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CHILDREN'S SCREEN CONTENT IN AN ERA OF FORCED MIGRATION



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Arts & Humanities
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3 November
2018

**Facilitating Arab-European Dialogue:
Consolidated Report on
an AHRC Project for Impact and Engagement**

CHILDREN'S SCREEN CONTENT IN AN ERA OF FORCED MIGRATION: FACILITATING ARAB-EUROPEAN DIALOGUE

Consolidated Report on an AHRC Project for Impact and Engagement

© Kings College London and the Project Team

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1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Rationale for the project

Children from Arab countries constitute a growing proportion of media audiences in Europe. Recent conflicts in the region have caused hundreds of thousands of families to flee their homes in the Arab world, especially Syria and Iraq, to find safety in Europe. In January 2017, there were 577,300 Syrians in Germany, 116,400 in Sweden, 51,400 in the Netherlands, 31,000 in Denmark and 11,500 in Bulgaria.¹ The displaced populations in European countries include large numbers of children.

The situation is often called Europe's 'migrant crisis'. From this perspective, refugee children tend to be viewed as a set of tragic statistics rather than individuals with unique histories and experiences. Yet fair and accurate representation of children with migration backgrounds constitutes a key step towards helping these children feel they have a stake in a new country. In turn, for European-born children, screen content is one of the most accessible ways to learn about forced migration and children of other cultures.

European media consequently face an urgent task of creating content that engages with the experiences of diverse and displaced children in balanced and informative ways. In fact, thanks to public service media mandates that are built into Europe's regulatory environment, the way is open for broadcasters to provide newly-arrived children with the benefits of a service they have not previously experienced, given the lack of Arab public service media.²

The one-year project 'Collaborative Developments in Children's Screen Content in an Era of Forced Migration: Facilitating Arab-European dialogue' (2017-18, www.euroarabchildrensmedia.org), funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), explored screen content made for and about children from the Arab region who have recently arrived in Europe. Aimed at 'Impact and Engagement', the project was intended to share findings from a three-year AHRC-funded research project (2013-2016)³ on screen content for children in the Arab world with stakeholders in Europe, including broadcasters, regulators, commissioning editors, producers, researchers and children's media advocates. Institutions in these sectors who partnered us for the Engagement project are gratefully identified below.

One of the Engagement project's major objectives was to explore representations of forced migration and diversity in European screen content for young children – those aged 12 and under. By integrating Arab experts into this process, we created opportunities for dialogue between European and Arab media practitioners, helping to alert European producers to the media needs, wants and experiences of Arabic-speaking children now living in Europe. Drawing on this dialogue, the project was designed to gather recommendations concerning the regulation, funding, and distribution of content for children that deals with diversity and forced migration. It also offers a springboard for further research.

¹ Eurostat, [Main countries of citizenship and birth of the foreign born-born population](#), 1 January 2017.

² See Jeanette Steemers and Naomi Sakr, 'Children's screen content in the Arab world: An introduction', in N. Sakr and J. Steemers (eds) *Children's TV and Digital Media in the Arab World*, London: I B Tauris 2017, pp. 8-9.

³ Naomi Sakr, Jeanette Steemers et al, [Orientations in the development of screen media for Arabic-speaking children](#). London: Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster.

1.2 The three workshops and symposium

At the heart of the project were three workshops held during 2017-2018 in Salford, UK, Copenhagen, Denmark, and Munich, Germany, and an end-of-project symposium in London. In total, these brought together more than 150 people working in various aspects of children's media: production, distribution, non-governmental organisations and academe. Arab practitioners taking part were born in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. Some were themselves refugees, now living in Denmark, Germany and the United Arab Emirates.

The first workshop was attached to the Children's Global Media Summit (CGMS), hosted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in Salford/Manchester in December 2017. The workshop, taking place on 4 December, focused mainly on English-language content. Discussion topics were guided by themes featuring in the CGMS itself, notably 'empowerment', 'freedom', 'education' and 'entertainment'. The two project partners helping to support this event were BBC Children's and the Public Media Alliance.

The second workshop took place across two mornings at the Danish Film Institute (DFI) on 19 and 20 March 2018 as part of the Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, CPH:DOX. In line with the documentary focus, it explored mostly factual formats and we followed two themes chosen by the CPH:DOX Children and Youth section, namely 'escaping' (*på flugt*) and 'democracy' (*demokrati*). Our project partner, BBC Media Action, contributed to this event.

The third workshop, in Munich on 24 May 2018, was hosted by our project partner, the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) on the premises of Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR) and under the umbrella of the biennial Prix Jeunesse International festival of children's screen content. In keeping with the 2018 Prix Jeunesse theme of 'Strong Stories for Strong Children', the workshop explored treatments of migration and diversity in mainly fictional storytelling genres.

The project ended with a symposium entitled 'Invisible Children: Children's Media, Diversity, and Forced Migration', on 14 September 2018 at King's College London. This was an opportunity to present findings from the workshops, release a *Project Report to Stakeholders*, and bring together key players involved in producing, regulating, funding, commissioning and commenting on children's screen media in Europe.

1.3 Screen content about diversity and migration

The project assessed a range of content for children up to 12 years old, an age group often neglected in studies of media and migration. Assisted by CPH:DOX and IZI, we collated a sample of 36 films and TV shows from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the UK, as well as Canada, the US and Malaysia/Yemen, which have been shown in Europe. The UK selection also included some family viewing. Five shows were aimed at pre-schoolers and six comprised animation.

Genres ranged through drama, reality storytelling, documentaries, news and 'infotainment', where educational TV is merged with entertainment. Factual programming, including news, made up the majority of what we showed at the workshops, 16 shows in total. We also showed clips from eight fiction programmes, including series, comedy drama and one-off shows (see Appendix). Live action drama for children is rare, because it is difficult to fund and sell internationally, and even rarer when it includes minority groups because of casting challenges that were recounted during project discussions.

1.4 Purpose of the Consolidated Report

This Report contains the collected works published as a result of the project. There were five of these, starting with the three briefings on our workshops in [Manchester](#), [Copenhagen](#), and [Munich](#), followed by the [Project Report to Stakeholders](#) and, finally, the briefing from the [London symposium](#) 'Invisible Children: Children's Media, Diversity, and Forced Migration'.

In this collection, the *Project Report to Stakeholders* is placed first, as it offers an overview of the remaining content. The present Introduction, originally contained in the *Project Report to Stakeholders*, doubles here as an introduction to the *Consolidated Report*. The purpose of all publications produced by the project is to stimulate continued dialogue among stakeholders after the project's completion.

2 PROJECT REPORT TO STAKEHOLDERS

The project report presented at the symposium in London in September 2018 summarised findings and recommendations from the three workshops, as follows.

2.1 Approaches to commissioning and distribution

2.1.1 Public service mandates

The workshops revealed how hard it is for producers to secure commissions for children's content about refugees and forced migration. Almost all the content we found had been commissioned by European public service broadcasters (PSBs), including the BBC (UK), Danmarks Radio (DR), Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Öffentlich-Rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ARD, Germany), Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF, Germany), Nederlands Publieke Omroep (NPO, Netherlands), Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF, Switzerland), Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT, Belgium), Radiotelevizija Slovenija (RTV, Slovenia), Radio Televizija Srbije (RTV, Serbia), and Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C, Wales/UK).

This pattern of funding reflects both PSB mandates to serve all communities and restrictions on advertising that have caused free-to-air private broadcasters across Europe to scale back their commitment to children's content over the past decade, leaving PSBs as virtually the only commissioners of domestically-produced children's programmes.⁴ A UK producer at the first workshop foresaw serious consequences:

Every region has a different economic environment, but we don't invest in our young people's minds like we're happy to invest in pure entertainment for adults [...] We don't put investment in media that are going to build the planet's future. It's a massive problem.

Finance for children's content from sources other than PSBs is limited. Where requirements for spending on children's content are statutory, this has been shown to promote quality improvements through the

⁴ Jeanette Steemers and Feryal Awan, [Policy Solutions and International Perspectives on the Funding of Public Media Service Content for Children: A Report for Stakeholders](#), May 2016, p.51, <https://bit.ly/2rAtpEY>

accumulation of experience and expertise. Yet securing public funds can be lengthy and frustrating. Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) commission children's content, but, as our Copenhagen workshop heard, filmmakers' creative visions do not always accord with NGO agendas.

2.1.2 Commercial digital media

Our workshops highlighted structural difficulties in funding children's content as well as in reaching child audiences. Professionals from across Europe were acutely aware that young audiences are increasingly viewing content online. A Scandinavian PSB executive explained that most of his channel's target audience, children aged 7-12, now watch content on YouTube rather than scheduled television, which makes it more challenging to promote content that touches on issues like forced migration. The decline in linear viewing is not so steep everywhere. A 2017 study by the UK regulator Ofcom suggested that UK children's viewing (aged 5-15) of linear TV on a television set had declined from just under 16 hours a week in 2007 to 14 hours ten years later.⁵

Some producers expressed concern that standards of ethics and diversity adopted by European broadcasting do not always apply to commercial content shown on online platforms. The Manchester workshop revealed minimal representation of minorities in online videos distributed by some digital companies and multi-channel networks (MCNs) on YouTube. Since YouTube pays more per view in Western countries, even producers based in Asia are incentivised to appeal to a 'white' audience and many refrain from including characters from other ethnicities in 'unboxing' or 'how to' tutorials.

2.1.3 The need for marketing and distribution strategies

Effective distribution and the ability to reach out to audiences emerged from workshop discussions as key factors not only in obtaining funding but in ensuring that content does not, in the words of one producer, live 'a very, very lonely life on some internet platform'.

"You can design your audience from a very early stage"

According to some participants, marketing and distribution planning need to start before the programme is made, not after it. One Danish content producer said: 'I never met a funder who said: "I will not promote diversity". But the problem is the distribution. The problem is that they [commissioners] are very scared of throwing their money towards something that is not being used, which is understandable. What we're facing in Denmark is that Flow TV is going for the lowest common denominator'.

Annette Brejner, Creative Director of the Financing Forum for Kids' Content, based in Malmö, Sweden, suggested that content producers need to have a strategy in place in order to secure a commission. She said: 'The producer must know their target group and the mechanisms of marketing the film and build an audience. You can design your audience, thinking from a very early stage [...] which helps to reach your target group. Because that does not come by itself, but you can help build a taste in children just how you can help them learn how to appreciate a good meal'.

⁵ Ofcom, *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report*, London: Ofcom, 2017, p. 28.

2.1.4 Integrating online distribution and linear broadcasting

The project found that successful producers and broadcasters are already combining online distribution, including social media and YouTube, with linear scheduling. For example, the Flemish 'tween' drama series *4eVeR*, commissioned by Belgium's VRT, is available both on linear children's channel, Ketnet, as well as the VRT website and YouTube, reaching 23-25 per cent of the target market in Flemish-speaking Belgium. The Danish web series, *Hassan og Ramadan* (Hassan and Ramadan), commissioned by DR and released as short episodes on YouTube, racked up approximately 100,000 views per episode on YouTube.

Broadcasters' struggle to accurately ascertain what child audiences view and value in a rapidly changing marketplace contrasts starkly with subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) services like Netflix or social media sites like Facebook, which rely on proprietary data, guided by algorithms, to push popular content to child consumers. While television and online distribution can be viewed as complementary, some workshop attendees noted that it is not straightforward to build an online audience. YouTube channels still need to be maintained and promoted to ensure the audience finds them. Those behind both *4eVeR* and *Hassan og Ramadan* attributed their shows' popularity online to the way the content reflects the rhythm of children's daily lives, as well as their reality formats and entertaining storylines that did not focus exclusively on migration.

2.2 Ethical concerns

2.2.1 Risks and benefits of revisiting trauma

Some European content producers have emphasised refugee children's dangerous journeys to Europe or their painful experiences of war and conflict. Our workshops considered the ethical implications of such representations, as some participants, both Arab and European, expressed concern about the ethical and psychological dimensions of refugee children's participation in factual productions that focused on flight.

The Manchester workshop discussed a UK reality programme designed for family viewing, in which a boy from Syria was interviewed on camera about his missing father. Participants were uncomfortable with the boy's painful experiences being turned into television drama, potentially causing him to relive traumatic experiences. A Palestinian child-rights advocate summed up the risk of this approach:

We just opened such a tough issue. They [the TV crew] were asking him about very, very sensitive issues. When you, as a social worker, journalist or lawyer, open an issue you should be able to close it. Who is going to close this?

On the other hand, a Syrian-born participant, whose young sons had experienced flight, noted during the Copenhagen workshop that it could be therapeutic for children to confront that experience, albeit several years later.

Ethical challenges become more complex if content is made with political intentions. The video campaign *#JegErDansk* (I am Danish) was made by a Danish advertising company in response to a statement issued by the Danish Parliament in 2017 that seemed to imply a contradiction between being Danish and descent from non-Western immigrants. Although not aimed at children, the video featured young children of non-Western parents being visibly upset when the notion is put to them on camera that they are not Danish. *#JegErDansk* was viewed over 1.5 million times within 24 hours of its release on Facebook and the Danish parliament changed its initial statement to be more inclusive. However, the filmmakers received criticism from politicians and the public for upsetting the children in the film. Speaking at the Copenhagen workshop, they said the children were relatives and friends, who had been appropriately counselled and benefited from the opportunity to mention their own experiences of discrimination.

2.2.2 Keeping an appropriate distance

Discussions about films depicting flight revealed concern about those that portray children in refugee camps as helpless and dependent on the aid of Europeans, implying a 'them' and 'us' narrative. Arab participants felt that some documentaries, like *Hello Salaam* and *Ferie på Flygtningøen* (Vacation on the Refugee Island), in which European children visited Greek refugee camps, ran the risk of sensationalizing refugee children's experience of forced migration with little regard for 'their culture, their music, their literature, their stories' or their families' normal living standards. Other participants felt that such films could educate European children about the realities of forced migration from a more personal perspective than news reports.

Participants were also uneasy about approaches that 'stand too far back'. A BBC *Newsround* programme set in Greece, which concealed the identities of two displaced boys, was perceived as too abstract and potentially dehumanizing, making it difficult for viewers to find points of identification. A Danish media professional summed up this dilemma as follows:

This is exactly the dilemma, because now you are so distant that you're not harming anyone. So, if you get closer, then you're starting to harm people. So, you need to find the right balance. [...] Are you showing some [life] vests, then you go straight to the stomach of people, or do you have a guy sitting from the back talking to her face about how awful it is and you don't get any feelings? I'm not saying one thing is better than the other, just that there is a balance to find.

Some films were thought to have found a balance that combines curiosity with respect. Participants appreciated the Dutch documentary *Een Jaar zonder mijn Ouders* (A year without my parents) as a non-sensationalist portrait of a Syrian boy, Tareq, who has recently arrived in the Netherlands. The film's main focus is on Tareq's new life, relationships, and the challenges he faces in the Netherlands, rather than on his escape from Syria. The film's director, Els van Driel, respected the fact that Tareq at first did not want to speak about his experience of flight, which she attributed to a desire to fit in with his Dutch peers. She also recounted that, when Tareq ultimately did speak about his experience for the film, it turned out to be helpful for him because his peers supported him emotionally afterwards.

2.3 Children's perspectives

2.3.1 Seeing oneself on screen

The workshops highlighted an urgent need for more domestically produced European content in which children with migration backgrounds see others like themselves on screen. This need is backed by research from the UK regulator, Ofcom, which reported in 2017 that 35 per cent of children aged 8-11 in the UK felt there were not enough programmes showing children who look like them.⁶

Exceptions to the rule include the award-winning German factual reality format *Berlin und Wir* (Berlin and Us), which was made with the intention of portraying refugee children in Europe in a positive light. One of the producers recalled: 'We had several refugee kids who wrote us in emails or commentaries on our blogs to say "this is the first time that you show our story...I feel good that you showed it"'. After watching a clip from the CBBC pre-school series *Where in the World?* featuring a Jordanian child, a Jordanian TV executive told the Manchester workshop that her channel, Roya TV, could readily show the programme to Jordanian children, who almost never see their day-to-day family lives portrayed on screen.

We heard similar responses to ZDF's preschool animated series *JoNaLu*, which features characters speaking different languages, including Turkish, English and Russian. One of the programme's writers, Ina Werner, told the project team that children with migration backgrounds were pleased to see television characters speaking their native language in *JoNaLu*, while German-born children were able to identify with the characters, even without understanding every word of the dialogue. However, the workshops also revealed that broadcasters can find it hard to know what children want to see. An audience researcher working with Denmark's DR explained the difficulties of conducting research with small target groups, including refugee children, who are not easy to reach.

2.3.2 A year is a long time for a child

The workshops showed that children's content about forced migration is often framed by an adult perspective, which might be at odds with the attitudes and interests of children themselves. For example, as IZI researchers told us, refugee children often want to look forward, not back. Responding to a question about the very positive attitude to life in the UK apparently displayed by two newly-arrived Sudanese girls in the CBBC programme *My Life: Coming to Britain*, Maya Götz of IZI said:

If you talk to refugee children who are there [in Europe] for one, two, or even four years, they are really at home. They are struggling with things in the here and now and not with what has been four years ago. [...] we often love to portray them still as refugees and [...] [t]hey have background stories that are really tough but to tackle them you have to be very careful. So, they are there and they are just normal children. They cope with the background stories pretty well.

Götz's observation was echoed by Marek Beles, producer of the Swiss documentary film, *Ayham: Mein neues Leben* (Ayham: My new Life), about a 10-year-old Syrian boy who fled to Switzerland with his

⁶ Ofcom, *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report*, November 2017, p 10.

family. Beles recounted that, as Ayham gradually settled into his new environment, he decided that he did not want to go back to Syria, even though his father wanted to return.

2.3.3 Giving children a say

Some European producers have been influenced in their work by children's expressions of anxiety about world events, including terrorism.⁷ UK producer Dominic Sant of Evans Woolfe said one aim behind making *Where in the World?* in eight different countries had been to produce content that challenges worrying news reports and makes children less fearful of what happens outside the UK. The Flemish drama series *4eVeR* also takes children's opinions and concerns into account, drawing on information from the child helpline Awel as well as VRT's own audience research to identify relevant storylines.

2.4 Showing diversity without naming it

A consensus emerged across our workshops that diversity issues can be woven into engaging storytelling without diversity as such being the story's main purpose. As noted above, the German preschool series *JoNaLu* engages with language diversity without broaching the subject directly. Gregory Boardman, producer of the preschool drama series *Apple Tree House*, recalled an episode in which different cultural responses to a solar eclipse were evoked without anyone 'forefront[ing]' the differences.

2.4.1 Adults' and children's different perceptions

Workshop discussions indicated that adults and children often have different perceptions of what 'diversity' means, not least because ethnic diversity is rarely an issue for young children, even though it may preoccupy their parents. As one UK producer put it, adults are often 'desperate to get the difference out', whereas 'children discover difference just by turning up somewhere'. Yet, he said, stories are often not written from the point of view of 'discovery in a child's mind'.

Ways to approach diversity from a child's perspective were exemplified in the ZDF drama series *Dschermeni*. Since those behind the series see children as being open to becoming friends with newcomers through play and shared activities, *Dschermeni*'s storylines follow four protagonists from different demographic and ethnic backgrounds who spend time together by a lake, playing games, and discussing their personal problems. A Canadian producer of Arab heritage welcomed the programme's child-centered approach to teaching diversity, saying:

One of my favorite things is the opening, because I saw a kid from every different background; it speaks to multiculturalism and to your ethnic background, your religion and so on [...] that exposure is so important for kids just to have that understanding, and it has not been talked about enough.

2.4.2 Entertaining and educating at the same time

Education and entertainment are sometimes thought of under separate headings. Workshop participants who had pitched programmes to the BBC said that BBC Children's and BBC Learning were not just

⁷ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/news-opinion/supporting-children-worried-about-terrorism/>

separate but had fundamentally different agendas, which require producers to decide beforehand which one to pitch to. A UK producer present in Manchester suggested that children's media would benefit from a crossover of education and entertainment, in order for producers to be better informed about the educational potential of media, and educators to know more about how different media work. In the Netherlands and Scandinavia, however, public broadcasters and producers work to secure distribution of their films in school settings, with the support of bodies like the Danish Film Institute and educational funding sources.

The Flemish drama series *4ever*, which features a diverse group of teenagers in Belgium, is intended to achieve a mix of entertainment and education. The series is made by producers with past experience in reality television, one of whom said:

Imagine yourself at home. I have a tough working day and you ask me: "Will you see a programme about a refugee or will you watch something else?" [...] I will choose the second one. But in that second one, maybe they can embed the story about the refugee and I will watch it. If they say it to me upfront, I will say: "Oh no, not today". I think the children are the same; they want to see something nice [...] Like a present there should be a nice label on it.

2.4.3 Political and cultural education

The Copenhagen workshop heard that news is virtually the only genre that gives Europeans access to information about Arab countries. Whereas Europeans get some idea of other cultures through films and TV shows made outside their own countries, especially the US, they see very little audiovisual content originating from the Middle East, leaving them unfamiliar with the settings that refugees have left. A participant from the DFI said this touched a 'bigger problem' of diversity in fiction and cinema.



That said, several shows discussed in the workshops did educate young children about political issues and other cultures. The German pre-school programme *Die Sendung mit dem Elefanten* (The Show with the Elephant) produced an episode that introduced children to the term 'refugee'. It featured an animated sequence in which a rockslide forces the crocodile Viktor to leave his pond and seek a new home, meeting resistance from the occupants of other ponds along the way. Participants welcomed the use of animation in this context, because it explored experiences of discrimination and exclusion without recourse to stereotypes.

In another example of animation avoiding stereotypes, *Asylbarn*, a Danish series dealing with immigration policy, tells the story of Jamila and Cecilie, who are friends in a refugee camp until Cecilie's family is deported. The German drama series *Dschermeni*, aimed at 9-12-year-olds, also tackles the political dimensions of forced migration and asylum, including lengthy asylum processes, illicit working by refugees, and deportation of asylum-seekers. A Syrian-born participant commended this form of 'political education' for children in Germany.

Dschermeni also addresses social and cultural issues. Rüyet, a character whose grandparents are of Turkish origin, discovers that her brother is gay, which is a subject of conflict within the family. The series was commended by workshop participants for dealing with different layers of diversity and discrimination, and for showing how racial and sexual discrimination often overlap.

An unusual Dutch documentary, *De Kinderburgemeester* (The Children's Mayor), offered entertaining insights into citizenship education. It follows Yassine, a Moroccan-Dutch boy, as he becomes children's mayor in Gouda for one year. He has two major aims: to get children from different ethnic groups to interact with each other and to meet his role model, the Moroccan-born mayor of Rotterdam, Ahmed Aboutaleb. A Danish producer with an immigrant background remarked:

I really like the film. It shows that, even though you have another skin colour, you can still have dreams and be able to pursue them. When I was growing up, I was limited. If I said I wanted to do something [I was told] "why don't you do something else?" I really like the perspective that he might have a dream of being there one day and he's trying to pursue it.

2.4.4 Religion matters

Workshop debates suggested that producers should be prepared to address religion when making content focused on refugee and migrant children in Europe. While it can be challenging to depict issues of religion without stereotyping or judging, some participants felt strongly that it is what one called 'a normal part of life' for many children, whether born inside or outside Europe, and should not be sidestepped.

Media treatment of religious practice can be contentious, however, and views were mixed among Arab participants in the workshops as well as among Europeans. Differences were especially marked over mention of the headscarf. A clip from *Berlin und Wir* showed German-born Malina asking Syrian-born Rashad if she will wear the headscarf when she is older. In a visually powerful piece of television, Rashad is shown thinking deeply about her (affirmative) answer, while Malina (away from Rashad) gives her view that the headscarf is a mark of oppression. Issues emerging from this clip ranged from whether the girls were speaking their own minds or echoing their parents, whether Rashad was given an equal chance to probe Malina's personal beliefs, and whether viewers see Rashad as an individual or as representing a community.

DR Ultra's web series *Hassan og Ramadan* is ostensibly about the religious practice of fasting, which it explores from the perspective of ten-year-old Hassan, who is officially too young to fast but wants to try it to be like his older brothers, despite warnings from his family not to let his schoolwork suffer. Most workshop participants in Copenhagen felt that the series showed Muslim values and practices in a positive light, teaching non-Muslim children about Ramadan through the daily experiences of a young boy who is strong-willed, has a sense of humour, loves football and wants to challenge himself. Although the series was clearly not about food as such, some Arab participants remarked that religion and food are often taken as proxies for Arab culture, which is infinitely richer than religious practice or 'exotic meals'.

2.5 Avoiding tokenism and victimhood

2.5.1 Issues in casting and scripting

Producing children's content that normalises diversity is impeded by the limited ethnic diversity in Europe's media workforce. Broadcasters in the UK were shown in 2017 to be under-performing not only in respect of ethnic diversity but also social mobility.⁸ This pattern is reflected in our content sample: children and adults with experience of forced migration only rarely occupy positions in scripting and production.

For scriptwriters from relatively privileged backgrounds, it is not easy to write convincingly about life experiences they are unfamiliar with. A Danish academic pointed out during the Copenhagen workshop that children's programmes in Denmark and Sweden are often embedded within Scandinavian concepts of childhood, which, at times, clash with the 'more conservative' understandings of childhood that exist within families newly resident in Europe.⁹

European content makers who have managed to integrate children and adults from ethnic minorities as actors in productions are clear about both the challenges and benefits. The writers of Three Stones Media's *Apple Tree House* based it partly on their own experiences of growing up in an under-privileged ethnically-diverse inner-city environment. The series also recruited a mixed cast in order to deliberately 'subvert the stereotypes in terms of who can do what'. Producer Gregory Boardman said:

After six months of casting, [trying to] put a boy from a genuine Muslim household on screen, we probably only had less than a dozen families come forward. [...] In terms of cultural precedents and women performers from a Muslim background available to perform in this country, it was a tiny, tiny list.

There was a consensus across the three workshops that children with migration backgrounds should have more agency in the process of film production. During the Munich workshop, a doctoral researcher based in Lebanon suggested that adults should 'not bring them [children] into our stories but allow them to bring us into theirs'. The Copenhagen workshop introduced an example of a participatory video initiative, *The One Minutes Jr*, run by the Dutch organisation Cinekid, whereby children living in Dutch asylum centers were helped to produce short films that were then seen in cinemas. Questions arose here about the power dynamics between children and adult facilitators in making production choices.

2.5.2 Representing integration

The conclusion was also reached that representing integration and promoting diversity requires more than projecting different skin colours on screen or assuming that one member of a minority appearing in a

⁸ Ofcom, *Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Television*, September 2017, pp 7, 26, 28.

⁹ See also Feryal Awan and Jeanette Steemers, 'Arab and Western perspectives on childhood and children's media provision', in Naomi Sakr and Jeanette Steemers (eds) *Children's TV and Digital Media in the Arab World: Childhood, Screen Culture and Education*, London: I B Tauris 2017, pp 25-28.

show can stand for a wider group.¹⁰ If children from different national and cultural backgrounds are given certain 'labels' in children's screen content – such as black, Asian or Arab – or are ascribed certain attitudes, there is a risk of tapping, even unintentionally, into existing stereotypes of race and gender.

Participants concurred that producers should explore aspects that children from all backgrounds have in common. Without showing the commonalities, there is a risk of enforcing a sense of 'us and the others'. The Dutch documentary *Heijplaters* offered a positive example of representing the similarities among five children of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Turkish, Syrian, Chinese, Surinamese and Dutch), who live in the harbour district of Rotterdam. Rather than making the boys' backgrounds the major focus of the narrative, the film focuses on activities they do together. The film's director, Mirjam Marks, explained:

[I]t's not explicit in the film, because I don't like to do it that way. It's about friendship in times of polarisation. That's an issue all over in the Netherlands. My thoughts behind it were ... With the news and everything, there is so much attention, especially from adults, on differences among people from different cultural backgrounds or beliefs. But there are so many equal things far more than difference, I think.

2.5.3 Competent children facing challenges

Content depicting the resourcefulness of children newly arrived in Europe can also counter narratives of passivity and victimhood. The short dramas *Nur* from Slovenia and *Swing* from Serbia, made as part of the European Broadcasting Union Drama Exchange, both showed displaced children overcoming challenges. Some Arab participants liked the way the films showed the children taking responsibility, taking care of themselves, being respectful of local social rules and displaying their problem-solving skills.

It was suggested that child characters who are not unequivocally strong but also have flaws and confront problems can open up points of identification for children in the audience. During the Manchester workshop, a German expert who has researched child audiences suggested that the CBBC programme *My Life: New Boys in Town* offered plenty for children to engage with through its format and storytelling, since it shows both the challenges and opportunities that come with settling into a new society.

2.6 Moving forward

2.6.1 Opportunities for open discussion

It was apparent from workshop debates that more opportunities are needed for open and critical discussion about children's content, beyond industry events where the emphasis is on competition and selling. Producers at the Manchester workshop said that even the Children's Global Media Summit was being deployed as a market instead of a place where people can share information about how to fund and exhibit the programmes that everyone at the workshop wanted to get made.

¹⁰ See e.g. Claire Dwyer, 'Contested identities: Challenging dominant representations of young British Muslim women'. In Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine (eds), *Cool places: Geographies of youth cultures*, London: Routledge, 1998, p 60.

2.6.2 Addressing the gender gap

Also needed in future is more attention to girls. A quick count of the programmes in our sample selection below reveals that 14 feature boys in the main roles, compared with only eight where girls are the main characters. Girls appear less on television than boys in general¹¹ and producers from the UK and Germany drew attention to the practical challenges of making films with and about refugee girls, because it is often difficult to get permission from families.

Constraints on access can also lead unintentionally to potential stereotyping. A Jordanian TV executive who generally liked the representations of Hamza in Jordan in the preschool show *Where in the World?* nevertheless questioned why he was shown with his mother in the kitchen and with his father in the mosque. The producer explained that he was aware of the film's gender dimension but found himself confronted with pressures of time and finance when filming in foreign locations.

The implications of representing female characters in particular ways came up in discussion of a clip from the long-running US show *Arthur*, aired on CBBC. In it, a north American girl character, DW, draws her idea of the former lifestyle of a male classmate just arrived from Senegal. Both the classmate and the teacher fiercely criticise what the drawing contains, in a scene that elicited strong objections from some workshop participants. A German researcher said: 'Producers ought to think about how child audiences react. Here comes a wonderful girl with all her enthusiasm, with all her fantasy, and it's so easy just to put in the sentence "oh it's wonderful", just to encourage her to be who she is instead of slapping her down'.

In contrast, a film that drew admiration from workshop participants was the Danish documentary *Laylas melodi* (2013). One of a series of films about three different Afghan children, this one follows eleven-year-old Layla, whose uncle has placed her in a Kabul orphanage. Layla is a strong and independent character who resists societal and cultural norms by playing music (forbidden under the Taliban), going to school, and resisting returning to her home village to avoid being married off. A DFI representative said:

I talked to one teacher using this [series] and he told us that the children were very much involved in the stories, and they could actually feel these children were children like them, not children in Afghanistan, but children with their own rights, thoughts and dreams [...]

2.6.3 Forced migration in historical perspective

Opportunities now exist for producers to put forced migration into historical perspective, so that children become aware that mass displacement has happened at different times and places and has followed routes from the global North to the South as well as the reverse. Europe's history of forced migration over many centuries is often forgotten and overlooked by European media. Workshop participants praised an episode of *Die Sendung mit dem Elefanten* which closed by encouraging children in the audience to ask their own parents and grandparents where they come from.

¹¹ Maya Götz and Dafna Lemish (eds) *Sexy Girls, Heroes and Funny Losers: Gender Representations in Children's TV around the World*, New York: Peter Lang, 2012.

3 MANCHESTER WORKSHOP BRIEFING

3.1 Screen content for and about refugee and migrant children in the UK: An overview

Refugee children comprise just a small segment of the UK child audience. According to statistics from the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, the UK gave asylum or other protection to 28,000 children in the seven years to February 2017. But fair and accurate media representation of displaced children surely constitutes a key step towards helping them learn a new language and feel at home in a new country. According to a [UNHCR report](#) in 2017, integration of Syrian refugees under the UK's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme was proceeding well but there was room for improvement in English language provision.¹²

Appropriate media content can serve not only those children caught up in forced migration. It is also an important way of communicating with UK-born children who have watched them arrive, at a time when children are becoming more fearful about the world around them. The NSPCC added a new webpage to its Childline service in 2016, called '[Worries About the World](#)', in response to the increasing number of children turning to Childline with anxiety about disturbing events seen in the news and on social media.

Children are ill-equipped to put news in perspective and, when it comes to violence in the Middle East, even adults confess to lacking knowledge of background and context, despite headlines and pictures in mainstream media. The Council for Arab-British Understanding conducted a poll in 2017, in which 81 per cent of respondents said they knew little or nothing about the Arab world.

The personal stories of young children caught up in forced migration have remained largely absent from dominant media representations, except when it is too late, as demonstrated by pictures of the body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, washed ashore on a Turkish beach in 2015. In a study of smartphone and digital media use by refugees, Marie Gillespie and her co-authors noted that, despite the high level of media reporting about refugees, provision of news and information for and by refugees is inadequate. Her study worked with Syrians who were well-educated and digitally literate but could not tell what mediated sources of information to trust.¹³

3.1.1 How much material is there and who makes it?

This workshop briefing is part of a project about representation of refugee and migrant children in European programming. Hosted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the workshop was a chance to see how different child voices are represented in English-language content, including shows produced for the UK. The majority of programmes for children that deal with diversity in the UK, including the lives of refugee children, are commissioned and screened by the BBC for its linear children's channels, CBBC (for viewers aged 6-12 years) and CBeebies (0-6 years), but are also available on demand on the BBC iPlayer.

¹² UNHCR, *Towards Integration: The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in the UK*, 2017, pp 20-21

¹³ Marie Gillespie, Lawrence Ampofo, Margaret Cheesman et al, *Mapping Syrian Refugee Media Journeys: Smartphones and Social Media Networks*, The Open University and France Médias Monde, May 2016, p 5.

As a public service broadcaster, the BBC has a mandate to produce material for marginalised and minority groups. In fact it is virtually the only commissioner of UK-originated children's content, including drama and factual programming, let alone children's content that depicts ethnic or social diversity or topics such as migration. With most children's schedules dominated by entertainment and animation shows, any TV programme made about refugee or migrant children, or even simply children from a diverse background, is usually a documentary.

Virtually all examples of relevant content we found for our workshop were documentaries. Exceptions were *Apple Tree House*, a rare live action drama series for pre-schoolers on CBeebies, and two animation imports: the US series, *Arthur*, and the Canadian series, *Mixed Nutz*. Section 3.6 below shows that live action drama is a rarity because it is difficult to fund and sell internationally, and because of practical issues such as the time and effort involved in casting, especially recruiting child and adult actors from minority backgrounds.

So *Apple Tree House* is rare in terms of both its genre and the work that went into producing it. It is also unusual in that, whereas most shows in our sample were made by people who had not themselves experienced forced migration or discrimination, and UK broadcasters were shown once again in 2017 to be under-performing in respect of ethnic diversity and social mobility,¹⁴ the writers of *Apple Tree House* based it partly on their own experiences of growing up in an inner-city environment.

Our overall project aims to assess the range of representation for children aged under 12, as most relevant content that does exist for children is primarily for teenagers. We based our sample selection on different target audiences, in line with broadcasters' own assumptions about who is watching their shows.

3.2 Representations of refugee and migrant children on UK television

3.2.1 Victimisation and 'othering'

Workshop discussions suggested that migrant and refugee children are (sometimes unintentionally) represented as lost and 'othered' children, who are victims, passive and do not have a 'proper' (i.e. European) childhood. This was common in films about children's lives in the camps and extended to their representation in European productions.

The experiences of refugee children are sometimes depicted in sensationalist ways, including in shows aimed at a general audience such as *Educating Greater Manchester* (Channel 4), a documentary series set in a secondary school in Salford, and in interviews on the breakfast TV show, *This Morning* (ITV). Here, refugee children were shown as requiring the help of (European) adults and children, and as grieving and sad.

Constructions of victimhood can unintentionally become entwined with prejudice, as when a refugee child ('the other') is shown accusing a British child ('one of ours') of bullying. However, workshop participants noted that other episodes of *Educating Greater Manchester* showed Rani integrated into a mixed friendship group and 'mucking around'.

¹⁴ Ofcom, *Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Television*, September 2017, pp 7, 26, 28

Responses to clips about Rani from Channel 4 and ITV

Participants noticed the continual one-way direction of interactions with British children in *Educating Greater Manchester* and particularly in the *This Morning* interview, where the local boy, Jack, was held up to be enterprising and kind, the sort of child who was 'going to go far in life'. In contrast, the exchanges with the Syrian boy, Rani, appeared awkward and stilted, as if, according to one comment, the presenter 'does not know what to do'. A Syrian participant saw a 'one-sided speech' about 'grief and victimisation', which reinforced assumptions about 'this begging mentality'. Sad accompanying music reinforced the sense of victimhood. According to one US participant, herself a migrant to the US:

'It's very rare that we see refugee children doing something that would be teaching the host children to do something, whether it's as simple as kicking the ball and scoring a goal or even helping out, with helping to solve a problem. Usually what we see is victimisation [...]

For one UK producer this approach was symptomatic of 'always going for the headline' and the 'quick fix', because it was easier to 'try and push for sympathy stories'. Empowerment would mean communicating something different, focused on optimism rather than the 'thing that is going to get the headline [...]'.

The clips focused on some of the more awkward encounters, but it was acknowledged that *Educating Greater Manchester* did show different types of interactions and clear instances of 'resilience' as the story developed and Rani developed friendships. This allowed similarities to be shown as well as differences. A particular incident showed Rani involved in mischief with his British friends, described by one participant as follows:

'There is a van with a lot of dust on it. Rani draws a rude picture on it with his mates and they run off. [...] And a lot of other kids get in trouble for it. Watching it with my 12-year-old, that is when she felt like he'd arrived, and she got to know him and she was rooting for him and he was a normal kid. He was actually free in that moment to be exactly the same as the other boys who were gathered around that van.'

3.2.2 Ethical issues

Some workshop participants expressed concern about the ethical and psychological dimensions of refugee children's participation in TV and film productions, especially news reporting and reality TV. In *Educating Greater Manchester*, the TV crew interviews Murad, an older boy from Syria, about his experience of fleeing and they ask him what he knows about his missing father. Participants from the US and Europe asked 'why would you ask a child on television if he believes his father is alive?' and remarked "you know that they are searching for the tears". A Palestinian children's rights advocate warned that the interview opened up 'very, very sensitive issues'. He and a Lebanese producer wondered how the interview was set up and whether Murad had received any counseling because the interview might have caused him to relive traumatic experiences.

3.2.3 Representing individuality and agency

In contrast to shows for a family audience, most children's shows were thought to present a more balanced, positive and optimistic representation of refugee children and children of immigrant heritage living in the UK. *My Life: New Boys in Town* and *Apple Tree House* showed young children with families and friends, experiencing everyday activities. In both drama and documentaries, the stories are typically presented from the child's point of view through voiceovers which one participant described as 'much more engaging and much more empowering'. The producer of *Apple Tree House* said its mixed cast allowed the producers to deliberately 'subvert the stereotypes in terms of who can do what'. Another participant, a German expert who has researched child audiences and how they respond to certain types of narrative and representations, found that *My Life: New Boys in Town* offered plenty for children to engage with through its format and storytelling. She said:

It's a wonderful piece. The beginning of this format shows a boy who is in charge of his life, he is competent, and he can do a lot of things. He is part of the family, so he's not alone. At the same time, you get the subtext that it's not as easy as you might think. It's very engaging for the audience because we know non-fiction sometimes has a difficulty to get the attention of the audience. So, it's really engaging, we want to know more about him, he is a character and we really want to go with him, to learn with him. The way it's staged, it has beautiful pictures; it's very well edited [...] a brilliant empowering piece. [...] And it's great to hear his voice.

3.2.4 Gender representations

The workshop clips focused almost exclusively on young boys with the exception of *Coming to Britain*, which revolves around two Sudanese girls, and *Apple Tree House*, which features two girls and one boy in the main roles. Girls appear less on television than boys in general¹⁵ and on-screen representations of refugee girls are particularly rare. Some Arab participants were concerned that representations of children from Arab countries ran the risk of embracing pre-existing gender stereotypes, which may well circulate in Arab media but hardly represent the reality of women's lives. Scenes for the preschool show *Where in the World: Hamza's Story* were filmed in Jordan. A clip we showed featured Hamza with his parents and siblings at home. A Jordanian TV executive among the participants commented on the way he was shown with his mother in the kitchen and with his father in the mosque. She said it reminded her of primary school books used to teach Arabic in Jordan, where 'we usually find the woman in the kitchen.... and the father is going to swim or'. Here, she said, we saw the father in the mosque, which is more of a serious thing, and he [Hamza] is helping his mother cooking [...] We don't see her working although we have a lot of women working now'.

UK producers at the workshop acknowledged issues about representing girls, but also drew attention to the practical challenges of making films with and about refugee girls, when it is often difficult to get permission. This was backed up by the experiences of content producers in Germany. A participant

¹⁵ Maya Götz and Dafna Lemish (eds) *Sexy Girls, Heroes and Funny Losers: Gender Representations in Children's TV around the World*, New York: Peter Lang, 2012

reported that a meeting of producers who had worked with refugee children revealed that it is possible to find girls and 'really give them a voice' but that it involves a lot of effort. 'You can't take the first choice, because first you will get four, five, six boys and then you will get the girls'. UK producers explained how they found themselves confronted with additional pressures of time and finance when making films in Arab locations. The producer of the *Where in the World* series was aware of the way Hamza had been portrayed doing different kinds of activity with each parent, but explained:

The challenge is, in terms of the commission, when we were casting we had two weeks to find a child. Then the director had three days to recce [...] It's problematic in places, but the realities of pressure and directors [...] to cast a strong child, that was the driver [...].

3.2.5 Lack of European knowledge about Arab childhoods

The difficulties of representing children from Arab countries in European programmes also remind us that Arab and European concepts of childhood differ. Feryal Awan, who studied screen content produced for children across the Arab world, found there is often more emphasis on becoming an adult than being a child.¹⁶ Whereas European producers tend to emphasise children's agency, it is rare to see children speaking with their own voice on Arab television, because adults typically take on the role of instructors and teachers in children's programmes. Examples include magazine shows such as *Anbar*, on Qatar's pan-Arab channel Jeem, and *Bait Byoot* on Palestinian TV, which are dominated by adult presenters, who, instead of seeking children's opinions, constantly provide advice and judgement.

3.3 Diversity dilemmas

3.3.1 Structural limitations in the children's media landscape

3.3.1.1 COMMERCIALISED GLOBAL MEDIA

The priorities of profit-driven commercial media in search of global markets mean there are limited resources and space for live action content that features the authentic experiences of children, unless this is subsidized and promoted by content providers with a remit to promote diversity in local markets, usually public service broadcasters. One UK producer told the workshop: 'The people who put the money in want to appeal to the widest mainstream audience there is'. This also means that some markets are more valuable than others, because 'you are going to get more per view out of America than you can get in the Philippines or somewhere else.' Producers wanted to show diversity and different cultures, but 'sometimes people higher up the food chain have a say and unfortunately, we do hit a bit of a barrier'. The example was quoted of someone in a commissioning position telling a producer that a programme would not sell to 'other territories' if it featured a mixed-race couple together. These limitations did not change in the digital world, because according to one online producer, 'we still have to present our case to our financiers, and clients, and the people who are paying us'.

¹⁶ Feryal Awan, *Occupied Childhoods: Discourses and Politics of Childhood and their Place in Palestinian and Pan-Arab Screen Content for Children*, PhD thesis, University of Westminster, 2016, pp 216-17

Similar issues about diversity affect content in Arab markets, where imported animation dominates the schedules, including those of MBC3, the popular children's channel of the Saudi-owned TV group MBC. Some local animation production has been built around local characters, as in the case of Cartoon Network's *Mansour*, set in the UAE, or *Bakkar*, set in Egypt, but this remains rare and can be used more as a marker of national identity than an endorsement of diversity.

3.3.1.2 LACK OF DIVERSITY AMONG UK SCRIPTWRITERS AND ACTORS

Diverse representations in children's content are further impeded by the limited representation of the UK's ethnic diversity in its media workforce, as producers, directors, writers or performers. It is not easy for scriptwriters from a relatively privileged background to write convincingly about life experiences they are unfamiliar with, such as those of children of lower socio-economic status. Three Stones Media, which made *Apple Tree House*, used 'street casting', the practice of recruiting unknowns who have not been to drama school, to achieve authenticity and realism. But *Apple Tree House* producer, Gregory Boardman, said that this method of casting child and women actors from ethnic minority backgrounds had been especially time-consuming and sometimes difficult. He explained:

After six months of casting, [trying to] put a boy from a genuine Muslim household on screen, we probably only had less than a dozen families come forward. The [Grandson character] literally was a choice of one. It's sad to say that the part of Grandma, the numbers of professional actresses in this country who could play her part was below 15. We actually saw quite a lot of amateur performers to try and bring to the list. In terms of cultural precedents and women performers from a Muslim background available to perform in this country, it was a tiny, tiny list. We've been absolutely blessed because she's been amazing on-screen and hopefully she'll inspire others to follow her.

3.3.1.3 OTHER CHALLENGES OF TELEVISION PRODUCTION

The limits of live action contrast with the opportunities of animation, where diversity of appearance can be shown by painting characters in different colours. Yet diversity involves far more than appearance. One participant argued that showing diversity extends to personal qualities and behaviours. Another asked the question of how a tolerant society should deal with intolerance, whether it was acceptable to be open to diversity that may actually reflect and foster intolerance and racism. Another noted the reluctance of some US producers to show a black child being uncooperative, for fear of perpetuating negative stereotypes. Meanwhile it was also noted that 'diversity' on some live action programmes can appear staged. Arab participants felt that the Syrian father wearing a *tarbush* to cook in *The Big Family Cooking Showdown* was a gimmick and not authentic.



*Mahmoud Ayoubi talks to the show's co-presenter, Nadia Hussain
(Still from The Big Family Cooking Showdown, BBC, 2017)*

3.3.2 Approaches to representing diversity: meaningful or tokenistic?

3.3.2.1 THE RISK OF TOKENISM

Participants felt there was a fine line between showing diversity and tapping into stereotypes of race and gender. If children from different national and cultural backgrounds are given certain 'labels' in children's screen content – such as Black, Asian, Arab, etc. - or are ascribed certain attitudes, there is a risk, even unintentionally, of tapping into stereotypes and of constructing refugee children as different. There was agreement about the pitfalls. One comment on the Canadian animation series *Mixed Nutz* highlighted the benefits of showing 'what we have in common' before looking at 'how diverse we all are', because, without showing the commonalities, there is a risk of creating a sense of 'us and the others'. A Syrian artist and director asked whether it was a question of presenting diversity as it exists or talking about the value of diversity in society. She argued that, if characters are picked merely to fill the predetermined roles according to colour or religion, this is 'the opposite of diversity, it is enforcing stereotyping'.

Inadvertent stereotyping was perceived in *Arthur*, an educational animation series made for the US PBS network. The clip we showed could be interpreted to signal that living in a city is somehow superior, although it was probably intended to show that the city origins of the boy from Senegal means he is 'like us'.

3.3.2.2 "SHOW THE DIVERSITY, DON'T NAME IT"

It was argued that writers and producers can weave issues of diversity into engaging storytelling and characters, without diversity as such being the purpose of the story. As one participant put it, 'you can show the diversity, don't name it'. Another said that adults are 'desperate to get the difference out', whereas 'children discover difference just by turning up somewhere'. Yet, he said, stories are often not written from the point of view of discovery in a child's mind'. If there is diversity of representation in stories, children of different backgrounds can all relate to the same story and want to engage with it. Such stories are not about who children are or where they have come from but about seeing someone you can relate to on screen. This approach was illustrated with a storyline about a solar eclipse from *Apple Tree House*, in which Grandma Zeinab is the one with the telescope who helps everyone with the science but disappears during the eclipse itself so she can go to pray. The producer recalled:

We did a story about an eclipse. It touched a little bit on folklore. The parents of the characters had different views about what the eclipse meant. [...] Just by working with the story, we were able to put so much in the script. In the end, the episode is about a group of children watching the solar eclipse, but culturally the information we were able to contain within that was hopefully of great value. But we didn't forefront any of that information.

A similar approach was illustrated on the UK reality format, *The Big Family Cooking Showdown*, which not only revealed diversity within one family, the Ayoubis, but also challenged gender stereotypes about Arab women. Only one daughter in the family wears the hijab, but she is the one who works in the construction industry as a structural engineer and is shown in her hijab and hard hat on a building site,

giving instructions to male builders. For one US participant in the workshop, seeing this family on television countered all sorts of stereotypes in the news and did so 'indirectly', in a 'wonderful way'.

3.4 Finding out about child audiences

3.4.1 Difficulties of measurement

Within the workshop, it was recognised that there is an urgent need for more reliable audience research with young children, including children caught up in forced migration, because we know little about what children are consuming on broadcast and online platforms and why they are consuming it. The difficulties of measuring audience responses when so many devices are used for television viewing are potentially serious at a time when children's public service broadcasting provision is falling and under threat.¹⁷ Statistics from the UK broadcast regulator, Ofcom, released in November 2017, show that 21 per cent of UK children aged three to four have their own tablet, as do 35 per cent of 5-7 year-olds and 52 per cent of 8-11 year-olds. The vast majority of them use the tablet to go online. Yet, even so, live viewing on the TV set remains an important part of children's lives, especially for younger children, for whom TV on the TV set makes up the largest proportion of their media time.¹⁸

3.4.2 Knowing how children engage with the wider world

Research is lacking on how children in the UK and Europe engage with the rest of the world. This is a significant concern for an organization like the BBC, which is required by its charter to 'provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them'.¹⁹

Ways to make children less fearful

Producer Dominic Sant recalled that his production company, Evans Woolfe, had been inspired to produce *Where in the World?* in eight countries after they noticed NSPCC research that suggested that up to 40 percent of British children worry about world events. This was revealed when they set up the new Childline webpage with the title 'Worries about the World'. Sant felt that there was a discrepancy between the daily realities of children living in countries other than the UK and representations of those realities in UK news media and aid campaigns. The aim behind *Where in the World* was to produce content that makes children less fearful of what happens outside the UK. For Sant the depiction of children successfully negotiating their daily realities amongst family and friends was crucial:

One of the key drivers for us was the sense that a lot of what children see is obviously the news and aid campaigns. That's all great, but the missing wider context was normal children living ordinary lives, just getting on with it.

It was challenging to make this kind of content, particularly in countries where you need permits to film, but feedback from UK parents whose children had watched the series was encouraging. According to Sant, after one episode showed a child using a bucket as a drum, a British mother tweeted a picture of her children drumming, copying what they had seen on TV.

¹⁷ Sonia Livingstone and Claire Local, 'Measurement matters: difficulties in defining and measuring children's television viewing in changing media landscape, *Media International Australia*, 163 (1). pp. 67-76.

¹⁸ Ofcom, *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report*, 2017, pp 2-3.

¹⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/corporate2/insidethebbc/howweare/publicpurposes>

3.4.3 German research with refugee children

Researchers from the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) in Munich, Germany, recounted their findings from interviews they had conducted with 40 refugee children, newly arrived in Europe. For these children 'empowerment' often means simple practical things, such as being able to go out on the street, having free time, and for girls especially, being able to ride a bike, or – for those from Afghanistan – being able to go to school. The researchers found that refugee children often want to look forward, not back to the past. This was relevant to the portrayal of two Sudanese girls settling into their new home in *My Life: Coming to Britain*.

Responding to a reference in the episode to the fact that the girls' family left Sudan because the father's life was in danger, and a question about the film's very positive treatment of the girls' attitudes to life in Britain, Maya Götz of IZI said:

If you talk to refugee children who are there [in Europe] for one, two or even four years, they are really at home. They are struggling with things in the here and now and not with what has been four years ago. It's a part of their lives but it's not the main part. We often love to portray them still as refugees and most of the children who are here, their father or mother was at risk; that's why they are here, otherwise they could have stayed. They have background stories that are really tough, but to tackle them you have to be very careful. So, they are there and they are just normal children. They cope with the background stories pretty well.

Götz also noted, however, a need for producers and broadcasters to know how UK-born children watching the episode respond to the girls and their story. 'We have to learn' how children perceive these things, she said, because 'we don't know'.

3.4.4 Research on children and media in refugee camps

While research with child audiences in Europe is complicated and often incomplete, credible data on media use by children in Arab countries is almost non-existent. A Jordanian television executive told the workshop that her colleagues assume that content can be produced without input from children. She said: 'We don't have children come and participate or even ask them what they want. We just preach at them and we give them messages'. She reported that parents concerned to protect their children from harmful content were often tempted to rely on an avowedly religious children's channel, like the Jordan-based *Tuyur al-Janna* (Birds of Paradise), because they perceive it as safer than Disney or other cartoons, even though others accuse it of brainwashing. Strong opinions among parents can make it hard for European producers trying to film 'normality' in an Arab country like Jordan, because they have to assuage concerns about media among parents and teachers and overcome deep distrust.

BBC Media Action, the BBC's international development charity, and Sesame Workshop, the New York-based non-profit organization which provides learning resources through television and other media, were both due to start projects with refugee children in camps in Jordan and Lebanon in 2018 that may start to provide some insights into these children's particular use of and responses to media content. BBC

Media Action's Alexandra Bucciatti told the workshop that, based on the initial research, expertise from the BBC Children's department and BBC Learning will be used to develop content to help 3-5 year-olds with literacy, numeracy and problem solving and 6-12 year-olds with problem solving, critical thinking and a sense of belonging. Many of the latter group have either been out of school for long periods, or never attended. For 13-16 year-olds, where being out of school for long can create a deeper sense of isolation, there are plans to develop a drama format around the idea of community. Content will be distributed online, by broadcast and also in refugee centres.

Sesame Workshop has collaborated with local partners to make local adaptations of the preschool educational show *Sesame Street* in many countries dealing with refugees and displacement, including Afghanistan. Estee Bardanashvili, of Sesame Workshop, told the workshop how it responded to the Syrian crisis by partnering with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), created for refugees after World War 2, with a view to creating content for refugee children that can help them be resilient and develop coping mechanisms in the face of trauma, as well as showing parents how to engage better with their children. Together these bodies launched a pilot Sesame Workshop/IRC Early Childhood Humanitarian Initiative in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Syria to produce and assess the accessibility of educational print and video materials for children aged 3-6 in urban centres and refugee camps, for example on mobile phones. In late 2017, Sesame Workshop and the IRC won a MacArthur Foundation '100 & Change' Award, securing \$100m to continue supporting the education of refugee children affected by the Syrian crisis.

3.5 Education and 'entertainment' in children's programming

3.5.1 Refugee schooling crisis

Forced migration brings with it an education crisis that particularly affects refugee children from Syria, Iraq and Sudan. Syria and Sudan were in the top five countries for UK asylum grants in 2016 and Iraq was in the top five for UK asylum applications.²⁰ UNICEF, the UN agency that provides humanitarian and development support to children and mothers in needy countries, estimates that around 2 million children have no schooling inside Syria while as many as 731,000 Syrian child refugees in surrounding countries, primarily Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, were out of school in 2017, a 6 per cent increase over 2016. It expects that more than 5 million Syrian children will need education assistance in 2018. As pressure on host community services mounts in countries neighbouring Syria, and refugees exhaust their savings, access to schooling becomes ever harder. A UNICEF regional study compiled in 2015, under the title *Education Under Fire*, estimated that internal displacement and conflict were resulting in 3 million Iraqi children and 3 million Sudanese children missing out on education.²¹

Efforts, like those of BBC Media Action and Sesame Workshop to address the education crisis through media resources, raise questions about the relationship between education and entertainment, and the extent to which educational content sets out to be entertaining. Entertaining lessons are not the norm in Arab education systems, a Syrian participant told the workshop, leading to a situation where 'most kids hate school'. But education and entertainment were also conceptualized as separate themes for the Children's Global Media Summit in Manchester to which the pre-summit workshop was affiliated. At the

²⁰ <https://fullfact.org/immigration/uk-refugees/>

²¹ UNICEF, *Education Under Fire*, New York: UN, September 2015, p 7.

BBC, children's education comes under the aegis of BBC Learning (with links to the UK school curriculum), whereas entertainment with broad learning objectives falls within the realm of the BBC Children's department, which has its own commissioning objectives.

3.5.2 Potential crossover between areas of expertise

Producers usually consult education or child specialists when they are targeting preschool audiences, but such consultation is much less common in making content for older children. Workshop participants who had pitched programmes to the BBC said that BBC Children's and BBC Learning were not just separate but had fundamentally different agendas, which require producers to decide beforehand whether to focus on education 'with a capital E', as one put it, to suit BBC Learning, or on 'softer education', in which case it would be proposed to BBC Children's. One producer suggested that the two parallel paths were missing a lot from each other. He said:

The thing that strikes me is that historically, the medium of television and other cultural mediums have been quite separate from education in terms of the progress of producers and creators on the television side. Producers do draw on education, they do draw on advice. But if you think of the creative directors working in education and what they are exposed to in terms of sociology and the psychology of the child [...]

It's almost as though the education world is only just waking up to the power of devices and platforms and the power of television and the moving image. In many ways, they caught onto it very, very late. In similar ways, there are a lot of people working in children's media who don't understand the full complexities of what they are dealing with, because they haven't necessarily come up through an education group.

It feels like the whole of children's media could do with a real crossover in terms of knowledge, so that producers genuinely understand the power of the tool in their hand and educators are also able to understand the medium in itself. Even today, I'm looking at some music tools that seem really well worked out from an educational point of view, but I just know, as a television producer, if you try and make them work commercially to a wide audience, they would die a death. Some of these things have had millions of pounds invested in them that a television producer could equally do great things with. It feels there is a real lack of a crossover that actually all cultures and all regions could benefit from.

3.5.3 Teaching youngsters about refugees' experience of flight

As part of discussing the mix of education and entertainment in relation to content for and about refugee children, workshop participants viewed a UK web drama called *Refugee*. Aimed at children at UK curriculum Key Stages 3 and 4, namely the 11-16 age group, the drama revolves around the premise of a UK family suddenly having to leave their home as refugees. With a storyline that goes backwards to reveal how the family started off in its Scottish home, it aims to explain the refugee crisis through dramatic scenes of flight. The film-maker, TrueTube, has a website for schools that provides short films, lesson plans and assembly scripts for religious education, citizenship classes and PSHE (personal, social,

health and economic education). It has its own TrueTube channel and beat the BBC to be named best UK channel at the Children's BAFTA awards in 2017. Its film, *Refugee*, also won a number of prizes, including a Learning on Screen Award. Judges praised the use of the reverse timeline to tell the story as a 'slow reveal'. They also praised the use of an ordinary setting relatable to the target audience.



However not all workshop participants were convinced by the reverse timeline. They felt that such educational content still needed the audience to identify with the characters. One suggested that it would have been more effective had the audience had a chance to get to know the fleeing family first, rather than at the end, because this limited the audience's ability to establish an emotional connection with the characters.

According to one UK producer: 'I feel that stories are most powerful when you get to know the person in that situation; I think a different version of *Refugee* would do that'.

3.5.4 Showing 'education' on screen

The workshop also viewed a clip from the long-running show, *Arthur*, made for US public television but also aired on CBBC in the UK. *Arthur* is broadly educational in that it promotes social skills among children and some more direct educational learning, although one US participants disputed its educational value. In the scene we showed, a North American girl character, DW, gets it 'wrong' in her assessment of the lifestyle a newly-arrived male classmate would have experienced in his African country of origin. DW draws an intricate picture, illustrating how she imagines the country, to show classmates but is immediately criticized by both the new classmate and the teacher for what the picture shows. In the clip, the teacher tells her to learn about a place first before describing it. The put-downs imply a kind of superiority for the African boy vis-à-vis the girl.

Some workshop participants felt that children watching the show, especially girls, might be discouraged to come forward with their own ideas, given the response DW encountered when she did this. One German participant felt that DW's enthusiastic drawing reflected her interest in the topic but this was not valued in the script. She said 'it needed just one sentence that complimented the girl on her drawing' [...] 'These are the moments when you really can make a difference ... You don't have to blame a child for being positive, for being open. Always keep in mind, as soon as you blame somebody, it has a meaning for the audience'. Here, by implication, '50 per cent of the audience is blamed'.

She continued:

Producers ought to think about how child audiences react. Here comes a wonderful girl with all her enthusiasm, with all her fantasy and it's so easy just to put in the sentence "oh it's wonderful", just to encourage her to be who she is instead of slapping her down. This is a very disturbing understanding of education. We know education is not working that way. That is the education not only of the last century, it's something from the 60s of the last century, where we control them and tell them what they are doing is wrong. Now we know we have to encourage them and give them competences.

3.6 Regulatory, commissioning, and distribution issues

Part of the rationale for the workshop, and the project it belongs to, lies in the opportunities that exist for European creators of children's content and advocates of children's media rights to get involved in conceiving and producing material for Arab children who have come to Europe because they have been forced to leave their countries of birth. Media and other bodies in Europe have the opportunity to integrate the needs of all refugee and migrant children into their forward planning and commissioning.

In theory, they should be encouraged to do this because of the way public service mandates are built in to the UK and European broadcast regulatory environment. These mandates open the way for European media to provide Arab families caught up in forced migration with the benefits of a service they have not experienced, since public service media (as defined by UNESCO in terms of the four simultaneous features of universality, diversity, independence and distinctiveness²²) are not found in the Arab region. It is public service mandates that require screen content to serve children and to provide them with locally-originated material. Among Arab countries, only Morocco and Lebanon have any requirement for their broadcasters to include a specific number of hours of programming for children and these requirements are not enforced. Arab-owned children's channels fill their schedules with dubbed imports, preferring to avoid the cost and censorship challenges of local production, while producers of children's screen content in the Arab region call in vain for basic regulatory initiatives that would stimulate production, such as protection of intellectual property, respecting of contracts, and provision of tax exemptions and industry incentives.²³

In practice, as the workshop heard, getting innovative material for children commissioned in the UK is easier said than done.

3.6.1 Racism in commissioning circles and distribution platforms

The standards of ethics and diversity assumed to prevail among public service media outlets do not always apply to content commissioned for online platforms. One UK producer gave examples of overt racism within some digital companies and multi-channel networks (MCNs) that distribute content on platforms like YouTube. These caused a 'general white-washing of entertainment' for children and minimal representation of black animated characters in online videos. The workshop heard that a company once provided a roster of characters who all had names, except for a black child, who was identified only in terms of his ethnicity. Because YouTube pays more per view in Western countries, even producers based in Asia are incentivized to appeal to a white Western audience and deterred from using hands of different skin colour for 'unboxing' videos or 'how to' tutorials.

The case of *Rastamouse* was cited for the racist comments it had attracted from representatives of a US toy company and a British supermarket. This British animated stop motion series follows a mouse reggae band who split their time between making music and solving crime mysteries, with an ethic of redemption, not retribution. First aired on CBeebies in 2011, it was inspired by books published between 2003 and 2012 that were read on the BBC television series *Jackanory Junior* in 2008. Concerns about possible

²² UNESCO, *Public Service Broadcasting: A Best Practices Sourcebook*, edited by Indrajit Banerjee and Kalinga Seneviratne, Paris, 2005, p 15.

²³ Feryal Awan and Jeanette Steemers, 'Arab and Western perspectives on childhood and children's media provision, in Naomi Sakr and Jeanette Steemers (eds) *Children's TV and Digital Media in the Arab World: Childhood, Screen Culture and Education*, London: I B Tauris 2017, pp 34-37

changes to the original conception of the show caused its makers, Three Stones Media, to turn down a co-production offer. They felt other bodies considered the concept as it stood to be too much of a risk in terms of content. For Three Stones Media the decision to go it alone in getting the idea 'out there' translated into a massive financial risk.

3.6.2 Limited funding for children's content

Evidence presented to the workshop by participants from various backgrounds indicated that lack of investment in children's media is a global problem. Makers of children's shows for the BBC said the budget for an equivalent show for adults would be three to four times bigger. In Jordan it was said that children's programmes attract neither advertising nor sponsorship. Even Roya TV, a private Jordanian channel with output that meets some public service criteria, has not been able to get investment in children's content, despite trying to persuade local businesses that it should be part of corporate social responsibility policies. The example of Arab channels keeping costs down by showing dubbed US or Japanese imports was cited as a problem because, according to a Syrian director, it 'doesn't represent the reality of the kids'.

However, UK producers did not place the blame on commissioners. Describing the commissioning process for *Where in the World?*, Dominic Sant said it was a 'brilliant experience', although he cautioned that 'there is only one market for a programme like *Where in the World?* And that is the BBC'. The idea stemmed from the company's experience of 'working in schools and with children all over the world in the last 15 years' and CBeebies reportedly saw the importance of 'showing the world' to UK children. The series aired in June 2017.

According to another producer, getting commissioning editors 'onside' was only half the job. That person then has to convince all the finance and marketing people in the organization and they are going to be less impressed by enthusiasm around a particular idea than by proof that something has a 'star name' attached or has already been sold successfully elsewhere. Animation is also more likely to get commissioned than live action, which is thought to be harder to sell on international markets.

A producer said that, ideally, 'you want a broadcaster for children that is happy to have big ratings but is also happy with a small rating that reaches a different part of the audience'. He said there was a 'real danger' that, if everything was measured solely on volume and mass, 'brilliant shows with smaller ratings' would be overlooked, even though they touch a 'part of the community or smaller groups that actually feel the show belongs to them'. Participants agreed that the implications of not funding content that teaches children about the world are serious.

One summed it up as follows:

Every region has a different economic environment, but we don't invest in our young people's minds like we're happy to invest in pure entertainment for adults [...] we don't put investment in media that are going to build the planet's future. It's a massive problem.

3.7 Recommendations

- Create more opportunities for **open discussion** about children's content beyond industry events where the emphasis is on selling. Producers at the workshop said that even the Children's Global Media Summit was being presented as a market instead of a place where people can talk openly and share information about making the programmes that everyone at the workshop wanted to get made.
- Make more local content in which children **see others like themselves** on screen, as well as people from their localities and communities. This was illustrated in the workshop by confirmation from a Jordanian TV executive that Roya TV in Jordan could readily show the scenes about Hamza in *Where in the World?* to Jordanian children. Children newly arrived in Europe from Arab countries would benefit from seeing others like them adapting to their new environment and learning their rights.
- **Work with children, not for them.** A UK producer said stories should be written 'from a child's point of view'. A participant who works with the London-based Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) quoted the words of 10-year-old girls developing skills at the media centre of Shoruq, a non-governmental organization set up in Dheisheh refugee camp on the outskirts of Bethlehem. The girls made it clear: 'Let us do things ourselves or, if you insist, work with us, do not work for us'.
- **Know more** about different notions of childhood across the world and about the previous media experiences of refugee children arriving in Europe, which include images of western culture they have consumed through US movies and sitcoms that circulate on Arab TV. As a UK producer put it, 'We tried not to put an anglicised view of the world onto the child we were filming'.
- **Find similarities** between children who are new to a country and those already there. A US participant, who experienced migration as a child, said children arriving in a strange place feel empowered if they see themselves sharing something they know with their new friends, whether it's their music, drawing or something 'as simple as kicking a ball and scoring a goal, or helping to solve some kind of problem'.
- **Be mindful of ethics.** There are ethical implications in publicly touching on the painful past of young refugees. Children who have fled conflict and persecution are likely to have been subjected to traumatic experiences, but they are defined by more than their past. Workshop participants felt strongly about a television scene in which a boy from Syria was asked about his missing father. One summed up the group's feeling by saying: 'We just opened such a tough issue. They [the TV crew] were asking him about very, very sensitive issues. When you, as a social worker, journalist or lawyer, open an issue you should be able to close it. Who is going to close this?'.

4 COPENHAGEN WORKSHOP BRIEFING

4.1 Reaching young children in northern Europe with factual content about forced migration

Iraqi, Syrian and other refugees and migrants who undertake dangerous journeys to Europe are often viewed as a set of statistics: numbers of people drowned in the Mediterranean; asylum seekers by country of origin and country of application; separated families seeking reunification; and unaccompanied minors. Yet it is often forgotten that Europe has a long history of forced migration. The

15th and 16th centuries saw Jews and Muslims expelled from Spain, and Huguenots expelled from France. The 20th century saw millions forced to leave their homes because of invasion, persecution or deportation. In some cases, such as the Nazi occupation of Greece and the former Yugoslavia, refugees from Europe sought safety by heading south, to Egypt or Syria. In the 21st century, in the face of Taliban militancy in Afghanistan, the US-led invasion of Iraq, political upheaval across the Arab region, and violent conflict in Syria, the direction of flight has been reversed. In thinking about how we reach young children with stories about migration, it is worth remembering that these past European experiences of dislocation are often overlooked by European media, which instead report the 'hostile environment' created by European governments around immigration - a 'hostile environment' that fosters insecurities about potential removal if you are unable to prove or obtain citizenship.

Nevertheless, for most Europeans, filmed reports are the most accessible way to find out about forced migration, and the same is true for children, who can be introduced to stories of refugee children or children whose parents were refugees. Equally important, however, are opportunities for children of refugee or migrant heritage to see themselves on screen. This is happening in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, which count significant numbers of refugees among their populations, including thousands of Syrians who arrived in 2014-16, as they escaped civil war. In 2015, Syrians accounted for 43 per cent of asylum applications in the Netherlands, 41 per cent in Denmark, 35 per cent in Norway and 33 per cent in Sweden, while 63 per cent of applications in Finland were from Iraqis.²⁴ With many children among the recent arrivals, how have producers of children's screen content in these countries reflected the stories of children who were born in Syria, Iraq, Palestine or elsewhere?

4.1.1 Overview of relevant factual content for young children

This workshop briefing, the second in a series of three, is part of a project focused on the representation of refugee and migrant children in European screen content for children. Hosted by the Danish Film Institute (DFI) on 19 and 20 March 2018 as part of the annual Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, CPH:DOX, two half-day workshops offered an opportunity to explore how the topic is handled in children's content made in Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK and Germany. In all these countries, screen content that focuses on children newly arrived in Europe is rare. The few examples to touch upon these issues are commissioned and broadcast predominantly by public service broadcasters (PSBs), including Danmarks Radio (DR, Denmark), Nederlands Publieke Omroep (NPO, Netherlands), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, UK) and Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF, Germany). In Denmark, the DFI, Denmark's national body for supporting film and cinema, is involved in the funding and distribution of children's content to a significant extent.

These funding patterns reflect the strong tradition of public service broadcasting in these countries, including mechanisms for making and screening children's content. For example, Denmark has two publicly funded channels for children, DR-Ramasjang for preschoolers and DR Ultra for older children. In the Netherlands, most children's content airs as a block for preschoolers (Zappelin) and a block for older children (Zapp) on the NPO3 channel, and this content is repeated on the digital channel, NPO Zapp Xtra. Since free-to-air private broadcasters across Europe have drastically scaled back their commitment

²⁴ Phillip Connor/Pew Research Center, *Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 million in 2015*, report released 2 August, 2016, p 21, <https://pewrsr.ch/2wwWN4J>

to children's content over the past decade, PSBs are virtually the only commissioners of domestically-produced children's programmes.²⁵ However, PSBs face competitive pressures from US transnationals, such as Disney, Viacom and Time Warner, and from online platforms such as YouTube (see Section 3.2.1).

The Copenhagen workshops discussed formats that inform children through factual representations rather than fiction, because we were hosted by CPH:DOX, a documentary festival. Films ranged in length from 12 to 24 minutes, and some have been screened at film festivals, including CPH:DOX, and in schools rather than on television. The workshop series is designed to facilitate discussion between those in Europe who regulate, commission, fund, produce or comment on children's content and invited Arab expert practitioners with experience of children's media. The programming we selected is for children aged under 12, in line with broadcaster assumptions about who watches their shows, but also reflecting the small amounts of relevant content made for this age group, as opposed to adolescents.

We organised our workshop clips in line with two themes chosen by the Children and Youth Section of CPH:DOX, namely 'escaping' (**PÅ FLUGT**) and 'democracy' (**DEMOKRATI**). Starting with these broad themes, we then divided the material according to the more specific themes that emerged during workshop discussions.

4.2. Challenges of funding and distribution

The workshops highlighted the many challenges that exist for European producers when creating content that speaks to the communication needs of children newly arrived in Europe. In fact, European broadcasters and governments have a legal obligation to ensure that this content is commissioned and distributed. Article 17 of the United Nations' Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) declares: 'States Parties ... shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health'.

Our previous research project revealed that children in Arab countries enjoy local screen content that engages with issues affecting their own lives and experiences if it is available.²⁶ When asked in creative workshops to construct their own schedules they also chose a diverse range of content including drama, news, quizzes, documentaries and sitcoms, reflecting a 'public service sensibility'. However, this is not what they get in practice, because Arab-owned children's channels are saturated with imported animation, which is cheap to buy and offers the opportunity to censor culturally sensitive content such as references to alcohol and relationships.²⁷ Across the region only Moroccan and Lebanese broadcasters are required to broadcast content aimed specifically at children, but these regulations are rarely observed. In their home countries, Arab children have not had access to large amounts of domestic content, and what they have

²⁵ Jeanette Steemers and Feryal Awan, *Policy Solutions and International Perspectives on the Funding of Public Media Service Content for Children: A Report for Stakeholders*, May 2016, p.51, <https://bit.ly/2rAtpEY>

²⁶ Naomi Sakr, Jeanette Steemers et al, *Orientations in the development of screen media for Arabic-speaking children: Findings Report*. London: Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster, 2015, pp 15-16.

²⁷ Feryal Awan and Jeanette Steemers, 'Arab and Western perspectives on childhood and children's media provision', in Naomi Sakr and Jeanette Steemers (eds) *Children's TV and Digital Media in the Arab World: Childhood, Screen Culture and Education*, London: I B Tauris 2017, pp 34-37.

seen is often heavily didactic and dominated by adults in ways that undermine children's agency and fail to promote critical thinking and progressive values.

4.2.1 Subsidies' impact on know-how

The above observations indicate that European content producers have ample potential for providing material that is both novel and interesting to children caught up in forced migration. But their biggest hurdles in doing so are securing both a commission and finance; with most productions reliant on subsidies, this is not getting any easier. In many European countries, local children's content is commissioned almost exclusively by PSB channels with few alternative sources of funding.²⁸ Denmark operates a small public service fund, *Public Service Puljen*, which is available to commercial broadcasters, and at least 25% of this fund has to be spent on children's content.²⁹ The DFI is obliged to spend 25 percent of its programming budget on children's content, which according to one DFI representative, resulted in a sufficient number of films for people in the film industry to accumulate 'more knowledge and experience [so] that they become better'. A Swedish participant noted that Sweden had a similar system and a commissioning editor for children's film, but removal of the position led to a decline in applications, with a decline to zero when the 25 per cent obligation was removed, leading to its reintroduction. In the Netherlands, film funding is available from organisations such as the NPO Public Broadcasting Media Fund and The Netherlands Film Fund.³⁰ Director Susan Koenen secured funding for *Het Haar van Ahmad* from the Dutch Cultural Media Fund before it closed in 2017.³¹ Filmmakers complain about the difficulties of obtaining public funds because of lengthy and bureaucratic application procedures. One Danish producer said he had given up on applying for public funding altogether, because of the time and labour involved in getting partial funding, which is never given upfront. For his company, it was easier to negotiate corporate sponsorship deals – for example, with Facebook and Google. Yet this carried risks of content being diluted by commercial priorities.

The Swedish organisation, The Financing Forum for Kids Content, aims to address some of these challenges. Projects participating in the Financing Forum are pitched to a number of suitable and significant decision makers, who in turn might offer support with funding. According to its Creative Director, Annette Breijner, the Financing Forum presented 23 projects from 14 countries for funding in the last year, including documentaries for children, where diversity is a key issue. However, she added producers need to have a marketing strategy in place from the start:

The producer must know your target group and the mechanisms of marketing the film and build an audience. You can design your audience, thinking from a very early stage [...] which helps to reach your target group. Because that does not come by itself, but you can help build a taste in children just how you can help them learn how to appreciate a good meal and quality standards.

²⁸ Steemers and Awan, *Policy Solutions*, p.51.

²⁹ Steemers and Awan, *Policy Solutions*, p.51.

³⁰ The Netherlands Film Fund is the national agency responsible for supporting film production and film related activities in the Netherlands.

³¹ <https://www.government.nl/topics/the-media-and-broadcasting/funds-for-the-media>

Some producers have sought support from charities, but this can bring other problems. According to a Dutch producer, 'NGOs don't necessarily know about media, how it works.... So, they want to be in it and wave their flags and banners and stuff like that. So, you have a huge problem making a real documentary without them being on top of it'. A representative from a UK NGO pointed out that funding agencies constantly wanted producers 'to prove to them how media have impact', not appreciating that impact can emerge ten years later. Although it was difficult to measure impact, a Danish representative argued that 'We have to become better in sharpening the arguments for why it's making a difference'.

4.2.2 The YouTube syndrome

One growing and major obstacle in funding children's factual content is the increasing difficulty of attracting young audiences to watch children's broadcast content. Broadcasters are losing young audiences to online platforms, particularly YouTube, where getting children to watch documentaries is, according to a Danish broadcaster, 'hard'. A Dutch filmmaker added that children who have migrated to Europe from Arab countries are primarily watching YouTube and adult news content because they have grown up watching satellite TV in their countries of origin. Distribution and the ability to reach out to audiences was now a key factor. As one Danish producer remarked:

I never met a funder who said: "I will not promote diversity". But the problem is the distribution. The problem is that they [commissioners] are very scared of throwing their money towards something that is not being used, which is understandable. What we're facing in Denmark is that Flow TV is going for the lowest common denominator and is turning TV into a candy store and cheap thrills, competing with cat videos in a way.

Children still watch a lot of linear television on a TV set, but this audience is declining as children's viewing shifts to on-demand online content on tablets and mobile phones. A 2017 study by the UK regulator, Ofcom, suggests that UK children's viewing (aged 5-15) of linear TV on a TV set had declined from just under 16 hours a week in 2007 to 14 hours ten years later.³² Older children, in particular, are spending more time online, with 8-11 year olds and 12-15 year olds in the UK spending over 13 hours and 20 hours online a week respectively.³³ This represents a challenge for broadcasters, but online distribution is not always the answer. According to an Arab participant working for an NGO, if 'there is no funding or actually someone dedicated to distributing it online and finding channels, then nobody watches it'. An experienced Danish director added that there are 'a lot of films ... produced in Denmark focusing on diversity and those films live a very, very lonely life on some internet platforms by an NGO. It really is a little bit of a waste'.

Reflecting on factual content, a Scandinavian PSB executive added: 'the issue is that we don't know how to use them'. Apart from schools and cinemas, this PSB had 'few good examples of how documentaries like these work on what we call VOD (video on demand) which is where we meet our target group, which is children aged 7-12'. He suggested that most of his target audience – children aged 7-12 – watch

³² Ofcom, *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report*, London: Ofcom, 2017, p. 28.

³³ Ofcom, p. 25.

entertainment and animation on YouTube and commercial channels, which makes it difficult for them to 'sell' documentaries focused on flight and diversity. Some short-form content about forced migration was shown in children's news bulletins and these were used to attract children to other stories. But distributing factual content was challenging because 'children don't choose to watch documentaries. We have a few, but we have far more examples of these not working, trying to get them to watch documentaries themselves. They don't is the short answer. They click on entertainment and fiction even on the public broadcasting website'. In his view 'the biggest market right now' for documentaries was schools.

The exception was *Hassan og Ramadanen*, which DR released as a web series of 17 shorter episodes on YouTube in 2017 and on the DFI's website, Film Centralen, as a 40-minute documentary. *Hassan og Ramadanen* did 'exceptionally well on YouTube', racking up approximately 100,000 views per episode. A DR executive said, 'we don't know why'. Such lack of knowledge about what child audiences view and value reflects the failure of audience measurement and evaluation in a rapidly evolving viewing landscape.³⁴ This lack of data stands in stark contrast to subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) services (Netflix) and social media (Facebook), which rely on proprietary data, guided by algorithms, to push popular content to child consumers.

In the view of an Arab representative working for an NGO, it might anyway be a mistake to always assume that children only watch short-form content, because they often view other children on YouTube for periods of over half an hour on topics that really interest them. A Swedish industry representative, active in marketing and development, pointed out that children are drawn to factual content because they are 'extremely interested in politics and how the world is put together', but they also want to make 'their voices heard and have influence'. It was up to adults to put documentaries into the schedules. A Lebanese producer suggested that children in the Arab world might be watching less television simply because there is 'nothing on TV that talks to them'. Echoing the success of *Hassan og Ramadanen*, she pointed to the success of the Lebanese web-based youth series *Shankaboot*, commissioned by BBC Media Action.³⁵ *Shankaboot* proved popular on YouTube and social media because it addressed issues that affect young people, such as drugs, relationships and gun crime.

While television and online distribution could be described as complementary, some attendees argued that linear television and film festivals are no longer an effective means of distributing factual content to children, and that producers should also consider online platforms and community screenings. Several workshop participants argued that it is not always easy to build an audience online. Websites and YouTube channels need to be maintained and promoted to ensure discovery by the audience. In a radical departure, a producer from a Danish advertising company claimed that they experienced no difficulties in promoting content online, but that online distribution strategies often require a compromise between 'dumbing down' the quality and successful online marketing. According to him, 'getting people to see anything is actually quite easy'. In his view promoting material on Facebook or YouTube was easier and faster than going through 'a two-year-round of funding and then hope that it'll go on television'.

³⁴ Sonia Livingstone and Claire Local, 'Measurement matters: difficulties in defining and measuring children's television viewing in a changing media landscape', *Media International Australia*, 63 (1), 67-76.

³⁵ *Shankaboot*, an interactive web-based video series filmed in and around Beirut, Lebanon, was the first web series drama in the Arab world.

4.2.3. 'I miss the voice of the children'

European producers revealed that it is often difficult to identify the kind of screen content children want to see, and even more difficult for children newly arrived in Europe. A DR audience researcher reported that it is particularly hard to conduct research with small target groups, such as refugee children, who are not easy to reach. Other workshop participants suggested that children from minority ethnic backgrounds might not be interested in watching European TV, because these programmes rarely reflect their lives. For example, one participant with a Syrian background, living in Denmark with her own children, remarked that the voices of children are often missing in content produced for them. She suggested that children are too often framed by the perspectives of adult producers.

The lack of programmes featuring refugee children is linked to a wider lack of diversity in European media industries. People with minority backgrounds are rarely to be found occupying positions as directors, editors, and broadcasters.³⁶ Moreover, as one Danish academic pointed out, children's programmes in Denmark and Sweden are often embedded within Scandinavian concepts of the child and childhood, which, at times, clash with the 'more conservative' understandings of childhood that exist within families who have recently taken up residence in Europe.³⁷

4.2.4. Cinemas and schools

One way to give young refugee children a 'voice' is to involve them in production. In 2017, the Cinekid film festival in the Netherlands ran a project, *Cinekid Inclusive*, that sought to involve children from marginalised backgrounds in producing short films distributed in cinemas. In cooperation with *One Minutes Jr*, Cinekid produced 11 films of 60 seconds duration, which were made with the participation of children in Dutch refugee camps. During a one-week workshop as part of a pop-up Cinekid festival during the school summer holidays, children living in asylum centers worked with the assistance of adult facilitators, some of whom spoke Arabic. They made films that display a range of topics and formats, choosing their own subjects and style, from the difficulties of settling into a new society (*Aya*), to comedy, and mother-child relationships, not just migration. Cinekid subsequently showed the films at the Cinekid festival, at which the young filmmakers were also present. Since April 2018, they have also been included as trailers before children's films at the Eye Film Museum in Amsterdam and may in future be seen on TV.

Video initiatives like *The One Minutes Jr* underline the importance of the participatory filmmaking process. However, some Arab participants were concerned about the psychological effects of children reliving their experiences as refugees, although one Arab producer thought it could be a form of therapy. Others were concerned about the power dynamics between the children and the adult facilitators in making production choices. Two Syrian-born participants suggested that the decision to make the films in asylum centres might have prompted children to focus more on their experiences of forced migration, when working together with European-born children might have prompted a broader range of topics.

³⁶ This issue also emerged in the first workshop in the series, held in Manchester, in the UK. See pp 9-10 of the workshop report at <https://euroarabchildrensmedia.org/manchester-workshop-report>

³⁷ See also Feryal Awan and Jeanette Steemers, 'Arab and Western perspectives on childhood and children's media provision', in Naomi Sakr and Jeanette Steemers (eds) *Children's TV and Digital Media in the Arab World: Childhood, Screen Culture and Education*, London: I B Tauris 2017, pp 25-28.

While *The One Minutes Jr* series was successfully distributed in cinemas, Cinekid's representative noted that, in the Netherlands, children themselves do not generally choose to watch documentaries. Another distribution avenue, also heavily used in Denmark, are schools. For example, the DFI runs a streaming service for [schools](#) and produces study guides for shows like *Hassan og Ramadanen* and *Tro Håb Afghanistan*, which are shown as part of the school curriculum. In the Netherlands, documentary films for children are gathered together on broadcaster NPO's website [Zapp Echt Gebeurd](#) (Zapp Really Happened), which school teachers can freely access.



The advantages of screening documentaries at film festivals and in schools are that these exhibition spaces allow for face-to-face discussions. After the premier of *Een jaar zonder mijn ouders* at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), for example, children in the audience were able to discuss the film with the director and Tarek, the film's subject, who was present at the screening.

Tarek from *Een Jaar zonder mijn ouders*, dir. Els van Driel

4.2.5 EU funds serving children in refugee camps

The workshop learned of a current BBC Media Action project for children affected by forced migration to be funded by the European Union (EU). The project is aimed at connecting displaced Syrian children in all parts of the world. Targeting children aged 3-5 years, 6-12 years, and 12-16 years, BBC Media Action plans to produce 20 five-minute videos for each age group, working with local production companies and advisers, including drama consultants and psychologists. The EU has so far funded a pilot in Lebanon, with further funding dependent on its outcomes. With half a million Syrian children currently living in Lebanon and 59 percent of these outside of formal education, BBC Media Action's pilot is educational and seeks to address numeracy and literacy for 3-5 year-olds as well as life skills (based on Unesco/Unicef frameworks) and psychosocial support for the older age groups. Focus groups are being used to identify children's media preferences and the best method of distribution. Distribution is likely to be through online channels and community screenings in collaboration with NGOs, community groups, and schools, because Syrian children are not watching much TV. A major challenge has been the EU's requirement of demonstrable impacts in the short term. While it is easy to estimate the impact of aid when it is in the form of vaccines, it is difficult to predict and demonstrate the practical outcomes of media content that addresses topics such as child rights, citizenship and tolerance. This kind of 'impact' is not easy to measure, not least because it is likely to be long term.

4.3. Putting flight into perspective

4.3.1 Life vests and rubber dinghies

Workshop discussions centred on the ways in which children who are forced to leave their homes should be represented on screen. This emerged first in relation to films about children's lives in refugee camps as well as their experiences of fleeing.

4.3.2 To label or not to label?

A constant theme that emerged in the workshop was whether the media should focus on children's forced migration journeys at all, revealing some differences between European and Arab participants. Some with forced migration backgrounds suggested moving away from children's journeys because this too often constructs a narrative of victimhood where European-born children are 'us' and newly arrived children, being singled out as a separate group, are 'the other'.³⁸ Labeling newly arrived children as 'refugees', 'migrants', or 'asylum seekers' was felt to reinforce such binaries. However, it was also stressed that content about escape, and children's experiences of conflict and migration, plays a vital role in educating European-born children about the reasons why many Arab families have recently arrived in Europe. One Danish academic said: 'We could do it differently, sure, we could do it in many ways. [...] I think it's really important that we address it. I think it's an obligation on society, because it's been such a huge problem for the last five years'. A participant who fled Syria and now resides in Denmark added that it could eventually be therapeutic for children to confront the traumatic experiences of their transit, but that this was not something to undertake soon after their arrival. On the contrary, it could take several years for them to be ready to talk about what happened. A Lebanese participant, who works with a UK NGO, suggested lessons could be learnt from ways that other forms of diversity are shown, such as disability. 'They try very hard to not make a big deal out of being disabled'. She suggested the same could apply to refugee children who are 'now a section of society and they are normal kids'.

4.3.3 Advantages of the documentary genre

Previous intrusive journalistic practices in conflict zones represent a significant hurdle in terms of media access. A BBC Media Action representative, who has worked in refugee camps in Lebanon, recounted that refugees often resist being filmed by journalists in the camps. She said: 'people are just like: "Go away. Don't come and see us". They don't want you there. They're sick of people coming and looking at them'. It was acknowledged that journalists often depicted life in refugee camps in sensationalist ways, without exploring more personal, nuanced stories.

Some participants felt that the problem with the story of escape is not the escape as such, but negative coverage of it. The alternative, open to makers of documentary films, is to re-tell individual stories in a detailed, personalized and sensitive way. One Danish researcher, who has interviewed many immigrants and refugees in Denmark, revealed that people with forced migration backgrounds are often very willing to share positive experiences of their journeys to Denmark with others. She said:

You can actually try to re-tell the story of escape, so it's not only a negative story but also a positive story, because people love to tell it. If you ask [immigrants and refugees in Denmark] about a positive story related to the flight, they love to tell their story. They love to tell their story about how long it took to come to Denmark, but I can also recognise that they don't want to tell the story that just repeats the stigmatisation. So I think there is a dilemma but also a possibility to re-narrate the story.

³⁸ See also p. 6 of the *Manchester Workshop Briefing* report from the first project workshop in Manchester, at <https://euroarabchildrensmedia.org/manchester-workshop-report>

4.3.4 Going 'home'

Some of the films discussed during the workshops constructed different meanings of 'home' for children. Even when children have moved to another country, they may still be hoping to return to where they came from or, alternatively, seeking to escape from cultural and societal pressures. The short video *Nuzuh* (Displacement), which is streamed on Oxfam International's website, presents interviews with Yemeni children living in Malaysia, who are asked whether they would like to return to their homes in the Yemeni capital, Sana'a. All of them say 'yes' and explain enthusiastically that they miss things like going to ballet classes, wearing traditional dress, and sleeping in their own bedrooms. *Nuzuh's* emphasis on the children's desire to return to Yemen was seen by one Lebanese producer as presenting a 'very powerful message' for Europeans, namely, that displaced people 'don't want to integrate, they don't want anything from you'. 'All they want is the war to stop so they can go back'.

There were other interpretations, however. A Syrian participant living in Denmark suggested that younger children are more likely to want to return home, because they associate 'home' with spaces, toys, and clothes 'in their familiar atmosphere'. By contrast, older children who have lived longer in a different country are more likely to struggle with questions of identity, because they 'will not be typical Yemenis or typical Syrians and also not Danish or Europeans'. These children are less likely to want to 'go back' if that means having to 'start from zero, a new school, new friends'.

To some, the interviews in *Nuzuh* seemed staged, almost 'like an advertisement', with the children smartly dressed and their statements indicating a middle-class background. They are certainly not representative of all Yemeni children, most of whom are unable to escape the country. As one participant pointed out, there are currently 2 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in Yemen.³⁹ Several responses suggested that, similar to corporate sponsorship, humanitarian agencies' support of screen content can sometimes lead to problematic filmmaking practices and one-sided stories, which exploit children to raise money for their cause.

'Home should be where life makes sense'

Discussions about the Danish documentary, *Laylas Melodi*, called into question the very idea that 'home' is necessarily a place to which displaced children unequivocally want to return. This short documentary focuses on Layla, an 11-year-old Afghan girl who lives in a Kabul orphanage, placed there by her uncle, while her mother lives in the rural mountains. Layla misses her mother badly but does not seek to return to her village, which is under Taliban control, because she fears that, once there, she will no longer be able to go to school or play music, and that she may be forced to get married. As one Syrian workshop participant commented, *Laylas Melodi* 'gives the message that sometimes [...] home should be where life makes sense, not where your mother lives. That's not what home means. What home means for this intelligent girl is where she has a life'.

³⁹ <https://bit.ly/2jQ1fly>

4.4 Ethical risks of exploiting vulnerability

4.4.1 When is 'close' too close?

Workshop discussions frequently returned to the ethical dimensions of documenting children's experiences of flight in documentaries and news. Some European participants saw films that get close to children in refugee camps, such as *Ferie på Flygtningeøen* and *Hello Salaam*, as an opportunity to allow European children to 'get to know what others experience'. Other participants, however, both European and Arab, perceived this approach as a potential violation of children's rights. On a practical level, we learned that revealing children's identities and experiences of escape can also put them at risk of prosecution if they have arrived illegally in Europe.

Discussions surrounding *Ferie på Flygtningeøen* brought some of the ethical challenges to the fore. The workshop clips showed how a ten-year-old Danish boy, Alvin (the director's son), visits a refugee camp while on holiday on Samos. Filmed with a smart phone, Alvin is shown meeting children in the camps and handing them sweets, before he is interrupted by a guard, and we learn that he and his father subsequently spent five and a half hours at the police station. The workshop heard that the filmmaker and his son entered the camp without having sought permission beforehand, which some participants saw as infringement of the children's privacy. There was a sense, including among Syrians in the room, that people in refugee camps do not want to be filmed because they feel ashamed of their situation. One also expressed concern about the film's psychological impact on Alvin, but the film's director reassured everyone that there had been no adverse effects on his son. He said the 'main story behind the film is why can't [the refugees] fly where they want? We fly on holiday down there. It's asked many times in the movie: Why can't they move like we do?'

The director said he had wanted to allow the documentary to unfold from the perspective of a child, by 'letting the children themselves be the stars', rather than imposing an adult perspective. He was interested in 'how we tell the world the truth, not for the grown-ups', but stated also: 'it's a European view for European children to understand and get close to the problematic. It's not made for migrant children'. He explained that children who watched the film in Danish cinemas wanted to know more about Alvin's detention by police and his encounters with children in the camp. A Danish-Egyptian participant saw the film as a portrait of the current refugee crisis that offers an alternative perspective to often 'simple' news coverage.

4.4.2 The pitfalls of standing too far back

Discussions also revealed issues arising when filmmakers were thought to be 'standing too far back'. The BBC Newsround episode, *Ayshah meets child refugees in Greece*, comprises short interviews with displaced youths whose faces are concealed and whose background stories are not further explored. Participants suggested that the programme keeps such a distance from the children it documents that it 'dehumanizes' them, making it difficult for children viewing to find points of identification. Similarly, a clip from German children's news *ZDF Logo!*, explaining the distribution of refugees in the EU through a series of graphic diagrams, was perceived as too abstract, because it avoided showing any of the human side of forced migration.

How then can filmmakers strike a balance between revealing too much and revealing too little? One Danish participant working for an NGO, summed up the tensions as follows:

This is exactly the dilemma, because now you are so distant that you're not harming anyone. So, if you get closer, then you're starting to harm people. So, you need to find the right balance. [...] Are you showing some [life] vests, then you go straight to the stomach of people, or do you have a guy sitting from the back talking to her face about how awful it is and you don't get any feelings? I'm not saying one thing is better than the other, just that there is a balance to find.

4.4.3 Films that change policy

Some documentaries are made with a political goal in mind, for example to critique European asylum policy and the social stigmatisation of children with minority backgrounds. The workshop considered the video campaign #JegErDansk, which was made for politicians, not children, but features young children being visibly confused and upset.

The video was made by a Danish advertising company, Gorilla Media, to challenge a statement issued by the Danish Parliament in February 2017, which suggested that 'Danes' should not be in a minority in Danish neighbourhoods. The statement read: 'today there are areas in Denmark where the proportion of immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries is over 50 percent'. This phrasing seemed to imply a contradiction between being Danish and being descended from non-Western immigrants. In the video, six Danish children with migration backgrounds are asked where they are from and all reply that they are Danish. When told that they are not Danes, the children appear shaken and disturbed and one girl bursts into tears. #JegErDansk went viral after being viewed over 1.5 million times within 24 hours of its release on Facebook. The Danish Parliament then changed its initial statement to be more inclusive, but meanwhile the film-makers came in for criticism from politicians and the public, partly on ethical grounds.

Ethical concerns were also voiced at the workshop. The film's producers explained that the children were all related to, or connected to, the filming team and had been happy to take part. A Syrian teacher doubted whether the film's positive political outcome justified the problematic ways in which it was made. But one of the producers explained that, immediately after filming, the children had started to articulate their own experiences of discrimination. Teachers subsequently took up the issue at school by introducing an assignment on 'What does it mean to be Danish?'

There was evidence from workshop participants that Danish-speaking children from visible minorities regularly experience racism and stereotypical judgments from peers and even teachers, but that this kind of discrimination is not openly addressed. A Syrian resident said children could face 'two circles' of ghettoization, a physical one imposed by the country and one created by their own families. One of the video producers said: 'We don't talk about the identity crises that children who don't look white in Denmark have. I had that when I was a child. I was hurt. People: say: "You're not Danish". ... I felt that with time it would change. It didn't, it became worse.'

4.4.4 Getting the distance right

The workshop discussed how filmmakers can achieve a balance between producing films that individualise children without harming them or portraying them as victims. Participants appreciated the documentary *Een Jaar zonder mijn ouders* as a non-sensationalist, balanced portrait of Tareq, who fled Syria to the Netherlands with his uncle and cousin. His parents could not join him until more than a year later.

The film's director, Els van Driel, recalled that, at first, Tareq did not want to speak about his experience of flight to his classmates, which she attributed to a desire to fit in with his Dutch peers and 'be a normal guy'. An Arab participant, herself a former refugee, added that keeping silent about bad experiences might reflect a cultural background that teaches people 'they should be strong, they should be normal, their sadness must just be inside them'. Van Driel recounted that, when Tareq did speak about his experience for the film, it turned out to be helpful for him because his peers supported him emotionally afterwards.

Van Driel chose to tell the story of Tareq's flight in the film, because she felt it was important for Dutch children to hear about it. However, the film's main focus is on Tareq's new life in the Netherlands while he is waiting for his parents to come, and the responsibility this places on his young shoulders. In one key scene, Tareq and his cousin Usama are seen chatting in Arabic at the swimming pool about how they like the big pools in the Netherlands and 'that there is no war'. Van Driel explained that she deliberately kept the camera at a distance so as not to influence their conversation.

A Lebanese producer commented on how genuine the scene felt and participants generally commended the depiction of Tareq as a confident, popular boy with a sense of humour. Some noted how one scene, set in Tarek's school, depicts a Dutch boy as very dependent on his mother (he claims that she cleans his teeth braces), while Tareq is represented as independent.

4.5 Sharing knowledge across borders

4.5.1 Sharing cultural knowledge

Some Danish participants in the workshop lamented the fact that news is virtually the only genre focused on the Arab world that is easily accessible for Danish audiences, and that it too often reflects an anti-immigration political agenda. By contrast, films and television programmes from the Middle East are rarely shown on European screens. This leaves a large gap in knowledge about Arab culture, which Arab participants were very keen to see filled. Culturally aware and sensitive films about children with migration backgrounds offer an opportunity for both European-born children and adults to better understand Arab culture and values. A Danish producer said:

I think the important part here is to counter the stereotyping that you have in the mainstream media and by that enable the children to also be able to talk to their parents, because you see everything just coming out in the mainstream media, and especially here in Denmark, with a certain political agenda. If you don't tell the full picture to the children, you can absolutely be sure they will feel the same as their parents.

4.5.1.1 THE EXPERIENCE OF RAMADAN

The Danish public broadcaster DR's web series *Hassan og Ramadanen* covers the practice of fasting during Ramadan. It unfolds from the perspective of ten-year-old Hassan, who decides to fast for the first time like his older brothers and parents. The majority of workshop participants found that *Hassan og Ramadanen* shows Muslim values and practices in a positive light, and teaches children about Ramadan in an entertaining way. Similar to the responses to *Een jaar zonder mijn ouders*, participants suggested that *Hassan og Ramadanen* was not only a programme about Ramadan, but also a portrait of a boy who has a sense of humour, is strong-willed, and wants to challenge himself. Participants welcomed the fact that *Hassan og Ramadanen* addresses issues around identity, showing that Hassan and his father see themselves as both Danish and Iraqi. A clip was shown in which Hassan asks his father which side he would take if Denmark was at war with Germany. His father responds that he would join the Danish army, as his family, house and work are located in Denmark.

Participants from Syria and Egypt remarked on the way religion and food are often taken as proxies for culture, when culture is potentially much richer than religious practice or 'exotic meals'. Other media professionals, however, suggested that religion forms an important part of life for many Arab families in Denmark, and non-Muslim children ought to understand and respect Muslim religious practices. DR promoted learning about Islam by inviting schools to Ramadan parties. A Danish media professional noted that this approach countered the kind of resentment that emerged in 2016 when a Danish town [voted](#) to require day care centres' and kindergartens' lunch menus to include pork meatballs, a traditional Danish meal that Muslim children are not permitted to eat. Some public institutions for children in Denmark had excluded pork dishes and required all meat to be *halal* (slaughtered according to Islamic practice).

4.5.1.2 DIVERSITY AND FRIENDSHIP – 'IT'S NOT EXPLICIT IN THE FILM'

The workshop revealed that films that do not make forced migration their main focus, but concentrate on other aspects of children's lives, can be particularly useful for teaching tolerance of other cultures. The Dutch documentary *Heijplaters* concentrates on the similarities between five children of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Turkish, Syrian, Chinese, Suriname, and Dutch; see image), who live in the harbour district of Rotterdam. Rather than making the boys' demographic backgrounds the major focus of the narrative, the film focuses on activities they do together, such as swimming in the harbour, listening to music and rapping, and playing football. Mirjam Marks, the film's director, explained that she deliberately sought to make a film that focuses on the boys' friendships, rather than their differences. She said:

... how I formulated it is that it's not explicit in the film, because I don't like to do it that way. It's about friendship in times of polarisation. That's an issue all over in the Netherlands. My thoughts behind it were ... with the news and everything, there is so much attention, especially from adults, on differences among people from different cultural backgrounds or beliefs. But there are so many equal things far more than difference, I think. Children say: "do you want to play football, let's play football," and they don't ask "where are your parents from, where do they live?" or things like that. So that was the underlying reason. I found this group and I made the film - to look at them, without the moral finger.

Some participants remarked that the positive depiction of diversity in a Dutch community sets a good example for children. One saw the film as offering an unusual pro-migration argument by demonstrating that the children benefit from increasing their friendship group when new families arrive in town.

The documentary film *Ahmad's Hair* was also perceived by one participant as 'showing diversity without naming it'. The film focuses on Ahmad, a Syrian boy recently arrived in the Netherlands, who grows his hair in order to donate it to a sick child. Susan Koenen, the director, explained that she wanted to show that Syrian families are in fact not so different from Dutch families, in response to what she saw as rising anti-Muslim attitudes in the Netherlands. As a UK participant observed, Ahmad's family are highly supportive and caring. In one scene, when Ahmad is fed up with his long hair, his father tries to cheer him up. In another, Ahmad's younger sister shows him how easily she makes new friends. In this way, the film introduces the subject of diversity by focusing on human qualities and family life rather than the concept of 'diversity' itself. We see Ahmad grow in confidence and overcome his shyness as his knowledge of Dutch improves and he begins to make new friends.

4.5.2 Sharing political knowledge

4.5.2.1 ASYLUM PROCESSES

In addition to *#JegErDansk* (see Section 4.3), the workshop discussed another film that explores the political aspects of European immigration policy, namely, *Asylbarn: Jamila if only I could fly*. Part-funded by the Danish Red Cross and the DFI, this film combines real-life settings with animation, focusing on two girls, Jamila and Cecilie, who are friends in a refugee camp until Cecilie's family is deported. The film was aimed at children aged 6-9 and has been distributed in schools, accompanied by study guides made by the DFI. Workshop participants saw *Jamila* as an opportunity for introducing both Danish and immigrant children to the political processes surrounding asylum. One producer with a migration background remarked: 'I really liked it on a lot of levels [...] this is the way I would teach my child about Danish immigration policy. A lot of them are refugee children. I know that my daughter would love to see something like that. It's engaging [in] the timing, humour'. A UK participant remarked that the film also focuses on the less mundane experiences of children's lives in refugee camps, such as flirting with boys, dancing and making new friends.

A Dutch producer wondered whether children should be exposed to issues of immigration policy at such an early age. But a DFI representative, who produced educational packs to accompany the show, explained that even young children aged 6 to 8 are aware of these issues, because they have friends from other countries who sometimes face deportation.

4.5.2.2 'DEMOCRACY'

In line with CPH:DOX's theme of 'Democracy', the workshop explored both the meanings of democracy and how this concept has been, and should be, treated in films made for children. Although children recently arrived in Europe come from countries where democratic rights of freedom of expression and information are limited, our previous research with children in Lebanon and Morocco showed that they had a strong sense of ethics and justice, and what constitutes fair and unfair treatment in the children's shows they watched.

Workshop discussions revealed that 'democracy' is a term with a problematic history, especially given attempts at 'democracy promotion' in the Middle East by Western governments that spent decades supporting dictators. An Egyptian participant pointed out that children in the Arab region are not necessarily taught the same ideas about democracy as children in Europe, and that it might be better to avoid the term altogether, since it is often 'demonised' in Arab countries. A Danish producer concurred, describing attitudes towards democracy among people he had encountered in Kazakhstan, who had told him that they hoped the US would not introduce 'democracy' in their country as they had done in Iraq.

One participant suggested that children in Denmark were also losing faith in democracy after the recent US elections, and reports of media giants violating individual rights to privacy. She suggested that young people are growing up with 'big' questions about political structures. Another, from Sweden, suggested that adults too often try to address political issues from an adult rather than a child's perspective, stating:

I find that very often when we are discussing what we should show to children and share with them, it's a mental construction about what is good for them or suitable for them, but it's a mental construction that in fact is a way of trying to heal a wound in ourselves and not based on where children are. It's much more about ourselves and it's always a misunderstanding... if we are speaking about unfairness, discrimination and loss, we can speak to children about that. The only thing we cannot do is lie about it.

A Dutch filmmaker, who has worked with refugee groups in Europe, pointed out that many refugees get disillusioned about European democracy because they imagine it as the 'promised land where values of human rights and children's rights are respected' but encounter instead racism and exclusion. A Syrian-born participant explained that her young sons' interest in participating in local elections in Denmark was generated by an election candidate promising to build a new swimming pool and playgrounds rather than focusing on political issues. This contrasted sharply with her own childhood in Syria, where she wore military uniform at school and attended military training. Before she arrived in Denmark, she had never believed in voting, because 'our country' [Syria] had been 'stolen by the regime'. In contrast, her children were growing up with feelings about what it's like to be a citizen with a sense of allegiance to society.

4.5.2.3 TEACHING CITIZENSHIP

The Dutch documentary, *De Kinderburgemeester*, offers an example of 'democracy in practice' and children's role as citizens. The film follows Yassine, a Moroccan-Dutch boy, as he becomes children's mayor in Gouda for one year. He has two major aims: to get children from different ethnic groups to mix, and to meet his role model, the Moroccan-born mayor of Rotterdam, Ahmed Aboutaleb. The film's director, Susan Koenen, is developing educational materials so that the film can be shown in Dutch schools.

Workshop participants admired *De Kinderburgemeester* as a film that can raise the aspirations of children from ethnic minority backgrounds. One producer with an immigrant background remarked:

I really like the film. It shows that, even though you have another skin colour, you can still have dreams and be able to pursue them. When I was growing up, I was limited. If I said I wanted to do something [I was told] “why don't you do something else?” I really like the perspective that he might have a dream of being there one day and he's trying to pursue it.

Koenen explained that it was indeed her aim to make a film that would present a role model for Dutch children with Moroccan backgrounds and show them that they 'can be what they want to be'. She felt that Moroccans often struggle to get on in Dutch society, and that she 'really wanted for years to show a great Moroccan boy to be an example for other Moroccan kids, because there are not so many examples for them in society, only some soccer players, but not people in politics with high positions that are really taken seriously'. Her observations are borne out in a scene in which Aboutaleb tells Yassine that he will have to work 'extra' hard in life, as Dutch people often hold prejudices against people of Moroccan origin. Two Syrian participants wondered whether this scene might place unnecessary pressure on children. But Koenen said 'It's reality'. She had 'really wanted to wake up Dutch children without Moroccan background to know this. They don't know how it feels'.

Koenen clarified that the film shows the dialogue about needing to work extra hard without thereby endorsing the idea or intending to send that message. Differences then emerged over whether filmmakers should project a realistic or an idealistic picture when engaging with citizenship and democracy. One Syrian participant felt that Yassine fell short of being an appropriate role model for children when he did not immediately clap his successor enthusiastically at the point of handing the position over to her, his facial expression revealing his disappointment that his time as mayor had come to an end. But a Danish participant pointed out that it was entirely natural for a child not to feel good about another child winning. And a Lebanese producer said: 'Some people don't understand that we are filmmakers and we choose one interpretation and one angle. We cannot do everything you ask for'.

A Danish producer with an immigrant background found that responses to the film revealed conflicting conceptions of childhood, with some people believing that children need protection (a dominant perception in Arab countries) or others believing first and foremost in children's agency (a more dominant perception in European countries).

4.6 Under-representation of girls

4.6.1. Gender gap in numbers

The films discussed in the workshop focused predominantly on boys. In the 14 clips shown during the two mornings, only four featured girls as the main characters (*One Minutes Jr: Aya; Marwa; Laylas Melodi; Asylbarn: Jamila*), three featured both boys and girls (*BBC Newsround; Nuzuh; #JegErDansk*), one can be described as "unisex" (*ZDF Logo!*) and seven featured boys (*Hello Salaam; Ferie på Flygtningeøen; Een jaar zonder mijn ouders; Heijplaters; De Kinderburgemeester; Het Haar van Ahmad, and Hassan og Ramadan*).

The total screen time of the films shown in the workshops was 197 minutes, of which films with boys as main characters take up 160 minutes. Films featuring girls accounted for 28 of the 197 minutes, while films featuring boys and girls were only 9 minutes long.

4.6.2 Layla: a strong story

Workshop participants responded overwhelmingly positively to *Laylas Melodi*, from 2013, a short documentary about eleven-year-old Layla, who lives in a Kabul orphanage. *Laylas Melodi* is part of a series of five films about different children in Afghanistan and their daily lives. Participants noted that Layla is a strong and independent character who resists societal and cultural norms by playing music (forbidden under the Taliban), going to school, and deciding that she prefers to live in an orphanage rather than returning to her home village where she risks having to get married. Layla's strong will and courage are indicative in statements she makes throughout the film, such as 'I'd rather be in prison than stop playing [music]' and 'if I find a man he has to let me do what I want'.

Laylas Melodi was seen as a positive example of filmmaking because it allows the audience to connect with the main character on an emotional and personal level, which one person described as 'eye level'. A Swedish participant said: 'When I see her, I remember things from my past and growing up, what I wanted to become and the fights with adults or other children. Even though I have never been at a child orphanage, she awoke so many human strings and this is what I think a director should go for'.

A representative from the DFI, which had provided financial backing for the series, said that Danish children were also very engaged by the films, because Jens Pederson, the director, chose children who are 'so strong and so powerful in the way they speak'.

She added:

I talked to one teacher using this [series] and he told us that the children were very much involved in the stories, and they could actually feel these children were children like them, not children in Afghanistan, but children with their own rights, thoughts and dreams. I know that Jens said that he always tries to make films about children who don't see themselves as victims. They are defining themselves as children and not as victims.

4.7 Recommendations

- **Establish a well-planned, multi-media distribution strategy.** Directors and producers need to think beyond 'traditional' broadcast, educational, community and digital outlets, in order to build audiences from an early stage. This is also necessary to secure funding.
- **Diversify production processes.** More children (and adults) from minority groups need to participate in the production and distribution of screen content, not only as subjects but also as producers, directors, and exhibitors.
- Focus on **strong characters** that generate audience interest by establishing a personal connection with the main characters on an emotional level, rather than focusing on children as victims.

- **Be mindful of ethics.** Filmmakers should seek permission from children before filming them, and take time to get to know, and gain trust from, their subjects. Children should not be forced to speak about subjects they feel ashamed of in front of a camera, in order to avoid harm and distress.
- **Be conscious of different conceptions of childhood in different regions.** The dominant approach to childhood and children in the Arab world is to see them as subordinate to adults and in need of protection. This contrasts with European conceptions across the media and education, which place greater emphasis on children's agency as well as the need to protect them from harm.
- **Show diversity, don't name it.** Avoid making difference the focus of the narrative, and try to identify similarities and connections between newly arrived children and children of the host community.
- **Foster exchanges** of cultural, religious, and political knowledge among European children and refugee or immigrant children. Films dealing with these issues should do so in ways that are respectful of other cultures.
- **Take opportunities to put forced migration into historical perspective,** so that children become aware that mass displacement has happened at different times and places and that migration flows have followed routes from north to south as well as the reverse.
- **Address the gender gap.** More films are required about girls' experiences of migration. In particular, strong female characters will enable more young viewers to establish a personal connection with the main characters in films.

5 MUNICH WORKSHOP BRIEFING

5.1 Drama and storytelling as vehicles for informing young children about forced migration

In 2014-16 Germany opened its doors to far greater numbers of people fleeing their homes than any other European Union (EU) country. At the beginning of 2017, after three years of particularly high levels of immigration, Germany had 5.2m residents who were born in a non-EU country, representing 6.3 per cent of its population.⁴⁰

This was the highest percentage of non-EU-born inhabitants for any of the 28 countries in the EU, except for Austria (7.7 per cent) and two Baltic states, Latvia and Estonia, both of whose populations include former Soviet citizens who have not acquired any other citizenship. The average for the EU-28 is 4.2 per cent. Whereas Austria's high percentage is attributable to arrivals from Serbia, Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina, for Germany the figure reflects its recent openness to migrants and refugees from further afield. While there were 116,400 Syrians in Sweden, 51,400 in the Netherlands, 31,000 in Denmark and 11,500 in Bulgaria, according to Eurostat data for 1 January 2017, the equivalent figure for Germany was 577,300.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Eurostat, [Migration and migrant population statistics](#), 22 June 2018.

⁴¹ Eurostat, [Main countries of citizenship and birth of the foreign born-born population](#), 1 January 2017.

As Syrian applications for asylum in Germany rose in 2016, so too did those from people fleeing Iraq and Afghanistan – to 97,162 and 127,892 respectively in a single year.⁴² The number of children among those fleeing to Germany can be surmised from the proportion of under-18s in the populations of Syria and Iraq. As reported by UNICEF, in its *State of the World's Children 2015*, under-18s accounted for 41.5 per cent of Syrians and 46.7 per cent of Iraqis, with under-5s making up 11.8 and 14.5 per cent of each country's total population.⁴³

Reflecting the impact of major demographic changes on all communities in Germany, whether born in the country or elsewhere, there has been significant media activity around the issues raised by forced migration. Producers of children's content realised that children were constantly hearing parents, teachers and news bulletins talking about 'refugees', but with little real sense of what being a 'refugee' meant. In 2017 the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI), affiliated to Bavarian broadcaster, Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), published an edition of its research journal, *TelevIZion*, entitled 'Refugees, Integration and the Media'.

IZI findings showed that 70 per cent of 6-9-year-olds in Germany had heard about refugees from television, rising to 89 per cent for those aged from 10 to 12. *TelevIZion* also revealed that knowledge among 6-9-year-olds was most accurate when they obtained it from the media, especially public service television, rather than from their parents. Those findings highlight the important role screen media play in helping children to make sense of recent events. What can we learn then from those who commission and make such content for children?

5.1.1 Overview of fictional treatments of migration and diversity

This workshop briefing, the third in a series of three, is part of a project focused on the representation of refugee and migrant children in European screen content for children. The one-day workshop took place in Munich on 24 May 2018, hosted by IZI under the umbrella of the biennial six-day Prix Jeunesse international festival of children's screen content. In keeping with the 2018 Prix Jeunesse theme of 'Strong Stories for Strong Children', the workshop explored treatments of migration and diversity in mainly fictional storytelling genres for children aged 12 and under. Several had been made for German public service broadcasters, namely those making up the ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) and ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen) networks, both of which contribute shows to the jointly operated children's service, KiKA (KinderKanal). We also showed content aired by public service broadcasters in Belgium (VRT/Ketnet), the Netherlands (NPO), Slovenia (RTVSlo), Serbia (RTS), Switzerland (SRF) and the Welsh-language broadcaster, S4C.

In terms of genre, the range of clips discussed at the workshop included animation for preschoolers, drama, both series and one-offs, reality storytelling and children's documentaries. The clips featured children of Arab heritage and touched on forced migration or broader issues connected with diversity, but all were from shows aimed primarily at a majority European-born audience.

⁴² Asylum Information Database (AIDA), <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/germany>

⁴³ For more regional and comparative data see J. Steemers and N. Sakr, 'Children's screen content in the Arab world: An introduction' in N. Sakr and J. Steemers (eds.) *Children's TV and Digital Media in the Arab World: Childhood, Screen Culture and Education*, London: IB Tauris, 2017, p 3.

The novelty and necessity of representing child newcomers on screen

Any young child of Arab heritage who sees someone like themselves in a European-made show may find this unusual, as it will have been rare for them to see themselves on TV screens in the countries they came from. Yet newly arrived children and their families are often completely unaware of the potential relevance to them of local screen content in their country of arrival. Aside from an obvious preference for content in their own language, refugee and migrant families are unfamiliar with the practice of public service broadcasting, which is non-existent in the Middle East, and they are understandably distrustful of media organisations, most of which are run by authoritarian governments or government associates in their countries of origin. Children's programming in Arabic on the most widely-watched Arab channels is dominated by imported animation from North America, Europe and the Far East, because dubbing imports is cheaper than making content in local Arab dialects for small audiences.

The economic challenges of making local children's content in Arab countries have left the sector largely underdeveloped in terms of supply chains, scriptwriting and production.⁴⁴ When Arab children do see themselves in home-grown content, it is most often as passive recipients of instructions and information imparted by adult presenters, who are more intent on teaching and directing than entertaining.⁴⁵ When they look for content in the new European settings, the device they use is most likely to be a mobile phone. For those whose lives and education have been disrupted by war, mobile phones have become vital for communication with family members as well as for translation apps, accessing music, video and games.⁴⁶ As children in all situations switch to online media consumption on mobile phones and tablets, the question of how to reach them has been a focus of all workshops in the series, including the one in Munich.

In Munich, as at the workshops in Manchester⁴⁷ and Copenhagen⁴⁸, a key objective was to alert European policy-makers, broadcasters and producers to the media needs, wants and experiences of young Arabic-speaking children now living in European countries, drawing on research into children's screen content and audiences in the Arab world, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and conducted in 2013-2016 by members of the workshop team.⁴⁹ Another was to create space for dialogue between European and Arab practitioners. To this end we invited Arab producers and education specialists, to comment on European content that featured migration issues or included children of Arab heritage.

The project as a whole looks at content for children under twelve, as reflected in the sample selection in the Appendix in Section 7. Of these, only *Merna in the Spotlight* was not discussed, through lack of time.

⁴⁴ See Steemers and Sakr, 'Children's screen content in the Arab world: An introduction' (op.cit.), pp 5-6.

⁴⁵ Feryal Awan, *Occupied Childhoods: Discourses and Politics of Childhood and their place in Palestinian and Pan-Arab Screen Content for Children*, PhD thesis, University of Westminster, 2016, p 191.

⁴⁶ See e.g. Nadia Kutscher and Lisa-Marie Kress, "'Internet is the same like food": An empirical study on the use of digital media by unaccompanied minor refugees in Germany', *Transnational Social Review*, Vol 6, Nos 1-2, pp 200-203.

⁴⁷ <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/88429031/ManchesterWorkshopBrie04122017.pdf>

⁴⁸ <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/96194739/CopenhagenBriefing19to20March2018.pdf>

⁴⁹ Naomi Sakr, Jeanette Steemers et al, *Orientations in the development of screen media for Arabic-speaking children*. London: Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster, 2015, pp 15-16

5.2 Stimuli for telling migration stories

5.2.1 Giving children insight into the meanings of forced migration

The workshop opened with a discussion of what kind of story can best represent complex issues around forced migration and diversity for children as young as 3 to 5 years of age, who may encounter refugees in preschool care settings. Participants expressed different views on what and how much such young children can grasp. Several remarked that preschoolers who have fled their home country suffer not only disruption to their daily routine, but also a sense of alienation when settling into a new society. Yet, as a Lebanese producer pointed out, young children are not necessarily able to express their feelings of 'disorientation, disruption and confusion'. A US participant remarked that children newly arrived in the host country are 'probably quiet and intimidated, afraid to be there', while their European-born peers might want to ask them questions. A Swiss producer added that preschool children are constantly learning about 'what is good and what is bad' and why that is the case, and those from the host community would be curious to know why something 'bad' might have happened to a displaced child.

A representative from Sesame Workshop in the US suggested that, although language, cultural barriers and psychosocial barriers are bound to exist between newly arrived children and the children of the host community, *both* groups are experiencing disruption of their daily routines. She argued that all preschool children are curious, and that the right type of content can 'create a safe space' in which children are encouraged to ask their parents and teachers questions about forced migration, 'creating something that will unify or help make that bridge between the host and the migrant community'.

It was agreed that a starting point should be to dismantle adult preconceptions of what children understand. A US producer noted that most preschoolers are barely aware of 'other countries', ethnic diversity, or war, which suggests a need to start by introducing 'the notion that somebody is coming from far away with a different language'. German, Lebanese and US producers argued that racial diversity is not an issue for preschoolers. One said: 'A creative show for preschoolers that pre-supposes that [racial diversity] is going to be perceived as something strange or uncomfortable is probably a mistake'.

A 24-minute episode of the preschool series, *Die Sendung mit dem Elefanten* (The Programme with the Elephant), focusing specifically on refugees and aired on the German children's channel, KiKa, introduced young children to the topic through a mix of animation and non-fiction content, including clips of children newly arrived in a German refugee camp. The episode closes with the adult presenter, André, and a puppet encouraging children in the audience to ask their own parents and grandparents where they come from. Although not referring explicitly to the German refugee crisis of 1945, this advice recognised the displacement of German-speaking people from Central and Eastern Europe during the 1939-45 war. Some participants saw educational value in this open-ended line of enquiry. One Arab participant said:

I don't think we can pretend to know what these children are feeling and thinking, but we can help them to ask questions. The puppet segment with the adult standing next to him is a very positive one ... it's very direct, it's very simple. What are refugees, why are they here? It serves everyone to understand, whether it's the host or the actual migrants.

A producer of the German drama series *Dschermeni* from ZDF agreed that children see forced migration differently from adults and are more open to becoming friends through play and shared activities. This understanding is reflected in *Dschermeni*'s storylines for 8-10-year olds, where the four protagonists – all from different demographic and ethnic backgrounds – spend time together by a lake, playing games, and discussing their personal problems. At the same time, the series does not shy away from addressing themes from adult life and pressing political issues, including lengthy asylum processes in Germany, illicit working by refugees, and the deportation of asylum-seekers deemed to come from a 'safe' country. One Syrian-born participant living in Berlin remarked that, by addressing these issues through child-centred stories, the series functioned as a form of 'political education' for children in Germany.

A Lebanese producer described *Dschermeni* and *Die Sendung mit dem Elefanten* as 'very brave' examples of storyline development, since they address not only political issues but also – in the case of *Dschermeni* – topics that are taboo in some communities. In *Dschermeni*, Rüyet, whose family are of Turkish origin, discovers that her brother is gay, which is a subject of conflict within the family. As a Slovenian producer pointed out, rejection of homosexuality is not confined to Turkish or Arab families but some parents of European origin also struggle to accept it. A Canadian producer of Lebanese heritage commended the series for dealing with different layers of diversity and discrimination, and for showing how racial and sexual discrimination often overlap. She remarked: 'I want to honestly applaud you for the show. It's brilliant because you're bringing in topics that are dealt with on an international, national and governmental level and now you're bringing it to children. This exposure is so important'.

5.2.2 The EBU's 'Message in a Bottle' series

The workshop explored three short fiction films with a forced migration theme, that were made as part of the European Broadcasting Union's (EBU) Children's Drama Exchange series. Marion Creely, former executive producer of the EBU's Children's Documentary Exchange, explained that the EBU's drama and documentary exchanges offer an economical way of sharing content among countries, who contribute one show and received a whole series in return. In the documentary exchange, featuring children aged 10-12 and aimed at 8-12-year-olds, films have previously been made in diverse countries and languages, including countries geographically outside Europe, such as Jordan, Egypt, Japan and South Africa.

The EBU Children's Drama Exchange, aimed at 6-9-year-olds, uses minimal dialogue to allow easy dubbing and cross-border distribution. The theme 'Message in a Bottle' was adopted for the series from 2014 to 2018, when it was replaced with a new theme, 'Tell me a Secret'. The workshop discussed *Nur*, *Dad*, and *Swing*, three films made in Slovenia, Wales, and Serbia respectively, that are connected by the 'Message in a Bottle' theme.

In *Nur*, a Syrian girl, who has left her family in Syria to live with her uncle in Slovenia, finds comfort in the scent of a bottle of rose water, which reminds her of home. A Slovenian producer, who worked on the EBU exchange, noted that the child playing Nur was of Serbian parentage. Her uncle was played by an engineer, not an actor, who is in fact half-Syrian and half-Slovenian. Members of the Syrian community in Slovenia advised on the authenticity of interiors and dialogue.



In *Dad*, a Welsh boy befriends a refugee boy on a beach, who is trying to send a note to his father in a bottle that he throws into the sea. Made before headlines about refugees dominated the news, *Dad* traces the Welsh boy's realization that both his father, a disabled soldier, and the boy have been traumatized by something they associate with the sound of planes. In *Swing*, two brothers, who have escaped from war in their home country and are in transit to Germany, evade arrest by the Serbian police. The younger brother carries the address of relatives living in Germany in a flask for safe-keeping.

The drama and documentary exchanges offer opportunities for producers to try new things. Creely recalled working with production teams in places where notions of childhood differ from those prevalent in Europe and North America. She had found that, in some Middle East countries, children were often initially not granted much of a role or dialogue in the film, but producers' involvement in the exchange encouraged them to give children more of a voice. She cited a Jordanian film called *The Breadwinner*, made as part of the exchange in 2005, about a 12-year-old girl who is taken out of school to help her fisherman father after he hurts his back, as evidence that children are 'quite happy to talk and tell their story' if given a chance. Jordan and Egypt have not been part of more recent exchanges.

When it comes to distribution, however, the one-off nature of the films and their close link to broadcast limits their chances of being seen. Although S4C, which contributed *Dad*, showed all the films in the series, not all broadcasters do likewise. This leaves open the question of how to improve promotion.

5.3 Getting migration stories to a diverse audience

5.3.1 Challenges of commissioning, producing and engaging children

Dialogue with producers during the workshop revealed the challenges of commissioning, producing and engaging young audiences. These become even more acute in content that deals with topics that are considered taboo among minority populations. One of *Dschermeni's* producers agreed that German broadcaster ZDF had been brave to commission a show that not only features refugees, but also portrays homosexuality. But the main difficulty, he said, had been to find young actors with Turkish backgrounds who were willing play a gay character. An Arab participant noted that a children's show containing mention of homosexuality would never be commissioned in the Middle East.

Lack of funding, exacerbated by restrictions on advertising during children's content, emerged as a key issue at the workshop in Munich, as it had at the previous workshop in Copenhagen. European public service broadcasters consequently end up as practically the only commissioners of locally-produced children's shows. In Germany private broadcasters focus heavily on animation and rarely commission factual content or drama that addresses political or societal issues. Thus the majority of children's content in Germany is commissioned by public service broadcasters ARD and ZDF, and their jointly-owned children's channel, KiKa, resulting in intense competition among production companies for limited slots and funding. Similarly in the UK, the BBC is virtually the only broadcaster to fund locally produced children's content. In small countries like Switzerland, where the market is fragmented between different language communities, public service broadcaster SRF is alone in commissioning home-grown children's content for its diverse language orkscommunities, while private TV stations rarely cater for young children at all.

Meanwhile, the advance of online VOD platforms presents challenges for European broadcasters, who are finding it more difficult to reach and engage children with linear channel offerings. The producer of the German preschool show *Die Sendung mit dem Elefanten* explained that WDR had created an app called 'Der Elefant' and made some content available online, including on YouTube, in order to reach a wider audience. But, in his opinion, the show is still seen primarily by white middle-class children, whose parents monitor what they watch on screen. Participants concurred that children were drawn more to YouTube than public service television, and this was particularly the case for ethnic minority audiences.

5.3.2 Online and View on Demand (VOD) viewing

In the face of competition from YouTube and Netflix, European broadcasters are trying to reach children online. For example, a distribution team at Switzerland's German-language public broadcaster SRF identifies the online behavior of the channel's target audiences by age and distributes "SRF Zambo" (the umbrella term for its children's programmes) accordingly: preschoolers retain one daily 8-minute slot on the linear TV station SRF1, allocated to the programme *Gutenachtgeschichtli* (bedtime stories), while all other children's programmes are streamed on the SRF Zambo [website](#). SRF Zambo also provides an [Instagram account](#) and an interactive [website](#) where children aged 6-14 can create a profile, share photos, and post to an online discussion board. According to a producer from Switzerland, audience tracking informs the distribution and marketing plan for every show. The same producer was very positive about the creative potential that comes about through online distribution, because of the way it frees producers from the rigid time restrictions of linear broadcast slots. He said:

You are no longer bound by fixed slots; you can produce as many minutes as the story calls for. It can be a three-minute story, but also a 15-minute story. Last year we made a fiction series. There was no problem that one episode was five minutes long, another was seven, then six.

In Europe, producers are also working on strategies that integrate online distribution alongside linear broadcasting. The Flemish drama series *4eVeR*, aimed at 9-12-year-olds and commissioned by Belgium's Flemish-language public service broadcaster VRT/Ketnet, is available on a linear channel, Ketnet, on the VRT website and on YouTube. The workshop learned from the producers that online and linear viewing of the show has been roughly equal, between an absolute average of 35,000 viewers for the linear screening and about 30,000 online viewers for each episode, which accounts for 23-25 per cent of the target market in a small country like Belgium, where Flemish-speakers number around 6.5 million.⁵⁰

The producers of *4eVeR* attribute the good ratings to the series' semi-scripted narratives and a reality drama format (see Section 4.2). The first series comprised 48 short episodes of 11 to 14 minutes, shown daily. They also believe its appeal rests on the fact that 'it is not about refugees...it's a well-integrated family who are actually fully Flemish'. As one said: 'In many fiction series the Arab guy is the poor guy; in our series the poor guy is the Flemish guy' while the family of Arab heritage are financially comfortable and friendly.

⁵⁰ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/517196/population-of-belgium-by-region/>

Viewership and revenue potential of online platforms

Some participants familiar with young people's viewing practices in the Arab region concurred in pointing out the possibilities of online video platforms, including YouTube, for sharing content made by and for children in Europe with children in Arab countries. One mentioned [Mohamad Al Jounde](#), a 16-year-old Syrian recipient of the 2017 International Children's Peace Prize, awarded in the Netherlands for his work as a 12-year-old refugee in Lebanon, where he and his parents started a school and he taught other child refugees maths and his passion, photography. Mohamad now lives in Sweden, where, according to a Lebanon-based participant who is in touch with him, he tells stories through YouTube. She said refugee children share content with their friends through online platforms and their storytelling should be encouraged.

Young people in Saudi Arabia have been getting around strict local restraints on their cultural expression by using YouTube for more than a decade and in November 2013 [Reuters](#) reported that Saudi Arabia had become the world's biggest user of YouTube per capita, reflecting the widespread uploading of homegrown lifestyle, satirical and other edgy content. In May 2018 the consultancy Global Media Insight found that the number of active [users of YouTube in Saudi Arabia](#) had overtaken active users of Facebook, while [YouTube penetration in the UAE](#) was close to Facebook at 79 per cent. Sesame Workshop in New York announced in December 2017 that the Abu Dhabi-based producers of *Iftah ya Simsim* had joined forces with YouTube's Creators for Change initiative and that the show's third season, starting in September 2018, will feature the region's top YouTube content creators, with some additional episodes available exclusively on YouTube.

The Saudi and UAE social media statistics reflect what a UAE-based participant in the workshop, Nathalie Habib of Blink Studios, called the 'very strong' level of engagement with online video platforms in the Arab world. Expressing admiration for the content sampled at the workshop, she urged Europeans to distribute it in the Arab world through online platforms, not necessarily through broadcast deals, as this could 'open up new windows of revenue'.

Habib cited audience statistics for the latest Gulf version of Sesame Street, *Iftah ya Simsim*, to prove her point. Reporting that viewership of *Iftah ya Simsim* had grown from 200 million views and 200,000 subscribers in 2015 to 300 million views and 0.5 million subscribers today, Habib stressed that online viewing and subscription VOD were changing the landscape for screen content in the Middle East region because international SVOD providers like Netflix and Amazon and regional ones like Icflix are willing to invest money in making children's content for local markets.

'We didn't have budgets before', Habib said. 'Now they're talking about budgets being allocated for original content. They're being very wary and very slow, but it's definitely making a huge impact on our media landscape and now everybody's mobilizing in a different way'.

5.4. Empathy as a dimension of storytelling

In the summer of 2015, the thousands of refugees from Syria arriving in Germany were welcomed by applauding crowds and commended by mainstream media. Now, three years later, the mood has changed. An emerging media discourse has suggested that refugees are no longer so welcome in Germany and that the country is being 'swamped' by immigrants.⁵¹ At the same time there has been a rise in support across Europe for political parties that take a strong stance against immigration. In response to this shift, one key question that emerged during our workshop was whether and how children's screen content that features forced migration can foster empathy, and what kind of strategies producers can use to create this kind of content. Given people's different backgrounds and experiences, empathy requires an act of imagination and intellectual engagement to understand what it is like for another person to experience adversity.⁵²

5.4.1 Feeling sorry for a crocodile

The first clip shown during the workshop was an excerpt from German broadcaster WDR's *Die Sending mit dem Elefanten*, which opens with an animated sequence in which a crocodile called Viktor has to search



for a new home after the pond he lives in is destroyed by a rockslide (rather than other animals). He finds a new pond. Initially the animals who already live there try to send him away but, after Viktor saves a monkey from drowning, the pond's inhabitants decide that he can stay. After watching the clip, participants highlighted differences between the softer depictions of animation and the reality of refugees' lives.

Some praised the producers' use of animation to engage with forced migration, because it allows children to identify with Viktor's experiences of discrimination and exclusion. A Syrian-born artist and filmmaker thought that the use of animated animals helped to avoid stereotypes. A Slovenian broadcaster saw universal appeal in the clip, remarking that, although the story reflects the experience of refugees, Victor's story of exclusion 'can be experienced by every child' regardless of their ethnicity. A Palestinian-born educational researcher concurred, noting that every child experiences exclusion at some point in their lives, such as when a group does not let him/her join in play. While the animation was judged to encourage empathy, a Syrian participant pointed out that it is normal not to want to share, especially in this case where the characters were afraid of the crocodile. She said children should not be made to feel guilty about the initial reluctance to share with Viktor.

Some participants commented on the fact that Viktor (the immigrant) has to perform a heroic act (saving the monkey) in order to be accepted by the other animals. A Palestinian researcher who grew up in Denmark interpreted the crocodile's heroic act as a realistic representation of societal expectations of refugees, saying: 'this is actually relevant in Denmark. Migrants have to earn something'. Her view was echoed by a Lebanese producer who noted that refugees often feel they must do something special to

⁵¹ Franziska Zimmerer (n.d). '[German media on the refugee crisis: How the refugees-welcome campaign has backfired](#)'. LSE: *Polis: Journalism and Society at LSE*.

⁵² Alison Landsberg, 'Memory, empathy and the politics of identification', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol 22, No 2, 2009, p. 223.

'deserve' acceptance, even though escaping a war zone and heading for a new continent might be deemed a heroic act in itself. A US researcher with experience of working with children in Lebanon, who are often under pressure to support their families emotionally and also financially through work, felt that the animation implied that refugees had to be 'exceptional' to be accepted. Since they are subject to both psychological and emotional pressure, she wondered whether it was also 'okay' and possible to show children as vulnerable from time to time, without portraying them as victims.

5.4.2 Children's perspectives

Stories which unfold from a child's perspective have proved effective in engaging children with issues of forced migration. In the case of German drama series, *Dschermenî*, Klaus Döring, both a producer and writer of the show, explained that the production team had sought to create a series that approached the refugee question through the eyes of a German boy. Moritz is blond, middle-class and lives 'a lonely life with his parents'. Throughout the entire show, there is 'no scene where there is no kid', reinforcing the perspectives and experiences of children from a variety of different backgrounds, where 'all the time we just know what the kids know'.

A Canadian producer of Arab heritage welcomed the approach taken in *Dschermenî*, saying:

One of my favorite things is the opening, because I saw a kid from every different background; it speaks to multiculturalism and to your ethnic background, your religion and so on [...] Usually in Canada, for example, the predominant notion is "okay, I'm gay" [but] the concept of coming out only applies to you if you are white. So how do we deal with it, if you are Canadian and belong to a different culture as well? That exposure is so important for kids just to have that understanding, and it has not been talked about enough. [Here] the way [the producers] brought it in is like [the kids] are dealing it with from all different backgrounds on a kid-to-kid level. Brilliant.

The workshop heard that, as the series' story unfolds, *all* of the characters end up taking refuge in the hut by the lake due to problems at home. Döring summed up this narrative choice as follows: 'We wanted to have the kids get a feeling for being a refugee'.

Another programme to foreground children's perspectives is the Flemish drama series *4eVeR*, which uses body cams and a non-scripted approach (see Section 5.2). In this way, the producers sought to give the narrative an authentic feel that children from different backgrounds can relate to – so much so that, as discussed in 5.2, workshop participants were keen to know how far younger viewers were aware that it was fiction and not reality.

The short Swiss documentary film, *Ayham: Mein neues Leben* (Ayham: My New Life) also presents the perspective of a child, a 10-year-old Syrian boy who fled to Switzerland with his family. The director, Marek Beles, whose own family left the former Czechoslovakia for Switzerland when he was a child, explained that he made the film with the aim of 'telling a story only through the child's eyes'. The production team followed Ayham over two years, from his arrival in Switzerland through his experience of gradually settling into his new environment, making friends at school and joining the local football

team. According to Beles, the film's focus on a child's point of view resonated with children in the audience, 'because the stories are coming out of the children, the children are really interested in other children and their stories'. Over time Ayham decides that he does not want to go back to Syria, even though his father wants to return.

5.4.3 Avoiding victimhood

As previous workshops revealed, European shows sometimes portray children with forced migration backgrounds as victims and fundamentally different from European-born children. But those workshops also showed how victimhood discourses are challenged by other shows that represent diversity without making it an issue and present characters that children in the audience can relate to.

'You don't have to be a refugee to be traumatised'

The EBU's short fiction film *Dad* is about a Welsh boy, Cai, who is on holiday with his parents, including his father, who appears to be a former soldier suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD). On a beach, Cai befriends a lone foreign boy, Amir, who appears to be a refugee. The boys have fun together until military planes fly over the beach and trigger an acute stress reaction in both Amir and Cai's father. As the producer explained, in gradually understanding his friend's problem, Cai begins to understand his father's trauma as well. A Palestinian-born participant appreciated the recognition that trauma is experienced by both the Welsh family and lone child: 'You don't have to be a refugee to be traumatised ... it disturbs [that assumption] in a respectful and honourable way'. A US academic noted the impact of the adult also showing fear. Although the target audience is 6 to 12-year-olds, the producer said the intention had been to make a film that both children and adults would relate to. While 6-year-olds might not yet be able to understand the film's message, she recalled attending a screening for children of the same age as the 10-year-old boy in the film. In her words, 10-year-olds 'absolutely get it'.

The short dramas *Nur* from Slovenia and *Swing* from Serbia, also part of the EBU Drama Exchange, were likewise both thought to show children as agents rather than victims, in their case by allocating adults peripheral roles. One Palestinian researcher thought the films showed displaced children as 'strong kids' who 'want to be responsible' and 'take care of themselves'. A Lebanese producer commended both films for showing children's problem-solving skills and resourcefulness. *Nur*, she observed, is confronted with the problem of having to replace her uncle's rose water which she has spilled by accident, while in *Swing*, two refugee brothers are shown working with a Serbian boy to avoid being stopped by police from reaching Germany. The same producer applauded the fact that *Nur* was depicted as respectful of the social rules of her new environment: when trying to find rose petals to make rose water, she stopped short of taking petals without permission. The Slovenian producer of *Nur* explained that the film aimed to avoid tapping into stereotypes in order to focus on Nur's individual emotional journey. To enhance the authenticity of the depiction of Syrian culture, the Slovenian production team worked closely with a Syrian advisor living in

Slovenia. This person had apparently said that Syrian families would usually send a son to a safer place in the first instance rather than a daughter.

The German factual reality format *Berlin and Us* (2016) was also made with the intention of creating counter-narratives to victimizing portrayals of refugee children within European mainstream media and, judging by the feedback, it succeeded. According to one of the producers:

There was one thing which was above all, ... one thing [we put] first, that we don't want to show the refugee kids as victims. We wanted to show them that they have the same strength and are strong as the kids in Germany. [...] We had several refugee kids themselves who wrote us in emails or commentaries on our blogs to say "this is the first time that you show our story ... I feel good that you showed it".

5.5 Choices about language and scriptwriting

5.5.1 'Soundscapes' and language learning

Language learning is relevant to children of all backgrounds and ages. While preschool children are learning their own language, children newly arrived in Europe need to acquire a language that is often very different to their mother tongue. Children generally acquire new languages very quickly, as highlighted by a sequence from *Berlin & Wir* (which was not shown during the workshop) in which Rashad explains that she came to Germany two years ago speaking only her mother tongue, Arabic, and some English. Two years later, she is fluent in German and sometimes struggles to find the right words in Arabic.

JoNaLu is a CGI-animated series for preschoolers shown on Germany's public service children's channel for children, KiKa. It engages with the diversity of language but, instead of broaching it directly, features characters who speak foreign languages and have different accents. In a clip shown during the workshop, the Turkish-speaking butterfly Sibel is learning a few German words by playing 'shop' with the German-speaking mice, Naya and Jo. The Turkish dialogue is not subtitled as preschoolers would not be able to read the subtitles. One of the programme's writers, Ina Werner, told us in an email exchange that the major aim of *JoNaLu* was to foster preschoolers' German language skills. The show features characters who speak foreign languages as different 'soundscapes', which in turn can foster children's awareness of their own language. According to Werner, German preschool children are familiar with hearing these different soundscapes at nursery and kindergarten, and the show sought to reflect this reality.

Werner told us that children with migration backgrounds responded positively to *JoNaLu*, because they were pleased to see television characters speaking their mother tongue, while German children are also able to identify with the characters, even though they may not understand every word of the dialogue.

Workshop participants praised the language diversity of *JoNaLu*. One German producer remarked that the programme's way of dealing with different languages is 'exactly the way kids would act in kindergarten' through repetition. He explained that children often become fluent in German within only 3-6 months of arriving in Germany. 'They just talk and keep talking and it doesn't affect their playing because they are just playing and talking along and then all of a sudden language starts to evolve'. A specialist on

multiculturalism based in Denmark admired the way JoNaLu represents cross-cultural experiences through linguistic diversity.

The clip seen in the workshop contains a sequence in which Sibel and Naya make money from paper to spend in Jo's 'shop' and then sing a song about *Geld* (money). One Arab participant felt this made money the focus of the episode rather than sharing, which is what happens in the end. She also noted that for children coming from the Middle East or living in the refugee camps, 'money is the only conversation they have every day because their parents are complaining that they don't have it'. The producer of the series, who was



unable to attend the workshop, had previously told us by email that German parents had also expressed similar worries about the focus on money.

However, other participants, including Arab colleagues, felt that children playing with money was uncontentious. One said: 'I don't know any children who have not played with making money or visa cards; it's very normal that children play bank and they play like they are adults'. A German academic

pointed out that money is 'something we [all] have in common'. She added: 'We can't just assume that everybody is poor'. This point was corroborated by a Syrian participant who pointed out that the poorest refugees in the Middle East are those who are displaced inside Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, rather than those who can afford to migrate to Europe.

The Welsh-language EBU drama *Dad* also develops its narrative through soundscapes. The workshop learned that most EBU exchange dramas feature minimal dialogue, because of the challenge of subtitling for young children. Workshop participants praised *Dad* for evoking the characters' emotional journeys through sounds – the sea, the beach, the plane overhead – and body language. The producer explained that the film followed the Welsh boy's many complex emotions and shows that, despite his difference from the refugee boy, there is camaraderie between them.

Arab colleagues found that the film created an unspoken emotional narrative that allows the audience to feel the characters' struggles themselves and that the boys' body language, including their hugging each other at the end, is 'something that we can all connect [to]'. A German academic added that language can often contribute to stereotyping and its avoidance in *Dad* means 'you don't know where the characters come from – what you see is their experience, without language distortion'.

5.5.2 Drama and reality formats: scripted, semi-scripted, unscripted

The workshop discussed the forms of storytelling adopted in scripted and semi-scripted dramas as well as 'unscripted' reality formats. *Dschermeni* is a drama series scripted in the traditional way. Two of its main characters, a Syrian boy, Yassir, and Senegalese girl, Aminata, are seeking to stay in Germany. Yet, while parts of the story engage with migration and asylum, this is not the sole focus of the drama – something we described in our Manchester Briefing as a strategy that shows diversity without naming it. *Dschermeni* revolves instead around the friendships and daily lives of four teenagers.

According to one of the show's producers, 'we wanted to have a very strong narrator [in Moritz the lead character] and we wanted to entertain the kids'. The clip shown in the workshop included a scene in which Moritz feels jealous of the attention his refugee friends receive from his mother, who is working in an asylum office. As they leave the office he gets into an argument with Yassir and Rüyset, voicing 'his' view (heard from his father) that refugees (including Yassir's brother) should not be working in the black economy in Germany. Teichmann added that, despite the series' various fast-paced narrative strands, its rhythms also allow for 'quiet and poetic moments' in which audiences have time to feel the characters' emotions (see Section 4) and understand their family conflicts.

Like *Dschermeni*, the Flemish drama series *4eVeR* centers on the friendship of a diverse group of teenagers, one of whom comes from a Moroccan and Muslim background. However, *4eVeR*'s approach to production is very different. The series, made by producers with past experience in reality television, can be described as a realistic drama that is semi-scripted, produced with non-professional actors aged 12-15, and shot with hand-held and body cameras.

The producers explained that they developed the basis of the narrative and themes of individual scenes, but the dialogue is in large part improvised by the actors. They auditioned over 400 young people, and according to the producers, although it is 'hard work' to produce with young people who have no acting training, it gives the programme a much more authentic feel. Indeed, workshop participants remarked that *4eVeR* 'feels very real', like content that is 'user-generated' while also being 'premium'.

In the clip shown at the workshop, the Muslim family are grieving for a relative killed in a terrorist attack in Belgium, but the bereaved boy is taunted by another child at school as if he were complicit with the terrorists. A children's producer from the Middle East said of the clip:

To me it feels very real. The reason I can say that is because one of my colleagues is Syrian and he has three teenage boys living in the West. The conversation in the beginning is so reminiscent of a similar conversation we had with them when there was one of the incidents that happened in the last two to three years, especially with his older son who had to go to school the next day and he was being bullied. [My colleague] told him what he needs to say and it was all in the same spirit of understanding, tolerance, and "don't fight. Don't fight back" in the sense of "don't argue [because] a lot of people have mixed feelings about what's going on". So ... the dialogue is real, the parents' attitude is real, what's going on in school is real and it's happening on a daily basis.

A Palestinian academic based in Denmark compared the programme to the Norwegian reality drama *Skam/Shame* (NRK), suggesting that blurring the lines between fiction and reality is attractive to audiences. The appeal of *4eVeR* is also connected to the fact that the series' themes are grounded in the interests and concerns of Flemish-speaking children in Belgium. The producers explained how they collaborate with the child helpline *Awel*, drawing on this information source to identify 'hot topics' that concern children before every series. Fear of terrorist attacks was one of the anxieties voiced by children after the attacks on Zaventem airport in 2016. The producers also refer to guidance on audience viewing preferences compiled by the Flemish broadcaster, VRT.

Answering questions about whether young audiences identify *4eVeR* as fiction or reality, a producer recalled that one of the actors went to his own school after his character had been sick in the series, and younger pupils said to him: 'We thought you were sick; how come you're at school?'. However, he said, the difference between the characters and 'real' people' was emphasized through the actors' social media accounts and blogs, which are in their own names, not those of their characters.

Although the factual series *Berlin und Wir* is not scripted, the producers told us in an interview after the workshop that they conceptualized the show's thematic focus before production started. They held castings to find children and presented the children with ideas to help them come up with activities they could share, such as playing music and sports and cooking.

5.5.3 Religion written in as a 'normal part of life'

Clips from *4eveR* and *Berlin und Wir* evoked some comments from participants about their treatment of religion. For example, a scene from *4eveR* in which teenage Jamil asks his father if he can accompany him to the mosque was interpreted by a Muslim participant as potentially highlighting a difference between Jamil and other Flemish teenagers. However, the producers clarified that the scene needed to be understood in the wider context of the storyline, which reflected a universal parenting issue: in fact Jamil had been grounded by his father previously for some misdemeanor and suggests going to the mosque to get into his father's good books. He later decides not to go again.

Commenting on the terrorist incident referenced in this episode, the producers said they had wanted to stress that young people from migrant families 'are also victims' because 'it is their religion that is abused for terrorist reasons'. A Palestinian researcher based in Denmark welcomed the programme's depictions of how teenagers deal with religion as part of their daily lives. She saw the show as an authentic representation of a multicultural Belgian society, where people from different backgrounds and different religions live side by side. She added: 'I love that the mosque is a normal part of his life – because it is'.

The clip from *Berlin und Wir* showed German-born Malina giving 11-year-old Syrian-born Rashad a football lesson. The talk turns to religious practice when Malina asks Rashad if she intends to wear the *hijab* headscarf when she is older. Individually, away from Rashad, Malina comments that she sees the headscarf as a mark of oppression. A BBC producer with a French/Egyptian background and a Syrian producer living in Berlin wondered why *Berlin und Wir* allowed religion to act as an identity marker since Islam is not the only religion in either Egypt or Syria. A producer responded that the show is not scripted and the conversation about the hijab emerged naturally. She also noted that another Syrian girl in other episodes wears skimpy shorts and t-shirts while stating that 'religion is in her heart'.

The headscarf conversation elicited questions about religion and reciprocity among workshop participants. A US educator and entrepreneur thought the encounter between Rashad and Malina was lacking in reciprocal dialogue about religion. He accepted the producers' point that another episode filmed at a self-defense class showed a Syrian girl being far more intrepid than her German counterpart. Nevertheless, he felt that Rashad does not get an 'opportunity to raise questions about the German girl and how she deals with the world'. A Canadian producer who previously wore the hijab expressed concern about preconceptions of Muslim girls in North America and Europe as 'oppressed' and 'probably bald' beneath the scarf. A US academic countered by saying Malina's curiosity about Rashad's beliefs seemed very natural.



Berlin und Wir: Rashad and Malina on the football pitch

Picture from KiKa

<https://www.kika.de/berlin-und-wir/sendungen/sendung95160.html>

One of the producers of *Dschermeni* noted that religion was a central issue in Germany now and that a future season of the show was in planning, where the main location would be a school and problems would include bullying and antisemitism.

5.5.4 Whose voice – children or parents?

Drawing on the notion of the 'burden of representation', which refers to the phenomenon whereby the few members of minority communities who appear in the media are assumed by people outside those communities to represent the whole group,⁵³ one of the workshop moderators suggested that Rashad – whose facial expressions and body language throughout the headscarf discussion indicate some inner turmoil on her part – should be understood as speaking for herself, not as informing viewers about any assumed consensus regarding the dictates of Islam. This triggered a debate about whether children speak for themselves or echo their parents.

A Lebanese producer countered that Rashad is not expressing her own opinion but that of her mother: 'because in our culture ... there is no autonomous opinion until you reach a certain age, where you have to get into big fights and arguments to get what you believe is right. [...] Whereas the German girl, it's ... so much her own opinion'. A US academic also felt that Malina's way of posing questions to Rashad appeared genuine and natural, despite implying judgmental attitudes about Islam.

Others noted that it is not a straightforward question of autonomy or conditioning. A PhD candidate from North America remarked: 'there are always these moments where kids are both trying to find themselves while also repeating other things. But in that repetition, they are also finding themselves, right? It's a question of who a person is, it's never quite that simple'. She added that she would have liked to know more about the family dynamics of the children in *Berlin und Wir* and their parents' opinions about their children's involvement in the series. She recalled having spoken to Syrian mothers who are concerned about their teenage daughters in Germany and felt that German mothers might be equally concerned about their daughters.

A Palestinian researcher who lives in Denmark disagreed with the notion that Rashad was not voicing her own opinion. She suggested that to think otherwise was to buy into stereotypes about Islam that dominate

⁵³ See e.g. Claire Dwyer, 'Contested identities: Challenging dominant representations of young British Muslim women'. In Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine (eds), *Cool places: Geographies of youth cultures*, London: Routledge, 1998, p 60.

in mainstream media. She argued that wearing a headscarf is a choice, saying: "I think it's something that we have to accept instead of having this assimilationist idea that people who come to Denmark need to take their scarf off... I don't care if it's because she wants to make her parents happy or anything else, but we need to see and to acknowledge that people who wear scarves also do it because they want to'.

She did not believe that Rashad would necessarily change her opinion about the headscarf when she is older, because her research with children had shown that religion matters and is a subject that children with an Arab background engage with on a daily basis. She said:

They [children] do say "I'm Muslim and I pray five times a day", so we have to have programmes where curiosity and talking about it are at the core. Religion does matter. I worked with kids, my empirical study is with kids. [...] Religion does matter for their own identity development.

5.6 Multicultural representation as the norm

5.6.1 Stereotyping without meaning to

Research by the UK regulator Ofcom, reported in 2017, revealed that 35 per cent of children aged 8-11 in the UK said there were not enough programmes showing children who look like them.⁵⁴ Against this background, the workshop explored the live action comedy drama *Jamillah and Aladdin*, commissioned by the BBC for its two children's channels, CBeebies and CBBC, and targeted at an audience of 4-7-year olds. Ten-year-old Jamillah lives in London and discovers an old lamp in the attic. She rubs the lamp and out comes a genie who grants her a wish. Jamillah wishes for adventure and is transported to 8th century Baghdad, where she meets Aladdin. The programme is one of very few preschool drama series in the UK with an ethnically diverse cast and the producer told the workshop that it sought to avoid stereotypes. She said it aspires to be an 'entertainment drama' with a 'fantasy adventure story' that gives children 'a sense of the world'. Cultural contrasts came with 'lots of sunshine, lots of colour, and seeing lots of different faces that are not white, which was kind of the main aim'.

However, despite the show's aim to be both inclusive and entertaining, some participants were concerned that it could give children false preconceptions about people and places in the Middle East. A Syrian artist and producer, questioning the fantasy representation of 'historic' Baghdad and the idea that its inhabitants were all brown-skinned, wondered whether the show perpetuated an Orientalist perspective that has influenced Western thought on the Middle East for centuries. She and a Lebanese producer indicated that the purported connection between Aladdin and Baghdad is based on the fact that Europeans often use the name *Arabian Nights* for the stories of *1001 Nights*, even though they have Persian, Indian and Chinese origins and are not part of Arab tradition. *1001 Nights* was introduced to Europe at the start of the 1700s when it was translated from Arabic by a Frenchman who heard the stories in Aleppo, Syria. The combination of villains and sorcerers eventually fed into negative Hollywood stereotypes, as demonstrated from 1924 onwards by the silent film, *The Thief of Baghdad*, and examined

⁵⁴ Ofcom, *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report*, November 2017, p 10.

in the 2001 book *Reel Bad Arabs*, which drew attention to negative representations of Arabs even in some Disney films for children, such as *Aladdin* (1992) and *The Return of Jafar* (1994).⁵⁵

The Lebanese producer said the Arab world is home to many stories that are 'much richer and full of imagination to relay all of the backgrounds, ethnicities, origins, and beauty of what the Arab world represents in its diversity', and those stories remain relatively unknown to European audiences. A UK academic drew attention to the long tradition of the *hakawati* (oral storyteller) in the Arab world. A Palestinian researcher meanwhile interpreted *Jamillah and Aladdin* as part of a 'contributive approach'. She said

I think we need to ask who is the intended audience when we talk about these programmes. In a multicultural educational sense, you would call it a "contributive approach", where you just add ethnic stuff and Orientalist stuff. This is something that multicultural education tries not to do. But it's not bad if there are other programmes as well. So if this is the only content for children in Denmark, then I would be worried. But if it's something that is contextualised with other stories, then I'm not so afraid of the Oriental approach.

5.6.2 No more labelling

As in previous workshop discussions about how forced migration, minorities and diversity are best represented in screen content for young children, participants expressed a need to avoid attaching labels to people and groups. A Syrian producer living in Germany explained that she would much rather be thought of as an artist, rather than a 'refugee artist', which she is often called, because the term 'refugee' signifies a temporary political status and does not define someone's identity.

A Palestinian-born researcher working in multicultural education told the workshop that she avoids labelling stories as being about immigrants or other minorities because it narrows the audience. An Irish producer made a similar point. She said you could attract good audiences for programmes about immigrants or people with physical, mental or extreme social disadvantage when they are cast as the hero of a story, providing the story is not about their 'difference'. Instead the programme should focus on an attractive storyline where the child takes on a challenge that most 'normal' children might also fear to undertake, such as practising and auditioning to get a part in a school show, trying to get a black belt in judo, running a school charity event and so on. In that way 'disadvantage' becomes a subplot and the audience gets to learn about someone's life and problems while being drawn in to watch an attractive and interesting story.

She continued: 'For most of us when we come up against adversity, we get disappointed and that's interesting for a TV audience [...] An ordinary child who is brave enough to be vulnerable and then overcomes it in the end is going to be a far more interesting documentary'.

⁵⁵ Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs. How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Olive Branch Press, Northampton, Mass., 2nd ed. 2009).

By the same token, the Irish producer said that focusing on children's talents, hobbies and interests and introducing aspects of forced migration that way would make for better storytelling. A Belgian producer similarly advised embedding tough stories into an entertaining programme. He explained:

Imagine yourself at home. I have a tough working day and you ask me: "Will you see a programme about a refugee or will you watch something else?" [...] I will choose the second one. But in that second one, maybe they can embed the story about the refugee and I will watch it. If they say it to me upfront, I will say: "Oh, not today". I think the children are the same; they want to see something nice [...] Like a present, there should be a nice label on it.

5.6.3 Moving on from stories about refugees and football

Towards the end of the workshop, participants discussed ways in which children's content about forced migration could move forward in the future. This debate was sparked by a North American educator who, referring to films for children about serious issues, argued that we are witnessing a 'creative crisis'. He asked:

How many documentaries can we watch about a young child who just arrived from a war zone, is having trouble surviving and learns to play soccer? Forget us, how many can we expect children to watch?

A participant from the Finnish public service broadcaster YLE concurred, recalling children's documentaries he had watched at film festivals about a 'brother dying of cancer and a parent suffering from Alzheimers' and did not want to watch again. He said: 'I question who would watch that as a child'. Urging a better understanding of the audience, he was sure that 'good stories can be told' about serious issues and hoped 'there is some sort of option to keep these stories alive'.

A German producer suggested that content should perhaps not only address children but also adults at the same time. He noted that adults often have stereotypical ideas about refugees that need to be challenged, including the dominant misconception that Germany is being 'swamped' or that it is safe for refugees to return to their homes.

Another proposal was that children with migration backgrounds could themselves be given more agency in the process of making films for and about them. A doctoral researcher from North America explained that many film production workshops have been conducted in Lebanon for Syrian refugee children who are now in Europe. These older children have the skills to project their experiences on the screen, using mobile phones. She suggested that adults should 'not bring them [children] into our stories but allow them to bring us into theirs'.

Some participants with Arab backgrounds stressed that content focused on forced migration is still needed to raise awareness. A producer from Dubai, who was forced to flee her home as a child,

suggested that, during conflicts in Lebanon and Palestine in the 1970s and 1980s, many people were forced to flee their homes to live elsewhere, and are now giving back to the region as much as they can. She said: 'We do have to tell these stories because the 7 billion people who live on this earth don't know these stories'. A Palestinian-born researcher, who grew up as a refugee in Denmark, compared the previous dearth of stories about forced migration circulating in the public sphere with the present situation, where those stories are starting to be told. Even so, she said, there are still no stories about Palestinian or Turkish immigrants in Denmark. 'We need those stories to change the conception of what [...] forced migration is'.

The producer from Dubai cited the recent Marvel drama *Black Panther* as an example of a film that resonated with a global audience by drawing from fantasy and super-hero narratives but also doing 'a good job of changing perceptions about what Africa is all about, as they celebrated the best parts of it in a futuristic way'. She thought content producers could do the same for the Middle East, saying:

I think that the balance is to create stories that can go global but at the same time can go back home to what we represent. So the stories need to have a universal message, a global one, whether you use animation, live action - you can still cater to all of these age groups. But what if you just think of a universal story that can travel, but then is representative with nuances that are positive to back home, to the Middle East. That is a stepping stone, a changing storytelling that actually can change mindsets and perceptions.

5.7 Recommendations

- **Avoid tokenism, labelling and victimization** in storytelling. Representing integration and promoting cultural knowledge requires more than projecting different skin colours on the screen or assuming that one member of a minority shown on screen can stand for a wider group. Narratives that focus on engaging characters and children's perspectives allow young audiences to relate to, and empathise with, topics like forced migration on a personal level. Stories about multifaceted ordinary children overcoming challenges in life are likely to be more appealing to audiences than those dealing with just one side of an experience or depicting children who are flawless and have no weaknesses.
- **Entertain audiences when educating them** about issues of forced migration, integration, and diversity. Programmes that do not make forced migration their main topic but experiment with unusual narratives, formats and soundscapes have proved more effective in appealing to diverse audiences than stories focused on the plight of refugee children only. Stories with a universal message and global appeal can also have nuances of locality that inform wider audiences about other countries and cultures.
- **Pay more attention to distribution strategies.** At a time when children are increasingly accessing screen content via a variety of platforms and devices, producers need to have a comprehensive strategy in place to reach young audiences. Combining linear and online distribution has proven

successful for some children's programmes, but web presence needs to be planned carefully to attract viewers.

- **Be prepared to talk about religion.** While it is challenging to depict issues of religion without stereotyping or judging, it is a central part of the lives of many children newly arrived and those born in Europe, and therefore should not be silenced. Children's content needs to help create an open discussion surrounding religion, especially in the current political climate in Europe, where new populist anti-immigration parties are using Islam to promote discriminatory political objectives.
- **Respond to children's concerns and give them a say.** Children are often anxious about events around them and programmes that address these concerns have won loyal followings. Children with and without forced migration backgrounds should have more say in content made about their lives. This can be achieved by integrating more children into the scripting and shooting process, and through testing pilots with them.

6 LONDON SYMPOSIUM BRIEFING

6.1 Introduction

The Symposium that forms the subject of this briefing was the last event in a year-long project funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the title 'Children's Screen Media in an Era of Forced Migration: Facilitating Arab-European Dialogue'.

The project, part of the AHRC's Follow-on Funding for Impact and Engagement, was intended to engage stakeholders in the field of children's screen media in discussions about representations of and for children from non-European backgrounds, including Arab countries such as Syria and Iraq, who have recently arrived in Europe through forced migration. Dialogues took place through three workshops, in Manchester, Copenhagen and Munich; they have been recorded in a briefing report for each one⁵⁶ and summarised in the [Project Report to Stakeholders](#), mentioned below.

The one-day end-of-project Symposium, also intended to promote dialogue, followed a different format from the workshops. Whereas participants in the latter all watched and discussed clips from relevant screen content selected by the project leaders, the Symposium consisted of five panels, involving a total of 24 panelists and five chairs. The first was an introductory session, at which the project team reviewed the workshops and their outcomes and presented the *Project Report to Stakeholders* summarising the workshop discussions.

Panellists on Session 2, representing broadcasters, diversity consultants and advocates for quality in children's television, assessed advances and setbacks in representations of diversity in children's content in the UK, Europe and further afield. In Session 3, early career scholars of Arab heritage presented findings about media treatments of flight, trauma, asylum and immigrant communities, as well as education initiatives for refugee children. This was followed by a session in which producers and commissioning editors analysed the processes and challenges behind commissioning, producing and distributing screen

⁵⁶ Links to the individual briefings are given on the Acknowledgements page at the end of this document.

content that adequately reflects demographic changes. In the final session, entitled 'Next Steps', panelists identified regional and global events and exchanges that could contribute to sustaining conversations about diversity in children's media beyond the end of the project.

This briefing provides an overview of topics that emerged during the five sessions. As such it also forms part of a consolidated report, entitled [Children's Screen Content in an Era of Forced Migration](#), which brings together all five publications produced as a result of the project.

6.2 Reaching child audiences

Among the themes that emerged from the symposium discussions was the question of how content producers can reach child audiences most effectively with content that fairly and accurately represents increasingly diverse societies in Europe and elsewhere, given current changes in the screening of children's content on different media platforms. This question remains a priority for future encounters around production of children's screen content.

6.2.1 Children's channels moving online

The symposium heard that children's programming on linear television is in decline across the world, with more and more TV channels for children moving to streaming content online. It was noted, for example that France 4, a French channel dedicated to children's programming, will stream all content online after it ceases broadcasting in 2020. DR Ultra, the Danish public broadcaster dedicated to children aged 7-12, will also be converted into a web channel by 2020.⁵⁷

Some producers welcomed this shift. In Belgium, half the target audience for VRT's teenage reality drama series *4eVeR* already watch the show online. A commissioning editor at DR Ultra said his channel's move to online streaming will allow content to be better tailored to young audiences and so compete with commercial platforms. Given teenagers' attraction to fictional content, DR Ultra seeks to attract a wide youth audience through short drama series that are streamed online. The editor said:

For us it [online distribution] was a really good thing because it meant that we had to signal to all the users in all the chains of development and producing that we [...] need to structure our programmes differently.

One challenge facing public service broadcasters' online platforms is strong competition from well-funded globally operating Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) channels, including Netflix and Amazon Prime. However, an academic participant suggested that the current expansion of SVOD platforms amounts to a 'bubble', which can ultimately benefit public service channels if the latter learn from the SVOD providers' production and distribution strategies.

In one example of a public service channel tapping into the opportunities offered by online distribution, an editor of the ZDF documentary drama series *Berlin and Us* explained that the programme's website provided clips, a blog, and a live chat through which viewers could connect with the protagonists and ask

⁵⁷ <https://digitaltv.dr-ultra-kun-streaming-2020/>

questions. She revealed that the show was 'binge-watched' online by much of the target audience. The show's non-scripted approach translated to open-ended narratives for each episode, which in turn encouraged audiences to watch all eight episodes online in one sitting.

Several participants cited evidence showing the extent to which children are consuming content online. In the UK 52 per cent of children aged 8-11 in the UK have their own tablets and access news online.⁵⁸ Panelists in Session 2 said children with minority ethnic backgrounds were more likely to have mobile devices, and that social media provide opportunities for disseminating alternative narratives to those created by mainstream media. A BBC commissioning editor reported that children go online in search of authentic representations and that children have been found to repeat-watch episodes from the BBC series *My Life*, which follows children from a variety of different social and ethnic backgrounds.

6.2.2 Disconnect between displaced children and public service media

The symposium offered no easy answers to whether the move online will make content reflecting diversity more visible to young refugee and migrant children. First, studies show that representations of diversity are limited in children's screen content. The International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) in Munich analysed more than 1,500 hours of television across 24 countries in 2007 and followed up in 2017 with a repeat study of eight of these countries, which found that, 'despite advocacy, research and education about the importance of equality in gender and racial representation, children's TV, which is mainly dominated by men, continues to present white boys as "the normality" and girls as "the other"'.⁵⁹

Secondly, it is not clear how much public service media content actually reaches young people with migration backgrounds. One media expert asked:

Marginalised people are marginalised partly because they are not engaged with public service programmes. So to what extent are you [producers] making these programmes in the hope of including an audience that appreciates and gets value from them as well as educating your broader audience?

The response to this was largely anecdotal. Although it is difficult to get statistical data because of the obstacles to conducting audience research with marginalised groups, including recently displaced children, some producers spoke of interactions that had taken place with audience members during the course of filming. The Flemish producers of *4eVeR* recalled that, when shooting scenes on the streets, they had been approached by Arab boys who told them they liked their show. A similar experience was recounted for the UK preschool drama *Apple Tree House*, filmed on a housing estate in east London. On one occasion mothers of Bangladeshi origin had surrounded an actor of Asian background who plays a headscarf-wearing grandmother in the show and told her that they regularly watch *Apple Tree House* as a family. The programme maker suggested language would be an obstacle to conventional audience research because the women who spoke to the actor 'would be talking on social media but almost certainly not in English'. An executive producer with the EBU spoke of children's positive responses when watching EBU

⁵⁸ Ofcom, *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report*, 2017, pp 2-3.

⁵⁹ Maya Götz et al, 'Whose story is being told?', *Televizlon*, 31/2018/E, p 65.

dramas during screenings in an ethnically diverse area of London. She said it was a 'magical experience' for children to see others like themselves 'in the country that maybe they or their parents have come from'.

6.2.3 Displaced children and online learning

George Alain of the Open University introduced his doctoral research at the symposium, aimed at designing educational mobile phone apps for displaced Syrian children living in refugee camps in Greece. Since the majority of these children have been out of formal education for a long time, digital technologies offer a route to improving literacy and mitigating the language barriers Syrian children face if they attend Greek schools. Alain stressed that the process of designing a mobile phone app to achieve these goals should start with a 'bottom-up' approach that involves children themselves as well as social workers and teachers.

When it was mentioned that many apps targeting refugee children have been designed already but have not been taken up, Alain blamed previous developers' failure to take refugee children's wider social circumstances and needs into account. He advised researchers to start by establishing children's interests and sensitivities and to proceed with this knowledge in mind.

6.3 Representing hardship

6.3.1 Trauma from different perspectives

Ethical questions about depicting the painful experiences of displaced children came up in the symposium as they had in the workshops. Sophie Chalk of the International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) noted that one in three UK children aged 9-16 worries [about conflict in the world](#). As the number of refugees seeking safety in Europe rose, mainstream media covered the situation incessantly, often without explaining the issues in ways appropriate for children. If children are to approach the world with an open mind rather than fear, she said, they urgently need screen content that enhances understanding of diverse cultures and traditions.

The symposium's panel presentations explored various approaches to representing the experiences of displaced children. A researcher who has studied the making of Palestinian television for children warned against overuse of the term 'trauma'. She said NGOs and Western journalists have often described Palestinian children affected by violent conflict with Israel as 'traumatised', thereby shifting the focus from what is in essence a political conflict about land rights to a matter of psychology. She said:

I feel in the Palestinian case children are looked at only through trauma discourse. So there's no other way of looking at Palestinian children – [as if] the only thing they are is traumatised. They're not looked at as having a childhood [...]. Actually they do have a childhood, just not the kind of childhood that we're used to.

Alain added that some teachers in Greece needed encouragement to treat refugee children there like any other child and not to position them as different from Greek children. The teachers were saying they did not know how to deal with Syrian refugee children. They said 'we know they are very traumatized so we are afraid to tell them you have done something wrong'.

In 2005 the BBC aired a documentary called *Asylum*, following four families for two years through the prolonged and tortuous asylum process in the UK. A member of one of the families, who was eight years old at the time of flight from Algeria, spoke from personal experience of her concern that refugees' stories could be silenced if media workers are afraid to ask searching questions. She said:

These children have already been traumatised; they want to talk about things and they want to unbury so much, but people who have not gone through the same [experience] are not ready to [...] put in the work to [...] help people to adapt.

She suggested that agreement is lacking on what constitutes trauma. A child psychologist based at Harvard University also argued that 'trauma' varies according to place and time and that researchers and producers ought to 'trust the children' on a case-by-case basis about whether they are ready to share their story at all, and if so, on camera. A German researcher advised distinguishing between trauma, a condition which calls for a professional response, and a 'traumatic experience', which is something sufferers re-live over and over again.

6.3.2 'Children are interested in children's lives'

Producers and editors shared some of the strategies they have adopted to promote children's content dealing with serious factual topics. The approach behind German public broadcaster ZDF's *Berlin and Us*, a series that follows eight teenagers, half from refugee backgrounds and half born in Germany, was to focus on friendships, conversations, and fun activities that are interesting to young audiences aged nine and up. In the case of Danish public broadcaster DR Ultra's web series about an 11-year-old Danish Muslim boy called Hassan, who wants to try fasting during Ramadan even though he is officially too young, the subject of Ramadan was treated as incidental. A DR Ultra editor explained:

By making the selling point a universal child's perspective that is fascinating for all children, we had a lot of children select these clips because they're interested in children's lives, and then they got a perspective on Ramadan. We don't sell it as "Hassan has to go hungry all day". They would never have chosen it if we had tried to sell it as a show about Ramadan, which it wasn't. It was about a guy like them playing football and trying Ramadan.

A UK producer highlighted the wealth of material available around the world, saying:

'As programme makers moving forward, we have to consider a refocusing of what children's media means to our families and our children. [...] 'by looking away from the glitzy homogenized Hollywood view of media and looking at real stories that matter to us, we can find the real stories that exist around the world can be just as entertaining as Hollywood'.

6.3.3 Histories of conflict and forced migration

Noting a mainstream media tendency to treat the levels of forced migration in 2015-16 as a new phenomenon, an academic with Arab background asked media practitioners at the symposium whether they had ever reflected on other migration stories over the past 50 years. In fact, as was pointed out in response, an episode of the German pre-school programme *Die Sendung mit der Maus* (The Show with the Mouse), which had been devoted to the subject of refugees, had implicitly alluded to mass population movements caused by previous wars because it ended with the presenter encouraging child viewers to ask their parents and grandparents where they are from.⁶⁰ A UK children's content producer agreed that people everywhere 'have some great stories to tell and explain why we're here now'.

Historical particularities of forced migration were highlighted in a panel contribution showing how the concepts of 'home' and *awda* (return) mean very different things to first generation refugees from Palestine than to their children and grandchildren. For children who have been born in refugee camps, the camps represent home and 'the idea of the literal return seems to be slipping away'. For their parents, however, returning home has both physical and symbolic meanings. A puppet show clip from a 2014 episode of the Palestinian children's TV magazine programme *Bait Byoot* illustrated these changing meanings of home and return. In it a Palestinian grandmother tells her grandson how beautiful life in Palestine once was and that he needs to keep passing down the story of flight to his children and grandchildren.

A children's television producer based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) urged Europeans to improve their knowledge about Arab history, societies and cultures and challenge the stereotypical representations the region has been subject to in much mainstream European media over the last half century.

6.4 Children's participation

Like the workshops, the symposium revealed how much scope exists for involving children in producing content.

6.4.1 Children as producers

Alain showed how his research had demonstrated ways in which displaced children and children of the host community can take an active part in designing educational tools. His research team developed a mobile phone app with the participation of children living in refugee camps in Greece, as well as their parents and teachers. Through their involvement the team was able to identify both children's media preferences and the social challenges they are facing. Greek children and their teachers also wanted to engage with the refugee children's culture, while Syrian children wanted an app that was both culturally and linguistically relevant. Alain said:

They want to see things from their own culture, things that are related to them, to their mother tongue, and developed within a participatory manner, with teachers, with parents, with children from the early stages.

⁶⁰ See *Munich Workshop Briefing*, p 8.

The Dutch documentary filmmaker Mirjam Marks has worked on several participatory filmmaking initiatives with refugee children in the Netherlands. One initiative produced *The One Minutes Junior* films⁶¹, made in collaboration with Cinekid, The One Minute Foundation, and [Vrolijkheid](#), a Dutch foundation running creative workshops with children and teenagers in centres for asylum seekers. Children in the centres, helped by filmmakers and artists, made 60-second videos on a topic of their choice. These films were distributed on YouTube and at the Cinekid festival, attended by children who had made them.

At the symposium Marks introduced her current project, *Zara and the Magic Football Boots*, a six-episode drama for national broadcaster VPRO, made in collaboration with Cinekid and Vrolijkheid, scripted by well-known Dutch writers and set in asylum-seeker centers. Marks showed a clip of the first episode, about a girl who wants to be part of a soccer team. It was made with refugee children who took on supporting roles and created animation sequences in the film. The serial was scheduled to premiere at Cinekid 2018, watched by all the refugee children, before being screened on Dutch national TV.

6.4.2 Children as presenters

The Jordanian television producer Sharif al-Zoubi introduced a pitch for a television show he has been commissioned to produce for Jordan's Roya TV, in which local children, including refugees, get a chance to contribute as presenters and reporters. Jordan has accommodated millions of refugees over a long period but little has been done to meet refugee children's media needs on local television.⁶² Al-Zoubi told the symposium that he plans a live show which, besides an adult presenter, will feature seven children becoming presenters and reporters, with some activities taking place in refugee camps. The aim is for children to voice their opinions and aspirations for the future.

6.4.3 Children as actors

There have also been initiatives to integrate migrant children as the protagonists in children's programmes, but these can face challenges. The symposium learned that the team behind *Berlin and Us* had worked hard to approach schools, social workers and institutions to find teenagers who recently fled to Germany. They found it especially challenging to recruit girls, whose parents were worried about possible lack of supervision, and it took time to build up trust with refugee families.

Although the producers prompted the teenagers in *Berlin and Us* with ideas about activities they could do together, the show is not scripted and the characters acted naturally on camera. Commissioning editor Margrit Lenssen recalled that, during the filming process, the group of teenagers grew as a team, developing friendships and tolerance for each other. She said: 'We think all of them could be good role models for the audience watching them. And their relationships show that it's much more rewarding to approach one another with curiosity than with prejudice'. She added that refugee children among the viewership shared their responses and own personal stories on the programme's blog, providing feedback that was taken into account in subsequent seasons of the show.

Challenges in casting children from minority communities were also recounted by the makers of the Belgian reality drama series *4eVeR*. They saw about 400 children during auditions, of whom 1 per cent were Muslim. They eventually used a specialized casting agency to find a teenage actor with a Muslim

⁶¹ See Copenhagen Workshop Briefing, pp 5 and 11.

⁶² See UNESCO, *Assessment of Media Development in Jordan*, Paris: 2015, p 130

background to feature as one of the main characters. Rather than making immigration or diversity the main focus of the series, the producers chose to challenge stereotypes by portraying the daily life of a Muslim family firmly integrated into Flemish society – an approach that attracted a large audience. As one of the producers said:

We try a different approach. It's just a show, we are not playing the immigration card only but focus on similarities instead of difference. We are convinced that we can reach a lot more kids by using this method and because we reached already almost 100,000 children in our target market, we think it works.

6.4.4 Children as advisors

A commissioning editor for children's programmes at DR was asked how his team involved children in programme making: at what stage did they come in and what remit were they given? His answer was to take the involvement seriously from the start and allocate resources for the process. That means, for example, sharing the first draft of a script with junior editors, who are children within the channel's target group. He said:

It's such a cliché, but it's to stay very humble about what you know and what you don't know. We are really good at producing TV and making it entertaining, but we are really not good at understanding how a child thinks, because every five minutes their references to how they talk and walk changes. Basically, it's a new generation every five years and I can only be an expert on how my own life was as a child.

6.5 Continuing the conversation

The final session of the symposium highlighted the importance of future research and dialogue around the issues raised during the project.

6.5.1 Discovering what children value

A leading UK specialist in research on children and culture introduced the last session by pointing out that policy-makers and media funders ought to understand that today's child audience is tomorrow's adult audience. Unless they reach child audiences today, they risk not having an adult audience in future. She added that evidence from audience research with children is essential to making a case for the importance of high-quality children's programming to policy-makers.

Another academic noted that the UK regulator Ofcom is good at finding out how children access screen content but provides less information about what shows children watch and what they value. Meanwhile, the findings Ofcom releases about children's use of devices other than the television set are often misreported by the UK press as showing that children 'are not watching TV any more'. In fact, as testified

by symposium participants, they are still watching plenty of screen content, on different delivery platforms.

Sometimes research about children's interpretations of what they watch can be important at politically sensitive moments. According to Maya Götz, this is what happened in Germany in January 2018, when a politician of the German right-wing party AfD attracted support on social media after accusing a documentary on a German public service channel about a romance between a 16-year-old German and a 19-year-old refugee of 'pushing' German-born girls into 'the arms of refugees'. Götz told the symposium that IZI's research showed 'no, it's exactly the other way around. After watching it, they know the difference, and they don't want to get involved [in this way] with different cultures'. She said: 'There are some moments when you need exactly this kind of research to show the children's perspective, to bring their voice in'.

6.5.2 Getting data from commercial services

Many symposium participants wanted a more open media environment in which data on young audiences are made freely available. Commercial broadcasters and SVOD channels are currently not obliged to share their market research. A children's media advocate suggested that licence renewal for commercial channels could be made conditional on those channels publishing their research. Another, recalling how Internet safety for children had moved from a marginal to a central policy concern in just five years, suggested there could be a campaign to bring about legislative change in the European Union that would make audience research freely available by law. The situation in television was contrasted with the film industry, where information about audiences is widely available, giving filmmakers the opportunity to refine future film projects.

While European producers worry about lack of audience data from online platforms, information about audiences in the Middle East has always been scarce and unreliable. However, a producer from the UAE saw opportunities for local companies to join forces with global corporations, such as Netflix, to secure funding. Worried that children's content will increasingly be dictated by media moguls, she argued: 'If we can't beat them, we need to join them and find out what they're up to, so that maybe we can pitch something that would actually make the difference for our part of the world because at the moment we're too small to make any difference'.

6.5.3 Gaining global reach

One suggestion from the final panel was that the kind of content exchanges fostered within the EBU could be extended globally. An EBU executive producer noted that the children's dramas and documentaries made for exchange among EBU members travel easily because they have so little dialogue. She suggested collaboration with a global agency, such as UNICEF, which is based in Geneva like the EBU, to widen the exchange framework and extend screenings to many more countries through events such as children's film festivals.

This suggestion was endorsed by Sally-Ann Wilson, CEO of the Public Media Alliance (PMA), the largest global association of public service broadcasters, with members in 54 countries. She recalled the success of previous global exchanges. One, which produced 12 short films between 2005 and 2010 under the title *What Makes Me Happy*, was initiated by the Ragdoll Foundation and supported by Save the Children, Oxfam and UNICEF. It featured children in Nepal, Vietnam, China, Colombia, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, South

Sudan, Uganda and a refugee camp in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.⁶³ Before that there was the acclaimed series *Open a Door*, also promoted by Ragdoll founder Anne Wood, in which broadcasters from 34 countries were recruited to produce a 5-minute story without words from a young child's point of view.⁶⁴

Speaking for the PMA, Wilson told the symposium that 'children's content is absolutely at the heart of what we do'. She expressed concern that children's programming is coming off mainstream broadcast schedules, without being replaced on multiplatform channels 'as effectively as we would hope it would be' and warned that the crisis in securing funding for children's content was likely to worsen in future. She cited examples of good practice across the globe but noted that content produced in this way often found no outlet other than YouTube.

6.5.4 Future events and action

The biggest future event presented at the symposium was the May 2021 World Summit on Media for Children in Dublin. This is one of a series that started in Australia in 1995 and has been held every three or four years since then, in Greece, Brazil, South Africa, Sweden, Malaysia and twice in the UK, most recently in Manchester, hosted by the BBC in December 2017. Marion Creely, ambassador for the forthcoming Dublin summit, said it would focus on creativity and storytelling and will be preceded by pre-summit gatherings in São Paulo, Johannesburg, Mumbai and, possibly, Dubai.

However, in the view of one participant, the biggest need was to find the levers of power. He said:

We know what to do, what the problems are. Where are the levers of power to affect them? If the idea is that research is going to influence government – maybe that's possible in the UK because of Ofcom, but not elsewhere. In most of the world government knows a lot and couldn't care less. The issue is creating new institutions, not motivating existing ones. It's to use the opportunity that online distribution offers to create new institutions and make content available.

⁶³ See <http://www.ragdollfoundation.org.uk/portfolio/what-makes-me-happy>. The British Council makes the films available as a classroom resource at <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/classroom-resources/what-makes-me-happy>

⁶⁴ For a sample of episodes last shown on CBeebies in May 2007 see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007qll1/broadcasts/2007/05>

7 APPENDIX: SAMPLES OF CONTENT

7.1 Animation

Arthur (1996-2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis - Series 14, Episode 25: ‘In my Africa’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner: PBS (US) • Producer: Cookie Jar Group (Canada) • Episodes: Airs on CBBC • Age group: 4-8 years 	<p>Set in the fictional American location of Elwood City, <i>Arthur</i> revolves around the lives of 8-year-old Arthur Read, his sister DW, and their friends and family. The show has educational goals connected to literacy, problem-solving and social goals linked to friendship, diversity and family. In this episode, Sheik moves from Senegal to Elwood City and joins DW's class. She presents him with a picture she has drawn of a hippo bus to swim to school and a volcano. He asks "Where did you learn this nonsense?", explaining that he comes from a big city. The teacher responds: 'DW I'm sure you meant well, but you should learn about a place before you describe it'. DW subsequently studies maps and books about Africa, determined to learn about the continent.</p>

Asylbarn - Jamila, Gid jeg kunne flyve (<i>Asylum Child - Jamila, If only I could fly</i> , Denmark, 2013)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director: Jannik Hastrup • Producer: Dansk Tegnefilm with support of the Danish Film Institute • Animation: Jannik Hastrup • Episodes: 3 x 10' • Age group: 6-9 years 	 <p><i>Jamila, if only I could fly</i> is one of three animated dramas in the series <i>Asylum Child</i>, based on the experiences of refugee children in Denmark. Jamila is an eight-year-old girl who was born in a Danish refugee camp, after her parents fled to Denmark from Iraq ten years ago. Jamila has had many friends at the refugee center, but most of them only stay for a short while. As the clips shown at the workshop revealed, right now Cecilie is Jamila's best friend with whom she flirts with boys and goes belly dancing at the afterschool club. But Cecilie and her family have been denied asylum and are deported, even though Cecilie was born in Denmark.</p>

Die Sendung mit dem Elefanten (<i>The Programme with the Elephant</i> , 2007- present, Germany), 2016	
Production Details	Synopsis Flüchtlingsspezial (Refugee Special)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers (Refugee Special): Renate Bleichenbach and Markus Tomsche for WDR • Writers: Renate Bleichenbach, Markus Tomsche and Clemens Gersch • Broadcaster: WDR/ARD/KiKa • Duration: 24 minutes • Age group: Preschool 	 <p>A little blue elephant provides continuity for this regular show, which offers entertaining and educational short films. The show also addresses more serious topics, such as friendship, grief, fear, and tolerance. In this episode, the programme introduces children to the complex subject of 'refugees'. It opens with a cartoon in which a rockslide forces the crocodile Viktor to leave his pond and seek a new home, meeting resistance from the occupants of other ponds along the way. Later in the episode, documentary clips introduce children from Syria and Ghana, newly arrived in Germany. It closes with the presenter encouraging children to find out about migration stories within their own families.</p>

JoNaLu (2008-2014, Germany)	
Production Details	Synopsis - Der Kaufladen (The shop)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: ZDF/KiKa • Producer: Jan Bonath for Scopas Medien AG • Script: Helge Mey, Michael Schulden, Ina Werner et al. • Duration: 26 x 35' (2 series) • Age group: Preschool 	 <p>The names of the protagonists, Jo, Naya and Ludwig together make up the title of <i>JoNaLu</i>. Jo and Naya are mice and Ludwig is a ladybird. The trio live together in a mouse hole in the house of Paul and his mother. On their excursions, they discover the world, showing children how to respond to different situations, and encouraging them to learn through music and dance. Other characters come from different countries and are recognised by speaking a different language: Caruso is from Italy, Sibel is from Turkey, Nikolaj speaks Russian, Carmen speaks Spanish, Scottie speaks English and Minou is from France. We showed a clip in which Naya and Sibel make coins from paper to go shopping in Jo's play shop.</p>

Mixed Nutz (2008)	
Production Details	Synopsis - Episode 1- ‘School’s in Session’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioner: Shaw Television and PBS (US) Producer: Big Bad Boo Studios (Canada) Episodes: 13 X 30’ Age group: 5-8 years 	<p><i>Mixed Nutz</i> endeavors to promote diversity and tolerance by celebrating cultural difference. The main characters in <i>Mixed Nutz</i>, all of whom are 9 years old, are from Iran, India, Austria, Cuba and Korea. In a clip from Episode 1, new boy, Sanjay, originally from India, joins the class and introduces himself to his new classmates using jokes, but not all of them understand him. In the following sequence, Damaris, whose parents moved to the US from Cuba, introduces herself to the class.</p>

ZDF Logo! (Germany, 2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis – Verteilung von Flüchtlingen in der EU (Distribution of Refugees in the EU)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prod./Broadcaster: ZDF Format: Animation 1 Minute Age group: 8-12 years 	 <p>This animated clip explains the distribution of refugees within the European Union (EU), and that the EU is now suing three of its own member states - Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic - which are failing to meet their refugee targets.</p>

7.2 Factual programming and documentaries

Ayham: Mein neues Leben (Ayham: My new Life, 2016, Switzerland)	
Production Details	Synopsis - Film and webisodes 1-17
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadcaster: Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF); ZDF/KiKa Directors: Marek Beles & Illona Stämpfli Prod. company: Essence Films Format: Documentary Duration: 28’ & 15’ webisodes Age group: 11-15 years 	 <p>Together with his family, 11-year-old Ayham is forced to flee from Syria to escape the war. He did not really want to leave his home and his friends, but the danger was too great. The family travelled for five months before starting a new life in Switzerland. The first few months are tough, but at school Ayham soon makes friends with classmates who like to play football. The football coach discovers his talent and makes it possible for him to have a trial with the Grasshopper Club in Zurich. The club then takes him into its junior team for one year.</p>

CBBC Newsround (UK, 2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis - Ayshah meets child refugees in Greece
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioner: CBBC Broadcaster: CBBC Format: News for children 2 minutes Broadcast 14 March 2017 Age group: 9-12 years 	 <p>CBBC Newsround reporter Ayshah Tull travels to Greece to meet children who have recently fled to Europe from conflict zones, particularly from countries in the Arab world. In interviews with children and youth (who remain anonymous), Ayshah learns that many of them are currently stranded in Greece and are eagerly hoping to move on and find a new home.</p>

De Kinderburgemeester (The Children's Mayor, NL, 2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dir. Susan Koenen Executive Prod. Albert Klein Haneveld Prod. company: Hollandse Helden Broadcaster- Commissioner: NPO Zapp - KRO-NCRV Format: Documentary 15 minutes Age group: 6-12 years 	 <p><i>De Kinderburgemeester</i> focuses on Yassine, a boy of Moroccan heritage who was Children's Mayor in Gouda for one year. Yassine has two goals for his one-year 'term of office': bringing children from different ethnic backgrounds together and meeting his role model, the Moroccan-born mayor of Rotterdam, Ahmed Aboutaleb. The clips in the workshop show Yassine sending an email to Aboutaleb, asking if they can meet. Aboutaleb replies saying that he does not have time, but perhaps Yassine can drop by. After a tour of the town hall, Yassine is told that the mayor is not available. But he does not give up and eventually manages to arrange a meeting, during which the mayor tells him that he has to work 'extra hard' as children's mayor, because many people have prejudices against Moroccan people. The closing scene shows a wistful Yassine as he hands over the role to his successor, Romaissa.</p>

<u>Een jaar zonder mijn ouders</u> (<i>A Year Without My Parents</i> , NL, 2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director: Els van Driel • Producer: Anouk Dark • Executive Producer: Anouk Donker • Production Company: IKON • Broadcaster: NPO Zapp • Format: Documentary • 23 minutes • Age group: 9-15 years 	 <p><i>Een jaar zonder mijn ouders</i> puts the spotlight on eleven-year-old Tareq, who has fled war in Syria to live in Europe. Tareq embarked on this journey without his parents, leaving them behind with his sister and brother. Once arrived in the Netherlands, Tareq starts a new life and goes to school (a clip shown at the workshop). However, he faces an uncertain future, not knowing if and when he will see his parents again. This documentary follows Tareq in this critical period of waiting for a reunion with his family after having been apart for more than a year.</p>

<u>Ferie på Flygtningøen</u> (<i>Vacation on Refugee Island</i> , Denmark, 2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writer/dir: Frej Pries Schmedes • Producer: Dorthe Rosenørn Schmedes • Broadcaster: DR Ultra • Production Company: Loke Film • Format: Documentary • 24 minutes • Screened at CPH: Dox 2018 • Age group: 7-12 years 	 <p><i>Ferie på Flygtningøen</i> explores the situation of refugees on the Greek island of Samos from the perspective of Alvin, a Danish boy who enjoys a beach holiday with his father (the film's director). The film opens with Alvin snorkelling in the sea, where he finds a small orange life vest and learns that it must have belonged to a child. Alvin subsequently tries to find and meet children who live in refugee camps on Samos, and hopes to give them candy. The clips shown during the workshop included Alvin finding the life vest and meeting a group of children in a refugee camp - an encounter that is interrupted by police, after which Alvin and his father spend several hours at the police station.</p>

<u>Hassan og Ramadanen</u> (<i>Hassan and Ramadan</i> , Denmark, 2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis - Film and webisodes 1-17
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner/Broadcaster: DR Ultra • Dir. Ulla Søe • Prod. Mette Mailand • Production Company: Plus Pictures with The DFI • Format: Documentary • 45 minutes (film)/17 x 5-9 minutes (Web series) • Target audience: Grades 3-6 	 <p><i>Hassan og Ramadanen</i> centres on eleven-year-old Hassan who lives in Køge, Denmark, with his family, originally from Iraq. Hassan's family are Shia Muslims and he has decided he wants to try fasting for the first time during Ramadan, inspired by his older brothers and parents. But how can Hassan concentrate at school, succeed at football, and play with his friends while not eating or drinking from dawn to sunset? <i>Hassan og Ramadanen</i> is a 45-minute documentary film, divided into 17 webisodes of 5-9 minutes duration for distribution as a web series on YouTube. We showed two clips. In the first, Hassan explains to his family that he would like to join them in fasting. In the second, Hassan and his father talk in the car about how and why they identify Denmark as their home.</p>

<u>Heijplaters</u> (<i>Harbourboyz</i> , NL, 2018)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director: Mirjam Marks • Producer: Nienke Korthof • Production company: Tangerine Tree • Commissioner: EO/IKONdocs • Broadcaster NPO Zapp • Format: Documentary • 15 minutes • Age group: 8-12 years 	 <p>Set in Heijplaat, a working-class harbour district in Rotterdam, this observational film introduces five boys who are close friends despite all coming from different religious and cultural backgrounds. They were born in the Netherlands, but their origins range from Dutch and Turkish to Surinamese, Syrian and Chinese. However, for this close-knit group of friends, these differences do not seem to matter. The clips we showed of <i>Heijplaters</i> revealed that in an area where containers and ships replace playgrounds, there is not much for the teenagers to do, which makes their friendship particularly important.</p>

<u>Hello Salaam</u> (The Netherlands [NL], Greece, 2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers: Hasse van Nunen & Renko Douze • Production Company: Een van de Jongens • Director: Kim Brand • Broadcaster: NPO Zapp • Commissioner: KRO-NCRV • Format: Documentary • 16 minutes • Screened at CPH: DOX 2018 • Age group: 6-12 years 	 <p>This short documentary follows two Dutch pre-teens, Sil (10) and Merlijn (11), who decide to spend their summer vacation at a refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos. From their mothers – who both volunteer in the camps – they have heard stories of children who live there, having made the dangerous crossing from Turkey in unseaworthy boats.</p> <p>We showed clips depicting Sil's and Merlijn's experiences of the camp, including a visit to an inflatable boat 'graveyard', handing out food to families crammed in temporary housing, and making friends with a group of refugee boys - aided by a translation app - which prompts them to reflect on how it might be to lose one's home, and become stranded in a foreign country.</p>

<u>Het Haar van Ahmad</u> (Ahmad's Hair, NL, 2016)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dir. Susan Koenen • Prod. Albert Klein Haneveld • Prod co.: Hollandse Helden • Broadcaster/Commissioner: NPO Zapp: KRO-NCRV • Format: Documentary • 23 minutes • Screened at CPH: DOX 2018 • Age group: 6-12 years 	 <p>Twelve-year old Ahmad has just arrived in the Netherlands from Syria. While he is busy trying to integrate into Dutch society, learn a new language and make new friends, he is also on a heart-warming, personal mission: he is growing his hair, so that it can be donated to a Dutch child who has lost their hair due to illness.</p> <p>The clips we showed revealed Ahmad's initial struggle with making new friends and learning Dutch, his growing confidence, and that for him, donating his hair is a way of giving something back for the help he and his family received from the Netherlands.</p>

<u>Neuneinhalb: Karim und Mahdi - Eine Grenzenlose Freundschaft</u> (Nine and a half: Karim and Mahdi - A Boundless Friendship, 2017, Germany)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: ARD/WDR/KiKa • Format: Documentary/News • Duration: 9 minutes • Age group: 7-11 years 	 <p><i>Neuneinhalb</i> is a news feature for children. This episode centres on the friendship between Karim and Mahdi, who fled his home in Afghanistan with his family two years ago and now lives in Germany.</p> <p>The family has not yet been granted asylum and faces deportation. Nevertheless, Karim and Mahdi enjoy their time together by celebrating Mahdi's 11th birthday - the first time in his life he is having a birthday party - going swimming and eating lunch with all of Mahdi's family.</p>

<u>Merna in de Spotlight</u> (Merna in the Spotlight, 2016, Netherlands)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: EO/IKON, NPO Netherlands • Director: Mirjam Marks • Format: Documentary • Duration: 15 minutes • Age group: 9 years and over 	 <p>Eleven-year old Merna and her parents had to leave Iraq because, as Christians, they were under threat from Islamic State fanatics.</p> <p>Merna previously only sang in church, but in Lebanon she makes a name for herself on the Arabic version of <i>The Voice Kids</i>. After waiting two years for permission to find a new home, Merna's biggest dream is simply to be able to live in a safe environment with her family.</p>

<u>My Life: Coming to Britain (2015)</u>	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner: CBBC • Producer: Ameer Fairbank • Company: Lizardfish, Manchester • Format: Documentary • Age group: 9-12 years 	 <p><u>My Life</u> is a documentary series commissioned by CBBC which follows the lives of individual children across the world. <i>My Life: Coming to Britain</i> follows the lives of two girls from Sudan and a boy from Romania as they try to settle into their new lives in the UK. Rania's and Marwa's story shows them embarking on a new journey of making friends, learning English and getting used to the weather. The film shows the girls embracing all things British, from fish and chips to having their first birthday party in the UK.</p>

<u>My Life: New Boys in Town (2017)</u>	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner: CBBC • Producer: Rachel Drummond-Hay and Tamsin Summers • Company: Drummer TV • Episode: Aired 4 March 2017 • Format: Documentary • Age group: 9-12 years 	 <p>Part of the <u>My Life</u> Series, <i>New Boys in Town</i> shows 12-year-old Adel, a Syrian refugee recently settled in the UK, embarking on a mission with his friend Elijah to welcome new refugees in his hometown of Bristol. One of them is Ahmad who is spending his first summer in the UK. The film follows Ahmad, Adel and Elijah at the Bristol Bike Project where Ahmad is given a bike to fix up before the three of them head off to enjoy a cycle ride around the city. This marks a poignant moment for Ahmad, who has barely ventured out of his flat other than to the supermarket. According to <u>Kez Margrie</u>, CBBC Executive producer, the series represents 'a treasure trove of different directing styles'.</p>

<u>Nuzuh (Displacement, Malaysia/Yemen, 2016)</u>	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director: Shatha Alghabri • Producer: Yemen Identity Organisation • Streamed by Oxfam • Format: Documentary interviews • 4 minutes • Age group: 10 years and over 	 <p>'We used to sleep on the floor — not in bed — so that when an explosion happened, the glass wouldn't shatter on us', explains one girl who fled Yemen's capital city, Sana'a, with her family. Through the thoughts of children who have fled to Malaysia to escape the dangers of living in a conflict zone, this short film highlights the ongoing war in Yemen. The children talk about what they miss about their lives in Yemen, whether they want to return to their home country, and what they would do if they were the president of Yemen.</p>

<u>The One Minutes Jr. (NL, 2017)</u>	
Production Details	Synopsis - <u>My Trip by Marwa</u> and <u>My New Friends by Aya</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner: UNICEF & The One Minutes Foundation • Producer: Cinekid & Stichting De Vrolijkheid • Format: Animation (Marwa), Documentary (Aya) • 2 x 1' • Age group: Family 	 <p><i>The One Minutes Jr.</i> is a participatory arts and video initiative that highlights the diversity among children and youth around the world. Through workshops, children produce videos of 60 seconds on a topic of their choice, and are mentored by adult film professionals. <i>My Trip</i> and <i>My New Friends</i> were made in workshops involving two Syrian girls (Marwa and Aya) who live in refugee accommodation in the Netherlands. <i>My Trip</i> is an animated treatment of the journey Marwa took with her family to escape the conflict in Syria. In <i>My New Friends</i>, Aya reflects on how she settled into a strange new country by making new friends.</p>

<u>Tro Håb Afghanistan: Laylas Melodi</u> (Faith-Hope-Afghanistan: Layla's Melody, Denmark, 2013)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors: Jens Pedersen & Tai M. Bakthari • Producer: Jakob Gottschau • Production company: Pederson & Co • Broadcaster: DR • Format: Documentary • 16 minutes • Age group: Grades 3-10 	 <p><i>Laylas Melodi</i> is one of five films in the series <i>Tro Håb Afghanistan</i>, which follows children in Afghanistan who live in the shadow of conflict in the country. The film follows eleven-year old Layla, who lives in a Kabul orphanage. Her father was killed in the war and she has not seen her mother for four years. However, Layla feels happy in the orphanage, because she can go to school and play music. Layla learns that her mother is coming to visit her. We showed clips demonstrating how Layla is torn between excitement about the reunion and fear that she might be expected to return to her mother's village to get married.</p>

<u>Where in the World: Hamza</u> (2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner: CBeebies • Producer: Dominic Sant • Company: Evans Woolfe • Episodes: 20 X 15' (1 series) • Format: Documentary • Age group: Preschool 	 <p><u>Where in the World?</u> is an international preschool documentary series that aired in June 2017. It follows eight children in eight countries in their daily lives. Producer Dominic Sant said: 'It's just really trying to capture what they do and where they go. One of the key drivers for us was the sense that a lot of what children see is obviously the news and aid campaigns. That's all great, but the kind of wider missing context was normal children living ordinary lives, just getting on with it. So we thought it'd be really good to go and film children with their families doing things, going to school, playing with friends and hopefully we achieved quite a lot'.</p>

7.3 Drama

<u>Apple Tree House</u> (2017)	
Production Details	Synopsis - Series 1: Episode 2 – <u>'First Days'</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner: CBeebies • Producer: Gregory Boardman and Eugenio Perez; Three Stones Media • Company: Five Apples Ltd. • Episodes: 60 X 15' (2 series) • Format: Drama with animation sequences • Creators: William Vanderpuye, Maria Timotheou, Akindele Akinsiku. • Age group: Preschool 	 <p>The series follows Mali, who has just moved to the Apple Tree council estate and makes a new best friend called Sam. The friends go on adventures, solving daily problems and overcoming childhood dilemmas in a 'very contemporary inner-city world', which could be 'any city in the UK'. The series plays as a mainstream idea that reflects both the diversity of characters that you might find in the inner city, but also 'a diversity of storytelling' giving opportunities to reflect the writers' own life experiences e.g. experiencing Ramadan, or explaining what children have seen on the news (e.g. a story about refugees). A prominent show, <i>Apple Tree House</i> is a part of <u>BBC efforts to</u> offer a 'more authentic' view of children's lives from diverse backgrounds.</p>

<u>Dschermeni</u> (2017-present, Germany)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: ZDF/KiKa • Producers: Martin Choroba, Johanna Teichmann (Tellux Films), Klaus Döring, Andrea Steinhöfel (Sad Origami) • Format: Fiction • Duration: 6 X 25' • Age group: 8-12 years 	 <p>This drama series follows the unusual friendship among four teenagers: Moritz, who is German-born; Rüyet, who is also born and lives in Germany and whose family came from Turkey three generations ago; a Syrian boy, Yassir, who is a refugee, and Aminata, a Senegalese girl who has applied for asylum in Germany with her family. Both Yassir and Aminata risk deportation. We showed a clip from episode 4, in which Moritz and Rüyet press for Yassir's and Aminata's right to stay in Germany by visiting the asylum office where Moritz's mother works. At home with her family Rüyet defends her brother, who has come out as gay. Following an angry scene, she flees the family home to a hut by a lake, where the friends often meet. Aminata is worried about her brother Youssouph, who is part of a criminal gang dealing in stolen goods, which she fears puts the family at risk of deportation if he is caught.</p>

<u>Dad</u> (2014, Wales)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: S4C • Writers: Catrin Clarke, Angharad Devonald • Director: Ashley Way • Producer: Sophie Francis • Distribution: EBU Exchange • Duration: 14 minutes • Age group: 6-12 years 	 <p>Ten-year-old Cai is suffering the impact of a nameless war happening far from his home in Wales. His soldier father has returned physically damaged and mentally fragile from the conflict. Cai and his mother are finding it hard to love this changed man. But, on a windswept beach, Cai befriends Amir, a refugee, who has got washed up alone and is scavenging to survive. The meeting of the boys from two different worlds is the beginning of healing for both.</p>

<u>4eVeR</u> (2016-, Belgium)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: VRT/Ketnet • Writers/Directors/Producers: Camiel Scheer & David Madder for ScheMa producties, in collaboration with Awel (https://awel.be/) • Format: Drama • Duration: 48 X 12' (Series 1). • Age group: 9-12 years 	 <p>4eVeR is a semi-scripted drama series, now running for four seasons, that follows the friendship between four Flemish teenagers who live in the same neighbourhood, but who grow up in very different families. The teenagers from white Flemish, mixed race and Moroccan backgrounds have fun together, but they are also confronted with difficult situations, problems, and setbacks. Themes covered in 4eVeR include love, insecurity, foster care, bullying at school, living in a new family, media literacy, poverty, depression, and discrimination. The clip shown in the workshop addresses the 2016 terrorist attacks in Belgium one year on as well as aspects of religion, and absent fathers.</p>

<u>Jamillah and Aladdin</u> (2015-2016, UK)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: BBC (CBBC, CBeebies) • Production Company: Kindle Entertainment • Format: Comedy Drama • Duration: 52 x 14' • Age group: 4-7 years 	 <p><i>Jamillah and Aladdin</i> is a live-action drama series featuring magic and comedy. Set in a fanciful version of 8th century Baghdad, it has a modern-day twist, as the protagonist is Jamillah, a young Londoner living with her extended family, who finds a magic lamp in the attic one rainy day and unwittingly becomes a hapless genie's new master. Fulfilling her first wish, the genie transports her to Baghdad where they meet Aladdin and have adventures.</p>

<u>Nur</u> (2014, Slovenia)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: RTV Slovenija • Dir. Kaya Tokuhisa • Producer: Metka Dedakovic • Executive Producer EBU: Beryl Richards • Prod. Manager: Barbara Daljavec • Distribution: EBU Exchange • Duration: 16 minutes • Age group: 6-9 years 	 <p>Nur, a young Syrian girl, arrives on her own at her uncle's house in Slovenia after fleeing the war. Her parents still live in Syria. Her uncle, a busy doctor, is often not at home and does little to assist Nur in settling into her new environment. Nur is also unable to establish a working phone connection with her parents and increasingly isolates herself in her uncle's flat. The only thing that reminds her of home is a bottle of rose water she finds on her uncle's shelf. After accidentally spilling it on the floor, Nur embarks on a mission to the outside world to replace it. During this journey, she gradually makes friends with Pia, a Slovenian girl who lives next door.</p>

<u>Refugee</u> (2016, UK)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner: TrueTube.co.uk • Producer: CTVC (UK) • Duration: 11 minutes • Format: Live action drama • Age group: secondary schools 	 <p>This award-winning film is presented as follows: 'If you were forced to leave your home and could only take one bag, what would you take? What would it feel like to be on the run from your own country, in the hope of finding a safe place somewhere else? In this short drama, we meet a young girl and her family in an unknown land and discover how they came to be there, far away from home.'</p>

<u>Swing</u> (2017, Serbia)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: RTS - Radio Televizija Srbije • Director: Branko Vucic • Executive Producer EBU: Beryl Richards • Distribution: EBU Exchange • Duration: 15 minutes • Age group: 6-9 years 	 <p><i>Swing</i> tells the story of two brothers who arrive in Serbia after fleeing conflict in their home country. On arrival, however, they have to hide from the police as they are travelling without documents. As one of the brothers, Saber, gets sick, they hide in a shed on a farm where Milos, a Serbian boy, lives with his parents. While Saber recovers slowly, his younger brother, Amir, makes friends with Milos, who secretly provides the pair with food and supplies. When Milos's mother discovers the brothers and calls the police, they are forced to leave.</p>

7.4 Infotainment

<u>Berlin und Wir</u> (Berlin and Us, Germany, 2016)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcaster: ZDF/KiKa • Director: Heike Raab • Prod: Till Dreier, Christine Pfenning, Markus Steiner (IMAGO TV) • Editorial: Margrit Lenssen, Eva Radlicki • Format: Documentary • Duration: 8 x 24' (2 series) • Age group: 9-15 years 	 <p>This non-fiction series features four teenagers (Seyid, Akram, Rashad and Bayan), who live in Berlin after fleeing their home countries, and four Berlin-born teenagers (Millane, Linus, Malina and Oskar). Their shared goal is to find out if they get on with each other, and if they are able to grow as a team. The camera follows them for three months as they experience their city and explore how much they have in common. We showed a clip from episode 4, which follows girls Malina and Rashad as they attend a football training session at Malina's soccer club. The series' first season won the 2018 International Kids Emmy for factual content in Cannes; its third season is in production.</p>

<u>Educating Greater Manchester</u> (2017, UK)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner: Channel 4 • Producer: Twofour Group (UK) • Episodes: 8 X 47' (2017) • Format: Fly on the Wall documentary • Target audience: Family, but post 9pm watershed 	<p>Synopsis - Various clips featuring Rani, a Syrian refugee</p> <p>Set in a secondary school in Salford, the episode focuses on 11-year-old Rani who recently moved to the UK from Syria and is struggling to settle in. The first clip showed Rani disclosing to the student counsellor that he is being bullied by another (British) student. In the second clip, Rani's teacher sets up a meeting between Rani and Murad, a 16-year-old student who also fled from Syria. After the meeting, Murad is interviewed about his flight from Syria (via a boat) and his missing father. Clip 3 showed coverage of the episode on This Morning (ITV), 31 August 2017, in which Rani and Jack are interviewed by the presenters about their friendship.</p>

<u>The Big Family Cooking Showdown</u> (2017, UK)	
Production Details	Synopsis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner: BBC2, 8pm • Producer: BBC, UK • Episodes: 12 X 59' (2017-18) • Format: Reality game show • Target audience: Family 	<p>Synopsis – Series 1, Episode 5</p>  <p>This competitive food show celebrates families who cook together. We showed a clip from Episode 5 (aired on 14 September 2017), featuring the Ayoubi family, long-settled migrants, who moved to the UK from Syria 25 years ago. The clip reveals diversity inside the family, with one daughter, a construction engineer, wearing hijab and the other not.</p>



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This Consolidated Report brings together five publications produced during a one-year project, funded by the UK's Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC), to stimulate dialogue between European and Arab stakeholders around European screen content for and about young children of Arab heritage who are living in Europe through forced migration.

The project, supported by AHRC funding for Impact and Engagement, included three workshops in different locations (Manchester, Copenhagen and Munich) under the same title, 'Children's Screen Content in an Era of Forced Migration: Facilitating Euro-Arab Dialogue', and a symposium in London on 14 September 2018 under the title 'Invisible Children: Children's Media, Diversity and Forced Migration'. The five reports gathered here are available separately online, namely – in chronological order of being produced – the [Manchester Workshop Briefing: Children's Screen Content in an Era of Forced Migration: Facilitating Arab-European Dialogue](#); [Copenhagen Workshop Briefing: Children's Screen Content in an Era of Forced Migration: Facilitating Arab-European Dialogue – Documentaries, Distribution, Ethics](#), and [Munich Workshop Briefing: Children's Screen Content in an Era of Forced Migration: Facilitating Arab European Dialogue – Drama, Storytelling, Empathy](#); [Project Report to Stakeholders](#) and [London Symposium Briefing](#).

For more details see the project website at www.euroarabchildrensmedia.org or contact Professor Jeanette Steemers at Kings College London (jeanette.steemers@kcl.ac.uk).

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funds world-class, independent researchers in a wide range of subjects: ancient history, modern dance, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, English literature, design, the creative and performing arts, and much more. This financial year the AHRC will spend approximately £98m to fund research and postgraduate training in collaboration with a number of partners. The quality and range of research supported by this investment of public funds not only provides social and cultural benefits but also contributes to the economic success of the UK. For further information on the AHRC, please go to: www.ahrc.ac.uk

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