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Review of the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors: draft report

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I. BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

1. The Committee of the Ministers adopted on 12 July 2007 the Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors (“the Recommendation”) to respond to challenges faced by member states hosting large numbers of unaccompanied children. The Recommendation sets out the concept of “life projects” as a policy tool, based on a joint agreement for a limited duration between a state’s competent authorities and an unaccompanied or separated child, aimed at developing the capacities of the child to acquire or strengthen the skills to become independent, responsible and active in the society. “Life projects”, by virtue of their flexible, personalised and holistic nature, should define the child’s future prospects, promote their best interests and provide for a long-term response to the needs of both the child and the parties concerned.

2. Thirteen years after the adoption of the Recommendation, several member states are still hosting large numbers of unaccompanied children in need of immediate assistance and access to durable solutions, which is considered to be evidence of the continued relevance of the issues covered by this Recommendation.

3. The Committee of Ministers adopted the terms of reference of the Ad hoc Committee for the Rights of the Child (CAHENF) for 2018-2019, instructing the Committee to contribute to the Action Plan by “reviewing Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors”.

4. In this context, the CAHENF launched a review to:

- (i) identify how and to what extent have countries implemented the principles and measures set out in the Appendix to the Recommendation, by taking stock of overarching implementation measures and collecting examples of good or promising practices related to policies, laws and practices in member states;
- (ii) consider whether the Recommendation is currently addressing challenges faced by member states and if not, which ones would merit further attention; and
- (iii) highlight lessons learned and what is needed to support the practical implementation of the Recommendation in the field, including how could the Council of Europe provide more concrete support to its implementation.

5. The Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), which has succeeded the CAHENF, has finalised the review, also by complementing and updating it with regards to the impact that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the integration and inclusion of unaccompanied children and the implementation of life projects.

6. When submitting this report to the Committee of Ministers, the CDENF aims at:

- (i) establishing whether and how the Recommendation has been implemented, taking into account the countries’ experiences on this issue, as shown by the replies of the 10 member states¹ to the request for information, highlighting areas where the implementation of the Recommendation appeared to be challenging, as well as possible solutions and examples of good practices²;

¹ Armenia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Slovenia, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg and Poland.

² For a detailed report, see CDENF (2020) 04 REV.

- (ii) advising the Committee of Ministers to keep the issue of “life projects” for unaccompanied children on the organisation’s migration related agenda, by proposing possible avenues and actions to enhance the implementation of the Recommendation and its principles, with a view to supporting member states in finding durable, long-lasting solutions to build life projects with unaccompanied children;
- (iii) encouraging all member states of the Council of Europe to reflect on positive measures which other states have already taken in the course of the follow-up to the present Recommendation.

II. IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THE RECOMMENDATION IN RESPONDING MEMBER STATES

Life projects: concepts and terminology

7. The analysis of the replies submitted by member states suggests that although the concept of “life projects” is widespread, it is generally known as “individual plan”. The term “life project” does not appear to be used at national level in responding states. Many member states have indeed developed national laws, policies and practices for the development of “individual plans” for unaccompanied children following their identification and registration. Furthermore, national child protection services have developed a “case management” approach when working with children that often, but not always, applies to cases of unaccompanied children.

Overarching Implementation Measures

8. Since the adoption of the Recommendation, a more elaborated legal and policy framework was put in place by responding states, addressing in particular asylum seeking and refugee children. Similarly, a protection framework of child victims of trafficking has also been developed, as a result of the wide ratification by states of the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, and the adoption of related implementing measures.

9. Special guarantees have been put in place for unaccompanied children seeking or enjoying asylum, in particular regarding non-refoulement and the identification of durable solutions.

10. All responding member states considered that the Recommendation appeared to remain relevant today and considered that “life projects” remained a useful response to safeguard the best interests of the child throughout the integration process. All reporting countries state that since 2007 steps have been taken to implement the principles and measures set out in the Recommendation at the national level.

Life projects as a tool for identification and implementation of lasting and durable solutions: Obstacles and limitations

11. In most responding states, child protection authorities are in charge of developing individual plans for unaccompanied children that will be granted refugee status and/or a long-term residence permit, to support their integration in the host country. However, only in a few countries authorities prepare an independence plan to support unaccompanied children prior to their transition to adulthood.

12. In most states, unaccompanied children who are still in the asylum process or are waiting for a decision on a long-term residence permit are usually denied international

protection when they turn 18. Some member states, however, offer some opportunities to unaccompanied children that cannot be returned to prolong their stay for a limited period of time and/or until their return is feasible, but only in a few cases they offer the possibility for status regularisation.

13. The Recommendation includes references to practical tools and advice for practitioners in the design and the implementation of life projects, providing a plan for young people in pursuit of a durable solution and also after it has been found. Life projects should set realistic objectives and should, to this end, take into consideration the legal status of the child, along with other elements such as the needs and the views of the child and the child's best interests. In practice, however, the legal and migration status of the child is the pivotal and determinant factor for the child's life and future prospects.

14. It is essential for the effective implementation of the Recommendation that a durable solution is identified for unaccompanied children as soon as possible to avoid situations of limbo, which are particularly detrimental for children as they evolve³. The identification of a durable solution shall not be seen as an isolated process that follows the procedure for the migration and/or protection status of the child. Rather, identifying the adequate durable solution and determining the best interests of the child shall be one and the same process, which must therefore influence the immigration or protection decision.

Developing life projects for unaccompanied children

15. Responding member states underlined that the best interests of the child is a guiding principle in all cases involving children, including in the case of unaccompanied children and that all the elements included in the Recommendation are taken into consideration in their best interests' national determination process. However, not all states appear to have put in place a specific procedure to determine the 'best interests of the child', which should constitute the basis for the identification of durable solutions and the development of the "life project". .

16. The Recommendation provides detailed guidance on the elements that should be taken into consideration when assessing and determining the best interests of the child and ultimately developing a life project that takes into consideration the child's individual situation and needs.

17. One of the main challenges identified concerned the fact that the results of the best interests determination, in most cases conducted by child protection authorities, are not necessarily reflected in the decision on the asylum/migration status of the child, which is instead issued by migration authorities. The various elements of life projects are thus determined at national level, by both migration and child protection laws. In practice, it is not evidenced how migration authorities take into consideration the best interests of the child, as reflected in the life projects, when deciding on the child's migration status;

Actors and professionals involved

18. The role of the care providers and child protection professionals, such as social workers and guardians responsible for developing an individual plan and the child's life project, is ultimately circumscribed and/or limited by immigration and asylum decisions. Indeed, immigration and asylum authorities appear to be the competent authority when it comes to finding durable solutions and/or, in practice, in determining the objectives of a life project of a child, in accordance with their decision on the legal and migration status of the child.

³ Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 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), 29 May 2013, CRC /C/GC/14

Interdisciplinary approach

19. Those member states whose systems provide for the development of individual plans usually see the involvement of various actors especially in the implementation phase, i.e. child protection authority (guardian/social worker or legal representative), accommodation/reception facility, school staff, etc. The actors having leading and coordinating roles vary among member states and they depend on the national protection system in place.

20. For the correct development and implementation of life projects, co-operation between migration and child protection authorities is of primary importance. However, both the member states' replies and the literature seem to point out that co-operation between the two authorities is usually fragmented and that the status and the decision-making power of migration authorities overrides, in practice, the best interests assessments and determination carried out by child protection authorities. While immigration authorities should definitely take into account the child protection staff's considerations, the latter should be duly trained to address a child's migration status and to support the child's access to and provision of legal advice where necessary. Interagency co-operation and coordination are essential for developing and applying an interdisciplinary approach.

21. Most responding states have not reported having created a specific institutional body in charge of coordinating actions taken towards unaccompanied children by different authorities and referred to the common practice of assigning the coordinating role to a guardian or social worker. However considering the challenges arising due to the lack of adequate legal frameworks or inadequacy of communication and coordination between it is clear that the effective coordination in this context is impacted by child welfare and immigration professionals, the effective implementation of this dimension of the recommendation is limited and/or defaulting.

Child's participation in the development and implementation of the life project

22. All responding member states confirmed that the development and implementation of each child's individual plan is closely followed by the relevant authorities, without however specifying what steps are taken to ensure that the child is informed of his or her rights, that he/she is able to express his/her views and on how those views are given due weight when establishing the life project or integration pathway.

Transnational cooperation

23. None of the responding member states reported to engage in transnational co-operation when it comes to life projects. This is mainly due to the fact that the projects are not designed to include returnees and/or those who are not granted a residence status and secondly, due to challenges and obstacles to an effective communication between authorities. With no doubt, these challenges would negatively impact the ability of the host country to monitor the course of the life project of the child in the country of origin.

Tools and procedures developed at national level to support practitioners

24. The majority of responding member states reported on guidelines, procedures and tools available at national level that aim to support practitioners in the development, adaptation and monitoring of life projects/individual plans for unaccompanied children. However, in most replies, the information was insufficiently detailed on the practical tools developed.

Review of individual plans developed and monitoring provisions

25. Provision must be made for progress, monitoring and reviewing life projects and individual plans both routinely and in response to changes in the child's situation. In some countries, specific timelines are foreseen in legal and policy documents and a review process is clearly defined.

Requirements for the successful implementation of life projects

26. Responses did not include sufficiently detailed information on how implementation is monitored by national or local authorities and on their obligations towards the child. The information provided by member states mainly focused on monitoring of reception facilities that are in principle responsible for the provision and or facilitate access to other support services.

Access to education and vocational training

27. All ten states reported that unaccompanied children have access to classes in the language of the host country and education on an equal footing with nationals. None of the member states' submissions provide any information on access to vocational training. However, many reported that access to vocational training for asylum seeking children and children without residence status is restricted.

III. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND LIFE PROJECTS

28. The Recommendation provides specific requirements and conditions for the successful implementation of life projects, with clear responsibilities for state actors to ensure the protection of the children, through allocation of appropriate resources, provision of access to social, welfare, health, educational services, legal representation and other services available to national children and young people.

29. The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 is being felt hardest by vulnerable groups of children as it is exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities and lack of access to services⁴. The situation is thus assumed to have impacted the implementation of the life projects of children, opening up a number of uncertainties and necessary adaptations to the individual plans to the extent possible.

30. Children without parental care, such as unaccompanied and separated children are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 related challenges and will suffer long after the pandemic ends⁵. In some cases, these challenges are added to situations of living in care placements⁶ or even in detention facilities such as migrant camps⁷.

31. In many Council of Europe member states, restrictive measures put in place in the context of COVID-19 responses have led to the suspension of registration, age assessment

⁴ D. You and others (April-June 2020). Migrant and displaced children in the age of COVID-19: How the pandemic is impacting them and what can we do to help. Migration Policy Practice, Vol. X, Number 2. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/68761/file>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ SOS Children's Villages International (May 2020). Covid-19 outbreak and its aftermath: A call to action: protecting children without or at risk of losing parental care. Available at: https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/2f48da70-4326-4fa8-950f-44fb5effe7c2/Covid19_Advocacy_PositionStatement.pdf

⁷ IOM (April 2020). COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #17: Impacts on migrant children and youth. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19_analytical_snapshot_17_impacts_on_migrant_children_and_youth_0.pdf

and other procedures (including relocation operations and asylum-seeking processes⁸) thereby locking migrant and refugee children out of access to the protections and services to which they are entitled. Moreover, UNICEF reported that the misinformation on the spread of COVID-19 exacerbated the xenophobia and discrimination that migrant children already face, therefore hampering their proper inclusion and integration.⁹

32. In this regard, international and civil society organisations have recalled that states should guarantee access to social services for all migrant children, uphold their rights to international protection¹⁰ and recognise unaccompanied and separated children as a priority group when developing short and long-term measures to respond to the pandemic.¹¹

Unaccompanied children's learning needs

33. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education has recalled that, during the pandemic, special emphasis should be placed on the equal importance of the right of marginalized or vulnerable children, including migrants, to continued education.¹² While school closures affect all children, distance learning is exacerbating existing inequalities, as many migrant children are unable to connect remotely to continue their education¹³ as they may not have access to the necessary digital technologies. Migrant children being out of school during the pandemic also increase risks of dropping school or lagging behind in terms of language learning.¹⁴

34. The Council of Europe Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees has stated that “continuing education through alternative learning pathways must be a top priority for all children, including refugee and migrant children. In the short-term this means ensuring access to learning, through temporary remote, alternative or distance learning”; “[i]n the medium term, it is essential that transitional measures are put in place to help children who have fallen behind in their education to re-join their level of schooling and competency” and “in the long-run [...] it is to set up contingency capacities to mitigate and manage risk in the future”.¹⁵

⁸ European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (April 2020). Open Letter on the emergency situation of migrant children trapped in camps at the border between Greece and Turkey and on the Greek Islands. Available at: <http://enoc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ENOC-Open-Letter-on-the-emergency-situation-of-migrant-children-in-Greece-FV.pdf>

⁹ UNICEF (April 2020). Quick Tips on COVID-19 and Migrant, Refugee and Internally Displaced Children (Children on the Move). Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/83556/file/Quick-Tips-on-COVID-19-and-Migrant-Refugee-and-Internally-Displaced-Children.pdf>

¹⁰ UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants (May 2020). Joint Guidance Note on the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Human Rights of Migrants. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/CMWSPMJointGuidanceNoteCOVID-19Migrants.pdf>

¹¹ SOS Children's Villages International (May 2020). Covid-19 outbreak and its aftermath: A call to action: protecting children without or at risk of losing parental care.

¹² Special Rapporteur on the right to education (June 2020). Right to education: impact of the coronavirus disease crisis on the right to education – concerns, challenges and opportunities. Human Rights Council Forty-fourth session. A/HRC/44/39.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ IOM (April 2020). COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #17: Impacts on migrant children and youth.

¹⁵ Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on Migration and Refugees (June 2020). Speech at the ECRI webinar on inclusive education in time of COVID-19 with special focus on migrant and Roma children. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/special-representative-secretary-general-migration-refugees/-/ecri-webinar-on-inclusive-education-in-time-of-covid-19-ith-special-focus-on-migrant-and-roma-children>

Unaccompanied children – specific groups facing a higher vulnerability and increased risks

35. Migrant children living in institutions and detention face a higher vulnerability, as their continuous care is easily put in jeopardy during the crisis.¹⁶ The United Nations Network on Migration has called states to prioritise the immediate release of all children – whether unaccompanied, separated or in families – from immigration detention, as children should never be detained for reasons related to their migration status and immigration detention is never in a child's best interests.¹⁷

36. Children in alternative care also face additional challenges, as there has been a reduction of access, visits and contact with social workers and specialised experts in charge of assessing their situation or of addressing specific and individual treatment for some children, with the consequent long-term impact the reduced services will have. Besides, the temporary or permanent closures of some care facilities has put these children in absolute danger.¹⁸

37. The pandemic is increasing unaccompanied children's financial insecurity, poverty and marginalisation. Young people aging out of care and transitioning into independent living are facing extremely fragile situations, due to the lack of protections and safety nets to survive. The youth migrant population has a higher likelihood of unemployment during economic crisis and of falling victims of labour exploitation, as they often work in the informal economy, in temporary work, and in sectors most impacted by the pandemic¹⁹.

38. Given its impacts, the pandemic may also lead to more children being trafficked or sexually abused or exploited²⁰. As child protection systems have halted during the pandemic, reports highlighted the situation of many unaccompanied children having been forced to live on the streets or in unsanitary overcrowded squats, facing a higher risk of being detained by immigration authorities and of falling victims of violence, abuse or exploitation.²¹

39. School closures and the lack of interaction with social workers, teachers and school friends are depriving children of their safe space and making them more vulnerable to become victims of trafficking networks²², and has heightened the risk of online sexual exploitation, with children spending more time online and an increase in demand for sexual materials from offenders.²³

Access to information, healthcare and mental health

40. Due to their poor integration in hosting communities, unaccompanied and separated children can be hardest to reach with accurate public health information in a language they understand.²⁴ The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and the UN Special

¹⁶ United Nations Secretary-General (April 2020). Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-children>

¹⁷ United Nations Network on Migration (April 2020). COVID-19 & Immigration Detention: What Can Governments and Other Stakeholders Do? Available at: <https://www.iom.int/news/covid-19-immigration-detention-what-can-governments-and-other-stakeholders-do>

¹⁸ SOS Children's Villages International (May 2020). Covid-19 outbreak and its aftermath: A call to action: protecting children without or at risk of losing parental care.

¹⁹ IOM (April 2020). COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #17: Impacts on migrant children and youth.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children (June 2020). COVID-19 Position paper: The impact and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficked and exploited persons. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Trafficking/COVID-19-Impact-trafficking.pdf>

²⁴ UNICEF (April 2020). Quick Tips on COVID-19 and Migrant, Refugee and Internally Displaced Children (Children on the Move).

Rapporteur on trafficking in persons have stated that particular attention should be given to inadequate or overcrowding facilities where migrant children are accommodated and that residents at such facilities, whether open or closed, should be provided with accurate and accessible information on the COVID-19 outbreak, practical advice on preventing infection and access to clean water, sanitation facilities and other prevention materials.²⁵

41. Unaccompanied or separated children face additional psychological harms, added to the pre-existing trauma; less recreational resources to deal with the boredom, anxiety and uncertainty caused by lockdowns and school closures; marginalisation and stigma from host communities; and poor access to psychological and social support, which is already underresourced among this group.^{26,27} Hence, the World Health Organisation has recalled that mental health services need to be readily accessible for unaccompanied children to get psychological support, especially if they are in detention or living in institutions.²⁸

Need of extending the protection measures for unaccompanied children

42. The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons have called for an automatic extension for at least six months of all protection and assistance programmes for unaccompanied children that are close to their expiration date, to ensure continuity of social inclusion processes.²⁹ The United Nations Network on Migration has also called states to suspend the automatic discharge of unaccompanied and separated children turning 18 from public care to avoid risk of homelessness and immigration detention.³⁰

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND NEXT STEPS

43. During the review of the implementation of the Recommendation, member states were invited to indicate measures which they would recommend in view of ensuring implementation of the Recommendation at the national level, including measures which should be taken by the Council of Europe. On the basis of proposals received, the following actions can be recommended as a possible follow-up:

1. There remains a need for more information from states for an appropriate implementation assessment and specific obstacles and challenges

44. The responses received have enabled to highlight a number of initiatives and good practices, which are a sign of positive achievements in reporting member states. However, the information received does not enable the CDENF to have a comprehensive assessment in a sufficient number of member states of the overall implementation of the Recommendation and its impact, let alone specific obstacles and challenges to implementation.

²⁵ OHCHR (April 2020). UN experts call on Governments to adopt urgent measures to protect migrants and trafficked persons in their response to COVID-19. Available at: <https://ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25774&LangID=E>

²⁶ D. You and others (April-June 2020). Migrant and displaced children in the age of COVID-19: How the pandemic is impacting them and what can we do to help. Migration Policy Practice, Vol. X, Number 2.

²⁷ SOS Children's Villages International (May 2020). Covid-19 outbreak and its aftermath: A call to action: protecting children without or at risk of losing parental care.

²⁸ World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe (June 2020). Factsheet: Vulnerable populations during COVID-19 response. Children in orphanages and unaccompanied minors in the context of COVID-19 response in the WHO European Region. Available at: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/publications-and-technical-guidance/2020/factsheet-vulnerable-populations-during-covid-19-response-children-in-orphanages-and-unaccompanied-minors-june-2020>

²⁹ OHCHR (April 2020). UN experts call on Governments to adopt urgent measures to protect migrants and trafficked persons in their response to COVID-19.

³⁰ United Nations Network on Migration (April 2020). COVID-19 & Immigration Detention: What Can Governments and Other Stakeholders Do? Available at: <https://www.iom.int/news/covid-19-immigration-detention-what-can-governments-and-other-stakeholders-do>

45. Considering the existing challenges faced by the administrations, it is not recommended at this stage to continue collecting information on the Recommendation as a whole, but rather focus on specific interventions, in order to provide support on identified aspects that require further co-operation among member states.

2. There is a need for the development of integrated child protection systems and a holistic child protection approach for all children in need of protection as a conducive framework for the application of CM/Rec(2007)9

46. Member states should be encouraged to develop integrated child protection systems and to apply a holistic child protection approach by developing joint trainings that enhance cooperation and bring together legal and child protection and welfare professionals, as well as asylum and migration authorities, promoting a shared understanding of the life projects approach. Moreover, strategies establishing clear reference and linking the Recommendation with other child protection tools and guidance should be developed, in order to increase the integration between different professionals dealing with children.

47. States should be assisted in the development of inclusive and non-discriminatory provisions and practices relating to life projects based on a holistic approach to provide all unaccompanied and separated children with a chance to (re-)integrate in a society and lead them towards an independent life, regardless of their immigration status or age. Promotion of principles such as the equity of care and non-discrimination will encourage member states to treat unaccompanied children under national child protection laws and policies.

48. This report has found that there is a compelling need to identify an adequate framework of effective transnational cooperation, as its absence prevents states from establishing provisions and practices concerning the implementation and follow-up of children who do not get a residence status in the host country, jeopardizing the effectiveness and impact of a life project.

3. Updating the explanatory memorandum to integrate examples of good practices and clarify terminology or developing an implementation guide should be considered

49. The key concepts and principles of the Recommendation are still relevant, therefore the CDENF does not consider that a revision of the Recommendation and the adoption of new standards in this area appear to be necessary.

50. The Council of Europe should take note of the evolution of the terminology used in the Recommendation. In fact, these differences appear to have triggered some difficulties in reporting on the implementation of the Recommendation. A more consistent use of the terms “unaccompanied” and/or “separated child” is suggested. Moreover, the term “child”, rather than “minor”, should be preferred, so as to be in line with the provisions of the UNCRC and to reflect other relevant Council of Europe standards and norms.

51. Although differences in terminology would not justify a whole revision of the Recommendation, clarifications on these terms could be provided **by a partial revision of the Explanatory Memorandum or the formulation of an implementation guide/tools, endowed with a collection of good practices.**

52. This work could be led by a thematic limited group of experts of the CDENF in the next biennium, and would be closely linked with other actions required for the preparation of the review of the implementation of the Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on effective guardianship

for unaccompanied children (due to be submitted to the Committee of Ministers within three years from its adoption).

53. Moreover, cross-referencing the present Recommendation with other relevant instruments of the Council of Europe (e.g. Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration, CM/Rec(2019) 4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood) could further spread and shed light on the notion of “life projects”. The same tools could also provide more detailed guidance on lasting and durable solutions as well as international cooperation, that are not addressed in detail, despite their importance within a life projects approach.

4. Stepping up efforts to harmonize the management of life projects at the national level and the provision of quality standards appears necessary

54. To enhance the operation of life projects, the Council of Europe should promote a clear distinction between the period before and after the status determination, defining and framing the life projects approach as a tool to both pursue durable solutions and facilitate the integration of the child. Further action by the Council of Europe in this area should enhance the capacity of professionals working with and for children, especially unaccompanied children, and promote social work practice and a case management approach among child protection actors.

55. Further **guidance and tools targeting policy makers and service providers** should be developed to increase awareness on life projects and the importance of assisting children in their transition to adulthood, **promoting good practices, through study visits, peer reviews, thematic conferences or workshops with relevant professionals, involving also the relevant committees, bodies and networks of the Council of Europe which work on the issues at stake.**

56. The CDENF is currently consulting member states and other relevant stakeholders on the proposed priority areas and actions that should be reflected in the future Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), in order to submit to the Committee of Ministers its first draft by the end of 2021. Such actions could be reflected in the draft strategy, if member states consider them to be among the priority actions.

57. Furthermore, subject to the Committee of Ministers' decision, additional follow-up given to the Action Plan for protecting refugee and migrant children in Europe (2017-2019) and proposals for further activities which could encompass actions to reflect the importance of “life projects” and operationalize, where necessary, the principles set out in CM/Rec (2007)09 and other relevant Council of Europe standards in this area, as suggested above.

58. To conclude, the CDENF invites the Committee of Ministers:

- a) to take note of this report and to advise on next steps, with due consideration of the additional challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to the situation of unaccompanied children to the implementation of life projects.
- b) to encourage states to continue their efforts to implement the various provisions of the Recommendation, and to translate and disseminate it as widely as possible.