

Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat: Documenting Migratory Journeys and Experiences

Findings Relating to Family Reunification, prepared by Dr Vicki Squire and Nina Perkowski

Findings pertaining to family reunification differ widely across research sites. Here we present findings from Phase 1 of our research project in Kos and Sicily, comprising a total of 51 in-depth qualitative interviews in Kos and 50 in Sicily (101 in total). Whereas many interviewees in Kos had family members already in the EU whom they often sought to join, many of those in Sicily did not know anyone who had moved to the EU. Several interviewees – particularly among arrivals in Kos – had left family members behind, hoping to reunite with them once beginning their asylum procedure within the EU. Beyond family networks, many interviewees in Kos also had friends who had moved to the EU, whom they often sought to join.

Findings in Kos

51% (26/51)¹ of interviewees in Kos had family members in EU countries, some of whom had lived there for extended periods of time, whereas others had arrived a few months or years previously. 29.4% (15/51)² had no family members, but knew friends who had moved to the EU and who had passed on information on conditions in various member states to them. Of the 51% who had family members in the EU, 11.5% (3/26)³ had travelled to the EU to join their wives or girlfriends, 1 of whom had children with her in the EU already. 23.1% (6/26)⁴ had adult children or siblings they were seeking to join. The remaining 65.4% (17/26)⁵ had cousins, uncles, or in-laws in the EU.

27.5% (14/51)⁶ of all interviewees were hoping to reunite with their extended family who were already in the EU. 12% (6/51)⁷ had extended family in the EU but sought to reach other countries than those their family stayed in. The latter was mostly due to expectations relating to reception conditions, length of asylum procedures, or the perceived speed of family reunification.

10% of interviewees in Kos (5/51)⁸ were seeking to move to EU countries in the hope of allowing family members to follow them through family reunification mechanisms. This included frail elderly parents, pregnant wives, or young children, for whom the journey was deemed too risky.

Findings in Sicily

In comparison, only 14% of interviewees in Sicily (7/50) had family members in EU member states, of whom 43% (3/7) were unaccompanied minors and 43% (3/7) women. Of those with family members, 43% (3/7) had siblings in EU states, whereas 57% (4/7) had in-laws, uncles, or cousins in the EU.

52% (26/50) of all interviewees, of whom 27% (7/26) were unaccompanied minors, 4% (1/26) women, and 69% (18/26) men, stated explicitly that they did not know anybody in the EU prior to arrival.

2% (1/50) of the total sample expressed the desire to bring their family to Italy through family reunification.

Notes on Research Samples

In Kos, 51 interviews were conducted from Sep-Nov 2015, including 5 unaccompanied minors and 4 women. In Sicily, 50 interviews were conducted in the same time frame, including 12 unaccompanied minors and 11 women. *Please note that while broadly reflective of demographic characteristics of those arriving on these islands over the last year, we do not claim our sample to be representative. For further information on this or the results presented in this overview, please contact: v.j.squire@warwick.ac.uk. The project website is available at <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/crossingthemed>*

¹ 76.9% (20/26) of this group were men, 15.4% (4/26) were women, and 7.7% (2/26) were unaccompanied minors.

² 93.3% (14/15) of this group were men, 6.7% (1/15) were unaccompanied minors.

³ All of them were male.

⁴ 16.7% (1/6) of this group were female, and 83.3% (5/6) were male.

⁵ 17.6% (3/17) of them were female, and 11.7% (2/17) were unaccompanied minors. 70.6% (12/17) were men.

⁶ 14.3% (2/14) of this group were unaccompanied minors, 21.4% (3/14) were women, and 64.3% (9/14) were men.

⁷ 66.7% (4/6) of them were men, 33.3% (2/6) were women.

⁸ All of them were male.