

# Migratory conditions of unaccompanied foreign minors: a quantitative analysis of social vulnerability

Condiciones migratorias de menores extranjeros no acompañados: un análisis cuantitativo de la vulnerabilidad social

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**ABSTRACT.** To know the relationship between migration towards Europe of unaccompanied foreign minors (UFMs) and their vulnerability. 730 UFMs participated in this study. A questionnaire was used. This tool was divided into four blocks: demographic data, migratory circumstances before reaching Spain, migratory circumstances in Spain, and exposure to criminal behaviours. According to the statistical analysis in Spain, 87.7% of them crossed the Strait of Gibraltar in extremely hazardous conditions. Eighty-five percent suffered from deprivation during transit. Once settled in Spain, 22.5% of UFMs or their peers has been enticed to commit illegal acts. This study offers precise numbers on the conditions of vulnerability suffered by UFMs both during their migratory journey from Africa and when living in Europe.

**RESUMEN.** Conocer la relación entre la migración hacia Europa de menores extranjeros no acompañados (UFM) y su vulnerabilidad. 730 UFM participaron en este estudio. Se utilizó un cuestionario. Esta herramienta se dividió en cuatro bloques: datos demográficos, circunstancias migratorias antes de llegar a España, circunstancias migratorias en España y exposición a conductas delictivas. Según el análisis estadístico en España, el 87,7% de ellos cruzó el Estrecho de Gibraltar en condiciones de extrema peligrosidad. El ochenta y cinco por ciento sufrió privaciones durante el tránsito. Una vez instalados en España, el 22,5% de las UFM o sus pares ha sido atraído a cometer actos ilícitos. Este estudio ofrece cifras precisas sobre las condiciones de vulnerabilidad que sufren las UFM tanto durante su viaje migratorio desde África como cuando viven en Europa.

**KEYWORDS:** Unaccompanied foreign minors, Immigration, Vulnerability, Children, Extreme conditions.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Menores extranjeros no acompañados, Inmigración, Vulnerabilidad, Niños, Condiciones extremas.

## 1. Introducción

Unaccompanied foreign minors (UFM) are underaged individuals who migrate alone to a different country becoming subject of legal protection being their parents absent. They have become an acute cause for concern in the European Union because some of its Mediterranean bordering countries have had to cope with an increasing influx of them. Under Spanish legislation UFM's are defined as:

An Unaccompanied Foreign Minor (UFM) is understood to be a foreigner under the age of eighteen who is a national of a State that does not have the application of the European Union regime, that reaches Spanish territory without an adult responsible for it, either legally or according to custom, appreciating the risk of the minor's lack of protection; as well as any foreign minor who, once in Spain, finds himself in that situation (BOE-A-2014-10515),

The number of UFM (male and female children) attended to in 2018 in the Autonomous Government of Andalusia (Spain), network of centres alone, was 9.130, a 120% increase on the 4148 minors attended to the previous year. In the last five years between 2015 and 2019, the total number of UFM's attended to is 22760. Of these, 20990 were males (92.4%) and 1740 were females (7.6% of the total).

These mass arrivals force Spanish authorities to offer increased social infrastructure. In statements made to the media in September 2019, the councillor for Social Policy in the Autonomous Government of Andalusia, said that the number of spaces available at 202 centres in the area, which are only for attending to homeless minors, was 2359.

However, according to the General Directorate of Childhood and Conciliation's own data, the number of spaces available at the beginning of 2020 has increased to 3362. As Andalusia is the main gateway for these children, this data offers an idea of the phenomenon's magnitude and the subsequent institutional effort necessary to address it.

The number of UFM's attended to by no means equals the total number of UFM arrivals in Andalusia and, even less, the rest of Spain. Counting arrivals reliably is extremely complex, or almost impossible, as many enter covertly - It is possible that clandestine entry is even more prevalent among female minors who are the victims of trafficking than is the case for male minors -, without the authorities having any way to register them. Nor are there data published or easily accessible regarding recorded minors. The first institutions to have contact with them are usually the Maritime Safety and Rescue Society, Red Cross, National Police, and Civil Guard, in addition to third-sector organisations hired by the GDCC of the Autonomous Government of Andalusia, or their equivalents in other autonomous communities, to cope with extraordinary arrivals.

The autonomous communities experiencing a greater influx of UFM's are Ceuta, Melilla and Andalusia, but even the autonomous communities do not have comparative statistics and both the Ministry of the Interior and the Juvenile Prosecution Service can only turn to data records, many of which are duplicates or contain false identities and ages.

Despite the difficulties involved in counting, the increase in arrivals to Spain of children and adolescents who are not accompanied by any adult is wellknown. According to Fuentes (2014), "The latest data facilitated by the Secretariat for Immigration and Emigration of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security on the 31st of December 2012 recorded a total of 2319 UFM's. If this information is reliable, in 2018 four times more immigrant minors than all those registered in the 2012 census in Spain were attended to in Andalusia alone" (p. 107) (Table 1).

Recorded <b>ADMISSIONS</b> of immigrant minors to Andalusia's Minor Protection System ( <i>Sistema de Protección de Menores de Andalucía, SPMA</i> ).							
Total Andalusia		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
	Male	815	1208	3209	7389	3144	15765
	Female	76	77	100	395	251	899
	<b>Total</b>	891	1285	3309	7784	3395	16664
Total number of recorded minors <b>ATTENDED TO</b> by the SPMA. (Includes voluntary departures and people found to be over 18 years old).							
Total Andalusia		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
	Male	1424	1853	3903	8559	5251	20990
	Female	246	228	245	541	480	1740
	<b>Total</b>	1670	2081	4148	9130	5731	22760
"SNAPSHOT". UFM's living in SPMA centres on 31st December.							
Total Andalusia		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
	Male	598	644	1105	2021	1671	*
	Female	148	142	142	225	194	*
		746	786	1247	2246	1865	*

Table 1. Immigrant minors in the Autonomous Government of Andalusia's minor protection. Fuente: General Directorate of Childhood and Conciliation. Autonomous Government of Andalusia (2020).

Assaf-Álvarez, (2018, p. 26) says the main reasons for these minors migrating are, in 96.1% of cases, a search for better job opportunities and a desire to have a better quality of life; followed by the need to improve their education and family reasons. The same author states that political and religious reasons are only decisive in 7.1% of cases.

By analysing their living conditions at the point of origin, Assaf-Álvarez (2018: 28-30) found that 22.5% of the UFM's surveyed in his study had no access to schooling; 44.3% lacked access to healthcare; 28.1% had no safe drinking water at home and 28% had no electricity. In addition, 16% were suffering from some kind of dental, dermatological, parasitic or transmitted pathology.

Authors such as Gallego et al. (2006), point to the "distance factor" in immigration with Morocco as the starting point, given its proximity to Europe. This is in addition to the media's distorted influence, which generates the illusion of access to welfare through little effort, as well as the influence of Moroccans who have returned from holiday and who "tend to represent a specific role" (of victors), which often does not reflect reality.

## 1.1. The issue with the immigration of unaccompanied foreign minors

The arrival of UFM in Spain is a serious human issue for receiving societies. These children arrive with barely any resources but, according to Spanish law, as they are under 18 years of age they must be declared helpless and protected by the administration. Their arrival generates social, economic and security issues and deficiencies.

The number of UFM attended by the Autonomous Government of Andalusia in 2018 amounted to 9.1% of the 100209 foreign minors, aged 0 to 17 years old, who were legally registered in the region in 2018 (and only 0.5% of the overall population between 0 and 17). In other words, only one in every 200 Andalusian minors is a UFM attended by the system and, in addition, many continue on their migratory journey. However, the opening of specific resources to attend to them may generate consternation and alarm among local residents in a population that is still not accustomed to this phenomenon. In small towns, UFM required health and education services that may saturate ordinary public provisions.

Some studies have been carried out on the social rejection these centres generate, including the study developed in the Basque Country by Moreno (2012), who states, "Rejection of resource establishment for the group has been notable over the years and has become a subject of social and political debate on several occasions." (p. 50). This author completed 1200 interviews among the population and the results showed that "32.1% of people believe that UFM should be returned to their country of origin; while 24.2% say they should be offered protected apartments or residences" (p. 54). Some 26.3% of those interviewed thought they should be taken in by families who share the same nationality; 9.7% think they should be distributed around the different autonomous communities, and 7.8% had no answer to the question.

In any case, attending to such an intense flux of minors requires special dedication from all administrations. In this vein, De Carlos (2018) says that, since 2014, the migratory crisis has required an enormous effort from the European Union. The same author also believes that, "as flows have tilted to the northern Mediterranean from Turkey (Greece) to Libya (Italy), even reaching Northern Morocco (Spain), this has proven how our country is the main destination for the bulk of flows from northern Africa" (p. 9).

The neighbourhood issues that may arise from alarm, a lack of knowledge, or service saturation are accompanied by those inherent to any adolescent community, which usually causes disturbances or consumes alcohol as a way of having fun. The latter activity is considered something habitual in a large part of the autochthonous adolescent population (Rubio-González, 2016: 146).

At any rate, this phenomenon must be comprehensively addressed from a social and economic standpoint, as well as in terms of security, and it must include educational models capable of continual development (González de Escalada, 2016).

From an economic perspective, in 2018 the Spanish Government made available €40 million to attend to UFM in the different autonomous communities. Andalusia, the community with the largest influx, received €27 million. This figure gives an idea of the united effort, as well as the budgetary endeavours, of the administrations to attend to this group in the face of an ongoing migratory phenomenon.

On top of the social and budgetary issues, the arrival of minors to Spain involves a security risk. As will be described in this study, many minors emigrate by turning to economic agreements reached with organised crime groups or illegal networks. Furthermore, the intrinsic helplessness of these children exposes them to criminal conduct once settled in Spain. González de Escalada (2019) cites "uncontrolled migratory movements" as a security threat to migrants themselves as well as the stability of many countries. In the same vein, the National Security Strategy published by the Spanish Government in 2017 names "irregular migratory flows" among the fifteen "threats, vulnerabilities and challenges" to the country's security (p. 91).



Tocino (2019) reports that “Europol has information on more than 40000 people suspected of participating in illegal immigration networks.” (p. 33). According to him, in 2015 alone, member states shared information on 10000 possible criminals, resulting in 1551 possible active networks.

The failure to coexist can also result in foreign minors seeking solace in religion, which in turn may lead to exclusionary or radicalised Islamic beliefs. As per Bermejo (2018), “the failure of multicultural policies encourages jihadism by countering hate speech with xenophobia” (p. 78). According to Molina (2017), “Jihadism is one of the greatest threats facing our country” (p.13). Meanwhile, Caballero (2017) addresses the problem of possible terrorist attacks in Spain and describes how it is highly likely integrated jihadi networks exist and these may include former combatants from the Near East (who may come into contact with UFM).

A third aspect is the vulnerability of foreign minors in relation to the consumption of psychoactive drugs, which ends up leading to criminal conduct. In a study on young offenders and drug consumption, the authors Guillén et al., (2009) noted that of the more than 24000 teenage arrests made in 2003 in Spain, serious drug consumption was involved in 1277 cases, while alcohol consumption was recorded in 2778 cases. “When these two figures are combined, the total is 4055, which corresponds to a sixth of all crimes.”

Ocáriz and Bermejo (2008) analysed 122 cases of foreign young offenders with procedural measures. Of those studied, 66% did not re-offend, 15% committed a second crime, and 20% committed three or more. Thus, a fifth of foreign offenders begin a criminal career (Table 2).

Country	2016	2017	2018	2019	%
<b>Morocco</b>					<b>82.2</b>
Male	669	2263	4653	3513	96.2
Female	43	70	244	138	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>2333</b>	<b>4897</b>	<b>3651</b>	
<b>Ivory Coast</b>					<b>7.9</b>
Male	119	211	362	323	91.5
Female	8	7	20	30	8.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>353</b>	
<b>Guinea</b>					<b>3.8</b>
Male	66	249	1051	162	94.7
Female	4	8	55	9	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>1106</b>	<b>171</b>	
<b>Algeria</b>					<b>2.3</b>
Male	111	171	131	97	93.3
Female	8	6	7	7	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>104</b>	
<b>Romania</b>					<b>1.6</b>
Male	19	12	8	66	94.3
Female	2	3	2	4	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>70</b>	
<b>Cameroon</b>					<b>1.1</b>
Male	32	24	90	37	77.1
Female	3	1	5	11	22.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>48</b>	
<b>Nigeria</b>					<b>1.1</b>
Male	4	10	6	36	76.6
Female	6	4	5	11	23.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>47</b>	

Table 2. The Autonomous Government of Andalusia’s record of UFM’s main nationalities (in descending order). Source: General Directorate for Family and Conciliation. Autonomous Government of Andalusia (2020).

## 1.2. Justification for the research project

It is socially assumed that UFM are a vulnerable group. However, there is a scarcity of scientific literature

that analyses said vulnerability in quantitative terms. Nevertheless, measuring a social group's vulnerability is no easy task. Ruiz (2012) points out some criteria in this regard and related to the type of threat or measurement unit (the individual, home, social group). This author opts for the description of social vulnerability outlined by Blaikie et al. (2005), which defines people's vulnerability as "the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from a threat's impact" (p. 11).

Following these authors' argument, in order to measure UFM's degree of vulnerability, then the intensity, nature and impact of the threats they are subject to (both during their period of migratory transit and during residence in Europe) must be identified and quantified.

Having access to a large group of UFM's attended to in reception centres allowed a pioneering research project to be carried out on the immigration conditions of this group of children (all of whom are male) and their vulnerability, which may otherwise have been extremely difficult to do. This research project may help to complete other studies on this social group, as well as serve as the basis for subsequent qualitative studies.

### 1.3. Objectives

As a broad-spectrum, quantitative study allowing numbers to be put to UFM's degree of vulnerability with some accuracy was required, three main research objectives were defined:

- Identify and quantify the constitutive threats of vulnerability related to UFM's migratory conditions.
- Quantify the degree of exposure to criminal or inappropriate conduct.
- Identify signs of religious intolerance or Islamic extremism in the group.

## 2. Method

According to Gorard (2003: 3), every social science study must have a numerical base. This study has used a quantitative analysis method, notwithstanding the fact that other researchers may supplement it with other primary research methods. The study was based on a questionnaire model with multiple-choice questions. This method is not without difficulties given that, as pointed out by Power (1992), a large enough, sufficiently complete sample must be obtained to ensure the data are reliable. Both Gorard (2003) and Power (1992) refer to the unconventional nature of using quantitative analysis in the social sciences, despite the fact it is essential to grant work greater precision.

The idea was to measure the vulnerability conditions of sample participants, more than their behaviour in different situations. This is because, as González (2003) writes, "the action of individuals is always governed by subjective meanings that are not observable, and that, therefore, cannot be analysed using quantitative methods." (p. 131)

### 2.1. Participants

This study's sample was comprised of 730 foreign males living in 26 UFM reception centres pertaining to the SAMU Foundation. The SAMU Foundation is an organisation that specialises in managing residential accommodation and educational centres for minors, including UFM's. The study population was all of the UFM's housed in residential centres, amounting to 952 total spaces. Thus, the sample corresponded to 76.6% of the population.

The study's universe was unaccompanied foreign minors living in public centres throughout Spain. The size of the universe cannot be defined exactly as its number is changeable. However, some media outlets suggest the number of UFM's residing in public centres in our country in 2019 is 12300, citing sources from the Ministry of the Interior. By trusting in this number, the sample would represent 6.08% of the universe.

As mentioned previously, at the time of the study, the SAMU Foundation had a total of 952 residential





spaces for immigrant minors in Andalusia, Aragón, Ceuta and Madrid. The SAMU Foundation offers the advantage of being able to develop a full survey with due procedural robustness to guarantee the experiment's integrity.

Thus, non-probabilistic sampling was carried out among the minors accommodated by this institution, with the result of 730 questionnaires completed, of which the "end survey" button was clicked in 722 cases. The recorded ages of participants ranged from 13 to 28 years of age, which shows that not all those who answered the questionnaire were minors (a factor that will be addressed later). The field work began on the 23rd of May 2019 and finished on the 17th of September 2019.

With regard to the study's ethical aspects, and pursuant to the Personal Data Protection Act 5/1999, the minors data base could only be accessed by duly authorised SAMU Foundation staff, and never in its entirety, but rather centre by centre.

A prior request for permission was made to its president in order to obtain access to the centre's directors and, in turn, have them request the consent of the minors involved to proceed to carry out the survey, which was completely anonymous in all cases. Special effort was made to uphold the privacy of each respondent.

## 2.2. Procedure

The questionnaire was divided into four blocks, which were not identified as such to the respondents: demographic data, migratory circumstances before reaching Spain, migratory circumstances in Spain, and exposure to criminal or radical behaviours.

The aim was to devise a sufficiently broad questionnaire that would provide data on the immigration conditions of UFM. A series of difficulties immediately arose that can be synthesised in the conundrum: what is the best way to get minors to answer questions, some of which are delicate, as sincerely as possible? To overcome this obstacle, two types of question were designed: one type that did not involve any hypothetical harm to their interests in the mind of the child, and another type that, according to their interpretation, could make them feel embarrassed to answer or legally compromise their position –this was impossible as questionnaires were anonymous.. This second type contained questions on (the coming of) age, organised crime networks, exposure to criminal behaviour, and intensity of religious conviction. Additionally, the questions were formulated using very simple language in a bid to obtain responses that were as sincere as possible.

Having designed the first questionnaire, several meetings were held with a work group comprising 3 very experienced psychologists who work at the SAMU Foundation's centres for minors. Following the indications of this team, various questions were reformulated with the aim of achieving greater efficacy. The decision was also made to ask less compromising questions directly and some of the more delicate questions indirectly, or to omit them completely.

The management team at each resource was responsible for ensuring that all UFM living in their centre complete the questionnaire with the due guarantees of reliability. The mediator or interpreter explained the purpose of the voluntary questionnaire to the minor, emphasising absolute confidentiality, as well as the importance of sincerity in their answers. The SAMU mediator or interpreter was responsible for filling in the questionnaire using the online application "e-Encuesta" on the web link provided. The mediator or interpreter communicated each question in Arabic, English or French. He or she read it out twice and asked "Do you understand the question?" before noting the minor's answer on the application in order to ensure the study's scientific integrity. Only UFM who have a good command of Spanish could answer in this language. The questionnaire was completed in a quiet place to ensure the minor was relaxed at all times. If the minor demonstrated a negative attitude, the questionnaire was postponed. There may only be one minor present per session to avoid interferences from peers.

In the end, a questionnaire containing 34 questions was devised. Of its questions, 33 were multiple-choice questions and there was one open question at the end of the questionnaire. Questions avoided the temptation of 'asking too much' to prevent fatigue and imprecision among respondents, for which reason a maximum of 10 minutes was set for each. Special effort was made to ensure every minor completing the survey was supervised by one of the centre's professionals, with due peace and quiet, and to guarantee correct use of the application (See appendix 1: "Questionnaire procedure. Research project on the migratory conditions of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors."). Questionnaires were completed in rounds at each centre.

The option of extending the survey to other institutions was considered but the idea was ultimately ruled out because, while the research project was being sponsored by general management at the SAMU Foundation, this would not have been the case in other institutions. This fact added hygiene guarantees to field work in one case, while sending the questionnaire to other institutions may have led to the intensity of management control over the procedure being lost and the study's integrity may have been compromised.

With a view to adding a qualitative element to the survey, a final open question was added at the end of the questionnaire: "Is there anything else you would like to add?" One in every ten respondents answered this question, or 75 in total. To reflect common patterns, answers that were the same or similar were compiled. As the answers were open, what was expressed by respondents sometimes reflected more than one concern among UFM's. Some answers have been transcribed literally (entered by professionals on the survey system).

### 2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using the statistical programme SPSS 22.0. For categorical variables, frequencies and percentages were used. For continuous variables, central tendency (average) values were used. In the case of qualitative variables, relative frequencies were calculated using a confidence interval of 95%, which was achieved by 195 respondents. For continuous variables, such as age, the average was calculated and standard deviation was used.

## 3. Results

The majority of minors surveyed came to Spain during the summer. Of them, 52% arrived in Spain between the months of June and September (June, 15.1%; July, 14.2%; August, 13.1%; and September, 10.7%). The months of lowest flow were December (4.8%), January (4.7%), February (3.7%) and March (4%).

When asked "How old are you?" 61.4% of respondents stated an average age of 17 years old and only 3.7% admitted to being 18 years old or over. The result shows the UFM's living in centres have an average age of 16.5 years old. However, when asked the control question "How old are you really?" the number of people of legal age increases considerably to 17.7%. Of them, 13.8% say they are 18, 19 or 20 years old, while 3.9% admit to being 21 years old or older. In other words, one in every six users of reception centres is already an adult, with 17 years old the average age of residents.

76.1% of survey respondents say they "really" like living in Spain and 17% say they "quite" like it. Only 6% say they "don't really like it" or "not at all". In terms of the reception centres themselves, 48.8% say that they "really" like them, 24.5% "quite" like them, 19.5% "don't really like them" and 5.2% don't like them "at all".

Only 5.1% of the sample say they legally entered Spain "with their own passport". The form of illegal entry was mainly dinghy (80%), followed by under a lorry (7.7%), "hidden on a boat" (2.2%) and "hidden in a vehicle" (1.1%). Two respondents (0.3%) said they arrived on a jet-ski.

18.7% of UFM's arranged coming to Spain "alone" and, therefore, they did not need to pay anyone. There is another 3.3% who crossed as a group without having to pay anyone. However, 76.7% say that they, their family or next of kin had to pay sums to be helped with transit.



Of them, 12.5% say that the cost was less than €1000; 15.7% say the cost of their journey was between €1000 and €1500; 13.7% say it was between €1500 and €2000; 13.9% say it was between €2000 and €3000; and 17.2% say they paid more than €3000.

With regard to identifying the recipients of funds, when asked “Who took payment for you to come here?” almost a third of respondents (31.1%) did not want to or did not know how to answer. Of those who answered, 54.8% state they put themselves in the hands of an organised crime, mafia-style network.

In order to ask the minors about such a sensitive issue, terms they could easily understand were chosen. Of those who did respond, 26.6% said they came with the help of a “bad mafia”, 15.3% said they used a “very secret network” and 12.9% said they came with a “network known by everyone.” 8.5% said they reached Spain by paying family members and 5.5% said that the people they paid were family “friends” or “acquaintances”.

During the journey to Spain, an average of 2.6 “adults” “helped” the minors. In the majority of cases, there were between one and three adults who helped the UFM (44.1%); while in 29.5% cases there were more than three people who assisted them.

In addition to the adults directly involved in the minors’ passage, when asked “Who else helped you?” 19.1% said they were helped by other minors; 14.5% by “police or gendarmerie”; and 4.5% by “civil servants”.

Regarding migratory conditions, 68.4% of the UFM (s) surveyed took one month or less to reach Spain; 12.7% took between two and six months; 5% between six months and one year; and 10.2% between one and three years. Only 1.3% of respondents said they took more than three years to reach Spain (nine respondents in total).

In relation to the minors’ vulnerability during their journey before reaching Spain, 26.7% say “they were treated very badly”; 13.6% say “they were treated badly”; 21% say they were treated “okay”. Conversely, 36.3% said they were treated “very well” or “well”. In this regard, it can be said that 61.3% of children suffered some form of abuse, mistreatment or negligence during transit.

Of the UFM (s) surveyed, a third said they had been mistreated, specifically 32.5% of them; while 27.4% were locked in or deprived of their freedom and 2.1% of them (fifteen respondents) say they were subject to sexual abuse. Two in every three minors (67.6%) say they were scared and 84.4% suffered deprivation (“hunger, cold, discomfort”) by not having their basic needs covered.

Immediately after arriving in Spain, 97.6% of respondents say they were admitted to emergency or reception centres and in 80.3% of cases they remained in them. However, 2.3% entered illegally without being detected (and 1.2% state they remained undetected) until they finished their time in a reception centre. 17.7% received assistance from third parties to move or travel within Spain. While 7.7% say that the people who helped them inside the country were strangers, 1.8% confess that they were members of a “very bad mafia”, with the total of both categories reaching 9.5% of survey respondents.

More than a third of the UFM (s) residing in reception centres say that they have family members in Spain, specifically 34.7%, but for some reason they do not live with them. Of those surveyed, the vast majority express their desire to remain in Spain (85.1%) while almost one in every ten intend to continue with their migratory journey to the rest of Europe (9.2%). This percentage challenges the belief that the majority of UFM (s) who arrive in Spain intend to continue their journey beyond Spain borders.

In terms of vulnerability conditions related to crime among the minors surveyed, 6.4% admit receiving offers to commit criminal acts or behaviour unsuitable for their age. Among the most common illegal business offered to this group is drug trafficking (12.5%), theft (6.1%), helping other immigrants (3.5%), watching the police (1.6%), joining a gang (1.3%) and “being with adults” (0.3%, or one respondent).

When asked “Do you know friends, colleagues or other minors who have been offered the chance to do bad things to earn money?” the percentage increases to 16.1%. According to these data, one in every six UFM has friends or acquaintances who have been asked to commit crimes or inappropriate behaviour, which is in itself a form of vulnerability. In this second group, drug trafficking amounts to 29.9%; theft, 13.3%; helping other immigrants, 4.1%; and “being with adults”, 2.2%. This final figure is more significant because eight respondents say they have “friends or acquaintances” who have been offered the chance to sell themselves (in comparison to the 70 of those who have been offered the chance to “smuggle hash”).

In relation to vulnerability resulting from the potential religious radicalisation of UFM, 96.8% of respondents say they are Muslim and 38.7% say they have received education in madrasas (Koranic schools but they are not necessarily radical). As proof of their religious devotion, 61.7% of UFM say they pray, while 42.2% say they would go to mosque daily if they could.

Of the study’s Muslim respondents, 13.8% say they are “slightly annoyed” that other Muslim minors “don’t pray” and 10.4% say they are “very annoyed” (24.2% if both categories are combined), which represents a sign of religious intolerance. 50.5% recognise that they receive external religious guidance to be “a good, honourable, practicing Muslim.”

#### 4. Open question

In the descriptive analysis of the literal transcriptions of 75 UFM, it was noted that 49 of them state their desire to find a job and 25 of them wish to study and gain training to be able to work and help their family. Fifteen minors hope to have a better life in Spain and want to stay here:

“Migration from Morocco to Spain is necessary because things are very bad in Morocco. I’ve come here to study and look for a better life.”

“It’s my dream to live in Spain because of the rights you have.”

In total, 52 minors asked for their documentation to be sorted so they can study, travel or work.

“Streamline paperwork procedures and be able to work soon because I don’t have much time left at the centre.”

“I would like to get Spanish nationality and I’ll make an effort to get it to prove I’m not just passing through.”

Twenty respondents say that the guidance received on how to be good Muslims has come from their parents, siblings or aunts and uncles. Some of them ask professionals at the reception centre to also guide them on religious matters.

“My family and two kids at the centre advise me on how to be a good Muslim.”

Some state they have left Morocco because of the political situation, in order to be free, and to save their lives and those of their families (15). Another aim is to have health coverage (3).

“I would like to fix my teeth as they aren’t straight and I’ve been bullied about them since I was little. I’d like to have a job and the correct paperwork.”

Other minors come to Spain temporarily in order to obtain documentation and then continue on their migratory journey to the rest of Europe, specifically Germany (2), France, Italy, London and Berlin, with the aim of family reunification (10).

“I don’t want to be separated from my brother, Mohamed Ali. He’s older than me and he might be referred somewhere else and I don’t want to be separated from him.”



Several respondents mention very difficult experiences during the migratory journey:

“When I was at sea, a pregnant woman and a boy died when the boat capsized.”

“When I got on the boat there were two of them, the one I got on and another that everyone died on. They never said anything to us but I knew five people on that boat.”

“A woman and a child died on the boat I came on when it capsized. Everyone else swam to shore as it was close.”

“He spent a lot of time in Ceuta where he was hungry and cold, with no bed and unable to call or see his mother. His family doesn’t have any money and his mother, two siblings and a grandmother live in the same room and they often go hungry. He thanks God that he’s now in Spain in a good centre and receiving an education, as he has the chance to have a better future and bring his mother and sister to Spain.”

As regards assessing reception resources, 12 minors feel satisfied in their centre. Many are grateful for it but they ask that meals could be improved, and they would also like them to be halal; they would like to see fewer sanctions and more free-time activities and facilities, such as skate parks and football pitches, among others.

“We UFM’s think of each other as brothers.”

“He says he would like to do more developed activities, such as join a football team, improved Spanish classes, etc. outside the centre, if possible.”

“I’m really sad because I don’t have my paperwork in order and I don’t have a job. I miss my family. My peers and my teachers are nice. I don’t have a problem with anyone.”

Some say they wish to live in Cádiz, Zaragoza or Bilbao. Others feel they have been in the centre for a long time yet they still do not have their paperwork in order, so they are now scared about coming of age and having nowhere to go. For this reason, they ask for help sorting their situation.

Several say there are issues in centres with ‘bad kids’ who create many problems because they steal inside and take drugs (2) and they perceive different treatment between Sub-Saharan Africans and Moroccans.

“Problems in the centre with bad kids who want to steal every day and only look to cause trouble, to take drugs...”

Regarding UFM’s professional preferences, some say they wish to work in agriculture, others want to be an interpreter at SAMU (2); some aim to be a hairdresser/barber (2); while others hope to be a professional mechanic, waiter or chef (2); and some would like to study telecommunications, plumbing or be footballers (5).

## 5. Discussion

This study shows the main aspects of vulnerability suffered by UFM’s: age, migratory conditions, psychological-stress, exposition to criminal behaviour and religious radicalisation.

These data confirm the known perception that waves of migrants arriving by dinghy coincide with the better weather. By extrapolating this result for practical purposes: within one year, the majority of UFM’s in protection centres would be of legal age, which brings its own issues of social integration. UFM’s start their migrations not as consenting adults with full command of their aspirations, but “convinced” by unscrupulous or desperate families. During transit, most of them were mistreated and upon arrival up to one in every six users of reception centres was already an adult (being 17 years old the real average age of residents). Extrapolating this result for practical purposes, that means within one year, the bulk of UFM’s arrived to protection centres would be majority of age, which entails its own complication for social integration. Protection centres for children and adolescents are specialised resources conceived to host underage persons, not adults. The results

of the present study are consistent with those discerned in the study by Assaf-Álvarez (2018), which says that the average price paid by migrant minors is €1642. One in every five respondents received some form of assistance from law enforcement, authorities or public personnel to reach Spain. One possible interpretation is that the ramifications of mafia interests are widespread and they even reach those who must work to eradicate the phenomenon. Up to this point, the conditions of physical vulnerability suffered by two thirds of the minors before reaching Spain have been quantified. A third of them can be considered serious or very serious.

Once living in Spain, UFM's are unable to fulfil their primary migratory objective: "to work". They are unable to do so, as they lack the administrative status to do so. This generates severe frustration in their early stages of their residence because they are unable to generate money. They cannot pay back the investment incurred by their parents. It is their moral debt to them. Fear, mistreatment, language barriers, frustration are acute stresses acting upon a young mind, no matter how good the professional social assistance provided.

Stevens and Dimitriadi (2019: 9-11) explain how immigrants arriving in Greece in 2015, all show a high degree of agency in seeking a better life. However, these dreamed aspirations often collide with a restricted legal framework upon reaching their European destination countries. There is an immediate conflict between the speculated immigration project and administrative and legal reality. Using Belgium as an example, Hassan Bousetta (2008) writes "immigration policy has been characterised by increasing control over access to both its territory and labour market" (p. 401). This study shows that the majority of minors living in specialised centres would prefer to stay here.

Anxiety and frustration may lead honourable youths to be lured into quick wins provided by criminal or immoral activities. Many UFM's do eventually obtain work permits and legal resident status, but the process will take many months in most cases, if not years. Engaging in delinquent activities would be another way to pay back their burdening moral debt.

In a study carried out in the Spanish autonomous community of the Basque Country, Ocáriz y Bermejo (2008) found out that 50% of underage offenders were unaccompanied and that 41% were ill-adapted to their lieu of residence. However, no clear relationship could be established between the fact of being foreign and delinquency. From their paper, it appears to be a clear link between inadaptation, losing of reference with responsible adults and criminal inclination.

A foreign youth, approaching his majority with no clear prospects of employment to send money home, would be therefore inclined to seek in delinquency a way forward. Results show that almost one in every ten was in the hands of people trafficking networks inside Europe.

Being a good Muslim, can be another way to mitigate frustration, calling upon the religious values of the family. If not appropriately guided, a young spirited mind is a fertile ground for spurious manipulation with Islamic radicalisation purposes.

In the open question of the study, twenty respondents explained that they received religious guidance from their families. This is probably the case with the majority of UFM's. However, there will always be a threat from radicalised elements of the Muslim community when they reach the age of majority.

Briggs and Birdwell (2009) say a lack of qualification and poverty define the British Muslim community to a larger extent than any other religious faith. They also link radicalisation to numerous groups that cannot simply be called fundamentalists without "understanding of the rich mosaic of political mobilisation that is now flourishing across large parts of our Muslim communities" (pp. 4, 27).

Exposing a child's personality to extreme Islamic beliefs in yet another vulnerability factor. In the best scenario, a radical young Muslim will find it difficult to integrate in a mainstream non-Muslim community in Spain, further jeopardising his prospects to make a living. At the worst, it may support illegal activities, including



abuse or terrorism.

Paradoxically, an inclination to crime or radicalisation would emerge as the right thing to do from the perspective of some UFM. They would be susceptible to engage in illegal activities, seeking to be more honourable: paying back their debt with their families and being virtuous in the faith they were educated in.

## 6. Conclusions

This quantitative study's data offer precise numbers on the conditions of vulnerability suffered by UFM both during their migratory journey from Africa and when living in Europe. Close to 90% of them cross the Strait of Gibraltar in extremely hazardous conditions (80% used dinghies and 7.7% hid under a lorry). This is in addition to the confession that 85% experienced deprivations improper of their age ("hunger", "cold", and "discomfort"). Two thirds were scared (67.6%) and a third were mistreated (32.5%). These data indicate that UFM are subject to risks and suffering far from the conditions to which any child or adolescent has the right in a normal environment.

The additional helplessness experienced by minors in their condition as victims of organised illegal immigration networks is evident in four of every five cases. Minors are forced by mafias to travel in illegal, unsafe and undignified conditions; some are even deprived of their freedom (27.4%).

After being welcomed by European institutions, UFM's vulnerability mutates from the physical conditions of transit to possible exposure to criminal or radicalised behaviour. 6.4% say they have been directly encouraged to commit a crime while 16.1% (one in six) say they have friends or acquaintances who have been encouraged to commit a crime. In total, almost one in every four respondents (22.5%) is vulnerable to suffering exposure to a criminal setting, whether personally or through third parties. It was explained that these percentages must be considered minimums as a respondent will have a natural tendency to deny any reproachable action. There is a lack of reliable data on UFM outside the protection system, although there is evidence that a fifth of foreign minors with procedural measures commit a crime on more than two occasions (Ocáriz & Bermejo, 2008). Furthermore, 10.4% of UFM show signs of religious intolerance, which would make them more inclined to be the victims of radical, spurious indoctrination by third-party influences.

This study had a clearly precursory nature, although subsequent research is required to qualitatively refine data and conclusions.

## 7. Limitations

On the one hand, not all respondents were minors, although the vast majority were. It would not be strictly credible to equate all respondents with UFM, although for practical purposes this has been done. The reason for this disparity is that UFM know that if it is proven they are adults via bone or metric testing or other tests, they will need to leave the centre and even risk being deported. Thus, the age data must be treated with caution and considered minimums as there may be many more respondents who have given an age under 18 years old.

On the other hand, during the psychology work group, it was noted that it would be difficult to measure the vulnerability of minors in terms of falling into religious extremism. However, in order to have an indicator of intolerance, one of the professionals involved in the work group suggested asking whether the respondents found a less religious attitude among their peers annoying. Thus, the question "Do you consider yourself to be an honourable, practicing Muslim?" was changed to "Do you feel annoyed if other Muslim minors don't pray?".

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