

# Promoting the social inclusion of migrant children and young people The duty of social services



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## Introduction

In 2015, the arrival of migrants in Europe reached unprecedented numbers. According to Eurostat, 1,322,825 migrants applied for asylum in the European Union (EU) in 2015 and 1,260,630 applied in 2016<sup>1</sup>. Among them, 95,205 unaccompanied children (UAC) applied for international protection in EU countries in 2015, and 63,280 in 2016<sup>2</sup>. European countries have the responsibility of supporting these children but they also have the chance to nurture their potential to enhance their contribution to our societies.

When it comes to unaccompanied children, social services are key for guaranteeing their protection and development ensuring access to mainstream care, education and health, as well as programmes fostering their long-term social inclusion. International, national, regional and local authorities are all called on to coordinate their efforts to create adequate legal, policy and practice frameworks that ensure unaccompanied children receive the best possible protection and support along the lines of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

For the European Social Network (ESN), as a network of public social services at local level, the integration of unaccompanied children is key. Many of our members have the statutory duty of providing care and support for these children and in many cases they are their 'corporate parents'. Therefore, ESN has been working on issues related to unaccompanied children and young people for several years. In 2005, ESN published its first report on the social inclusion of young asylum seekers<sup>3</sup>. Some of the issues highlighted in the report are still of relevance today, and they are more important than ever given the exceptional number of children and young people arriving in EU countries since 2015.

ESN members in social services across Europe have signalled to ESN the various challenges they have been facing in supporting migrants' inclusion as a result of the refugee crisis. This led to ESN conducting a questionnaire and publishing a second report in 2016 analysing the impact of the refugee crisis on local public social services<sup>4</sup>. Also in 2016, ESN addressed legal, policy and practice frameworks to support unaccompanied children at the launch of the publication 'Investing in Children's Services: Improving Outcomes'<sup>5</sup>, which reviews children's services in 14 European countries to contribute to the implementation of the European Commission's Recommendation 'Investing in children'<sup>6</sup>. ESN's Chief Executive Alfonso Lara Montero also wrote an article<sup>7</sup> for the British newspaper the

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<sup>1</sup> EUROSTAT (2017), Asylum and first-time asylum applicants – Annual aggregated data (rounded).

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00191&plugin=1> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>2</sup> EUROSTAT (2017), Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors – Annual data.

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00194&plugin=1> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>3</sup> ESN (2005). Promoting inclusion for unaccompanied young asylum seekers and immigrants – A duty of justice and care.

<http://www.esn-eu.org/raw.php?page=files&id=187> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>4</sup> ESN (2016). The impact of the refugee crisis on local public social services in Europe. <http://www.esn-eu.org/raw.php?page=files&id=2174> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>5</sup> Lara Montero, A. (2016). Investing in Children's Services, improving outcomes. <http://www.esn-eu.org/raw.php?page=files&id=2062> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>6</sup> European Commission. Recommendation - Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage (2013/112/EU). <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112> (last accessed 05/10/17)

<sup>7</sup> Lara Montero, A. (2016). 'EU states are denying child migrants essential services', The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2016/aug/23/child-migrants-denied-essential-services> (last accessed 13/09/17)

Guardian and a paper<sup>8</sup> for the social services magazine 'Servicios Sociales y Política Social' on this issue.

In March 2017, ESN developed an online questionnaire to identify key issues for the social inclusion of migrant children and young people. The questionnaire was submitted to public social services, local authorities and third sector organisations working with migrants and migrant children. We received a total of 50 completed questionnaires from 19 European countries, and identified three main issues to be addressed in the short term: housing, the development of integration strategies, and support for unaccompanied children.

The questionnaire also aimed to identify key issues concerning access to education and training, healthcare and guardianship, as well as specific national legislation for unaccompanied children. Thanks to the questionnaire, we discovered specific practices in relevant areas of work with migrant children and young people, including care and protection for unaccompanied children, migrant families, and migrant young people's transition to adulthood.

On 23-24 October 2017, ESN organised a seminar<sup>9</sup> in cooperation with ESN member, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, entitled 'Migrant children and young people: social inclusion and transition to adulthood'. The seminar helped us to analyse the state of play in international, European, national and local policies concerning unaccompanied children and young migrants to ensure their effective inclusion and smooth transition to adulthood.

Starting from the development of international instruments and policies, a number of key themes were explored, namely access to education, health, care and protection services, the importance of strengthening refugee families' integration, transition to adulthood, and future scenarios for policy and practice. Participants also took part in group discussions.

The main outcomes from the presentations at the seminar and the group discussions form the basis of this report, which addresses some of the key themes raised in the questionnaire and the discussions held at the seminar. Section one describes the main difficulties in the reception of migrant children in Europe, such as the conditions at the 'hotspots', age-assessment, and preventing child-trafficking. Section two focuses on care and support for unaccompanied children, specifically access to key services, such as accommodation, healthcare and education and the coordination of these services through a guardian. Section three also analyses services access but with a focus on migrant families, while section four focuses on the role played by education and labour market integration in the transition to adulthood of unaccompanied migrant young people.

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<sup>8</sup> Lara Montero, A. (2016). 'La crisis de los refugiados y el impacto en los servicios sociales públicos en Europa', *Servicios Sociales y Política Social*, Vol. XXXIII, n. 111 (August 2016), pp. 13-27

<sup>9</sup> ESN Seminar 'Migrant children and young people: social inclusion and transition to adulthood' webpage: <http://www.esn-eu.org/events/109/index.html> (last accessed 05/12/17)

## Chapter 1: Reception of migrant children and young people: main challenges

The treatment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and migrant young people on arrival in the EU is critical. Not only does it reflect our humanity and our values, but it sets the tone for how they can expect to be treated as they work their way through the system and seek acceptance and integration.

On arrival, it is essential that children are met by reception workers, such as border guards, who are empathetic and properly trained. The EU and global agencies are now providing funding and training on the ground to ensure that this is the case.

Delays in moving children on from reception centres, which can be unsuitable for them, are one of the biggest challenges. Another is shortages of child protection workers and, particularly, guardians to represent unaccompanied minors. Speaker after speaker at the seminar stressed the central importance of early allocation of a guardian to every unaccompanied child.

This section looks also at the use of detention, which should be considered for children in only the most exceptional circumstances; the problem of trafficking of children, and the steps being taken to counter it; and the controversial question of age determination and assessment. Because the great majority of UAC present as teenage boys without documentation, age identification is a key issue. But practice across the EU is inconsistent and does not always meet recommended standards.

### 1.1 Reception conditions in the hotspots

As noted by Maria Zuber, Coordinator on Minors at the Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs at the European Commission (EC), the EU had received almost 400,000 children and young people under age 18 between 2011 and 2016. In 2016, one in three, of the 100,000 arrived, were unaccompanied. In the first quarter of 2017, the proportion was more than two in three. Almost 90% of unaccompanied arrivals were boys and seven in 10 were aged 16 or 17. The rise in the number of arrivals had put strain on even the most well-resourced social services systems, such as Sweden's.

The response to such a challenge had to be a comprehensive one that addressed all stages of the child migrant journey and the needs of accompanied, as well as unaccompanied, minors, Zuber stressed. The approach, as set out in the EC Communication on the Protection of Children in Migration<sup>10</sup> in April 2017, should have five key elements:

- Action external to the EU, identifying root causes of migration and the child's journey from its start to its end.
- Identification and registration of the child.
- Reception on arrival in the EU.
- Access to status determination and procedural safeguards.
- Durable integration solutions.

The most crucial step for the unaccompanied child, in Zuber's view, was the earliest possible allocation of a guardian or other representative to shepherd them through the process of reception, settlement and integration. The worst outcome for the child was being left "in limbo", uncertain of their status or of the progress of their case, and a guardian's involvement could make all the difference.

Conditions in the reception 'hotspots', mainly in Greece and Italy, made such early involvement difficult. However, the presence now on the ground of agencies including the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, or Frontex, Interpol and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) was helping improve the quality of the initial contact. For example, border guards were receiving training in thorough scrutiny of any adult claiming to be accompanying a child.

Progress in moving children on from the hotspots under the EU relocation scheme<sup>11</sup>, had been slow, Zuber conceded. In Italy, just 51 had been transferred, although almost 400 more were "in the pipeline" and it was important to acknowledge success where it occurred. The deadline for the scheme might have passed, but the moral obligation has not and pledges to accept children were still welcome.

Zuber identified three key tools for member states to use to improve their handling of child migrants: the on-the-ground technical and operational assistance now available from EU agencies; the EU's legal framework, which had been reformed and updated in response to the challenge; and available funding, which was more varied than was often appreciated.

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<sup>10</sup> European Union (2017). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – The protection of children in migration. SWD (2017) 129 Final. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170412\\_communication\\_on\\_the\\_protection\\_of\\_children\\_in\\_migration\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170412_communication_on_the_protection_of_children_in_migration_en.pdf) (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>11</sup> European Union (2017). Factsheet 'Relocation: EU solidarity between member states'. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20171114\\_relocation\\_eu\\_solidarity\\_between\\_member\\_states\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20171114_relocation_eu_solidarity_between_member_states_en.pdf) (last accessed 18/01/18)

The legal framework included the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>12</sup>, Council decision on relocation<sup>13</sup>, and provisions on migration, security and asylum<sup>14</sup>. The asylum package had been significantly amended to make it more applicable to emerging patterns of migration so that its second iteration now included, for example, definitions of ‘minor’ and ‘unaccompanied’.

The two principal funding options were the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)<sup>15</sup> and the Internal Security Fund (ISF)<sup>16</sup>. It should not be forgotten that the Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF)<sup>17</sup> could be tapped to support external initiatives such as joint working with non-EU states to counter trafficking. Structural and investment funds, such as the European Social Fund<sup>18</sup>, and Erasmus Plus<sup>19</sup> could also be considered. Where extra support was needed, as it had been in Greece, help could be sought via an Emergency Support Instrument<sup>20</sup>.

Astrid Podsiadlowski, Head of Sector Rights at the Child, Equality and Citizen’s Rights department of the FRA, described how her agency’s role had become more operational since it adopted responsibility for training and disseminating best practice in the hotspots in early 2016.

What FRA staff had found in the reception centres was a shortage of medical professionals, particularly those able to provide psychological therapy for traumatised children; a lack of comprehensive education provision for children and young people; and a failure to collect systematic and comparable data<sup>21</sup>. Although matters had improved, for example with dedicated facilities in Greece, there continued to be too few guardians for children, an absence of 24-hour caretakers at some centres and also insufficient numbers of child protection officers – or at least insufficient numbers of those with training<sup>22</sup>.

Because of a shortage of suitable move-on shelters for unaccompanied children, Podsiadlowski said, they tended to stay longer than other migrants in the reception centres. Like Zuber, she stressed the critical importance of advocacy by an allocated guardian.

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<sup>12</sup> European Union (2000). Charter of fundamental rights. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf) (last accessed 06/12/17)

<sup>13</sup> European Union (2015). Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32015D1601> (last accessed 06/12/17)

<sup>14</sup> See EU legal rules on migration on the European Commission dedicated webpage: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en) (last accessed 06/12/17)

<sup>15</sup> European Commission. Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/asylum-migration-integration-fund\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/asylum-migration-integration-fund_en) (last accessed 10/01/18)

<sup>16</sup> European Commission. Internal Security Fund (ISF). [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/security-and-safeguarding-liberties/internal-security-fund-police\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/security-and-safeguarding-liberties/internal-security-fund-police_en) (last accessed 10/01/18)

<sup>17</sup> European Commission. Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF). [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/international-affairs/global-approach-to-migration/mobility-partnership-facility\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/international-affairs/global-approach-to-migration/mobility-partnership-facility_en) (last accessed 10/01/18)

<sup>18</sup> European Commission. European Social Fund (ESF). <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp> (last accessed 10/01/18)

<sup>19</sup> European Commission. Erasmus+ Programme. [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en) (last accessed 10/01/18)

<sup>20</sup> European Commission (2017). Press Release “EU launches new humanitarian programme for the integration and accommodation of refugees in Greece”. [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-2121\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-2121_en.htm) (last accessed 10/01/18)

<sup>21</sup> FRA (2016). Monthly data collection on the current migration situation in the EU.

[file:///C:/Users/Valentina.Guerra/Downloads/fra-2016-monthly-compilation-com-update-3\\_en.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Valentina.Guerra/Downloads/fra-2016-monthly-compilation-com-update-3_en.pdf) (last accessed 06/12/17)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid



Podsiadlowski summarised the challenges as:

- Lack of appropriate reception centres.
- Difficulties creating adequate shelters for unaccompanied minors.
- Delays in family reunification and in processing such cases.
- Shortages of trained child protection officers and guardians.
- Inconsistent access to formal education.
- Disappearances of children with no proper investigation.
- Growing numbers of instances of self-harm.
- Children's lack of information and rights awareness.

One continuing weakness in the system was the quality of 'best interests' assessments of children under the Dublin Regulation<sup>23</sup>. The regulation, which first took effect in 1997 and was most recently amended in 2013, is designed to determine which EU state has responsibility for migrant applicants for asylum. The information held by FRA points out to assessments not taking place or taking place late, rather than carried out in a timely, effective and child-inclusive way.

## 1.2 Child detention

According to estimates by Europol, 10,000 child migrants have gone missing since arriving in the EU<sup>24</sup>. This is seen by some as justification for the EUODAC<sup>25</sup> proposal to fingerprint all children from age six on arrival, down from the present minimum age of 14, but also for the use of detention to prevent them escaping.

Astrid Podsiadlowski said detention was used and could be justified as being in the child's best interest<sup>26</sup>. But because it could have adverse long-term consequences, its use was specifically limited under EU law and it should be typically considered only in exceptional circumstances.

If detention was used, it should be for the shortest time possible; it should never be in a prison, but in 'dignified' conditions; and it should be clearly demonstrable that all alternatives had been considered beforehand.

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<sup>23</sup> European Union (2013). Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?sessionId=jHNITp3HLjqw8mqGbQSpZh1VWpjCyVQq14Hqcztw4pbfSQZffnrn!557467765?uri=CELEX:32013R0604> (last accessed 06/12/17)

<sup>24</sup> Townsend Mark (2016). 10,000 refugee children are missing, says Europol. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/30/fears-for-missing-child-refugees> (last accessed 06/12/17)

<sup>25</sup> The EUODAC Regulation establishes an EU asylum fingerprint database. When someone applies for asylum, no matter where they are in the EU, their fingerprints are transmitted to the EUODAC central system. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/identification-of-applicants\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/identification-of-applicants_en) (last accessed 12/01/18)

<sup>26</sup> FRA (2017). *European legal and policy framework on immigration detention of children*. Available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/child-migrant-detention> (last accessed 05/12/17)

Alternatives, as set out in the EC Communication on child migration, could include:

- Surrender of passport (if appropriate).
- Use of open residential facilities.
- Residence restriction.
- Regular reporting.
- Electronic monitoring.
- Release on bail.

Protection of the child from exploitation or prevention of them from going missing should never be used as an excuse for detention, Podsiadlowski insisted. If detention was used, the child's right to education should always be observed: at present, only three EU member states (the Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia) could guarantee the child's right to education regardless of how long a child was detained, as some states (Austria, Finland, France, Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, parts of Germany, Greece and Sweden) claim that provision of schooling was unnecessary for short periods of time<sup>27</sup>.

### 1.3 Children victims of human trafficking

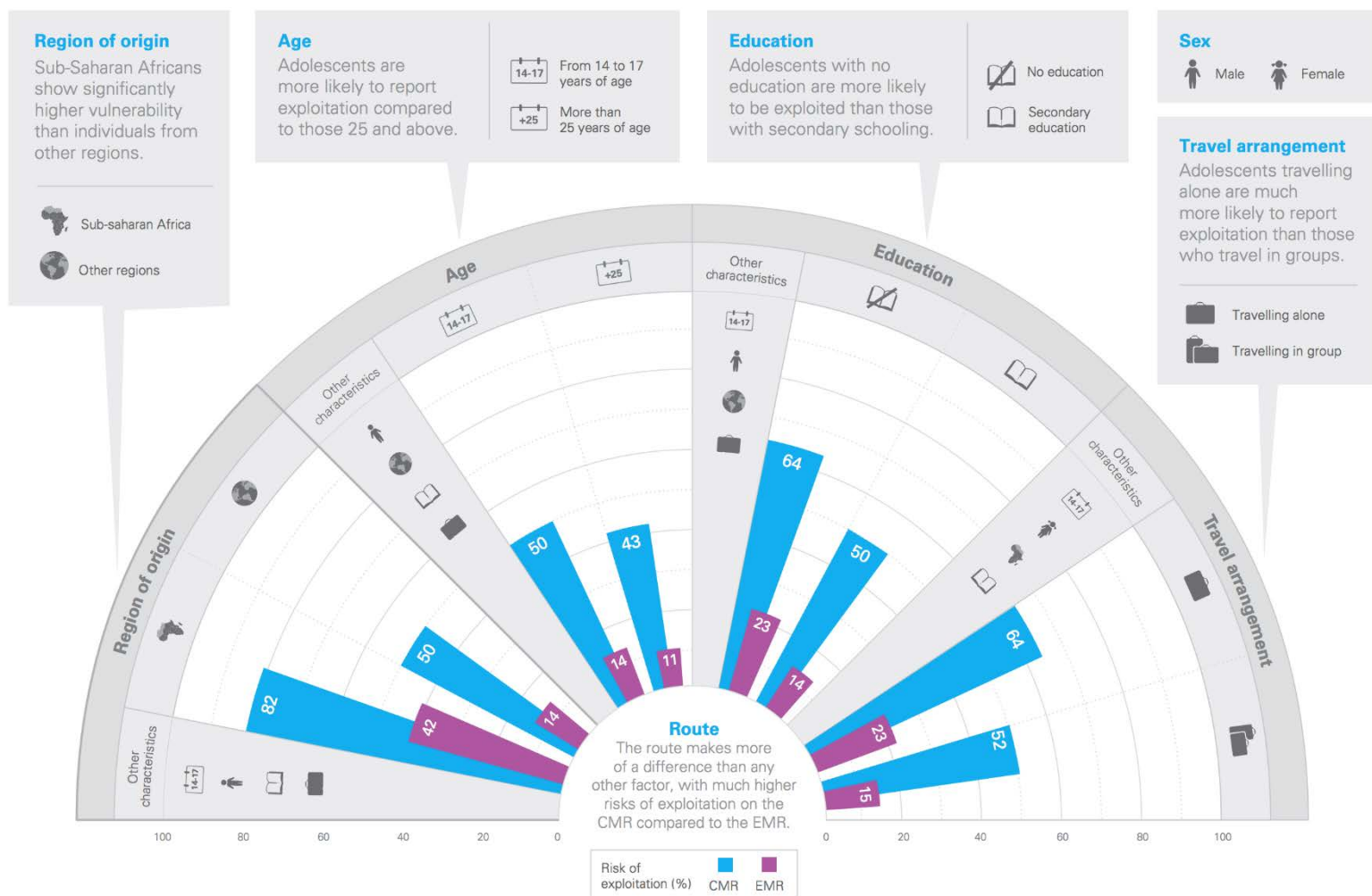
One of the most repugnant aspects of child migration is the exploitation of minors by traffickers. Lucio Melandri, Senior Emergency Manager for UNICEF's work on the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe, discussed the problem and the steps being taken to tackle it.

It was estimated that 22,700 child migrants were stranded in Greece, Bulgaria and the Balkan states in June 2017, Melandri said. Many of them had low levels of education, and were from sub-Saharan Africa, and were prey to traffickers because no one else offered them any prospect of reaching western Europe (Figure 1). Between 2015 and 2017, 1,400 children had drowned in the Mediterranean after they or their families had paid traffickers to make the crossing.

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<sup>27</sup> FRA (2017). Current migration situation in the EU: Education. <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/current-migration-situation-eu-education> (last accessed 13/09/17)

**Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of experiencing exploitation based on a logistic regression model for migrants with a specific set of characteristics travelling on the Central Mediterranean route (CMR, blue) and the Eastern Mediterranean route (EMR, purple)**



\*United Nations Children's Fund /IOM (2017) – Harrowing journeys<sup>28</sup>

Melandri identified six reasons for children falling into the hands of traffickers:

- Restrictive border policies, causing children to be stranded.
- Slow relocation, resettlement and asylum procedures.
- Sub-standard reception centres.
- Limited opportunities for family reunification.

<sup>28</sup> United Nations Children's Fund /IOM (2017). Harrowing Journeys. Children and youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation. P.29  
[https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Harrowing\\_Journeys\\_Children\\_and\\_youth\\_on\\_the\\_move\\_across\\_the\\_Mediterranean.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Harrowing_Journeys_Children_and_youth_on_the_move_across_the_Mediterranean.pdf) (last accessed 05/12/17)

- Limited access to guardianship, services and child protection.
- Detention for migration control purposes and fear of return.

Children often resorted to traffickers repeatedly if they were sent back from EU states. But the scale of this problem was unknown because no comprehensive data were collected on numbers forcibly repatriated. The poor quality of data generally was a serious impediment to effective work by agencies like UNICEF: the most recent data set for trafficking had been collected in 2014, a year before the big increase in migrant numbers. To a great extent, therefore, trafficking is a 'hidden phenomenon'.

One study which had been carried out was an analysis of the experiences of 11,000 children and youth who had crossed the central and eastern Mediterranean<sup>29</sup>. Among the findings was that 28% of the minors had not only been held against their will, but forced to work without pay.

In response to demand from EU states for practical advice, UNICEF published 'The Way Forward'<sup>30</sup>, in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Rescue Committee. A roadmap of action with five key recommendations:

- Strengthen child protection systems.
- Invest in outreach to children at risk.
- Ensure support is not conditional on collaboration with authorities.
- Prevent prosecution of children for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Offer children access to services and durable solutions built with them.

UNICEF has deployed mobile teams with cultural mediators to identify children at risk and refer them to services. In this way, in 2016, it had engaged almost 21,000 minors -Melandri claimed. It also trained child protection officers, encouraged development of alternatives to detention and provided education and psychosocial support.

Melandri emphasised that UNICEF was not supporting children to be 'on the move' and to remain exposed to abuse. Rather, it was encouraging interventions like provision of humanitarian or education visas and family reunification that could stop trafficking and prevent abuse and violence against minors.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF (2017). The way forward to strengthened policies and practices for unaccompanied and separated children in Europe. [https://www.unicef.org/eca/Way\\_Forward.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eca/Way_Forward.pdf) (last accessed 05/12/17)

## 1.4 Age assessment procedures

Determining whether a migrant is a child or an adult - and therefore how they should be supported - is one of the most difficult and controversial issues facing social services and other agencies. The great majority of unaccompanied children arriving since 2015 have been boys who say they are 16 and 17, but lacking documentation to prove their age or identity.

Lucio Melandri of UNICEF said that 92% of all minors now reaching Italy were unaccompanied, of whom 94% were boys stating they were aged 15, 16 or 17. Maria Zuber of the EC said that 69% of child asylum applicants across the EU were from children aged 16 or 17, with the most common countries of origin (in order) being Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea and Somalia.

In group discussions, delegates agreed that age assessment methods were often too arbitrary and subjective. This could give rise to frustration and grievance on the part of the young person. Procedures were defined at national level: in Germany, age was assessed by independent experts on the basis of a one-hour interview; in Sweden, medical tests were used, but results were said to vary from one doctor to another.

A survey of age assessment policies and practice in 37 Council of Europe member states was published in September 2017<sup>31</sup>. It found a 'highly fragmented' picture with a minority of states not following European and international standards that recommend assessment should be led by child development professionals, should be carried out only with the young person's consent and should take account of a margin of error. Some states were found to be using invasive tests such as dental checks or even sexual maturity evaluations.

Age assessment can be of critical importance in respect of female migrants because of the problem of forced marriage. One participant from Sweden said in the group discussions that she and her colleagues were able to prevent girls marrying an older man only if they were assessed to be under 15.

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<sup>31</sup> Council of Europe (2017). Age assessment: Council of Europe member states' policies, procedures and practices respectful of children's rights in the context of migration. <https://rm.coe.int/age-assessment-council-of-europe-member-states-policies-procedures-and/168074b723> (last accessed 06/12/17)

## Chapter 2. Unaccompanied children in care- from reception to social inclusion

Unaccompanied children face several challenges in integrating in reception societies since the moment they arrive. Understanding the asylum-seeking procedure, preparing sufficient and adequate information for the asylum interview and living in the uncertainty of not knowing as to whether their status will be granted are some of these challenges. While they go through the asylum-seeking process, they need to access accommodation, healthcare and education, as well as other services that can facilitate their integration, such as language and cultural integration courses or professional training.

The UNCRC states that every child must be guaranteed the same rights. Therefore, the reception of UAC and their social inclusion have put significant pressure on social services who are directly responsible for guaranteeing a number of rights outlined in the Convention. Some of these rights include access to accommodation, healthcare and education. In its report 'Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes', ESN pointed out that whilst asylum-seeking children are entitled to access these services, the reality might be different<sup>32</sup>.

ESN members have noted that in general, there are too few interpreters, social workers and foster families. Schools have also experienced difficulties in meeting the needs of unaccompanied children and some healthcare services, such as dental care, have struggled to meet demand<sup>33</sup>. Social services have also had difficulties in following up on suspicions of violence and distress in private family homes or children's homes accommodating asylum-seeking children<sup>34</sup>.

This section focuses on care and support for unaccompanied children, and analyses the way in which access to key services is guaranteed at local level. This includes accommodation and care in residential facilities and foster families, healthcare, and education. The section starts by discussing the role that guardians may play in coordinating and supporting unaccompanied children to access these services.

### 2.1 Guardianship

According to the UNCRC, every state is responsible for the protection of any unaccompanied and separated child on its territory<sup>35</sup>. Having clarity as to who is responsible for the child's care and protection is key as it is having a person who can support their access to care and mainstream services. At the seminar, Jantine Walst of Defense for children said that appointing a guardian can be instrumental to fulfil this requirement. The guardian should be appointed as soon as the unaccompanied child has gone through the

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<sup>32</sup> Lara Montero, A. (2016). Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes. Available at: <http://www.esn-eu.org/raw.php?page=files&id=2062> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>33</sup> Lara Montero, A. (2016). 'EU states are denying child migrants essential services', The Guardian, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2016/aug/23/child-migrants-denied-essential-services> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> UN (1989). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/> (last accessed 03/11/17)

initial stages of the asylum-seeking process and this role can be assigned to an individual or a legal person.

Throughout Europe, guardianship for UAC is mainly regulated by domestic law. As a result, there are differences from country to country. As this is an issue that spans beyond national frontiers, it is necessary that European countries work towards some form of harmonisation to guarantee equality of treatment of all UAC. FRA has identified four main functions of guardians: safeguard the child best interest, ensure the child's overall wellbeing, exercise legal representation and complement the child's limited legal capacity<sup>36</sup>.

At the seminar, it was highlighted that more should be done to reduce delays in appointing guardians, and on reducing their caseloads depending on whether guardians are volunteers or paid professionals, for which some form of European guidelines would be useful.

The organisation Defense for Children ran a project involving 127 unaccompanied children, 68 guardians and 30 experts with the aim to come up with core guardianship standards<sup>37</sup>. As a result, 10 standards were identified and endorsed by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe:

**Core standards for guardians of Separated Children in Europe:**

- Standard 1** The Guardian advocates for all decisions to be taken in the best interests of the protection and development of the child.
- Standard 2** The guardian ensures the child's participation in every decision which affects the child.
- Standard 3** The guardian protects the safety of the child.
- Standard 4** The guardian acts as an advocate for the rights the child.
- Standard 5** The guardian is a bridge between and focal point for the child and other actors involved.
- Standard 6** The guardian ensures the timely identification and implementation of a durable solution.
- Standard 7** The guardian treats the child with respect and dignity.
- Standard 8** The guardian forms a relationship with the child built on mutual trust, openness & confidentiality.
- Standard 9** The guardian is accessible.
- Standard 10** The guardian is equipped with relevant professional knowledge and competences.

*\*Defense for children<sup>38</sup>*

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<sup>36</sup> FRA (2014). Guardianship for children deprived of parental care. A handbook to reinforce guardianship systems to cater for the specific needs. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/docs/guardianship\\_for\\_children/guardianship\\_for\\_children\\_deprived\\_of\\_parental\\_care\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/docs/guardianship_for_children/guardianship_for_children_deprived_of_parental_care_en.pdf) (last accessed 03/11/17)

<sup>37</sup> Defense for Children (2011). Core standards for guardians of separated children in Europe.

<http://www.corestandardsforguardians.com/images/22/335.pdf> (last accessed 03/11/17)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

Guardians should not be considered as the only accountable actors for the support given to the child, as their main role is to ensure that UAC receive all support needed in terms of access to services, support with the asylum-seeking process, or access to integration programmes.

Some countries are implementing important changes in their guardianship systems. In Italy for example, last April, a law was adopted allowing regional governments to recruit volunteer guardians, who would be selected and subsequently trained. In the past, guardians were usually lawyers, mayors and other local authority representatives who could be responsible for more than 50 children each. However, with the new law, guardians can be responsible just for one child each. In June 2017, 54 volunteers were selected and trained by the Sicily Region and assigned one child each, with the exception of two brothers assigned to the same guardian. This has been positive with children more likely to trust their guardians, and the reduction in the caseload has allowed to speed up the legal asylum process in many cases.

## 2.2 Accessing care and accommodation

Providing accommodation according to the child's best interest is the first crucial step for their social inclusion. In most cases, UAC are hosted in reception centres until their asylum-seeking procedure starts or until their needs are assessed, and a care plan put in place. Once the actual asylum-seeking procedure starts or they have been appointed a guardian, UAC are transferred from reception facilities to local authorities according to the redistribution scheme adopted in each country, and they are taken into care by local social services.

Providing accommodation according to the child's best interest is part of the statutory duty that local services have for UAC. Usually foster care is the preferred type of accommodation for children under 12. It has been noted that accommodating UAC in foster families facilitates a faster and better integration due to the security and safety provided by the family. Participants at the seminar agreed that trust, together with a secure and stable family environment, helps UAC to alleviate psychological stress caused by the situation of their family back in the country of origin or the uncertain outcome of their asylum process.

For UAC aged 12 to 18, the most common accommodation facilities are apartment-sharing groups, residential homes and supervised accommodation. These types of accommodation are very common in Austria<sup>39</sup>. Thomas Dunning from the Irish Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) explained at the seminar that in Ireland, UAC coming to the attention of border police or immigration officers, are immediately referred to TUSLA and cared for either in residential units or in a foster home<sup>40</sup>.

Some UAC have higher levels of autonomy since in most cases, they might have travelled independently through several countries. In those cases, it may be more adequate for them

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<sup>39</sup> Heilemann, S. (2017). The accommodation and care system for unaccompanied minors in Austria. *Social Work and Society International Online Journal*, Vol. 15, No 1. <http://www.socwork.net/sws/article/view/494/998> (last accessed 02/11/17)

<sup>40</sup> Arnold, S. & Ní Raghallaigh, M. (2017). Unaccompanied minors in Ireland: Current Law, Policy and Practice. *Social Work and Society International Online Journal*, Vol. 15, No 1. <http://www.socwork.net/sws/article/view/496/1000> (last accessed 02/11/17)



to be accommodated at 'supported lodgings', which is a form of family care that involves young people having more independence and receiving less support from carers.

In the United Kingdom, the NGO Pathways to Independence provides 'supported semi-independent accommodation' in shared, safe and good quality housing accommodation for 16 to 21-year-old UAC. This type of accommodation is particularly suitable for UAC that have acquired a high level of independence through their lives, and do not feel comfortable with the supervision of a foster family or staff in the residential homes for children.

When different professionals and services are offered in the accommodation, integration seems to be more successful<sup>41</sup>. When an integrated model of accommodation, psychological support, mentoring programmes, information about asylum-seeking procedures, support in entering education and training is in place, UAC show more motivation and capacity to integrate quickly in their host countries.

### 2.3 Access to healthcare and psychosocial support

UAC may be exposed to severe health risks during their journey and to high chances of exposure to exploitation, abuse and trafficking. They can also face poor living conditions and uncertainty in the way they may be welcome in destination countries. As noted at the seminar by Soorej Puthooppambal, World Health Organisation (WHO) Consultant, such situations may lead to poorer health outcomes<sup>42</sup>.

Pre-migration conditions also affect the health status of children on arrival. Most common health issues on arrival include respiratory diseases, diarrhea, skin infections, malnutrition, and communicable diseases due to inadequate shelter and sanitation conditions during their journeys. Those most at risk for vaccine preventable diseases are young children who have not yet been vaccinated because of the lack of vaccination programmes in their home countries<sup>43</sup>.

According to WHO research, less than one third of European countries have specific directives on immunisation of migrants and refugees and the accessibility to free vaccines varies according to the legal status. Although all EU Member States provide emergency healthcare, access to prevention programmes, treatment for chronic diseases or primary care is sometimes limited<sup>44</sup>. Accessing healthcare is also difficult due to language and cultural barriers, therefore, cooperation between health and social services is key to ensure that refugee children receive the care they need.

Four countries (France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) explicitly entitle all migrant children, irrespective of legal status, to receive equal care to that of nationals. Belgium and Sweden have equal entitlements for non-EU or non-EEA migrant children in transition or in an

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<sup>41</sup> Find here more info about Pathways to Independence: <http://www.pathwaystoindpendence.org.uk/> (last accessed 02/11/17)

<sup>42</sup> WHO (2016). Technical briefing: unaccompanied minors in Europe – implications for health, social and education sectors. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/migration-and-health/news/news/2016/12/technical-briefing-unaccompanied-minors-in-europe-implications-for-health,-social-and-education-sectors2> (last accessed 02/11/17)

<sup>43</sup> WHO (2017). A review of evidence on equitable delivery, access and utilization of immunization services for migrants and refugees in the WHO European Region. [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/351644/HEN53.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/351644/HEN53.pdf?ua=1) (last accessed 02/11/17)

<sup>44</sup> Doctors of the World (2012). Access to healthcare for vulnerable groups in the European Union in 2012. Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201302/20130208ATT60776/20130208ATT60776EN.pdf> (last accessed 13/09/17)

irregular legal situation. Many other European countries entitle asylum-seeking children to equal care. In some countries, UAC have broader entitlements to healthcare than accompanied migrant children. In Germany, healthcare for asylum-seeking UAC is based on the child's individual needs, including access to psychological care. In the UK, UAC in the asylum-seeking system are entitled to NHS treatment on the same terms as national children and other children in care facilities.

Lack of awareness and information on entitlement among migrant children, the complexity of some European health systems, the lack of training and guidance of health professionals, and administrative obstacles to access to services could also impact access to healthcare, Puthoopparambil explained. For example, in France, UAC are entitled to a complementary health insurance in addition to primary healthcare access. However, there is a high non-take up of services because the healthcare system is complex and difficult to navigate<sup>45</sup>. The inability to regularly attend appointments, frequently having to move, and language difficulties are also obstacles for UAC to access healthcare.

Poor levels of mental health of UAC have also been observed. Speaking at the seminar, Guglielmo Schininà, Head of Mental Health, Psychosocial Response and Intercultural Communication Section of the International Organisation on Migration (IOM), explained that mental health does not only imply the absence of mental disorders, but also the capacity to cope with stresses of life. Due to highly traumatic journeys and experiences, most UAC show disorientation, confusion, sense of instability, sense of loss, lack of trust, sense of inferiority and isolation. Analysis provided by the IOM highlights that most common psychological reactions for UAC include behavioral problems, developmental problems, complacency to maltreatment, lack of education, delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, adultisation in certain aspects of life/development<sup>46</sup>. The uncertainty of prolonged transit and asylum-seeking procedures has also a strong psychological impact<sup>47</sup>. Schininà highlighted at the seminar that resulting mental health issues may include isolation, adaptation disorder, aggressiveness, and anger.

The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC)<sup>48</sup> developed a layered system of complementary mental and psychosocial support as illustrated by a pyramid (Figure 2). Basic services and security should be delivered through adequate services that address basic physical needs such as food, shelter, water, basic health care, control of communicable diseases. The second layer addresses people who are able to maintain their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing if they receive help in accessing community and family support. Focused and non-specialised support represents the necessary support for the smaller number of people who additionally require more focused individual, family or group interventions by trained and supervised workers. This layer also includes

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<sup>45</sup> Défenseur des droits (2017). Droits de l'enfant en 2017. <https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rae-2017.pdf> (last accessed 28/11/17)

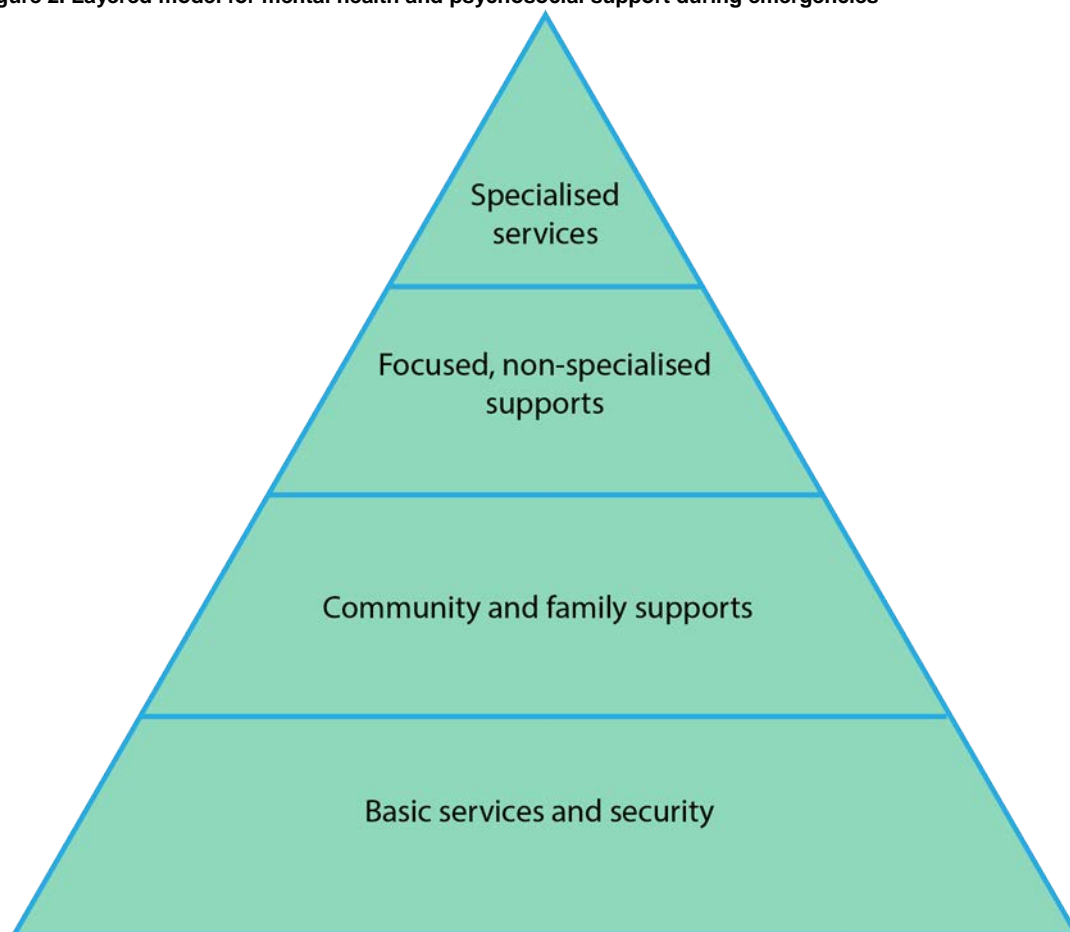
<sup>46</sup> IOM (2013). Children on the move. [http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/children\\_on\\_the\\_move\\_15may.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/children_on_the_move_15may.pdf) (last accessed 02/11/17)

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Children's Fund/IOM (2017). Harrowing Journeys – Children and Youth on the Move across the Mediterranean Sea at risk of trafficking and exploitation. [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Harrowing\\_Journeys\\_Children\\_and\\_youth\\_on\\_the\\_move\\_across\\_the\\_Mediterranean.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Harrowing_Journeys_Children_and_youth_on_the_move_across_the_Mediterranean.pdf) (last accessed 02/11/17)

<sup>48</sup> The Inter Agency Standing Committee is a primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. It is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/> (last accessed 10/01/18)

psychological first aid (PFA) and basic mental healthcare by primary healthcare workers. The top layer of the pyramid includes specialised support for people with severe mental disorders whenever their needs exceed the capacities of existing primary/general health services.

**Figure 2. Layered model for mental health and psychosocial support during emergencies**



*\* Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC)<sup>49</sup>*

The IOM recommends developing early intervention strategies and programmes because psychological first aid and positive communication, psychosocial support and counselling have proven to be very effective to prevent the development of serious mental health issues. As noted by the WHO, health systems alone cannot guarantee high-quality care for migrant children and young people<sup>50</sup>. These strategies should be integrated in the existing child protection, social, educational and health services to increase chances of success.

<sup>49</sup> IASC (2007). IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/emergencies/guidelines\\_iasc\\_mental\\_health\\_psychosocial\\_june\\_2007.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/guidelines_iasc_mental_health_psychosocial_june_2007.pdf) (last accessed 27/11/17)

<sup>50</sup> WHO, Migration and health: key issues. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/migration-and-health/migrant-health-in-the-european-region/migration-and-health-key-issues#page-wrap> (last accessed 13/09/17)

## Implementation in practice

### Health education and access to healthcare for UAC, Melilla (Spain)

*Since April 2006, Doctors of the World Spain runs a project in cooperation with the local authority targeting UAC in Melilla (Spanish city in the northern coast of Africa). This project addresses both UAC living in reception centres and UAC sleeping rough near the harbour. Doctors of the World aims to improve the health conditions of UAC and their access to mainstream healthcare.*

Doctors of the World organises group workshops in one of their reception centres. Workshops are designed for a maximum of 25 participants and organised in cooperation with local public authorities in charge of guardianship of children and aim to tackle health education, drug prevention, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, self-care, healthy habits and self-esteem.

In addition to targeting UAC, Doctors of the World designed and implemented workshops for professionals working with children. The objective is to ensure that they are better acquainted with health-related issues facing UAC such as glue inhalation or drug use, intercultural communication and referrals to healthcare centres. The project aims also to assess the level of burn-out caregivers and professionals experience, through individual interviews.

Doctors of the World also targets UAC sleeping rough near Melilla harbour. There are approximately 50-100 UAC sleeping rough every day in Melilla, and most of them are young Moroccans aged 10 to 17. NGOs refer them to Doctors of the World staff, who in turn refer them to mainstream healthcare. Depending on their needs, they are taken to hospital emergency units or health centres. They are always accompanied by an intercultural mediator to ensure fluent communication between healthcare staff and children.

Thanks to José Maria Atienza Borge from Doctors of the World for this practice contribution.

## 2.4 Access to education

According to the EU Reception Conditions Directive<sup>51</sup>, asylum-seeking children should have access to education until an expulsion measure is actually enforced. Moreover, the directive establishes that access to the education system should not be postponed for more than three months from the date when the application for international protection was lodged on behalf of the child<sup>52</sup>. When it comes to primary and secondary education, FRA notes that some children might need specific support before joining regular schools<sup>53</sup> but there are barriers preventing access to education. Sometimes accommodation is too far from the school, the difficulties to learn the language, or being in a school level that is not the most appropriate.

In general, during the first months upon arrival and until children are in accommodation, access to mainstream education is delayed<sup>54</sup>. During the first months, children often move to different locations. Due to long delays in asylum-seeking procedures, temporary accommodation may be often prolonged, delaying the possibility of UAC to join mainstream education<sup>55</sup>. Some countries are setting up special programmes for UAC in reception centres. This is the case in Greece, where a programme called Reception School Annexes for Refugee Education has been established<sup>56</sup>.

As noted by FRA, once enrolled in school, asylum-seeking children generally benefit from the same services as national children. Until they reach the age limit for compulsory education, children are integrated in mainstream education, whereas for those who have passed compulsory age for schooling, vocational training and adult classes seem to be the most viable solution.

For children aged within the limits of compulsory schooling, preparatory classes are organised before they join mainstream education<sup>57</sup>. These classes allow children to acquire the necessary language skills and literacy level to proceed to mainstream education. Preparatory classes usually include special language courses, different types of immersion classes and additional support, including one-to-one tutoring.

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<sup>51</sup> European Union. Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast). <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=EN> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>52</sup> FRA (2017). Current migration situation in the EU: Education. <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/current-migration-situation-eu-education> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> NESET II (2017). Continuity of learning for newly arrived refugee children in Europe. <http://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Refugee-children.pdf> (last accessed 03/11/17)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

In some EU Member States, UAC who enter mainstream education are also eligible for additional support such as language courses, financial allowances for school supplies and support in case of disabilities<sup>58</sup>. In four Member States (France, Slovakia, the Netherlands and Sweden), children with some form of trauma have access to psychological support. However, according to a research conducted by the Network of Experts Working on the Social Dimension of Education and Training (NESET II) only in three Member States (Austria, Finland and Poland) teachers have received support or guidance in dealing with traumatised children<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> FRA (2017). Current migration situation in the EU: Education. <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/current-migration-situation-eu-education> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>59</sup> NESET II (2017). Continuity of learning for newly arrived refugee children in Europe. <http://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Refugee-children.pdf> (last accessed 03/11/17)

## Implementation in practice

### Youth and Education Service for Refugees and Migrants in Ireland

*The Youth and Education Service for Refugees and Migrants is part of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board. It provides a range of education and youth support programmes for unaccompanied children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds aged 12 to 25.*

The Migrant Access Programme is a reception and transition programme that prepares newly arrived migrants for post-primary school. The Programme aims to increase the students' ability to engage with the post-primary school curriculum, while developing their overall literacy, learning and interpersonal skill-set to help them integrate into school and life in Ireland. Classes take place 20 hours per week from September to July. Enrolment is on-going and students integrate into mainstream school at different times depending on their individual abilities and circumstances.

The School Support Programme supports young people in mainstream school through weekly after school and holiday time language classes and revision camps. In addition, the Study Buddy Homework Club supports students through volunteer 'Study Buddies'. The Youth Programme also works with young people to support their transition into adulthood and independent living. Education, access to the labour market, accommodation, referrals to specialist services are some of the many areas of work. The service also collaborates with organisations to promote equality and inclusion of young migrants.

Between 2016 and 2017, 112 UAC and young migrants took part in the programme. They improved quickly their English and managed better the school curriculum. Furthermore, their confidence increased as well as their skills and knowledge. They also benefited of better access to social services and were able to manage independent living.

Thanks to Jessica Farnan from the City of Dublin Education and Training Board for this practice contribution.

## Chapter 3: Strengthening the integration of refugee families

Compared to other migrant families, refugee families do not choose to migrate but do so to flee from war, danger or persecution. Therefore, they are very vulnerable and often have specific needs to successfully integrate in society. Social services have strong case management responsibilities since they need to provide educational support, language training, career and educational counselling, mental healthcare, and social integration support. Some families are also more vulnerable than others, such as single mothers or families where domestic violence has occurred. These vulnerable families need special attention from social services who need to find the best solutions to help them overcome their traumatic experiences and empower members of the family to guarantee their social inclusion.

Refugee children coming with their families require significant attention in order to integrate and perform well in the education system. In group discussions, participants agreed that this is especially important as children in families are often less likely to integrate as they are shielded by their family and do not have the same exposure to the host country's society as UAC. Interestingly, there is also a growing imbalance in families, where children hold more power because of their ability to speak the host country language whilst the parents cannot.

Another problem facing refugee families is the fact that they often end up in almost segregated areas, where other migrants have also settled, and it is cheaper to live. These areas are often poor and deprived, with inferior quality public services (poor schools, lack of positive role models, high crime levels).

### 3.1 Access to basic services: accommodation, healthcare and employment

Accessing accommodation and healthcare for all members of the family is one of the challenges refugee families face when arriving in their host countries. In Germany, upon arrival, families are accommodated in shelters. At the beginning, many different services visit them, but lack of coordination usually results in families being confused about the different services they are entitled to.

In France, the same problem has been observed. Too many different professionals visit families upon their arrival and this does not produce the best outcomes for their integration. Moreover, it has been noted that there is a high non-take up of services because they are too fragmented and difficult to access. Having a single contact person seems to be the best way to guarantee that families improve their understanding of services and quickly start their integration process.

Many countries are experiencing a lack of social housing, therefore social services are helping refugee families find alternative accommodation, including private rentals. In Spain, social services are helping refugee families to find cheap rental houses. When receiving financial aid and support from social services, refugee families are required to sign an agreement where parents engage to take children to school, pay rent, or find a job. Thanks to this agreement, many private landlords are more likely to rent their flats to them.



In Sweden, refugee families can choose where to live but if they cannot find adequate accommodation, the national government is responsible for finding them accommodation. However, social housing is only provided for three years. Social services can still provide financial aid, but NGOs or family and friends usually help them find alternative accommodation afterwards. Accommodation provided by the state may not always be suitable for families with children because houses are usually small, which has led to Swedish social services reporting for instance children's difficulties with homework.

Social services in Europe agree that integration is a slow and complex process. Most of the time, long asylum-seeking procedures leave families in the uncertainty of whether they will be able to stay in the host country or not. Sometimes, migrant families move from city to city hoping to find better reception services, which means that children change school causing them discontinuity and instability.

Social services are responsible for guaranteeing that children integrate into the education system<sup>60</sup>. According to a study conducted by FRA, several EU Member States face difficulties in providing asylum-seeking families with childcare facilities due to long waiting periods, language barriers, long distance, insufficient guidance and lack of information<sup>61</sup>. In schools, there is a lack of linguistic and cultural mediation, also to be able to communicate with parents<sup>62</sup>.

Social services are also responsible for helping parents find employment which can ensure the financial sustainability of their families<sup>63</sup>. Cooperation between social and employment services is crucial to successfully integrate parents in the job market of the host country. One main challenge is that until they are officially granted the status of refugees, asylum-seekers have no access to education or employment. During table discussions at the seminar, representatives from Germany and Spain explained that in these countries asylum-seekers have no right to access jobcentres programmes until they have been granted the refugee status or any other form of international protection.

Women have more difficulties in accessing jobcentre programmes, because many women are also be mothers, hence they need access to free childcare or part-time programmes that would allow them to take care of their children. In some cultures, women may face opposition to access employment. It is therefore important to inform women about their rights, and support them in the emancipation process, if they wish so. During the table discussions at the seminar, a social services representative in Sweden observed that giving women their own money has empowered them and led to some changes in the balance of power in the family context.

Social services also support refugee families through activities in day centres. Day centres provide meals for children, support for personal hygiene or homework, and parenting support. Due to the many challenges that refugee families face, early intervention and

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<sup>60</sup> WHO, Migration and health: key issues. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/migration-and-health/migrant-health-in-the-european-region/migration-and-health-key-issues#page-wrap> (last accessed 13/09/17)

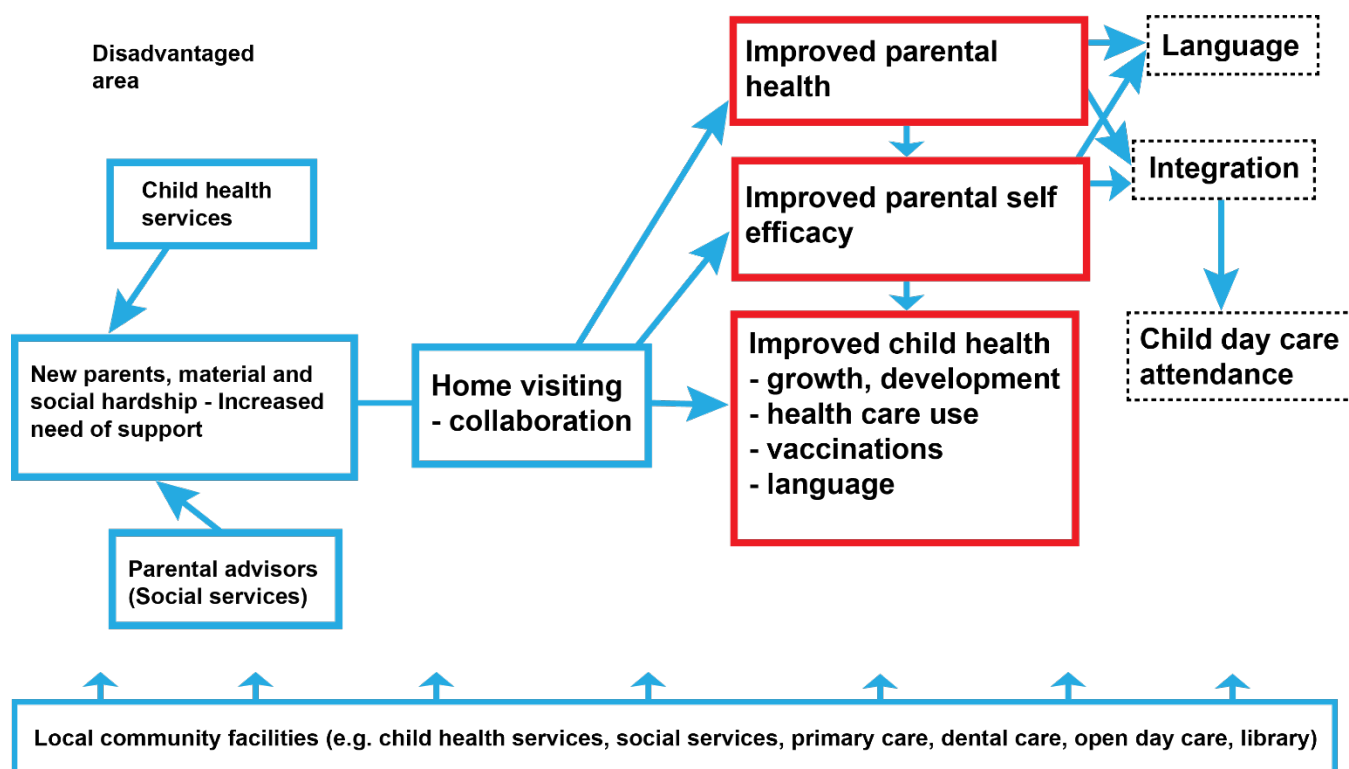
<sup>61</sup> FRA (2017). Current migration situation in the EU: Education. <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/current-migration-situation-eu-education> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>62</sup> NESET II (2017). Continuity of learning for newly arrived refugee children in Europe. <http://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Refugee-children.pdf> (last accessed 03/11/17)

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

parenting support are crucial. As highlighted in the diagram below, parental support provided through home visits and activities in an open daycare centre in Stockholm resulted in improved parental and child health and parents' self-esteem.

Figure 3. Rationale and design of the parental support programme provided in the district of Rinkeby, City of Stockholm.



\* Burström et al (2016)<sup>64</sup>

Engaging with religious communities can also play an important role in supporting refugee families' inclusion. In Sweden for example, social services are working on building a fruitful dialogue with imams and evangelist priests as they are well respected in their communities. Imams and priests can play a key role when it comes to informing people about services and life in the host country, especially for families experiencing difficulties in the integration process.

<sup>64</sup> Figure 3 was redesigned from Figure 1 in Burström B., Marttila A., Kulane A., Lindberg L. and Burström K. (2016). Practicing proportionate universalism – a study protocol of an extended postnatal home visiting programme in a disadvantaged area in Stockholm, Sweden. <https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12913-017-2038-1> (last accessed 10/01/18). This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

## Implementation in practice

### Family services for single mothers in Hannover, Germany

*The Unit for Migration and Integration at the Department for Social Development in the City of Hannover created a specific support structure for asylum-seeking refugee single mothers because they noted refugee single-parent households had difficulties in accessing services. They work with three main groups of single mothers from West African countries, North Iraq and women who became single parents during the route or after arriving in Germany.*

Services provided for single mothers include violence prevention programmes in shelters, a women's refugee centre, a contact person at the police, specialised counselling programmes for victims of human trafficking and forced marriage, trauma and psychological support, and childcare (provided by the department for youth).

Social workers with a comprehensive knowledge of the target group, trauma issues and women's rights provide specialised services. Social workers also act as intercultural mediators. The department organises group and individual counselling. Thanks to these sessions, participants have the opportunity to learn German, how to use public transport, create their own social network, access trauma and psychological help and navigate the system to obtain support.

During its pilot phase, 60 single mothers were involved in the project. Five of the initial participants are now responsible for some of the group sessions, where they work as co-moderators. Single mothers established a strong social network between them to provide each other informal support.

Thanks to Cornelia Stolzenberg from the City of Hannover for this practice contribution.

### 3.2 Family reunifications: challenges for unaccompanied children

UAC have the right to apply for family reunification which means that their family can join them in the host country. However, reuniting with their family can also have a negative impact on former UAC. During discussions at the seminar, a representative from social services in the Netherlands noted that there are a lot of difficulties when parents come to join their children, because after years of autonomous life it is hard for these children to live together with their family again.

Moreover, in many cases when their families arrive, former UAC are responsible for supporting them and interrupt their education or integration programmes. This problem has been identified in most countries. In group discussions at the seminar, a social worker explained that in Germany, it has been noted that the lack of programmes to prepare UAC to reunite with their families impacts previous efforts to integrate them in society. For example, cases have been documented of UAC dropping out of school to find a job and support their families financially, added a representative of social services in Sweden at the seminar.

Social services have an important role in supporting the child when the family joins them so that s/he continues to go to school and takes part in integration programmes. However, there are no structured programmes to support UAC before or after their family arrives, and this is an issue that should be taken into consideration.

## Chapter 4: Transition to adulthood of unaccompanied children

For many young migrants, reaching 18 can be associated with a loss of public services support, such as housing and legal representation. However, progress has been made to extend the provision of care beyond the age of legal adulthood to former UAC up to 21<sup>65</sup>, and in an increasing number of countries up to 24 or 26.

In a study conducted in 2014, the Council of Europe and the UN Refugee Agency highlighted that reaching adulthood has a significant impact on the psychological wellbeing of asylum-seeking unaccompanied migrant children because of their specific vulnerability and needs<sup>66</sup>. These include access to appropriate accommodation, education, employment and healthcare as well as to appropriate information about the consequences of reaching the age of majority, in particular regarding the rights and responsibilities they have when they become 18.

Despite the many challenges that young migrants face when they reach 18, several programmes are being developed in different countries to ensure their successful integration and transition to adulthood. Social services have a key role to play in providing guidance and access to services. Access to education, employment, housing, healthcare and psychological support remain at the core of any policy aiming to successfully foster the social inclusion of young migrants.

### 4.1 Transition to independent life for young migrants turning 18

Turning 18 could entail losing the right to stay in the host country. Many young migrants turning 18 disappear when they lose the right to stay in the country where they are. In Norway, half of Afghan boys disappear before they turn 18 to prevent their deportation, highlighted a participant in the seminar discussions.

In addition, turning 18 also entails being transferred from children's services to adult or migration services, which may also mean moving to another part of the country. For example, in Ireland and Sweden, young adult refugees are moved to other municipalities where reception centres or shelters for adults are located.

In table discussions at the seminar, it was noted that in Sweden there is a growing concern because many young people turning 18 are pulled out of their education programmes, social networks and communities, thus jeopardising the integration efforts made until then. In most cases, this leads to them not continuing education or losing contact with their child protection social workers or guardians. However, exceptions are made for young people receiving the final response from migration services only a few months after they turn 18. In this case, they can stay in the same municipality but the state reduces their daily allowance, so the municipality has to provide them with additional support.

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<sup>65</sup> OECD (2016), Making Integration Work: Refugees and others in need of protection, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/8116031e.pdf?expires=1505485380&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9001580546CAA7EAFDAAF2221BC76243> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>66</sup> UNHCR/CoE (2014). Unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking and refugee children turning eighteen: what to celebrate? <https://rm.coe.int/unhcr-coereporttransitionadulthood/native/1680724c42> (last accessed 13/09/17)

A representative from the UK highlighted that a new English law required children who are looked after by the state to be supported until they turn 25<sup>67</sup>. However, UAC turning 18 and not having received yet a response from the Home Office, cannot claim state benefits. Therefore, some local authorities, like Brighton and Hove, continue paying for their living allowance, education and services until they receive the final decision. Because of the slowness of the asylum-seeking process, this support becomes expensive as the local authority also supports children who receive a negative response and decide to appeal.

UAC can stay in foster care until they reach 21 (or 22 in Scotland). This policy approach was taken because of the recognition that outcomes for looked after children are much lower when UAC lose support at the age of 18. Furthermore, it is foreseen that the government in Scotland will provide support up to the age of 25, and funds to find accommodation for care leavers up to 21.

A representative from Romania explained at the seminar that every looked after child turning 18 can be supported until the age of 26 if they are enrolled in education; if they are not, they can receive special protection upon request for a period of maximum two years. The municipality of Arad created a residential centre for Romanian young people in care that is now open to young migrants as well. The aim of the centre is to prepare young migrants to independent life, and they can stay in the centre until they turn 28. Social services help them to find accommodation, education or work.

Similarly, a representative from the Spanish region of Andalusia presented at the seminar a programme called '18+' for local children looked after by the regional government which is now open to migrant young people. Young people from migrant or disadvantaged backgrounds share flats and learn how to live independently. They also benefit from counselling and mentoring in everyday life issues, from opening a bank account to managing household chores. This practice has proved to be successful thanks to the collaboration between different service providers.

A representative from the Spanish region of Navarra, illustrated the support for UAC turning 18 provided by the regional government in the form of homes supervised by social workers. Young people who are looked after by the state can start claiming minimum income benefits when they turn 18 and they can also enter an individual inclusion programme. A representative from the region of Galicia explained that the regional government supports young migrants until they turn 25, and accommodate them in homes where migrants and local young people live together supervised by social educators. A mentoring programme led by previous users of these homes is also implemented.

In Ireland, UAC who have been granted refugee status, can stay with their foster families if they are in full time education, noted a representative from the Irish Child and Family Agency (TUSLA). For those who are not in foster families and get permission to stay, they continue to be sheltered in adult hostels because of the growing housing crisis in the country. TUSLA, is now renting private flats to accommodate young migrants. It is conceived as an

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<sup>67</sup> UK Government (2017). Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Chapter 16). [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/pdfs/ukpga\\_20170016\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/pdfs/ukpga_20170016_en.pdf) (last accessed 06/12/17)

independent living arrangement, although social workers visit them and continue supporting them with an aftercare package, on top of financially assisting them with the rent. Irish care leavers (including UAC) are entitled to social welfare benefits of an amount of EUR180 per week from the age of 18 to 21.

Social services in Europe agree that it is important to guarantee an aftercare package to former UAC to support their transition to adulthood. It has been noted that the transition to independent life can be successful, but it takes several years and depends on the successful coordination of all stakeholders involved. Stakeholders in Sweden are increasingly recognising the importance of strong social support networks for unaccompanied children and are fostering forums like BABA targeted at homeless young people and unaccompanied children that provides overnight shelters and where staff and volunteers support them in 16 different languages<sup>68</sup>. In Malta, the Foundation for Shelter and Support to Migrants (FSM)<sup>69</sup> provides various types of support for migrants including training to help them find employment, mental health support and social support.

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<sup>68</sup> BABA, <https://www.stadsmissionen.se/vad-vi-gor/migration-och-integration/baba-rad-och-stod-ensamkommande-barn-pa-flykt> (last accessed 23/11/17)

<sup>69</sup> Foundation for Shelter and Support to Migrants, <http://fsmmalta.org/> (last accessed 23/11/17)

## Implementation in practice

### Young volunteers and refugees flat-sharing (CURANT), Belgium

*CURANT is a project supporting flatsharing between unaccompanied young refugees and Flemish young people, for at least one year. CURANT also provides independent living training and psychological help. The project is targeted at unaccompanied young adults, aged 17 to 22, with refugee status.*

In Belgium, once unaccompanied children reach adulthood they are no longer able to benefit from subsidised shelter, enrolment in reception classes, customised training and the support from a legal guardian. This group of young adults is very often unqualified, not in education, employment or training, and has higher chances of developing protracted dependence on social welfare. CURANT aims to provide support to unaccompanied children when they reach the age of legal adulthood, increasing their chances to fully integrate into society.

Different forms of cohabitation schemes are provided in the framework of the project: cohabitation in two-bedroom apartments, cohabitation of several refugee-buddy pairs sharing a community house and cohabitation in 16 to 20 modular (two bedroom) units on one site. CURANT provides affordable housing at EUR250 monthly per person. Moreover, CURANT offers individually tailored guidance and counselling focused on activation, education, independent living, language, leisure, and social integration.

This integrated approach aims to empower young refugee adults by developing their resilience, independence and general life skills. In total, CURANT aims to reach from 75 to 135 refugees in the programming period 2016-2019. In its first operational year, 24 refugee-buddy pairs took part in the programme.

One of the most innovative aspects of CURANT is the buddy system. Buddies are Flemish young people aged 20 to 30 who volunteer as flatmates. The NGO Vormingplus Antwerpen, one of CURANT's partners, selects the buddies and match them with the young adult refugees. Buddies help their refugee flatmates, and are supported with guidance during the project. Through the buddying system, CURANT aims to create social interactions between young locals and refugees on a peer to peer level rather than on a caregiver/caretaker basis.

Thanks to Jolien de Crom from the City of Antwerp for this practice contribution.



## 4.2 Integration of young migrants in education and the labour market

Access to education and the labour market are important factors in the transition to adulthood. Asylum-seeking unaccompanied children are entitled under EU law to access primary and secondary education<sup>70</sup>. Unfortunately, this right is not always guaranteed for children approaching the age of adulthood because compulsory education often ends between the ages of 15 and 16<sup>71</sup>. When it comes to higher education access, a number of barriers have been identified, such as lack of information, advice and individual guidance; lack of recognition of qualifications, inadequate language support and lack of adequate financing<sup>72</sup>.

Access to education and vocational programmes has proved to be fundamental to ensure the financial independence of young adult migrants<sup>73</sup>. The education system can support migrant young people by helping them discover their skills and improve their abilities, which is crucial for building a better life in the country where they settle<sup>74</sup>. Moreover, access to the labour market can then be easier. There is also solid evidence that education can help young migrant adults make friends and find mentors, and provides them with useful skills such as independence, problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork and self-esteem<sup>75</sup>.

Due to irregular schooling and low skills, many UAC risk ending up not in education, employment or training. As highlighted by the chart below, there is a difference in how young foreigners succeed in finding employment compared to native-born peers with two foreign born parents (Figure 4).

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<sup>70</sup> European Union. Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council layim down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast). <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=EN> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>71</sup> CoE (2014). Unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking and refugee children turning eighteen: what to celebrate?, <https://rm.coe.int/unhcr-coereporttransitionadulthood/native/1680724c42> (last accessed 13/09/17)

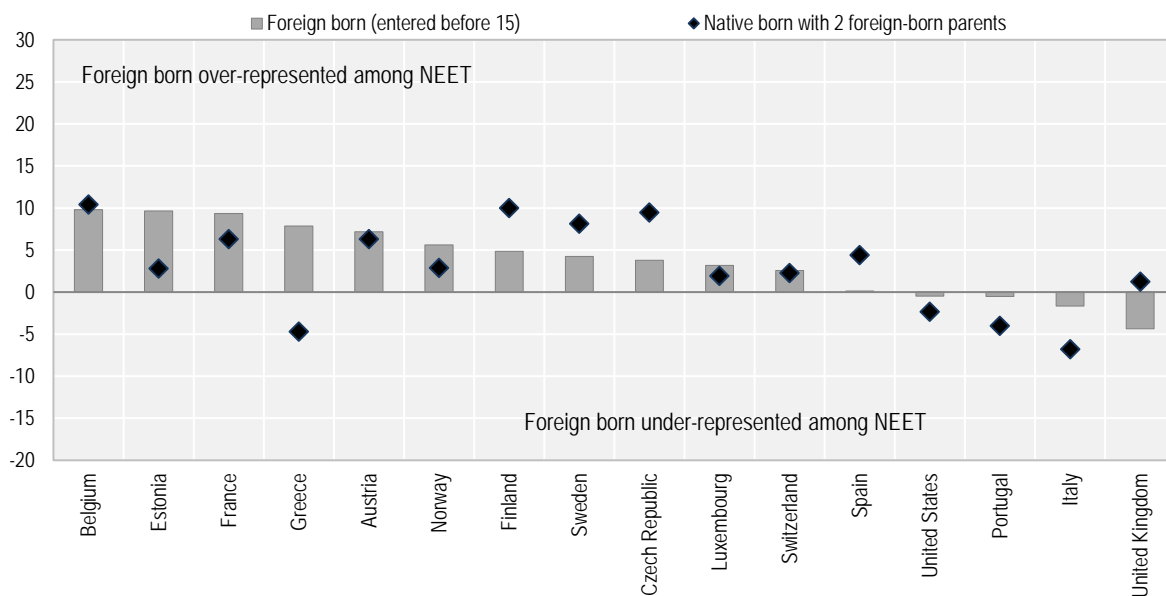
<sup>72</sup> European Students' Union (2017). Refugees welcome? Recognition of qualifications held by refugees and their access to higher education in Europe – Country analyses. <https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ESU-Are-Refugees-Welcome-WEBSITE-1.compressed-1.pdf> (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> UNHCR (2016). Missing out – Refugee education in crisis. [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/missing-out-refugee-education-in-crisis\\_unhcr\\_2016-en.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/missing-out-refugee-education-in-crisis_unhcr_2016-en.pdf) (last accessed 13/09/17)

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

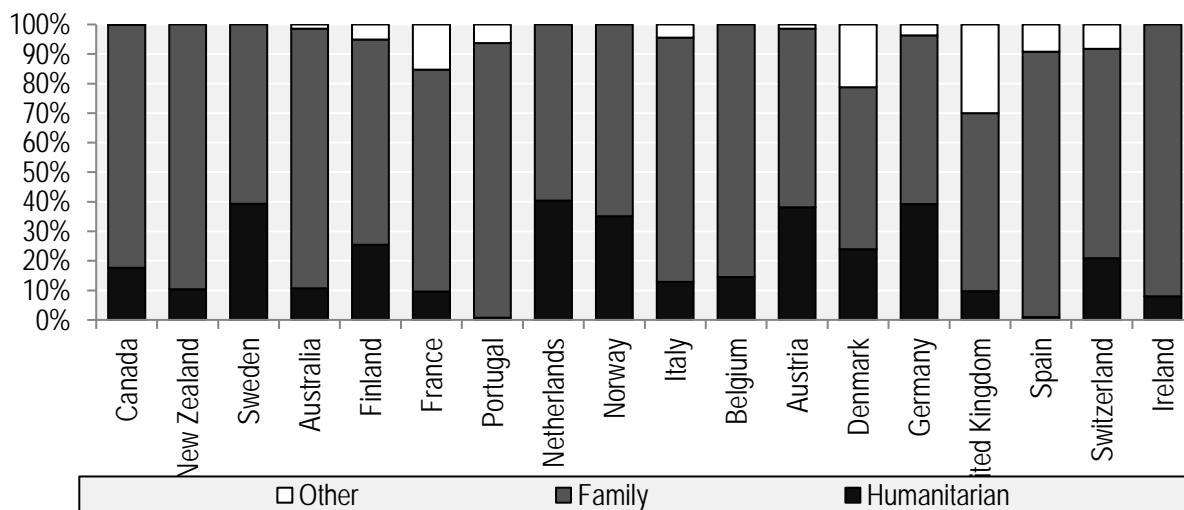
**Figure 4. NEET rate, 15-34, by place of birth and parents' place of birth, 2014** (Percentage point difference with native-born children of native born)



\* European Union Labour Force Survey 2014

The reasons for migration (Figure 5) also impact the outcomes of successful integration in the labour market. When migrating for humanitarian reasons, migrants have often been out of education or employment for a while and may have health issues that impact finding employment negatively.

**Figure 5. Reasons for migration.**



\* International Migration Database - International Database

As highlighted at the seminar by Emily Farchy, Economist from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the age at arrival is also very important. If young migrants arrive when they are above or near the age of compulsory schooling, usually they tend to enter the labour market immediately, and it is often a challenge for them to find sustainable employment.

Those who arrive before the end of compulsory schooling usually access mainstream education, but experience difficulties learning the language and in performance. Those who arrive below the age of 7 tend to better integrate in education and later in the labour market. Children of foreign born parents also experience difficulties because they do not have the support of native children navigating society and finding the services and educational pathways that they need.

OECD's Farchy explained at the seminar that foreign-born children tend to be guided towards vocational education. This means that though some children could perform well in higher education, they do not enrol at University due to low self-esteem and confidence. Career advisors have an important role to play so that vocational training does not become the *de facto* pathway for migrant youth.

Mapping young migrants' skills is very important to guide them towards education or employment. In June 2017, the European Commission launched the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals<sup>76</sup> to help professionals working with migrants and refugees gather information about skills, qualifications and experiences. The tool is designed to support assessment, form a basis for offering guidance, identify up-skilling needs and support job-searching and job-matching.

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<sup>76</sup> European Commission, EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals. <https://ec.europa.eu/migrantskills/#/> (last accessed 24/11/17)

## Implementation in practice

### Education and professional training for young refugees, Austria

*The Youth College is a consortium of nine partner institutions in the City of Vienna providing education to young migrants (predominantly asylum-seekers, refugees or beneficiaries of international subsidiary protection). Students who have completed compulsory schooling in Austria are trained for a professional career or higher education. Other students are supported to pass examinations to help them obtain national qualifications.*

The project started in 2016, and today 1,000 young migrants attend the Youth College. It aims to prepare students to access mainstream education or employment. The College provides social work and socio-educational counselling. More than 80 teachers of German as a second language and general education and 28 counsellors work in the Youth College to assist students in their personal development.

The Youth College offers a large portfolio of studies with over 50 courses. After an initial assessment conducted with the student, s/he is presented with different options to meet their educational and professional goals. Some students may enrol in general education to complete compulsory schooling or find an apprenticeship. Those with German proficiency are supported to continue their education or find employment. The schedule is flexible so that students can participate in social activities, such as field trips, educational leisure activities, or open school.

This project is funded with EUR6.000.000 annually through the European Social Fund (ESF), the City of Vienna Department for Integration and Diversity, the Public Employment Service Vienna (*AMS Wien*) and the Vienna Social Welfare Fund (*FSW*).

Out of 1,268 students that took part in the project in 2016, 94 dropped out. The rest successfully accessed mainstream education or employment.

Thanks to Renate Schober from the Vienna Social Fund for this practice contribution.

## Key concluding messages

Some important lessons can be drawn from our work on migrant children and young people's social inclusion:

1. Long asylum-seeking processes hinder integration. Participants at ESN seminar highlighted that it is crucial for unaccompanied children and migrant young people to have their asylum-seeking process solved first so that they can fully engage in the inclusion process.
2. Issues faced by unaccompanied children should first and foremost be addressed from a child protection perspective and then from a migration or asylum-seeking angle.
3. Reception centres should be better equipped to address the needs of children on arrival, specifically healthcare professionals and practitioners supporting traumatised children.
4. Unaccompanied children should be provided with a guardian at the shortest possible delay so that they have a reference person who safeguards their interests and helps them coordinate the services they access.
5. Age assessment should always be led by child development professionals, carried out only with the young person's consent and most importantly taking account of a margin of error. EU Member States still follow different age assessment procedures, therefore it is crucial to work towards harmonising procedures.
6. Access to education should be guaranteed soon after the child's arrival. Preparatory classes are key to help children learn the language of the host country, and integration in mainstream education should take place as soon as possible. The role of school, career advisors and cultural mediators is key to help unaccompanied children and young migrants take the right steps towards their professional career. Training teachers and professionals working with unaccompanied children and young migrants is key to support their integration.
7. Access to care for children in irregular migration situations should be improved, because in many cases there is a lack of services take up. This is mainly linked to the fear of being reported to migration authorities.
8. Specific support should be provided for migrant children coming with their families as these children have specific needs, which may go unnoticed. For unaccompanied children reuniting with their families, it is important to assess as to whether this may lead to them dropping out of education or training.
9. Social services in Europe highlight the need of preparing young migrants in their transition to adulthood, hence providing a package of support after children leave care at 18.
10. Effective service coordination, for example, between child protection, health and migration or between social services, education and employment, is key to ensure the successful integration of migrant children and young people in societies across Europe.

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