Brunel University London

Service Children's Progression Alliance Annual Conference 2023

Conversations about support for children from military families: exciting possibilities

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Activity

Find out the following from those you are grouped with:

- What is your favourite place?
- Where are you from?
- Where is home?
- How many schools did you go to?

Who Are We and What We Do?

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Research: ‘Grown Up’ Children from Military Families

- ‘The overlooked casualties of conflict’ report in 2009 identified the need to ‘understand the pressures’ on children from military families (RNRMCF, 2009: p.4).
- Service Pupil Premium funding for schools was introduced in 2011 to support specific challenges (MoD, 2021).
- OfS note that children from military families face ‘equality gaps’ and have ‘support needs’ (2020: p. 36).
- ‘Grown-up’ children are currently absent from research, policy and practice: focus on serving military, veterans, spouses and school-aged children.
- The ‘grown ups’ are missing because they are not in the military and not seen as the responsibility of the military (unless they join up).
- So we know very little about the childhood and educational experiences from those now grown up.

Findings: Themes

no one's ever asked me anything …and I've actually got quite a lot to say

- Accents
- Backgrounds
- Behaviour and expectations
- Being new/the stranger
- Belonging/identification
- Careers
- Changes
- Challenges
- Cultural touchpoints and references
- Curriculum
- Deployment: worries and return (serving parent)
- Family: parents
- Family: siblings
- Family: the extended family
- Friends: making/leaving
- Home and house: arriving/leaving*
- Identity
- Leaving
- Living abroad
- Loss
- Migration: in and out of UK
- Mobility
- Opportunities
- Pride
- Qualifications
- Reflections on the impact on the life course
- Revisiting places
- Sadness
- School: arriving/leaving
- Shared experiences
- Social class/rank
- Talking about the experiences
- Teachers
- Threat, risk and security

Questions

Activity Follow Up

- What did you notice about the activity?
- How did that feel as a speaker and as a listener?
- How did moving around feel and leaving your belongings behind?
- How did it feel to share responses to the ‘personal’ questions with people you don’t know?
- How could the activity have been organised to be more supportive?

Implications

- What are the implications of this for the work we all do?

1.2m

Over 1.2 million referrals to CAMHS for under 18s in 2022

1 in 6

Children aged 5-16 were said to have a probable mental health problem in 2020.
Less than 1 in 3 of these children had access to NHS support.

1 in 3

1 in 3 adult mental health problems directly connect to adverse childhood experience

Young Minds, 2023

Key Findings

Mobility, Challenges and Opportunities

- High levels of geographic mobility throughout their early and late childhood: temporary and ‘super’.
- Challenges from temporary- and ‘super’-mobility.
- Opportunities from temporary- and ‘super’-mobility.

Talking and Pride

- Some reluctance to talk about their experiences of growing up in a military family with their parents and siblings, particularly with the parent who served.
- Mixed reactions in terms of identifying and feeling a sense of pride in coming from a military family: positive, negative and ambivalent.

Uniqueness and Getting On With It

- Recognise their uniqueness in relation to the similarities and differences between them and others (‘the same but different’).
- Say they ‘just got on with it’.

Comments: James

Moving schools and house:

- “we’ve been moving around every couple of years throughout my early childhood and stuff, lots of moving schools”
- “play by play”

Boarding school:

- “a school that is really good until you have any problems”
- “just someone at the door … that was the thing that I would most have liked to be different”

‘Separated’ from family:

- “I’d probably have dealt with that better being at home because I could have talked more easily to my parents.”

Friendships:

- “I never clicked with a friendship group…”
- 2…after I left in the sixth form I was completely out of contact with everyone”

Impact on belonging:

- “having a very non-Scottish accent”
- “being the outsider”
- “I was a newcomer”

Politics:

- “I had to deal with the fact that my dad worked in an industry of killing people”
- “I’d really be happier if you hadn’t been complicit in murder”

Comments: Sam

On moving around: The thing that probably did affect me …the moving around definitely affected me. I found it very difficult you know moving to a new school and making new relationships and fitting in, I did find that really hard….

On friends: …not that I didn't have friends, I did have good friends when I was at school but you know they weren't friendships that have carried on in the same way that you know other relationships in my life have.

On siblings: [Having children] made me reflect on the relationships I have with my siblings, we have different experiences because we were at different schools at different times, we have different relationships because of the dynamic of my family.

On belonging: I have no sense of belonging to a community that I grew up in – where do I actually come from?

On the 'life': I don't know, it's not a life I would have chosen, it's not a life I did choose for my own children, I wouldn't have ever have even considered choosing that sort of life … I think that security and grounding and a sense of belonging [are important for friendships]…and we all need these things, and I think I wanted that for my own children, and I wanted them to go to one school. I didn't want them to trek around the country.

Comments: Ronnie

On school: … the schooling was different, the syllabus was different, if we're looking at it from an educational point of view… just everything …everything was different, and it's so weird, but by this point how many schools had I been to? So I just kind of got on with it and you just learn to go with the flow. I knew that an entire year pretty much of my GCSE work had been erased and I had to start again.

On home: I would say I live …where my physical house is, that's where I go home and I have all my … as in I have all my stuff, I go to bed, I brush my teeth, whatever. But if we're talking about where … where I … my feelings are, I could say a number of places.

On the experience: you become more resilient. You get amazing experiences. I feel like … I feel like it's a gift that not many people are given, because I feel like if I had grown up in one place, I might not feel like I want to go and explore and I might not have the confidence to do that.

On telling others where you come from: So I guess it's … do I actually … is this person interested? Do I actually know this person? Like as in have we met more than once? Have they offered up anything about themselves? Because it's give and take, remember. And do they have the stamina for this? Do they have the stamina to sit and listen? Is their drink full? You know? Do they need the toilet? Quite often I will joke, I'll be like, do you need to go for a refreshment break before we start this because you know it's going to be a while! Then I … then I start, and then I just explain.

Comments: ‘Grown Up’ Children from Military Families

“We are mostly normal people - no glaring positives or negatives”

“When you move every two years, that is always your experience of education, that kind of just being the outsider, being the new kid, becomes the pattern that is consistent”

“I’m sure that most people don’t go to like four different primary schools”

“…where my physical house is, that’s where I go home … my feelings are, I could say a number of places”

“You get amazing experiences. I feel like … I feel like it’s a gift that not many people are given”

“…you are all kind of in the same boat…lots of people in the same boat doing the same thing”

“Yes, I think it’s definitely had an impact, yeah, whether it’s positive or negative is hard to tell because I can’t go and live the alternate timeline.”

Conversations About Intervention and Support

Examples:

- Families and Friends
- Family Federations
- Community Development Officers
- Schools:
  - Service Pupil Premium
  - Thriving Lives Toolkit
- NHS and CAMHS
- Therapy

Conclusions: Summary

- Important ‘personal contemplations’ on particular and extraordinary everyday lives (‘the same but different’).
- Complex navigations of both the positive and negative aspects of these unique ‘everyday life’ experiences.
- ‘Affinities’, ‘potent connections’ and nostalgia shape personal lives and relationships, the sense of home and belonging, education and futures.

Conclusions: Research Opportunities

Children and 'grown up' children can provide an invaluable source of information to support current children from military families, their families and those who work with them, as well as other 'grown up' children.

Research into their lives and experiences

- Further research with this group to develop more detailed and nuanced understandings.

Research into the effectiveness and impact of support

- Looking at child concerns vs adult perception of concerns (relevant experiences).
- Use of Service Pupil Premium to support access to programmes of support.

Conclusions: Aspirations and Call to Action

- Recognise each individual's unique identity
- Provide timely and appropriate support for children, young people and grown ups to help them recognise their own unique identity
- Provide access to safe spaces to explore their experiences, emotions, the challenges and the positives
- Empowered with strategies to navigate their experiences
- Policy-making, including MoD and DFE, engage with and respond to the accounts of children and 'grown up' children
- All to know that identity matters

Questions

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Appendix Material

Key Findings: Mobility, Challenges and Opportunities

Curriculum

- Attending a boarding school can be challenging
- Repetition of learning
- Lack of consistency
- Adapting to different teaching styles

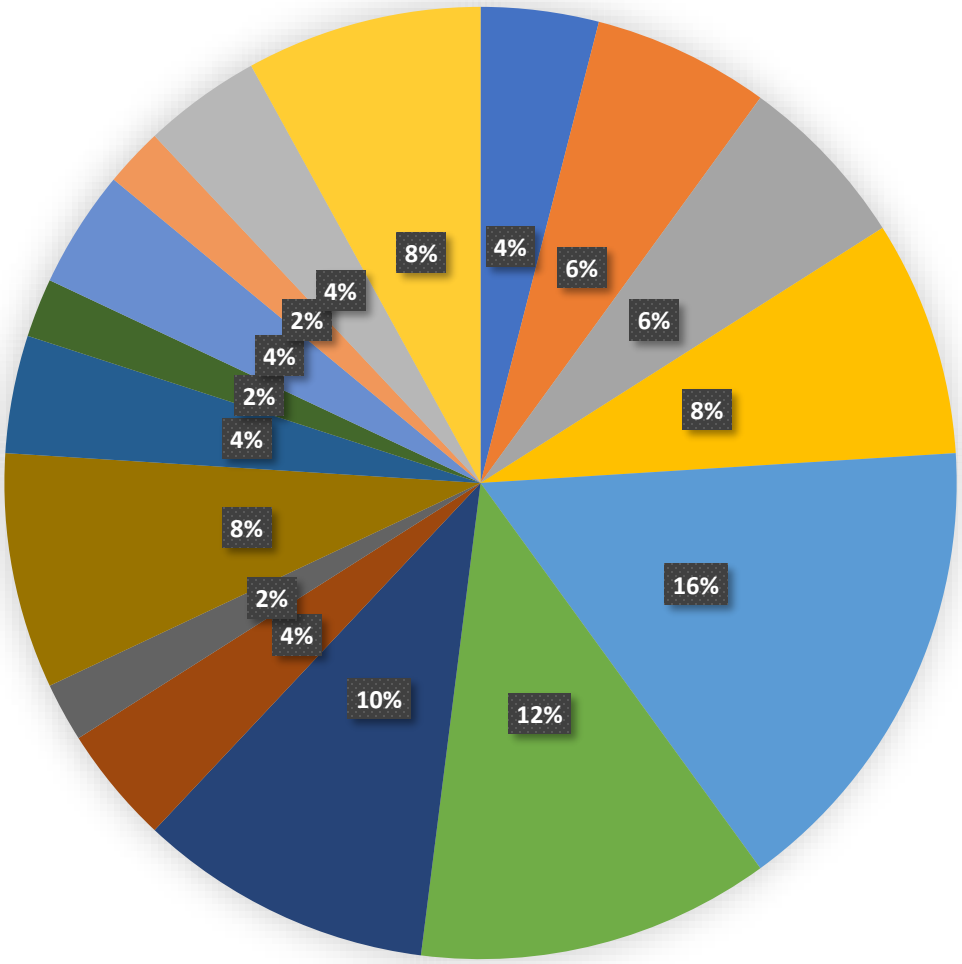
Socialisation

- Challenges maintaining long-term friendships
- Moving to a non-military school can be challenging
- Experiencing different cultures presents opportunities and challenges

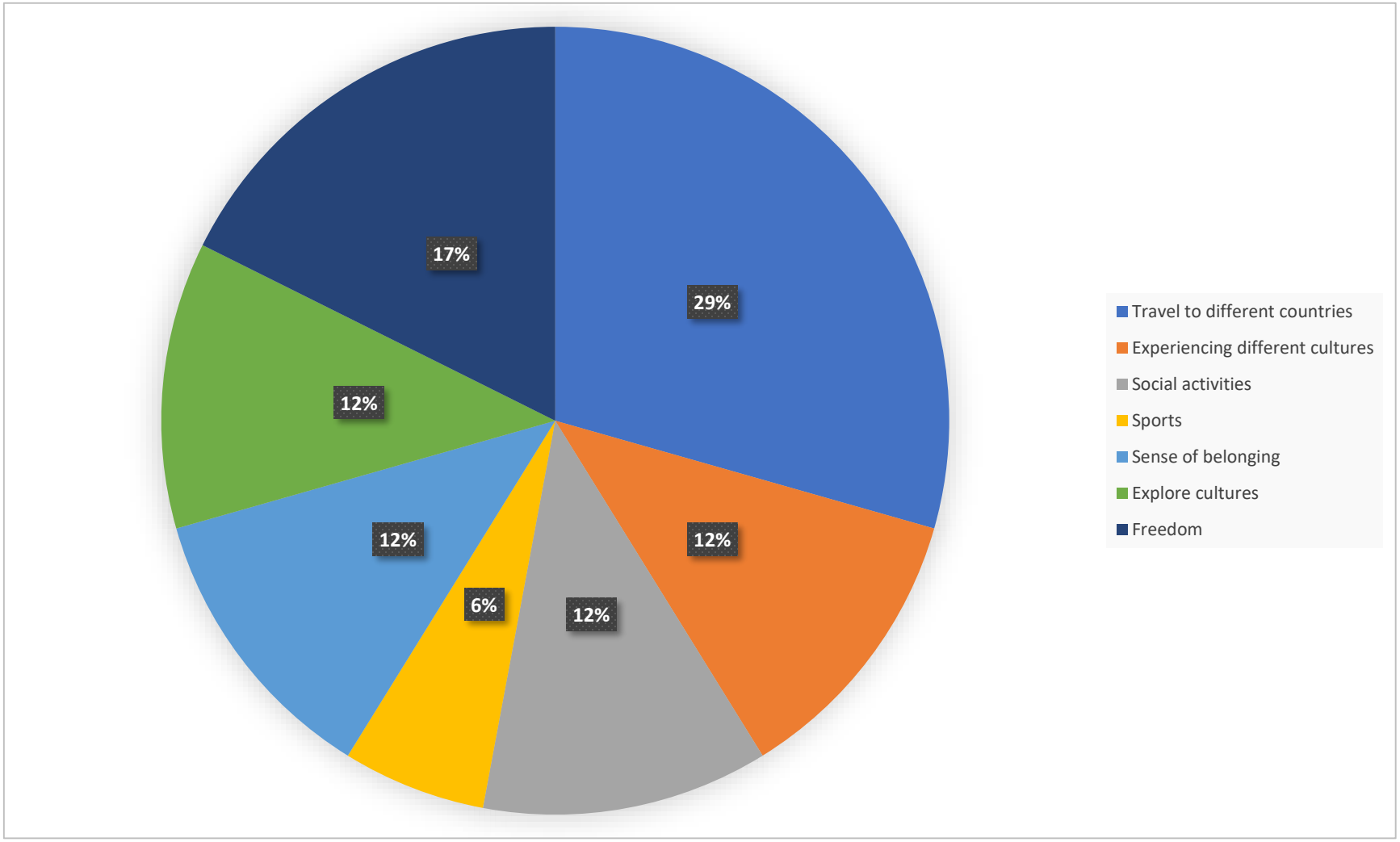
Other barriers

- Different accents and language barriers
- Teachers who do not fully understand some of the challenges associated with being a child from a military family
- Constant changing of schools
- Lack of confidence

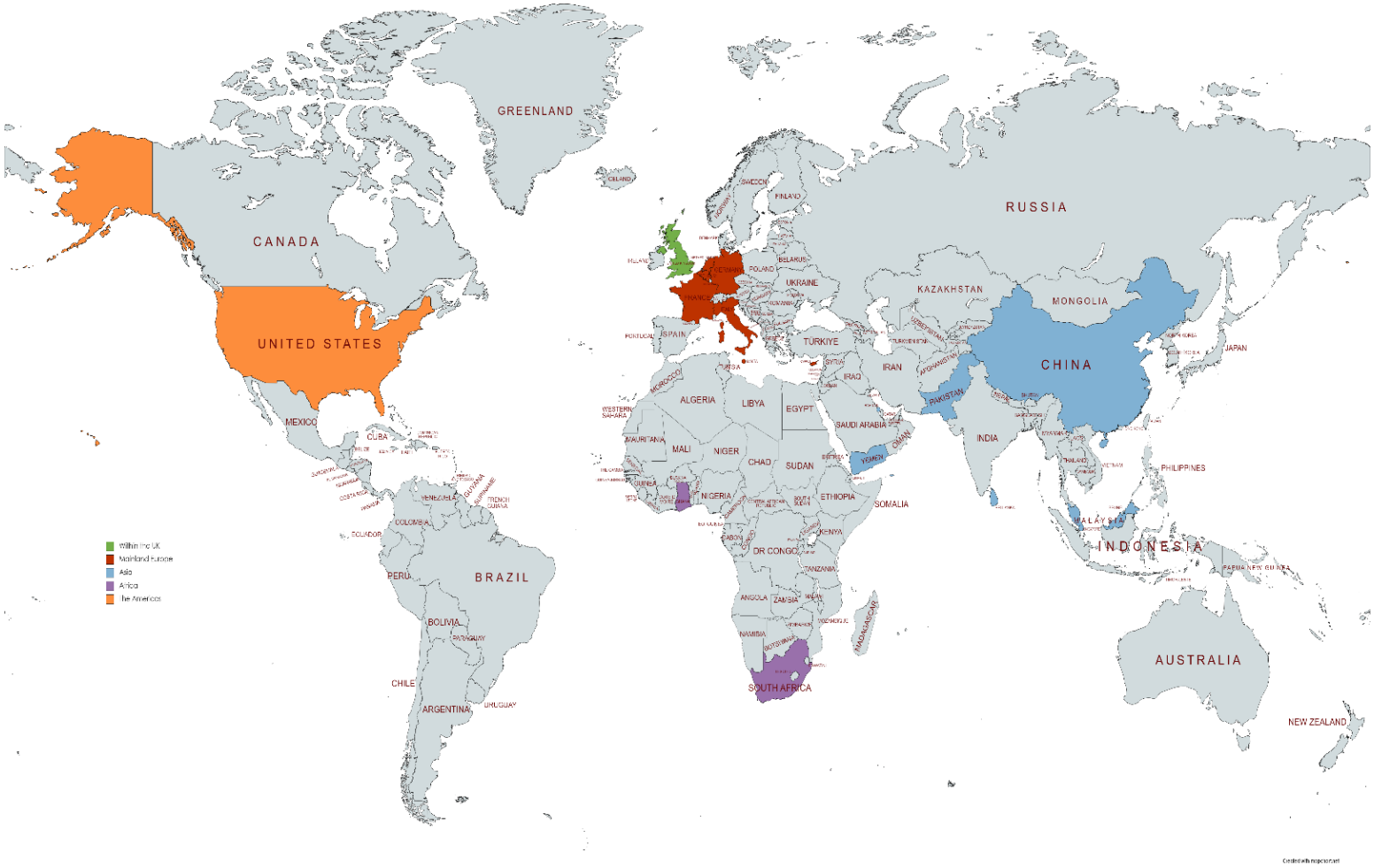
Key Findings: Challenges



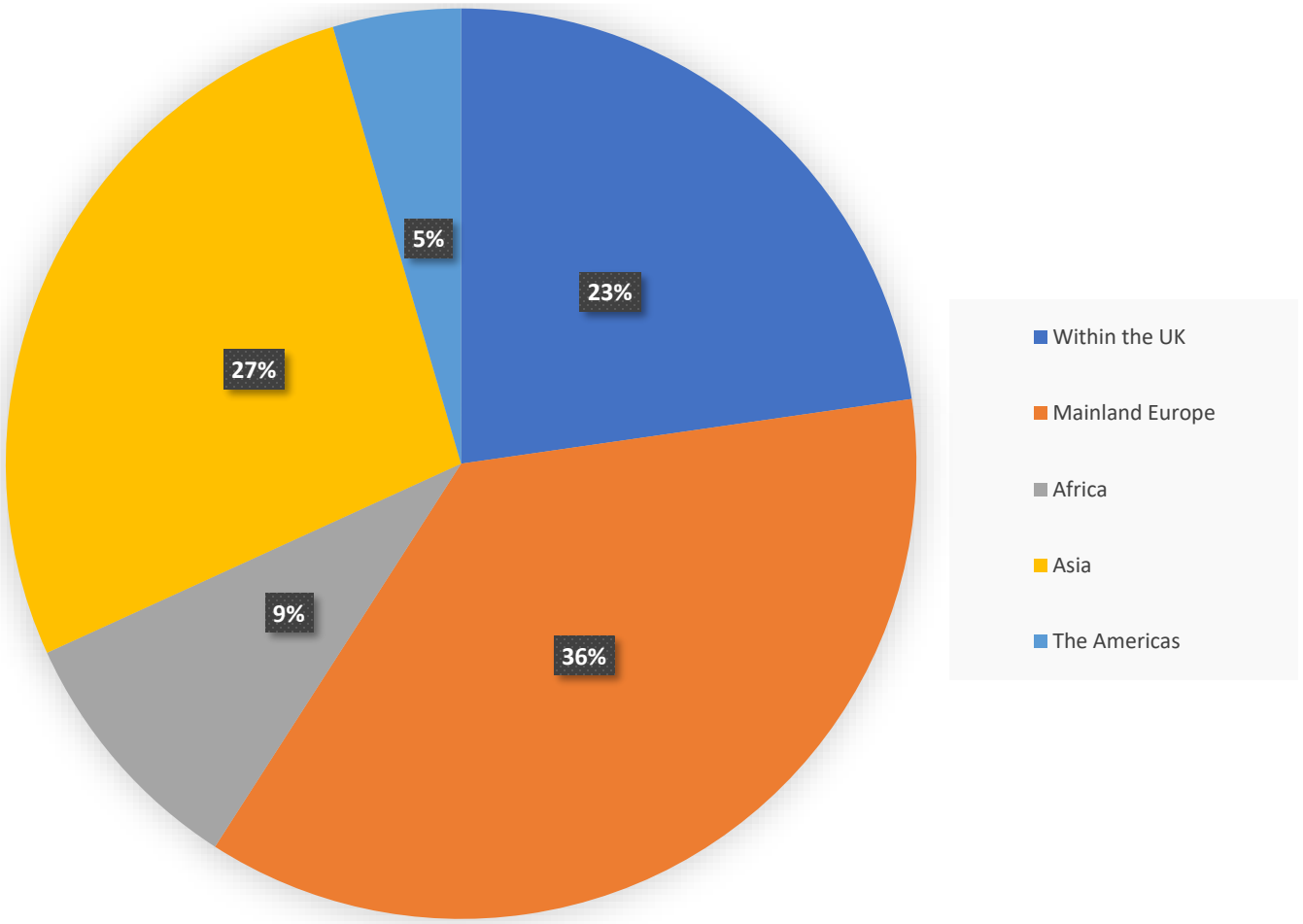
Key Findings: Opportunities



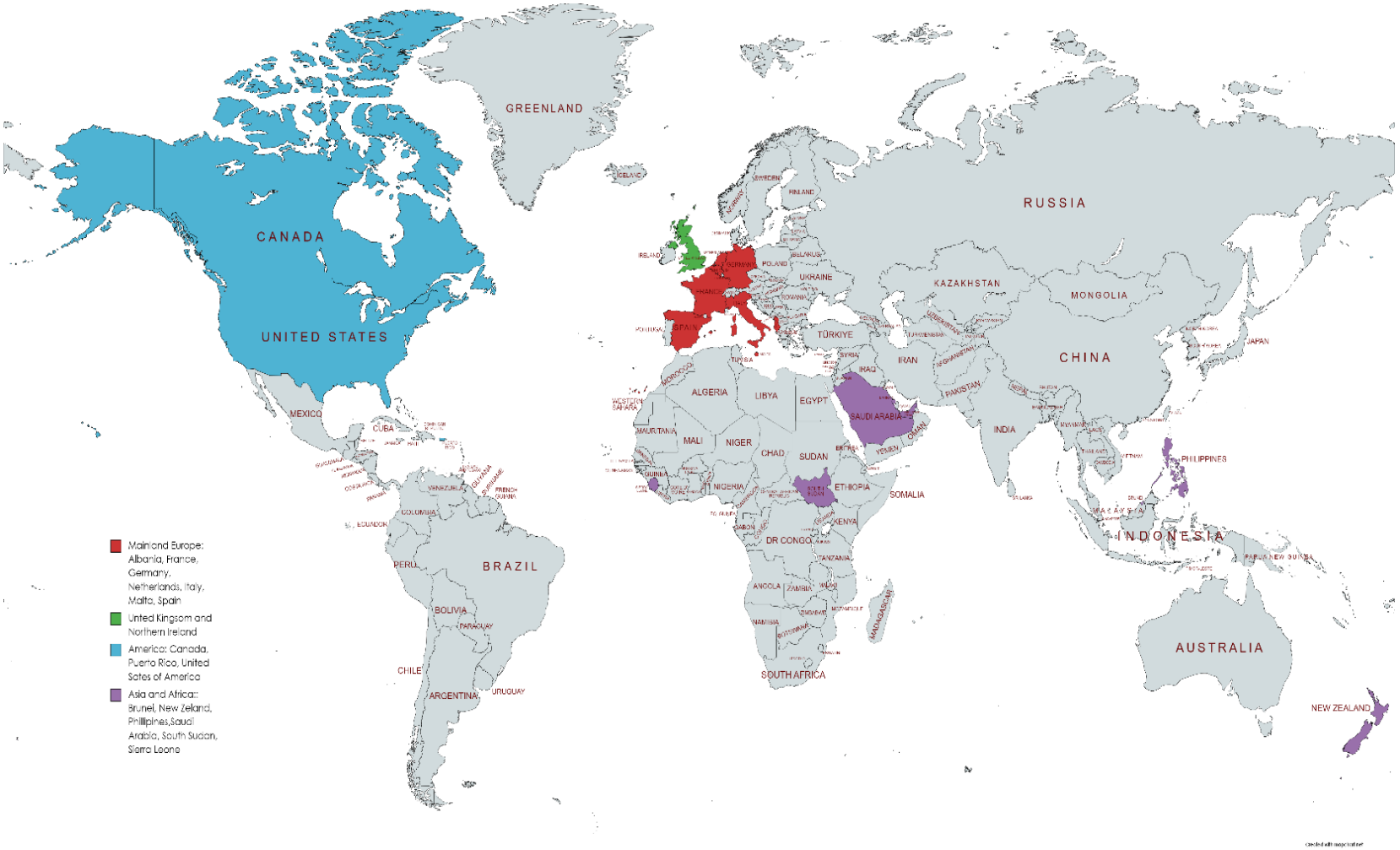
Countries Lived In: Before 18 Years of Age



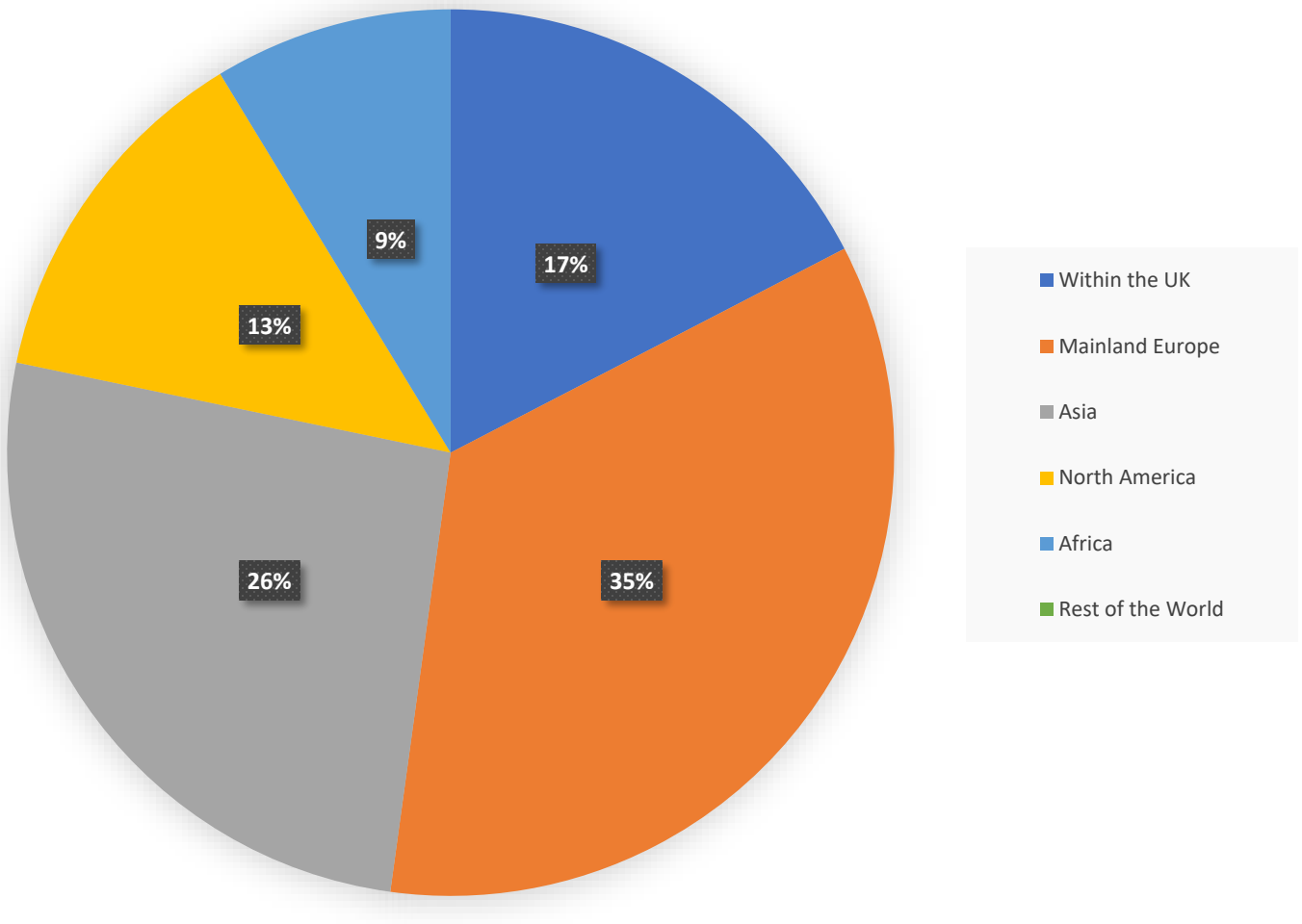
Countries Lived In Before: 18 Years of Age



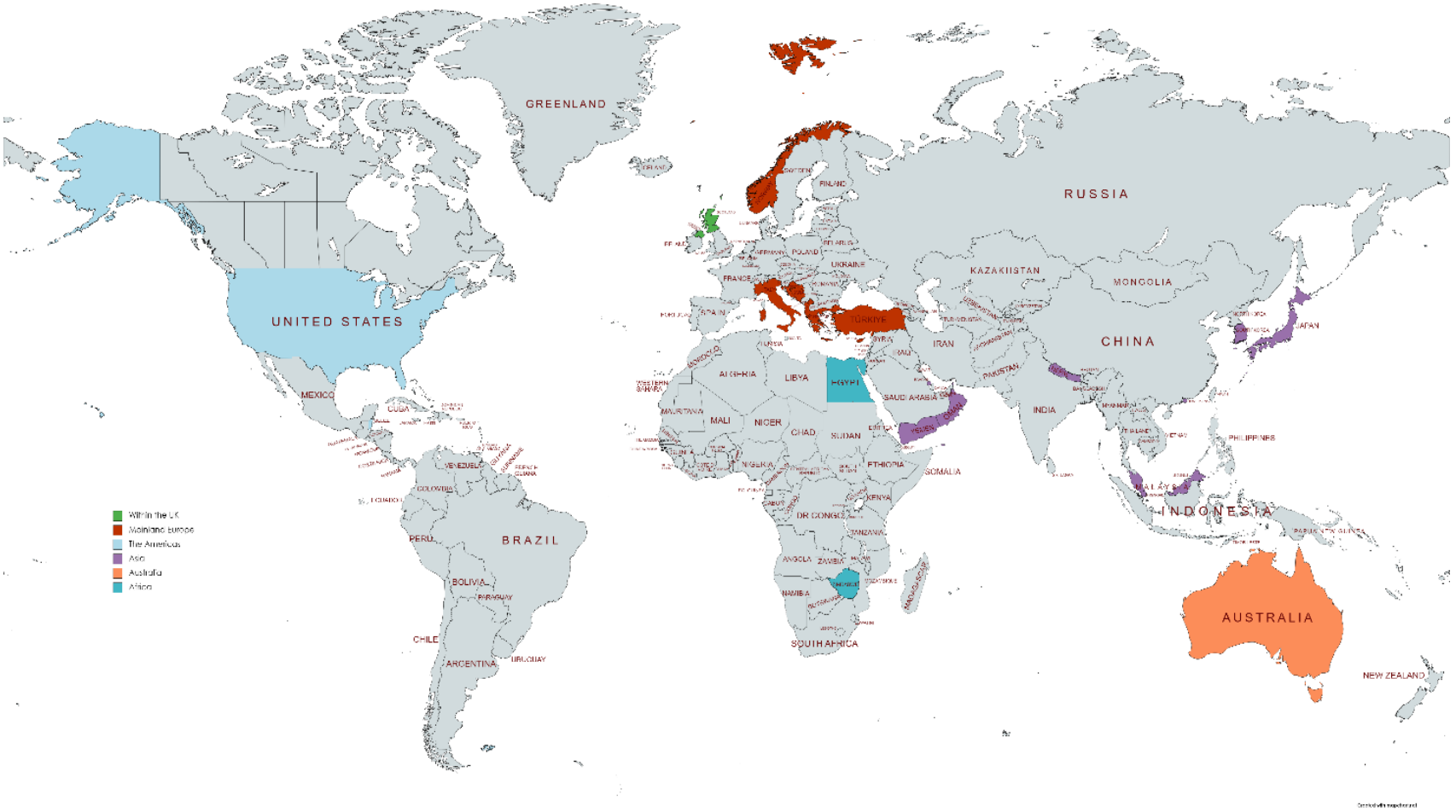
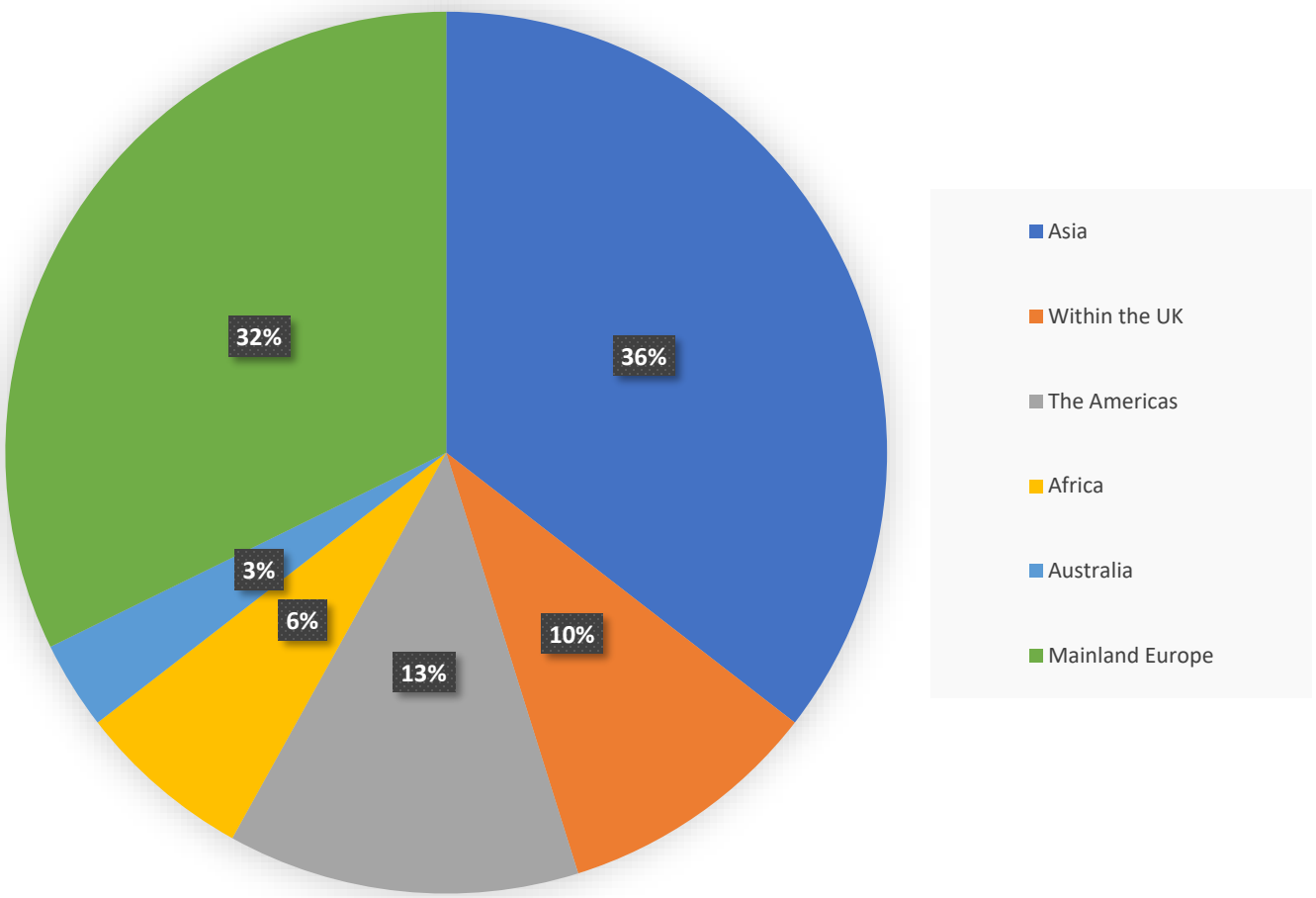
Countries Lived In: After 18 Years of Age



Countries Lived In: After 18 Years of Age



Postings Without Family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