

THE USE OF THE SCHENGEN INFORMATION SYSTEM (SIS) TO PROTECT CHILDREN

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3RD PANEL: BEYOND BORDERS: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In this panel, Dr. Mario Cuschieri from the International Relations Unit of the Malta Police Force and an SIS expert provided valuable insights into the law enforcement response when children go missing. He shared data and described the cross-border mediation efforts undertaken to safeguard as many children as possible. David Thiry, representing the Luxembourg NCP, presented findings from the 2024 EMN Luxembourg Inform on the guardianship of unaccompanied minors. This was followed by Nilde Robotti from the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), who detailed the tools and support the EUAA offers to Member States when addressing the needs of migrant children.



The SIS is the largest EU information system used by the authorities for border management and security. Competent national authorities including border authorities, Law enforcement authorities, judicial authorities, return authorities, authorities examining and taking decisions on residence permits and long-stay visas can access and enter alerts on certain categories of people and objects in the SIS. It can be searched using both alphanumeric and dactyloscopic data.

Apart from alerts on return, refusal of entry and stay, arrest for surrender or extradition, on persons searched for judicial procedures and unknown perpetrators of terrorist offences or serious crime, the SIS also includes alerts on:

- a. People (adults or children) reported missing
- b. Children at risk (which needs to be concrete and apparent) of abduction by own parents, relatives or guardians
- c. Children at risk of being taken unlawfully abroad in the context of trafficking of human beings and other forms of gender-based violence or terrorism or conscription/enlistment into armed groups or conflicts
- d. Vulnerable adults at risk of being taken unlawfully abroad in the context of trafficking of human beings or other forms of gender-based violence.

The alerts on missing people aim at ascertaining the safety and at protecting the missing data subjects. The alerts on people at risk show a move from a purely law enforcement oriented approach to a more victim-oriented one. They form another layer of protective measures; which authorities need to use with extreme caution for the protection of the data subjects. The renewed legal basis requires a decision and hence an assessment (including an assessment in terms of necessity and proportionality) by competent authorities, which include also judicial authorities. Moreover, authorities are required to indicate the type of case as for example whether a missing child was an unaccompanied child in the context of migration. DNA profiles may be added to alerts on missing people who have to be institutionalised following a decision by a competent authority, following a proper assessment. When acting in furtherance of alerts concerning children, the authorities are obliged to take into consideration the best interest of such children, to consult immediately with the authorities which decided on the issuing of such alerts and child protection authorities.

In Malta, the Commissioner of Police is entrusted with the operation of the SIS at national level (through the N.SIS Office) and with the exchange of supplementary information on SIS alerts (through the SIRENE Office). The Malta Police Force immediately uploads alerts in the SIS and carries out investigations whenever adults or children (including unaccompanied children in migration) are reported missing, as for example from AWAS-managed residences. Similarly, the Malta Police Force immediately enters alerts on children and adults at risk of being taken unlawfully abroad upon the receipt of decisions by the competent authorities, including Courts, Appogg or the Foundation for Social Welfare. The SIRENE Office ensures with the department concerned that all relevant data are available upon the entry of the alert and exchanges without delay any supplementary information with its foreign counterparts upon hits or whenever authorities consider it to be in the subject's best interest, in line with the applicable EU rules.

The SIS is a very good tool due to the data it contains and its availability but its effectiveness is dependent on its intelligent use by the competent authorities. The interoperability of the existent and the new EU large scale IT systems and the introduction of the additional tools such as the Multiple Identity Detector would also contribute to the protection of these persons, subject to the same conditions. Enhanced cooperation amongst the competent local and foreign authorities is also essential.



NAVIGATING NEW HORIZONS – MY JOURNEY

JOHN TESTA - SENIOR MANAGER, PDPI, MHSE, EMN MALTA COORDINATOR

'Children in Migration' was the 3rd EMN national conference I organised as EMN Coordinator. We chose the theme 'Navigating New Horizons' because we wanted to explore the different facets of the services being offered in Malta and Europe and understand the vision each of the practitioners have in the present global context.

When I was chosen for the role of EMN coordinator, I had just been promoted to Senior Manager at PDPI, with a number of years working on Migration Policy. Initially I approached with caution, particularly when it came to organizing events. While I was accustomed to handling a broad range of responsibilities, EMN presented an entirely new and unique challenge for me. In my third year, I can confidently say this was the best conference I've coordinated. Everything came together seamlessly—from the speakers and their contributions to audience questions and the moderators—creating a powerful and impactful discussion on migration. In particular - Jane Farrugia Buhagiar who not only moderated but who created this conference with us, step by step. Without her expertise this conference would not have been the success it was. She was pivotal in finding the best speakers and especially the migrant families who found help and solace the team of the Community Liaison Workers (CLW), who are "a truthful link between the families, schools and the International Learners' Directorate (ILD)".

In conclusion, even with a flawless plan and exceptional collaborators and speakers, the success of a conference also depends on creating the right environment. This extends beyond the physical venue to the welcoming atmosphere cultivated by the entire team.



REGISTRATION OF TCN STUDENTS IN OUR SCHOOLS

CATHERINE MICALLEF - EDUCATION OFFICER – INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS' DIRECTORATE



In Malta, Third-Country Nationals (TCNs), which refers to non-EU/EEA/Swiss citizens, are eligible to register for schools, provided they meet specific criteria. Registration processes can differ depending on whether the student is enrolling in a state school, private school, or international school. TCN students can attend public schools in Malta if they have a legal right to stay in the country (e.g., with a valid visa or residency permit). The Ministry of Education oversees the admissions process for state schools.

- Proof of legal residence in Malta (e.g., residence permit or visa)
- Birth certificate or passport
- Immunization records (students must meet vaccination requirements)
- Proof of address (e.g., utility bill, lease agreement)
- Previous school records (if applicable)
- Guardianship details if the child is not accompanied by a parent



These are the steps that one should follow / expect when registration takes place:

1. Parents/ Guardians download the online application
2. Preparation of all the documents is fundamental.
3. Parents apply at the One-Stop-Shop in Floriana
4. Registration file is processed at ILD offices in Hamrun
5. Parents receive an SMS from 'My School' that registration process is finalized
6. Application is forwarded to the College
7. College contacts the Mother School
8. Initial assessment is carried out to determine if student needs induction.
9. Mother School contacts the parents / guardians
10. Student can start attending school.

From January 2nd till to date, International Learners' Directorate received over **1352** registrations with over **520** initial assessments.

Students came from all over the world, namely Albania, Algeria, America, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Brazil, United Kingdom, Chile, China, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Israel, Japan, Lebanon, Libya, Macedonia, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Venezuela.

The aim of our Directorate is to make the transition of these learners as smooth as possible so they can integrate into our society and benefit from the education system in our country.

1ST PANEL – DISEMBARKATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS & ACCESSING EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Lorraine Bartolo, representing the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), provided an insightful overview of the processes that follow disembarkation. She highlighted key steps such as age assessment, the appointment of a guardian, issuance of care orders, development of a care plan, and securing suitable accommodation for minors.

Another session in the first panel was a detailed explanation of what it involves for those accompanied with their parents and for the guardians to access the Educational Services. This session was splendidly dealt with by Catherine Sammut, educational officer of the International Learners' Directorate (MEYR).

SUPPORTING MINORS TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

KRENAR HODJA - SOCIAL WORKER UMAS, AWAS, MHSE

The UMAS protection unit within AWAS mainly focuses on supporting unaccompanied minors accommodated in Dar il liedna, separated minors living in the community with relatives and claiming minors in closed centres. Social work interventions vary depending on the specifics of the clients group.

Interventions are primarily geared towards addressing the immediate needs of minors, starting with the asylum process. Initial efforts ensure documentation is in place, followed by educational and language support to improve employability. Language learning focuses on English and Maltese, and minors are guided toward either further education or legal employment aligned with their skills and interests. Life skills training, including budgeting and home management, is provided to prepare them for independent living by age 18.

Collaborations are essential for effective outcomes. Partnerships with organizations such as UNHCR help in navigating the asylum process, while Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) facilitates access to language classes and foundational education. Further educational opportunities are pursued through MCAST, and Jobsplus provides pathways to legal employment. For minors requiring additional support, services such as Osanna Pia or the Migrants Commission offer transitional assistance to promote independence.

Challenges complicate the transition process. The prolonged asylum process can extend beyond a minor's 18th birthday, leaving them in a state of uncertainty. Employment restrictions for minors from safe countries during their initial 9 months result in irregular work engagements. The housing crisis presents additional hurdles, as high rental costs and discrimination make it difficult for young adults to secure stable accommodations. Furthermore, minors who arrive close to their 18th birthday often lack sufficient time to prepare for independent living.

2ND PANEL – LIVING IN COMMUNITIES

The second panel consisted of AWAS officers, Clyde Bonnici who spoke on how transition of the minors to adulthood is facilitated at Dar Liedna, and Krenar Hodja, who spoke on how the minors are being prepared to go out in the community. Senior Executive at Jobsplus, Christian Cassar spoke on how the Job Brokerage Office offers young migrants the service of finding jobs, while also matching their skills. Malcolm Lee Attard, the Regional Community Development Leader with FSWS, spoke on the Agency being provided to migrants in the community to access Therapeutic Services. He gave examples of how much his work and that of his team involved going the extra mile. Then, it was the turn of persons living in Malta, migrants, who explained the long and winding road they had to walk to make it possible to reunite with their families. This part was the turning point of the conference, since it more than talking about 'them' – it was 'them' talking about their experiences. This part it took us to the other part of the migrant reality – maybe the hardest, that of leaving everything behind them, not knowing how things would turn out. However, the beautiful part of this session was them thanking 'us' Maltese persons and the fantastic ILD Community Liaison Officers, who mediate between their culture and our culture!

The panel finished with Omar Rababah, an ILD social worker who heads the Community Liaison Team, recounting the service his team provides and the detail they go into, to help and assist in every way possible.

