



THE SITUATION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILY IN CATALONIA

ABSTRACT

SEPTEMBER 2018

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EL DEFENSOR
DE LES
PERSONES

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Síndic de Greuges de Catalunya (Catalan Ombudsman)

1st edition: September 2018

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Layout: Síndic de Greuges

Cover picture: Pixabay

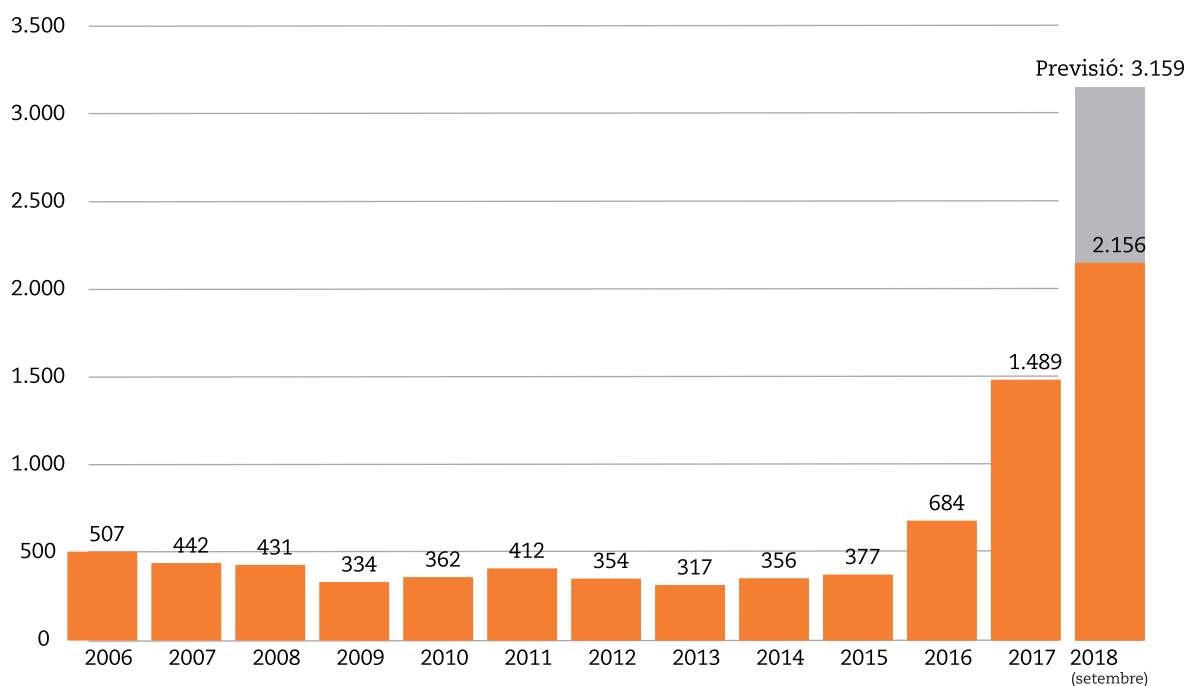
THE SITUATION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILY IN CATALONIA

The presence of unaccompanied migrant children as a structural phenomenon begins to be detected by the Administration towards the end of the nineties. In the last two decades, the arrival of migrant children without family has experienced several fluctuations, which have forced the protection system to modulate its intervention, not only to the specificity derived from the enormous social

vulnerability of children immersed in migratory processes, but also to the need to provide at different rates the resources necessary to give an immediate protective response adjusted to the arrival flows.

After a few years of stagnation of the arrival flows, with figures around the 400 new cases taken per year, from the year 2016, a new period was begun, characterized by exponential growth, arrival of migrant children alone. Of the 377 new cases taken by the protection system during 2015, it goes to 1,489 in 2017, with the forecast to end 2018 around 3,159 new cases (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: Evolution of the number of new cases of migrant children without family references arrived in Catalonia (2006-2018)



On the occasion of the presentation of the report *The situation of migrant children without family in Catalonia*, on Friday, September 28, 2018, the Catalan Ombudsman calls on the Spanish State Government, the Catalan Government and the Catalan local administrations, a global and transversal contingency plan in the short term to accommodate migrant children without family who arrive in Catalonia. According to the Catalan Ombudsman, further structural changes of the protection system are also required.

In this regard, it demands more resources, more involvement and collaboration of all the

administrations and a legal framework that incorporates a protocol of action that guarantees that the rights of newly arrived children prevail over their condition of foreigners.

The report highlights the efforts made by the General Directorate for Care of Children and Adolescents, especially in the last months, in the creation of reception centers and other resources to accommodate migrant children without family (2,047 new places from June 2017). If we take into account that at the beginning of 2017 there were 2,873 residential places in the protection system, the creation of new places means a 75.1% increase.

New places created from June 2017 until September 15, 2018, to manage the arrival of migrant children without family

Resource type	Places	%	Centers
Reception centers	914	44,7	34
Assisted apartments (16-17 years old)	143	7,0	18
Assisted apartments (18-21 years old)	136	6,6	34
Residence for young people linked to work placement programs	48	2,3	4
Emergency protection service	4	12,4	254
Temporary service and extensions of reception center	314	15,3	17
Specialized support service for young people	78	3,8	-
Individualized protection itineraries	160	7,8	-
Total	2.047	100,0	111

By the end of 2018 the protection resources will be doubled. If the current tendency is maintained, it is possible the arrival of 6,000 migrant children during the year 2019. This could require the commissioning of more than 3,000 places. This would imply that three residential resources or places would have multiplied by three years. Although it is a hypothetical scenario, it is necessary to work with anticipation to avoid inadequate situations of attention.

In the report, the Catalan Ombudsman emphasizes that, given the urgency but also the lack of medium-term provision, problems related to the overcapacity of centers have been generated, with the use of protection system centers not foreseen to manage these situations, with the use of temporary stay centers to cater permanently for migrant children, with the creation of centers with unsuitable quality conditions, among others.

This situation has tensioned the protection system and has affected the quality of care of migrant children and other fostered children, as well as professionals who are responsible for their care.

The report also highlights the structural deficits of the protection system, such as the lack of resources for the family reception of migrant children (less than 1%), lack of policies to promote the return of migrant children with their families in accordance with their best interest, funding shortfalls of the system of protection and support in the transition to adulthood and shortcomings in the provision of mental health programs for unaccompanied migrant children. The Catalan Ombudsman also recalls the need to guarantee sufficient places for programs of new opportunities and job placement.

Likewise, in regards to the first reception processes, the Catalan Ombudsman emphasizes that the immediate care circuit does not take into account the condition of a child, and prevails the application of measures related to the control of migratory flows. On the other hand, the delay in the assumption of the guardianship by the General Directorate and in the processing of the documentation by all the competent administrations also poses a difficulty for the integration of these young people.

In order to promote the reception of migrant children through the co-responsibility of all administrations, there are many resources and services in the territory that can help cover the social and educational needs of these children. For this reason, the report includes the recommendation to develop a map of resources and services in the territory.

It is also necessary to demand that any administration attending these children, even provisionally, such as the police, ensures that their basic needs are met.

Also with regard to co-responsibility, the Catalan Ombudsman also requires the State Administration to take measures to guarantee additional funding to the regions that will help manage the increase in the arrival of unaccompanied migrant children. It also calls for changes of the Protocol and the state regulations to improve the reception and the processes of determination of age and documentation.

At the state level, it is also essential to improve the functioning of the registry, the coordination between regions and the assumption by all the regions of their obligations. In this regard, it is necessary for

children who have passed through other regions to be identified, registered and properly protected.

The complexity of the phenomenon means that the General Directorate also needs the collaboration of the local administrations and the departments of the Catalan Government. Town councils have competences in the field of social services, which must be put at the service of the contingency plan, especially in the provision of facilities and resources in the territory that can be used for the reception of these newly arrived migrant children.

According to the Catalan Ombudsman, unlike what happened with the refugee reception, the General Directorate has so far found some reluctance in other administrations, which are not aware of the seriousness of the situation and which do not situate the response to this phenomenon as priority in their political agenda.

The Catalan Ombudsman takes the opportunity of calling the entire society, as well as the media in their informative work, for the maximum collaboration to guarantee the best possible reception of these children.

SÍNDIC

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PERSONES

Síndic de Greuges de Catalunya
Passeig Lluís Companys, 7
08003 Barcelona
Tel 933 018 075 Fax 933 013 187
sindic@sindic.cat
www.sindic.cat

