har ökningen påverkat?

5. Framtiden

- Hur ser utvecklingen ut i Sverige (resp. Europa)? *Varför?*