



# ALTERNATIVE FAMILY CARE

**ALFACA**

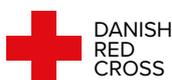
Manual for staff working with reception families and unaccompanied children living in reception families



# ALTERNATIVE FAMILY CARE

**ALFACA**

Manual for staff working with reception families and unaccompanied children living in reception families



© Nidos, Danish Red Cross, Jugendhilfe Süd-Niedersachsen, Minor-Ndako, Organization for Aid to Refugees, August 2016

Published by: Nidos, Maliebaan 99, 3581 CH Utrecht, The Netherlands

Authors: Marjan Schippers, Peter van de Pol and Liedewij de Ruijter de Wildt (Nidos), Kerstin Thys (Minor-Ndako), Marie Krogshøj Larsen (Danish Red Cross), Zima Massoumi (Jugendhilfe Süd-Niedersachsen) and Martin Rozumek (Organization for Aid to Refugees).

Language review: Mandy Savage

Layout/Design: BakOS DESIGN



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	8
<b>0.1 WHAT THIS MANUAL IS ABOUT</b> .....	9
<b>0.2 FAMILY BASED CARE: LEGAL FRAMEWORK</b> .....	11
0.2.1 UN instruments.....	11
0.2.2 EU Law.....	15
0.2.3 EU policy .....	17
<b>0.3 FAMILY BASED CARE COMPARED TO OTHER FORMS OF RECEPTION</b> .....	18
<b>0.4 HOW FAMILY BASED CARE CAN BE ORGANISED</b> .....	20
<b>0.5 TERMINOLOGY</b> .....	21
<b>0.6 OVERVIEW ON AVAILABILITY OF FOSTER CARE FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES</b> .....	23
<b>MODULE 1</b>	26
<b>1.1 GENERAL EDUCATION FOR WORKING WITH THE TARGET GROUP AND THEIR SPECIFIC SITUATION</b> .....	27
1.1.1 Introduction.....	27
1.1.2 Background information on unaccompanied children .....	28
1.1.3 Development of unaccompanied children.....	29
1.1.4 Psychological well-being .....	32
1.1.5 Safety Risks .....	34
<b>1.2 WORKING IN AN INTERCULTURAL ENVIRONMENT</b> .....	36
1.2.1 Introduction.....	36
1.2.2 Culturally sensitive communication.....	36
1.2.3 Cultural context of the unaccompanied child.....	37
1.2.4 Specific topics related to cultural differences in the situation of an unaccompanied child .....	41
1.2.5 Specific topics related to cultural differences in the risk of child abuse involving unaccompanied children.....	42

<b>1.3 NEED FOR GUIDANCE</b> .....	46
1.3.1 Introduction.....	46
1.3.2 Basic needs of unaccompanied children after the flight.....	46
1.3.3 Strengthening protective factors for unaccompanied children.....	49
1.3.4 Guidance for family reunification.....	51
1.3.5 Self-reliance at 18.....	52
1.3.6 Guidance on the outcome: return or integration.....	52
<b>1.4 EMPOWERING THE UNACCOMPANIED CHILD</b> .....	56
1.4.1 Introduction.....	56
1.4.2 Promoting resilience.....	56
1.4.3 Involving the family network.....	56
<b>MODULE 2</b> .....	60
<b>2.1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	61
2.1.1 Reception in families.....	61
2.1.2 Placement in ethnic or indigenous reception families?.....	62
<b>2.2 RECRUITING FAMILIES</b> .....	64
2.2.1 Introduction.....	64
2.2.2 How to recruit.....	64
2.2.3 Which families to recruit: important characteristics for reception families.....	68
<b>2.3 SCREENING FAMILIES</b> .....	71
2.3.1 Introduction.....	71
2.3.2 Who and when to screen.....	71
2.3.3 How to screen.....	74
<b>2.4 MATCHING AND PLACEMENT</b> .....	76
2.4.1 Introduction.....	76
2.4.2 Matching.....	77
2.4.3 Placement.....	81

<b>REFERENCES</b>	88
<hr/>	
<b>ANNEX 1</b>	90
<hr/>	
<b>DUTCH SCREENING TOOL FOR ASSESSING RECEPTION FAMILIES</b> .....	90
Part I: Item list with questions that have to be asked.....	90
Part II: Decision instant.....	94
Conclusion:.....	95
<b>ANNEX 2</b>	96
<hr/>	
<b>NIDOS MATCHING FORM</b> .....	96
<b>ANNEX 3</b>	102
<hr/>	
<b>DANISH ACCOMPANYING PERSON – SCREENING INTERVIEW</b> .....	102
<b>ANNEX 4</b>	105
<hr/>	
<b>STANDARD FOR SUPERVISION OF PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINOR ASYLUM SEEKERS</b> .....	105

**0**

# INTRODUCTION

# 0.1 WHAT THIS MANUAL IS ABOUT

---

This manual has been developed for professionals working with reception families and the unaccompanied children living with them. It may be useful to different kinds of practitioners, depending on the country they work in and the childcare system in operation there. The manual could therefore be used by guardians (professional, semi-professional or voluntary), social workers, mentors, staff at reception facilities, behavioural scientists, psychologists or any other professional responsible for the reception of unaccompanied children in families.

The manual is part of the Alternative Family Care (ALFACA) training, which also consists of e-learning. A PDF version of this manual and the e-learning, as well as literature, tools and other useful information, are available through the website of the European Network of Guardianship Institutions, ENGI, at [www.engi.eu](http://www.engi.eu).

The ALFACA manual contains all the basic information regarding working with reception families who take care of unaccompanied children. The most important tools are available in its appendix, whereas other useful tools can be found on the website. E-learning gives the user the opportunity to practise with the information provided in the manual. Those who want to deepen their knowledge should look at the extra literature provided on the website.

## Background

The ALFACA training was developed as part of the 2015-2017 ALFACA project, co-funded by the European Commission, and coordinated by Nidos (the Netherlands) and its partners Jugendhilfe Süd-Niedersachsen (JSN, Germany), Organization for Aid to Refugees (OPU, Czech Republic), Danish Red Cross (Denmark), Minor-Ndako (Belgium) and Kija (Austria).

Nidos, JSN and the Danish Red Cross are the most experienced in providing reception in families. Both Minor-Ndako and Kija have just started providing reception in this way and OPU has no experience as yet, just the intention to start using reception families.

Nidos and JSN offer reception in both temporary and long-term families. The families used by Nidos are mainly of ethnic origin (both related families and non-related families), whereas JSN uses mainly German and some ethnic families (no related families). The Danish Red Cross only offers placements within related families.

The impulse to develop a training like this came from the Reception and Living in Families (RLF) project that ran during 2013-2015<sup>1</sup>. This provided an overview of the then-current state of the art for reception in alternative care – more specifically family based care – of unaccompanied children in EU member states, Norway and Switzerland (see overview in 0.6). One of its recommendations was to develop practical training that would help guardians, social workers and other staff working with unaccompanied children to provide them with professional family based care.

---

<sup>1</sup> Co-funded by the EC and coordinated by Nidos and partners CHTB (UK) and SALAR (Sweden).

Work at case level is similar in different countries, making more cooperation, knowledge exchange and training of interest and potential added value to all those involved. European providers of reception and care from different countries have much to learn from each other. Providing reception in families for unaccompanied children has many similarities – the content of the work in practice differs only slightly from country to country, whereas this work differs significantly from the same services provided to other target groups. Coordinated development of tools and training for recruiting and screening suitable and willing families, making the right matches, and supporting both the family and the child during the placement is therefore beneficial. This also holds true for training the families on how to take care of this specific group of children living ‘between’ cultures, and to help them to cope with loss and other traumatic experiences. This will improve the care provided and reduce placement breakdowns.

This introduction provides professionals working with unaccompanied children with information on the legal framework for their reception, and with examples of experiences with reception of this target group in families. It aims to explain the general context of reception in families.

Module 1 shines a light on the general approach for supporting unaccompanied children. It focuses on the particular situation of these children and their need for guidance, and on working in an intercultural environment.

The website includes in-depth material written primarily for specialised professionals. This is targeted training for those interested in supporting unaccompanied children with personal development issues.

Module 2 provides specific information on recruiting, screening and matching families, and on placing a child in a reception family.

## 0.2 FAMILY BASED CARE: LEGAL FRAMEWORK

---

This section describes the international legal framework on reception of unaccompanied children. It highlights the rights, responsibilities and minimum standards which must be respected according to UN instruments, EU law and EU policy<sup>2</sup>.

### 0.2.1 UN instruments

#### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989)**

In the preamble of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) the following statement is included:

“*Recognising that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.*”

According to article 20 of the CRC, children who are temporarily or permanently deprived of their family environment are entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the state. Otherwise, alternative care should be ensured through foster care, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption or placement in suitable institutions that care for children. The CRC also requires ‘States Parties’ to pay due regard to continuity in a child’s upbringing and to the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

Article 22 of the CRC specifies that children seeking refugee status and child refugees should receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in accessing their due rights. In cases when parents or family members cannot be traced, the child should be accorded the same protection as children who are permanently or temporarily deprived of their family environment for any reason.

The implementation of the CRC is monitored by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Independent experts issue general comments on provisions of the CRC. The most relevant on accommodating unaccompanied children are as follows:

#### **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No.6 (2005) on the treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated children outside their country of origin**

This comment draws attention to the vulnerable situation of unaccompanied and separated children and provides guidance on the protection, care and treatment of unaccompanied children.

---

<sup>2</sup> This section was originally written by Nidos for the report of the RLF project.

It stresses in paragraphs 39-49 that articles 20 and 22 of the CRC are explicitly applicable to unaccompanied children. It further states in paragraph 40 that when selecting accommodation options, “the particular vulnerabilities of such a child, not only having lost connection with his or her family environment, but further finding him or herself outside of his or her country of origin, as well as the child’s age and gender, should be taken into account”.

Paragraph 40 also sets out parameters for appropriate accommodation and care arrangements as follows:

- children should not, as a general rule, be deprived of liberty.
- changes in residence for unaccompanied and separated children should be limited to instances where such change is in the best interest of the child.
- siblings should be kept together.
- a child who has adult relatives arriving with him or her or already living in the country of asylum should be allowed to stay with them unless such action would be contrary to the best interest of the child. Given the particular vulnerabilities of the child, regular assessments should be conducted by social welfare personnel.
- regardless of the care arrangements made for unaccompanied or separated children, regular supervision and assessment ought to be maintained by qualified persons to ensure the child’s physical and psychosocial health.
- States and other organisations must take measures to ensure the effective protection of the rights of separated or unaccompanied children living in child-headed households.
- children must be kept informed of the care arrangements being made for them, and their opinions must be taken into consideration. This parameter is stressed again in paragraph 25 of the General Comment.

### **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No.14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (art. 3, para. 1)**

The main objective of this general comment is to strengthen the understanding and application of the right of children to have their best interests assessed and taken as a primary consideration or, in some cases, the paramount consideration.

Its overall objective is to promote a real change in attitudes leading to the full respect of children as rights holders (paragraph 12). The Committee expects that this general comment will guide decisions by all those concerned with children, including parents and caregivers (paragraph 10).

According to this comment, one of the elements to be taken into account when assessing the child’s best interests is the child’s identity.

Paragraph 55 states that children are not a homogeneous group and therefore diversity must be taken into account when assessing their best interests. The identity of the child includes characteristics such as sex, sexual orientation, national origin, religion and beliefs, cultural identity, personality. Although children and young people share basic universal needs, the expression of those needs depends on a wide range of personal, physical, social and cultural aspects, including their evolving capacities. The right of the child to preserve his or her identity is guaranteed by the Convention (art. 8) and must be respected and taken into consideration in the assessment of the child’s best interests.

Paragraph 56 states that, regarding religious and cultural identity, for example, when considering a foster home or placement for a child, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child’s upbringing and to the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background (art. 20, para. 3), and the decision-maker must take into consideration this specific context when assessing and determining the child’s best interests. The same applies in cases of adoption, separation from or divorce of parents. Due consideration of the child’s best

interests implies that children have access to the culture (and language, if possible) of their country and family of origin, and the opportunity to access information about their biological family, in accordance with the legal and professional regulations of the given country (see art. 9, para. 4).

Another important element is preservation of the family environment and maintaining relations.

Paragraph 59 states that the family is the fundamental unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of its members, particularly children (preamble of the Convention). The right of the child to family life is protected under the Convention (art. 16). The term 'family' must be interpreted in a broad sense to include biological, adoptive or foster parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom (art. 5).

### **UNHCR Guidelines on determining the best interests of the child (2008)**

According to the UNHCR Guidelines on determining the best interests of the child, it is necessary to consider the following issues in the context of temporary care arrangements:

1. Foster care arrangements are preferable to institutional care, which should normally be avoided.
2. Care systems existing within the community should be used, provided they function satisfactorily and do not expose the child to risks.
3. Care within the extended family should be given priority. If such care is not possible or appropriate, temporary care should be in a family-based setting, with arrangements to keep siblings together.
4. Decisions should not build on hypothetical prospects of a better relationship in the future, but rely more on the proven history of the relationship in the past.

### **UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (2010)**

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children were adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2010.

Their purpose follows from the annex that states the following:

1. The present Guidelines are intended to enhance the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of relevant provisions of other international instruments regarding the protection and well-being of children who are deprived of parental care or who are at risk of being so.
2. Against the background of these international instruments and taking account of the developing body of knowledge and experience in this sphere, the Guidelines set out desirable orientations for policy and practice. They are designed for wide dissemination among all sectors directly or indirectly concerned with issues relating to alternative care, and seek in particular:
  - (a) To support efforts to keep children in, or return them to, the care of their family or, failing this, to find another appropriate and permanent solution, including adoption and kafala of Islamic law;
  - (b) To ensure that, while such permanent solutions are being sought, or in cases where they are not possible or are not in the best interests of the child, the most suitable forms of alternative care are identified and provided, under conditions that promote the child's full and harmonious development;
  - (c) To assist and encourage Governments to better implement their responsibilities and obligations in these respects, bearing in mind the economic, social and cultural conditions prevailing in each State; and
  - (d) To guide policies, decisions and activities of all concerned with social protection and child welfare in both the public and the private sectors, including civil society.

Under their general principles and perspectives on alternative care, they stress in paragraph 21 that the use of residential care should be limited to cases where such a setting is specifically appropriate, necessary and constructive for the individual child concerned and in his/her best interests. Paragraph 22 states that in accordance with the predominant opinion of experts, alternative care for young children, especially those under the age of 3 years, should be provided in family-based settings. Exceptions to this principle may be warranted in order to prevent the separation of siblings and in cases where the placement is of an emergency nature or is for a predetermined and very limited duration, with planned family reintegration or other appropriate long-term care solution as its outcome.

Finally, according to paragraph 23, while recognising that residential care facilities and family based care complement each other in meeting the needs of children, where large residential care facilities (institutions) remain, alternatives should be developed in the context of an overall deinstitutionalisation strategy, with precise goals and objectives, which will allow for their progressive elimination. To this end, States should establish care standards to ensure the quality and conditions that are conducive to the child's development, such as individualised and small-group care, and should evaluate existing facilities against these standards. Decisions regarding the establishment of, or permission to establish, new residential care facilities, whether public or private, should take full account of this deinstitutionalisation objective and strategy.

Regarding family based care, paragraph 18 is worth mentioning: it highlights that, in recognition of the fact that, in most countries, the majority of children without parental care are looked after informally by relatives or others, States should seek to devise appropriate means, consistent with the present Guidelines, to ensure their welfare and protection while in such informal care arrangements, with due respect for cultural, economic, gender and religious differences and practices that do not conflict with the rights and best interests of the child.

According to article 29(b) of the guidelines, alternative care may take the form of:

- (i) Informal care: any private arrangement provided in a family environment, whereby the child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis by relatives or friends (informal kinship care) or by others in their individual capacity, at the initiative of the child, his/her parents or another person without this arrangement having been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or a duly accredited body;
- (ii) Formal care: all care provided in a family environment which has been ordered by a competent administrative body or judicial authority, and all care provided in a residential environment, including in private facilities, whether or not as a result of administrative or judicial measures.

According to article 29(c), with respect to the environment where it is provided, alternative care may be:

- (i) Kinship care: family based care within the child's extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child, whether formal or informal in nature;
- (ii) Foster care: situations where children are placed by a competent authority for the purpose of alternative care in the domestic environment of a family other than the children's own family that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care;
- (iii) Other forms of family-based or family-like care placements;
- (iv) Residential care: care provided in any non-family based group setting, such as places of safety for emergency care, transit centres in emergency situations, and all other short- and long-term residential care facilities, including group homes;
- (v) Supervised independent living arrangements for children.

The guidelines apply to all public and private entities and all persons involved in arrangements for a child needing care while in a country other than their country of habitual residence, for whatever reason (article 141). Unaccompanied or separated children already abroad should, in principle, enjoy the same level of protection and care as national children in the country concerned (article 142).

In determining appropriate care provision, the diversity and disparity of unaccompanied or separated children (such as ethnic and migratory background or cultural and religious diversity) should be taken into consideration on a case-by-case basis (article 142).

## 0.2.2 EU Law

Both the Recast Reception Conditions Directive<sup>3</sup> and the Recast Qualification Directive<sup>4</sup> provide rules for accommodating unaccompanied children. The Directives are both part of EU asylum legislation that has been adopted and has been, or shortly will be, implemented by all member states, except for the United Kingdom (UK), Ireland and Denmark.

### **Recast Reception Conditions Directive**

The recast Reception Conditions Directive lays down minimum standards for the reception of applicants for international protection. Deadline for implementation was 20 July 2015. It does not apply to the UK, Ireland and Denmark. The Reception Conditions Directive<sup>5</sup> will continue to apply in the UK (but not in Ireland or Denmark).

The directive aims to provide better and more harmonised standards of living to applicants for international protection throughout the EU, irrespective in which member state the application has been made. It replaces the Reception Conditions Directive of 2003 that lays down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers. There are new rules concerning detention and better standards for vulnerable persons including (unaccompanied) children. Member states that wish to do so can provide for more favourable rules. The new EU rules aim to take better into account the different national legal systems, avoid unnecessary administrative and financial burden, and enable member states to fight abuse of their asylum systems more effectively.

The personal scope of the directive not only comprises asylum seekers but every person who has lodged an application for international protection, including asylum and subsidiary protection.

It has an extensive set of rules governing detention of applicants for international protection, for instance that unaccompanied children can be detained only in exceptional circumstances and never in prison accommodation. The directive also consists of a more specific regime concerning the assessment of special reception needs of vulnerable persons such as minors and victims of torture.

The preamble states that in applying this directive, member states should seek to ensure full compliance with the principles of the best interests of the child and of family unity, in accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms respectively (9). It also states that the reception of persons with special reception needs should be a primary concern for national authorities in order to ensure that such reception is specifically designed to meet their special reception needs (14).

---

<sup>3</sup> Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003

Article 23 states that regarding children:

1. The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration for member states when implementing the provisions of this Directive that involve minors. Member states shall ensure a standard of living adequate for the minor's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
2. In assessing the best interests of the child, member states shall in particular take due account of the following factors:
  - (a) family reunification possibilities;
  - (b) the child's well-being and social development, taking into particular consideration the child's background;
  - (c) safety and security considerations, in particular where there is a risk of the minor being a victim of human trafficking;
  - (d) the views of the child in accordance with his or her age and maturity.

Article 24(2) states that:

Unaccompanied children who make an application for international protection shall, from the moment they are admitted to the territory until the moment when they are obliged to leave the member state in which the application for international protection was made or is being examined, be placed:

- (a) with adult relatives;
- (b) with a foster family;
- (c) in accommodation centres with special provisions for minors;
- (d) in other accommodation suitable for minors.

Member states may place unaccompanied children aged 16 or over in accommodation centres for adult applicants, if it is in their best interests, as prescribed in article 23(2).

As far as possible, siblings shall be kept together, taking into account the best interests of the child concerned and, in particular, their age and degree of maturity. Changes of residence of unaccompanied children shall be limited to a minimum.

## **Recast Qualification Directive**

The recast Qualification Directive sets out standards as to who qualifies as a beneficiary of international protection and the content of protection granted. Just like the Recast Reception Conditions Directive mentioned above, it is a central legislative instrument in the establishment of a Common European Asylum System. It was adopted in 2011 and applies to all EU member states with the exception of Denmark, Ireland and the UK. Ireland and the UK will continue to be bound by the Qualification Directive<sup>6</sup>. The member states bound by it were required to bring into force domestic legislation necessary to comply with the Directive by 21 December 2013.

The preamble states in (18) that 'the best interests of the child' should be a primary consideration of member states when implementing this Directive, in line with the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In assessing the best interests of the child, member states should in particular take due account of the

---

<sup>6</sup> Directive 2004/83/EC.

principle of family unity, the child's well-being and social development, safety and security considerations and the views of the child in accordance with their age and maturity.

Article 31(3) states that:

Member States shall ensure that unaccompanied children are placed either:

- (a) with adult relatives; or
- (b) with a foster family; or
- (c) in centres specialised in accommodation for minors; or
- (d) in other accommodation suitable for minors.

In this context, the views of the child shall be taken into account in accordance with their age and degree of maturity.

Article 31(4): as far as possible, siblings shall be kept together, taking into account the best interests of the child concerned and, in particular, his or her age and degree of maturity. Changes of residence of unaccompanied children shall be limited to a minimum.

## 0.2.3 EU policy

The EU Action plan on unaccompanied minors (2010-2014)<sup>7</sup> set out a common approach based on respect of the rights of the child, in particular 'the best interest of the child' which must be a primary consideration in all action related to children taken by public authorities. One of the three main issues concerning unaccompanied children that needed action according to the plan was reception. One of the priorities mentioned was evaluating whether it is necessary to introduce a specific instrument setting down common standards on reception.

The European Agenda for Migration put a particular emphasis on the need to protect children and to follow up on the Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors. This work is now under way, to employ a comprehensive approach for the protection of children throughout the migration chain.

Priority for the vulnerable, and in particular unaccompanied children, is also built into the relocation process. Child protection and child safeguarding are planned to be fully integrated into the hotspots<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors 2010-2014, COM (2010) 213 final of 6 May 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the State of Play of Implementation of the Priority Actions under the European Agenda on Migration, COM(2016) 85 final.

## 0.3 FAMILY BASED CARE COMPARED TO OTHER FORMS OF RECEPTION

---

Although it is broadly recognised that the best outcome for most unaccompanied children is to be in a family-like environment, living in a reception family is not yet common practice for unaccompanied children in the EU member states. The majority of these children are placed in institutional reception facilities (de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015, p. 6).

Countries that use reception in families have found that this is better for children. Guardians in the Netherlands and social workers in Germany, for example, report less incidents and psychological problems among children who live in families than there are among children living in other types of reception. Children manage to cope better when they are in a family. Compared to other forms of reception, family based care also has the advantage that it is more sustainable. Reaching the age of 18 does not automatically mean that the child has to leave the family.

The University of Groningen in the Netherlands does research into unaccompanied children's well-being, living circumstances and place in Dutch society. The views of unaccompanied children living in four different types of care facilities in the Netherlands (reception families, small living units for four children, communal living groups for 12-15 children, and larger children's groups called campuses within reception centres) are taken into account in the research.

Kalverboer et al. (2016) found that "unaccompanied minors in reception families fare best and are most positive about their place in Dutch society. Minors in small living units and small communal living groups often miss affectionate bonds, care, support and stability in their lives. Minors in campuses most often say they feel lonely and sad and excluded from Dutch society. They experience a lack of care and support from adults. The quality of the child-rearing environment in campuses was judged by the researchers as being so low that these facilities appear to be unfit for unaccompanied minors".

Kalverboer et al. (2016) refer to several academic studies focusing on different types of facilities for unaccompanied minors during the steps of flight and settlement and on their needs to flourish and to feel at home in the new country (Sirriyeh, 2013; Söderqvist, Sjöblom & Bülow, 2014). "Sirriyeh (2013) concludes that in successful foster care placements in England, young people became integrated into family networks of care and carers and assumed like-family status to one another. She reports positive outcomes in placements where young people had been included in structuring the activities and culture of the household such as contributing to food choices. She also reports positive outcomes in placements where young people had developed relationships of trust, intimacy and reciprocity with foster carers and foster carers' families that had been supported through visible symbolic displays of trust and care. Although the research has not compared foster care placements with other placement options, Sirriyeh found significant benefits in access to family care and support, trusted confidantes and advocacy in negotiating key services compared to what is known about other types of placement options. Söderqvist, Sjöblom and Bülow (2014) studied the home concept in relation to the situation of unaccompanied minors placed in residential care units in Sweden. Their findings confirm that the concept involved both objective aspects such as a physical building and more subjective components that can be seen as a state of mind. Criteria such as having somewhere to sleep and eat as well as criteria such as creating feelings of comfort and security had been included. In a likewise manner, Kohli, Connolly and Warman (2010) examined the perception of unaccompanied minors in foster care on food and survival after arrival in the UK. Their conclusion is that food has a multiple meaning. It is related to many aspects of finding sanctuary and negotiating belonging within the foster family and can arouse powerful feelings of being at home in a new country. Several studies recognised that the best outcome for most unaccompanied minors are highly

supportive environments (Nidos 2015b; Ni Raghallaigh 2013; Wade 2011; Wade et al. 2012). Ní Raghallaigh (2013) concluded that separated young people should be provided with individualistic care. Wade et al. (2012) find that good foster care can make a positive difference to the lives of many unaccompanied young people”.

Also relevant in the discussion on the best place for an unaccompanied child to grow up are the outcomes of Dutch cross cultural research on trauma, attachment and resilience by van IJzendoorn. “Children develop well in different cultures around the world where they are raised by a network of carers, instead of just by one mother and one father. These children tend to get attached to several ‘chosen’ sensitive adults. Usually the biological parents or other closely related adults” (van IJzendoorn, 2008, p. 216). “On the other hand, children who grow up in institutions or children’s homes lack a stable and long-term bond with a permanent carer most of the time. That’s why you can say that they suffer structural neglect. These children face multiple changes of carers who often work in shifts” (van IJzendoorn, 2008, p. 148). The harmful effects of institutional care for abandoned children or orphans are reason for serious concern. At a young age, these children already show the result of these disadvantages in all areas of their development.

Research has shown that adoption can be a successful intervention which leads to a significant improvement in the child’s development. Adoption shows that a child’s development is amazingly flexible, even though there has been severe deprivation at a young age and a drastic change to a new environment. “The development of adopted children improves significantly after adoption, compared to peers who stay behind in children’s homes” (van IJzendoorn, 2008, p. 207). That’s why van IJzendoorn suggests that long-term foster care offering good prospects can be seen as an equal intervention to adoption.

A study by Bronstein, Montgomery & Dobrowolski (2012) concerning the mental health of unaccompanied male Afghanistan children indicates that children in the host country growing up in semi-independent living arrangements show more post-traumatic stress symptoms than those living in foster care.

Bronstein et al. describe the following regarding mental health: “Some factors appeared to help the children construct their lives. The stability of a supportive placement, opportunities for young people to build new attachments, resume education and construct networks of social support that provide a bridge between the old and the new appeared to have protective effects (Wade. 2011). When children themselves stated that they received support from friends, it turned out that this was a protective factor for mental health (Kovacev 2004; Montgomery 2008). This also applied to positive school experiences reported by children themselves (Kia-Keating & Ellis 2007; Kovacev 2004; Sujoldzic et al. 2006). Wernesjó (2011) points out that more research is needed which deals with life experiences in the host country and is based on the unaccompanied minor’s own perspectives, focusing in particular on well-being and factors contributing to this. There do not seem to be many studies which compare the views of minors living in different types of care arrangements on the aspects that contribute to their strengths and resilience”.

“There are hardly any budgetary objections to reception in families Although this type of reception is generally considered to be less costly than institutional reception, it is difficult to arrive at a comparable cost per placement as a result of the diversity of systems (local/national, services offered, types of organisations responsible, budgets mixed with mainstream youth care). It is therefore impossible to present a sound estimate for providing reception in families per country. The Dutch situation, where Nidos is responsible for reception in families on a national level, is the only one for which there is a clear overview of the costs involved. These figures prove that reception in families is cheaper than other forms of reception available in the Netherlands, which are 3.5 to 6.5 times more expensive” (de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015, p. 128).

“The municipality of Venice in Italy has also found that reception in families is cheaper than other forms of reception. It decided to invest in reception in families when it was no longer able to sustain accommodation expenses in 2007-2008 due to rising numbers of minors arriving” (de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015, p. 63).

JSN has found that reception in families is cheaper than other forms of reception. In some cases, as much as 50% cheaper.

## 0.4 HOW FAMILY BASED CARE CAN BE ORGANISED

---

The practice of reception provision within families exists in a number of European countries. Sharing knowledge of these practices and approaches in different countries has until now been incidental and scattered. The RLF project revealed the current practice regarding reception of unaccompanied children in families in Europe. “The main reason that only a limited number of unaccompanied children live in families is that there is insufficient knowledge of how to increase the provision of family based care for this group of children, e.g. how to recruit suitable and willing reception families. In addition, good practices often remain limited to the local level – although one municipality or region may have developed good practices, these are not shared and replicated in others. Finally, financial and organisational structures often fail to explicitly support development” (de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015, p. 128).

### **National or regional?**

“In most member states where family based care is offered to unaccompanied children, several public, private or voluntary bodies (as well as concerned citizens) are involved in the placement of a child. These fragmented practices also differ nationally, regionally or locally, depending on the community. They are usually led by the people in that district, especially in the context of social values and responsibilities, rather than a shared, state-led framework being applied, where it is arguably more likely that innovative practice is allowed to flourish (albeit difficult to measure)” (de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015, p. 128).

“Youth care and migration legislation are not aligned, with the result that only four member states and Norway have a structured system characterised by the involvement of a mandated or state-certified public, private or voluntary body (at a national, regional or local level) in the placement of a child in a family. In theory, the system is a regulated and/or consistently applied framework within a specified geographic or administrative area. The family is responsible for the day-to-day care of an unaccompanied child in their home, and is paid a salary and/or remunerated for expenses, rendering them accountable. In practice, the Netherlands is the only member state that has a framework like this which is accessible to all unaccompanied children (nationally applied and laid down in policy by the Ministry of Security and Justice). Sweden, Norway, Ireland and the UK have frameworks that function inside the mainstream youth care system, but do not always allow for kinship/network family placements and are more ‘fragmented’ in practice from one municipality to the other” (de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015, p. 127).

### **Within the mainstream youth care system or not?**

Depending on the national or local situation, unaccompanied children could be taken care of within the mainstream foster care system, by specific placements in reception families or in alternative family care situations. Different approaches may be used. “This is motivated by political reasons or by whether the country is a transit or a destination country. It can also be the result of the way countries offer services to meet the needs of children:

- in some countries, care arrangements used for unaccompanied children are embedded in the care system for indigenous children and the same standards apply, whereas other countries apply a different system with separate standards for unaccompanied children;
- some countries address the cultural needs of the children and therefore use families from different cultural backgrounds, whilst others only use indigenous families;
- in some countries, kinship care for unaccompanied children is part of the care system, whereas in others it is not” (de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2015, p. 128).

# 0.5 TERMINOLOGY

---

## Unaccompanied child

The term 'unaccompanied child' is used throughout this manual in line with the definition provided in General Comment No. 6 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, on the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, as follows:

“Unaccompanied children” (also called unaccompanied minors) are children, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention, who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so”.

The term 'child' is used throughout this manual in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, with the following definition “For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, maturity is attained earlier”.

## Professional

The term 'professional' is used throughout this manual to indicate the people working with reception families and the unaccompanied children living with them.

These professionals may be different kinds of practitioners, depending on the country they work in and the childcare system used. They may be guardians (professional, semi-professional or voluntary), social workers, mentors, staff at reception facilities, behavioural scientists, psychologists or any other professional responsible for the reception of unaccompanied children in families.

The term 'guardian' can have different meanings depending on the country the guardian works in. Because of these differences in meaning of the term 'guardian', it is very important to have a clear understanding of the system in which it is being used.

In the Netherlands, Nidos is the unaccompanied child's 'legal guardian'. It is the child's legal representative, has parental responsibility and is accountable for the child. The person supporting and guiding the child has studied social work and done targeted Nidos training on unaccompanied children.

In Belgium, Dienst Voogdij, a federal government service, appoints a guardian for an unaccompanied child. The guardian is the child's legal representative and has parental responsibility in order to contribute to a sustainable solution in the interests of the child. There are three different types of guardians: voluntary guardians, guardians who work as employees for an NGO that provides care for unaccompanied children, and self-employed guardians.

In Denmark, the 'personal guardian' can be either a volunteer or a Red Cross employee. In either case, it will be a professional, who will prepare the child for any interviews with the authorities and follow up afterwards. A 'legal guardian' has custody over the child and functions as their legal advocate. This person will be present at every meeting during the asylum process. If the child gets a residence permit, another legal guardian may be appointed. This could be because the child has had a Red Cross employee as a legal guardian, and legal guardians for children with residence permits are always volunteers. Alternatively, it is because the legal guardian or the child decides not to continue the relationship due to geographical or personal issues. A new legal guardian will then be appointed by the state administration, after recommendations from the Red Cross. It

is advisable, if possible, and if desired by the child and the guardian, for the child to continue to have the same legal guardian after the child has been given a residence permit, because they know each other well and might already have a solid relationship.

## **Reception family**

The manual uses the term 'reception family' to indicate the family that takes care of the child in the receiving country in Europe. This term is not always used. These families may also be referred to as 'foster families' and 'host families'.

There are several kinds of reception families used in different countries: they may, for example, be a 'related family' (next of kin or people known to the child) or a 'non-related family' (people not known to the child).

Kinship family is family that is related within four degrees. This could, for example, be a first cousin. But in 'we-cultures', kinship may also stand for some other close relationship, like with a neighbour or close friend.

In current practice, a 'non-related family' is, in most cases, an 'indigenous family'. However, there are countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany, that have had very good experiences with 'ethnic families' who have the same or similar backgrounds as the unaccompanied children.

## 0.6 OVERVIEW ON AVAILABILITY OF FOSTER CARE FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES<sup>9</sup>

	NL	Sweden	UK	Ireland	Norway	Germany	France	Italy	Belgium	Austria	Switzerland	Finland	Denmark	Luxemburg	Spain	Portugal
Structural system	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘
Scattered practice	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Use of mainstream foster care system	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✘	✘	⚠	⚠
Separate system for unaccompanied children	✔	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘
Use of indigenous families	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✘	✘	⚠	⚠
Use of ethnic families	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✔	✔	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	⚠
Use of traditional foster care (families not known to child)	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✘	✘	✘	⚠	⚠
Use of kinship care (family members and network)	✔	✔	✔	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	⚠	⚠

<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from the report of the RLF project, p. 134.





# 1

# GENERAL APPROACH TO THE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

# 1.1 GENERAL EDUCATION FOR WORKING WITH THE TARGET GROUP AND THEIR SPECIFIC SITUATION

---

## 1.1.1 Introduction

An unaccompanied child is extremely vulnerable: underage, alone and a refugee. Their migratory background, relationship with their family and network, and their prospects of return mean that general education on the specific situation of unaccompanied children is vitally important for people who are guiding them. It is also important for the recruitment and guidance of reception families.

Working with refugee children calls for a culturally sensitive attitude based on respect and an open mind for the background, values and experiences of the child.

It is important to:

- recognise and respect the child in the role they want to and can play for the family, the independence they developed during the flight, their religion, the need for contact with their biological family, the traumatic experiences the child has had, and the loss they have experienced;
- show interest and respect for the child's perception of illness, their explanations and possible solutions;
- make it possible for the child to have contact with their biological family whenever possible, and involve the family with the well-being, development and asylum procedure of the child;
- assess the risks of: pressure from human smugglers/people traffickers, honour-related violence if a child would start to diverge from the norm, female genital mutilation (FGM), and forced marriage.

Specific topics in this context will be explained in this module.

## 1.1.2 Background information on unaccompanied children

This section describes important issues relating to the background of children who leave their country alone and flee to Europe.

### Being a refugee, alone and underage

Unaccompanied children are young people who have escaped to Europe without the guidance of their parents or a legal guardian. First of all, this means that they have been alone while having to go through all kinds of difficult, often dramatic, experiences during their flight and the migration process. It also means that they have had to try to process these experiences by themselves. They lack the necessary support, on all levels, but particularly on an emotional level.

On top of this, the reason for their flight is often a life without a future, caused by war and poverty. The children carry their experience with danger, daily sorrow and loss with them.

In the first place, escaping means that these children have had to leave many things behind: their house, their family and friends, their school, their country with its own cultural background, habits and language, material belongings, their social status, diplomas or their validation, future prospects in their home country, etc. These experiences of loss and of multiple disruptions are a central fact for everyone who has had to leave their country and try to build a new future in a totally new country with a totally new culture. This loss, coming together with homesickness and not feeling at ease in the new, unknown and strange surroundings, causes in many of them a fundamental feeling of being uprooted.

“Unaccompanied children are *alone and underage*, which means a lack of family context and especially of contact with the parents. For many of these children this means that they have lost their hold and safety and don't have anyone they can really rely upon. Apart from this, we see that parents can be very present without physically being present” (Derluyn, Wille, De Smet & Broekaert, 2005).

### Asylum procedure

When these children finally arrive in Europe, they face another period of stress and uncertainty caused by the asylum procedure. The procedure is hard to understand, as are the different roles played by the organisations involved. Family at home often nervously await the outcome of the asylum procedure, hoping for a positive answer on both the request for asylum and its possible effect on family reunification. Asylum seekers may also have been instructed by the smugglers or their network on what and what not to say about their flight. This can cause a lot of stress to the child.

Another consequence of the asylum procedure in most European countries is that children have to be 'alone' to be eligible for protection and reception services for unaccompanied children. Many of them fear they may have to return home if they provide information about their family. This could mean that they keep secrets and that it is often difficult to involve the biological family of the unaccompanied child in their support, supervision and protection.

#### Good practice:

Minor-Ndako and Nidos have had good results with mediation where someone explains the unaccompanied child's particular situation (asylum procedure and family reunification) to both the child and their family. The child is often relieved when their family has been properly informed about the procedures and told about things they can do themselves to enable asylum and family reunification.

### 1.1.3 Development of unaccompanied children

This section addresses three areas of development, each of which may have been affected by the burden of the flight and circumstances preceding the flight. It discusses the development of satisfactory relationships and attachments, how the child develops their own identity, and specific developmental tasks for young unaccompanied refugee children.

#### **Attachment and living in a reception family<sup>1</sup>**

Most unaccompanied children have grown up in an extended family with satisfactory relationships and attachment. They have developed a basic trust in others and in themselves because of these positive experiences. However, this trust may have been damaged by the circumstances that led to the flight and experiences during the flight itself. Developing a safe relationship and attachment to the reception family can help the child regain their trust in others and in themselves. A carer's sensitivity to the needs of a child and the signals the child gives, the predictability of a carer's behaviour, and the continuity and stability provided by the person caring for the child are all important factors in the development of a secure relationship in which the child forms an attachment.

When a child is placed with an unknown reception family, they will always have to build a new, safe relationship and become attached to the new carers. A child that has experienced safe relationships before will build new relationships more easily, based on these previous positive experiences. But a child who has had bad experiences will find this more difficult.

“The theory of attachment assumes the evolutionary importance of attachment for a baby to survive; every child needs an attachment figure who protects them and takes care of them during their first years after birth. Attachment is important for the development of the young child's emotion regulation, including the neurobiological level. Most children (around 60% worldwide) form a safe attachment” (Prins & Braet, 2014, p. 426).

Van IJzendoorn, professor of child and family studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands, has proved that the connection between the pattern of attachment of the child and the pattern of attachment of the parent is very much independent from the cultural and economic context. An overview of similar studies, over different cultural and economic contexts, shows that this connection amounts to 70-80% (van IJzendoorn, 2008).

The Danish Red Cross, Nidos, Minor-Ndako and JSN have experienced numbers comparable to those found by van IJzendoorn. Most of the unaccompanied children under the guidance of these organisations had a safe relationship with, and a strong attachment to, their carers in the countries of origin.

“The chronic lack of safety during their flight and having to process difficult, often traumatic experiences during the migration process by themselves can, however, provoke a serious lack of basic trust in young refugee children. And mistrust and hypervigilance are protective factors to many refugees, a coping strategy, a way to survive. As one refugee puts it: because of my lack of trust, I survived the flight to Europe” (Plysier, 2003).

The study led by van IJzendoorn mentioned above concluded that adoption and long-term foster care are effective interventions for children who are confronted by loss and neglect in their early childhood. Because of this, it is the assumption that the continuity and stability foster families can offer may repair a lot of the damage done by the lack of basic trust and disorganised attachment in young refugee children (van IJzendoorn, 2008).

---

<sup>1</sup> More information on attachment can be found in the in-depth material on [www.engi.eu](http://www.engi.eu).

The Dutch directives for youth care (de Wolff, Dekker-van der Sande, Sterkenburg & Thoomes-Vreugdenhil, 2015) give the following guidelines to promote basic trust:

- “take the time to be in contact with the child in a positive and playful way. Invite the child to do things together, give the child room but always stay in charge;
- talk and act in a friendly way. Create a relaxed and positive atmosphere, have fun and enjoy being together;
- be predictable, reliable and clear with the child. Say what you are doing and do as you say;
- give the child your full attention, make contact. Look and listen properly and say what you see the child is doing and what emotion the child has. Check if this is right and investigate that conclusion if necessary;
- put yourself in the child’s place, consider what’s going on in their mind, show them that you are listening. Offer comfort or help whenever the child is sad or fearful, and stay near them if the child rejects this;
- clarify cause and effect to the child, help the child to see the connection between an event, feeling and behaviour;
- try to respond to the needs and wishes of the child as well as possible. When this is not possible, explain the reasons for this to the child. They will then feel that they are being taken seriously”.

## Relationship with reception family and biological family

### Good practise: contact with the biological family

It is Nidos’ experience that unaccompanied children sometimes have difficulty with the fact that they are being placed in a reception family. They say that they already have a father and a mother and don’t want new ones, or they say that they want a family with a beautiful house where they can learn Dutch right away and don’t care about other things. There are also unaccompanied children who don’t mind being placed in a reception family, but behave like a guest and don’t connect with the family at all. This can lead to disappointment within the reception family, because they would like to have a proper relationship with the child and get attached to them.

Just like a child in foster care, an unaccompanied child has a huge connection with their biological family, feeling a strong loyalty to them. They may be afraid that they will like their stay with the reception family so much that it will feel like they are betraying their biological family. They may also be afraid to lose their own family if they get attached to the reception family.

Nidos has found that it is best to respect the child in this, and that it is very supporting to both the child and the reception family if they have contact (preferably on a regular basis) with the child’s biological family. Dutch foster care states that it is important that the biological parents give the child ‘emotional permission’ to stay with the foster family. That makes it easier for the child to connect with this ‘new’ family. Mutual trust and respect between the biological family and the reception family supports the child in their adjustment to the reception family.

## Development of the unaccompanied child’s identity

During adolescence, developing your identity is a central developmental task. Adolescents try to develop their own identity during this life stage in relation to their parents, siblings, friends and the society as a whole. Going through the migration process on their own often interferes with the development of their identity (van der Veer, 2002).

Unaccompanied children often experience the difficult migration process and having to deal with it during adolescence. Going through the many stressors attached to the forced migration during this phase has an effect on the psychosocial functioning of these children. After all, they had to leave behind friends and peers, their role models, in their country of origin. They also lack parents as central identification and detachment figures. These factors complicate a smooth development of their own identity, and many unaccompanied children therefore struggle with increasingly complicated questions concerning identity (Plysier, 2003). The perception of familial and cultural loyalty often plays a central role within this difficult development of identity. Unaccompanied children have to combine values and standards from two totally different cultures whilst developing their own identity. They have to search for ways to experience their own cultural roots and model these in a new, Western society.

## **Support with identity development**

Children from 'extended family cultures' experience their identity as part of the family and not so much as an individual, so a longer period of time in Western society may lead to confused feelings about this. The child will feel 'in between' cultures, which may result in misunderstandings or alienation. It may even lead to exclusion from the original social context or rejection from the extended family because the child's behaviour 'damages the family honour'.

It is very important to involve the biological family in the changes their child goes through in Europe with all the new and more liberal norms and values. And it is also important to help children understand how vulnerable they are if they do not belong to something – their extended family, compatriots or peers. They need to find a balance between the different cultures. The child can also contribute to the well-being of the family, and the family honour, by functioning successfully in the new society. A different kind of behaviour, with more freedom, will then be more easily accepted by the extended family.

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 given to unaccompanied children strongly focuses on the maintenance and development of social networks, role models and friendships, as even one friendship can make a great difference.

It is important to build a bridge between the child they used to be in the country of origin and the child they are becoming in the new situation.

## **Group identity**

Sökefeld describes group identity as "a construction based on features that members of a group consider relevant and share with each other. Diaspora memories of the home country, discourses on a shared history or collective traumas shape the base of a shared identity. In this sense, the diaspora is an imaginative community based on a discursive construction" (Sökefeld, 2006, p. 266-267).

This kind of group identity and collective trauma is frequently seen among Eritrean children who fled Eritrea in 2014-2015. They don't trust anybody and want to stay together.

## **Specific developmental tasks for unaccompanied children**

Both juvenile refugees and unaccompanied minor asylum-seeking children are in the middle of the dynamic process of development towards maturity, just like other children. This calls for general developmental tasks per age group that have to be met if they are to become a healthy functioning adult. For adolescents these tasks consist of learning how to take care of yourself, learning how to progress in society, and learning how to shape and influence your own life. These tasks are more complicated for children who have fled their country of origin.

They need specific cultural and refugee developmental tasks as a result of their background and the situation they find themselves in.

These extra tasks are to do with social contacts or social isolation, family that stayed behind, cultural differences and integration, coping with post-traumatic problems and future prospects (van der Veer, 2002).

## Resilience

While the development of most unaccompanied children does not seem to have been adversely affected, the circumstances under which they develop are less favourable in some respects and this makes them vulnerable. As Dutch psychotherapist van der Veer described in 1996 in Nidos' first methodology book: "any impediments to the normal development process are mainly caused by environmental factors and only in a small number of cases by the child's own limitations or disturbances". On top of this, Derluyn (2005) stresses that it is very important to stress that even if these problems have a significant effect on the functioning and emotional well-being of these children, they still are and remain "normal children in abnormal situations".

Ni Raghallaigh (2010) describes the following concerning resilience: "Rutter (2003) suggests that although some refugee children remain psychologically vulnerable and a few manifest 'disturbed' behaviour, most seem to cope with the multiple stresses they experience. Increasingly, attention is being paid to the diverse ways in which children respond to the challenges of forced migration, and to the fact that many emerge as "active survivors" rather than as "passive victims" (Rousseau & Drapeau 2003, p. 78). For example, social workers who were interviewed by Kohli (2006a) said that they found unaccompanied minors to be "interesting and elastic in their capacities to survive and do well at times of great vicissitude" (p. 7). In essence, the resilience of these young people is beginning to be acknowledged, at least to some extent, although German (2004) contends that studies investigating the resilience of refugees are not yet given the same attention as research that looks at their vulnerability and its manifestations. While definitions vary, according to Masten & Powell (2003), resilience refers to "patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant risk or adversity" (p. 4). A person can be resilient or they can show resilience to a particular risk (Ungar 2004). Various authors have commented on the resilience of forced migrants, including unaccompanied minors (e.g. Muecke 1992; Ahearn 2000; Kohli & Mather 2003; Kohli)".

### 1.1.4 Psychological well-being

Unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents are a vulnerable group in Europe. Their difficult living situation may affect their emotional well-being, which can result in considerable emotional and behavioural issues (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008; Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick & Stein, 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 & Broekaert, 2008).

Several behavioural and emotional problems are seen in refugee children in general and unaccompanied children in particular: sleep problems, panic attacks, social withdrawal, apathy, nightmares, diverse development problems, headache, hyperactive behaviour, depression, passivity, concentration disorders, symptoms of anxiety, loneliness, separation anxiety, low self-esteem, digestive disorders and problems with eating.

## Trauma and stress

Unaccompanied children often have to deal with traumas<sup>2</sup>, loss, unpleasant travel experiences and worries about family that stayed behind as well as stress about the asylum procedure and family reunification. A negative outcome of the asylum procedure and other residence procedures, or a long family reunification procedure, can have a very harmful effect, giving the children even more stress.

Stress resulting from uncertainty and tension does not enable trauma recovery. A Dutch longitudinal study looking at psychological issues, traumatic stress reactions and the experiences of accompanied minor refugees, Dutch children and unaccompanied minor asylum seekers showed that unaccompanied minor asylum seekers report more stressful life events than the two other groups. In addition, unaccompanied minor asylum seekers had more often experienced several traumatic events than the other two groups (Bean, Derluyn, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Broekaert & Spinhoven, 2007).

The psychological well-being of unaccompanied children was looked at in a longitudinal follow up study by Vervliet, Meyer Demott, Jakobsen, Broekaert, Heir & Derluyn (2014). This study followed 103 unaccompanied children from the moment they arrived in Belgium until 18 months later. Unaccompanied children reported generally high scores on anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Linear mixed model analysis showed no significant differences in mental health scores over time, pointing towards the possible long-term persistence of mental health problems in this population. The number of traumatic experiences and the number of daily stressors led to a significantly higher symptom level of depression (daily stressors), anxiety and PTSD (traumatic experiences and daily stressors).

## Psychological help<sup>3</sup>

The emotional well-being of unaccompanied children is a serious concern for their support and reception. Self-destructive and suicidal behaviour is frequently seen in large reception centres. It hardly occurs in reception in families.

### Good practice:

JSN and Nidos have found that destructive and aggressive behaviour or disappearances hardly ever occur within the group of unaccompanied children staying with reception families, but do take place in reception facilities, large ones in particular. The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children, ENOC, found this as well (2016, p.18). Since 2011, JSN's experience is that self-destructive, suicidal behaviour and the use of psychopharmaca is seen among less than 1% of unaccompanied children living in reception families.

We may assume that unaccompanied children are not always referred to psychological care services in good time. Mental healthcare organisations are not always culturally appropriate or suitable for the unstable situation of these children. Transcultural psychological support, if available, is better suited to refugees.

### Good practice: trauma and recovery

Nowadays, the general advice in the Netherlands is to get children back into a daily routine as soon as possible after traumatic experiences. This allows them to experience safety in the present which reduces the stress of having been in danger (hyperarousal). Experts are also aware that trauma debriefing brings with it the risk of being traumatised again and should therefore be done as little as possible.

---

<sup>2</sup> More information on trauma can be found in the in-depth material on [www.engi.eu](http://www.engi.eu).

<sup>3</sup> More information on psychological help can be found in the in-depth material on [www.engi.eu](http://www.engi.eu).

Traumatised refugee children who are not capable of recovering themselves need specialist care. Being traumatised can also hinder progress on the asylum request if a child is not able to make a statement about their traumatic experiences.

#### Implications for guidance:

- offer children a suitable (daily) routine as soon as possible;
- only discuss traumatic experiences with children who have made it clear that they are willing to do so (no unsolicited interviewing);
- acquire knowledge on processing trauma and trauma-related symptoms;
- offer professional care if symptoms persist;
- bring to the attention of the lawyer and the interviewer that trauma may prevent correct answers being given during an interview for the asylum procedure.

## 1.1.5 Safety Risks

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

### Human trafficking

In getting to Europe, unaccompanied children have often already been smuggled, for this may have been the only means for them to travel. Some of them have not just been smuggled but have been trafficked as well. Human trafficking exists for many reasons (including prostitution, drug smuggling, weapons smuggling and unpaid labour) and does not only take place during the journey to Europe but also after the child arrives in Europe. Unaccompanied children are very vulnerable and easily influenced by human traffickers. This can be caused by the lack of a support network, their wish to help the family, the pressure from their family to send money home and sometimes even by witchcraft or the occult.

#### Good practice: signs of human trafficking

Nidos has developed a list of 'hard' and 'soft' signs of human trafficking, based on literature and experiences. The list is particularly useful during the first meeting at the centre for registration and application, to decide whether a child needs to go to protected reception. Further research is done in the protected reception facility.

#### Recognising signs of human trafficking

##### **HARD SIGNS:**

**Travel arrangements:** arrangements and payment not done by family, final destination is unknown to the child, reason for coming to this country is unknown.

**Documents:** child has no or false identification documents, or is illegally in the country and comes from a country known as a risk country for trafficking.

**Family:** family has been threatened and/or blackmailed, family is poor.

**Human trafficker:** the person who is with the child arranges visa, is unknown to the child; is related to human traffickers.

**Finances:** the child has to pay a debt, housing, clothing, etc. are arranged by the person who is with the child, the child is dependent on this person.

**Place to stay in the country:** the child doesn't know his own home or work address, the child sleeps at work.

**Violence or abuse:** the child is abused or threatened, visible signs of abuse.

**Work:** the child is forced to work, prostitution, the child came to the country under false promises, the child escaped.

**Location found:** the child escaped or was found by the police or asked the police for help.

#### **SOFT SIGNS:**

**Health:** complains about sleep and digestive problems.

**Fear:** of trafficker, situation, violence.

**Attitude:** withdrawn, stressed.

**Story:** is not complete, incoherent, unbelievable, rehearsed.

## **Risk of sexual abuse**

Unaccompanied children run a high risk of being raped during their flight or the period before it. Rape is, after all, quite common in war situations. There are also children, mostly girls, who 'buy safety' as a survival strategy by offering themselves to men in exchange for their protection. Sometimes these girls display overly sexualized behaviour during the first period after the flight. This makes them very vulnerable to abuse in forced prostitution, but also in their own environment. A reception family and the people who give the child guidance (guardian, mentor, etc.) will have to resist this behaviour and try to change it.

This is also a risk for, for example, 'dancing boys' (Bacha bazi) – boys, often from Afghanistan, who at a young age learnt to dance like girls and are sexually abused by older men. Their behaviour may include feminine gestures, which makes them vulnerable to new abuse situations.

## **Risk of forced labour and smuggling**

Unaccompanied children are also being used for smuggling weapons or drugs or for labour exploitation. This often happens under threat of having to pay back the human smuggler for the journey, but it can also be carried out by a larger criminal organisation. Young people who arrive illegally after the age of 18 are very vulnerable to this kind of abuse and exploitation.

# 1.2 WORKING IN AN INTERCULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

## 1.2.1 Introduction

Working with unaccompanied children means working with children who come from different cultures. Knowledge and skills for how to approach these children are therefore very important.

Interculturally sensitive communication is at the heart of working with children with different cultural backgrounds. Besides knowledge of the social structure of the child's culture, it is important to have the ability to see norms and values from their perspective, to be aware of the influence of your own cultural and ethnic background on how you think and act, and to be skilled in dealing with differences. Showing empathy, creativity and boldness is also important (Jessurun, 2008, p. 503-514).

## 1.2.2 Culturally sensitive communication

Culture is dynamic, so knowing about other cultural backgrounds is not enough to improve communication. A professional can only acquire knowledge about the other person by meeting them and having interaction and dialogue. This means empathising with them, being interested in who they are and what is important to them, and respecting their boundaries.

It is important for the unaccompanied child that the conversation is experienced as safe. The intention of the discussion must be clear: agree on the frameworks and talk about what will happen with the information. If the professional has to deal with traumatisation or if there are difficult topics or secrets, it is important to agree on what will/will not be discussed, or to decide when exactly the discussion will stop.

By asking open questions (who, what, how, when), the other person is invited to share things. Active listening requires probing further into what the other person says; this is only possible if you deviate from your planned approach for the interview. The professional has to give them the opportunity to ask questions and has to know their attitude towards different cultures as well as their own. The tendency to favour conformity to dominant social norms is often greater than many people are aware of. It is important to really connect with the other person by having an open approach. In the case of children, it is also important to assess the development level.

### Good practice:

Minor-Ndako takes the time to build a relationship of trust with the child. The organisation has found that these children need clarification of the help that is being offered to them. After all, many of them have no experience with social workers. To talk about difficulties can be seen as a way of keeping the difficulties alive and making them bigger. Talking about personal matters can be interpreted as something that does not seem morally right. Talking about your background while an adult is taking notes can feel like being

questioned by the police. It can provoke fear and feelings of being unsafe, especially when children come from instable regions where it is difficult or even impossible to trust others. That is why Minor-Ndako staff introduce themselves and their way of working before they ask the children personal questions. This in contrast to traditional social work where a guiding question is used to encourage the client to take the first step.

In intercultural communication, issues may arise because people interpret behaviour differently. It is therefore important to be conscious of the danger of an ethnocentric bias, putting your own values and standards above universal ones. The following method helps to be aware of and deal with this.

Following the three-step method developed by Pinto (2007) may contribute to more effective intercultural communication. The first two steps teach us to look at things from both perspectives (that of the person themselves and of the other person). In step 3, any differences may be indicated for both cultures. This model is described briefly in the text box below.

### Intercultural communication<sup>4</sup>

**Step 1:** You become conscious of the influence of your own culture on your own behaviour.

**Step 2:** You become conscious, ask about, learn about and gain insight into the culture of the other person and the behaviour that stems from it.

**Step 3:** The insights this knowledge gives you, enable you to really connect and bridge the divide.

## 1.2.3 Cultural context of the unaccompanied child

This section gives a description of the most important differences between the cultures of unaccompanied children and their host countries. It includes working methods, attitudes and good practices which are relevant for giving guidance to the children and the families they live with. Knowledge of the main cultural aspects, backgrounds and possibilities of unaccompanied children is required to guide them with respect, to support them in the situations they face, and to recognise the risks they are exposed to in their vulnerable position.

### Extended family culture

Unaccompanied children generally come from an extended family culture, a culture in which the interests of the extended family is of utmost importance. The child often leaves as the result of a decision of the (extended) family, who often make huge financial and emotional sacrifices for this. The moment of departure also means that the child is mature, regardless of their age. Unaccompanied children are generally resilient young people who, especially in the beginning, want to contribute to the well-being of the (extended) family.

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. 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 becomes clear from their wish to satisfy the expectations and

---

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from Kaveh Bouteh, presentation at Nidos, May 2016.

instructions of the family and the desire to help their family by sending 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. In addition, families back home compare the amount of money a child sends them, the school the child attends and the child's achievements to that of others. Adapting to this individually-orientated culture can cause alienation from the (extended) family, with the risks of being cut off, excluded or rejected.

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 often considered as a lack of respect and a sign of poor upbringing, meaning a disgrace to family honour. Democratic principles and freedom of expression such as expressing their own opinion or vision and being part of the decision-making process are unusual for an unaccompanied child. The child may therefore feel very uneasy if they are constantly asked for an opinion.

## **Guilt versus shame culture**

The difference between the me-culture and the we-culture within a confrontation regarding behaviour is connected with differences between the guilt (me) culture and the shame (we) culture.

Each type of culture has its own set of rules with regard to wrong-doing or wrong behaviour and they are determined by the *beliefs* of the individual and other people regarding guilt.

The guilt culture is typically and primarily concerned with truth, justice, and the preservation of individual rights. It is suggested that the emotion of guilt is what keeps a person from behaviour that goes against his/her own code of conduct as well as the culture's. In contrast, in a typical shame culture what other people believe has a far more powerful impact on behaviour than what the individual believes. The desire to preserve honour and avoid shame is one of the primary foundations of the culture. Additionally, it may be impossible for an individual to even admit to themselves that they are guilty or have done something wrong (even if they have done) particularly when everyone else considers them to be guilty because of the shame involved. As long as others remain convinced that they are innocent, the individual does not experience shame. A great deal of effort therefore goes into making sure that others are convinced of your innocence.

The shame culture determines that the avoidance of shame is necessary, no matter what the cost. Western models of shame and guilt view shame as the 'bad' and guilt as the 'good' moral emotion. In non-Western cultural contexts, shame is not only valued as the 'good', but also viewed as an appropriate/expected emotional response to wrong behaviour (Bedford & Hwang, 2003).

### **An example:**

Making an apology is the standard first step in a guilt culture. By doing so, you admit your mistake, your guilt, which enables you to search for solutions. However, in a shame culture, offering an apology means accepting the shame, and is therefore avoided as much as possible. For someone coming from a shame culture, the first step will be to rebuild the relationship and, with that, removing the shame.

Bagozzi, Verbeke and Gavino (2003) found that people from both Western and non-Western cultures experience shame when they have a painful experience, but the actions/response to the experience are different for a person from a Western culture and a person from a non-Western culture. People from the West take self-protective action, whereas people from non-Western cultures engage in more relationship building/recovery.

A social psychological study (van Alphen, 2008) found that the intensity of shame that the shamed person experiences determines the strategy they will adopt.

Roughly speaking, there are two options:

- the shame is accepted;
- the shame is rejected.

If the intensity is low, the person will see it as something relatively unimportant and will be more inclined to accept the shame. If the shame becomes more intense, the person will be inclined to stand up to it. However, there is a threshold above which the shame is so intense that the person cannot deny it any longer. In this situation, someone can do nothing other than accept the shame. In that case, there will be an opportunity to, for example, apologise and repair the damage.

### An example: the important role shame plays in a we-culture

During a conversation between a mentor in a reception facility and an unaccompanied child concerning their undesirable behaviour, a child coming from a we-culture will above all try to repair the relationship: "We are always on good terms with each other, aren't we?". However, the mentor from a me-culture wants to discuss the problem first and search for solutions by means of apologies, agreements and sanctions. A child from a we-culture would prefer to avoid such a confrontation and will search for a more indirect way to repair the relationship with the mentor. The child will, for example, angrily walk away from the confrontation to start doing all kinds of other tasks. This is their attempt to repair the relationship with the mentor. The mentor, however, will exert pressure on the child to have the conversation, thus making the child feel they are being driven into a corner to talk about the shameful content, which is impossible for the child to do without repairing the relationship first.

Distinctive characteristics between individually and collectively-orientated cultures are the following:

'Me' Culture	'We' Culture
Individualistic: who are you?	Collectivist: who do you belong to?
Individual interest: independent, assertive, own choice	Group interest: connected with the group, obedient, modest
Low power distance	High power distance
Feminine	Masculine
Honesty: admitting errors, appreciation of confession, telling bad news straightaway	To keep honour intact: covering up errors, denial prevents loss of faith, carefully expressing bad news

## Health

Culture and religion also greatly influence opinions on 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. Apart from this, psychological illness is considered a kind of madness and something to be ashamed of that damages someone's honour. Complaints are therefore often experienced physically, we call this somatisation. It is often difficult to motivate unaccompanied children who are referred to mental healthcare. They do not see the benefit of 'talking' and visiting a psychologist can mean that you are 'crazy'. A culturally sensitive approach is important to help with engagement, and there are mental care institutions with transcultural specialisations in many European countries.

## How to deal with differences in ideas about health

An interested and respectful attitude to the symptoms, statements and possible solutions can be a good start. Asking how this problem would be solved at home can be helpful. This can also be done by involving the biological family. That may contribute to recognition of the legitimacy of the illness and enables the unaccompanied child and their family to choose to have the traditional treatment they used to have at home<sup>5</sup>.

### Black magic in Eritrea

Black magic is an invisible part of social life in Eritrea. There are four forms of black magic: Debtera, Buda, Tebib and Tonqualay. They involve having power over and influence on other people. A person who practises black magic has so much influence on others that people who are possessed by this person perform certain actions without being aware of what they are doing or do things without wanting to.

If black magic is being practised on someone, that person will be possessed by someone or something. This can be a living person or an evil spirit/devil ('sheytan'). It can be so serious that it results in suffering or, in extreme situations, even death.

To be protected against black magic or the evil eye, it is customary in Eritrean and Ethiopian culture to wear an amulet or talisman. This is very common in rural areas in particular, and people believe they are protecting themselves by wearing the amulet: 'better to prevent than to cure'.

If someone is already possessed, an evil spirit can be forced out by a Debtera reciting aphorisms in a language not known to human beings. The priest will force out the evil spirit by reciting lines from the holy book and/or praying<sup>6</sup>.

#### An example:

If John is jealous of Anne, he can ask a Tebib or Buda to aim his evil eye at Anne for payment. The Tebib asks for something personal (such as hairs or nails) of Anne's and mixes it with secret ingredients or herbs to possess Anne (people therefore never just throw away anything personal in Eritrea).

Stories are told in Eritrea of women who go to a Tebib to keep control over their men. By going to a Tebib with their marital problems, women can possess their men by using herbs which make sure that he does not go to other women. This can also have a negative outcome: the husband can get depressed and not be able or willing to work and behave very differently and in a negative way.

#### Good practice: Eritrean priests

Eritrean priests in the Netherlands are often asked to help young Eritrean asylum seekers get rid of their symptoms of illness.

---

<sup>5</sup> More detailed information on involving ritual treatment in Western treatment can be found in the in-depth material on [www.engi.eu](http://www.engi.eu).

<sup>6</sup> Information from the knowledge centre on Eritrea within Nidos.

### Good practice: cultural mediators

In both 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 discussing difficult topics such as sexuality and safety as well as the guidance and needs of the unaccompanied children. This works especially well in a group context, given the group-orientated cultural background of many of the children.

## 1.2.4 Specific topics related to cultural differences in the situation of an unaccompanied child

### Family expectations and interests

Unaccompanied children have often left their country with expectations from the family that the child's departure will be of benefit to the whole family. The image of the opportunities that the child will have in Europe is often unrealistic, with the expectation that money will be sent, family reunification will soon take place, or the child will build a successful career and send more money. These expectations may feel like an enormous burden to the child, especially because they really want to help their family and do not want to disappoint them.

Other pressure can come from the fact that they are expected to take care of younger siblings or an elder sister. This role is normal in a lot of extended family cultures, but can cause a lot of stress in their situation – alone in Europe.

### An example:

Two brothers are in Belgium and the eldest brother feels responsible for the younger brother behaving well. The family back home have told him to beat his younger brother because the boy has started smoking. The eldest brother feels he really has a problem. On the one hand he does not want to get into trouble with the Belgian system, which does not allow beating, and on the other hand he does not want to fail in controlling and raising his younger brother as his family expects him to. So the social workers called the parents to explain the situation and how they are dealing with it. After lots of telephone calls, the mother relieved the boy of his task, telling him that the social workers will take care of his brother and that the family is OK with that.

### Secrets

As described in section 1.1.2, many asylum seekers keep things secret. These secrets often regard the family situation, as their compatriots, family or smugglers have advised them not to reveal the actual situation. This can cause children a lot of stress, especially when they are being pressured to tell someone more about their family situation. But secrets or telling lies are also a mechanism in a 'shame culture' for coping with shameful or honour-violating situations. Lying to protect the family honour is very much part of a we (shame) culture although less acceptable in a European me (guilt) culture. The following example shows the painful consequences of keeping secrets.

### An example:

Two sisters (unaccompanied children) were cared for by a loving reception family in the Netherlands for many years. At some point, it became clear that there was an adult sister in the Netherlands as well. She was made very welcome in the reception family and often visited her sisters. Years later it became clear that this woman was not the elder sister but the mother of the girls. She was in the Netherlands illegally and hoped that her children would receive a residence permit because they were unaccompanied. The reception family was shocked and could not deal with the fact that they had been taking care of these orphans for all these years while there was a mother. Unfortunately, the placement had to be ended because of this.

## Age dispute

Unaccompanied children often come from countries where their birth is not registered or the date of birth is not known. The age of these children is usually assessed<sup>7</sup>, and the support given to them is adapted to that assessment without changing the age on their identity documents. However, an uncertain age may lead to difficulties with respect to housing and education, where allocation is usually based on the age stated on identity documents. The professional guiding the child can play an important role in this, advocating in the child's best interests.

## 1.2.5 Specific topics related to cultural differences in the risk of child abuse involving unaccompanied children

Research has revealed several risk factors for child abuse and that the risk of child abuse in foster care is higher than in biological families. This section discusses specific topics related to cultural differences in the risk of child abuse during reception in families.

### 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 here is that honour can be damaged or lost. Honour is sometimes considered an important factor in societies where, in the struggle for existence, 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 subject themselves to the rules and norms of the group or face a 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 making rules of honour.

Honour in extended family cultures is often about subjects relating to education and succession. *The violation of honour*, therefore, often concerns relationships, partner choice, sexuality and successors. Teaching, monitoring and protecting honour may be accompanied by violence, particularly when honour is under threat. Honour violation is worse if it is known about outside the group through gossip and slander that is often experienced as shameful; the more people who are aware of the violation, the greater the chance of honour-related violence. If

---

<sup>7</sup> More information on Age Assessment can be found on [www.engi.eu](http://www.engi.eu).

it has been violated, *restoration of honour* may take place through honour-purifying actions, such as marriage, divorce, rejection, denial, accepting the situation, or attempting reconciliation. Killing is the ultimate form of restoration, 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 from cultures with strict rules of honour (extended family or we culture) are often influenced by the new culture, that is orientated towards individual development (individual or me-culture), and there may be a great risk of honour violation. 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 and may discuss this matter 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 your own codes, are important when discussing this, but it may be quite difficult.

## 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 a lot of traditional cultures. Girls in refugee and migrant families from these cultures are at the bottom of the family hierarchy when it comes to their rights. This situation is changing in many of the families who have lived in Europe for a longer time, but freedom of movement is sometimes still very much restricted (Pharos, 2009).

## Forced marriages

In some cultures, marriage may take place 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 arranged marriage. Sometimes a girl is not forced to marry the partner chosen by her parents, but she feels obliged to do so out of loyalty. Or she is under such pressure that she does not dare object. She may also trust her parents, because of their good choices in general. The question is whether the girl has a choice or is being 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 decide on an honour killing (Pharos, 2009).

Preparations for a forced marriage are often made before a girl turns 18, after which the marriage takes place and not much can legally be done. The guardian or mentor may help 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 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.

In recent years there have been many 'child brides' amongst the refugees in Europe. This generally concerns voluntary Muslim marriages arranged by the family to protect the daughter in refugee camps or on her flight to Europe.

### **An example: when a child married to an adult arrives in Denmark**

A marriage between an adult and a child (minor) is often thought of as a forced marriage in Western countries and therefore generally believed to be wrong. In the asylum system in Denmark, children under 15 will always be placed in a children's asylum centre according to asylum regulations, which means they are separated from their adult spouse.

In spring 2016, the Minister of Integration stated that an asylum-seeking couple in which one of the partners is a child aged 15-17 should also be separated in the asylum accommodation system. This new policy was first applied to couples with no children, but it was also meant to be implemented for couples with children.

The Danish Red Cross found that some of the couples being separated were very frustrated by this rule and that, in particular, some of the married children involved had increased symptoms of depression, isolation and self-harm. They felt very unsafe without their partner, their primary 'safety person'. This led to the social care system and psychologists becoming involved.

In light of its experiences with separated couples with no children, the Danish Red Cross advocated for the young couples with children by contacting the Ministry, who were working on new guidelines for separating the couples. The Danish Red Cross wants the Ministry to consider the couples' right to well-being and family life and include that in their guidelines. The Red Cross do not support forced marriage, but find it important to take into consideration that these marriages were entered into before the couples came to Denmark, in a different culture and not necessarily forced. It is therefore necessary to investigate whether the cohabitation between the adult and the child (above 15 years old) endangers the well-being of the child. This should be done in each case and the child should be heard too. Separation should only take place where either the child or professionals state that the cohabitation between the adult and the child is detrimental to the well-being of the child. As great harm could be done to both the cohabiting child and any of the couple's children, the rule should only be applied after evaluation of each specific case. The separation should not be based on Western understanding of age and marriage.

### **An example: child brides in the Netherlands**

Child brides from Syria are under the guardianship of Nidos after their arrival, because the marriage of a minor is not recognised in the Netherlands. It often concerns arranged marriages to guarantee the girl's safety in a refugee camp or to transfer the care of a daughter in order to have more resources for other children in the family. It is customary in many cultures to marry within the family. This is also the case in Syria.

A good example is the following situation. An underage girl and her male adult cousin had an Islamic marriage and fled to Europe together. They both declared that the marriage had only been arranged for safety reasons and had not been consummated. For this reason, it was no problem for both of their families if the marriage were to be annulled by the imam, as they both wanted.

## **Female genital mutilation**

A particular form of child abuse is female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as the circumcision of girls. FGM may cause health issues in menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth and can lead to (constant) pain. Apart from young girls being circumcised, FGM may also be done after sexual contact, after childbirth or as a more extreme form of an earlier circumcision.

In Europe, circumcising girls is considered genital mutilation and is forbidden. Some families who come from regions where this is customary, often no longer want their daughters to be circumcised when they live in Europe, but may be pressurised into doing so anyway. There is no data on cases of FGM in Europe, but it is known that families send girls abroad to have the procedure and this is also forbidden in Europe. A possible indication of plans for circumcision is certain travel plans/holidays to the country of origin.

Culturally sensitive discussions about circumcision with those involved may highlight the risks and provide solutions. Circumcision can become a problem for a girl when she gets to know Western culture in which circumcision is seen as a violation. Whereas she always thought of circumcision as a natural thing, she will now experience it as something that is not right. Her previous lack of awareness was a protective factor that has now disappeared.

### **An example: female genital mutilation in Belgium**

A 17-year-old girl from Sierra Leone asked Minor-Ndako for help because she was confused by sex education at school. The theme of female genital mutilation had been discussed and it was said that this is a form of abuse of women that still takes place in Africa. During therapy, the girl explained that the circumcision was not her choice and that she suffered a lot from it, but that she had been told she had to become a woman.

We discussed the different meanings of being a woman, how people can have different opinions on it, which ideas predominate and how contradictory these can be. We concluded that entering a different culture goes hand-in-hand with experiencing other ideas, receiving different feedback than you are used to, and that this can cause confusion (Huybrechts, 2009).

## **House slave or Cinderella**

In many cultures, and especially in bad economic situations, it is customary for girls to have domestic and carer tasks within the family from a very young age. Girls are prepared for this and it gives them a positive self-image if they are able to fulfil the tasks according to expectations. However, there are also situations in which a girl, generally not a biological child, is given the role of house slave. If there are children travelling with a family, a child that is not their own often does a disproportional amount of the chores in the household, or has to take care of other children. These children are called a 'Cinderella' or 'house slave'.

It is important to be aware of an unequal position of an unaccompanied child in a reception family. Signs of this, or of a child being used as a house slave, are: not going to school, lack of sleep, a lot of domestic or carer tasks, and not receiving the same care as the other children in the family.

# 1.3 NEED FOR GUIDANCE

## 1.3.1 Introduction

At the beginning of their stay in the host country, unaccompanied children need safety and time to rest in order to be able to recover from the journey and make the transition to the new situation.

### Good practice in the Netherlands: conditions for upbringing

The Dutch professor Kalverboer has developed the BIC model (Best Interest of the Child), that specifies 14 conditions for good development. The basic assumption is that if all conditions are met, a favourable development of the child is guaranteed and we can speak of safety (Spinder & van Hout, 2008).

The BIC-Model is the basic way of working for diagnostic pedagogical assessments at the 'Study Centre for Children, Migration and 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. (Kalverboer & Zijlstra, 2006).

The BIC model has been adapted for unaccompanied children<sup>8</sup>.

## 1.3.2 Basic needs of unaccompanied children after the flight

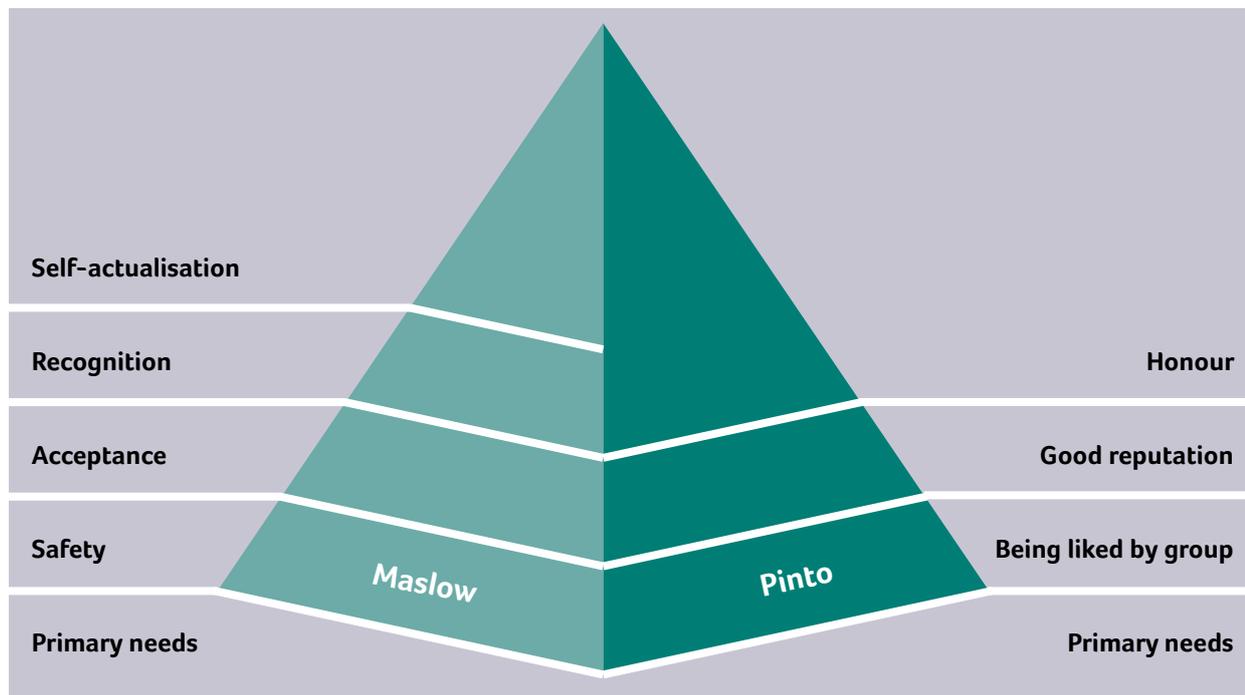
Immediately after arrival, many unaccompanied children focus on obtaining the desired residence permit and their primary basic needs, such as sufficient food, a place to stay and safety. Adolescents in particular often strongly focus on interaction with one another, with children also wanting to engage with peers from a similar background. In practice, you see that as long as children are focusing 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.

---

<sup>8</sup> The complete instrument is available on [www.engi.eu](http://www.engi.eu).

## The basic needs of an unaccompanied child at the beginning of the reception period

The pyramids of Maslow and Pinto may help to understand these needs.



The pyramids of Maslow and Pinto show the hierarchy of basic human needs for, respectively, the individual and extended family structures. The pyramid of Maslow is applicable to the Western-oriented human (12% of the world population), but not for the whole of mankind. The Eastern part of the world (88%) has different needs to the Western part and another hierarchy in needs (Pinto 2007).

Six years of research in the Netherlands (2009-2015) into unaccompanied children's opinions on the guidance they receive concluded that many children feel the need to have permanent guardians. Guardians who are personally involved. Besides social and practical support, unaccompanied children need an affectionate bond. Children in all types of care facilities talked about missing their families. Reception in reception families seems to compensate best for their losses because these children become part of a new social system (Kalverboer et al., 2016). The research has also shown that many unaccompanied children feel it is important to live in a family or small-scale reception facility and report a change of living situation as being annoying. On top of this, the children find it important to learn the language of the host country as quickly as possible.

Another need that unaccompanied children express is the need for recognition for who they are, taking into account their background, the independence gained during their journey and their desire to contribute to their family's interests. Many unaccompanied children also wish that people would recognise the misery they have gone through and the often traumatic experiences they have had, without having to talk about it. A network of people who have had the same experiences is also very helpful, as described in the next example.

### An example: network

The Danish Red Cross asylum centres for children have found that bonds of safety and confidence between unaccompanied children in the centres are sometimes comparable to the bond between a child and a primary carer such as a parent. This kind of normality makes them feel safe. They have in common the experience of being alone during the flight and difficult memories. They do not necessarily share these, but there is a mutual understanding of what each of them has gone through. Being a minority in a foreign country, it makes

you stronger if there is more than one of you. It is often, but not always, children with the same nationalities. They treat each other like family and contribute to each other's well-being. They comfort each other if they're sad, calm each other down if they're agitated, cook for each other if they're ill, and help each other in other ways.

Important issues in the first phase of the reception of unaccompanied children are:

- the initial phase of reception focuses on offering rest and safety;
- the basic needs of the child are provided: shelter, sufficient food, physical safety and being in touch with family;
- the contact with the child is based on showing interest and being reliable;
- the child's distrust, secrets and unwillingness to talk about things is respected;
- the child's level of independence is respected;
- aiming for continuity in mentors/guardians and the reception facility;
- suitable and preferably useful daily activities are available;
- there is positive support for the child's experience and expression of religion.

### Good practice: reception in Denmark

The vision for reception at Danish Red Cross asylum centres is based on three values: safety, worthiness and meaningfulness. In the children's centre this starts at the car park, where the staff wait for the newcomer in a Red Cross jacket. Almost all the children know the Red Cross and what it stands for, and that gives a feeling of safety. Being friendly becomes a professional tool, and the staff use face and body language to express safety and kindness. The reception is very structured, but individual needs (physical and psychological) are always taken into consideration. Basic needs are provided: a shower, clean clothes and a good sleep in a safe environment.

The reception centre has a special reception room, where the unaccompanied child is registered and receives practical information and information about their rights. The conversation that the child has there with their new contact is with the help of an interpreter. The room is comfortable, with a couch, a map of the world and a cup of tea. Some children want to talk, some just like to sit there, others want the door open or a compatriot at their side. This first talk is of great importance for the whole process. Here they are told that the Red Cross will take care of them and that the flight is over. They tend to scan the environment, and seeing other children laughing, talking to the staff, playing football, going to and from school, etc. helps them feel safe. For girls it takes a bit longer, depending on how many girls there are at the centre. The more girls, the safer they feel.

Reception is about creating a feeling of safety, providing basic needs and giving information about what will happen now. The child has a health check and starts school the following day – if they want to. In the reception centre, everything is an offer, not an obligation.

In the accommodation centre, where the child will move to after one or two weeks, it is of great importance that they feel welcome and expected. A mentor – one of the other children – will be ready to welcome the newcomer. And the new child will meet both their primary and secondary contacts, people who will be responsible for their physical, psychological and social development. These people will focus on the child's individual skills and on providing the necessary support to ensure they are resilient, high-spirited, patient and tolerant. The children have responsibilities and duties at the centre, and school, activities and training for daily life are always part of the routine. If the child has special needs, social care and/or psychological help will be provided. There is an appreciative approach to the children. They benefit from being able to mirror themselves in others, as long as the centre is not too big, for then the environment will seem too noisy and this will hinder their development.

### **1.3.3 Strengthening protective factors for unaccompanied children**

A well-known methodological approach in (youth) care is working at strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors. However, protective and risk factors for children growing up in their country of origin are not always the same as those for unaccompanied children.

#### **Protective and risk factors for unaccompanied children according to scientific research**

The guidance of unaccompanied children aims to increase their resilience by reinforcing protective factors for the child and their environment and by minimising risk factors. 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.

Considering risk and protective factors for unaccompanied children<sup>9</sup>, it is important to note that the age limit of 18 for being underage is not a worldwide standard. Often, this 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 destination country. An unaccompanied child may have performed tasks that in European society can only be performed by adults (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008).

It is also important to add here that the journey to Europe, in particular, makes unaccompanied children more mature in their behaviour.

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 & Broekaert, 2008; Fazel et al., 2012; Reed, Panter-Brick & Stein, 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 taken care of by a family member after arrival, have fewer problems than unaccompanied children (van der Veer, 1996). Unaccompanied children separated from their relatives appear to have a 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 & 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 abroad. 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 & 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

---

<sup>9</sup> The list ' Specific protective and risk factors for unaccompanied children' can be found on [www.engi.eu](http://www.engi.eu).

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 & 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 from 2011 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) described 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., 2007; Hodes, Jagdev, Chandra & Cunniff, 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 et al., 2012). 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.

A study from van Ijzendoorn (2008) showed that particularly the genes related to the dopamine system make children more or less receptive to the environment. Specific combinations of such genes may help some children to not develop post traumatic stress and 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 and risk factors specific to unaccompanied children:

#### Protective factors:

- Language ability in host country language
- Religion
- Emotion regulation
- Safety
- Continuity of residence
- Social support
- Living with others from their background
- Contact with family

#### Risk factors:

- Physical or psychological health issues
- Uncertainty
- Trauma experiences
- Experienced violence
- Being unaccompanied
- Little social support
- Living in large reception centres
- No contact with family

## 1.3.4 Guidance for family reunification

In some European countries, a significant number of unaccompanied children qualify for family reunification<sup>10</sup>. Before actual reunification takes place, the child often has to wait for a long time and go through a lot. When the moment that parents and child see each other again has finally arrived, everybody is very happy. But when they live together as a family again, it is not always easy. The reunification can also result in new and unfamiliar tension.

### **An example: family reunification in the Netherlands**

In 2014 and 2015 refugees, especially Syrians, often sent their children ahead to Europe to apply for family reunification. At first, it was customary that the eldest son was sent, but during 2015 Nidos found that the children who entered the Netherlands, alone or accompanied, were younger than before. There were even children under the age of 10. It turned out that there was a link between this phenomenon and the chance of surviving the passage to Europe. Boats with little children made it across more often than boats without them. The more refugees came to the Netherlands, the more time the family reunification procedure took. In 2015 and 2016 this provoked a lot of panic and dismay, as the families pressurised their children to influence and speed up the procedure.

In the meantime, the first reunifications took place and Nidos witnessed, apart from many happy children, other children who panicked because their families were coming over.

There was, for example, an eight-year-old girl who declared just before the reunification that she did not want to live with her family because she had been beaten by them in the past. This did not happen in the (Arab) reception family that took care of her and she liked that. With Nidos guidance, and the understanding shown by the parents and the reception family, this has been solved. The girl is very happy to be living with her parents and siblings, is not being beaten and visits the reception family on a regular basis.

Migration at different times also increases the risk of situations occurring which involve family honour. During the absence of their parents, the child gets used to Western rules of behaviour and having more freedom. This can easily conflict with the stricter rules of behaviour of the biological family. So it is of utmost importance to involve the parents in the development of their child in Europe during the guidance period, despite borders and distance. If the (extended) family does not have enough understanding of the new situation, this can result in the parents trying to re-educate the child as soon as they are together again, to protect the family honour and their good reputation<sup>11</sup>. And this may lead to child abuse.

A reception family can make a valuable contribution by involving the biological family in events and the child's development while staying with their family. This can also prevent the child behaving in a way that could damage the family honour.

---

<sup>10</sup> More information on Family Reunification can be found on [www.engi.eu](http://www.engi.eu).

<sup>11</sup> Based on an article by Marjan Schippers and Mirjam van der Meer (Nidos) in Tijdschrift voor de jeugdgezondheidszorg, special edition on newcomers, will be published in October 2016.

## 1.3.5 Self-reliance at 18

In most European countries, children become adults when they turn 18. As mentioned in section 1.3.3, this age limit often doesn't correspond with the unaccompanied child's culture.

In some countries, for example Denmark and the Netherlands, the reception facilities change at that age, and payment for reception in reception families stops too. Depending on the stage of their asylum procedure, the child will then have to live in an asylum centre for adults.

The aim of guidance in the Netherlands and of living in a reception family is therefore for unaccompanied children to be self-dependent at 18. And in European countries where there is legal guardianship, the child is no longer given guidance by a guardian from that moment on.

Being self-reliant is difficult for many children. Unaccompanied children are often very worried about turning 18. They dread the bureaucratic paperwork that they will have to deal with. Uncertainty about where they will live in the future often plays a role as well. Apart from a network of friends and role models, a support network that children can rely on and can turn to with their questions is of the utmost importance. A social life as a result of education or work is, of course, also helpful. Speaking the language of the country of residence is another strong protective factor.

In some countries, continuing youth care and/or the guidance of a guardian is a possibility which can be very supportive.

### **Good practice:**

In Germany, youth care can be provided until the age of 21, if necessary, which is being done in Süd-Niedersachsen. JSN has had good experiences with this.

### **Coaching to build self-reliance**

To coach unaccompanied children in self-reliance, it is important to:

- pay constant attention to building a support network, both formally (organisations) and informally (friendships, compatriots and integrated adults or adults that were born in the host country);
- try to keep the reception family within the support network of the child when they turn 18;
- ensure that the child knows where they will be living, well before they turn 18;
- make sure the next home will match the network and daily routine (education/work) of the child as well as possible.

## 1.3.6 Guidance on the outcome: return or integration

The unaccompanied child's request for asylum has either a positive or a negative outcome. Guidance in the case of a negative result focuses on return. Living illegally in the host country cannot be seen as an acceptable option for an adolescent.

Giving guidance for the child's return is often difficult, as both they and their family had pinned all their hopes on a residence permit based on asylum. They didn't want to consider a rejection.

Integration after receiving a residence permit also calls for good support. The differences in culture and society are often considerable and this asks a lot of the child and their capacity to adjust.

## Return

There are many differences between European countries regarding asylum legislation for children. The Czech Republic, for example, grants all unaccompanied children a residence permit if they apply for one. The Netherlands will not send back unaccompanied children against their will before they turn 18, but there are cases of children being urged to return on a voluntary basis before they reach the age of 18.

Return is a big issue for most unaccompanied children. They fear their safety or reprisals because they left. They are also ashamed of not having been able to help their family or are afraid of rejection by their family for not succeeding in Europe.

Children who return may not be welcomed back into the family if they come back empty-handed. Families have often made great financial sacrifices to enable the journey and returning without any money may give the family a serious financial problem. Moreover, returning empty-handed from Europe is not considered very credible in the eyes of the local community in the country of origin. An unaccompanied child who has returned may be considered a failure and no longer welcome in the community, making the opportunities for housing and income difficult.

Guiding return can reduce many of these problems. Important are:

- good up-to-date information on safety in the country of origin;
- the experiences of those who have already returned;
- informing the family of the reason of the compulsory return, in order to 'apologise' for the child;
- a return plan aiming at not returning empty-handed (for example, by including education focused on return) and in consultation with the family.

### An example:

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) offers possibilities to return with assistance, which can enable honourable return. IOM also investigates the safety of return and, for example, the possibilities for children to go to school.

A boy who just turned 17 has to return to Afghanistan when he turns 18. He has a plan to start a shop there with financial support from IOM.

His guardian from Nidos calls the father in the presence of the boy to discuss the plan. The father then discusses the plan with the rest of the family and together they decide that it is better for his safety if the boy goes to an uncle who lives in another region, and that it is not wise for him to start a shop because the boy could easily be robbed.

The family suggest that the boy learns to drive a car in the Netherlands and does a course in automobile engineering. Financial support from IOM will enable him to become a taxi driver once he is back in Afghanistan.

## Good practice: return policy at Nidos

Return policy at Nidos is based on the vision that working on the sustainable return of a child requires working on double commitment: the commitment of the child and the commitment of their family.

This commitment to return can be achieved if a sustainable plan for a safe return is prepared in cooperation with both the child and the family. The plan should offer an independent existence, based on correct and credible information, monitored by international and local organisations, together with case management by Nidos and the commitment of the child and their family.

### Double commitment can be achieved through:

- good timing;
- involvement of the family in the situation of the child from the start of the counselling, and activation of the family in respect of problems and plans for the future;
- determining, together with the child, at which moment the possibilities for return will be looked into, and by making a return plan.

### A sustainable return plan:

- offers a safe stay for the child;
- offers prospect of an independent existence for the child through education or work;
- offers development opportunities for the child;
- is prepared by, or with the consent and support of the family;
- offers family-based care, preferably within the family, but otherwise in other forms;
- is supported by local organisations.

### Assuring a sustainable return means:

- that the return is monitored by local and international organisations;
- that the return plan and the first period of return are supervised to enable that, if necessary, the plan can be adjusted with the help of local organisations and/or the family.

## Good practice:

The Danish Red Cross offers return counselling to rejected asylum seekers in their centres, and there is a specific approach for children.

Children who have just arrived are often tired, tense and confused. They have received incorrect and contradictory information about reception and the asylum process in their new country. They therefore find it difficult to orientate and settle down. In addition to the need for safety, it is important for them to know what will happen now. So the main goal of the initial contact with the children is to help them feel that they are in control and to help them understand the context and meaning of the new and strange situation they are in.

Early intervention is very important, giving the child basic information on the asylum procedures, including the possibility of return counselling if they wish to withdraw their asylum application or the application is rejected.

The main message in return counselling is: don't stand alone in this situation, but take the offer of impartial counselling. It is a motivational talk with an adult who can help the child make choices about their own future on an informed basis. It is the child themselves who makes the choices, but the counsellor helps them by explaining the options.

It is in this early stage, before there is any frustration about asylum rejection, that the seeds are sown for return counselling in a later stage.

If a child's asylum application is rejected, the Danish Red Cross contacts them directly. This is done either through the legal guardian or staff at the centre. It is important that all legal guardians (volunteer and paid) and the staff at the centres are familiar with return counselling objectives and possibilities.

If the child is staying with relatives (private accommodation), the relatives will often be able to provide very useful information which can be used in connection with the return counselling. It is important to speak to the child alone as well, because the relatives can have their own motives for or against the child's return.

The legal guardian may participate in the return counselling, but this should be determined on the basis of the relationship between the child and the legal guardian. There might be ambivalence after the rejection that affects the relationship, and then it might be better for the child to be assisted by a neutral person. Since the legal guardians are familiar with the return counselling objectives and possibilities, it is often good practice for the legal guardian to refer the child to an independent and neutral person who has not guided the child throughout the procedure and is therefore not emotionally affected by the asylum rejection. The rejection leads the child into a transformation process in which the consequences of the rejection must be comprehended, processed and accepted. This is where the neutral person can make a difference, guiding the child through the decision-making process to make their own informed decision.

## Integration

Just like other migrants, refugees have to deal with adjustment to their new environment. When people are confronted with a different culture for a long time, they acculturate. The way they look at the world changes and some of their norms and values change too.

Berry (1990) distinguishes various strategies for acculturation: integration, assimilation, segregation and marginalisation. Integration is generally seen as the most successful strategy for social well-being. In this context, integration means adjustment to the new environment while retaining your own culture.

Acculturation strategy		Adjustment to dominant culture	
		Yes	No
Maintenance of culture	Yes	Integration	Segregation
	No	Assimilation	Marginalisation

As described in section 1.1.2, the unaccompanied child's identity develops in a different way to how it would have done if they had not migrated. Their idea of their own developing identity changes because of the different norms and values they are confronted with. Role models from their country of origin do not fit into their life anymore, but neither do role models from the new society. Compatriots and former unaccompanied children who are also building their future in a Western society can become new role models for these children.

Several studies show that getting to know and participating in a new society, whilst maintaining their own cultural norms and values, contributes to the well-being of the child. It helps them to find their own way in the new society.

### Good practice: points of attention for guiding unaccompanied children at Nidos

- search for role models (from the child's own culture or with a similar background) in the child's network;
- getting to know the new society and culture should proceed at the child's pace;
- the child should be supported in finding their way into education or work that is realistic and matches the child's future prospects;
- participation in the new society is part of the guidance;
- if desired, contact with compatriots is part of the child's life.

# 1.4 EMPOWERING THE UNACCOMPANIED CHILD

## 1.4.1 Introduction

Empowerment means making a child stronger by increasing their resilience. Support offered to the child by their (family) network can make a major contribution to empowering the child. Extended family is an important protective factor for unaccompanied children.

## 1.4.2 Promoting resilience

There is increasing attention for the way children survive and what makes them stronger.

The focus is not on shortcomings or risk factors but on capacities that help children to cope with problems as well as possible: protective factors and resilience. Emphasising resilience helps to understand the way unaccompanied children handle adversity and what the needs of unaccompanied children are. It is also helpful for modelling interventions. Resilience generally concerns 'good adjustment or positive development results in spite of serious threats' (Masten, 2001, p. 2); like a dynamic process containing positive adjustment within the framework of meaningful adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000, p. 543). In other words: you are capable of being positive, focused on the future and strong in difficult times, i.e. able to recover and to bounce back. After all, it is impossible for an unaccompanied child to return to an ordinary life. In this case, the metaphor given by Walsh (2002) may be suitable: she describes resilience as 'leaping forward' into an uncertain future.

## 1.4.3 Involving the family network

Unaccompanied children usually come from an extended family culture and involving the family network in the guidance is natural and logical. As described earlier, several studies reveal that contact with the biological family is an important protective factor for unaccompanied children.

The biological family can play an important role in:

- assisting the child;
- taking away the burden on the child when the goal of the flight is not met;
- taking away the pressure on the child regarding family reunification;
- worries about the child's behaviour (pedagogic authority);
- health problems;

- working out return plans;
- decisions that have to be made;
- placement in a reception family; if the biological family approves of the placement, it is supportive to the child.

### **Good practice: Cross-Border Networking**

In its search for effective methods, Nidos has gathered and refined many positive experiences of involving the family network.

Based on a methodological set-up similar to Family Group Conference from New Zealand, a Cross-Border Networking (CBN) methodology was launched in 2013. The core of the methodology is that existing, new and imaginary networks are involved in support and guidance from the start. Since the arrival of particularly Syrian and Eritrean children in 2014-2015, it has become normal in Nidos's work for them to be in contact with the family from the moment Nidos gets acquainted with the child. There is no barrier to doing so because the child has a right of asylum and the family is in favour of contact to enable family reunification as soon as possible. Especially with Syrian children it is often easy to get in touch with the family by telephone or Skype.

The Danish Red Cross also has positive experiences in taking an active role, if the child agrees, of course, in contacting the family abroad as soon as possible. They explain the realistic opportunities for the child and the possibilities for family reunification, and talk about how the family can contribute to this. Unattainable expectations can be eliminated this way, relieving the children of a heavy burden. The use of smartphones makes cooperating with family abroad much easier than before.





# 2

# RECEPTION IN FAMILIES

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

---

Across Europe, there are different opinions on what is the best place for an unaccompanied child to grow up. For each child this depends on many factors and therefore has to be individually assessed to reach a tailor-made decision.

The international legal framework on reception of unaccompanied children highlights the rights, responsibilities and minimum standards which must be respected according to UN instruments, EU law and EU policy (see 0.2 of the introduction).

Access to appropriate accommodation, especially reception in families, is mentioned in several reports. Making living within a family one of the recommended options for unaccompanied minors, as highlighted in these reports, is supported by some scientific publications. The most important argument for reception in families resulting from this research is that children who grow up in children's homes fall behind in their development compared to children who experience growing up in a family.

### 2.1.1 Reception in families

There are several kinds of reception in families that might be suitable, i.e. reception in the (family) network of the child and reception within families that are not yet known to the child.

#### **Growing up within their own network**

Growing up within their own (family) network has, apart from the above-mentioned advantages of living within your own culture, the added advantages of a shared family and migration history plus existing, often affective, relationships. The smells, the food, the dialect spoken; recognisable stress buffers often overlap more here than in unknown ethnic families. Some unaccompanied children might have relatives in the destination country with whom they can live. Others may be accompanied by people who are not relatives but might also be suitable for them to live with. In these cases, professionals need to evaluate the relationship between the child and the relative or accompanying person, and that person's ability to take care of the child's needs.

#### **Growing up in an unknown reception family**

If unaccompanied children do not have their own (family) network or responsible companions with whom they can live, reception in families not known to the child may also provide a safe place.

Some unaccompanied children do not agree to being placed in a family, for example because they are already used to living an independent life and looking after themselves. In that case, reception in a family should not be considered. These children may benefit from reception in small-scale reception facilities or from living on their own instead of reception within a family.

## 2.1.2 Placement in ethnic or indigenous reception families?

The advantages and disadvantages of placement in ethnic or indigenous reception families are seen differently from country to country in Europe.

Some countries use ethnic families, as they have the experience that unaccompanied children are better off being placed in an environment where they don't have to lose their cultural identity and the family itself has experienced aspects of migration.

Other countries focus on placement with indigenous reception families because they believe this adds more to the speed or quality of integration in the new environment. They may also be reluctant to work with ethnic families after negative experiences with reliability or difficulties in monitoring the placement, or because cultural matching is considered discriminating.

A first international literature study by Arkesteijn (2015) describes the advantages cultural matching has on the ability to create a positive self-image and to learn to cope with racism. Another argument in favour of cultural matching mentioned in the study is the fact that non-ethnic families feel less competent to offer the child cultural guidance. Apart from this, placement in families with the same cultural and ethnic background is considered a protective factor for unaccompanied minors' mental health (Geltman, Grant-Knight & Metha, 2005).

A contra-indication for ethnic placement, however, may be the fact that unaccompanied children, often inspired by their families' opinions, would prefer to live with an indigenous family. They think that getting to know the host country in this way will help them to integrate and learn to speak the language, resulting in better education and a higher standard of living.

### Using ethnic families: 'protective wrapping'

Countries that use ethnic reception families are, for example, Denmark, Germany (Süd-Niedersachsen) and the Netherlands.

#### Good practice:

Nidos' experience with cultural placements in ethnic families has been good. It bases this, amongst other things, on the following expert insights.

Tjin A Djie and Zwaan refer to 'embedding into the culture' and 'embedding into the group' with 'protective wrapping'. Protective wrapping is all-encompassing and concerns not only family but everything associated with familiar ways of the past, e.g. smells, scenery, traditions, rituals, history and food. There are habits and customs of the past that are no longer applicable after migration and talking about these may, in itself, have the effect of 'protective wrapping'. According to Tjin A Djie and Zwaan, protective wrapping encourages people who are vulnerable. Everybody practises protective wrapping, not only migrants. In difficult periods, all people look for pleasant memories, experiences of safety and warmth (Tjin A Djie & Zwaan, 2007, p. 45).

In the methodology on reception in families developed by Nidos, protective wraps are called "anchors from the past and the present, e.g. people who remind you of family, old or new friends with connections to the past, familiar customs, food, etc. In short: everything that was familiar when everything was still safe" (Spinder, van Hout & Hesser, 2010, p. 38). These good 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 and Zwaan (2007) state that re-

embedding in a family and a social support system are crucially important to move on to a new phase of life, and have a stabilising effect.

Spinder et al. (2010) explain that ethnic families can provide a stable environment for unaccompanied children. They provide a safe place to stay where comforting and energising memories can be called up from the past. Through connection with, and recognition of, context from the past, feelings of alienation and confusion may be reduced, which will enable the child to seek contact with the unfamiliar outside world. Ethnic families can help children look for important anchors from the past that may help them to experience a feeling of trust and safety in the present. In that sense, these reception families provide continuity for unaccompanied children.

Kouratovsky (2008) has introduced the concept of protective wrapping to denote the profound influence of factors like culture, migration and language on bio-psycho-social development. Wrapping applies to each person and the disturbance that migration causes can result in greater vulnerability for many generations. Children are born with the ability to cause their carers to react. Those reactions are adapted to the child with a special, traditional use of language that is already strongly culture-specific and therefore culturally charged. This teaches the child something about themselves right from the start, in preparation for both passive and active communication with the outside world. The reactions of their social environment lay the basis for a child's self-understanding and their ability to explain and understand their 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'. Kouratovsky calls protective 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 help the child recognise these stress buffers and therefore help to regulate stress.

The concepts mentioned above show that reception in an ethnic family with the same background who can provide safety, basic needs, attention and structure in daily life, gives a child a good chance of normal development and natural recovery from deprivation, loss and trauma. On top of this, an ethnic family is able to offer comfort and guidance to the child, drawing on implicit knowledge based on their own experiences with migration and integration, and the stress buffers needed when fleeing, processing trauma, and mourning. And, finally, ethnic placements contribute to maintaining the cultural identity and the native language. This makes remigration easier whenever this should be the case.

Countries with experience with cultural matching, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, stress the importance of the family's integration within the host country for preventing social exclusion, especially when the child being placed is allowed to stay in the country.

## Using indigenous families

There are also positive stories of placement in indigenous families, especially when these families have intercultural knowledge and experience. The Süd-Niedersachsen region in Germany, for example, has been working with German families since they started offering reception in families in 2011.

### Good practise: use of indigenous families in Germany

Despite sometimes using ethnic families, the majority of reception families used by JSN are indigenous families. Some unaccompanied children ask to be placed in a German family in order to learn the language better and faster. JSN has found that the children learn German very quickly. They also learn the culture and values of their new country and how to get along in the new society. JSN expects the reception families to be culturally sensitive. This is achieved using workshops and interpreters for both language and culture who help the reception families to understand the children's culture.

## 2.2 RECRUITING FAMILIES

### 2.2.1 Introduction

In some European countries, recruiting reception families is a task reserved for accredited non-governmental youth care institutions. In other countries, placements of unaccompanied children can only be done within the child's network.

In order to recruit suitable reception families for this vulnerable group of unaccompanied children, a number of aspects need to be taken into consideration. It has to be clear that reception families have the right motivation, are capable of taking care of children, can guarantee the safety of the child, and aim to have a long-lasting relationship with the child but can also let go if there is no prospect of the child being granted a residence permit.

Unaccompanied children definitely need the opportunity to be in touch with their biological parents or family and should be encouraged to do so. Taking care of unaccompanied children requires a sensitive and selfless attitude. The urgent need for reception families should never weaken the focus on safety.

### 2.2.2 How to recruit

Recruiting reception families is a matter of constant effort, patience and persistence. The efforts made may only have a positive result in the long term.

#### **Good practice:**

It is Nidos' experience that it is important to always stay in touch with people who could be useful either as a reception family or as a key figure.

It is also important to know which groups to aim for. Both general and specific characteristics should be considered. In general, these families need to be able to take care of unaccompanied children who are vulnerable (having lost their homes and families), but at the same time determined in their search for new perspectives and a safe place to live. It is worthwhile to look for families with a specific cultural background.

#### **Recruiting relatives (kinship care)**

The first option is to ask the child or the parents/family back home (if possible) if there is any family in the host country. Sometimes children have an address or telephone number of relatives who also live there.

Recruiting then starts by contacting this family and investigating any possibilities they have to shelter their young family member. The recruitment phase aims to explore both the possibilities and the commitment of family and child. If this gives a positive outcome, the screening procedure can be started.

## Recruiting people to become approved reception families

To recruit people, inviting them to come to information meetings and visiting them during gatherings of their own communities (religious groups, churches, mosques, cultural groups, schools, sports clubs, etc.) are a good start. Recruitment via already approved reception families or key figures in the community can also work very well.

It is important to inform candidate reception families about the background and specific needs of unaccompanied children. It's also important to actually ask these families whether they could consider becoming a reception family and to let them weigh up the advantages and disadvantages. They need to be asked whether hosting an unaccompanied child would fit in with their current living circumstances. If this is the case, they can be asked to take on the responsibility. If they are willing to do so, the screening procedure can be started.

## Recruiting for a specific match

The various recruiting strategies mentioned above may also be suitable for recruiting for a specific match, but the best option is, of course, using the child's network and key figures in the desired community.

If a reception family is required for a child with specific needs, recruiting can be done with the help of all the available information. Specific needs may vary. This could involve finding a reception family in a particular town because of practical circumstances like studying, but it can also mean that a family will have to be capable of supplying extra care. People should be recruited on the basis of this specific information, and extra skills in, for example, nursing or having a home suitable for a disabled child may be selection criteria. Recruitment via the network and social environment of the child tends to be the most successful.

## Recruiting plan

Reception family recruitment can start with a recruiting plan. This will determine what specific needs need to be taken into consideration: married couples, single parents, people with or without own children, ages of the children that have to be placed, ethnic or indigenous families, cultural background and languages spoken. It is important to specify the necessary capacity and diversity. An example of this is being able to place siblings pairwise together or in three- or foursomes.

Making a recruiting plan will help to formulate targets, strategies and concrete activities.

## Gaining access

### Good practice: gaining access

It is Nidos' experience that it is important to gain access to groups of people where there may be opportunities, gaining their confidence and getting them involved. This approach is a combination of:

- getting people engaged with the interests and needs of the unaccompanied children;
- appealing to their concern and sense of responsibility with regard to the children;
- giving correct and detailed information on taking care of unaccompanied children;
- stimulating people to spread the message;
- organising meetings where interested people can hear the experiences of others;
- setting up media campaigns.

Gaining access to migrant groups calls for cultural sensitivity and sincere interest in the person and their background. Being reliable as a professional is very important. But also not accepting the first or even second 'no' as a definite 'no'. Instead, trying to find out what that refusal really means.

It is also important to help people overcome their doubts, uncertainties or fears. Apart from this, recruiters should always include a 'win-win message'; what do we and what do you get out of it in a non-material way? Recruiters should take the initiative by contacting candidate families instead of waiting for them to get in touch. Being aware of the right timing is helpful: try to reach someone or a group at a later date if they seem to have other priorities at the moment. And finally, it is important to learn how to recognise which activities are productive and which are not.

## Working with key figures

Key figures are people who have a special relationship with the target recruitment group. They may have a leading position or influence the target group in another way. They can promote the organisation and help to stimulate feelings of concern and a sense of responsibility amongst the target group. Key figures may also be used as cultural advisors or mediators in finding the right people to become reception families. It is important for the organisation to get to know the key figures as people who are trustworthy and concerned about the unaccompanied children and the target group. Key figures can guide recruiters on how and where to find potential reception families if they don't go to find them themselves.

### Good practice:

In the Netherlands, key figures and reception families are often former unaccompanied children.

### An example: how to develop a recruiting plan

**How many places to aim for?** (target the number of places or families)

**What families are needed and for whom?** (ages of children, gender, number of places, ethnic cultural or indigenous family, languages, religion, single with or without children, ages of own children)

**Where to find them?** (through approved reception families, network, key figures, cultural groups, schools, churches, mosques, community centres, etc.)

**What families to avoid?** (no time should be wasted on applicants that are not suitable anyway because they are too young or too old, live in the city instead of the countryside or vice-versa, are dogmatically religious, or because of contra-indications such as smoking, alcohol or drugs).

**How many places are needed within what timeframe?** (formulate SMART goals)

**What methods will be used, what activities are to be undertaken and by whom?**

**Can this be done regularly or is extra staff or money needed?**

**When to evaluate progress on the targets?**

**Does the plan have to be adjusted when effects are beneath expectations?**

**Do the goals have to be altered?**

**Do the 'finding places' or activities have to be altered?**

## Ways of recruiting and their impact

Several methods can be used to recruit reception families. They are explained below.

### Advertisements

Advertising with specific information on the child and their needs may be successful. When using advertisements, it is important to:

- carefully determine which publications are the best ones for the target group(s);
- give adequate information on who should reply (and who should not);
- try to prevent too many unusable reactions that will still need responding to;
- decide how people should respond: by phone, mail, website, etc.

#### Good practice:

Although it may be useful to work with advertisements, Nidos has found that the best recruitment method is a personal approach.

### Flyers

Flyers can be used effectively if the distribution points are carefully chosen. It is important to select places where the target group is expected to be. Flyers should be attractive and colourful and should give brief information that makes the reader want to know more about the organisation and the children. They could be published in several languages when targeting reception families with a specific cultural background. The flyers should be renewed on a regular basis by using a different lay-out or new colours to keep them attractive. They have to contain adequate and updated contact information for replying in the preferred way, like mail address, website or telephone.

### Information meetings

There are several possibilities for information meetings:

- interested groups within church communities or mosques;
- interested groups within NGOs;
- interested groups within migrant associations, schools, sports clubs, etc.

The meetings should target the groups determined in the recruiting plan. It is important to be very careful with regard to groups that have a (possibly extreme) political or religious interest. The meetings should be used to inform people in a realistic way on the issues of unaccompanied children and their needs, telling them about the importance of helping and about the support people can expect to receive from the organisation.

## Contact meetings for sharing information on taking care of unaccompanied children

Reception families can be asked to share their experiences and skills at a meeting with friends, family or neighbours who might be interested in becoming reception families. Another option is asking reception families to recruit other families.

## Social media

For recruitment via social media it is important to define the target group very precisely. Once a message is shared, it may reach a large group of people within Europe or even further. That may lead to an unexpected response, both in number and the kinds of reactions. A lot of this may be a waste of time. To avoid that happening, it might be worthwhile starting a social media campaign among people you know and instructing them to only spread the message among people or groups they know and within the range of the chosen environment. That way the scope of action can be limited. It is also important to give adequate information and say who you would and would not like to respond. It may be helpful to refer to the organisation's website and ask people to look at it properly before they apply.

### Examples:

The child's teacher can be asked to help find a reception family connected to the school. Sometimes it's possible to arrange a meeting between a child and a family without creating any expectations to see whether there is anything that may lead to a match. A child playing with a friend at the friend's home has been known to lead to the friend's parents taking on the care of the child.

An African boy living in a reception centre seemed somewhat isolated and confused and his guardian was looking for a suitable reception family. Attempts to match the boy with the families available were unsuccessful. When the boy started to visit an African mosque regularly, the guardian got in touch with the leaders of that faith community. They were asked to help look for a suitable reception family for the boy and did, in fact, find a nice family for him.

## 2.2.3 Which families to recruit: important characteristics for reception families

Whether the reception families used are indigenous or ethnic, related or non-related, what is most important is that the families want to meet the needs of the child. The general conditions to focus on while recruiting reception families are universal and described below.

### 1. Intercultural skills

Reception families for unaccompanied children need to be culturally sensitive, which means that they are sincerely interested in the child's background, habits and life in the home country, their current plans, and the plans and expectations of their parents or family. The reception families are expected to be aware of their own norms, values and codes of conduct, and to learn the (culturally-specific) norms, values and codes of conduct of the child, making a distinction between opinions and facts.

Cultural sensitivity is very important. It means that strange or baffling behaviour or habits will lead to conversation and questions rather than judgement and rejection.

Language skills are an important factor in recruitment and matching. Especially in the first months of a placement, communication between the child and the reception family is important. Misunderstandings may easily occur. If there is no match with the child's language, use of an interpreter is often necessary to explain things and to understand the child. The 'Three-step-method' in module 1, section 1.2.2, can be used to practise and improve intercultural communication skills.

## 2. Migration background

According to experiences in some European countries, taking care of unaccompanied children works out best in reception families with a migration background, preferably from the same or similar country of origin, or at least in families that have intercultural skills.

A background of migration makes people sensitive – even in the third generation after migration – to the effects of flight and resettlement of children who had to leave their family and homeland. Placement with people not necessarily from the same country of origin but at least with a migration background therefore has definite advantages. It seems obvious that children will benefit from the fact that they can feel safe in an environment where they are able to speak their own language and where they feel comfortable about the food, the smells and familiar habits. The ethnic reception family can be seen as a transitional space from which the child can step into the new environment and experience it, but can also refer to what they know and maintain their cultural identity. Reception families with a migration background are, of course, expected to be integrated in society and speak their new language reasonably well. Reception families should therefore have been living in the country for a period of at least two years, preferably longer.

The outcome of this kind of reception also seems to be better (compared to reception families without a migration background). To scientifically investigate this idea, a study was initiated in the Netherlands by the University of Groningen (Kalverboer et al., 2016).

## 3. Contact with the biological family

The reception family has to be interested in the biological family of the child and willing to try to give absent parents or family a place in the child's daily life. This should preferably lead to contact with family by telephone or social media. The family can then be informed about the well-being of the child and about the actual situation in the new country.

It is in the child's interests that their parents at home or elsewhere give them permission to stay with the reception family. A child wants to be loyal to their parents. It can be very helpful if the child's absent parents or other family can also be asked for advice in difficult situations or when choices have to be made. Involving absent parents or family makes the child feel supported, choices are easier to make, and the reception family can anticipate on what kind of parenting the child is used to. At the same time, the child's situation can be explained to the absent biological parents or family. They can be reassured about the well-being of the child in the new situation. And the parents can then help the child by giving them realistic expectations that will prevent emotional stress.

## 4. Pedagogical and nurturing skills

Reception families should have basic pedagogical and nurturing skills that fit the age-related needs of the child. But they will also have to take the child's background, life events and experiences into consideration in their approach. The family should have some experience with the age-related needs of the child, perhaps by having raised children of their own. All of this has to be investigated during the screening and should be monitored during the placement.

## 5. Sustainability

Placement sustainability is also an important issue when recruiting reception families. The recruitment plan should therefore also aim at recruiting different age groups that are suitable for taking care of different age groups of children. Moving children should be avoided as much as possible. It should also be the intention of the reception family to take care of the child until they turn 18, and preferably until the child has grown up. Nevertheless, recruitment of short-term families may often be useful, for instance for temporary placement of children who have asked for family reunification, or for children who are in need of emergency shelter.

## 6. Religion

The child has the right to practise their own religion and must feel free to do so. Religion can be very important for a good match between the reception family and the child. Children often feel supported by their religion and sharing the same religion with the reception family may be essential.

Organisations can expect from reception families that they support the child in their religious needs, and that they accept it when the child does not feel (the same or) any need for living a religious life. Religion may also be important to the absent parents, enabling them to accept the reception family taking care of their child.

## 7. Composition of the reception family

To ideally match the specific needs of a child, it is important that recruitment looks into the need for availability of reception families with a specific composition. For example, the age of the parents themselves (there is a minimum age of 21 for foster parents in all European countries) and the number of children and their ages.

Recruitment should also aim at having variety in the availability of families. These families must, however, always have an adequate level of integration in society and an acceptable financial situation.

### Good practise:

Reception families in the Netherlands should not have any serious debts, but living on benefits is not a problem.

Finally, it is also important that the whole family (including the children) agrees upon becoming a reception family for the unaccompanied child.

## 8. LGBT families

In many countries all over the world, the acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people is a taboo topic. Being LGBT is often seen as something that is chosen. Placement with LGBT reception families could generate the fear that the child may also choose to become LGBT. This can mean that the child's family will not support the placement, and may then lead to loyalty issues. Decisions on these kind of placements therefore have to be carefully considered and only made in cooperation with and agreement of the child and if possible their family.

## 2.3 SCREENING FAMILIES

### 2.3.1 Introduction

In cases of reception families, it is vitally important that the family offers the child a safe place where they can develop in the right way towards self-dependency and adulthood. Screening foster parents is a legal obligation in Europe. In almost all European situations, the law requires foster parents to agree to investigation that will lead to a 'certificate of good conduct'.

If the risk of child abuse is taken into account during reception family screening, any situation in which abuse could take place is recognised, thus preventing abuse. As well as knowledge of (factors of) the risk of child abuse, it is also important to be aware of protective factors against child abuse, because these may reduce or counterbalance the risk.

If the situation of an applicant reception family shows some risk factors and few protective factors, it does not mean that child abuse or domestic violence are bound to take place. In other words, factors of risk of child abuse do not necessarily have to stop applicants becoming a reception family, but do force professionals to clearly weigh up and discuss the risks and protective factors.

#### **Good practise:**

As the screening task entails great responsibility, screening is done in Germany (Süd-Niedersachsen), the Netherlands and Belgium by professional social workers who are trained specially to recruit and screen reception families. These social workers are also responsible for matching the children when they are signed up for placement in a related or non-related reception family.

### 2.3.2 Who and when to screen

#### **Screening related families**

If the child is already staying with kinship carers, or has re-entered the related family after a temporary interruption, the focus should be on continuity of the parenting situation, including continuation of the secure relationship between the child and the carer.

Screening will therefore focus on assessing whether that relationship and the parenting situation are sufficiently safe. Or at least, whether it is safe enough while the child waits for reunification with their biological parents, if reunification is foreseen. To be able to make this assessment, close observation of the interaction between the child and the family is an important source of information. The level of sensitivity of the carers and the responsiveness of the child, in particular, will provide information on the quality of the attachment. Besides this, there also has to be commitment regarding the placement – between the child, the reception family, absent family and the guardian.

If a related family being screened has not yet taken care of the child, continuity of the parenting situation does not yet play a role. But attachment, connection and ‘protective wrapping’ (see section 2.1.2.) may already exist, and the child’s interests with regard to being placed in their own network has to be part of the screening. The questions that need to be answered are the same as those in the situation described above. Though it may not yet be possible to include interaction and the quality of the attachment between child and carer in the screening, it will still be possible to include the way they talk about each other, how well they know each other, and an impression of their attachment. The commitment of all those involved is of equal importance in this situation.

A disadvantage of placement within a related family that has only recently settled in the new country may be the fact that they have not yet fully recovered from their own flight and may not yet be integrated in society. Family members are, however, frequently expected to take responsibility regardless of whether they are capable of doing so.

### **Good practice: Danish standard for supervision of reception in related families**

The Danish Red Cross has a ‘standard’ for supervision of reception of unaccompanied children in related families. The standard is meant to fulfil the vision of the Danish Red Cross that unaccompanied children are given the opportunity to reside in an appropriate socio-cultural and familiar environment during the first step in the application process.

In order to fulfil this vision, the Asylum Department has chosen a strategy where:

- unaccompanied children are accommodated, as often as possible, with relatives residing in the country, and at the same time it is decided whether this serves the child’s best interests;
- the accommodated children are offered the same services as the children and adolescents residing at the centres;
- the accommodated children’s social network is strengthened;
- the reception families are supported by regular advice and guidance, training and supervision.

The standard addresses a number of objectives that must be fulfilled in order to make sure that the accommodation is beneficial for the child, and that the child gets the support needed<sup>1</sup>.

### **Good practice: Danish interview for screening accompanying persons**

The Danish Red Cross uses a screening interview to talk to an accompanying relative of a child within the first two–three weeks after they have arrived in Denmark. The screening interview is conducted by two social workers/social coordinators from the accompanying persons’ team, an interpreter and any possible network of the accompanying relative.

The aim of the screening interview is to ensure a qualified clarification of whether the relationship with the accompanying relative seems to be long-standing and long-lasting. If so, the accompanying relative is accommodated at the centre currently designated for this purpose. If the relationship is not deemed to be long-lasting, the accompanying relative is offered accommodation at the Kongelunden asylum centre.

The screening interview thus forms the basis of the accompanying relative’s path through the asylum system and will eventually be included in the evaluation of the accompanying person<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> The standard mentioned can be found in annex 4.

<sup>2</sup> The interview mentioned can be found in annex 3.

## Screening non-related families

When a non-related family or person is found willing to take care of a child, it is important to investigate and ascertain whether they can meet all the conditions necessary for the child's development and a safe upbringing.

A screening method, developed according to laws and regulations, should roughly contain the following topics regarding candidate families:

- their general attitude towards fostering and taking care of unaccompanied children;
- their family situation and background;
- the safety within the family system and the sustainability of a placement.

When non-related families are screened, there will not yet be any attachment between the child and the family. Therefore, screening can be done using general questions which take the risk factors for child abuse and any potential protective factors into account.

A first assessment of the sensitivity of the carers can be made based on observations of their relationship with their own children. Furthermore, references should be requested, from the family doctor and child health centre, for example, and verified by interviewing teachers of the carers' own children, employers or the network around the family. An assessment of the sustainability of a placement is also of importance as it can be helpful for the matching process and for assessing whether a child can, if necessary, stay in the family until maturity. Issues like the sustainability of the relationship between the carers themselves as well as their emotional and physical health may be investigated.

## Complementary screening as a result of life events

Life events are radical changes in the living conditions of a person or within a family. They impact on their strength and may be hard to deal with. Life events may put parents or other family members in a situation in which their personal stability is affected and they start to behave unpredictably. This may lead to strong mood swings or even violent behaviour. On the other hand, they may seek comfort and affection from the children, both of which can lead to sexual abuse.

New circumstances in either a related family or a non-related family may require a complementary screening. This can evaluate their strength and coping strategies in the new situation and its effect on the safety of the child in the family and the sustainability of the placement.

In the life events mentioned below, a complementary screening ought to be done. The effect of the new circumstances on the balance of the family's capabilities and coping in relation to the needs of the child should be weighed up once more. Issues that justify a complementary screening are:

- changes of family composition (births, deaths or other family members joining the household);
- pregnancy of a family member;
- severe illness (physical or mental) of a family member;
- relationship or marital problems or divorce;
- loss of residence permit (the family and/or the child);
- threat of being deported or plans for the family's return to the home country;
- one of the carers becoming unemployed;
- severe financial problems;
- moving to another home;
- traumatic experiences within the family or affecting the child (accidents, sexual, physical or mental abuse, discrimination).

## 2.3.3 How to screen

Screening reception families for unaccompanied children is a task for social workers or other professionals specialised in foster care issues. They can develop a suitable screening tool. As in all screening tools used by mainstream foster care organisations, safety and the risk of sexual and other abuse are prominent issues. During screening for related families or if focusing on non-related families of ethnic origin, the 'family honour' concept has to be taken into account as well when looking at these issues.

### Good practice: the Dutch screening tool

Nidos has developed a screening tool in which, depending on the kind of placement and the existence of a relationship between the child and the family, different aspects are emphasised in the final consideration and described in terms of customised indicators. The screening is done by specialised social workers.

The tool<sup>3</sup> consists of a list of risk factors and instruments. They are scientifically based and need to be used carefully. For instance, a psychiatric disorder should only be scored when it is diagnosed by a psychiatrist, otherwise it would be nothing more than an assumption. Apart from CARE-NL<sup>4</sup>, the screening tool uses signs for honour-related violence and protective factors that come from a list called LIRIK<sup>5</sup>.

The risk and protective factors that have to be taken into account in the screening are:

- A. An assessment of the safety of the child within the family;
- B. An assessment of the risks of child abuse based on risk factors (CARE-NL), early signs of violence in controlling relationships (Movisie<sup>6</sup>) and protective factors (LIRIK);
- C. An assessment of the quality of the attachment in kinship placements;
- D. An assessment of the sustainability and long term prospects of the placement;
- E. Are there any contra-indications;
- F. Outcome of investigation and references;
- G. **Conclusion:** what is in the interests of the child, taking into account safety, continuity in their upbringing and the sustainability of the placement?

### Good practice:

In the event that the screening of a related family already taking care of a child has a negative outcome, the Nidos guardian involves a behavioural scientist in the decision to end the placement.

### Good practice: the Dutch screening process

Nidos describes the screening process in the procedure below. This can be used for both non-related families and related families. The family screening process can be spread over a number of meetings with the candidate reception family during a maximum period of two months.

<sup>3</sup> The complete tool can be found in annex 1.

<sup>4</sup> Child Abuse Risk Evaluation: CARE-NL, de Ruiter & de Jong (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Light Instrument for Risk Taxation of Child maltreatment: LIRIK, ten Berge & Eigenraam (2006).

<sup>6</sup> List of signals of honor-related violence, Movisie (2010).

## 1. The application

Candidate reception families mostly register by telephone. During this first conversation, some information on the organisation and reception in families can be shared, the social worker will explain the screening process and an appointment can be made. The family can be asked how they got to know about the organisation and what expectations they have. The first questions could be:

- How did you get to know about us?
- What makes you want to take care of unaccompanied children?
- What is the composition of your family?
- What is the ethnic background of your family?
- What languages do you speak?
- For children of what ages and gender would you be available?
- What is your home situation in general? (housing/spare rooms, employment, health)
- Do you have any serious financial debts?

Based on the above information, an information pack can be sent to the applicants, further questions can be answered or an appointment to start the screening procedure can be made.

## 2. First meeting: the intake

This is when the social worker meets the candidate family for the first time. It is advisable to plan this meeting so that all family members can be present. The family has already received extensive information on the organisation and reception in families. The screening process will now be explained and their motivation to become a reception family will be discussed.

The social worker will ask the candidate family to provide names of people who can give references (referees). The family will then sign a form in which they give the referees permission to provide the organisation with information. The social worker will also ask the candidate family (both non-related families and related families) to fill in a written request for a statement of no objection/certificate of good conduct.

The intake will start with questions on motivation, background and current situation of the family, their vision on raising a child and family characteristics.

The social worker will hand out the following documents to be discussed:

- the complaints procedure;
- information about legislation on personal registration;
- financial information.

## 3. Second meeting: the screening

It is advisable to plan this meeting without any children present, as it will take longer than the first meeting. The family will now be assessed on their suitability for reception and the social worker will talk to them about their family situation in more depth. The following will be addressed: questions resulting from the first meeting, motivation and expectations, and background information on the family that will enable a reliable judgement on their suitability for becoming a reception family. The focus will be on caring and pedagogical skills, requesting or accepting support in this, cultural sensitivity, nurturing and educational issues, safety, and gender-specific roles. Themes such as returning to the home country, contact with biological family here or abroad, and adoption will also be addressed.

## 4. Third meeting: screening outcomes

The draft report of the screening will be discussed with the carers. The organisation will explain the way matching and placement are done. The results of the screening will also be discussed with the family's referees. Their reactions or comments will be added to the report. Two copies of the final version of the report will be sent to the family later for them to sign. One of these will be their copy to keep, and the other copy will be added to the family's file at the organisation.

## 2.4 MATCHING AND PLACEMENT

### 2.4.1 Introduction

Although there are different methods for matching, they all take into consideration the effect of factors such as child characteristics, religious background, parenting style, family factors and composition, absent biological parents and environmental factors on the matching process. Matching is an important factor in the stability of a placement and should therefore be seen as a professional process that should not only be based on information from the child's file, but also on the profile of the reception family and the wishes of the biological parents, other relatives and the child themselves.

The involvement of one stable and objective third person during matching, placement and further guidance can prevent the child being caught in a conflict of loyalties. This should preferably be the guardian, but can also be a social worker specialised in foster care.

#### **Commitment**

The challenge of placing unaccompanied children in reception families calls for commitment from all those involved. To be more specific, from the child concerned, from their biological, but absent parents or head of the extended family, and from the reception family including their children and close relatives.

To make sure that commitments are realistic, it is important to hear and evaluate the expectations held by all those involved. On top of this, expectations that cannot be met should be known before the placement. There might, for example, be expectations regarding standard of living in the reception family or the family might expect something from the child that the child can't give. To ensure realistic commitment, the professional responsible for the match and the placement should therefore listen to everyone involved and make all of them understand what to expect. By doing that, the expectations can be evenly balanced.

The family should:

- be open to adjustment and cooperation;
- understand that the child is used to making their own decisions;
- understand a collective way of thinking (most relevant to non-ethnic families);
- understand the skills that the child has gained during their flight.

The child should:

- follow the house rules;
- help with tasks in the house;
- be cooperative with the family.

If involved, the biological parents or extended family should:

- help the child settle in at their new home by giving their consent;
- support the placement;
- accept the placement.

If there is no consent, but after weighing up all the arguments it does still seem to be in the child's interests for the guardian to persevere with a specific placement, it is important that it's made clear to the parents or extended family that it is not the child's decision. It will help if the child's biological family has had ample opportunity to give their considerations and advice to the guardian about the placement. Their solutions and the best options for placement must be taken very seriously. But in the end it is the guardian who takes the decision according to their duty as legal representative and protector of the child.

If there is not enough commitment anymore, mediation between the child, their family and the reception family is of vital importance to rebalance expectations.

## 2.4.2 Matching

Matching refers to the stage before actual placement of a child with a reception family. During this stage, a suitable reception family is being sought for a specific child. Matching is therefore mostly applicable to placements in non-related families. But for kinship placements it is also useful to check the match systematically, in order to confirm the match between child and family as well as the safety and sustainability of the placement.

During matching, as much information as possible on essential factors should be included, both concerning the child and the intended reception family. Comparison of these factors may indicate the suitability of a family, but may also be used to formulate issues that need attention during the placement. Apart from essential matching factors of a personal nature and on the social and financial situation of the family, practical issues should also be considered. For example, whether the child will still be able to keep their current network, school and contact with family or compatriots, and how well the child would fit in with the family's own children.

### 2.4.2.1 Matching methods

To develop a matching method for unaccompanied children, it may be useful to address their specific needs using parts (but not all) of the method used in the mainstream youth care system. On the basis of three theoretical approaches or models from the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK, matching can be looked at from the following perspectives:

- **Model for matching on variables**

This model distinguishes the following variables of children and foster parents: the child's history, the social and emotional development of the child, and the acceptance and style of parenting of the foster parents. These should be taken into consideration in the matching process and before the actual placement (van Dam, Nordkamp, & Robbroeckx, 2000).

- **Model for matching on types of children and foster parents**

This model assumes that there could be a subdivision of different types of children and different types of foster parents. This way, a range of different features can be compared and taken into consideration in the matching process (De Maeyer, Vanderfaeillie, Van Holen, Van Schoonlandt, & Leconte, 2013).

- **Model for matching on the behaviour of foster parents in interaction with the behaviour of the child**

This model endorses the concern of gaining enough insight into the daily behaviour and competences of the child compared to the daily behaviour and competences of the foster parents, to be able to make an optimal match (Street & Davies, 1999).

## Developing a matching method

The above-mentioned methods (or combinations of them) are useful for developing matching methods. But the required information on the unaccompanied child is often not available, so will have to be gained in most cases from the child themselves. If possible, the child's parents or family abroad or any other relatives should be approached to get more information to enable the matching.

### Good practice: Dutch matching method

So far, only Nidos has developed a matching method<sup>7</sup>. JSN matches on some minimal criteria like age, language and family composition, if there is the possibility of a choice at all. In its work over a period of years, Nidos has learned that other important factors for a good match are the child and their family's own agenda and/or the instructions given to the child by the family. This calls for professional curiosity about the child's thoughts and the family's expectations in order to involve them in the matching process.

## Child factors in general

Factors concerning the child that should be taken into account are cognitive development, coping behaviour, psychological and emotional development, social development, physical development and health, (age-appropriate) self dependency, behaviour, motivation, prior experiences with placements, the child's expectations, and special needs.

Regarding age appropriateness, it is good to realise that the ages of unaccompanied children are not always correct. They sometimes simply don't know their own age or are told by flight 'guides' that giving another age will be to their advantage.

Situational factors are the possibility of obtaining a residence permit, the relationship with the candidate reception family, long-term prospects of placement (with regard to family reunification), former placements, the role of the absent parents or family, siblings to be placed in family care, and inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by the child.

## Reception family factors in general

Factors concerning the reception family that should be taken into account are pedagogical skills, nurturing skills, capacity to offer security, sensitivity, cultural added value, ability to support the child's ambitions, degree of integration, family composition, stable family life /life events, family motivation (including that of their own children), sustainability that can be offered, ability to make the child feel free, expectations regarding the child, and their motivation to involve biological parents or family.

## Related family

Placement in a related family is the first possibility to be considered if available.

In the case of unaccompanied children, kinship placement might have been part of the original plan the parents or family made before the flight from the home country. Quite often, children and kinship families have found

---

<sup>7</sup> The Dutch Matching Form can be found in annex 2.

each other and already live together before any official has noticed the absence of the child's parents. Even if a biological family does not at all agree with the related family being screened, the family's suitability for taking care of the child should still be looked at. In doing so, the most important matching criteria are taken into account. In this situation, matching focuses on weighing up matching factors and screening outcome against the family bond and vision, as well as the wishes of the child, reception family and absent parents. During related family screening, it is necessary to check their motivation thoroughly, and not simply assume that people will help anyway because they are family. It may occur that a family has accepted the task of taking care of a family member against their will. If that is the case, deciding against a placement must be considered. The biological parents should then be told that you have come to the conclusion that the situation is not the most suitable but this is not the fault of the related family.

## Important knowledge for matching with ethnic families

If the child is to be matched with a family of the same or a close cultural background, it is important to consider the religious background of the child and the reception family.

It may also be of importance to consider the background of the child and the family in terms of clan/ tribe of origin. And refugees from areas of war may not match with certain political groups. In this regard, it is important to pay attention to the motivation for taking the child in: what does the family expect?

### 2.4.2.2 The matching process itself

There are several possible starting points for matching unaccompanied children. A child may have just arrived in the country, may have stayed in a reception centre for a shorter or longer period of time, or may have stayed with a short-stay reception family.

When the child is in a safe and stable situation, there should be enough time for a thorough investigation of all needs and child factors, while working through the matching process. If this is not the case, a temporary placement with a specially selected reception family for short-stay reception may be considered.

Sometimes a child arrives with family that takes care of the child spontaneously, or has been asked to do so by the parents or family abroad. After screening a situation like that, it is wise to apply a matching model to check whether the placement is safe and sustainable.

#### Good practice:

In the Netherlands, all unaccompanied children arrive at a centre for registration and application.

Sometimes they arrive with relatives. After the registration and application formalities, a Nidos guardian talks to the child and their family about the best place for the child to stay. If the guardian sees nothing other than affection and a warm relationship, the child will be sent to stay with these relatives. Nidos does an initial safety check at the relatives' home as soon as possible within a maximum of five days (legal obligation). The living conditions and personal situation of the relatives are investigated, and the child's safety with the family is assessed.

If a child up to 14 years old arrives at the application centre on their own, they are placed temporarily with a short-stay reception family living close to the centre directly after being registered. They stay there for only a few days, to give the guardian time to either find and investigate possibilities for kinship placement, if there are relatives in the country, or allows time for finding the best match in a non-related reception family somewhere in the country. Families from different cultural backgrounds who speak different languages are specially recruited for this temporary reception and are prepared to take a child at any time of the day or night.

Although matching is supposed to be done before actual placement begins, situations exist in which matching will be done after the arrival of the child within a related family. In these cases, matching will be the third step in the following process:

- a safety check within five days after the notification that an unaccompanied child has arrived at a related family;
- screening the family within three months after the arrival of the child in the family;
- matching as soon as the screening report has been finished.

At the end of the process, the strengths and weaknesses of the match will have been determined, expectations will have been made clear to all those involved, and there will be a clear picture of the issues to be addressed.

## Consultation and commitment of the absent parents or family

The extent to which biological parents or family members who are important to the child agree with the placement in a reception family has an effect on the stability and sustainability of the placement. Their disagreement will most likely provoke a loyalty conflict. And even the slightest negative tone in communication between biological parents or family and the reception family may cause instability.

If possible, communication between the guardian/social worker and the biological parents or family should take place with the help of an interpreter. It can also be helpful to ask a 'key figure' to support the communication and talk to the biological family. This 'key figure' has to be a member of a cultural or ethnic group that is well integrated in the new society. He or she can help with analysing the problems with regard to cultural differences and can mediate or advise in conflicting issues. This person can also operate as a cultural mediator in finding the most important person in the family who can give permission, or from whom commitment should be gained. This could be the father, the mother or – more likely – the grandfather, grandmother or even a headman of the tribe or a priest.

### An example:

Qasim became an orphan when he was only a baby and was taken in by his uncle – his father's brother. The family emigrated to the Netherlands. At the age of 10, Qasim was placed with another uncle because the family who had taken him in was going to live in the UK and Qasim couldn't join them because he didn't have the Dutch nationality. It soon became obvious that this uncle wasn't capable of raising Qasim. He had neither the time nor the possibility to take care of the young boy. When the guardian wanted to place the boy in another family, the uncle got very upset and did not agree. Discussions about the situation led to new agreements. Then the boy ran away and the guardian talked to the uncle again. He asked him why he didn't want to cooperate in finding another solution for Qasim. The uncle then explained that he had promised the family to take care of Qasim, that the boy was expected to keep in touch with his family in Afghanistan, and that they expected him to support them financially in the future. For these reasons the uncle could not agree to another solution for the boy. He wanted Qasim to come back to him and behave. The guardian now understood that the uncle was acting under pressure from the family, and asked the uncle if he would agree with another solution for Qasim if the family would also accept that. The uncle asked for the grandfather in Kabul and the uncle in the UK to be involved as they had to decide what to do. The guardian invited the uncle to come over to the Netherlands from the UK to help find the best solution for Qasim. As the uncle could not come over himself, he sent his wife. During a family consultation by phone with the uncle, the aunt and the grandfather in Kabul, it was decided that Qasim could not stay with the uncle. An older cousin and his wife were prepared to take care of Qasim.

## Presenting the child to the reception family

Before presenting the child to a family, the guardian/social worker responsible should make a list of all available matches in the child's current environment. The degree to which the environment in which the match will be made should be taken into account depends on the attachment of the child to their current network. School and friends are important factors to take into consideration.

It is worth looking at possible matches with families that come from the same or a very similar ethnic background as the child. If such family is not available, an unaccompanied child could benefit from placement in a family with a similar cultural background or a family with a migration background. Factors like languages spoken in the family and their own experience as a refugee and integrating in a new environment are also helpful.

All child factors and reception family factors are compared and weighted. Critical factors may mean that a matching does not go ahead, or that special issues are identified that may need extra attention or guidance.

The next step is to present the child to a family that is believed to be the best match. The family should have received all the information that is relevant to give them the right impression of who it is that they are going to be taking care of.

## Presenting the reception family to the child

If the family that is believed to be the most suitable match agrees with the placement, the guardian/social worker has to inform the child about the family, explain the factors that are likely to be of interest to the child, and answer any questions the child may have as well as possible. The child should be given an age-appropriate role in making a plan for getting to know each other before the placement begins. The role of the guardian/social worker is very important in this.

## Try-out process

The wishes of the child and the candidate reception family are carefully brought together in a 'try-out' process. Questions, remarks and suggestions should be shared with all involved after every step in the process. These will be taken into consideration during the next steps.

This is a "tailor-made" process that should eventually lead to effective decision-making. It has to be guided by the guardian/social worker. The length of each stage in the try-out process may vary, depending on the child's situation, their motivation and their way of coping with the process, plus the urgency of the need for a better kind of reception. It is good to be aware of the fact that children from some cultural backgrounds have learned to respect adults and be grateful for any help. These children will therefore not find it easy to give their real opinion if it is a negative one.

## 2.4.3 Placement

The placement has to be carefully prepared. The child may, for example, have to leave behind people and friends who they trust. To prevent new scars or traumas, farewells need to be made properly and important bonds should, if possible, be maintained.

Practical issues that have to be arranged vary from ending membership of a sports club to ensuring continuity in medical treatment. Giving the child and the reception family a role in these practical matters, before the placement begins, can be very helpful in building mutual confidence. One option is letting the reception family take the child to school.

## Evaluation

An evaluation with both the reception family and the child (separately and together) should be held after approximately six weeks.

Until this evaluation, there should be frequent contact with the family and the child, so that matters can be solved before they become real problems or misunderstandings. During the first few days of the placement, this will occur several times. If necessary, an interpreter or key figure could help with this evaluative contact.

The evaluation after six weeks focuses on practical issues as well as the well-being of the child and solving any problems or misunderstandings. If the family and the child need more guidance, or the child or the placement are particularly vulnerable, extra evaluations could be scheduled between the six-week evaluation and a yearly evaluation.

### Good practice:

The Danish Red Cross evaluates placement in a related family as follows:

- one visit before the match is made and the child moves in;
- evaluation visit after six weeks;
- after that, visits with three-month intervals unless there are special needs.

There is also frequent telephone contact with both the family/relatives and the child as well as with external partners, including school. On top of this, there is regular contact with the child via SMS and Facebook. Finally, there are networking activities for children living with related families, including an annual three-day trip with social activities.

## Guidance for the child and the reception family

In most European countries, guiding and supervising the reception family and the child is done by one and the same social worker. There are specific aspects regarding the child, the reception family and the risk of child abuse that need special attention from the social worker. These aspects are mentioned below.

Regarding the child:

- be alert to signs of developmental problems;
- offer psycho-education for the psychological problems involved, threats to the child's development, and the tasks an unaccompanied child has to perform;
- advise on how to deal with the problems;
- advise on how to promote attachment and resilience;
- bridge the gap to professional psychological guidance if necessary.

Regarding the reception family:

- be alert to signs of imbalance between the burden on the family and their capacity to cope;
- be alert to signs of imbalance between distance and closeness in the reception family's relationship with the child;
- give advice and support for encouraging contact between the child and their biological parents or family;
- explain the legal procedure of the asylum application;
- give support for dealing with uncertainty with regard to obtaining a residence permit;
- advise on raising children between two cultures;
- advise on parenting problems.

## Good practices on guidance:

Nidos invites reception families to coffee meetings and World Cafés<sup>8</sup> on a regular basis. Here the families are asked for their feedback on the guidance given to them and the children by the guardians. During the meetings, several issues can be discussed, such as the need for support, cultural differences in raising children, parenting, sharing good practices, and life as an asylum seeker or migrant.

JSN arranges meetings five times a year for reception families only. During these meetings, the families can share experiences and get information. Sometimes there are speakers who give information or a lecture on trauma, relationships, education or work.

Besides this, families receive coaching on specific problems in five to-six sessions a year from an external coach. JSN has found that just listening to the problems of other reception families and having the opportunity to share your own problems with other families is a great help.

JSN has had good results with 'experiential pedagogy' (*'Erlebnispädagogik'*), taking reception families and children on, for example, a high ropes course. This made the children physically stronger while strengthening the bonds between the people in the group.

JSN also celebrates special holidays together with families and children (for example, Christmas for the Eritrean children and Nowruz for the Afghan and Kurdish children).

## Risk of child abuse

There are several signs that could indicate child abuse. The following situations should be seen by the social worker as warning signs that something might be wrong:

- older children correcting (sometimes excessively) the behaviour of younger children (imitating parents);
- requests for passports or travel permits for girls from at-risk groups (for FGM, honour-related violence, forced marriage);
- holidays to countries where FGM often occurs;
- the reception family shows little or no interest in the child but has many demands;
- the child suddenly has expensive things (telephone/clothes);
- signs that the child has damaged the family honour, with what the reception family calls 'very indecent behaviour';
- being absent from school on a regular basis;
- unequal position of the child compared to other children in the family.

## Risks of breakdown

One of the most frequent reasons for breakdowns when children are placed out of the home in regular foster care is daily conflict between the foster child and the foster parents (Oort, 2010).

Nidos has not found that daily conflict causes breakdowns. What can be a source of conflict, though, is how much freedom adolescents want and get. This can play a specific role in a related family. These families feel responsible for protecting the 'honour' of the child and their biological family, allowing them less freedom than the child feels is acceptable.

---

<sup>8</sup> See for more information on this method: <http://www.theworldcafe.com>.

Early breakdowns are caused by the lack of a good match between the child and the reception family, wrong expectations (sometimes caused by cultural differences), and the child's biological family not supporting the placement.

Life events in the reception family can also damage the balance between the reception family's strength and burden on the family. Events such as the death of a family member, arrival of a new family member, concern about the financial situation, unemployment, divorce, illness or the unaccompanied child not receiving a residence permit.

To prevent breakdowns it is important to:

- give the family and the child time to get properly acquainted and see if it is a good match;
- take the time to discuss the expectations of the child and the reception family;
- involve the child's biological family in the placement and ask for their 'permission';
- evaluate the placement after a short period of time, and end it if it is a mismatch or there are differences in expectations;
- be alert to and discuss behaviour by the child that could damage the family honour;
- keep an eye on the balance between the reception family's strength and the burden on the family and the impact of new life events on this.

## An example: Dutch model for reception in families

Phase	(Counselling) Process	Theory, Practice, Methods	Activities / Instruments
Recruit families and maintain contact	Recruit families	Site-specific; social networking; presentations; intercultural approach	Trace key figures; establish contact; arrange information meetings
	Maintain and strengthen contact with families	Connect with motivation, questions and expectations of families	Organise contact meetings and parenting education
Screen candidate families	Investigate family suitability	Culturally sensitive approach to contact with candidate families (Pinto three-step method)	Home visits; list of important issues for intake meeting; full screening questionnaire
Child's application for reception in families	Inform and prepare child for reception in families	Connect with motivation, questions and expectations of the child	Complete application form
Match child with family and placement	Establish process for introductions	Systematic approach	Child visits home of candidate family; consultation between guardian and social worker; involve biological family/child's network
Guidance for child and family during placement	"Protective wrapping"	Work with 'family continuity'	Use diary; ecogram and genogram
	Strengthen parenting skills of family in interests of child	Goal-driven approach; improve transitional environment	Parenting education; home visits
	Monitor child's safety	Goal-driven approach	CARE-NL; LIRIK, Movisie list of signals of honor-related violence
	Strengthen social network of family and child, focusing on development of child's prospects	Goal-driven approach	Diary
Evaluation	Monitor development and safety of child; monitor welfare and capacity of parenting system	Goal-driven approach	Home visits; standard evaluation forms
End placement	Evaluation	Strengthen relationship with organisation	Complete standard form
Aftercare	Interview family		Home visit





# REFERENCES

- Arkesteijn, P. (2015). *Culturally matched families. A study on placing unaccompanied asylum seeking children into culturally matched families.* (Masterthesis, University of Groningen).
- Bagozzi, R.P., Verbeke, W., & Gavino, J.C. (2003, April). Culture moderates the self-regulation of shame and its effects on performance: The case of salespersons in the Netherlands and the Philippines. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(2), 219-233.
- Bean, T.M. (2006). *Assessing the psychological distress and mental healthcare needs of unaccompanied refugee minors in the Netherlands.* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Leiden). Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/dm7lWb>
- Bean, T., Derluyn, I., Eurelings-Bontekoe, L., Broekaert, E., & Spinhoven, P. (2007, April). Comparing psychological distress, traumatic stress reactions, and experiences of unaccompanied refugee minors with experiences of adolescents accompanied by parents. *The journal of nervous and mental disease*, 195(4), 288-297.
- Bedford, O.A., & Hwang, K.K. (2003). Guilt and shame in Chinese culture: A cross-cultural frame work from the perspective of morality and identity. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 33(2), 127-144.
- Berry, J.W. (1990). Psychology of acculturation. Understanding individuals moving between cultures. *Applied cross-cultural psychology*, 232-253.
- Bronstein, I., Montgomery, P., & Dobrowski, S. (2012). PTSD in Asylum-Seeking Male Adolescents From Afghanistan. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 25(5), 551-557.
- Carlson, B.E., Cacciatore, J., & Klimek, B. (2012). A risk and resilience perspective on unaccompanied refugee minors, *Social Work*, 57.3, 259-269.
- De Maeyer, S., Vanderfaeillie, J., Van Holen F., Vanschoonlandt, F., & Leconte, L. (2013). De vragenlijst beoordeling pleegzorgsituaties (VBPS): een instrument ter ondersteuning van het matchingproces in pleegzorg: een pilootonderzoek. *Orthopedagogiek: onderzoek en praktijk*, 52, 17-32.
- de Ruiter, C., & de Jong, E.M. (2006). Child Abuse Risk Evaluation-NL (CARE-NL). Retrieved from: <http://www.corinederuiter.eu/risk.php>
- de Ruijter de Wildt, L., Melin, E., Ishola, P., Dolby, P., van de Pol, P. & Murk, J. (2015, February). *Reception and Living in Families: Overview of family-based reception for unaccompanied minors in the EU Member States.* Utrecht, the Netherlands: Nidos, SALAR, CHTB.
- Derluyn, I., & Broekaert, E. (2008). Unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents: The glaring contrast between a legal and a psychological perspective. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 31(4), 319-330.
- Derluyn, I, Wille, B., De Smet, T., & Broekaert, E. (2005). *Op weg. Psychosociale en therapeutische begeleiding van niet-begeleide buitenlandse minderjarigen.* Antwerpen – Apeldoorn: Garant.
- de Wolff, M., Dekker-van der Sande, F., Sterkenburg, P., & Thoomes-Vreugdenhil, A. (2015). *Problematische gehechtheid voor jeugdhulp en jeugdbescherming.* Leiden, the Netherlands: TNO Child Health. Retrieved from: <http://goo.gl/McZm2a>
- European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (2016, January). *Safety and fundamental rights at stake for children on the move.* Retrieved from: <http://goo.gl/wybhtM>
- Fazel, M., Reed, R.V., Panter-Brick, C., & Stein, A. (2012). Mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in high-income countries: risk and protective factors. *The Lancet*, 379(9812), 266-282.
- Geltman, P.L., Grant-Knight, W., Mehta, S.D., Lloyd-Travaglini, C., Lustig, S., Landgraf, J. M., & Wise, P.H. (2005, June). The “lost boys of Sudan”: functional and behavioural health of unaccompanied refugee minors re-settled in the United States. *The Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 159(6), 585-591.
- Hodes, M., Jagdev, D., Chandra, N., & Cunniff, A. (2008, July). Risk and resilience for psychological distress amongst unaccompanied asylum seeking adolescents. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49(7), 723-732.
- Huybrechts, A. (2009). Interculturele psychotherapeutische ontmoetingen. *Systeemtheoretisch Bulletin*, 27(1), 5-25.
- Janssen, J. (2006). *Je eer of je leven, een verkenning van eorzaken voor politieambtenaren en andere professionals.* The Hague, the Netherlands: Elsevier.
- Jessurun, N. (2008). *Handboek Systeemtherapie, Migratie, hoofdstuk 44.* Utrecht, the Netherlands: De Tijdstroom.

- Kalverboer, M.E., & Zijlstra, A.E. (2006). *Asielzoekers kinderen en het recht op ontwikkeling: het belang van het kind in het vreemdelingenrecht*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: SWP.
- Kalverboer, M., Zijlstra, E., van Os, C., Zevulun, D., ten Brummelaar, M., & Beltman, D. (2016, February). Unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands and the care facility in which they flourish best. *Child and Family Social Work*, 1365-2206.
- Kouratovsky, V. (2008). *Cultuursensitieve diagnostiek en therapie*. In T.I.Oei en L.Kaiser; *Forensische psychiatrie onderweg*, 371-385. Nijmegen, the Netherlands: World Legal Publishers.
- Luthar, S.S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000, May). The Construct of Resilience: A Critical Evaluation and Guidelines for Future Work. *Child Development* 71(3), 543-562.
- Masten, A.S. (2001, March). Ordinary magic. Resilience processes in development. *The American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227-38.
- Movisie 2010. Signalenlijst huiselijk geweld. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/WEZf8g>
- Ní Raghallaigh, M. (2011). Religion in the Lives of Unaccompanied Minors: An Available and Compelling Coping Resource. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41(3), 539-556.
- Ní Raghallaigh, M., & Gilligan, R. (2010, January). Active survival in the lives of unaccompanied minors: coping strategies, resilience, and the relevance of religion. *Child and Family Social Work*, 15(2): 226-237.
- Oort, F.J. (2010). Het ondersteunen van pleeggezinnen met een hoog risico op ongewenste beëindiging van de plaatsing. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/zz23dm>
- Pharos (2009). Kennisdocument kindermishandeling. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/ICozUx>
- Pinto, D. (2007). *Interculturele communicatie, een stap verder*. Houten, the Netherlands: Bohn Stafleu van Lochem.
- Plysier, S. (2003). *Kinderen met een tweede huid. Onthaal van kinderen op de vlucht*. Antwerpen, Belgium: Garant-Uitgevers.
- Prins, P., & Braet, C. (2014). *Handboek klinische ontwikkelingspsychologie*. Houten, the Netherlands: Bohn Stafleu van Loghum.
- Reed, V.R., Fazel, M., Jones, L., Panter-Brick, C., & Stein, A. (2012). Mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in low-income and middle-income countries: risk and protective factors. *The Lancet*, 379(9812), 266-282.
- Sökefeld, M. (2006, July). Mobilizing in transnational space; a social movement approach to the formation of diaspora. *Global networks*, 6(3), 265-284.
- Spinder, S., & van Hout, A. (2008). *Jong en Onderweg: Nidosmethodiek voor de begeleiding van ama's*. Utrecht, the Netherlands: Stichting Nidos.
- Spinder, S., van Hout, A., & Hesser, K. (2010). *Thuis en Onderweg: Nidosmethodiek voor Opvang en Wonen in Gezinsverband*. Utrecht, the Netherlands: Stichting Nidos.
- Street, E., & Davies, M. (1999). Assessing and matching foster care relationships: an international framework. *Adoption and Fostering*, 23(2), 31-41.
- ten Berge, I.J., & Eigenraam, K. (2009). *Licht Instrument Risicotaxatie Kindermishandeling*. Utrecht: Nederlands Jeugdinstituut.
- Tjin A Djie, K., & Zwaan, I. (2007). *Beschermjassen: transculturele hulp aan families*. Netherlands. Assen, the Netherlands: van Gorcum.
- Turnell, A., & Edwards, A. (1999). *Signs of Safety: A Solution and Safety Oriented Approach to Child Protection Casework*. United States: WWNorton & Co.
- van Alphen, M.F. (2008). *De Rol van Schaamte bij Herstelgericht Werken*. Lelystad, the Netherlands: Inspiration Press.
- van Dam, W., Nordkamp, S., & Robbroeckx, L. (2000). *Passen en meten in de pleegzorg, plaatsingsmethodiek nader onderzocht, literatuurstudie en model ontwikkeling*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: SWP.
- van der Veer, G. (1996). *Voogdijmaatschappelijk werk en gevluchte adolescenten*. Utrecht, the Netherlands: De Opbouw.
- van der Veer, G. (2002). *Gevluchte adolescenten: ontwikkeling, begeleiding en hulpverlening*. Utrecht, the Netherlands: Pharos.
- van Ijzendoorn, M.H. (2008), *Opvoeding over de grens, gehechtheid, trauma en veerkracht*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Boom Academic.
- Vervliet, M., Meyer Demott, M.A., Jakobsen, M., Broekaert, E., Heir, T., & Derluyn, I. (2014, February). The mental health of unaccompanied refugee minors on arrival in the host country. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 55(1), 33-37.
- Walsh, F. (2002, April). A Family Resilience Framework: Innovative Practice Applications. *Family Relations*, 51(2), 130-137.

# DUTCH SCREENING TOOL FOR ASSESSING RECEPTION FAMILIES

---

This screening tool is used for assessing the suitability of aspirant reception families. The tool consists of different parts in which, depending on the kind of placement and the existence of a relationship between the child and the family, different accents may be emphasized in the final consideration.

## **Part I:** Item list with questions that have to be asked

### **1. Offer<sup>1</sup>**

- age
- gender
- nationality
- preference kind of reception (short term, long term)
- number of places

### **2. Family situation**

- current situation
- opinion of other family members towards taking the child in
- network; friends, family, neighbors (expected reaction on the child)
- visitors, other inhabitants and over-night guests
- frequent contact with other persons
- physical and psychological health
- experience in hosting children (professional or within family/circle of friends)
- recent big changes in the family and if so, what was their impact on the family

### **3. Education and profession**

- source of income
- potential debts
- education of the family members
- profession of the family members
- working hours
- day care (possibilities)

---

<sup>1</sup> Only specific offer when kinship placement.

#### **4. Hobby's and leisure activities**

- hobby's family members
- ideas concerning the importance of sports and hobby's for the child

#### **5. Living circumstances**

- sufficient presence of the carers
- description home and neighborhood
- safety home and safety regarding to traffic
- available room / place for the child
- play area if relevant
- provisions such as schools, shops, clubs and a library
- accessibility by public transport

#### **6. Views towards upbringing and safety**

##### **A. Own upbringing**

- How were you raised yourself?
- What did your parents intent to learn to you in their upbringing?
- How do you judge your upbringing?
- How did you got to know your partner? Was this an arranged situation?
- How did your children got to know their partners? Was this arranged?
- At what age did you marry?
- What was your own family situation when you were a child?
- What were your parents like?
- What would you do differently?
- What do you like about your own childhood?
- How is the contact with your family?

##### **B. Views towards upbringing**

- What do you consider important in upbringing (values and standards) and how do you achieve these? For example, how do you want the child to address you?
- How do you cooperate as reception parents: who is responsible for what tasks concerning housekeeping and caring for the child?
- In which matters do children in your family have a say or not?
- What would you do when a child misbehaves?

##### **C. Upbringing skills**

- What do you find difficult to handle?
- What do you consider as unacceptable behavior?
- What do you find difficult in raising your own children?
- What would you think about support on upbringing for a child with problematic behavior?
- Which rules would you apply?
- In which way do you apply rules?
- What do you do if a child does not follow the rules? (ability to negotiate?)
- Is it important to you to explain the rules and how do you explain them?
- How do your correct a child?

- How do you stimulate a child?
- How does an argument proceed within your family?
- Does violence occur within your family and if so, how does it proceed?
- How do you know what your child thinks and feels? (sensitivity)
- Suppose that your child would start smoking or does not want to wear headscarf anymore and your compatriots make remarks about it, how would you deal with this?

#### **D. Sexuality**

- What do you think about erotic / provocative behavior of the child and how would you deal with it?
- What's your opinion about homosexuality and what would it mean if a child placed in your family turns out to be homosexual?
- In which way do you give attention to sexuality in the upbringing?

#### **E. Safety and risk factors**

Child abuse is 'each for a child threatening or violent interaction of physical, psychological or sexual nature that parents or other persons that the child is dependent on actively or passively impose, that causes or may cause severe physical or psychological damage to the child'

It is known from science that there are factors that enlarge the risk on child abuse.

This is why Nidos asks the following questions:

- Have you been victim of child abuse yourselves?
- Did it happen that children in your family were beaten and how did this occur?
- Is child abuse minimalised or denied?
- Does 1 of the family members have a (several) mental disorder, is there a diagnose and treatment?
- Does a family member have suicidal or murderous thoughts?
- Are there problems with the use of medicine ( medication, drugs and/or alcohol)?
- Is er bij uw gezin sprake van persoonlijkheidsstoornis gekenmerkt door boosheid, impulsiviteit of instabiliteit?

### **7. Religion**

- Own perception of religion and daily interpretation
- In which way does religion influence the motivation to take care of a child?
- Membership of a church / religious community and which rituals does this implicate?
- How do you deal with children with another religion? How does this fit in to your way of living?
- What's your opinion on habits and rituals that come with certain religions, such as fasting, having an altar, going to Mosque or having a special diet?

### **8. Motivation**

- Why did you apply?
- What are your expectations of the child/the placement:
  - wish to have a child
  - company for only child
  - financial reason
  - social worker motives
  - abuse of child as babysitter/ kitchen help

- religious considerations
- combination of motivation and life events (empty nest, loss child, divorce, loneliness)

### **Kinship placement**

- Why do you prefer to do this?
- What happens if you refuse?
- What happens if we do not place the child within your family? (apologise)

## **9. Insight in and dealing with cultural differences**

- Cultural differences: experiences with other cultures, attitude towards other cultures, in how far should a child adapt themselves, in how far are you prepared to adapt yourself, how do you bridge differences (also between kinship families, tribes, etc.)
- What's your opinion on 'secrets' that children have and how do you deal with them?
- What do you think about your reception child behaving differently from your own children?

## **10. Questions and signals related to honor issues**

- Are there differences within your family as to what boys and girls are allowed? If so, which are these differences?
- Are there things that are respected from you in your culture that you personally not approve of? (for example circumcision of boys and girls and arranged marriages)

## **11. Impression of social worker themselves**

- suitability to receive guidance
- openness
- flexibility
- engagement (distance-proximity)
- ability to let go and attach
- closed family structure
- rigiditeit
- cooperation with Nidos and potentially family of the child

## **12. Points of attention**

- particular medical details of the family with regard to health, is a handicap a problem, what if the child falls ill
- pets
- particular details on living circumstances
- attitude towards uncertain future perspective/return
- holidays, both national and abroad (potential reception if child can't join the family)
- attitude towards sexuality, erotic behavior,
- Aids/HIV/Hepatitis (no standard testing, only if there is a medical indication based on current medical views/ directives . Nidos has an active policy, especially concerning teen-age mums)
- circumcision (ethnic, religious, esthetic or hygienic arguments are no reason for accepting circumcision of boys who are under guardianship of Nidos)
- adoption/ perspective of obtaining a residence permit
- own integration /assimilation/place in Dutch society

## Part II: Decision instant

If the **child is already staying with a related family** (kinship carers), or has re-entered the related family after a temporary interruption, the focus should be on continuity of the parenting situation, including continuation of the secure relationship between the child and the carer.

Screening will therefore focus on assessing whether that relationship and the parenting situation are sufficiently safe. Or at least, whether it is safe enough while the child waits for reunification with their biological parents, if reunification is foreseen. To be able to make this assessment, close observation of the interaction between the child and the family is an important source of information. The level of sensitivity of the carers and the responsiveness of the child, in particular, will provide information on the quality of the attachment.

If a **related family being screened has not yet taken care of the child**, continuity of the parenting situation does not yet play a role. But attachment, connection and ‘protective wrapping’ may already exist, and the child’s interests with regard to being placed in their own network has to be part of the screening. The questions that need to be answered are the same as those in the situation described above. Though it may not yet be possible to include interaction and the quality of the attachment between child and carer in the screening, it will still be possible to include the way they talk about each other, how well they know each other, and an impression of their attachment. The commitment of all those involved is of equal importance in this situation.

When **non-related families** are screened, there will not yet be any attachment between the child and the family. Therefore, screening can be done using general questions which take the risk factors for child abuse and any potential protective factors into account. A first assessment of the sensitivity of the carers can be made based on observations of their relationship with their own children. An assessment of the sustainability of a placement is also of importance as it can be helpful for the matching process and for assessing whether a child can, if necessary, stay in the family until maturity.

In order to make a decision on the placement it is important to:

- weigh all the arguments gathered above (include the difference between a related family placement and placement in a family that is new to the child), and
- score A-F from the list below (based on the risk of child abuse)

### **A. Estimation of the safety of the child within the family**

### **B. Estimation of the risks on child abuse based on risk factors (CARE), the list of signals on early signaling in dependency relations (Movisie) and protecting factors (LIRIK):**

- Negative attitude towards help and intervention, also regarding the own problems
- Negative attitude towards the child, risk on Cinderella position
- Problems in interaction between adult(s) and child(ren)
- Family stressors
- Social-economical stressors
- Insufficient social support
- Violent parenting
- Relational violence
- Cultural influences
- Sectarian religion or religious pressure
- Understanding of the role and position of the guardian
- Honor related risks
- Inconsequent moral standards

- Lack of communication at home
- Gossip about the family within the society
- Gossip by the family about family
- Loss of one of the parents
- Former missing of family members
- Sudden move or disappearance
- Intensive contacts with family abroad or sudden traveling to family / family council
- Former reporting of domestic violence
- Abuse or disturbance on the address of the family
- Overprotection or hiding a child
- Defensive attitude towards organizations, authorities or police

**C. Estimation of the quality of the attachment in kinship placements:**

- Weigh the family relation, affection and durability of the relation that family and child had so far
- How do they speak of each other, characterize each other?
- Would there be disproportional pressure from other family on the placement?

**D. Estimation of the durability and the long term perspective of the placement:**

- Are the parents healthy?
- Is the age of the family in proportional relation to the age of the child to be able to adequate parenting ?
- Are there any plans for migration?
- Is there a wish to have children of their own or a wish to ask for family reunification, which might conflict with the intention to take care of the child until adulthood?

**E. Estimation of Are there any contra-indications:**

- Child abuse committed in the past
- Severe psychiatric diagnosed disorders
- Disorder of personality characterized by anger, impulsivity or instability
- Addiction to alcohol or drugs

**F. Outcomes investigation referees ( at least two of them of which one has to be independent):**

- Family doctor
- Teacher(s) of the own children
- National consultation centre baby and toddlers healthcare
- Employer(s)
- refugee counseling organization
- Imam, Priest or Reverend
- District police officer
- Neighbors (if not friends)

## Conclusion:

What is in the interest of the child, taking into account safety, continuity of the upbringing and durability of the placement? Mention positive points and points of attention. Also mention negative points and feedback to applicants.

In case of a negative screening of a child who already stays in a kinship family, the social worker, guardian and the behavioral scientist are involved in the decision of ending the placement.

## ANNEX 2

# NIDOS MATCHING FORM

Date:

Name of social worker:

Region:

Matching details child – family		
NIDOS registration number of child	Reception family number <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> related family <input type="checkbox"/> non related family
Family name/surname of child	Name of reception family	
First name(s) of child	Date and place of birth of reception parent 1	
	Date and place of birth of reception parent 2	
Name by which they are known	Number of children of their own	
Gender	Boy(s) Girl(s)	
Date of birth	Ages per gender	
	Boy(s) Girl(s)	
Nationality	Nationality/nationalities	
Tribe	Tribe	
Religion	Religion(s)	
Current address	Address	
Reception facility	Town/City	
Date of arrival in the Netherlands	In the Netherlands since	
Languages	Languages	
Fluency in Dutch/other languages	Fluency in Dutch/other languages	
Child protection measure	<input type="checkbox"/> good <input type="checkbox"/> average <input type="checkbox"/> poor <input type="checkbox"/> none	
<input type="checkbox"/> (temporary) Guardianship		
<input type="checkbox"/> (V) OTS		
<input type="checkbox"/> VoVo		

<sup>1</sup> Fill in the family number as recorded in PRS (registration system for children Nidos is responsible for).

Status <input type="checkbox"/> Residence permit <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertainty concerning procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Denied asylum <input type="checkbox"/> Return process <input type="checkbox"/> Other	Status <input type="checkbox"/> Residence permit <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertainty concerning procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Denied asylum <input type="checkbox"/> Return process <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Name of guardian:	
Acting guardian:	
Region:	
Telephone number:	
Mobile phone:	

Child's situation	Strengths	Areas of concern
Right to stay	<input type="checkbox"/> Residence permit <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Uncertainty concerning procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Denied asylum <input type="checkbox"/> Return process <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Child's relationship with reception family	<input type="checkbox"/> Know each other <input type="checkbox"/> Same culture <input type="checkbox"/> Same religion <input type="checkbox"/> Same language <input type="checkbox"/> Children of the same age <input type="checkbox"/> Other children are older <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Do not know each other <input type="checkbox"/> Different culture <input type="checkbox"/> Different religion <input type="checkbox"/> Child and family speak different languages <input type="checkbox"/> Only younger or older children <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Placement prospects	<input type="checkbox"/> Initial reception <input type="checkbox"/> Short-term placement <input type="checkbox"/> Long-term placement <input type="checkbox"/> Date of placement	<input type="checkbox"/> Unclear <input type="checkbox"/> Very uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Placement possible until
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		

Earlier placements	<input type="checkbox"/> First placement <input type="checkbox"/> Previous successful placement(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Previous placement breakdowns
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Role of biological family	<input type="checkbox"/> Family supports placement <input type="checkbox"/> Reception family was suggested by biological family <input type="checkbox"/> Family reunification has been requested <input type="checkbox"/> Regular contact with biological family	<input type="checkbox"/> Family does not support placement <input type="checkbox"/> There is no contact with family <input type="checkbox"/> There are problems with family reunification
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Siblings	<input type="checkbox"/> Child will be placed with siblings	<input type="checkbox"/> Siblings in another family
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Any inappropriate sexual behaviour (victim or perpetrator)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		

### Matching decision model (factors used to make a match)

Child's characteristics	Strengths	Areas of concern
Intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/> Intelligent <input type="checkbox"/> Went to school <input type="checkbox"/> Good school results <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning disabilities <input type="checkbox"/> No or very little education <input type="checkbox"/> Illiterate <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with school tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Coping behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving <input type="checkbox"/> Seeks social support <input type="checkbox"/> Expression of emotions <input type="checkbox"/> Reassuring thoughts and wishful thinking	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance/denial <input type="checkbox"/> Palliative reactions <input type="checkbox"/> Recurring depressive reactions <input type="checkbox"/> Expression of emotions <input type="checkbox"/> Reassuring thoughts and wishful thinking
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		

Psychological and emotional development	<input type="checkbox"/> Trust in others <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerful <input type="checkbox"/> Can show emotions <input type="checkbox"/> Can regulate emotions <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Symptoms of trauma <input type="checkbox"/> Symptoms of anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Symptoms of depression <input type="checkbox"/> Problem with attachment and/or trust in others <input type="checkbox"/> Too much trust in others <input type="checkbox"/> Low self-esteem <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional outbursts <input type="checkbox"/> Detached <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Social development	<input type="checkbox"/> Has friends <input type="checkbox"/> Makes friends easily <input type="checkbox"/> Easy to get on with <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Has few friends <input type="checkbox"/> Finds it hard to make friends <input type="checkbox"/> Not easy to get on with <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Physical development	<input type="checkbox"/> Adequate physical development <input type="checkbox"/> Physical health <input type="checkbox"/> Normal weight <input type="checkbox"/> Not circumcised <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate physical development <input type="checkbox"/> Looks older/younger than calendar age <input type="checkbox"/> Overweight/underweight <input type="checkbox"/> Circumcised <input type="checkbox"/> Physical disabilities <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Self reliance	<input type="checkbox"/> Good personal care and hygiene <input type="checkbox"/> Able to look after themselves <input type="checkbox"/> Can keep to agreements <input type="checkbox"/> Capable of solving problems <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor personal care and hygiene <input type="checkbox"/> Needs extra guidance for keeping to agreements <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot keep to agreements <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		

Behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> Behaves appropriately <input type="checkbox"/> Keeps to rules and agreements <input type="checkbox"/> age-appropriate behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> Rebellious <input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent to punishments or rewards <input type="checkbox"/> Lies <input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Sexually inappropriate behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Age-inappropriate sexual behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Age-inappropriate behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Delinquent behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Socially acceptable behaviour
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Motivation for placement	<input type="checkbox"/> Child is positive about placement <input type="checkbox"/> Child not sure about the placement <input type="checkbox"/> Child was part of this family in country of origin	<input type="checkbox"/> Child does not want to be placed in a family <input type="checkbox"/> Child does not want to be placed in this family <input type="checkbox"/> Child does not give their opinion on the placement
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		
Extra information about the child	<input type="checkbox"/> Talents <input type="checkbox"/> Sport <input type="checkbox"/> Hobbies <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		

Reception family's situation	Strengths	Areas of concern
Pedagogical skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Offering safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sensitivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cultural added value	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supports future prospects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integration in the Netherlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of places according to age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Family's capabilities for coping with life events / stability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motivation for the placement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sustainability of the placement that the family can offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Safety for the child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clarification of strength and/or area of concern <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no		

### Possible safety risks

### What are the considerations for placing/not placing or confirming/not confirming the family network placement?

Match:	
<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no

### What are the points of attention for guidance? (add these to the care plan for the child)

### Matching process

Agreements about meeting and getting to know each other?

What is the family's opinion?

What is the child's opinion?

### Autorisations

Date	
Name of guardian	
Signature	
Date	
Name of social worker responsible for the family	
Signature	
Date	
Name of manager	
Signature	

## ANNEX 3

# DANISH ACCOMPANYING PERSON – SCREENING INTERVIEW

The screening interview is an interview held with the accompanying relation within the first two –three weeks after arriving in Denmark. The screening interview is conducted by two social workers / social coordinators from the accompanying persons' team, an interpreter and any possible accompanying network of the accompanying relation.

The aim of the screening interview is to ensure a qualified clarification of whether the accompanying relation seems to be of long-lasting character. If the relation is deemed so, the accompanying relation will be accommodated at the centre currently designated to have accompanying relations accommodated. If the relation is not deemed long-lasting, the accompanying relation will be proposed accommodation at the asylum centre Kongelunden.

Thus, the screening interview forms the basis of the accompanying relation's course in the asylum system and it will eventually be included in the evaluation of the accompanying person.

	Person ID	Name	Age (date of birth)
Accompanying person			
Any possible own family of the accompanying person			
Accompanied child			
Accompanied child			

Accompanying person's relation: (what is the relation between child and adult)	
---	--

Date and place of the accompanying person's screening interview.	
Social coordinators from the accompanying persons' team	
Language of interpretation	
Native country	
Arrival in Danmark	

## Background and upbringing:

Describe your families (the child and the accompanying person are asked to describe their families):

### Background / upbringing / family

Who are the family members?

Where are they?

Network in Denmark?

How was the relation between the accompanying person and the child while living in the native country? How much contact / knowledge have they had about each other in the native country?

Education, employment and schooling (both for the accompanying person and his/her spouse if any such exists, the accompanied child's schooling and his/her parents)?

Hobbies (of the accompanying person and the accompanied child)?

### The reason why the child is with accompanying person:

Is there any contact with the parents?

What is the parents' attitude to the fact that the child is with accompanying person?

Who decided that the child should be with the accompanying person?

What is the reason that the child is with accompanying person?

### The escape:

Describe the escape.

What have you been through / experienced along the way?

How is it to be together at the asylum centre far from home?

What are the challenges?

What are you doing together?

## The accompanying person's role / task of the accompanying person and the child's connection to the accompanying person:

The accompanying person's role / the task of the accompanying person is to have a good relationship with the child, including the accompanying person's ability to give the child a stable and secure environment, support the child's development, and cooperate with the child's parents and the authorities (in the asylum system and subsequently in the municipality). The accompanying person must have good health and energy to handle the task.

It is important that the accompanying person evaluates whether he/she can have the child living with him/her for a longer time (years) – also in case the accompanying person's own family should come to Denmark at a later point.

It is also important to inform the accompanying person that he/she can say no if the task is too difficult, and choose to help and support the child in a different way instead (explain about the children's centre, etc.).

### **Notions of what it would mean to be accompanying person of a child:**

What ideas does the accompanying person have about being the accompanying person of a child?

What concerns does the accompanying person have with regard to being the accompanying person of a child?

For how long does the accompanying person imagine that the child will live with him/her? What are the thoughts in case of receiving residence permit and relocation to the municipality, as well as a possible arrival of the accompanying person's own family/children to Denmark?

### **The accompanying person's connection to the child and the quality of the connection:**

How is the accompanying person's relationship with the child?

How will the accompanying person describe it?

What does the child mean to the accompanying person?

What does the accompanying person think about what he/she means to the child?

What does the child use the accompanying person for?

What does the accompanying person think about the child's needs in everyday life in order to thrive?

How does the child behave when he/she is upset / has problems and how does the accompanying person support and help the child in such situations?

How does the accompanying person deal with the child being angry, withdrawn, or showing assertive behavior, etc. – and especially the child's sorrow and longing for his/her family?

How does the accompanying person deal with setting limits for the child?

### **The child's connection to the accompanying person:**

Ask the child to write a list of adults who are important to him/her (drawing is also possible). The accompanying person should be mentioned – if not, ask why the accompanying person is not listed?

Ask the child if he/she sometimes experiences being sad or scared, and encourage the child to describe such situation.

Ask the child which person on the list he /she would go to in case he/she is frightened / sad?

What does the child like to do with the accompanying person?

What would the child like to do with the accompanying person?

### **Overall evaluation and conclusion of the screening interview:**

# STANDARD FOR SUPERVISION OF PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

---

## Introduction

It is the vision of the Danish Red Cross that unaccompanied minor asylum seekers get the opportunity to reside in the appropriate socio-cultural and familiar environment during the first step in the application process.

In order to fulfill this vision, the Asylum Department has chosen a strategy where:

- unaccompanied minor asylum seekers will be accommodated, to the extent possible, with relatives residing here, and at the same time it is evaluated that this serves the child's best interest.
- the accommodated minors will be offered the same services as the children and adolescents residing at the centers.
- the accommodated minors' social network will be strengthened.
- the foster families will be supported by regular advice and guidance, training and supervision.

## Goal

In connection to the strategy, the standard for supervision of private accommodation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers is established with the following objectives:

### Area specific objectives

- the Asylum Department must ensure that the establishment of individual private accommodation of an unaccompanied minor asylum seeker is proceeding according to the guidelines (see *Annex Guidelines for private accommodation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers*, section 1).
- the Asylum Department shall be able to substantiate, after examination of family care based on the pre-interviews with the child and home visit to the family, that the accommodation will be beneficial for the unaccompanied minor. It must be ensured that there is a match between a child and a family.
- it should also be ensured that the municipal authorities have issued a permit for the family where the private accommodation of the child is sought, according to regulations and instructions in Social Services Act, so that at least a nothing to prevent statement is available from the municipal authorities.
- privately accommodated unaccompanied minors of age 7-17 years old must, as a minimum, be offered education equivalent to that offered to the asylum seekers of school age accommodated at the centers, either locally or at the center they are associated with (see *Guidelines 2.1*).

- privately accommodated unaccompanied asylum seekers of age 17 and 18 years old should be offered education, as a minimum to the same extent as 17-25 years old asylum seekers accommodated at the centers, either in the form of municipal services locally or at the center they are associated with.
- younger children should be offered financial support for enrollment in socio-pedagogical arrangements and school clubs, and participation in leisure activities in organized form should be promoted.
- children with special needs should be offered treatment and special support similar to those offered to minor asylum seekers accommodated at the centers, for example by a specialist, psychologist, psychiatrist, or by a support person through the support funding.
- the Asylum Department must visit and conduct a flexible monitoring of each unaccompanied minor asylum seeker accommodated privately, basically four times a year with approximately three months intervals until the minor turns 18.
- the supervision includes a check on the child's condition in terms of development and behavior, schooling, healthcare offers, real place of residence, following the prescribed treatment, leisure activities, friendships and other relevant factors.
- two annual workshops will be arranged for the unaccompanied minors and their foster families with opportunities for group counseling, exchange of experiences and training in relevant topics. The workshop has an actual and relevant professional content adjusted to the target audience. The workshop offers frameworks and activities to strengthen their network. The form of workshops varies between academic, social and recreational offerings. The workshop focuses on the young people privately accommodated from the age of about 14 and over and their families.
- the Asylum Department will inform the foster parents of the privately accommodated minors about the representative scheme and will qualify those who are interested and link those who are suitable to the scheme.
- the families' efforts are sought to be qualified both by individual teaching and supervision and by offers to participate in different meetings in order to exchange experiences.
- there should be particular focus on foster families approved to have a child less than 14 years.
- if the unaccompanied minors are granted asylum, the social consultant must ensure that the handover to the municipality goes in accordance with the guidelines (see *Guidelines* section 3).
- before the unaccompanied minor turns 18, it is evaluated whether this young person must have an offer similar to after care, in case his or her application for asylum has been rejected (see Social Services Act § 76).
- if the child or the adolescent gets a deadline for leaving Denmark, it must be ensured that there is a real offer of support to a dialogue with the immigration authorities about the prepared return (this is also valid for the adolescent who turned 18 after arrival).

### **Organization and structural framework:**

- the supervision is carried out by the Asylum Department's social consultant, who has an office in building 2 in Sjælsmark and reports to the secretariat's chef.

### **Involvement of volunteers:**

We seek volunteers in the local area to support the child or the adolescent for example with homework and participation in extracurricular activities.

**Performance requirements:**

- all privately accommodated minors must receive a schooling offer.
- a pre-interview with the child and a home visit to the family must be conducted to substantiate that it is in the child's best interest to be privately accommodated.

**Danish Red Cross, Asylum Department**

## **Annex to the standard for supervision of private accommodation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers**

**References**

The Social Services Act, Executive Order on Social Services Act, no. 941 October 1, 2009.









