CONNECT

Identifying good practices in, and improving, the connections between actors involved in reception, protection and integration of unaccompanied children in Europe

WORKING WITH THE UNACCOMPANIED CHILD

IDENTIFICATION
RECEPTION
PROTECTION &

OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

A TOOL FOR GUARDIANS AND OTHER ACTORS WORKING FOR THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD

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INTRODUCTION

Every year thousands of unaccompanied children travel to Europe in search of a new life. Reception conditions as well as access to the asylum and other protection procedures differ between countries and further progress is needed to ensure that unaccompanied children's rights are respected in EU Member States. A wide range of actors and issues are involved in responding to the situation of unaccompanied children arriving in Europe. The CONNECT project aims to contribute to ensuring proper implementation and application of EU obligations, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, by considering the roles and responsibilities of actors responding to the situation of these children and how they best work together.

THE CONNECT PROJECT

Save the Children Sweden together with UNHCR's Bureau for Europe, NIDOS in the Netherlands, Coram Children's Legal Centre in the UK, Save the Children Italy, Don Calabria Institute, the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in Italy and the County Administration in Västra Götaland in Sweden, have received funding from the EU for a 12 month project, ending in September 2014. The project aims were to identify and promote good practices on reception and protection based on national mappings carried out in Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. The CONNECT project have also produced a *"Reference Document on Unaccompanied Children - a Compilation of Relevant EU Laws & Policies"* that will support EU Members States and other actors in ensuring proper application of EU law and policy relating to unaccompanied children, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The project also produced a *comparative report* based on the country reports, which identifies common challenges across the four countries and national practices from one country that might inspire good practice across the region.

Each country have through pilot projects developed *practical tools* which can be used by actors across the EU Member States. These tools address specific aspects of how actors address the situation of these children and can be used separately or together as a toolkit.

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

A Tool to Strengthen Cooperation between Actors Involved in the Protection System for Unaccompanied Migrant Children (Italy)

THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD AND PARTICIPATION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

A Tool to Support the Collection of Children's Views on Protection and Reception Services (The NL)

LOCAL COOPERATION FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

A Tool to Assess and Improve Reception Conditions (Sweden)

WORKING WITH THE UNACCOMPANIED CHILD

A Tool for Guardians and Other Actors Working for the Best Interest of the Child (the NL)
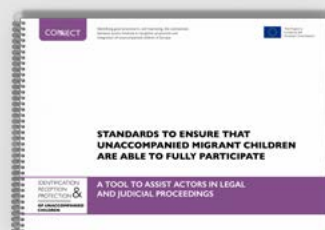
STANDARDS TO ENSURE THAT UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN ARE ABLE TO FULLY PARTICIPATE

A Tool to Assist Actors in Legal and Judicial Proceedings (the UK)

In developing the tools we have tried to ensure that the tools are:

a) based on a child rights perspective and relevant EU obligations,

b) directed towards strengthening the capacity of actors to engage in the situation of children and, to the extent possible, support better inter-agency work,

c) relevant, practical and effective and

d) aspirational and transferable to other contexts.

TOOL INTRODUCTION

This report is part of the CONNECT-project, an initiative of Save the Children Sweden that was implemented by multiple partners in five EU Member States. The CONNECT-project was funded by the European Commission with the aim of improving the situation for unaccompanied children in the European Union, through increased knowledge, better exchange of existing practices and development of new ones. Nidos is one of the partners participating in CONNECT. In the Netherlands, Nidos is a national organization providing guidance and support to unaccompanied migrant children since the 1990s.

The CONNECT-project resulted in a number of products: an EU Reference Document on references in EU legislation that are relevant to unaccompanied children, several country studies and a number of tools to be used in the field of unaccompanied children. This report, a guidance tool for guardians and other actors working for the best interests of the (unaccompanied migrant) child, is one of the tools developed in the framework of the CONNECT-project. The report reflects the experience in as well as the knowledge of working with the target group that has been built up by Nidos throughout the years. Of course, the target group in itself is very diverse in terms of age, background and vulnerability. Nonetheless, the unique situation these children are in makes that they share much more similarities with one another than, for example, with children in regular youth care in a Western country. And, as a consequence, the guidance of these children is different from either working with children in a different setting or, of course, from working with adult migrants and refugees.

In each of the European Member States, the protection and guardianship of unaccompanied children is arranged differently. Nidos has, in its cooperation with many partners all over the European Union and a.o. through the projects ENGI (European Refugee Fund 2008) and ENGI: GIP (European Refugee Fund 2010), become increasingly aware of the importance of specialization when working with unaccompanied children. On the other hand, other European Member States have been interested in developing knowledge of the working methods and experiences of legal custody or guardianship gained through Nidos engaging with this target group over the years.

The issues of guardianship and representation of unaccompanied children have also received increased attention on the macro level, for example in the recently adopted European Directives in the field of asylum and, for example, in the recent publication on guardianship systems from the Fundamental Rights Agency. Representation or guardianship of unaccompanied children is also very important as a safeguard for children to exercise their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Chils; for example the interpretation and implementation of article 3 of the CRC on the best interest of the child has attracted increased attention the past few years – a subject to which specialized carers and representatives are needed.

As an organization with a mandate for guardianship and a specialism only on unaccompanied migrant children, Nidos has been developing knowledge and working methods for more than a decade (and as a part of a different organization for many more years). This document presents a cross-cutting view on the current state of affairs and serves as a transfer of knowledge from one specialist to another. It can also serve as a stimulating and learning document to less specialized actors who do have responsibility for or work with unaccompanied children. The reception, support, and regulation of legal custody is organized differently in each country, but the target group is the same and many aspects of guidance are also the same. Therefore, this tool is generally applicable to all who work with the target group: governments and NGO's can assess whether their services are adequately skilled, have adequate knowledge of the target group and are covering all aspects of the work described. Guardians, social workers and reception staff can use the tool to reflect on their own work. Furthermore, the document could serve as a first step towards a practical European approach on the subject.

In this tool, we shall refer to 'unaccompanied minors' as unaccompanied children, including "all unaccompanied and separated children under 18 who find themselves outside their countries of origin, regardless of their immigration status and whether or not they have claimed asylum". This definition is drawn from the *Handbook for Front-Line Professionals,* published as a result of the Council of Europe Project, 'Life Projects for Unaccompanied Migrant Minors'.

At Nidos, social workers are the guardians and youth care workers, therefore, when we speak of guardians, we also refer to social workers or counsellors who provide care to children relating to custody and child protection measures. The care focuses specifically on unaccompanied child refugees and asylum seekers (AMAs) and unaccompanied child migrants (AMVs) staying in the Netherlands without a request for asylum and for whom return to the country of origin is a realistic option.

Nidos' basic principle is that priority is given to the interests of the children. The children have had to leave their familiar environments due to extraordinary circumstances and develop and grow into independent adults in a social and cultural environment that is entirely new. The cultural disorientation and lack of knowledge and integration in the new environment, together with their situation regarding the law concerning aliens, make them vulnerable and requires education and support based on respect, safety, and protection (Nidos Annual Report 2012).

In Chapter 1, we highlight the specifics of this guidance tool on unaccompanied children and the differences with children who have grown up in the Netherlands. Chapter 2 presents an historical outline of the methodology developments at Nidos and the tensions that sometimes exist between government policy and the practical aspects of working with unaccompanied children. In Chapter 3, based on the experiences and knowledge gathered by Nidos over the past years, we describe specific aspects of the guidance and support of unaccompanied children, such as practical methodological approaches that can be used by a wide group of mentors, social workers, or guardians in their work. Finally, Chapter 4 suggests areas for further development and exploration so that the work with unaccompanied children will be more tailored and suited to the guidance needs and risks inherent in this target group.

CHAPTER I

SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE GUIDANCE ON UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

In this chapter, we highlight what, in Nidos' experience, is specific to the support and guidance of unaccompanied children compared to the needs of children who have grown up in the Netherlands. This is described from the perspective of the child, regarding what has been learned and what is known from research. Based on many years' experience, Nidos believes that guidance for unaccompanied children requires specific expertise that is different from that needed for other children in youth care who grew up in the Netherlands. This overview will clarify the specific knowledge and skills required to professionally care for unaccompanied migrant children who live in Europe. The specialised knowledge and skills, that differ from regular youth care work, are not widely taught in the training courses for youth care workers in the Netherlands.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Extended family culture

Usual terms to indicate cultural differences between "countries of origin of refugees and asylum seekers" and "Western countries" are extended family culture versus individually-orientated culture or 'we versus me' culture. David Pinto (2007) states that, in individually-orientated cultures, individual fulfilment is the highest aim and, in family-orientated cultures, it is (family) honour.

Being focused on individual fulfilment and personal development can seem strange to unaccompanied children who have recently arrived in the West. This is clear from their wish to satisfy the expectations and instructions of the family and the desire to send money home immediately, even if they are only receiving a very small amount in pocket money. When choosing a school, the expectation of the family is also often more important than the opportunities for individual fulfilment. Adapting to this individually-orientated culture often causes alienation from the (extended) family, with the risks of being cut-off, excluded, or rejected.

Democratic principles and freedom of expression are also unusual for an unaccompanied child, such as expressing their own opinion or vision, and being part of the decision-making process. The participation of an unaccompanied child in their guidance and reception, or within the organisation (as is usual in youth work and education) is hard to establish in organisations working with unaccompanied children. However, the experience with collective discussions, such as discussions using the 'World Café-approach', can be successful. Children from extended family cultures learn to respect older people and not to have an opinion and desires of their own. Expressing their own opinion is considered a lack of respect and a sign of poor upbringing, meaning a disgrace to family honour. Therefore, an unaccompanied child may feel very uneasy if they are constantly asked for an opinion about certain adults. The transfer to a culture in which individual development is considered important and democratic principles, such as participation and freedom of expression, are the norm is strange for many unaccompanied children.

Family honour

Children coming from cultures with strict rules of honour (extended family culture) regarding partner choice, sexuality, and gender roles often are exposed to a culture orientated towards individual development (individual culture) and the danger of violating family honour may be great. A child will have to make their own choices between individual fulfilment and the risk of rejection by the family or more drastic forms of honour-related violence. Aid workers, youth care workers or guardians must recognise and understand the risks so that they can help the children consider the matter and look for solutions.

Gender differences

The differences in position between women and men from extended family cultures are often great. Refugee girls from many countries of origin have been subjected to, or are at risk of, genital mutilation. Other risks are arranged marriage (sometimes at a very young age) and restriction on freedom of movement. Boys often are, even at a young age, responsible for the honour of the girls and women in the family, particularly if they are the oldest 'man' in the family. The relationships within a family, therefore, may be very tense and uncertain.

WAR AND POVERTY

There is a large contrast between the situation from which unaccompanied children originate and the often traumatic experiences during the long flight and the prosperity in Europe. Minor refugees often have incorporated survival strategies. In Europe, this 'survival behaviour' is often labeled inappropriate or problematic behavior, especially when children end up in 'regular' youth care facilities and services, where there is insufficient experience and know-how with this aspect of the target group. The approach to tackle problematic behavior as a result may have adverse effects for the child.

BEING A CHILD AND ALONE

Unaccompanied children are alone and must continue to be on their own to be eligible for protection and reception services specifically for unaccompanied children. Often, it is difficult to involve the family in the support, supervision and protection of children because of the importance of 'being alone'. Unaccompanied children fear their return if they provide information about family. It is a similar case regarding the age of the child, where the difference between being under/over 18 years cannot be reliably determined, even with age assessment. Moreover, unaccompanied children often come from countries where their birth is not registered or the birth date is not known. With unaccompanied children, age is usually assessed and the supervision is adapted to that without changing the age on identity documents. However, an uncertain age may lead to difficulties with respect to housing and education, where the allocation is usually based on age stated on identity documents.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

Unaccompanied children are often burdened with traumas, loss, unpleasant travel experiences, and worries about family that stayed behind. Negative asylum or residence procedures often have a very harmful reinforcing effect on these. Stress resulting from uncertainty and tension does not enable the processing of traumas and this distinguishes the psychological wellbeing of unaccompanied children from that of other children in Western countries. A Dutch study looking at psychological issues, traumatic stress reactions and experiences of accompanied child refugees, Dutch children and unaccompanied child asylum seekers, shows that unaccompanied child asylum seekers report more stressful life events than the two other groups. In addition, unaccompanied child asylum seekers had more often experienced several traumatic events than the other two groups (Bean et al., 2007a). The emotional wellbeing of unaccompanied children is a serious concern in their support and reception as they may frequently show self-destructive and suicidal behaviour.

The study also shows that guardians do not properly distinguish between unaccompanied child asylum seekers with many psychological difficulties who need help and unaccompanied child asylum seekers with few psychological issues who may not need help (Bean et al., 2006). We may assume that unaccompanied children are not always referred to psychological care services in good time. In addition, the treatments offered by the Dutch Mental Healthcare Association (GGZ) are often not really culturally appropriate or suitable for the unstable situation of the unaccompanied children. In practice, these services do not provide trauma treatment and are often limited to medication. Transcultural psychological support, which is better suited to help traumatised refugees, is only available at a number of specific places in the Netherlands.

OBJECTIVES OR INSTRUCTIONS OF THE FAMILY

Unaccompanied children have often been sent with expectations or instructions from the family that the child's departure must be of benefit to the whole family. The image of the opportunities that the child will have in the West is often unrealistic, with the expectation that money will be sent, family reunification will take place, and that the child will build a successful career and send more money. Children may be burdened enormously by these unrealistic expectations. Nidos has taken an active role, in consultation with the child, in contacting the family as soon as possible to explain what the real opportunities are for the child. Children are often relieved when the family expectations are adjusted in this manner. Contacting the family can be complicated because many unaccompanied children are 'closed off' about their background and family circumstances.

Alternative perspective

Upon arrival in Europe, many children do not reach their original goal or destination. Some are picked up in transit to family in another European country, others must return to their country of origin immediately, or when they reach age 18. Due to, among other things, the denial of contact possibilities with family or their unrealistic expectations, it is often difficult to discuss with the child (and preferably also with the family) what alternatives exist. As a result, many children find themselves in risky situations because they see no other possibilities than to stay illegally in Europe.

SAFETY RISKS

Compared to other children, unaccompanied children experience additional risks due to their vulnerable position as refugees, the fact that they are without family or a responsible adult, and possibly because they have exhausted all legal remedies.

Human trafficking and human smuggling

In getting to Europe, unaccompanied children have often already been smuggled, for this may be the only means for them to travel. For a number of them they are not just smuggled, but trafficked as well. Human trafficking exists in several forms, including prostitution, drug smuggling, weapons smuggling, or unpaid work, and does not just take place solely during the travel but also once in Europe. Due to a lack of support network, the pressure from family to send money, and sometimes even superstition, unaccompanied children are very vulnerable and easily influenced by human traffickers. In the Secure Protection, where Nidos places children who are clearly victims of trafficking (between 10 and 20% of the unaccompanied children for whom a guardian is appointed yearly), it can prove difficult to keep children out of the hands of traffickers. The children engage as soon as there is the opportunity, as they want to earn money and are often afraid following threats made concerning their families; it is obviously difficult to encourage them to make other choices.

Abuse after end of legal stay

Children who are nearing the end of their reception period and have exhausted most legal remedies are extra vulnerable to abuse and traffickers. Often there is strife and difficulty, due to people coming and going near the large-scale reception where the older children stay, and is probably connected with prostitution and drug dealing. A study (Staring, 2010) among young asylum seekers who left with an unknown destination after their residency status ended shows that a large majority of them initially roamed the streets. The subsequent accommodation and work they found were often accompanied with abuse and bad working conditions. In this study, very few young asylum seekers were working in the sex industry. The children aim at lawful stay and try to avoid engaging with the Police. The researchers concluded that the vulnerability of former unaccompanied children manifests itself especially in long-term dependency relationships and housing and work situations outside of the sex industry.

Return

Unaccompanied children may not be welcomed back into the family if they return empty-handed. Families often have made great financial sacrifices to make the travel possible and returning without money may mean a large financial problem for the family. Moreover, returning empty-handed from Europe is not seen as very credible in the eyes of the local community in the country of origin. A returned unaccompanied child may be considered a failure and no longer be welcomed in the community, making the opportunities for housing and income difficult.

The return of children to a children's home also poses a risk, as being raised in an institution may lead to development issues for the child, particularly due to the lack of opportunities to build secure and lasting relationships with their carers.

PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS

For many years in youth care, a basic methodological principle has been to start from risk factors and protective factors of the children and their environments. Risk and protective factors are circumstances in the environment and characteristics of the individual child. To realise change, the positive factors are used to reduce the influence of the risk factors. Support focuses on the promotion of the protective factors and the creation of new ones. The protective and risk factors discussed within the social sciences usually apply to children raised in the West. In practice we see, but also know from studies, that other factors also apply to unaccompanied children. Besides the specific risk factors listed above, from the literature we are aware of specific protective and risk factors for unaccompanied children[1].

Protective factors:

- Language ability in host country language
- Religion
- Emotion regulation
- Safety
- Continuity of residence
- Acculturation
- Perspective
- Social support
- Contact with family

Risk factors:

- Physical or psychological health issues
- Cognitive limitations

[1] For a more detailed description, see Chapter 3.

RESILIENCE

Due to their background and circumstances, unaccompanied children are a very vulnerable group. While most do not show very negatively affected development, the circumstances under which they develop are less favourable in specific respects and make them vulnerable. As the psychotherapist, Guus van der Veer described in Nidos' first methodology book (1996): "any impediments in the normal development process are mainly caused by environmental factors and only in a small number of cases also by limitations or disturbances with the individual child." This is what distinguishes unaccompanied children in general from other children in youth care. They often display behavioural or personality issues. The approach of mainstream youth care often does not suit the reception of unaccompanied children.

NEED FOR GUIDANCE ON UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

There is a great contrast between the situation unaccompanied children usually come from and the experience of prosperity in the West. Interviews with unaccompanied children (Nidos, 2013) show that they focus strongly on basic needs, such as sufficient food, a roof over their head, and safety. There is a great need for a permanent and sufficient availability of food, but that is not always the case at the reception facilities. The children complain in the interviews that punishment at the reception facilities is the limitation of access to food if they are late, and that the fridge is locked during the night, or that they are not allowed in if they return late. We may assume that as long as unaccompanied children focus on the basic necessities of life (mainly on 'survival'), it will be hard to motivate them to work on further personal development. In practice, we often say that a child is still in 'survival mode' and support then focuses as much as possible on the child's stabilisation.

LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP AND PROMOTION OF INTERESTS

In many European Member States, a form of guardianship or legal custody is provided for by law. This custody is accompanied by the obligation to promote the interests of the unaccompanied child who is alone and lacks parental supervision. These interests concern both their educational situation (can the unaccompanied child develop safely and without threat?) and their asylum proceedings (are the grounds for asylum of the unaccompanied child sufficiently clear and are they brought forward in the proceedings?). Naturally, a lawyer also plays an important role in this, but a guardian must promote the best interests of the child and make sure that the procedure is carried out carefully. This is an element that is not part of mainstream youth care work. In the Netherlands, practical questions and concerns in youth care surrounding residency are often referred to Nidos.

Another aspect in the promotion of their interests is that the guardian with legal custody also ensures that the unaccompanied child can develop without being threatened and that decisions are always taken in the best interests of the child. This means that a guardian must act if an unaccompanied child's development is threatened due to their staying, or threat of having to stay, in an unsafe place.

Professional guardian

A person who has formalised legal authority in respect of an unaccompanied child can promote their interests in a professional manner and assess if the interests of the child are considered, taking action if necessary. A guardian does this based on their knowledge of unaccompanied child refugees, the fields of pedagogy and psychology, awareness and experience of other cultures, knowledge of refugee status, and the access and residence procedures.

A guardian with legal custody must:

- ➲ Monitor the asylum proceedings
- ➲ Help children deal with their experiences of having new freedoms in Europe
- ➲ Take action where a child's development is threatened
- ➲ Encourage contact with family
- ➲ Promote return, if that is in the best interests of the child

A person without legal custody has far fewer opportunities due to lack of knowledge, support, and professional distance. Lack of professional distance and experiencing the powerlessness of an unaccompanied child may also affect professional guardians in situations of threatened deportation. However, a professional guardian has a work network and environment that can offer support such as work supervision and peer review.

CONCLUSION

The specific characteristics of unaccompanied children, who usually come from poor countries wrecked by war, show that working with them demands specific knowledge, expertise, and attitude. Knowledge about the background of unaccompanied children, legislation in respect of migrants and asylum, legal custody (guardianship), transcultural psychology and pedagogy, and risk signs around lack of safety. Expertise requiring culturally sensitive skills to connect with the unaccompanied child and their network, and skills to deal professionally with the situation of the unaccompanied child, often experienced as hopeless. A curious and caring attitude and concern for the backgrounds, experiences and possibilities of the unaccompanied children.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT AT NIDOS

In this chapter, we describe the methodology development at Nidos, showing how the organisation addresses government regulations and legislation, developments in youth care, and the increase in its own specialist knowledge regarding unaccompanied children. In addition, the methodologies developed are closely connected to the reception of unaccompanied children and are in line with those developed for the management of guardianship.

2.1 HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT

In the Netherlands, since the early 1990s unaccompanied child refugees and asylum seekers have been provided with care and support. Stichting de Opbouw (now Nidos) provides guardianship and takes care of part of the reception. In 1996, Opbouw's first handbook was published, *Voogdijmaatschappelijkwerk en gevluchte adolescenten [Social work in respect of guardianship and adolescent refugees].* This handbook, written by Guus van der Veer, who, as psychotherapist, researcher and trainer, sought to promote the knowledge and expertise of social workers at Opbouw. The book reflects the vision of the guidance for unaccompanied child refugees and asylum seekers and also describes methodology. The core of this vision is the assumption that nothing is wrong with the children but that they may lack something. "They have not come to the Netherlands because they were problematic, but because there were problems in their country. This starting point requires an approach that begins from the strength of the children and not from the problems."[2] Van der Veer formulates this as:

> " *In the guidance of and aid to children, we may assume that the majority of them do not have a disturbed development process. However, specific aspects of the circumstances under which they must develop are less favourable... From this point of view, the purpose of the guidance of adolescent refugees is to support the normal development process and remove the impediments thereto as much as possible. Any impediments in the normal development process are mainly caused by environmental factors and only in a small number of cases also by limitations or disturbances with the individual child.*"

[2] Quote of the Director in the Preface of the first handbook (van der Veer, 1996).

The methodology emphasises the differences and similarities between child refugees and Dutch children; the general development aspects of children form the starting point, supplemented with the additional factors that young refugees have to handle. Much attention is paid to the consequences of traumatisation, disorientation, and survival strategies. The role of a social worker acting as a guardian is to ensure that the development of a child continues as well as possible, to offer support to promote optimal development, and to take action when the development stagnates. In supporting the typical development process, the guarding of child refugees focuses on reinforcement of protective factors of the child and their environment so that resilience is increased and risks are reduced. Important protective factors are having or developing a social network from which the child may derive protection, support, and a feeling of belonging. Contact and living with family or a new foster or host family is strongly recommended. Other protective factors discussed by van der Veer are the ability of a child to express emotions by making music or to channel aggression through sports activities.

In 2004, the Netherlands was shocked by the death of the three-year-old toddler, Savannah. She had been under the supervision of youth care for years, but nevertheless died from starvation and maltreatment by her mother. More tragedies followed in which very young children died from maltreatment by their parents, although youth care was involved with the family. Youth care workers were the subject of much publicity and criminal prosecution. Subsequently, the authorities implemented a programme for improvement of the quality of care and supervision orders and also guidance on guardianship called "Better Protected". Nidos participated in this programme but the Ministry recognised that the target group also needed its own methodology. Nidos then developed a methodology largely based on that developed for child protection for care and supervision orders (Delta methodology) and a guardianship methodology, but with very specific contents. The Ministry supervised and approved Nidos' methodology in the framework of its improvement programme, "Better Protected" for youth care. Another consequence of this programme is that from 2014 youth care workers must be registered with a professional association and will be covered by disciplinary law (2015). This professionalisation means that youth care workers will work in accordance with guidelines drawn up by their professional association and, in order to remain registered, they must update their knowledge and skills through accredited education and a practice of registered feedback (peer review or supervision). We must wait and see to what extent these guidelines will also apply to the specific unaccompanied children target group.

The reception of unaccompanied children and Nidos' role in this has also changed over the years. The basic principle has always been that the first reception was provided by the COA (Central Reception Agency for Asylum Seekers) in large-scale centres, and that Nidos was responsible for the second phase. Together with youth care organisations, Nidos developed small-scale reception options with various types of guidance. One example is the small living units with four unaccompanied young people living together with guidance and support. Everything is focused on increasing self-reliance and can be compared with centres for independent living in mainstream youth care. For young unaccompanied children, 'children's communal units' with 24-hour guidance are provided. The basic principle regarding children under 12 has always been that it is best if they can be received in a family, preferably of their own culture. This form of reception, 'Reception and Living in a Family Context' (OWG) has been extended over the years with older and vulnerable children also always received in families. Children who need more expert care or help are sometimes placed in mainstream youth care or psychiatric institutions.

Between 2005-2006, the authorities decided that the reception of children aged 15 years and older was taken over from Nidos by the COA. The children's communal units and small living units remained and campuses (large-scale reception centres for children aged 15-18 without a residence permit) were added. Resulting from the 2004 changes in the legislation regarding foreigners, children over age 15 were generally no longer eligible for a residence permit after 18. The idea was that integration of these children was undesirable and aimed to make the child return to the country of origin at the age of 18. This policy is outdated; the children developed poorly at a campus, there were many incidents, return was not organised and control had become a major issue. Nearly all campuses have since been closed.

Methodology development regarding forms of reception focused on the development factors children have to cope with and on the development of (language) skills to become self-reliant using protective factors and the strengths of children. Co-operation between guardians and Nidos in reception has always been part of the work of formulating the objectives together, and working in the same 'language' with the child.

Nidos is always granted guardianship of unaccompanied children upon their arrival in the Netherlands. Engaging with the various registration and reception streams, Nidos always ensures that a guardian is present at the first registration to meet the child, arrange for guardianship, and especially to assess if the child can safely be placed in the reception facility for their age group. Much expertise has been developed at Nidos to recognise victims of human trafficking at the first meeting and to encourage them to go to a protected and safe form of reception.

2.2 THE NIDOS METHODOLOGY, "YOUNG AND UNDERWAY"

The Nidos methodology for the guidance on guardianship, described in *Jong en Onderweg [Young and Underway]* (Spinder et al., 2008), is largely based on the Delta methodology for care and supervision orders and the newly developed guardianship methodology.

The following concepts and work principles from the Delta methodology have an important place in Nidos' specific ways of working:

The 4-Step Model

❶ Strong points and points for attention

❷ Development of the young person, conditions and impediments

❸ Desired development results

❹ Objectives and actions:
  • Working according to plan.
  • Engaging and positioning - engaging is in line with the child's motivation and positioning is the protection of the child's interest using knowledge and expertise.

The strong points of the child and their environment are identified and concerns are also stated. Everyone gets an opportunity to talk, firstly the child, mentor or parent educator, teacher and the guardian. Based on this, development impediments (if any) are stated together with the desired development results. Using the strong points, together with the child and their network, an Action Plan is created where targets are drawn up and actions are agreed upon. A safety assessment is also part of this analysis, where the focus is on the child and their environment. In this methodological approach, the child's

development takes a central position. The general development aspects of Western children have been supplemented with additional development aspects of unaccompanied children (Van der Veer, 1996).

In addition, we look at the educational and development conditions that have been formulated by Kalverboer in the BIC-Model (2006). This relates to 14 domains required by a child for typical development, 7 in the educational context and 7 in the environment (see Appendix).

The areas within which the guardian must focus their activities are:

❶ The promotion of interests to ensure good progress of the asylum proceedings, take action when the development of the young person is threatened, provide for the legal incapacity of the child(including medical treatment, choice of schools, choice of residence) and asset management.

❷ The personal development, leading to independence and self-reliance through, among other things, adequate educational possibilities, social inclusion, and active social participation.

❸ The daily residential and living environment, where the guardian supervises the developmental conditions and removes possible impediments in the personal and social functioning and social participation.

❹ Alert for, and the prevention of abuse, disappearances, and children being in 'illegal' situations.

In the Nidos methodology, special attention to understanding the background of unaccompanied children, and the concepts of traumatisation, disruption and survival strategies is essential. The strength and influence of family ties is also of great importance. Usually, young people come to Western Europe with 'specific instructions', which they often carry as a secret and a burden. How we deal with this and use the strength of family ties in their support and guidance is an important theme.

Another important aspect, and one of the most difficult, in the guidance of unaccompanied children is return. In 2004-2005, Nidos, together with partners, tried to set up return communal units and return education, but this was unsucceessful. One of the reasons was the great influence that unaccompanied children have on each other in a group context, particularly that of a child who advises against co-operation on return because another chance of a residence permit may still present itself. Children who initially were open to look into, or work on, return possibilities stopped after this type of advice from peers. Often there is success in making return the subject of discussions if family is involved who understands that there is no future for the child in Europe and participates in considering professional opportunities upon return. There are also positive exchange experiences with children who have already returned. A realistic picture of options in the country of origin and practical tips from a peer with the same background may positively affect the willingness of the child to look into return possibilities.

Nidos prefers to place unaccompanied children in a host family, ideally from their own culture. From a pedagogical point of view, it is of great importance for children to be able to build lasting relationships with affective and sensitive educators. In institutional education contexts, that opportunity rarely exists due to the continuous change of group leaders and this is why a host family is greatly preferable to reception in an institute, particularly for children. Moreover, reception in their own, or a related, culture provides children with a transitional space, a place where their own culture brought from the country of origin meets the new culture in which they now live. The cultural family functions as a protective cover (Tjin A Die, 2010) for the child, an anchor from the past and present, everything what was old and familiar. The method of working with host families has been described separately in the methodology book, *Thuis en Onderweg [At Home and Underway],* (Spinder et al., 2010).

EVALUATION OF THE METHODOLOGY

When Nidos evaluated the methodology in 2011/2012, the 4-Step Model seemed hard to apply in practice. The formulation of strong points and concerns in Step 1 succeeds well, even together with the child, but formulating the development impediments or threats is very difficult. This requires knowledge of development psychology that youth care workers do not usually have. The formulation of targets succeeds reasonably well, but youth care workers have trouble determining the content of a plan when there are few concerns about a child. It is very difficult to involve children in their own plan as they are not used to contributing their opinions and have been raised to respect adults. In general, they are positive but do not understand why all the paperwork is required.

What is effective or not?

Elements from youth care methodology	Effective/not effective with unaccompanied children
4-Step Model - Analysing what the issues are and making a plan to address them together with the child.	**Not effective:** unaccompanied children do not understand all of the paperwork. They are not used to having a say, giving their opinion. Speaking in child development terms, threats of impediments is not the language of children.
Engaging and positioning	Positioning is effective for unaccompanied children who are law abiding. They also like engagement and prefer to have an engaged guardian.
Involving the network in solutions	**With difficulty:** the subject of contact with family is hard to open up and often holds many secrets from the child to his or her guardian or social worker
Starting from the child's own strength	**Not effective:** unaccompanied children are not used to seeing themselves as individuals or having an opinion of their own, particularly not about themselves.

2.3 METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS AT NIDOS

SAFETY

Based on the evaluation, results of the unaccompanied child refugees and asylum seekers participation project, 'AMA Monitor' (2009-2014), and developments in mainstream youth care, Nidos is further developing the methodology. The starting point for this development is its improvement and simplification, wherever possible. A connecting element in the methodology will be empowerment of the child and their family through finding a (cultural) link with the strengths of the child and their family.

In recent years, Nidos has also considered the problem of guidance for unaccompanied children upon return and the vision for this is included in the methodology. Increasing emphasis is placed on safety by the authorities and in Nidos' methodology, risk management is also increasingly important.

Risk assessment

The use of risk assessment tools is becoming increasingly embedded and, since 2009, systematic risk assessment has been mandatory for all youth care institutions in the Netherlands. Nidos continually works with additional tools that are focused on risks associated with the target group, including forced prostitution and honour-related violence. There is good co-operation with the National Expertise Centre for Honour-Related Violence (LEC-EGG) of the Dutch Police.

Screening of host families

The screening of host families has been extended with the identification of risk factors for child abuse, including risk factors associated with the target group.

Child abuse

It is mandatory for organisations working with young people to have a policy on child abuse (child abuse reporting code). Nidos has a child abuse protocol focusing on the risks and signs associated with the target group. Child abuse monitoring officers have been appointed in every team, have specific training and knowledge regarding refugee child abuse, and can call on the support of the behavioural team, where necessary.

Victims of human trafficking

Since 2004, it became noticeable that groups of unaccompanied children disappeared a short time after they had arrived in the Netherlands - girls from Nigeria, boys from India, and later also Chinese children. It became clear that this involved organised human trafficking and the children ended up in situations of (sexual) exploitation and abuse. From 2006, on Nidos' initiative, pilots were carried out with various forms of small-scale reception for these 'at risk' children. In 2008, under the responsibility of the Ministry, a type of reception was introduced that allows for a limited freedom of movement, now called 'protected reception'. A methodology developed for this protected reception focusing particularly on the experience of safety, as trust in the mentors and guardians is built up over time. As a result, the influence of the 'human traffickers' is reduced and a safer space is created for the child to work on another perspective. In the first period, there is limited freedom of movement to help foster a feeling of safety. In consultation with the child, freedom of movement is increased, but the child's safety is always the main focus. The child's sense of self-esteem is encouraged and awareness is developed that other options are possible rather than co-operating with the traffickers. In addition, Nidos plays

an important role in the identification of victims, offering guidance in reporting pathways, and the development of other perspectives in collaboration with the children and mentors. There is close co-operation with partners working against human trafficking, such as the Aliens Police, the Royal Military Constabulary, Centre of Expertise on Human Trafficking and People Smuggling (EMM), CoMensha, and specialised reception organisations. In 2013, a project promoting the co-operation of different agencies combatting trafficking of children began, with Nidos as the supervising agency.

PROMOTION OF INTERESTS

Residence proceedings-dedicated staff

Greater emphasis is placed on the monitoring of careful legal residence proceedings where the background of the unaccompanied child is presented as well as possible. Previously, this task was considered to be that of a lawyer, however, dedicated staff in every team support their colleagues in the promotion of these interests, and are themselves supported by Nidos' lawyers.

Dublin-dedicated staff

Nidos' experience with the appointment of a Dublin-dedicated staff member is very positive and is now sharing its experiences with other European Member States. A youth care worker, appointed to that position, quickly developed specialist knowledge in this field and succeeded in winning many cases working together with specialised lawyers.

Return-dedicated staff

One of the tasks of the youth care worker is to ensure a safe and sustainable return plan and a specialist youth care worker for the entire organisation supports other care colleagues with this.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

Suicide prevention

In 2011, Nidos started recording incidents that showed a large number of them involved suicidal and self-harming behaviour. Youth care workers and mentors often appeared to have reached their limit, frustrated and unsure of how best to address this. Subsequently, training courses were organised with a number of youth care workers becoming suicide prevention trainers supporting their colleagues. Following this, staff dedicated to psycho-social issues will be appointed in every region.

Promotion of expertise

Since 2012, the behavioural scientists have been offering training courses for all youth care workers, such as job training for new youth care workers focused on specific aspects of working with unaccompanied children; training for child abuse-dedicated staff focused on the identification of signs and risks of child abuse; and courses in development psychopathology focused on the recognition of, and guidance on, psycho-social issues for dedicated staff working in this field.

Screening tools

As previously stated in Chapter 1, research has shown that it is difficult for youth care workers to properly assess the seriousness of psycho-social issues of unaccompanied children. Therefore, in 2014, Nidos will start using the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) in their systematic screening, under the management of the Behavioural Sciences Department within Nidos.

Training in listening

In 2013, a training course was introduced to improve (culturally) sensitive communication skills. This training will be developed further in 2014 and will be available to all youth care workers.

INVOLVING THE NETWORK

Cross-Border Networking

Involving the network in the guidance of unaccompanied children is often difficult. This has to do with the fear that having a (family) network would lessen the chance of a residence permit. Unaccompanied children usually come from an extended family culture and involving the network is rather obvious; in its search for effective methods, Nidos has gathered and refined many positive experiences of involvement with the family network. Based on a methodological setup similar to Family Group Conference from New Zealand, a Cross-Border Networking (CBN) pilot was started in 2013. The core of the methodology is that from the start, the existing, new and imaginary networks are involved in the support and guidance. Working with family network consultations also links with developments in youth care in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Return

In 2012, Nidos drafted its vision of return. In short, this implied that return is only possible if there is a sustainable return plan regarding the educational situation and development opportunities, and that the plan is approved by the child and their (family) network. Of course, monitoring of the return is also important.

PARTICIPATION

It has been clear for some time that unaccompanied children who were not raised with democratic principles, such as expressing their opinion or having a say but with the norm of showing respect and not contradicting adults, find it difficult to change. Various projects have been set up to explore children's experiences of their guidance and reception so that this can be taken into consideration in policy.

AMA Monitor

In 2009, Nidos started the AMA Monitor with a number of various elements.

- ➲ **Research from Groningen University**
  Annually, the university researches approximately 30 unaccompanied children based on semi-structured interviews and questionnaires (BIC-Q, SDQ, and from 2013, also SLE and RATS).

- ➲ **'Tell your Story'**
  Every year in the 'Tell your Story' Project, 4th year students of Utrecht University of Applied Sciences interview unaccompanied children about the guidance and reception they received. These interviews provide a surprising amount of information.

- ➲ **'World Café'**
  In this method, work is based on themes and done in groups seated at large round tables. The children write, create things, draw (everything is possible), while a discussion takes place about the themes. The experiences with unaccompanied children are very positive and the participants are enthusiastic. Doing things together may suit their culture well.

- ➲ **Evaluation form at the end of guardianship**
  At the end of Nidos' guidance, each unaccompanied child is requested to fill in an exit form with questions about their experiences with the guidance.

Interviews about the opinions, experiences, and advice of unaccompanied children

In 2012-2013, after training focused on a culturally sensitive manner of follow-up questions about the opinions, experiences, and advice of unaccompanied children, youth care workers interviewed 50 unaccompanied children about reception and guidance. The results of the interviews are included in the AMA Monitor and may also prove to be a first step towards the formulation of quality criteria for unaccompanied children, similar to the Quality Standards in Out-of-Home Child Care in Europe (Q4C Standards).

SELF-RELIANCE

At Nidos, the guidance for unaccompanied children aims to increase their resilience by reinforcing protective factors of the child and their environment. Self-reliance is an important survival strategy of young refugees and its promotion may be seen as the reinforcement of coping skills that contribute to the resilience of the child.

Simplification of the methodology

Nidos has instructed the development of a graphic tool that the guardian can use, together with the child and mentor or host parent, to picture the degree of self-reliance and show what must still be done. The aim is to offer this tool, instead of an action plan, to children from about age 15 who mainly need guidance towards independence and whose development is not impeded or threatened. The expectation is that a graphic tool will be more accessible than an action plan on paper and that working on self-reliance is a concrete and clear target that may also work as motivation. When the tool is ready, unaccompanied children will give feedback on it through World Cafés. Unaccompanied children whose development is impeded or threatened and need more guidance will undergo detailed evaluation using the 4-Step Model, and screening tools will provide support in this process.

2.4 RECEPTION AND LIVING IN AN 'OWN CULTURE' FAMILY CONTEXT

Reception in families (OWG) is an important part of the reception of unaccompanied children. We constantly work on quality improvement and recruitment and screening of families coming from the same countries as the unaccompanied children, so-called 'culture families'. The recruitment and screening is carried out by OWG workers, who are youth care workers with additional responsibilities. The screening is supplemented with examination of risk factors for child abuse focused on the target group. The OWG workers have been trained in culturally sensitive communication so that they can discuss difficult or sensitive subjects in the screening and guidance. The OWG worker and the youth care worker jointly examine possible opportunities and evaluate each placement with the unaccompanied child, host family, and each other. The needs of guidance for the unaccompanied child and the host parents is the role of the youth care worker, whereas the OWG worker has an advising and supporting role, particularly where it concerns the support of the host parents. OWG workers organise 'World Café' meetings with host parents around the general need for guidance and educational themes, with a satisfaction survey distributed among host parents twice a year.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDANCE ON UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN EUROPE

Knowledge of the main cultural aspects, backgrounds, and possibilities of unaccompanied children is required to guide them with respect and support in the situations they face, and to recognise the risks they are exposed to in their vulnerable position.In this chapter, we describe knowledge and ways of working developed by Nidos that may be useful for guardians(and f.e. reception workers, social workers) with various roles and responsibilities in the professional guidance of unaccompanied children in different countries.

3.1 CULTURAL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

EXTENDED FAMILY CULTURE

The differences between cultures are sometimes denoted with terms like: 'me versus we' culture, or individual versus collectivist or extended family culture. David Pinto (2007) describes the differences as a continuum with the concepts of fine-meshed (F) versus coarse-meshed (G) structures. In a fine-meshed structure, detailed rules of behaviour exist for virtually every situation, which the individual only has to comply with and where little room exists for one's own behaviour. In a course-meshed structure, an individual adapts the general rules into behaviour for their own specific situation and thus has much more freedom. Pinto calls Maslow's Pyramid a needs hierarchy for the G-structure, with *self-actualisation* as the highest need. Beside it, he places a hierarchy of needs for the F-structure (Pinto's Pyramid) where *honour* is the highest need. With greater collective identity, the group is more important and the individual less so.

Overview of distinctive characteristics between individually and collectively-orientated cultures:

'Me' Culture:	**'We' Culture:**

• Individualistic:
    who are you?
	• Collectivist:
	    who do you belong to?

• Individual interest
    independent
    assertive, own choice
	• Interest of the group
	    connected with the group
	    obedient, modest

• Little power distance	• Large power distance
• Feminine	• Masculine

• Honesty
    Admitting errors;
    appreciation of confession
    Telling bad news straight away
	• To keep honour intact
	    Covering up errors;
	    denial prevents loss of faith
	    Carefully expressing bad news

From the training on culturally sensitive communication, 'Making taboo themes such as child abuse a subject of conversation', Pharos Expertise Centre Health Differences (May 2014).

Fariba Rhmaty (2011), a transcultural system therapist, writes:

> " *Whereas in a 'me culture' everyone is often equal and participates in all the decision-making, even little children, in a 'we culture' more hierarchy and difference exist. In a 'we' culture, as a child and as an adult, you derive your strength and identity from the contribution you make to the system. Matters like personal happiness, independence, self-fulfilment and privacy, which have top priority in a 'me' culture, are less relevant. Social responsibility and commitment are more important for mental wellbeing than autonomy... Every system contains elements of 'me' and 'we' cultures and balances between them.*"

IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY HONOUR

Honour is a universal concept and refers to the manner in which an individual relates to the group(s) that they are part of. Families or groups can also have honour but a crucial aspect is that honour can be affected or lost. Honour is sometimes considered an important factor in societies where, in the struggle for subsistence, people mainly depend on themselves. A group is usually stronger than an individual and has a greater chance of securing scarce resources for its maintenance. The individual, however, must then subject themselves to the rules and norms of the group or face penalty of exclusion or worse. Codes of honour are then a means through which others are kept at a distance. If there is enough for everybody, individuals do not depend on a group for their survival and the importance of group rules is lessened, with more room for individual decisions.

Honour is subject to change and differs in each group; opinions about what a person must be or do to be honourable differ on individual, group, or society levels but there are also many similarities. Education and control of the group (community) are the main mechanisms for the (re)production of rules of honour. Honour in extended family cultures is often about subjects relating to education and succession. The violation of honour, therefore, often relates to relationships, partner choice, sexuality, and successors. The teaching, monitoring, and protecting of honour may be accompanied by violence, particularly when the honour is under threat. Violation is worse to the extent that it is known outside the group with gossip and slander often experienced as shameful and violating honour; the more people who are aware of the violation, the greater the chance of honour-related violence. If it has been violated, rehabilitation may take place through honour-purifying actions, such as marriage, divorce, rejection, denial, accepting the situation, or attempting reconciliation. Deadly rehabilitation is the ultimate form, sometimes by suicide. The situation depends, of course, on the nature of the conflict, the extent of the violation of honour, and the codes of honour (Janssen, 2006).

In Europe, children coming from cultures with strict rules of honour (extended family culture, we-culture, F-culture) are often influenced by the new culture orientated towards individual development (individual, me-culture, G-culture), and the risk of violating honour may be great. A child will have to make choices between individual self-actualisation and the risk of rejection by the family, or worse. Aid workers, youth care workers, and guardians can help children to make well-considered decisions in this matter and may discuss it with the family. Codes of honour are also part of assimilation. Understanding and respect for the codes of honour of others and awareness and insight into one's own codes are important when discussing this, but it may be quite difficult[3]:

> *…When I explain to him why, as an Afghan, I find it important to do everything in accordance with my belief and culture, I feel that I'm not understood, no matter how often I explain it. If I say to him I want to contact my family and send them money, he doesn't understand why I want to send money. In one way or another, he doesn't want to understand that it's important in our culture that we always have contact with our parents and always help them, especially because I am the male of the house".*

Boy, age 16

> *Sometimes I'm afraid that, if I'm not careful, I'll be like them, my curiosity sometimes leads me to being tempted. I don't want to forget my culture and belief, but at the same time everything's so open here and there's too much freedom".*

Boy, age 17

[3] From 'Tell your Story', 2012.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

In many countries, children are supposed to follow the specific wishes of the family. Restriction of the freedom of movement for girls and arranged marriages are violations of the right of self-determination found in many traditional cultures. In many traditional refugee and migrant families, regarding their rights, girls are at the bottom of the family hierarchy. This situation is changing in many refugee and migrant families who have lived in Europe for a longer time, but freedom of movement is sometimes still very much restricted (Pharos, 2009). Many girls from traditional migrant and refugee families feel discriminated against in various respects compared to their brothers, not just in the unfair division of household chores, but also their freedom of movement. In addition, many girls are not allowed to enter into a relationship with a boy, whereas boys have much more freedom. Girls sometimes face great difficulties if they are expected to contribute significantly to the household and have limited freedom, but also then expected to be successful at school.

Forced marriages

In some cultures, marriage sometimes takes place (forcibly) at a young age, being 'married off'. This also happens with children and may then be considered child abuse, but how often it occurs is not known. In practice, it is difficult to draw the line between a forced and an arranged marriage. Sometimes a girl is not literally forced to marry the partner chosen by her parents, but she feels obliged to do so out of loyalty or is under such pressure that she does not dare object. The question is if the girl has a choice or is forced. The pressure to agree is not only great for girls; boys may also be married off. If a child refuses, this may lead to abuse, house arrest, threats or forced return to the country of origin. If they continue to resist and, for example, run away, a family may proceed with honour killing (Pharos, 2009).

Preparation for a forced marriage often happens before age 18, after which the marriage takes place. The role of Nidos or guardians is to guide and support the child in their choices. Going against the will of the family can have serious consequences, such as rejection by the family. For people from collectivist or extended family cultures, loss of family often has a very great impact, because, as an individual, they feel 'less than' within the extended family.

Female genital mutilation

A special form of child abuse is female genital mutilation (FGM), often also called circumcision of girls. In the Netherlands, circumcision of girls is considered genital mutilation and is strictly forbidden. Some parents coming from regions where this is customary, often no longer want their daughters to be circumcised when they live in Europe, but heavy pressure is exerted to do so anyway (www.opvoeden.nl). There is no data on the carrying out of female circumcision in the Netherlands, but it is known that families send girls abroad to have the procedure.

Forms of circumcision of girls:
- ➲ **Incision:** this 'mildest' procedure requires a puncture or small cut to be made in the clitoris or foreskin with the symbolic objective of letting a few drops of blood flow.
- ➲ **Circumcision:** similar to male circumcision, this involves cutting away all around the foreskin of the clitoris (Sunna circumcision). Often more is intentionally cut away, sometimes unintentionally.
- ➲ **Excision or clitoridectomy:** this procedure goes even further by cutting away the top of the clitoris or even the entire clitoris. Sometimes, the small labia are also partially or entirely removed.
- ➲ **Infibulation:** the most drastic form of circumcision is the 'pharaonic circumcision', where all external genitals are cut off. The wound is given an opportunity to heal completely except for a very small, pencil-sized opening, through which menstruation blood and urine can leave the body. (BJZ Protocol Child Abuse, 2010)

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates the total number of circumcised girls and women in the world at between 100-140 million, with an estimated two million added to this annually. It occurs in 20 African countries and with population groups in a number of countries such as Yemen and Oman, and in Asia (Indonesia). In Somalia, Djibouti, North Sudan and Mali, almost all girls are circumcised, usually in the most drastic form (infibulation). Circumcision is typically done to young girls, but the exact age differs in each country. In Somalia, the age is between six and ten years, before the first menstruation, but it may also take place during adolescence. The circumcision often takes place during school holidays, so that the girls can recover (AJN 2005). Circumcision may happen several times, after sexual intercourse or childbirth, sometimes with a harsher procedure. In Dutch asylum law, being at risk of circumcision may be reason for awarding right of residence.

Traditionally, parents have a circumcision performed to protect a girl and safeguard her future. The circumcision also determines the female identity of the girl based upon opinions, values, and norms in respect of matters like virginity, chastity, and cleanliness. Many girls and women in the countries of origin see the act as something that is self-evident: it is part of life, for everyone has been circumcised. Often they are relieved and proud when it is over; the pain is seen as part of a woman's life similar to the pain of childbirth. Some of the arguments presented in favour:

- ➲ Protects the girl's virginity
- ➲ Increases the chances of marriage
- ➲ Gives her status in the community (the reverse applies even more where an uncircumcised girl runs the risk of being rejected)
- ➲ An infibulated woman is more beautiful
- ➲ Sign of being raised well
- ➲ Supposed to be a rule for cleanliness (www.meisjesbesnijdenis.nl)

The origin of circumcision of girls is not clear, however, as a tradition, it is often linked to Islam, but is not mentioned in the Koran. There are also Christian peoples who perform circumcision on girls. Originally, it was probably

connected with fertility rituals and initiation ceremonies that, in some regions, became interwoven with local religious practices (www.meisjesbesnijdenis.nl).

In Europe, any type of circumcision of girls is forbidden. It is also forbidden to have a girl who was born in the Netherlands circumcised in another country, such as during a holiday in the country of origin.

Circumcision of boys

As a result of the international discussion about circumcision of girls, the discussion about circumcision of boys is also increasing. In many places in the world, it is the norm for every boy to be circumcised for religious reasons. In Islamic and Jewish families in the Netherlands, boys are also circumcised but this is discouraged by the Royal Dutch Medical Society. There are no medical advantages of circumcision, it goes against the physical integrity of children and may lead to serious complications.

HEALTH

Culture and religion also greatly influence opinions about illness and Western healthcare has a hard time connecting with refugees and migrants. It is generally known that migrants and refugees often feel that a physician is not taking them seriously if they do not get a prescription for medicine. In many cultures, it is not customary to make a distinction between psychological and physical complaints. It is often difficult to motivate unaccompanied children who are referred to the Dutch Mental Healthcare Association (GGZ); they do not see the benefit of 'talking'. Research by American psychologist, Tammy Bean (2006), showed that unaccompanied children who received treatment at mental healthcare institutions (GGZ) did not experience any benefit from it. A culturally sensitive approach is important to help with engagement and, in the Netherlands, there are a few GGZ institutions with transcultural specialisation.

CULTURALLY SENSITIVE COMMUNICATION

Culture is dynamic and knowledge about cultures is not sufficient to improve communication. You can only acquire knowledge about the other through meeting, interaction, and dialogue. This demands that you can empathise with the other person, are curious about who they are, and respect their boundaries.

It is important to experience the meeting as safe and the intention of the discussion must be clear: agree on the frameworks and discuss what will happen with the information. If you have to deal with traumatisation or there are difficult topics or secrets, agree on what will/will not be discussed, or decide when exactly the discussion will stop.

By asking open questions (who, what, how, when), the other person is invited to share things. Give the other person the opportunity to ask questions and know your attitude towards different cultures as well as your own. The tendency to favour assimilation to the dominant norms is often greater than many people are aware. Connect with the other person through an open, listening, and curious approach, and with children, also assess their development level. Active listening requires probing further into what the other person says; this is only possible when you let go of your agenda.

In intercultural communication, issues may arise because people interpret behaviour differently. Following the 3-Step Method (Pinto, 2007) may contribute to more effective intercultural communication. The first two steps teach us to look from both perspectives (that of the person themself and of the other) and, in Step 3, any differences may be indicated for both cultures.

Step 1: Become aware of and know your norms, values, and codes of conduct.

Step 2: Learn the (culture-specific) norms, values, and codes of conduct of the other person, making a distinction between opinions and facts. Ask what you do not understand. After these first two steps, both perspectives are revealed.

Step 3: In handling differences, determine how the other person deals with the differences in norms and values found in the given situation. Determine where your limits are regarding adaptation to, and acceptance of, the other person. These limits are explained to the other person in a manner suited to their cultural communication codes.

3.2 WAR AND POVERTY

Refugee children often use strategies for survival and there are various studies[4] that focus on the survival strategies of unaccompanied children. Goodman (2004) interviewed 14 unaccompanied children from Sudan who remained in the United States. From the analysis of the interviews, four main strategies helped them to deal with their situation:

- ➲ Collectivity was a survival strategy in which unaccompanied children saw themselves as part of a group; they showed the importance of mutual support.

- ➲ Suppression and diversion were used as defence mechanisms to forget the stressful life events from the past.

- ➲ Unaccompanied children indicated that they believed God had everything under control and that His will determined their life or death. In this way, they gave significance to the circumstances of their lives.

- ➲ Unaccompanied children looked forward to a better, more hopeful future in the US.

In an Irish study by Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010), various strategies or mechanisms were revealed by unaccompanied children when telling how they deal with their situation. In all strategies, religion was the matching element:

- ➲ Adaptation to the dominant culture or finding a balance between own and new culture

- ➲ Focusing on positive circumstances

- ➲ Suppressing thoughts about the past

- ➲ Being self-reliant and independent

- ➲ Continuing activities previously done in the country of origin

- ➲ Distrusting people around them

Many refugee children have to deal with continuous uncertainties, from the past, in their present situation, and their view of the future (waiting to know about their situation and residence). This chronic uncertainty may worsen psychological issues and undermine confidence in the future.

INSTRUCTIONS, EXPECTATIONS, AND SECRETS

Children who have been sent to the 'West' have often been instructed to succeed in such a way that the whole family will also be able to profit. Sometimes children are sent as a form of rejection, when the honour has been violated after rape, homosexual interactions, intellectual or physical disabilities, or psychiatric illnesses. When the perspective of unaccompanied children in the asylum proceedings is negative, we regularly see extreme expressions of despair, varying from nervous breakdowns to serious suicide attempts, and shame towards the family often plays a large role. This despair and thoughts of suicide, at the prospect of having to return to the country of origin, can be understood if we recognise the family's interests and hopes for the child's stay in the West, and that for many unaccompanied children, their individual interests are felt to be less important than the interests of their extended family.

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4   A literature study by a student of Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, commissioned by Nidos 2012.

RELIGION

Religion may be a strongly protective factor for refugees. It is known, however, that victims of human trafficking are frightened and threatened with the use of occult religions, such as the influence of Voodoo with victims from Nigeria. If the victims do not co-operate, they are told that something will happen to their family in the country of origin (as Voodoo has a magical side that can exert power from far away). In practice, it proves very difficult to lessen this influence, but we have positive experiences with the use of credible allies, such as those of a (Voodoo) priest.

3.3 EMPOWERMENT: FROM THE STRENGTH OF THE CHILD AND THEIR NETWORK

RESILIENCE OF YOUNG REFUGEES

Due to their background and circumstances, unaccompanied children are very vulnerable. The majority does not show seriously troubled development, but the circumstances under which they develop are less favourable in specific respects and make them vulnerable. Any impediments to the typical development process are mainly caused by environmental factors and only in a small number of cases also by limitations or issues with the individual child (Van der Veer, 1996). The guidance of unaccompanied children aims to increase their resilience by reinforcing protective factors of the child and their environment. Protective factors are circumstances in the environment and features of the individual child that can be used and reinforced to increase the resilience of children and reduce risks. Resilience is partially determined by genetic factors and partially by acquired coping strategies. A study by the research group, IJzendoorn (2008), shows that particularly the genes related to

the dopamine system, such as DRD4 and COMT, make children more or less receptive to the environment. Specific combinations of such genes may help some children to not develop post traumatic stress problematic behaviour after abuse or neglect. The positive and negative effects of environmental influences are different with each child, as there are different levels of receptivity.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND RISK FACTORS FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents are a vulnerable group in Western Europe. Their difficult living situation may affect their emotional wellbeing, which can result in considerable emotional and behavioural issues (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008; Fazel et al., 2012). Uncertainty often makes the children and adolescents believe that it will be difficult to realise their dreams. This may cause conflicts of loyalty towards parents, family, and country of origin, to which considerable promises may have been made (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008).

Considering risk and protective factors for these unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents, it is important to note that the age limit of 18 (in the Netherlands) is not a worldwide standard. Often this Dutch age limit does not correspond with the unaccompanied child's culture and various approaches within, and between, cultures exist. In many countries, a strict separation between the worlds of children and adults does not exist; an unaccompanied young person may have left their country as an adult and be assigned as a child in the Netherlands. An unaccompanied child may have performed tasks that in Dutch society can only be performed by adults (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008).

Often refugees have to deal with consecutive traumas that may have happened in the country of origin, but may also have occurred during the flight, or in the new, strange country (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008; Fazel et al., 2012). Experiencing violence (threatened and actual violence), as both victim and observer, is a large risk factor for psychological issues (Reed et al., 2012). Various

studies show that adolescents accompanied by a family member, or received by a family member after arrival, have fewer problems than unaccompanied children (Van der Veer, 1996). Accompanied children separated from their relatives appear to have greater risk of poorer mental health.

Support and protection may help children and adolescents to cope with the psychological effects of traumas and misery. In the case of parental divorce, they often lack social support and protection and also lose other important relatives. As a result, children lose a world of significant adults, safety, stability and 'roots'. In addition, they have a greater risk of experiencing traumatic events during the flight, mainly through lack of protection, and also lack social and economic resources in the foreign country (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008). Children and adolescents whose relatives are in a difficult situation (such as in prison) have increased risk of developing psychological issues. This appears to also be the case if children have difficulty in maintaining contact with their relatives. The existence of contact with family (far away) has a protective influence (Fazel et al., 2012).

The acculturation process may cause much stress as it may lead to loss of contact with the traditional ways of life (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008). Integration in the foreign society while retaining the original culture implies better adaptation; holding on to traditional family values is protective, but it is important that children and adolescents also integrate, having an opportunity to acquire skills in the language of the new society (Fazel et al., 2012). In the living situation, this means that it is protective if children and adolescents live together with other people from the same background who are integrated in the new society, providing protection against psychological issues (Fazel et al., 2012; Van der Veer, 1996).

Supportive environments reduce psychological symptoms, however, in practice, such an environment does not always exist. The living circumstances in the new country are often difficult, including living in large refugee centres, in groups with little privacy, and limited staff (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008). Such accommodation negatively affects the children's functioning, instead of living alone or in a host/foster family, where experiencing safety and privacy appear to be important (Fazel et al., 2012).

In qualitative research on the role of religion with unaccompanied children, Ní Raghallaigh (2011) found that religion gave unaccompanied children meaning, comfort, and a feeling of control in their new living circumstances. For many, religion appears to be an important factor in how they deal with their situation. Carlson, Cacciatore and Klimek (2012) describe belief in a higher power or religion as an individual protective factor. The survival strategies used depended on the circumstances and past experiences of the unaccompanied child.

Various studies (Geltman et al., 2005; Bean et al., 2007b; Hodes et al., 2008) have demonstrated risk factors that predict the development of post traumatic stress reactions in unaccompanied children, such as little social support, the number of traumatic experiences, and physical injury. Girls and older unaccompanied young people have a greater risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS). Health problems, from before the emigration or acquired during flight, or in refugee camps, also appear important risk factors (Carlson, Cacciatore and Klimek, 2012). Guus van der Veer (1996) suggests the ability of a child to express emotions by making music or by channelling aggression via sports activities is a protective factor.

The specific protective and risk factors for unaccompanied children are summarised:

Individual factors:

➲ **Host country language skills**
Protective: if the foreign language is spoken sufficiently

➲ **Religion**
Protective: children may receive support, meaning, comfort, and control from their religion and derive strength from it

➲ **Emotion regulation**
Protective: when a child recognises their emotions and knows how to feel better in the event of a buildup of emotions
Risk: when a child does not know how to handle overwhelming emotions

➲ **Physical or psychological health issues**
Risk: health issues before emigration, or received during the flight, or in refugee camps

➲ **Cognitive limitations**
Risk: a serious cognitive limitation affects the ability of a child to function independently in society

Environmental factors:

➲ **Safety**
Protective: experiencing safety, sufficient food, accommodation, no threat of violence
Risk: experiencing lack of safety

➲ **Continuity of residence**
Protective: small number of transfers
Risk: more than four transfers

➲ **Acculturation**
Protective: living in a host family or small-scale housing with residents of the same cultural background helps maintenance of own culture and integration into new culture
Risk: living in large refugee centres, little privacy and limited contact with guardians

➲ **Perspective**
Protective: certainty regarding residency status and clarity about the future
Risk: lack of clarity, long proceedings

➲ **Social support**
Protective: no hindrance of discrimination and racism, being appreciated, peer support safety at school and affiliation with the community
Risk: discrimination, racism, no peer support, no safety and no feeling of connection

➲ **Contact with family**
Protective: contact with (distant) family or staying with or having arrived together with family
Risk: no contact with family

RECEPTION AND LIVING IN 'OWN CULTURE' FAMILIES

If unaccompanied children do not have their own family network with whom they can live, reception in families with a comparable cultural background may also provide a safe place. Because of recognisable norms, practices, and customs, such 'own culture family' is a familiar environment that facilitates the unaccompanied child in getting to know the new society at their own pace. The culture family functions as a transitional space within which the transition may gradually take place.

Protective wrapping and wrap

Kitlyn Tjin A Djie (2010) refers to embedding into the culture and in the group with 'protective wrapping'. It is something that is all-encompassing, not just about family but about everything associated with familiar ways of the past - smells, scenery, traditions, rituals, history, and food. There are habits and customs of the past that are no longer applicable after the migration and talking about this may, in itself, have the effect of 'protective wrapping'. According to Tjin A Djie, protective wrapping encourages people who are vulnerable, and everybody does it, not just migrants. In difficult periods, we look for pleasant memories, experiences of safety and warmth.

In Nidos' *Opvang en Wonen in Gezinsverband [Reception and Living in a Family Context]* (Spinder, 2010), protective wraps are called anchors from the past and the present, such as family, or people that remind a person of family, old or new friends with connections to the past, familiar customs, food, religious symbols, smells, and music. In short, everything that was old and familiar when everything was still safe. Memories may be mixed with unpleasant ones that were a reason to flee, but there will always be memories that are cherished. Tjin A Djie states that re-embedding in a family and social support system is crucially important to move on to a new phase of life and has a stabilising effect.

> "Culture families may provide that stabilisation for unaccompanied children... They provide, as it were, a place to stay put, where safe and revitalising memories can be called up from the old frame of reference. Through connection with, and recognition of, the context from the past, feelings of alienation and confusion may be reduced and it will be possible to look for contact with the unfamiliar outside world... Culture families, together with the child, can look for important anchors from the past that may help the unaccompanied child to experience trust and safety in the present. In that sense, these reception families provide continuity for unaccompanied children."

Spinder, 2010

Kouratovsky has introduced the concept of wrap to denote the profound influence of factors like culture, migration, and language on the bio-psycho-social development. Wrapping applies to each person and disturbance of this upon migration can result in greater vulnerability for many generations. A child comes into the world with the ability to call up reactions of caretakers. Those reactions are adjusted to the child in special traditional language use (motherese) that is already strongly culture-specific and culturally burdened. This way, the child learns to know itself from the beginning in a passive and active exchange with the world outside it. The reactions of the social environment lay the basis for self-understanding and the ability to explain and understand the child's own behaviour as part of a social group. A group, characterised by a specific culture, where 'culture' can be understood as a collection of 'body practices' (2008). Kouratovsky (2009) calls wrapping a buffer against stress; if the stress cannot be handled, the risk of difficulties exists. Placement of an unaccompanied child in a reception family with a similar cultural background will support the child in recognising the stress buffers and help to regulate their stress.

Children from so-called 'extended family cultures' experience their identity as part of the family and not so much as an individual, and increased time spent in Western society may lead to confused feelings about this. The child will feel in between cultures, which may result in alienation and exclusion from the

original social context or rejection from the extended family. It is important to help children understand how vulnerable they are if they do not belong to something - their extended family, compatriots, or peers. Social exclusion, or the feeling of not belonging anywhere, creates much stress and may lead to psychological issues or psychopathology. It is important that the guidance and support of unaccompanied children strongly focuses on the maintenance and development of social networks and friendships, as even one friendship can make a great difference.

CROSS-BORDER NETWORKING

Working with unaccompanied children also means working with their extended families and networks. It is difficult to bridge cultural differences and to win the trust of unaccompanied children so we work together with them on ways to involve the network in their life and future.

The point of departure should be to involve the (family)network in the guidance as much as possible. If you do not succeed in the beginning to establish a contact with the family network, the family may also be involved theoretically by asking questions such as "suppose we ask…" ("Suppose we could speak with your grandfather now, what would he advise you?")

Experiences of co-operation with the network

Nidos' practical experience with involving the family network shows that children are often relieved when the family is properly informed by the youth care worker about their circumstances, such as poor chances in the asylum proceedings, educational possibilities, or chances of family reunification. It is also clear that family, close or distant relatives, take action when they are really concerned about their family member or in a crisis situation. Unaccompanied children are often very concerned about family that is left behind and may be extremely relieved when contact is re-established or family members are located. Contact with the network may also result in information relevant

for the residence proceedings or the guidance and support of the child, such as documentation used for legal proceedings or to prove identity. In the event of family reunification, discussions may take place with a realistic perspective of expectations and possibilities. The contact may also make clear that there are loving, well-intentioned parents, or concerned family who very much want the child to return. The child and their family may present better solutions than those considered by the youth care worker. This may result in an extension of the support network and where the child is told that they are always welcome in the (family) network if plans in Europe fail.

Impediments in contacting the network

An unaccompanied child often denies that contact with the family network is possible and it is not always clear if this is connected to the residence proceedings. A guardian will have to accept that an unaccompanied child is not necessarily open and honest about their situation. They may also avoid contact due to fear that the family is disappointed because of not fulfiling their expectations or instructions. There are situations, such as involvement of the family in human trafficking, where the network contributes to the child's lack of safety and contact might makes things worse. Contact is only established in consultation with the child.

Solution-orientated ways of working, such as Signs of Safety (SOS) and Family Group Conference (FGC), which are based on strengths and solution possibilities for the family, are similar to this method of involving the unaccompanied child's network. Empowerment requires trust in those strengths and even if not directly visible they may be empowered through activation. This demands that an aid worker seeks out solutions for the child and their family in a way that is not patronising, but rather engages as an equal and collaborates with all concerned.

From old to new network

The guidance must start from the idea that an unaccompanied child has an existing network and will develop a new one. When we speak of getting to know an unaccompanied child in their context, this means the network to which they belonged (old) and the one they will belong to (new). Detailing the needs for guidance and plans for the future takes place with the child and their old and new networks jointly. By involving the old and new network in the guidance from the beginning, the child is supported in the transfer from 'where they belonged' to 'where they will belong'. In the guidance, a central place is given to the development of a new network.

3.4 THE PROMOTION OF INTERESTS AND GUARDIANSHIP

In many European Member States, a form of guardianship or custody is provided for unaccompanied children (sometimes by volunteers, professional or otherwise) and in some countries, the responsibilities are divided between legal custody and social support and guidance. In the Netherlands, custody of unaccompanied children is exercised by a professional guardianship agency appointed by the Court, with the pedagogical and custodial authority exercised by a specifically educated youth care worker employed by Nidos. This has been provided for in the Dutch Civil Code. Because of the absence of parental authority, a temporary guardianship order is made by the Juvenile Court, however, if parents do become involved, this order may be cancelled. In practice, this means that where legal permission is required from a body having authority, it is the Board of the Foundation that gives its signature. This is the case for a passport application, registration at school, or permission for medical treatment. Custody of unaccompanied children in the Netherlands is organised the same as for children in youth care whose parents are not, or no longer, able to care for them.

The youth care worker, from their position of authority, is the person obliged to promote the interests of unaccompanied children. These interests relate to the educational situation (is the child in a position to develop safely and without threats?) and also to the asylum proceedings (are the grounds for asylum of the child sufficiently clear, and are they presented in the proceedings?) A lawyer also plays an important role in this but the guardian/youth care worker must make sure that the proceedings are carried out carefully and in the best interests of the child. The interest of the child, as set out in Article 3 IVRK, is currently noted in asylum law cases but it is not specified for how long this interest will be taken into consideration.

Kalverboer has developed the BIC-Model (Best Interest of the Child Model), where 14 conditions for good development are specified. The basic assumption is that if all conditions exist, a favourable development of the child is guaranteed and we can speak of safety (Spinder, 2008). The BIC-Model is the basic way of working for the orthopedagogical diagnostic research of the 'Research and Expertise Centre for Juvenile and Aliens Law' at the University of Groningen.

It helps to outline the quality of the educational environment of the child and compare it with alternative situations. Decision-making in favour of the environment with the highest quality provides the child with development opportunities and is in their interest. A decision taken based on the above-mentioned starting points conforms with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically Article 3:

> "*In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration) and Article 6 (States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.*"

www.RUG.nl

BIC-Model adapted for unaccompanied child refugees and asylum seekers[5]

Conditions in educational system		Conditions in society
ACTUAL SITUATION	Physical wellbeing	
	1. Adequate care	8. Safe physical wider environment
	2. Safe physical direct environment	9. Respect
	Education	
	3. Affective climate	10. Social network
	4. Flexible educational structure	11. Education
	5. Adequate model behaviour of parents	12. Interaction with peers
	6. Interest	13. Model behaviour in society
PAST AND FUTURE	7. Continuity in education and care, perspective for the future	14. Stability in living circumstances, perspective for the future

Kalverboer's BIC-Model adapted for unaccompanied children (Spinder, 2008).

3.5 PROTECTION AND ATTENTION TO SAFETY

When providing guidance to unaccompanied children, knowledge of the safety risks for this target group and culture-specific issues is essential to make a proper assessment of the risks they may be exposed to and ensure their protection.

VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING, EXPLOITATION, AND ABUSE

With some children, the suspicion of possibly being victims of exploitation already exists upon arrival, often relating to prostitution and forced labour. It is important to try during the initial meeting to get a clear picture of the child and their situation. By asking a number of specific questions, we can consider if the child belongs to a risk group of children who are victims of human trafficking, or are exploited because they are forced to work while other people profit. If a child belongs to a risk group, it is important to place the child in a protected environment and provide appropriate help. Victims may come from anywhere; in the past few years, children mostly come from Western Africa (particularly Nigeria and Guinea) but also from China and India. It is not always easy to assess if the child is at risk during the intake as they have usually been frightened with violence, threats and intimidation, and are silent about the exploitation and abuse. Inexperience and lack of awareness also make it difficult to determine this as, in the large-scale asylum centres, recruitment is sometimes on-going. It is also known that children who have exhausted all legal remedies face a greater risk of exploitation. New forms of child exploitation always appear in Europe, such as 'the dancing boys of Afghanistan', a practice in which Afghani boys, usually dressed as girls, must entertain an exclusively male audience with song and dance, and be of sexual service.

[5] For a more detailed description, see Appendix.

HONOUR-RELATED VIOLENCE

Honour killing is a phenomenon under traditional law where a family or tribe believes it can recover the lost moral honour by murdering the person (of any gender) causing the loss of honour or the one found guilty of the loss of honour. It exclusively concerns physical violation of the moral honour. The decision to commit an honour killing is only taken when there is no other solution (for the recovery of honour), such as marriage. In principle, one person cannot decide to commit an honour killing on their own initiative, rather the entire family or tribe is involved. The family or tribe may also justify the act retroactively (Pharos, 2009).

One of the greatest misunderstandings is that honour killing is a typically Islamic phenomenon but it also occurs among Christians, Jews, and Hindus. The Koran does not allow believers to take the law into their own hands and the murder of fellow believers is expressly forbidden. Nevertheless, it is a custom that is hard to eradicate, particularly within Islamic communities in rural areas. Honour killings are shocking news that attracts a lot of attention, even though a small percentage of people are victims of honour killings. Much greater is the hidden distress among women who are seriously restricted in their freedom of movement by the honour morals and experience other forms of honour-related violence, such as forced marriage, threats, abuse, social isolation, and rejection (Pharos, 2009).

Honour-related violence also includes threat of honour killing, leading someone to suicide, physical abuse or maiming, rejection, or threats. Rejection of children also occurs, usually connected with offended honour or a damaged appearance, as a form of recovery of the family's honour. Rejection can result from loss of virginity, rape, homosexuality, physical or mental disabilities, and psychiatric illness, and may be a reason for the flight of an unaccompanied child.

GENDER-SPECIFIC RISKS

Circumcision

As previously described, circumcision of girls occurs in many refugees' countries of origin. The pressure on families, even if they live in Europe where circumcision of girls is forbidden, may be great. In the Netherlands, there are various prevention programmes against the circumcision of refugee and migrant girls. A risk factor that may indicate plans for circumcision is particular travels/holidays to the country of origin. Circumcision may also cause health issues in menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. Additional circumcisions may also be performed after sexual contact, childbirth, or as a harsher form of an earlier circumcision. Culturally sensitive discussions about circumcision with those involved may highlight risks and provide solutions.

Forced marriage

Preparations for a forced marriage are often made before a girl turns 18 years old, after which the marriage takes place so not much can legally be done. The guardian may help guide the child to make choices in this matter but going against the will of the family may have serious consequences, such as rejection by the family. Loss of family can have a very great impact on people from a collectivist or extended family culture, as they often feel less worthy as individuals than as part of the extended family.

Cinderella

Regarding children travelling with a family, we often see that the child who is not their own does a disproportional amount of the chores in the household or has to take care of other children. We call this child a 'Cinderella' or 'house slave'.

Signs of child abuse specific to refugee children:

- ⊃ One of the children helps out disproportionately in the household (Cinderella).
- ⊃ Older children perform correcting tasks towards younger children (imitating educators) and the tasks may sometimes be excessive.
- ⊃ Request for passport or travel permit for girls from risk groups (for circumcision, honour-related violence, forced marriage).
- ⊃ Holidays abroad where circumcision often occurs.
- ⊃ If educators show little or no interest but have many demands.
- ⊃ Suddenly having expensive possessions (telephone/clothes).
- ⊃ Signs that the child has affected the honour of the family, through what the educators call 'very indecent behaviour'.

USE OF RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS

In the Netherlands, a number of tools are specifically used with the refugees and migrants target group and there is a risk assessment focusing on honour-related violence (*Movisie, Violence in Dependency Relationships*). Commissioned by Nidos, PI Research has developed a check-list for identifying victims of human trafficking during the intake procedure for unaccompanied children. This identification list includes various indicators for possible human trafficking such as 'hard' indicators, having or not having travel or identification papers, and 'soft' indicators, (non-verbal) behaviour and feelings of unaccompanied children. The list is based on expertise, research and already existing tools.

Nidos also uses a 'safety form' systematically (at least once a year) to assess if sufficient educational conditions (from the BIC-Model) exist in the child's accommodation situation and whether there are signs of child abuse and/or honour-related violence. The risk factors of child abuse for children who stay in a family context are also assessed; the LIRIK can be used and, when there are suspicions of child abuse, the risk assessment tool, CARE-NL , is also applied.

3.6 PSYCHO-SOCIAL GUIDANCE

CHRONIC STRESS AND TRAUMATISATION

American psychologist, Tammy Bean, obtained a doctorate in 2006 with research on psychological complaints of unaccompanied child refugees and asylum seekers. She concluded that over half of the unaccompanied children (920 were examined) had post traumatic stress complaints. Half of this group (25% of the total group) also experienced depression or fears. Half of the unaccompanied children indicated that they received insufficient psychological care, as teachers and guardians appeared not to adequately notice psychological issues. The research also showed that 34% of the examined unaccompanied children did not have serious psychological complaints.

Definitely during the first period after arrival, unaccompanied children have to deal with stress around the procedure, uncertainty about the future, disorientation, missing and worrying about the family. Many were traumatised before and/or during the journey. As a result, many unaccompanied children have to deal with 'chronic stress', which can considerably affect their functioning. The brain may lose the ability to concentrate and regulate emotions, so children may be flooded with emotions, thoughts and relived experiences, leaving less capacity to remember and store information. A bit of stress in daily life is necessary and good for learning capacity, but too much stress, however, is unhealthy.

The stress zone tolerated by the amygdala (in the brain) is sometimes called the 'window of tolerance'. If the stress remains within these levels, the brain can handle the stress well. A child (or adult) can experience the emotions, bodily sensations, and thoughts that belong to an experience without the defence system having to become active. Because the child remains within the 'window of tolerance', they can process that experience effectively. With

[6]   LIRIK - Light Tool for Risk Assessment of Child Safety.

[7]   CARE-NL - Child Abuse Risk Evaluation - Dutch version.

traumatic experiences, if the stress level is no longer tolerable and too much danger threatens, the defence system is activated. To divert the danger, the body may bring itself into a state of heightened or hyper-arousal. In a state of hyper-arousal, threatening danger is met with a direct reaction - heart-beat and muscle tension increases, the child is attentive and alert, the senses become hypersensitive, everything is focused on the threatening danger, as dopamine and noradrenaline are released. It is a situation where active defence against danger is used, such as fight, flight, or active freeze. If the brain assesses that active defence is actually hindering survival and will not be able to avert the danger, it proceeds to passive defence where the body prepares itself for very serious injury, a kind of shock situation, in which as much energy as possible is saved. The body moves to a state of lowered or hypo-arousal and the brain temporarily loses the ability to assess danger, and the ability to think and solve problems has been switched off. A situation of hypo-arousal is accompanied with slower heartbeat and superficial slow breathing, reduced blood circulation and hypothermia. A stream of opiates is released, reducing pain and causing a kind of rest. Passive survival states include submission or passive freeze (paralysis). Both defence systems, hyper- and hypo-arousal can also be perceived in animals (Struik 2010).
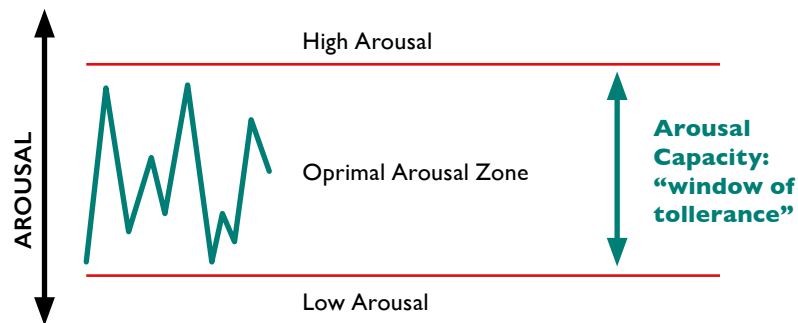
Due to traumas and chronic stress, the 'window of tolerance' of unaccompanied children is often very small. They enter a state of hyper- or hypo-arousal faster, or remain in it longer. In hyper-arousal, they are constantly alert, easily alarmed, react in an agitated manner, quick to anger, or react fearfully at specific triggers. In hypo- or low arousal, they stiffen at specific triggers or stare

ahead and are very passive. To process traumas, the 'window of tolerance' must be sufficiently large, or the limit will be quickly reached again and this requires effective emotion-regulating skills. Understanding the functioning of the human stress system and also for the chronically stressed unaccompanied child provides good guidance possibilities.

USE OF SCREENING TOOLS FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

In youth care, screening tools are increasingly used to assess the seriousness of psychological and behavioural issues. Nidos and RUG (Groningen University) use the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) on a small scale for unaccompanied children. The SDQ screens for psychological issues (emotional stress, behavioural issues, hyperactivity/lack of attention, and difficulties with peers) and skills in children aged 3-16 inclusive. There is a version for teachers, one for parents, and one for young people aged 11-17 (source: NJI). This tool has not been validated for unaccompanied children but the experience is positive. An additional advantage is that the questionnaire is freely available online in 80 languages and scoring is also possible on the website (www.SDQinfo.com).

In the previous research on psychological complaints of unaccompanied children in the Netherlands (2006), Tammy Bean has translated various questionnaires and standardised them for use with unaccompanied children in the Netherlands and for other refugee populations. The questionnaires used outline general psychological complaints; number of significant events; post traumatic stress reaction; adaptation and perspective for the future; and need of, and experience with, mental healthcare in the Netherlands. The questionnaires are suitable for the quick listing of complaints of refugee children and may be used by psychologists, psychiatrists, orthopedagogues, and physicians. The questionnaires can also be used in a research setting and for the monitoring of complaints during a specific period of time. The questions may bring up stressful memories and aftercare should be arranged before the questionnaires are used (Stichting Centrum 45). They include HSCL-37 A (Hopkins Symp-

tom Check List-37 A); the SLE (Stressful Life Events); and the RATS (Reactions of Adolescents to Traumatic Stress). The lists are available in approximately 30 languages with a Dutch or English manual accessible via Centrum 45 (registration not required).

EXPERTISE IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

Unaccompanied children regularly express their wish for suicide and this leads many guardians to feel powerless. Knowledge and understanding of suicidal thoughts contributes to being able to handle this. Thoughts of suicide often arise as a reaction to problems that seem impossible to solve and, although many people do not actually want to die, they do not want to carry on living their life in such difficult circumstances. As they no longer see acceptable options for the future, thinking of suicide is a form of self-protection: they are protected against even greater disaster, having to live with a dreadful perspective for the future, with unbearable feelings of loneliness, or having to live without feelings. The thoughts may be compulsive and hard to suppress or stop. Worrying continuously, especially during the night when everything seems worse, may result in exhaustion and that may be another reason to think about suicide. In French, worrying is called 'torturer l'esprit', torturing the spirit or, in other words, self-torture. The function of worrying is to protect a person against future disaster but if this becomes too much, then this self-defence can be self-torture. Thoughts of suicide are often accompanied by depression, where everything is experienced through negative thoughts that may become seriously distorted. Much support and treatment may be required to counter these distorted thoughts (Kerkhof, 2012).

Nidos has positive experiences of training youth care workers in suicide prevention. The training has enabled the workers to sensitively discuss the topic of suicidal thoughts and, as a result, they are better able to recognise and assess the seriousness, and are better equipped to determine when specialised help is needed. Ad Kerkhof, Professor of Clinical Psychology, Psychopathology and Suicide Prevention at the VU University Amsterdam has provided this training for trainers.

PSYCHOLOGICAL GUIDANCE AND TREATMENT OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Unaccompanied children often have difficulty with the Western approach to psychological issues. They are generally not used to discussing everything and often do not have words to express psychological issues. They usually do not see a solution in discussing their complaints, which are often experienced as physical, so specialised transcultural institutions can be better in connecting with them. Treatment of traumatised children initially focuses on stabilisation or improving emotion regulating skills. In practice, EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) appears to be effective treatment for traumatised child refugees, even when there are still uncertainties regarding living situation and residence permit. In EMDR, internal focus is on the experience of the traumatic memory, while external diverting stimuli ensure that the trauma is integrated. It is not necessary to describe the traumatic experiences completely or to re-experience them fully. The information processing system is affected by the treatment, resulting in a fading out of the traumatic memory, where the person will be able to think of the event without becoming emotionally affected. The accompanying pictures become hazy and increasingly fade away. In addition, cognitive restructuring may occur because new insights are connected with the event and it is no longer experienced as quite so threatening. Negative blocking by traumas can be removed by EMDR with positive results often already noticeable after a few treatments.

In their daily support, it is important to keep depressed and dejected children active in a regular structure. At Minor Ndako, reception and guidance for children in Brussels, there are good experiences of using 'mindfulness' in a group context. They also have positive experiences of group discussions with a psychologist working together with a cultural mediator. Psycho-education is always important, providing children with insight into their functioning helps them to understand their difficulties, such as worrying, depressed feelings, or angry outbursts.

Transcultural system therapy

System therapy approaches the complaints of clients in connection with their family and context. Fariba Rhmaty, a transcultural system therapist, considers it important that, in dealing with migrants from we-orientated cultures, attention is paid to the larger cultural system rather than the nuclear family as is the practice. With her clients, Rhmaty examines the family system to identify sources of strength, support figures and solution strategies. Highlighting an important difference between education in Iran and the Netherlands, Rhmaty describes how it is customary in the Iranian culture that parents make all the important decisions and arrange everything. In the Netherlands, however, that does not work because, in the school system, the child is expected to learn to be independent and take initiative.

The strengths and solutions for clients of we-orientated systems can often be found in the family system. Families form a protective system and have the wisdom required to solve problems. Families can guide you towards sources of power, support figures, advice and solutions that may help a client. If a family is not present physically, you can still give them a place in the support. Rhmaty always looks for weaknesses in the workings of the family system using the genogram and uses the extended family to guide her in ways to heal her client. One of the things she does is to hang the genogram in the treatment room, places photographs and objects, and has the client express the voice of important support figures and people of authority. She asks her client who would be a support figure and what advice the grandmother, uncle, or cousin would give, or she may ask who makes the decisions in the family and what decision this person of authority would take in this case. This way she creates embedding in the original support structure for her client. She asks circular questions such as: "If grandma was an important support figure in Iran, what would your grandma have advised in this situation?" Rhmaty's experience is that the answer almost always helps to direct her client in the present situation (Rhmaty, 2011).

3.7 WORKING TOWARDS A SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE PERSPECTIVE FOR THE FUTURE

NIDOS VISION OF RETURN: DUAL COMMITMENT OF THE CHILD AND THEIR NETWORK[8]

Commitment of an unaccompanied child and their family to return is possible if, in co-operation with the child and family, a sustainable and safe return plan is made. Dual commitment of the child and their family can be achieved through well-timed involvement and engagement with the family, and by determining jointly with the child when return possibilities will be examined.

Safe and sustainable return plan

A durable return plan prepared by, or with consent and support of, the family includes:

- ➲ A safe living situation for the child
- ➲ Family-based care provided willingly by the family
- ➲ Perspective of an independent life through education or work
- ➲ Development opportunities for the child
- ➲ Support of the return plan by local organisations

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[8] The most recent vision of return has been described by Nidos in May 2012.

Monitoring return

To ensure durable return, it is necessary that:

- ⮕ Return is monitored by local and international organisations
- ⮕ Nidos supervises and provides case management of the return plan during the initial period after return
- ⮕ The plan is adjusted with the help of local organisations and/or the family, if necessary
- ⮕ Nidos and support partners learn from and use the positive and negative experiences to adapt their work methods.

Monitoring Returned Children - Kosovo and Albania (MRM)

A monitoring tool has been developed based on Groningen University's BIC-Model and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). In total, 149 children aged 12-18, who all returned to Kosovo or Albania in a family context, were interviewed by researchers from Kosovo. Based on the interview, the researchers completed a BIC-Q (Best Interest of the Child Questionnaire), and the children completed the BIC-S (Best Interest of the Child - Self Report) and the SDQ. The results showed that children who returned voluntarily were in the best situation and were also in good condition mentally, with those who were forcibly returned being worst off. In the total group, 6 of the 14 development conditions were insufficient. The SDQ scores showed that 40% of the returned children had emotional or behavioural issues and 50% of the returned children experienced emotional stress and difficulties with their peers.

3.8 NEED FOR GUIDANCE ON UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

The differences between unaccompanied children are great in respect of their backgrounds, experiences, development, vulnerability, skills, self-reliance, and perspectives for the future. Guidance must be provided that recognises each child's specific circumstances and can be adapted to support the unique needs of the child. Immediately after arrival, many unaccompanied children focus on obtaining the desired residence permit and their primary basic needs, such as sufficient food, a place to stay, and safety. Adolescents, in particular, often strongly focus on interaction with one another, with children also wanting to engage with peers from a similar background. In practice, we see that, as long as children focus on the primary necessities of life and on 'survival', it is hard to motivate them to work on further development. It is important that the guidance suits the needs of the unaccompanied children; the Maslow and Pinto Hierarchy of Needs may help to understand these needs.
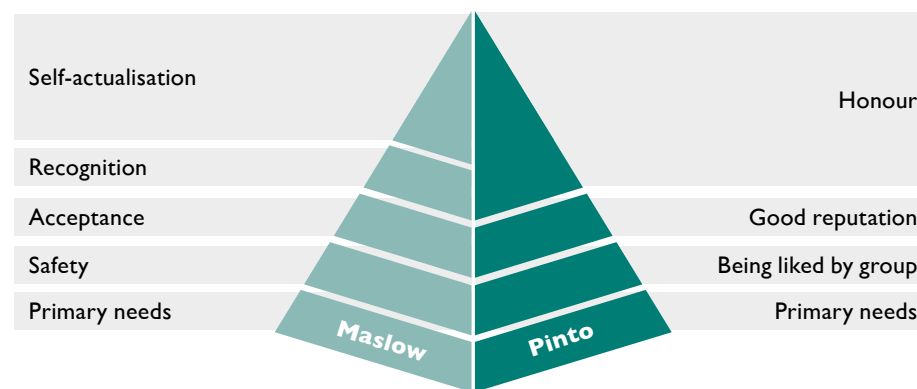
The Hierarchy of Needs of **Maslow** (left) and **Pinto** (right) for the (G) coarse-meshed or individualistic and the (F) fine-meshed or extended family structures, respectively. Maslow's pyramid applies to the Western (G) orientated person (only 12% of the world population), but not to all people. The Eastern (F) part of the world (88%) has different needs than the West and requires another specific (F) hierarchy of needs (Pinto 2007).

From research (Nidos AMA Monitor, 2009-2013) on the opinions of unaccompanied children about the guidance they receive, many children feel the need to have permanent guardians. Guardians who are there to support at important moments, empathise, and be understanding as a parent would. Many unaccompanied children feel it is important to live in a family context or in small-scale reception, and a change of living situation is annoying. They also find it important to learn the language of the host country as quickly as possible.

In Belgium and Italy, there have been positive experiences of working with cultural mediators. These are often former unaccompanied children who have integrated and can act as trusted facilitators in the discussion of difficult topics such as sexuality, safety, and expression of guidance and support needs of the unaccompanied children. This works especially well in a group context, given the group-orientated cultural background of many unaccompanied children.

3.9 METHODOLOGICAL GUIDANCE

To enable a cultural connection, it is important that methodological guidance addresses needs and support while focusing on the possibilities and solutions from the child and their (family) context.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

At the first meeting with an unaccompanied child, the question is asked who can be informed that they have arrived safely. There is the possibility to contact someone by phone, if desired, with confidentiality of the telephone number ensured. The guardian begins by asking many questions about the child's background, such as: Where are they from? Who were important people in their life in the country of origin? How did they live? What foods were eaten there? What is the economic situation? Who makes the decisions in the family? An overview of the family and support system can be made with a genogram. The guardian may enquire if there is a family network where the unaccompanied child can be received, where they are coming from and where they are going. Based on this first interaction, information and impressions are used to assess the risks of human trafficking and disappearance, for example if the travel target has not yet been reached. In the initial phase, guidance usually focuses on support in the proceedings, becoming familiarised with the new country, building trust in the guardians, and the development of a (new) network.

SKILLS, NEEDS, AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Skills are the strong aspects of the unaccompanied child and their context. How much education have they had? What subjects are they good at? Which talents are present? Are they self-reliant?

Needs relate to the expectations of the unaccompanied child and their family when travelling to Western Europe. Are there concerns or issues? How vulnerable is the child? Is help needed and what does the child and/or the family think in that case? What does the family expect from the child? Is that realistic, and what must happen according to the family? Is the child very vulnerable or are there other big worries? If so, experts may be engaged. Is the child safe and experiencing sufficient safety? What are the pedagogic needs of the child? Which reception is desirable and does it satisfy the conditions for the child's development?

Sources of support are the protective factors for the unaccompanied child. Is any family present in the country? Is religion of any support? Is contact with the family possible, or has a new network been developed? Are there friendships, peers or fellow compatriots? Can they be involved in the guidance, if necessary? Which coping skills has the child developed and can they regulate stress sufficiently with them?

Determination of guidance targets

Based on this listing, the first targets can be determined together with the child and their network. What shall we work on in the coming weeks? Who will do what, and how? Feasible and realistic targets are formulated that can be concretely realised in the short term. Working in cycles, the targets are continuously evaluated, adjusted, and determined together with those involved. We can continuously adjust to need and situation and the ideas and solutions from the child and their context can always be taken into account.

PROMOTION OF INTERESTS AND LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

In the guidance, it must be clear who is legally responsible for the unaccompanied child and who promotes their interests. The legal representative ensures that the child can develop well and, if necessary, takes action if the child's development is threatened, and the person promoting their best interests must ensure that the asylum proceedings are followed carefully.

Example of a Guidance Plan

From the perspective of:	Skills		Needs		Sources of support
	What is the child good at?	What are the strong points?	What does the child need?	What poses concerns?	What are the supports for the child and environment?
The child					
The network					
The guardians					
What will be worked on in the coming weeks?					
	Target		**Who does what?**		**When ready?**
Guidance targets	I				
	2				
	3				
Next evaluation:					

INVOLVING THE NETWORK

Guidance is based on the child and their context. By involving the old and the new networks in the guidance from the beginning, the child is supported in the transfer from 'where they belonged' to 'where they will belong'. The development of a new network may play an important role as new contacts, friends, and support figures are always brought forward and included in the new context. In consultation with the child, the network may be involved in setting targets or in bigger discussions, such as the development of a perspective for the future or return, and this can be facilitated via (cross-border) network conferences like Skype.

Where there are concerns about the psychological wellbeing of a child, the network may be of considerable importance, whether it is the new network, a long-distance network, or an imaginary network using circular questions ("What would your grandmother advise now if she were here or if she were still alive?"). If there are concerns about the child's behaviour, pedagogic authority figures may be looked for in the local, long-distance, or imaginary networks. A one-time pedagogic exercise by a person of authority often has a positive (corrective) effect on a child, even from a long distance.

When all legal remedies have been exhausted for a child and they are threatened with deportation or if the child has to continue living independently, the network is of paramount importance. If deportation or return is imminent, the network is activated to co-operate in creating a plan for the future based on the commitment of the child and the family. If there is a crisis situation, we assume that there is family and a network that want to help or take action and they must be given the opportunity to do so. Often they are present in the background, but experience teaches us that, when there is a risk that the situation may go wrong for the child, they are ready to help immediately and also effectively.

If unaccompanied children do not wish to have contact with their family, this is respected. The reason may be due to secrets or that the child wants to protect their family, but sometimes they are embarrassed because they do not feel that they have achieved enough. The unaccompanied children may be victims of their family's actions, such as in human trafficking. Even if contact is not desirable, it is important to approach the child in this context. Involvement of the family may not go any further than imaginary support based on circular questions and support may be sought from a new network or other sources.

A Cross-Border Conference Network (CBCN) may be set up to look for solutions together with the child's network. This may be a formal meeting where as many concerned people as possible meet from the extended network, sometimes via virtual means due to the long distances.

SELF-RELIANCE

The final objective of guidance for unaccompanied children is to ensure self-reliance when they reach adulthood. Self-reliance, however, is also an important survival strategy for young refugees. The promotion of self-reliance may be seen in that sense as the reinforcement of coping skills and contribute to the resilience of the child.

At present, Nidos, in co-operation with PI Research, is developing a graphic programme in which the development of these skills is outlined by the children and their guardians.

Daily guidance for unaccompanied young people often focuses on learning self-reliance skills in the following basic areas:

Personal	
Development tasks	Examples of skills
Health	Dealing with one's health sensibly
	Seeking medical help in good time
	Handling chronic stress or post traumatic difficulties
	Dealing with expectations and concerns about family that remained
Personal care	Taking care of personal hygiene, clothes, and care of outward appearance
Living	Keeping the living space clean and hygienic
	Preparing healthy meals
Finances and paperwork	Keeping paperwork organised and updated
	Managing own finances and budget
Social life	Building up a social network
	Establishing friendships
	Giving form to intimate relationships

Society	
Development tasks	Examples of skills
Being an asylum seeker	Creating a realistic perspective for the future
	Dealing with family expectations; loss of honour and embarrassment if the expectations are not satisfied
	Dealing with family that stayed behind
	Living in a strange environment that is sometimes experienced as hostile
	Dealing with various cultures
School/Work	Finding and keeping school/work
	Creating a realistic professional perspective in Europe, country of origin, or elsewhere
	Having leisure time
Official agencies	Following the asylum proceedings
	Engaging with official agencies
Travelling	Using public transport and accessing basic infrastructures

3.10 CLIENT PARTICIPATION

Client participation is common practice in democratic countries, however, the participation of an unaccompanied child in their own guidance and reception in youth care and education is not so useful. Children coming from extended family cultures learn to respect older people and especially not to have opinions and desires of their own; expressing their opinion is rather seen as a lack of respect and sign of poor education. An unaccompanied child may feel very uneasy if constantly asked for an opinion about certain adults. However, it is very important to know the opinions and experiences of unaccompanied children on the guidance, as only then can we connect with the ever-changing groups of young people coming from different circumstances.

There are various forms of participation that are suitable, with communication in a group context more so than individual discussions or forms, largely due to the cultural background of most unaccompanied children.

Experiences with collective discussions such as the 'World Café'[9] method have been successful. They can help children express themselves about topics like their guidance in a group context. Conducting focused, culturally sensitive interviews also provides useful information, where the child is allowed to lead and direct the discussion. When we listen actively, children feel that they are heard, enabling them to express their opinions about the specific subjects determined by them. We can always learn from children and their experiences if we facilitate and support effective and accessible ways for them to share.

[9] For a detailed description of the 'World Café' methodology, the Nidos CONNECT tool: *Participation of unaccompanied children: organising feedback;* Liedewij de Ruijter de Wildt.

CHAPTER 4

AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

PARTICIPATION IN THE GUIDANCE

Despite Nidos' positive results with forms of participation suitable for unaccompanied children, much remains to be developed. When we succeed in connecting and engaging in discussions with unaccompanied children, much useful information is gained that enables us to make the guidance more suitable and appropriate to their needs. Particularly in complex matters, such as family expectations, perspectives for the future, and return, much can still be improved through working in collaboration with the unaccompanied children. The use of cultural mediators may also contribute to increased participation.

INVOLVING THE FAMILY NETWORK

In Western societies, it is increasingly the norm to involve the (family) network in the needs of care for family members; in poorer societies, this is common practice. If people cannot rely on the authorities to provide, then they are dependent on each other and this means being dependent on the extended family. Where possible, Nidos involves family in the guidance and has positive experiences with this, but it also often proves difficult. The unaccompanied child may have an interest in saying that there is no family, because otherwise the danger exists that they will be sent back. Family, after all, may be considered adequate reception upon return. It may also be a result of the culture of Western-orientated workers in the field, as aid in the West has been based for a long time on a patronising principle where the central assumption is the professional knows what is best for the client. Co-operation with the (family) network also requires letting go and trusting in good solutions proposed by the unaccompanied child and their network. Finding the right balance between being responsible for an unaccompanied child, if this is based on legal authority, and leaving the solution to the unaccompanied child and their network is not always an easy or automatic process. Tension may be experienced between having to take action if the child's development is threatened, and having to trust the solutions of the network. Further development in working with the unaccompanied child's network is very much recommended.

REALISING SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE RETURN

Return of children is often not an issue as this usually happens when they turn 18. In most cases, the guidance has ended and the unaccompanied child is left to their own devices. Nidos has a clear vision of how return could be realised safely and sustainably together with the network. This requires co-operation with the network and with local parties and only effective monitoring will show what does or does not work. The vision of safe and durable return is clear but must be further worked on and developed in practice. This is also true for the development of alternative options in the event of an undesirable residence situation, if safe return proves impossible.

PROTECTION AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING, ABUSE, AND EXPLOITATION

Unaccompanied children are extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by human traffickers. Various European countries have much experience in dealing with these problems and attention and resources are directed to tackle them. Co-operation and collaborative exchange of experiences increase the knowledge of, and insights into, potential victims and the ways of working of human traffickers. This may also improve our insights into the approach: how can we help victims to defend themselves sufficiently well so that they have the courage to break free from the traffickers? How can we better our approach through exchange?

INSIGHT INTO PSYCHO-SOCIAL ISSUES

There is little experience so far with the use of psychological screening or test material with child refugees, and the material that is used is generally not standardised for the target group. As a result, identification of particularly chronic stress and traumatisation is probably insufficient. This may have a very adverse effect on an unaccompanied child in asylum proceedings but may also lead to difficulties in connecting with guardians and other staff. There is also the problem of using psychological test material for measuring intelligence as these tests are based on school knowledge and skills that for many child refugees without school education are unreliable tools. Nevertheless, they are frequently used in the absence of alternatives. The validation and development of psychological test material for children with a non-Western or refugee background is very necessary.

RISK MANAGEMENT SPECIFIC TO THE TARGET GROUP

As risk management is increasingly the practice in Western society, more risk assessment tools are developed for risks specific to migrant groups, such as circumcision and honour-related violence. In the identification of victims of human trafficking, various tools have been developed, however, there are no tools aimed at the specific risks of very vulnerable unaccompanied children. The development of international risk assessment tools specifically for the target group of unaccompanied children is greatly needed.

4.1 ADVICE FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Participation

Further development of forms of participation that are suitable for the cultural background of unaccompanied children to ensure their opinions and experiences about the guidance they receive are always heard. Use cultural mediators, as is the practice in Belgium and Italy.

Cross-border networking

Further development and expansion of ways to involve the network in the guidance of the unaccompanied child and help to shape their future together.

Safe and sustainable return

Detailing and enabling safe and sustainable return together with the network and local parties. Monitoring of return is an essential part.

Risk management

Development of risk assessment tools focusing on the specific risks of unaccompanied children. Validation and standardisation or development of psychological screening and test materials for the most frequent issues with unaccompanied children, such as chronic stress, traumatisation, mood difficulties and fear. Development of guidelines to address the issues with intelligence tests or assessments of children without a school background, and who cannot be tested in their own language.

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APPENDIX: IMPORTANCE OF THE YOUNG PERSON AND CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT – ADAPTED FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILD REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS[10]

EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENT: CURRENT SITUATION

Physical wellbeing:

1. **Adequate care** is suitable care for the health and physical wellbeing (providing accommodation, heating, clothing, personal property, food, income, etc.) of the child. The people responsible for the education and/or foster parents need not worry about this condition.

2. **A safe physical direct environment** provides physical protection to the child, meaning an absence of danger in accommodation and environment, no threatening toxic influences, abuse or violence.

Education

3. **Affective climate** - security, support, and understanding from at least one adult, appropriately expressed within the relationship the child has with this educator.

4. **Supportive flexible educational structure**
   - Sufficient regularity in daily life.
   - Encouragement, stimulation, instructions, and realistic demands.
   - Setting boundaries and rules, giving insight into and arguments for the boundaries and rules.
   - Checking the behaviour of the child.
   - Allowing sufficient room for the child to explore their desires, freedom for own initiatives and experiments, and the freedom to (learn) negotiate/negotiating about the structure.
   - The child does not receive more responsibility than they can handle and experiences the consequences of their behaviour within the boundaries, learning to assess the consequences and consider the behaviour.

5. **Adequate model behaviour of parent** - the child takes on the behaviour, conduct, norms and values of the people responsible for education and/or foster parents who are important, now and later.

6. **Interest** - showing an interest in the child and their world by the people responsible for their education and/or foster parents.

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[10] It concerns the lists of Kalverboer and Zijlstra (2006). Because of the specific situation of unaccompanied child refugees and asylum seekers (the parents are not there to exercise authority), the list has been adapted accordingly. Some points have been added (Spinder, S. and Hout, A. van (2008), *Jong en Onderweg, Nidosmethodiek voor de begeleiding van ama's [Young and underway, Nidos methodology for the guidance of AMAs],* Utrecht: Nidos).

EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENT: PRESENT AND FUTURE

7. **Continuity in education and care, perspective for the future** - at least one adult takes care of the child in such a way that attachment is created. The basic trust that evolves is maintained by the availability and care of that adult and the child experiences a perspective on the future.

SOCIETY: CURRENT SITUATION

8. **A safe physical wider environment** provides physical protection to the child.- the neighbourhood and society where the child grows up is safe. Crime, war, natural disasters, contagious diseases, etc. are absent.

9. **Respect** - the needs, wishes, feelings and desires of the child are taken seriously by the child's environment.

10. **Social network** - the child (foster family) has various sources of support in their environment.

11. **Education** - the child receives education and training and the opportunity to develop talents (sports or music).

12. **Relationships with peers** - the child has relationships with other children and peers in various situations fitting with the child's world and development level.

13. **Adequate model behaviour of society** – the child interacts with other children and adults and takes on the behaviour, conduct, norms, and values that important now and later.

SOCIETY: PRESENT AND FUTURE

14. **Stability in living circumstances, perspective for the future** - the environment does not change suddenly and changes that do occur are announced, and can be understood by the child. Sources of identification and support continue to exist, as well as the possibilities to enter into relationships through unity of language. Society provides the child with a perspective for the future.