

TOOLKIT ON THE TRANSITION OF UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN TO ADULTHOOD



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TOOLKIT ON THE TRANSITION OF UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN TO ADULTHOOD

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Jointly implemented with:



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List of acronyms

CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EMDR	Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
PFA	Psychological First Aid
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN	United Nations

Glossary

For the purposes of this toolkit, the following definitions are used.

Asylum seeker: an individual who is seeking international protection.¹

Age assessment: any process carried out by a competent authority to estimate a person's age.²

Age of majority: the age at which a child becomes an adult and acquires full legal capacity. Having reached the age of majority means that a person can engage in legal activities and is liable for contractual obligations.³

Child: every human being below the age of 18 years.⁴

Guardian: a person who is appointed or designated to support, assist and, where provided by law, represent unaccompanied or separated children in processes concerning them. The guardian acts independently to ensure that the child's rights, best interests and well-being are guaranteed.⁵

Migrant children: children crossing borders for whatever reason.⁶

Psychological First Aid (PFA): a type of early intervention that aims to provide immediate support and assistance to individuals who have experienced a traumatic event, such as a natural disaster, a violent attack, or a personal crisis. PFA aims to reduce the distress and emotional impact of the traumatic event by addressing basic needs, promoting safety and comfort, and providing practical and emotional support. It is typically provided by trained mental health professionals, first responders, or community members with basic mental health knowledge.

Unaccompanied child: a child who has been separated from both parents and other relatives and is not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.⁷

Refugee: a person who is outside his/her country of nationality due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and who is unable or, because of this fear, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country. A refugee could also be a stateless person who is outside the country of habitual residence for the same reasons.⁸

Separated children: children who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.⁹

Transition into adulthood: can be understood as "the assumption of new roles and tasks related to the acquisition of autonomy and social integration, that culminates in the achievement of education, training, work, mature relationships, financial and housing independence."¹⁰

Youth: the terms youth and young people are often used to refer to adolescents and young adults together. In the absence of a unified international definition, the United Nations define "youth" as all persons aged between 15 and 24, mainly for statistical purposes.¹¹

1. Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951) 189 UNTS 137 and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 31 January 1967) 606 UNTS 267.
2. Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2022\)22](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on human rights principles and guidelines on age assessment in the context of migration. See further: European Asylum Support Office (2014), *Age assessment practice in Europe*, p. 57.
3. Council of Europe Recommendation [Rec\(2012\)2](#) on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18, p. 6. See also, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Age of majority*.
4. Article 1, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989.
5. Council of Europe, *Effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration*, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)11 of the Committee of Ministers and Explanatory Memorandum, 2022, II.1.d., p. 12. See also, FRA, *Guardianship for children deprived of parental care, A handbook to reinforce guardianship systems to cater for the specific needs of child victims of trafficking*, 2015, pp. 11-12.
6. *Promoting child-friendly approaches in the area of migration - Standards, guidance and current practices*, December 2019, p. 18.
7. Council of Europe, *Effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration*, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)11 of the Committee of Ministers and Explanatory Memorandum, 2022, II.1.b., p. 12.
8. *United Nations Convention relating to the status of refugees, 1950, Article 1A(2)*.
9. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *General comment No. 6 (2005): Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin*, 1 September 2005, para 8.
10. López, M.L., Santos, I., Bravo, A. and del Valle, J.F., 2013, The process of transition to adulthood of young people fostered by the child welfare system. *An. Psicol.*, 29, 187–196; cited in PICUM, *Turning 18 and undocumented: Supporting children in their transition into adulthood*, 2022, p. 4.
11. United Nations, *Definition of Youth*, undated.

Introduction

Every year, large numbers of migrant and refugee children arrive in Europe via various migratory routes, often without their parents or adult caregivers. They are known as unaccompanied or separated children. Most of these children are male, aged between 16 and 18 years old when arriving and come from various countries, regions, and social and political contexts.

Unaccompanied migrant children fall under child protection schemes upon arrival in various European countries and are thus protected by the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). However, the situation changes radically when these children turn 18 years old. They lose their rights under child protection systems and cannot rely on specific safeguards for minors in migration law. Generally, legal safeguards do not provide for a transition period for unaccompanied migrant children who reach the age of majority. Depending on their legal status and administrative situation, some (former) unaccompanied migrant children risk finding themselves in precarity, homelessness or become vulnerable to human trafficking and illegal networks. Moreover, unaccompanied migrant children face additional difficulties such as legal and bureaucratic hurdles and difficulties accessing education, employment, accommodation, and social services. In such situations, turning 18 years old is not something to celebrate, but rather a transition that can be associated with a lot of fear, insecurity and loss of orientation.

Supporting unaccompanied migrant children in their transition to adulthood requires a holistic and multidisciplinary approach that recognises their multiple dimensions of well-being. Additionally, it is equally important to bear in mind that unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood are not a homogeneous group, and their experiences and needs may vary; it is then essential to consider them inside a specific context and to take into account their different individual characteristics and specific needs.

In conclusion, unaccompanied migrant children need continued support after they turn 18 years old. Legal safeguards should provide for a transition period for unaccompanied migrant children who reach the age of majority to prevent them from becoming homeless or vulnerable to human trafficking and illegal networks. Support programmes should also be designed to address the unique challenges and needs of each unaccompanied child and provide them with comprehensive and individualised assistance.

What is the purpose of this toolkit?

The toolkit aims to provide professionals working with unaccompanied migrant children with knowledge, concrete tips, tools and ideas to better support these youngsters in their transition to adulthood. To this end, the toolkit covers a wide range of topics particularly important for unaccompanied migrant children during this critical period of their lives, including how to facilitate access to legal support, education, employment, social integration, health and well-being, and accommodation.

The toolkit aims to be interactive, user-friendly and seeks to provide the readers with possible new perspectives or invitations to try out new methods and approaches.

For whom is this toolkit intended?

The toolkit is intended for professionals and stakeholders working with unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood, including social workers, lawyers, educators, healthcare providers, frontline officers, field officers, youth workers, foster families, mentors, guardians, and community workers. It is also relevant for policymakers, government officials, and non-governmental organisations working in the field of child protection and migration.

How is this toolkit structured and how to use it?

This toolkit is structured in a user-friendly format and consists of an introduction, five main modules – each focusing on a specific topic – and the annexes; the content of each section is briefly described below.

MODULE 1 provides an overview of how to strengthen support systems for unaccompanied migrant children during their transition to adulthood.

MODULE 2 discusses legal frameworks and procedures related to basic rights and legal support. The module covers several aspects including immigration and asylum procedures, the relevance of chronological age, as well as aspects related to the Dublin regulation, family reunification, access to basic rights and legal support.

MODULE 3 begins by exploring the psychosocial impact of migration on unaccompanied migrant children followed by a discussion of the differences between psychosocial support and psychotherapy. The module also provides insights on how to work on stabilisation and resources with unaccompanied migrant children during this transition phase and outlines what professionals can do to support them.

MODULE 4 discusses the right to education and the labour market, the main challenges for unaccompanied migrant children in this regard and explores ways to support them. It also emphasises the role of non-formal education during the transition to adulthood and provides guidance on how to facilitate access to education and the labour market.

MODULE 5 delves into key aspects related to access to accommodation such as the stages of moving out of care and the various accommodation options available. Additionally, the chapter provides essential tips for professionals on how to best support unaccompanied migrant children and young people in accessing accommodation.

ANNEXES: Annex 1 contains a workshop programme proposal, and Annex 2 a relevant bibliography and Council of Europe reference documents.

Activities are proposed throughout the toolkit. Some are just short invitations to self-reflect for you as a professional. Others can be done together with unaccompanied migrant children and young adults. Some activities can be proposed to them either individually, or as a group.

MODULE 1 – System strengthening to support young people in transition to adulthood

” Wisdom is the intelligence of the system as a whole ”

Gregory Bateson

In this chapter, we address the following:

- ▶ Defining systems
- ▶ Me, the unaccompanied child and society: roles, responsibilities, mandates and limits
- ▶ Who is the unaccompanied child in transition to adulthood? Identity and complexity
- ▶ Identifying needs and challenges of unaccompanied migrant children in your country/ local context
- ▶ Creating networks in transition times
- ▶ How to best prepare transition?

1.1. DEFINING SYSTEMS

Societal systems can be explained through the image of a mobile over a baby bed: little turtles, penguins, and dolphins. Can you picture it? We could say that each of us has a mobile, composed of many smaller parts or systems. We are part of our original family, our current family. We are part of social groups or systems. We have a professional system. Our body works like a system, our organs are interconnected and interrelated. In each of these systems, we are ourselves, but in connection to whom or what surrounds us. If one of the elements starts moving, it makes the whole system move, or even sometimes the whole mobile.

This is exactly the way societal structures and laws function. We like to create superficial separations between ages (child, youth, adult), countries or origins, and fields (education, health, accommodation, labour, etc.). However, we must not forget that at the core of it all, there are human beings struggling to navigate through life.

When working with unaccompanied migrant children, or unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood, you are depending on, and cooperating with, a whole structure of systems. You are an individual human being, who comes with your own set of values, systems you belong to, persons you are in a relationship with, things you have experienced, and reasons why you chose to work in this field with this particular target group. Maybe you are a partner, a daughter, a brother, a parent, or a friend. You are also a colleague, a social worker, an educator, a lawyer, a psychologist, etc.

Just as professionals are more than their profession, unaccompanied migrant children are more than these three words (unaccompanied – migrant – children). They are complex human beings, with stories, family links, resources, skills, dreams, and opinions related to other topics than migration and integration. To best accompany unaccompanied children during the transition to adulthood, it is important to help them think about who they are, to identify beyond their legal status, and to differentiate from each other through what makes them unique and related to each other.

1.2. WHO ARE UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN IN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD?

Unaccompanied migrant children in transition are a diverse group of individuals who share a unique set of circumstances. Here are some key points to understand about who they are:

- ▶ They do not have family members or other relatives on the territory
- ▶ They were assessed as minors

- ▶ They are foreign nationals
- ▶ They are adolescents
- ▶ They approach their eighteenth birthday
- ▶ Most of them are boys, some are girls
- ▶ Their legal status will change after they turn 18 years old
- ▶ They need to be self-dependent and autonomous but might not be fully ready for that

However, the above is quite incomplete as a picture for a person.

A first step in accompanying unaccompanied migrant children in their transition to adulthood is to put the richness of their identity back into the centre.

Giving unaccompanied migrant children the opportunity to connect through other themes than their current status often creates a sense of pride, a willingness to open up, and a connection to their own resources. It allows for the creation of new links between young people, and with you as professionals.



Exercise 1: Exploring Identity

Participatory exercise with unaccompanied children in transition to adulthood



Objectives:

- ▶ To help unaccompanied children in transition explore their identity and sense of self
- ▶ To encourage self-reflection and introspection
- ▶ To facilitate group bonding and understanding of each other's identity

Materials:

- ▶ Pieces of paper
- ▶ Pens or pencils
- ▶ Pre-printed flower template (optional)

Instructions:

1. Introduce the activity and explain its objective.
2. Distribute the materials (paper and pens/pencils).
3. Instruct the youngsters to draw a flower with several petals, either freehand or using a pre-printed template.
4. Ask them to write their name in the centre of the flower and then fill in the petals with different aspects that define them. These can be qualities, things they do, persons they relate to, aspects of their personality, traits... there is no right or wrong.
5. Once they have finished, invite them to share their flower with others in the group.
6. Encourage the children to add more petals to their flowers based on what they learn from others' flowers.
7. After everyone has shared their flower, bring the group back together for a debriefing discussion.
8. Ask open-ended questions to encourage reflection, such as:
 - How was it to draw your flower?
 - How easily did you find things to put in? What does it say about you?
 - How did you feel when sharing your flower?
 - What did you learn about yourself?
 - What did you learn about others?
 - What would you like to be able to put into this flower in the future?

Thank the children for participating and remind them that their identity is unique and valuable.

Unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood are adolescents. Adolescence is by itself a period of transition. An in-between childhood and adulthood. A moment of confusion, hormonal changes,

body changes, voice changes. A moment when young people start to differentiate themselves from their parents and explore their identity, their values, and their interests. It is a period where young people start feeling attraction and developing their sexuality. It is a moment in life where the emotion of shame is very present, where the balance between “being similar enough to others”, and “being different enough”, is difficult to hold.

Adolescents need guidance, support, and adult figures to face all these sudden changes. So, they can explore, fail, try again, wonder and project into the future. Guiding these adolescents with their existential questions about the world, their identity, the body, relationships, etc. is an important aspect of preparing them for adulthood.

In addition, unaccompanied migrant children go through particular situations in relation to their migratory situation: they are in a country that is not their own, they may have had to go through a long and dangerous travel route, and in some cases, they face discrimination, xenophobia, and the potential effects of the grief and uprooting that migration implies, which places them in a very vulnerable situation.

Therefore, it is believed that unaccompanied migrant children undergo a “**triple transition**” which includes the universal transition from adolescence to adulthood, the transition of migration that involves leaving behind their roots to adapt to a new cultural and social environment, and finally, the transition of overcoming traumatic experiences before, during, or after their journey, with the activation of resilience factors that enable them to attain a state of new or rediscovered individual well-being.¹²

1.3. AN INDIVIDUALISED APPROACH

Many unaccompanied children in transition come from rather collective cultures and societies. The way private and public space, time, distance and proximity are organised vary greatly. The way family structures are organised, and the way children are raised, are also quite different. While for many unaccompanied children being alone in a room may be considered a punishment rather than a minimum standard of comfort, for others, it may be an important step towards independence and autonomy.

Most children reaching Europe have also gained a high level of responsibility already, be it by their initial uprising, or by the many hardships they had to overcome and survive. When reaching Europe and entering the child protection schemes, they often feel infantilised by rules concerning bed hours, lack of right to free time by themselves or high levels of adult supervision in tasks they used to accomplish themselves. Paradoxically, when turning 18 years old, all of this is suddenly taken away, with no or very little support left. This extreme shift is not related to the actual physical and psychological development of the child, but exclusively to age, be it the actual age, or the age based on the age assessment.

To better understand the situation of each unaccompanied child, professionals should inquire about various aspects related to their transition to adulthood. **The more comprehensive and individualised the profile is, the better can each child be accompanied and guided towards adulthood.**

As a professional, you may find the following questions helpful in creating a more comprehensive needs profile:

- ▶ Did the youngster already live independently before?
- ▶ What is the youngster’s level of literacy?
- ▶ How well does the youngster speak the language?
- ▶ How emotionally stable is the youngster?
- ▶ How well connected is the youngster to other peers or to a community?
- ▶ Does the youngster exhibit any extreme behaviour or engage in risky activities?
- ▶ Does the youngster have specific needs to be addressed?

12. ISMU Foundation (2019), *At a Crossroad. Unaccompanied and Separated Children in their Transition to Adulthood in Italy*. UNICEF, UNHCR e IOM, Roma.

1.4. IDENTIFYING SPECIFIC NEEDS

Unaccompanied migrant children are recognised as a vulnerable group. They have a double vulnerability because they are children and because they cannot rely on their parents or other primary caregivers for parental support. Certain unaccompanied migrant children, however, also have additional vulnerabilities, increasing the risk of under-representation and different forms of abuse and exploitation. Adequately trained professionals must be in a key position to identify and appropriately support unaccompanied migrant children with additional vulnerabilities. To mitigate the risks associated with additional vulnerabilities, unaccompanied migrant children should be offered a consultation mechanism to express themselves in a safe environment close to their daily routine and habits. Especially for unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood, who might be at risk of losing the required professional support upon reaching the age of majority, peer support groups can be a helpful tool to offer a network that remains available after reaching the age of majority.

The identification of specific needs is a fundamental step for a comprehensive approach, as these may place unaccompanied migrant children in a situation of greater vulnerability compared to their peers.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of some specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV): refers to any type of violence or harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.¹³ SGBV can also be psychological, including threats, blackmail, or other forms of coercion. Violence may also include economic exploitation, begging and other forms of child labour. SGBV against unaccompanied migrant children may have occurred in their country of origin, during their migration trajectory or in the host country. Inappropriate living conditions make unaccompanied migrant children vulnerable to falling victim to SGBV. Sexual violence against children is a taboo, therefore its disclosure is rare, hindering the identification of victims. Professionals dealing with unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood should be able to identify all forms of SGBV and make the appropriate referrals.

Trafficking in Human Beings (THB): is a complex phenomenon as it is a serious crime that severely violates human rights. THB is a crime typically hidden within communities and societies. THB survivors are very hard to identify, as they rarely disclose their trafficking experience on motive. Identifying and dealing with THB in cases involving unaccompanied migrant children is a challenging field of humanitarian work. It combines multiple tasks and disciplines to protect the survivors and help them continue their lives autonomously without the fear of falling under the influence of trafficking networks again.

Furthermore, transitioning to adulthood implies that certain safeguards for children no longer apply, aggravating the risk of THB. The risk of misidentification of (potential) victims of THB is exacerbated by language barriers, a lack of access to (accelerated) asylum procedures, limited protection solutions such as adequate accommodation, lack of information and training of state officials and limited free legal aid. Professionals working with unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood should be aware of these factors to increase the likelihood that specific needs relating to vulnerability associated with THB are correctly and timely identified.

Grounds related to **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI)** might be a ground for international protection. At the same time, it makes unaccompanied migrant children vulnerable to under-representation, abuse and exploitation. Especially for unaccompanied migrant children from countries of origin where discriminatory policies and societal practices towards SOGI are widespread, it is a challenge to offer a safe climate of confidence and a relationship of trust so that the applicant feels safe to self-identify. Offering a safe environment is vital both for the psychological well-being of unaccompanied migrant children and for considering SOGI-related circumstances as a ground for international protection. Especially in the age group of unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood, SOGI-related issues might manifest themselves. Professionals working with unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood should be aware of the legal and human rights frameworks that apply in different countries of origin to understand the experiences of unaccompanied migrant children before they arrive in the host state and how this affects their psychological state. To offer a safe climate of confidence and trust, professionals working with unaccompanied migrant children must respect aspects that relate to SOGI.¹⁴

13. Council of Europe, Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2011, available via <https://rm.coe.int/ic-and-explanatory-report/16808d24c6>, p. 8.

14. See, for an overview of national guidance and practices towards SOGI in asylum policy in the EU member states, European Union Agency for Asylum, [Survey on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Key Findings Report](#), 2022.

The specific needs of unaccompanied migrant girls in transition to adulthood: Girls arriving by themselves are even more in danger of sexual abuse, human trafficking and other forms of violence or slavery. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that unaccompanied girls:

- ▶ may have experienced gender-based violence in their country of origin or during their journey, which can have a profound impact on their mental and physical health.
- ▶ may have specific health needs that are related to their gender, such as reproductive health, and may require access to female healthcare providers.
- ▶ may face barriers to education, such as discriminatory attitudes or lack of access to resources, which can limit their opportunities for the future.
- ▶ may be at increased risk of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking and sexual exploitation, and may require additional protection measures.
- ▶ need to benefit from specific programmes and services that promote their empowerment and help them develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed in life.

1.5. IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES

Unaccompanied children in transition to adulthood encounter a variety of challenges, which may be common or unique to each individual. Many factors play a significant role in defining what young people in transition to adulthood will need, and which challenges they will face. These include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ whether they have applied for asylum
- ▶ their administrative status
- ▶ the host country they are in, its laws and regulations
- ▶ the level of trauma they have experienced
- ▶ the level of education and literacy
- ▶ the age upon arrival, or the time available between arrival and turning 18
- ▶ whether they have specific needs
- ▶ the discrimination they face
- ▶ their ability to connect to others, make friends, etc.

To best accompany the preparation for the transition to adulthood, it can be useful to list all the challenges faced by the young person. Some challenges are clear and pragmatic, and easy to identify. Others may be more intuitive, difficult to grasp, or based on fears and insecurities about the future. Furthermore, unaccompanied migrant children may not always have a complete understanding of the challenges they might face during the transition to adulthood, which may in turn lead to oversight of important aspects. Making unaccompanied children aware of the challenges relating to the transition to adulthood and working through these challenges together can be a helpful way to make them realise certain things without adding anxiety.

In Annex 1, you will find a table “Identify challenges, fears, needs, resources and next steps” which can serve as a basis for identifying challenges and needs in various fields, supporting the young person and examples of concrete steps to be taken. This table could be filled in on a regular basis, as a preparation process towards independence and adulthood. Identifying fears can help either to address them, or to deconstruct some of them if needed, in order to reassure the young person about some unrealistic concepts. This exercise could even serve as a form of self-evaluation, with weekly and monthly objectives, as a way to introduce unaccompanied children to early life project development in their transition to adulthood. The table could even be related to some “homework”, with one concrete task or line to be filled in every week. If one topic appears particularly difficult, external resource persons could be identified to help. This could, for example, include former unaccompanied children who have already been through this process.



TIPS

When planning for the transition to adulthood, it is crucial to start as early as possible. By doing so, unaccompanied migrant children can better envision their future and have a sense of agency and control over their actions and decisions. This allows for a more concrete and achievable plan for their next steps towards becoming independent adults.

1.6. IDENTIFYING NETWORKS

For unaccompanied children arriving in Europe, the whole societal care system is very confusing. They may struggle to identify the people responsible for various aspects related to their care, including whom they can trust, who is in charge of what, whom to approach for different aspects, who is respecting confidentiality, and who is not.

It is extremely useful to identify existing coordination mechanisms and networks for the protection of children and adolescents in the context of migration. This implies knowing the functioning of each instance involved in supporting unaccompanied children in key areas related to the transition to adulthood such as legal support, housing and social benefits, access to education and the labour market, access to health care and psychological support; and try to clarify, as far as possible, who is in charge of what.

Ideally, it is expected that these instances work in an articulated manner in the comprehensive care of unaccompanied migrant children, including their transition to adulthood, with established guidelines and protocols.



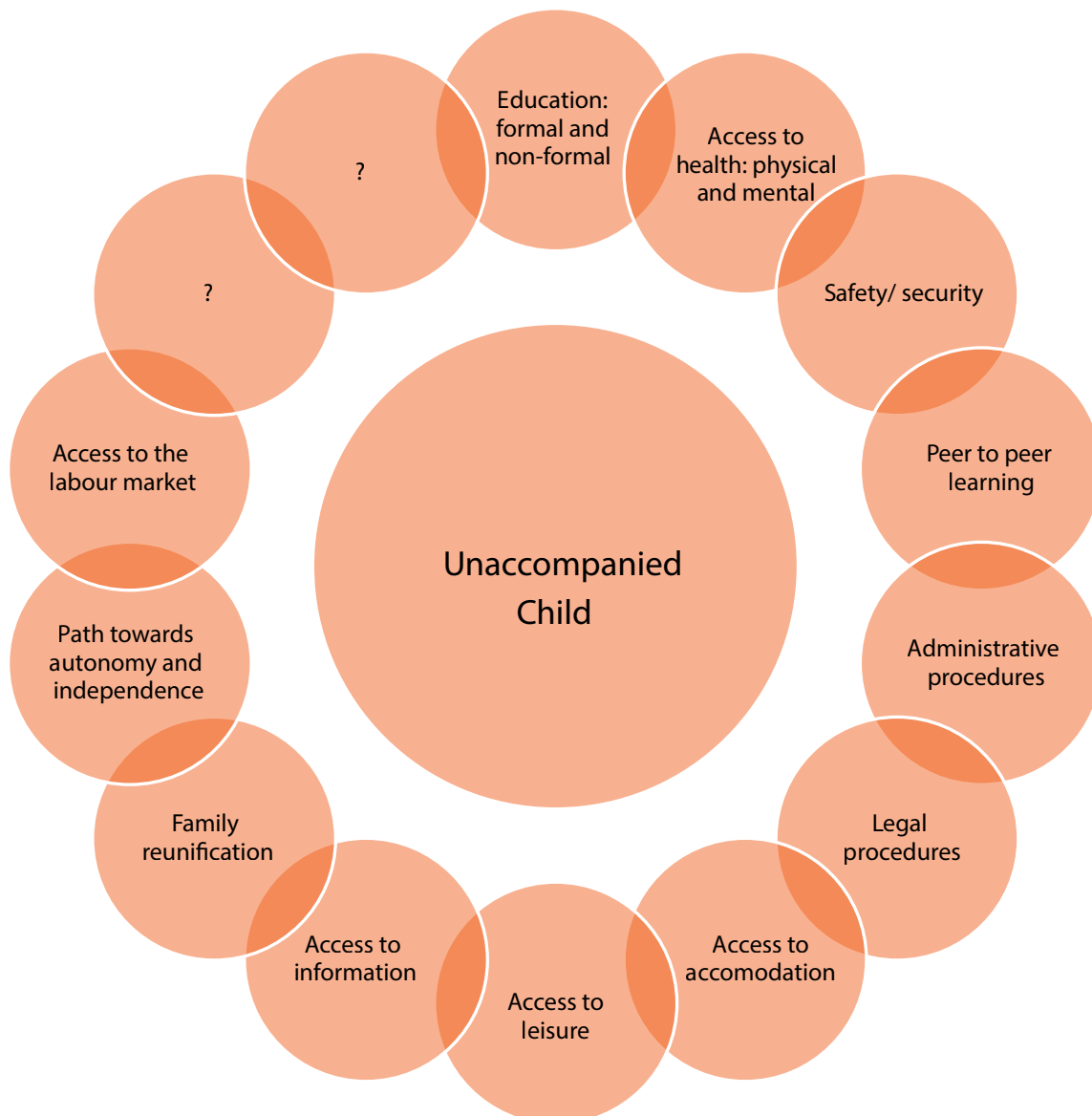
Exercise 2: Identifying networks

Take a look at the graph below

- ▶ In which of these fields do you intervene in your work with unaccompanied children?
- ▶ For each of these fields related to the support for the child, who can be a contact person/ organisation? Is it within your structure? In your town? Is it a national organisation? Can it be another young person, or a former unaccompanied child?
- ▶ Sit down and try to brainstorm on your existing and available networks.
- ▶ Are some categories empty? How could you identify new networks? Who could be a person to contact? Meet?
- ▶ In the first round, you can start identifying support networks for **unaccompanied children under 18**.
- ▶ Then, in the second round, try to do the exercise again, this time in the context of **unaccompanied children turning 18**.
- ▶ Which networks remain? Which ones need to be replaced? Who can be new contact persons/ institutions?
- ▶ Once you have filled this circle yourself, do it with colleagues who may think of additional networks.
- ▶ Then, share it with unaccompanied children in transition to adulthood. Let them think together with you about the networks, communities, contact persons, social media groups or websites they may know.

This is a good exercise to get a clear picture of what is available and what is missing. It can allow for targeted research and help unaccompanied migrant children in transition to prepare and create new contacts and opportunities.

WHAT	WHO IS IN CHARGE BEFORE 18	WHO IS IN CHARGE AFTER 18	ACTION REQUIRED?
Access to education (formal and non-formal)			
Access to physical health			
Access to mental health			
Access to the labour market			
Access to accommodation			
Access to security/ safety			
Access to leisure			
Access to information			



? Let's reflect

- ▶ What do you notice?
- ▶ What could be a concrete next step in order to develop support networks for unaccompanied children turning 18?
- ▶ Where can you find good practices in relation to the areas where support is lacking?

CONCLUSION

The transition of unaccompanied migrant children to adulthood is a time consuming, interdisciplinary process which requires clear communication within and between institutions, as well as transparency and consultation with the young people, in order to best prepare and accompany them during this period of great change.

The various factors influencing the success of the path towards autonomy need to be taken into account in order to provide each young person with the adapted and required support.

This can be done by analysing the existing support mechanisms at the local level and what is missing, in order to start identifying alternative solutions or involving additional stakeholders.

Throughout this process, it is important that the young person, with all his/her complexity and multi-faceted needs, remains at the centre of attention in order to continue focusing on their best interests and progressive autonomy, even beyond the age of 18.

MODULE 2 – Access to basic rights and legal support

” Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. ”

United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25

In this chapter, we address:

- ▶ Access to basic rights concerning immigration law, including:
 - The relevance of (chronological age) and age assessment
 - International protection and the asylum procedure
 - Dublin Regulation
 - Family reunification
 - Residence Permits
 - Return and immigration detention
 - Right to be heard and to participate in proceedings
- ▶ Access to basic rights concerning social and economic rights, including:
 - Guardianship and legal representation
 - Access to healthcare
 - Access to reception facilities, housing and accommodation
- ▶ Access to legal support
 - How to build a trusting relationship with the unaccompanied migrant child
 - How to cooperate with other professionals
 - How to communicate legal issues
 - Key aspects for legal professionals

As already indicated, unaccompanied children are internationally recognised as a particularly vulnerable group because they travel alone without their primary caregivers as children. This is why they have specific protection needs.¹⁵ As with other adolescents transitioning into adulthood, specific protection needs might change as the unaccompanied migrant child becomes of age, but it does not evaporate altogether. In this module, we will address:

- ▶ How do the basic rights of unaccompanied migrant children evolve when an adolescent becomes of age?
- ▶ To what extent the need for legal support evolves during the transition to adulthood?

2.1. ACCESS TO BASIC RIGHTS CONCERNING IMMIGRATION LAW

The legal reality of unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood is complex and confusing. On the one hand, immigration law affects their residence status and the perspective to settle in the host country. On the other hand, civil and administrative law relating to the notion of family, child protection, access to

15. United Nations, Committee on the Rights of the Child, [General Comment No 6 \(2005\): Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin](#), 1 September 2005.

education, employment, health care, housing, and legal support affect local integration into the host state. To further complicate this already intricate web of laws and regulations, the migration status of the unaccompanied migrant child can drastically affect access to the social and economic rights indicated above.

(a) The relevance of (chronological age) and age assessment

The specific protection for children in international, regional and national law is based on the age of the unaccompanied migrant child. This way, age is used to determine eligibility for specific protection. The focus on chronological age applies to both immigration law and civil and administrative law regulating the legal protection of unaccompanied migrant children. The focus on chronological age makes the correct age assessment of the migrant essential for determining which safeguards apply.

This is challenging for two reasons. Firstly, it can prove difficult or even impossible for unaccompanied migrant children to provide reliable evidence of their age. The reason for this can be that there is no evidence of exact age, for instance, because of a lack of birth registration. Another reason can be that this evidence is unavailable to unaccompanied migrant children when they need to present it to the relevant authorities.

As entitlement to legal rights often depends on age, it can be beneficial for an unaccompanied migrant child to claim to be a minor, even when this is not true, or when someone does not know their exact date of birth. Conversely, unaccompanied migrant children sometimes claim to be an adult to avoid child protection measures limiting their agency over their migration trajectory. It is good to be aware of how (alleged) unaccompanied migrant children can make different usages of the uncertainty of their age.

States use a wide array of different methods to assess and determine age. Some of these measures are criticized as either unreliable or in violation of children's rights standards.¹⁶ Where doubts concerning age persist, an unaccompanied migrant child is entitled to the benefit of the doubt to secure that he/she is not treated like an adult.¹⁷

Secondly, the focus on chronological age is challenging because the state's assessment that a migrant has reached the age of majority does not mean that there is no need for special protection. It does imply that certain legal safeguards are not applicable, but it is without prejudice to the specific needs of the individual. In your work, you might encounter a migrant who either claims to be a minor or who you consider to have the same protection needs as a minor but is considered an adult by the state. In these circumstances, there is a gap in legal protection and a need for customization in social protection.

Doubting the claims of unaccompanied migrant children regarding their age can undermine legal protection and result in human rights violations, including placement in immigration detention or in reception facilities for adults. Immigration detention or inappropriate reception facilities can result in violations of human rights and children's rights. It is, therefore, essential to be aware of the role of chronological age in entitlement to fundamental rights.

(b) International protection and the asylum procedure

In many states, applying for international protection or asylum can be the only recourse for unaccompanied migrant children to regularise their status. This makes effective access to the asylum procedure an essential basic right of unaccompanied migrant children. Even though the transition to adulthood might be relevant for the qualification for international protection, coming of age is not a decisive factor. Whether an unaccompanied migrant child is entitled to international protection depends on the prospective assessment of the asylum applicant's situation upon return to the country of origin.

States determine whether an asylum applicant needs international protection within the asylum procedure. These procedures assess the extent to which the applicant has a well-founded fear of persecution or would face a risk of serious harm. Eligibility for international protection is based on the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, the European Convention on Human Rights, and other international human rights instruments, and if the state is a member state of the European Union (EU), the EU Qualification Directive.¹⁸ These legal

16. See, for an overview of different methods and their human rights implications, Council of Europe Children's Rights Division, [Age assessment: Council of Europe member states' policies, procedures and practices respectful of children's rights in the context of migration](#), 2017.

17. See, for further analysis, Fenix – Humanitarian Legal Aid, [A Child's Best Interests? Rights Violations in the Absence of Presumption of Minority](#), 2022.

18. In the EU, Denmark is the only Member State that is not bound by this Directive. However, Denmark is a party to all major international human rights instruments.

instruments are implemented in national law, meaning that the domestic authorities apply national law in individual procedures.

In certain circumstances, the host state may deny international protection to unaccompanied children seeking asylum on the grounds that they can obtain protection in another country. This safe country principle is outlined in various EU regulations, which establish that a non-EU country may be regarded as a safe third country for an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child, provided that the applicant has a significant link to that country and can receive protection there. Asylum seekers may also be transferred to other EU member states to have their asylum claim assessed under the Dublin Regulation (see section on the Dublin Regulation below).

The outcome of the asylum procedure determines whether the unaccompanied child will get the right to stay in the host state. The outcome of the asylum procedure depends on the assessment of the risk the asylum seeker faces in the host state. Together with country-of-origin information, the credibility of the asylum claim is an important determinant of the outcome of the asylum application. In the credibility assessment, states should have due regard to the specific circumstances children and adolescents find themselves in during the asylum procedure.

As a professional, you should be aware that unaccompanied children transitioning to adulthood might have incorrect assumptions about the asylum procedure. They may have heard this from family or peers in the country of origin or from fellow migrants or smugglers they have met during their journey. Ideas about the role of age in the asylum procedure might be part of these assumptions, which might influence the statements that children make about their age.

An essential step in the asylum procedure is the asylum interview, in which the applicant is asked about the merits of the asylum claim. Unaccompanied children should be adequately informed about the asylum procedure, including the asylum interview, by the state authorities, the guardian, and the legal representative (see below). For minors, states must consider minors' age and provide specific safeguards. Such safeguards relate, for instance, to the location of the asylum interview and the types of questions that are asked. As there are no safeguards for young adults, this group must be adequately informed about the asylum procedure, including the asylum interview. Unaccompanied children who are 16 or 17 years old when lodging the asylum application might transition into adulthood during the asylum procedure, affecting the extent to which they are provided with legal assistance when they reach the age of majority.

The rejection of an application for international protection can mean that an unaccompanied child transitioning to adulthood must leave the host state's territory without prejudice to the possible appeals procedure. Legal procedures can be complicated, and an unaccompanied child transitioning to adulthood must be adequately informed about the procedure, especially considering that most unaccompanied children applying for international protection already approach the age of majority, increasing the likelihood that they come of age during the asylum procedure.

(c) The Dublin Regulation

In EU member states, asylum applications are generally not processed in case another member state is responsible for doing so based on the EU Dublin Regulation.¹⁹ This legal instrument, which is directly applicable in the legal system of the states bound by it, regulates which state is responsible for handling an asylum application. If another member state is deemed responsible, a take-over or take-charge request is made. Upon the (implicit or explicit) acceptance of this request, the asylum application is considered inadmissible under the EU Procedures Directive. The Dublin Regulation is based on the same principle as the safe third country concept introduced before. In case protection can be found elsewhere, the applicant is not entitled to international protection in the host state.

Unaccompanied migrant children are afforded specific protection in the criteria determining the responsible member state under the EU Dublin Regulation. Based on a judgment of the Court of Justice of the EU, it is deemed that an unaccompanied minor can only be transferred to another EU member state if this is regarded to be in the child's best interests.²⁰ It is not in the child's best interests to be transferred to another member state where no family members or other caregivers are legally present. Because of this, unaccompanied migrant children cannot be transferred to the first member state of entry.

19. 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, [2013] OJ L 180/31 (Dublin III regulation).

20. Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), 6 June 2013, Case C-648/11 (MA, BT & DA).

Unaccompanied migrant children can also find themselves in a situation in which they are stuck in an EU member state while other family members are legally present in another EU member state. In these circumstances, generally, the EU member state in which family members are legally present is responsible for handling the asylum application of the unaccompanied child. In this way, applying the EU Dublin Regulation functions as an instrument to realise family reunification. Problems may arise where this responsibility is not recognised. The reason for this is that the EU Dublin Regulation functions as a legal instrument between the member states. An asylum seeker is the subject of a procedure under the Dublin Regulation but is not part of these procedures. This means that the asylum seeker is dependent on the two involved EU member states to realise the transfer of the applicant and to bring the family members together. Legal obstacles can arise when the authorities of the host member state refuse to make a request to the responsible member state and when the responsible member state refuses the transfer request. Legal remedies are and should be available to remedy these obstacles. However, these procedures are complex, and it is recommended that specialised legal advice is sought.

It is important for practitioners to acknowledge that legal protection under the EU Dublin Regulation very much depends on the question of whether the applicant is considered to be a minor. Like with other safeguards, the distinction between minors and adults is absolute; there is hardly any leeway for the specific needs of young adults. Asylum applicants are often aware of the Dublin Regulation and might act accordingly. This can apply to declaring their chronological age. The result of this can also be that unaccompanied migrant children do not comply with the order to leave the territory of the host member state. Within the system of the EU Dublin Regulation, the responsibility of the EU member state that is responsible for handling the asylum application lapses when the asylum applicant is not transferred after a period of six months after the acceptance of the transfer request. The six-month time limit may be extended up to a maximum of one year if the transfer could not be carried out due to imprisonment of the person concerned or up to 18 months if the person concerned absconds.

Unaccompanied migrant children who disagree with their transfer because, for instance, they dispute the determined age may use this provision to avoid the transfer. This makes unaccompanied migrant children especially vulnerable to different types of exploitation because there is no right to reception and contact with the authorities might lead to the execution of the Dublin transfer. It is important that practitioners are aware of this vulnerability.

(d) Family reunification

The definition of unaccompanied migrant children already provides that the applicant has been separated from his/her parents and other family members. States are under the obligation to avoid the separation of children from their parents and, if this occurs, to bring them back together in a positive, humane, and expeditious manner.²¹ Several challenges can be identified in the family reunification of unaccompanied minors. It is important for practitioners to be aware of these challenges in their interaction with the unaccompanied child transitioning to adulthood.

Firstly, eligibility for family reunification depends mainly on the migration status of the applicant. Unaccompanied migrant children without lawful residence generally do not qualify for family reunification. Similarly, unaccompanied children whose asylum application is being considered can generally not apply for family reunification yet. Reunification with family members who have stayed behind in the country of origin or in a transit country is often an important objective for the unaccompanied child. Because of lengthy asylum procedures, which are followed by the procedure for family reunification itself, the separation from family members can last a long period of time. This can result in stress and anxiety concerning the separation itself and the insecure prospect of the realisation of family reunification. It is important that the unaccompanied child is informed about the possibility of family reunification and the possible duration of all procedures in a timely and realistic manner to manage expectations.

Secondly, pursuant to the EU Family Reunification Directive, unaccompanied minors are eligible for family reunification with family members in the ascending line, e.g., the parents. EU member states where the Directive applies have the possibility to limit the right to family reunification to sponsors who have been awarded refugee status. Whether and to what extent this possibility is implemented in national law depends on the implementation of the Directive in national law. The member states may require the application for family reunification to be submitted within a period of three months after the recognition of eligibility for international protection. It is important that unaccompanied child's sponsors are informed accurately,

21. Articles 9 and 10 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

and timely of the possibility of applying for family reunification in order to prevent the application being submitted outside the three-month period. Under the EU Family Reunification Directive, unaccompanied children only qualify to be reunited with family members in the ascending line. This means that the Directive does not pose an obligation to the member states for the family reunification of siblings or other direct family members of the unaccompanied child sponsor. Whether and under what conditions other family members are eligible for family reunification depends on how this is regulated in national law, with widely varying practices.

Thirdly, and especially relevant for unaccompanied children transitioning to adulthood, the moment of the lodging of the asylum application is the relevant moment in time to determine eligibility for family reunification in the ascending line. A reason for this is that otherwise, the eligibility of unaccompanied child's sponsors would depend on the duration of the asylum procedure. The Court of Justice of the EU established that this would not be in the child's best interests and interpreted the Directive accordingly.²² As asylum procedures and family procedures can be lengthy, this means that an unaccompanied child who has reached the age of majority is still eligible for family reunification in the ascending line the moment when they were below the age of majority at the moment of the application of international protection. It is important to be aware of this and to inform the unaccompanied transitioning to adulthood timely about this possibility.

Family reunification can end the separation of families. Transitioning to adulthood does not mean that the unaccompanied child is no longer in need of support from family members. Continued separation from family members takes away the support network of unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood, in a period of life where such support is very much needed. Even though they generally do not qualify for family reunification, also unaccompanied migrant children without lawful residence lack this support network. This heightens the need for specific legal and social protection for young adults, which is often lacking in practice.

(e) Residence Permits

In the EU, unaccompanied children who transition to adulthood may have several options for obtaining a residence permit. These include subsidiary protection, which is granted to those who do not meet the criteria for refugee status but still face a real risk of harm if returned to their country of origin. Unaccompanied migrant children who have resided in an EU member state for a certain period may also be eligible for a residence permit based on humanitarian grounds or on the basis of their family life. Additionally, unaccompanied children who have been granted international protection or who are in the process of obtaining it may be entitled to a residence permit. The exact requirements and procedures for obtaining a residence permit vary by country, so it is important to seek legal advice and information from the relevant authorities.

Naturalisation could be another option for unaccompanied children. It is a process through which an individual can acquire citizenship of a country where they are not originally from. In some EU member states, naturalisation is an option for unaccompanied children who have been in the country for a certain period of time, have no criminal record, and can demonstrate their integration into society. This process typically involves meeting certain requirements, such as language proficiency, passing a citizenship test, and demonstrating a commitment to the country's values and way of life. Naturalisation can provide unaccompanied children with the right to vote, work, and live in the country permanently, as well as access to additional benefits and protections.

(f) Return and immigration detention

In case it is established that an unaccompanied child is not eligible for international protection, provided that there is no other ground for lawful residence, the unaccompanied child has an obligation to leave the territory of the host state. In the member states of the EU, this obligation is based on the EU Returns Directive. In other states, the obligation to leave the territory might be based on national law. Within the scope of the EU Returns Directive, unaccompanied children can be issued a return decision. A return decision is an order to leave the territory of the EU. The Court of Justice of the EU has emphasised the obligation in the EU Return Directive that the member state concerned must establish that there is adequate reception for the unaccompanied child in the country of origin and that domestic practices in which return decisions are issued but not enforced are not in accordance with the Directive.²³ Unaccompanied children transitioning to adulthood must be fully

22. CJEU 12 April 2018, Case C-550/16 (A. & S.).

23. CJEU, 14 January 2021, C-441/19 (TQ).

informed of their rights. Next to the obligation of the state to inform the unaccompanied migrant children, the guardian and/or legal representative play an important role in this.

There are different ways to enforce the return of foreign nationals. The default option in the EU Returns Directive is that foreign nationals are granted a period in which they can leave on their own motion. Many Member states, sometimes in cooperation with international organisations or non-governmental organisations, offer programmes to assist foreign nationals in complying with the obligation to leave. In case this does not materialise, and in case there are from the outset reasons to believe that the foreign national will not leave by his own motion, a forced return can be considered, in which the member state uses coercion to make the foreign national comply with the obligation to leave. This is also referred to as deportation.

Throughout the immigration procedure, the host state has the right to provide lawful residence on national grounds. It is simply the prerogative of the state to determine that a foreign national can stay. This also applies to unaccompanied migrant children. In some states, this makes it possible for unaccompanied migrant children who do not qualify for international protection to nevertheless get lawful residence on grounds in national migration law. This can, for instance, be on the ground that the unaccompanied migrant child is enrolled in (professional) education or humanitarian grounds. Whether it is possible for unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood to qualify for lawful residence on another ground than international protection depends on how this is regulated in national law. In addition, there might be reasons why the need for international protection develops over time because of circumstances that could not have been presented during the initial application for international protection. In such circumstances, it could be possible to lodge a new application for international protection. The guardian and/or legal representative of unaccompanied migrant children play an important role in determining whether it is opportune to lodge a subsequent asylum application.

For unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood who are the subject of return procedures, chronological age is an important factor for several reasons. Firstly, some states may be reluctant to take and enforce return decisions towards unaccompanied migrant children, and as a result of that, there might be possibilities to obtain lawful residence on other national grounds than international protection. Secondly, procedural safeguards that do apply to minors do not apply after the unaccompanied migrant children have reached the age of majority. Important areas where this applies are guardianship and access to other social and economic rights. Unaccompanied migrant children approaching the age of majority should be informed about the changes in legal protection that are the result of becoming of age.

Even though immigration detention of unaccompanied migrant children is the topic of fierce criticism, there is no absolute prohibition on the use of immigration detention for this group. An important safeguard against immigration detention for unaccompanied migrant children is that it may only be imposed as a last-resort measure. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has underlined that states should refrain from using immigration detention for children in the context of migration altogether.²⁴ Also the Council of Europe strongly support the termination of detention practices for children. According to the EU Reception Conditions Directive, detention should only be applied if other less coercive measures cannot be applied effectively. To this end, member states must ensure that the rules concerning alternatives to detention, such as regular reporting to the authorities, the deposit of a financial guarantee, or an obligation to stay at an assigned place, are laid down in national law and are applied in practice. When children, including unaccompanied migrant children, are placed in immigration detention, at least the conditions should be appropriate for the age of the detainee. When states follow the call to refrain from detaining children, reaching the age of majority also becomes the moment in which unaccompanied migrant children face the risk of being detained with the purpose of deportation.

(g) Right to be heard and to participate in proceedings

Crucial to all the basic rights discussed above is the right of the child to be heard and to participate in proceedings. This general principle of children's rights is firmly protected by Article 12 of the CRC and furthermore codified in Article 24(2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

The context in which the right to be heard and to participate depends on the specific immigration procedure concerned. For instance, the asylum interview has a different objective than an interview in the context of

24. UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW), *Joint general comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration*, 16 November 2017, para. 5.

taking a return decision. Before a hearing, the child should be prepared for what to expect. Furthermore, unaccompanied migrant children should be informed about the manner in which the views of the child are taken into account in the decision or lack thereof. The guardian and or legal representative play an important role in preparing the child for hearings and other interactions with the (immigration) authorities of the host state.

The right of the child to be heard should be administered in a way that is appropriate for the age of the unaccompanied migrant children. The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has developed a checklist for professionals concerning which actions must be taken to ensure that the right to be heard is administered in a child-friendly way.²⁵

Especially in immigration procedures that concern unaccompanied migrant children, the right to be heard also exists after unaccompanied migrant children have come of age. The reason for this is that safeguards on the right to a personal interview also apply to adults. However, procedural safeguards on how the right to be heard should be administered do not apply to adults. Unaccompanied migrant children should be prepared for these changes in the way the (immigration) authorities communicate with them. Especially considering that unaccompanied migrant children lack the support network of their families, it is important that they are emancipated early so as to be able to stand up for their own rights.

Even though specific safeguards for children concerning the right to be heard and to participate in proceedings do not apply to adults, unaccompanied migrant children should be prepared for their transition into adulthood. The objective of this is to achieve self-reliance and independence when unaccompanied migrant children reach the age of majority and lose the procedural protection associated with the rights of minors. A thorough individual action plan can assist these youngsters in developing realistic expectations, outlining both challenges and solutions and ensuring they can thrive as they enter adulthood.

2.2. ACCESS TO BASIC RIGHTS CONCERNING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Alongside the basic rights in immigration law, unaccompanied migrant children enjoy specific social and economic rights compared to adults. Becoming of age can have far-reaching implications on the extent to which unaccompanied migrant children qualify for social and economic rights. Immigration status plays an important role in determining the extent to which unaccompanied migrant children continue to benefit from certain social and economic rights after reaching the age of majority. The result of this is that unaccompanied migrant children reaching the age of majority can find themselves in a very difficult socio-economic position in the host state, increasing the risk of different forms of exploitation.

(a) Guardianship and legal representation

In the absence of parents, there is an urgent need for the state to appoint a legal guardian to make sure that the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child is properly guaranteed until the unaccompanied migrant children reach the age of majority or until the unaccompanied migrant children are reunited with the parents.²⁶ Based on this obligation, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has held that states are required to create the underlying legal framework to secure the proper representation of unaccompanied migrant children.²⁷ The duty to appoint a guardian is laid down in different instruments of EU law, e.g., the EU Asylum Procedures Directive and the EU Reception Conditions Directive. Furthermore, within the context of the right to respect for private life, the European Court of Human Rights has held that a guardian should be appointed as soon as possible.

The task of the guardian is to represent the unaccompanied migrant child in the best interests of the child. Even though the obligation to appoint a guardian is generally accepted, there is a lack of a clear legal framework on the specific tasks and duties of a guardian vis-à-vis unaccompanied migrant children. There is no common framework on how many pupils a guardian may have and how often the guardian and the unaccompanied migrant children have contact. This all depends on the guardianship system laid down in national laws and regulations. In some states, the guardian system for unaccompanied migrant children is the same as for own nationals who lack parental guardianship. In other states, a specific organisation provides guardians to unaccompanied migrant children.

25. EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), [Child-friendly justice – Checklist for professionals](#), 2017.

26. Article 18 CRC

27. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *General comment No. 6 (2005): Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin*, 1 September 2005, para 33.

Often there are different actors involved in providing a safe and stable living environment and in the legal representation of unaccompanied migrant children. The provider of daily care for unaccompanied migrant children may be a different person, family, or organisation than the legal guardian. Furthermore, often a specific legal representative, e.g., a lawyer, is appointed to represent the unaccompanied migrant children in legal (immigration) proceedings. The different professionals involved in caring for the unaccompanied child may have different professional perspectives on what is in the best interests of the child.

Guardianship orders are ordinarily terminated when an unaccompanied migrant child reaches the age of majority. The reason for this is that by reaching the age of majority, the unaccompanied migrant child acquires the legal capacity for himself. The risk associated with this is that unaccompanied migrant children, from one moment to another, lose all support and guidance and are forced to make decisions in life that a young adult is not yet fully capable of. This can create different problems in the life of young adults. That is why it is important that unaccompanied migrant children are offered a soft landing into adulthood.

Several factors contribute to making the transition to adulthood as smooth as possible. Firstly, unaccompanied migrant children must be prepared for the changes that will occur after reaching the age of majority. Through counselling and education, unaccompanied migrant children can be made aware of the opportunities and challenges that follow from reaching the age of majority. Secondly, even though the guardianship order might be terminated, this does not mean that all counselling must automatically stop. A recent example is the agreement between the Dutch guardianship organisation NIDOS and the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security on providing support to former unaccompanied migrant children with asylum status who have reached the age of majority. Providing counselling after reaching adulthood can assist unaccompanied migrant children in integrating into the host community successfully.

(b) Access to healthcare

Like with other social and economic rights, the extent to and the way in which unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood have access to health care depends heavily on migration status. Unaccompanied migrant children who have been granted international protection are granted access to health care like other residents. Unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood who are still in the asylum procedure while reaching the age of majority often continue to benefit from health care provision within the national reception system. For unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood without lawful residence, access to health care is the most problematic. Often only access to primary health care is provided to migrants in an irregular situation.

Unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood face barriers to accessing appropriate health care. The understanding of physical and mental illnesses is influenced by the cultural background of unaccompanied migrant children. This is combined with being a newcomer to the national health care system of the host state. Unaccompanied migrant children and young adults often report feelings of stress, anxiety, depression or express aggressive behaviour. When they reside in a reception facility for asylum seekers, children can receive psychological support where needed. The legal guardian and other social workers can assist in identifying both health care needs and facilitate access to appropriate treatment. The risk exists that this supporting network falls away upon reaching the age of majority.

Consequently, professionals should ensure that access to health and psychological support does not stop upon reaching adulthood, and mental health professionals should dedicate as much time and commitment as necessary to continue the support in adulthood. This starts with proper screening of health care needs when the unaccompanied migrant children are still minors. Unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood should be educated on how to access healthcare in the host country.

For unaccompanied migrant children with particular healthcare needs or other vulnerabilities, it is important to ensure that sufficient counselling remains available after reaching the age of majority. Continued involvement of the guardian and other social workers who are already familiar with unaccompanied migrant children can contribute to guaranteeing effective access to health care.

(c) Access to reception facilities, housing and accommodation

When transitioning to adulthood, unaccompanied migrant children can generally not stay in the reception facilities that are specifically catered for minors. This transition can create a feeling of insecurity. Securing housing and accommodation can be a particular challenge for young adults. The extent to which the unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood faces problems in finding proper accommodation depends on the national context of the host state and the immigration status. Unaccompanied migrant

children who have been granted international protection often need to rely on the availability of public housing schemes that are available to beneficiaries of international protection. Where this is not available or not accessible, it can create an insecure situation.

Unaccompanied migrant children who are still in the asylum procedure upon reaching adulthood usually remain eligible for accommodation in a non-specific reception facility, not specifically catered for unaccompanied minors. However, unaccompanied migrant children without international protection and in an irregular situation may face a lack of access to housing or accommodation upon reaching adulthood. The availability of assistance with housing depends on the national context. Whether there is some form of assistance with housing and accommodation available depends on the national context. Unaccompanied migrant children in such situations should be prepared for this prospect before reaching the age of majority.

For access to education and the labour market see Module 4 below.



Exercise 1: Legal Framework Research

Objective: To familiarise practitioners with the legal framework applicable to unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood in their respective countries.

Instructions :

1. Select your country of practice.
2. Conduct research on the legal framework applicable to unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood in your country. This could include laws, policies, and regulations at the national and local levels.
3. Identify and summarize the key legal provisions relevant to unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood, such as changes in their legal status and access to basic rights.
4. Reflect on how this legal framework could impact your work with unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood.
5. Consider ways to use this information to improve your legal support services for unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood.

2.3. ACCESS TO LEGAL SUPPORT

In the previous sections, it became apparent that with reaching the age of majority, unaccompanied children transitioning to adulthood can no longer rely on the substantive safeguards that apply to children. Basic rights that solely apply to minors are no longer applicable after unaccompanied migrant children reach the age of majority. Effective access to legal support is vital to prepare unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood for their new rights and responsibilities as an adult.

(a) How to build a trusting relationship with the unaccompanied migrant child

As a field professional working with unaccompanied migrant children, building a strong and trusting relationship is key to providing effective support. However, this can be challenging given the complex and often traumatic experiences unaccompanied migrant children have gone through. Here are some **essential tips** to build a relationship of trust with unaccompanied migrant children:

Show interest: Field professionals defend the child's well-being in total. That means that they are, by definition, interested in the child *per se* and not just their needs. Ask questions about their everyday life, likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams. Remember small details that the child shares with you to demonstrate that you care not only about your responsibilities towards the child but about the child as a person.

Manage expectations: Making a good impression in your (first) meeting is essential. It is crucial to come prepared. To ensure you start on the right foot, it is a good idea to show the unaccompanied migrant children that you know the case and understand the implications of the transition to adulthood. By showing that you are knowledgeable and clearly understand what is to come for the unaccompanied migrant child, you can

build trust so that the unaccompanied child understands what to expect after transitioning to adulthood and also from you as a professional.

Rules govern professional relationships, and you operate in a regulatory framework. Outline these rules to the child from the outset and make clear that regulations towards the child bind you. Transitioning to adulthood implies that the rules that govern your relationship with the unaccompanied migrant child might change after the child reaches the age of majority. Be clear and transparent about how your role towards the child might change and to what extent the child may continue to rely on your support.

Mirror the attitude you want: Children reflect feelings projected by adults. Be calm, attentive, confident, and kind. Remember that if you show worry or anxiety, it is likely that the child will internalise that as well. Unaccompanied migrant children often lack family support in the process of transitioning.

To show respect for the child, you must respect their time. Be on time and give good estimations of the duration of your meetings and appointments. Avoid scheduling meetings that disrupt the unaccompanied migrant children's routine (e.g., during school hours).

Never make false promises: Your relationship with the unaccompanied migrant child is managed by a regulatory framework which might imply that transitioning to adulthood limits your ability to support the child after reaching the age of majority. Delineate your role and what the child can expect from you now and after the eighteenth birthday. Only share information you can reasonably be sure about; avoid making promises that you may not be able to keep or that are not up to you, even if you are trying to reassure the child.

Unaccompanied migrant children often have a high turnover in their focal points. In your role as a professional, you should try to avoid that where possible. Explain the confidentiality terms that bind your relationship and the circumstances requiring you to break confidentiality (e.g., if the child tells you his/her health is in danger).

Give space for agency: You act in the child's best interest but do not forget that the child is at the centre. Especially for unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood, turning 18 years old means acquiring a whole new set of rights and responsibilities, drastically increasing the children's agency. That is why it is important that, as minors, unaccompanied migrant children are given the space to express their opinion and preferences, articulate their concerns, and influence their future. Give the child the time and the information necessary to do that. In this way, you can prepare them for their impending new role as an adult.

Most unaccompanied migrant children have completed journeys that their peers could hardly imagine. Even though they are still children, you must not forget that they have developed an unusual independence for their age. It is a significant source of strength and resilience; acknowledge and adjust your actions to the unaccompanied migrant children's capabilities.

Your relationship with the child will grow stronger on these foundations. As you get to know each other better and demonstrate to the child that they can rely on you, they will feel safer and relaxed. They may even confide in you, often revealing crucial facts about their case or potential vulnerabilities. Building a trusting relationship is necessary for good collaboration with the child and for developing the legal case.

(b) How to cooperate with other professionals

"Well-being" is a holistic concept encompassing multiple areas of life. Transitioning to adulthood during a pending immigration procedure, having to integrate into a new environment or dealing with the outcome of an unsuccessful immigration procedure influence various areas of life. The approach towards ensuring the child's well-being must be holistic, meaning that all aspects of the unaccompanied migrant children's life are considered.

In an ideal situation, unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood will have access to a multidisciplinary team to handle their case, pooling their respective areas of expertise. Field professionals should strive for multidisciplinary as much as possible, enlisting the support of the child's social workers, psychologists, educators, interpreters, caretakers, and other professionals (or volunteers) supporting the child.

By implementing legal procedures, including the best interest determination, the four-eye principle is crucial to minimise the individual's subjectivity.²⁸ However, in all stages of the case, including preparatory steps and counselling, a holistic approach multiplies the beneficial impact of each professional. The holistic approach aims to empower unaccompanied migrant children in the different areas outlined below.

28. European Union Agency for Asylum (EUA), [EASO Practical guide on the best interests of the child in asylum procedures](#), 2019.

Assess and identify needs: Each professional's particular perspective makes them sensitive to different types of needs. Where one professional is focusing on the legal aspects of the immigration procedure, another assists the unaccompanied migrant child in (additional) psychosocial support. Jointly, the professionals can make the necessary arrangements for the legal proceedings to respect the child's psychosocial state.

Give opportunities for disclosure: If an unaccompanied migrant child has access to different professionals with their own expertise, the likelihood of forming a meaningful bond of trust with one of them increases. The availability of a multidisciplinary team increases the probability that the child will disclose relevant information to the involved professionals. These interdisciplinary teams are ideally composed of professionals with various backgrounds. For example, a girl may feel more comfortable disclosing information about SGBV to a female professional.

Avoid re-traumatisation: Throughout their journey, unaccompanied migrant children may be required to recount their story, experiencing its traumatic aspects repeatedly. By liaising with professionals who already know the child's history, valuable details can be shared among the team without forcing the child to reshare them. The presence of multiple professionals from varying backgrounds is also important to mitigate the risk of (unintentionally) mishandling a case.

A holistic approach is the ideal intervention "method". However, without a multidisciplinary team of professionals, you can still build your capacity by adopting a multidisciplinary perspective. For instance, as a professional focused on legal aspects of the unaccompanied migrant child's case, you can be aware of the mental health risks unaccompanied migrant children face.²⁹ You can furthermore learn to recognise signs and symptoms of re-traumatisation.³⁰ Additionally, you can strive to stay informed about screening techniques for vulnerabilities,³¹ including for specific issues (e.g., trafficking).³²

(c) How to communicate legal issues

Due to the innate complexity of legal procedures, unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood are often left feeling that actions are undertaken in their name and kept uninformed about the necessary legal steps for advancing their case. Hence, legal professionals must invest further in formulating the clarity and directness of the information they share. Below different safeguards for effective communication about legal issues are outlined.

Repetition: Repetition is the mother of all learning. Repeat important points, using different vocabulary as much as possible; ask the child to repeat back what you said and verify their understanding of the discussed legal issue.

Preparation: If an unaccompanied migrant child is doing something for the first time, they will most likely not proceed accurately. Prepare and rehearse until you and the child feel ready for the real-life situation. Preparation is especially crucial for asylum interviews and court appearances.

Timelines: Children tend to focus on short time results. Ensure you share information pertinent to the short-term; outline what will happen in the long run but share the details only when necessary. An essential timeline that can prepare unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood is the implication of reaching the age of majority. Often it is already clear how reaching the age of majority will impact legal and social support. If that is the case, you can sketch the timeline and the implications of becoming an adult for receiving (legal) support.

In your sessions with unaccompanied migrant children, do not forget that **communication is always a two-way process**. Even if the session aims to disseminate information, you must be attuned to listen too. When the child shares something, bear in mind the following:

- ▶ **Acknowledgement:** As a general rule, it is important to believe the child. At a minimum, you should acknowledge that their lived experience is their reality, even if you know there are other versions or interpretations of their story.
- ▶ **Questions:** Always give sufficient time and opportunities for the child to ask you questions or clarifications.

29. UNHCR, [Guidance on working with refugee children struggling with stress and trauma](#), 2019.

30. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), [Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event: Coping with Retraumatization](#), November 2017.

31. UNHCR and International Detention Coalition, [Identifying and addressing vulnerability: a tool for asylum and migration systems](#), 2016.

32. British Red Cross, [The identification of victims of human trafficking in transit and destination countries in Europe: A practical guideline for frontline workers](#), February 2019.

- ▶ **Coherence:** What the child shares may not be consistent and may have gaps. Be aware that this is a frequent occurrence among unaccompanied migrant children due to the circumstances of their journey and may also be caused by traumatic experiences.
- ▶ **Silence:** The child's silence is also a form of communication. Respect their silence when they do not want to share.

(d) Key aspects for legal professionals

When meeting with a child, you are usually neither the first nor the last professional the child will meet with until their case is closed. A consequence of reaching the age of majority is that particular (legal) support will no longer be available after reaching the age of majority. Several aspects relating to the availability of (legal) support to unaccompanied migrant children that should be considered by professionals dealing with unaccompanied migrant children are outlined below.

Uncertainty: Uncertainty is a prime characteristic of the legal cases of unaccompanied migrant children. Immigration proceedings may take a long time with uncertain outcomes and are often followed by further proceedings. Lengthy immigration procedures can be exhausting for unaccompanied migrant children, resulting in exasperation or anger. Your communication with the child does not necessarily cause these emotions. Still, they may be the outcome of the cumulative exposure of the child to immigration proceedings and the reception system.

Previous experiences: The unaccompanied migrant children's previous encounters with the legal system in the host state or in the country of origin might have been unpleasant. Children could express a sense of fear and lack of trust caused by those experiences towards you.

Update: The individual situation of unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood and the legal framework are in constant development. Circumstances, regulations and procedures are changing, which might affect the legal position of unaccompanied migrant children. The information that unaccompanied migrant children have about the status of the immigration procedure comes from different sources, also from others than professionals working on the unaccompanied migrant child's case. It is important to provide children with accurate and reliable information concerning the immigration procedure to help them to make sense of the status of the process. One evident development is that unaccompanied migrant children reach the age of majority on a specific date. Unaccompanied migrant children must be adequately informed about the consequence of this development for immigration procedures and access to basic rights and social services.

Space for emotions: Sessions with unaccompanied migrant children can quickly become emotional. You should pay attention to any indications that the child needs a break or that the child is not feeling comfortable. Ask the child or other professionals involved what they need in those moments and avoid applying unnecessary pressure.

Counterbalancing rumours: Unaccompanied migrant children are particularly vulnerable to rumours about their prospects in the host state. These rumours are often spread both online and through their social environment. Counterbalancing them is a complex process, but the following tips may help you:

- **Argumentation:** Provide arguments and sources to support what you are saying, thus showing the child what to expect from their information providers. Refrain from spreading rumours by only communicating aspects that are within your expertise. Refer the child to other relevant professionals when you cannot provide the support or information requested or discussed.
- **Education:** Educate unaccompanied children on how to verify their facts by themselves. You can point the child to trustworthy information. You can also encourage the child to think about the motives of the people giving them information and underline that if someone asks for money or favours in exchange for information, this person should not be trusted.
- **Positivity:** In your effort to fight a rumour, avoid criticising their trusted sources or individuals; avoid eroding trust in others but focus instead on widening the perspective of the child.

A legal session with an unaccompanied migrant child does not have to be just informative; it can be educational. Seize the opportunity to educate unaccompanied migrant children about their rights and empower them to protect their interests.

In addition to the above general principles, bear in mind the below **specific considerations for communicating with children**:

(i) language issues

Children have various levels of language proficiency and literacy. Make sure to:

- ▶ Cover all bases by using combinations of visual, oral, and written information.
- ▶ Adapt your vocabulary and pace of speaking to the level of the child. At the same time, be aware that only a fine line separates your effort to be understood from being condescending.
- ▶ Body language is language; be attentive to the child's body language, as well as your own.
- ▶ Avoid jargon!

(ii) age considerations

Children's capacity to understand changes according to their age and maturity. Make sure to:

- ▶ Stay informed about the different stages of development in childhood.
- ▶ Bear in mind that children have different ways of learning, that also change according to their age; some ways may be better geared for some life stages than others.³³
- ▶ Don't forget that most children (and most adults) cannot stay concentrated for more than 45 minutes; plan accordingly, and make sure to include breaks!
- ▶ Expect that the development of unaccompanied children may be behind the curve, due to unfavourable circumstances in their childhood, as well as lack of schooling;³⁴ learn to recognise that and adapt your approach.

(iii) spatial considerations

Your meeting space is your conversation's backdrop. Pay attention to it, and make sure to:

- ▶ Follow, to the degree possible, guidelines on making your space child friendly.
- ▶ Be aware of your own positioning in the space; you may need to adjust your stance to speak on the same level as the child's height or arrange furniture so that you are not sitting behind a desk.

(iv) cultural issues

Remember that a child is first of all a child. Cultural practices do not override children's rights, and cultural normality can and should be challenged when it is against a child's best interest. That being said, cultural differences are an important aspect of working with unaccompanied children. Make sure to:

- ▶ Be aware of your own cultural lens. What you think is right may be your own cultural bias.
- ▶ Educate yourself on the cultural background of the children you work with.
- ▶ Different cultures have different conceptions of the age of majority, independent of legal norms. For example, a boy of 15 may be culturally expected to be an income generator; a girl of 14 may be already receiving engagement offers. Know and anticipate these practices, and the risks they may come with.

(v) religious issues

Religion, much like culture, should be respected. However, it is important for professionals to know the difference between cultural and religious requirements. Make sure to:

- ▶ Educate yourself on the religions of the people you work with. Some may even signify membership of a persecuted group, and thus constitute a legal vulnerability.
- ▶ Be aware of religious holidays. For example, avoid scheduling lengthy or difficult meetings during the month of Ramadan.
- ▶ If necessary, explain and frame the difference between religious law and your national legal framework.

33. UNICEF, the Learning for Wellbeing Foundation, and the Fetzer Institute, [What Makes Me? Core Capacities for Living and Learning](#), 2022.

34. Vaghri, Ziba; Tessier, Zoë; Whalen, Christian, [Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Children: Interrupted Child Development and Unfulfilled Child Rights](#), 2019.



Exercise 2: Participatory activity with unaccompanied migrant children on access to basic rights and legal support “Know Your Rights!”

Objective: The objective of this activity is to empower unaccompanied migrant children with knowledge about their basic rights and the legal support available to them during their transition to adulthood.

Materials: large chart paper or a whiteboard; markers; handouts with information on basic rights and legal support.

Instructions:

1. Introduce the activity by explaining that it will focus on basic rights and legal support available to unaccompanied migrant children in their transition to adulthood.
2. Divide the participants into small groups and distribute handouts with information on basic rights and legal support.
3. Ask the participants to read through the handouts and discuss with their group members what they learned.
4. Have each group present their key takeaways from the handouts on the large chart paper or whiteboard. Facilitate a group discussion to clarify any questions or concerns that may arise.
5. Using the chart paper or whiteboard, create a list of the basic rights and legal support available to unaccompanied migrant children. Ask the participants to share any personal experiences they have had in accessing their rights or legal support.
6. Discuss any challenges or barriers that unaccompanied migrant children may face in accessing their rights and legal support. Brainstorm solutions and strategies that can be used to overcome these challenges.
7. Conclude the activity by emphasising the importance of knowing and advocating for their basic rights and encouraging the participants to share this information with their peers. Provide them with resources where they can access legal support if needed.

Note: This activity can be adapted to focus on specific areas of basic rights or legal support, depending on the needs and interests of the participants.

CONCLUSION

The goal of facilitating the transition of unaccompanied migrant children to adulthood is to empower young adults to become self-reliant and autonomous. Safeguarding the effectiveness of access to basic rights and legal support in the process of transitioning to adulthood is necessary to achieve the objective of empowerment.

Reaching the age of majority affects access to basic rights and legal support for unaccompanied migrant children. Where specific safeguards apply to children, these safeguards tend to not apply to adults. In this way, ageing out means that certain basic rights no longer apply and that legal support is limited. Unaccompanied migrant children are particularly vulnerable in the process of transitioning to adulthood because a support network that can help to cope with newly acquired obligations and responsibilities is often missing. Legal support should, inter alia, prepare unaccompanied migrant children for the different rights and responsibilities associated with coming of age.

MODULE 3 – Psychological impact and support

” It is never too late to have a happy childhood ”

Milton H. Erickson

In this chapter, we will address:

- ▶ Psychosocial support vs. psychotherapy
- ▶ Psychological first aid and supporting young people in transition
- ▶ Working on stabilisation and resources with unaccompanied migrant children in transition
- ▶ What can you do as a professional?

In this module, we will differentiate between psychotherapy, which is led by mental health specialists (usually psychiatrists or psychologists), and psychosocial support, which can be led by various professionals working with unaccompanied migrant children and who are trauma informed. While the first aims at addressing the issues of trauma, the latter rather aims at stabilizing the child and accompanying them in overcoming daily challenges, also linked to their traumatic experiences.

This module focuses on psychosocial support. Thus, the exercises proposed throughout the module can be done by professionals and/or with children. They will facilitate a better understanding of what unaccompanied migrant children are going through, and therefore help to identify areas of intervention.

3.1. DIMENSIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

The psychological impact of what unaccompanied children in general, and unaccompanied children in transition to adulthood in particular, face is frequently underestimated. Migration has psychosocial impacts that can make people more vulnerable to mental health problems. Migrants are in a state of vulnerability regarding their uncertain future. In this sense, the theory of psychotrauma helps to better understand the possible psychological impacts of migration.

Psychotrauma can be explained as a non-integrated, non-digested experience. When we go through a traumatic event and do not recover from it, we can get triggered by many things in the present that bring us back to traumatic memories of the past. Triggers can be anything: a sound, a place, a smell, a look, someone's attitude, a song, the title of a book, a colour, a combination of words, someone's voice, a Christmas tree... anything.

The second aspect of a non-digested traumatic event is that it changes self-perception. When traumatised, we perceive ourselves in the world through negative self-beliefs, such as “I am guilty”, or “I am weak”, or “I am in danger” or “I am unworthy”. We then interpret every step of what we do through this belief, like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This means that trauma does not only impact our past, but also our present life, and our projection of the future.

Unaccompanied children in transition to adulthood usually develop a very high level of anxiety towards the future, which is partly due to trauma, but partly also to the very real danger of homelessness and vulnerability after reaching the age of majority. Perceiving and accompanying this anxiety can have positive effects on the well-being and resilience of young people and future adults.

There are 2 main dimensions to psychological support:

- (a) Professional counselling and psychotherapy
- (b) Daily psychosocial support

(a) Professional counselling and psychotherapy

The first dimension needs to be taken care of by psychologists, psychotherapists and/ or psychiatrists. In most European countries, psychological support and counselling are provided to unaccompanied migrant children through the national welfare system.

In this regard, it is vital to ensure continuity of care in the first place. Only when this is not possible, it is convenient to identify networks of professionals who can take over in transition time. This is often difficult, for various reasons.

- ▶ Firstly, because there may be long waiting times for finding an available professional.
- ▶ Secondly, because it takes time to create a trustful relationship with a mental health professional. Unaccompanied migrant children are often tired of having to tell their traumatic stories over and over again to various adults for various purposes. They tend to avoid having to start such a process again with a new person, with whom they may not trust or have a relationship.
- ▶ Thirdly, depending on the social security system of each country psychotherapy may not be covered by the national system, and would need to be paid for by the young adult him/ herself, which, in a situation of high precarity, will clearly not be the main priority.
- ▶ Eventually, a sense of cultural sensitivity is important to accompany this particular target group in therapy. Some unaccompanied migrant children describe that they feel judged or not understood when they share some of their fears of life experiences. This is particularly the case when they talk about some religious practices or traditions, of some community rituals linked to healing, traditional medicine, prayers, or witchery.

Therefore, it is essential to identify local actors, often NGOs or associations, who can offer a continuation of psychological support to unaccompanied migrant children once they reach majority.

(b) Psychosocial support

The second dimension of psychosocial support can be addressed by professionals who are not necessarily therapists or psychologists/ psychiatrists.

As Bessel Van der Kolk³⁵ noted, what we need are trauma- informed societies. We need professionals dealing with human beings to be sensitive to trauma, to be able to recognise it and to self-soothe or soothe others in situations of acute stress or trauma.

In this module, you will find concrete approaches and exercises you can do with unaccompanied minors in transition, to support them in their mental health struggles. This does not replace the work of mental health professionals. However, it contributes to stabilisation in the here and now, and can be considered psychological first aid.

A solution-focused way of looking at trauma would be “the more trauma there is, the more resources there are”. Is this surprising to you?

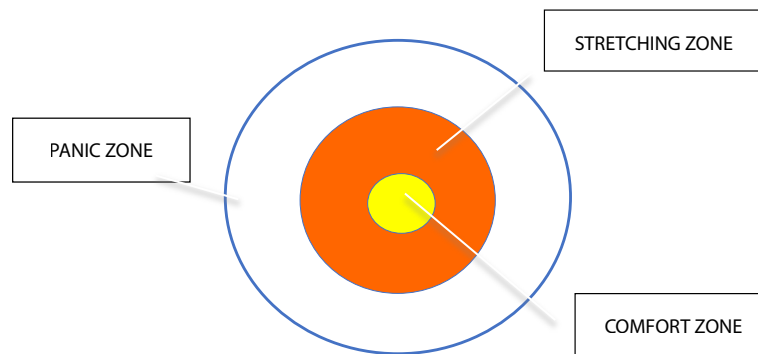
In other words, if these youngsters have survived everything they have been through, from loss of family, exile, traumatic experiences during migration, loneliness, violence, institutional trauma, cultural loss of references, etc., and are still standing up and functioning today, then we can only assume that they have a lot of maybe unknown resources.

One important part of working on the psychological impact of the transition to adulthood is to help them reconnect to these resources. Here are two models that can be useful in understanding what the psychological dimension of transition to adulthood for unaccompanied migrant children can be.

3.2. THE COMFORT ZONE MODEL

This model was initially developed by a German trainer, called Karl Rohnke, and re-adapted by Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja to talk about trauma.

35. Van der Kolk, Bessel M.D, The body keep the score: Brain, mind and body in the healing of trauma, 2015.



The comfort zone corresponds to everything that makes us feel comfortable, safe, “at home”, without having to make any effort. It is the zone in which we can just be.

Please take a moment to identify everything that defines your comfort zone. It could be places, things you do, people who surround you, etc. Write them in the box below:

Comfort zones are very individual, we do not all have the same. For some, quietness is a comfort zone, whereas for others, it needs to be loud and alive.

When doing this exercise with Ahmed, a young unaccompanied migrant child from Syria one day, his therapist suggested a quiet comfort zone. Ahmed said: *“Oh no! Quietness for me is the moment before the bombing! A comfort zone is at the markets, with kids playing, people shouting, music and life”.*

Very often, our comfort zones are defined by habits, rituals, traditions, beliefs, language and cultural codes, friends, family, etc.

When we get out of our comfort zone, we reach **the stretching zone**. This is also called the **learning zone**. Here, we are out of our comfort zone, we need to adapt, do things differently, to make an effort, but it remains manageable. We can deal with it. As before, this zone cannot be defined, it is individual and contextual. For some, running an educational activity in a foreign language will be a comfort zone, whereas others could be in total panic.

Finally, when we lean out of the stretching zone too much, we reach **the panic zone**. In this area, we are not able to process anymore. We move to the physiological survival-mode. We cannot think, reflect, conceptualize or understand. We are rather in fight, flight or freeze-modus, and all we want is to go back to our comfort zone.

Again, please think of situations in which you have been, or regularly are in a panic zone. List them, try to remember what it felt like in your body, and reflect on how you managed to get out of the panic zone again.

Situation that created panic	Body perceptions/ reactions	How did you manage to get out of it

Human beings have great capacities to survive and to adapt to change. They learn, they develop, they transform. With experience, our zones tend to broaden, and what initially felt like panic can become a stretching or even comfort zone.

What does all of this have to do with unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood?

Well, first of all, they have lost their complete comfort zone a first time by leaving home and arriving in Europe. Home, family, friends, language, culture, traditions, rituals... all gone! They have spent their time since arrival trying to set up new small comfort zones. In the shelter, at school, with friendships, with trustful relationships with a guardian, a social worker, and a therapist. They have started to understand cultural codes, to learn the language.

For many, turning 18 means a sudden loss of the comfort zone *again*. And what surely was initially traumatizing, can become a re-traumatization, with the risk of a strong impact on mental health and coping strategies.

The closer to 18 young unaccompanied migrant children are when arriving in Europe, the less time they have to actually adapt and develop new comfort zones.

3.3. HOW CAN YOU HELP?

As a professional in the field, you do not have any influence on the administrative procedure of unaccompanied children. National laws define the way this transition happens, whether young adults can stay in their accommodation, benefit from further administrative support, remain in the welfare system until the age of 21, or have to simply leave the whole support system. However, what you can do is create small comfort zones in the here and now. By helping the young person in transition to identify and access comfort zones, you ensure that they have somewhere to relax, reconnect to resources, and regain trust in themselves, life and the future. This could be a weekly activity they continue doing. A place where they can come when needed. A reference person staying in touch with them. Something that creates continuity between the life before and the life after 18.

Unaccompanied children often develop a strong community of support with each other, and often remain in touch after leaving the children’s home or shelter. Communities can play the role of providing comfort zones.

In your professional context, what types of comfort zones do you identify for the unaccompanied migrant children you accompany? You can start writing these down or ask them to help you identify their comfort zones.

When asking them about comfort zones, Mamadou answered: *“It is the dinner we have every Monday evening with my educator. He comes to the apartment, we cook together, we talk, and play games. I like this moment; we often laugh, and we share intimate conversations”.*

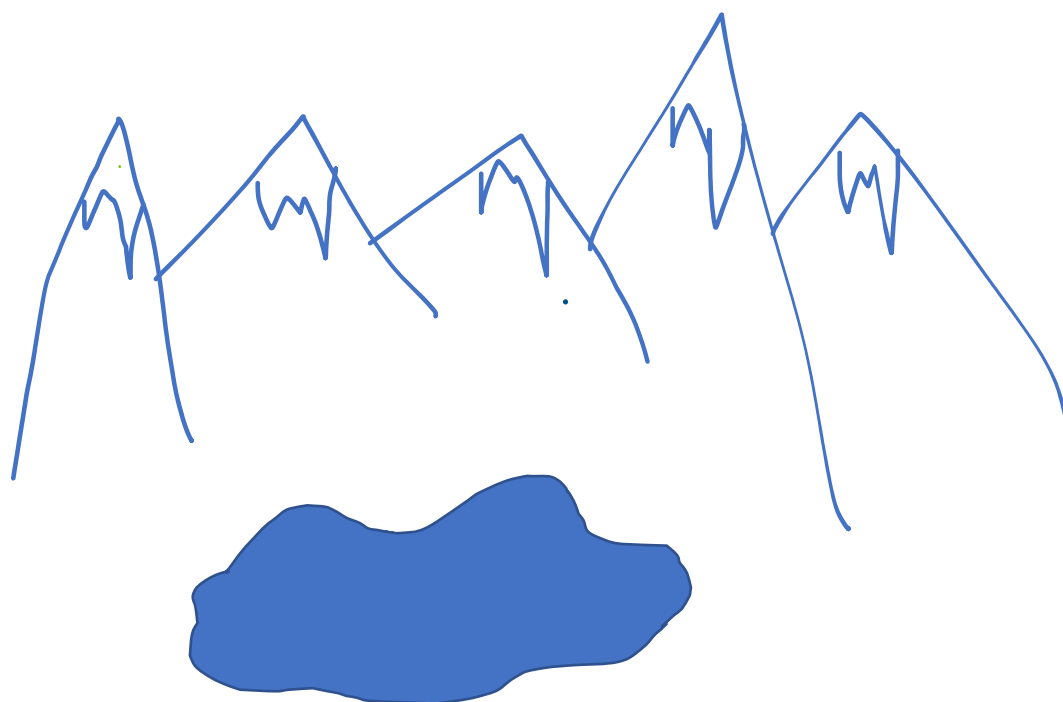
? Let’s reflect

- ▶ How can such qualitative moments of support, small bubbles in chaos, and comfort zones in the midst of big challenges, be organised and supported by you and your structure?
- ▶ What do you already do? What could be developed? With the support of whom?

Collect some ideas below:

What do you already do?	What could be developed?	Partners/ networks/ contacts?

3.4. LAKES AND MOUNTAINS



This scheme is used in EMDR-therapy training ³⁶ to explain what trauma is about, and how can proceed in treating it. The lake represents all our resources: Everything that has contributed to us being here and alive today. Our values, our learnings, our experiences, challenges we have overcome, people we have relationships with, our beliefs etc. Remember, the more trauma there is, the bigger the lake!

The mountains with glaciers represent our non-digested events or trauma. Traumatic events are so painful that we often cannot handle reconnecting to them, so we freeze them, we disconnect from the emotion by dissociating, by focusing on here and now, daily steps, in order to keep functioning. And this is a very valuable survival mechanism.

Unaccompanied migrant children often use this mechanism with events related to home, but also to traumatic situations during the travel route, crossing the Mediterranean, losses on the way or violent experiences they made. They cannot both focus on constructing a new life in Europe and dealing with a traumatic past. Often, they come back years after, after having settled administratively, after having found some stability in their professional and emotional life, to finally work through events of the past.

Supporting the psychological well-being of unaccompanied migrant children in transition does not mean that we should start to address these events. On the contrary, it is much more constructive to let them be, and to help the young person to focus on the lake. Because, as said earlier, they sometimes lose trust in themselves and forget that they have a lake.

The next pages will provide you with various tools and exercises to help unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood connect to their lake.

(a) Solution-focused language

Focusing on the lake starts with language, and with the type of questions we ask. In the solution-focused approach, we replace problem-oriented questions with questions that focus on resources. Here are some examples.

³⁶. EMDR stands for eye movement desensitization and reprocessing and is a form of trauma-therapy. This scheme was developed by a trainer in the French-speaking training course for professionals.

PROBLEM-FOCUSED QUESTIONS	SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS
What happened?	How did you manage to overcome the situation?
What is difficult at the moment?	What helps you to keep going?
Are you alone?	Who can help or support you?
In which situations is it difficult?	Are there any exceptions? Moments or situations when it is better? What is different then?
	Who taught you to be... (strong, brave etc.)
	What do you need now?

? Let's reflect

- Are there any other solution-focused questions you can think of? Try them out and note the differences you observe.

(b) Working with scales

Scales can be a powerful tool, if used in a solution-focused way.

0 → 10

When his therapist asked Souleymane "on a scale of 0-10, how are you today? , 0=very bad, and 10= very well", he answered: *"With the grace of God, Madam, I am OK. 3."*

In a problem-oriented approach, you would think: *"Hmm, a 3 is pretty bad"*. Wouldn't you?

The therapist would then ask, *"What happened"*, and Souleymane would start telling her that he has sleeping problems, that he still did not get his asylum appointment, that math is really difficult, that he still did not find a trace of his parents back home, etc. Many things his therapist knows already, Souleymane knows already, and none of them has an influence on. But it is a 3.

So, the therapist rather asks: *"OK, what is the 3 made of?"* And then, after a short surprise about the question, Souleymane tells her about the educator from last year who came to visit, and whom he really liked. About the exercise he managed to do by himself for the first time. About his favorite football club winning a game.

Do you feel the difference? As long as a person is alive, they have resources. And your role as educators, social workers, and professionals working with children in transition to adulthood, is to remind them of it.

(c) 3 questions for a happy life (by Dr. Luc Isebaert)

Solution-focused rituals that we practice daily help us to develop our solution-focused brain cells. Rituals take a minimum of 30 days to become more natural. So, they need a bit of time to integrate.

This exercise can be done:

- By yourself daily, at work or at home.
- With your colleagues, in team meetings, for example weekly.

- ▶ By the young people you work with, either alone, or together with you, or as a group.
- ▶ By hanging them up in public spaces, such as your office, the toilets, in the waiting rooms, or the corridors.

Every evening, try to answer these 3 questions:

1. One thing I did today that I am satisfied with.
2. One thing someone else did today that made me feel good.
3. One more thing that was good today.

If you work with unaccompanied migrant children from different countries, you could ask them to translate the three questions for you in their respective languages and hang them up somewhere.

(d) Grounding exercises

As mentioned earlier in this module, unaccompanied children in transition to adulthood, without any secured future, can be triggered easily at any time by connecting to past experiences, to the current situation, or to the uncertainty of the future.

Fear, like any other emotion, is useful when a real danger occurs. But fear, when permanently installed, becomes a real handicap, which keeps young people from living their lives. Unaccompanied migrant children in transition are asked to be particularly efficient in planning their future, to prove that they have the willingness and motivation, that they have integrated successfully into the host society, and that they can stand on their own feet. But fear of the future can completely block them from moving, each little step can become difficult. Society may easily judge some unaccompanied migrant children turning 18 for not making any effort. In reality, trauma and anxiety are so strong that they are unable to move. They need specific support, and the capacity to self-soothing the body is an important aspect of the stabilisation process.

Grounding exercises can help to come back to the here and now, to calm down and focus again. They are particularly helpful for persons with a high level of anxiety, sleeping disorders, emotional instability or difficulties coping with everyday life.

Here are some easy grounding exercises which you can teach them, or do with them regularly:



Exercise 1: 5-4-3-2-1 (developed by Betty Erickson)

This exercise focuses on a sensorial connection to the body and allows a person to quickly come back here and now.

Tell me 5 things that you see... for example: I can see the cup. I can see the wall. I can see the window...
Breathe.

Tell me 5 things that you hear...for example: I can hear my breath. I can hear voices outside. I can hear a car...
Breathe.

Tell me 5 things that you feel in your body right now... for example: I can feel my watch on my wrist. I can feel the chair I am sitting on. I can feel my feet in my shoes...
Breathe.

Then repeat the exercise with:

4 things you see, 4 things you hear, 4 things you feel in your body.

3 things you see, 3 things you hear, 3 things you feel in your body.

2 things you see, 2 things you hear, 2 things you feel in your body.

1 thing you see, 1 thing you hear, 1 thing you feel in your body.

At the end of the exercise, you can ask "how do you feel now?"

This is an exercise unaccompanied children can also do by themselves. It also works very well as a sleeping aid. This exercise also works very well on the phone, if a youngster calls you and is in panic, to help him/her to settle again.



Exercise 2: Heart coherence (developed by David O'Hare)

Heart coherence is a certain breathing rhythm which allows the body to calm down, and to reach a balance between over-activation and under-activation.

When breathing for 5 minutes in this particular rhythm, the body is grounded, and back into here and now.

It consists in breathing in a rhythm of 6 breaths per minute for 5 minutes, or 5 seconds of breath in, and 5 seconds of breath out, for 5 minutes.

The easiest way of doing it is to download an app on the phone, or to go on Youtube and type "heart coherence". Here are some links amongst many others:

Exercice de cohérence cardiaque, Catherine Darbord:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bM3mWlq4M8E&t=102s>

Respirelax :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tr5NI74ifgw>

Cohérence info :

<https://www.coherenceinfo.com/guides-respiratoires/>



Exercise 3: The box (developed by Dr Hélène Dellucci)

Objectives:

- ▶ Enable participants to create mental space by sorting out their thoughts and worries.
- ▶ Promote a sense of calmness and relief by visualising and letting go of difficult emotions and concerns.
- ▶ Encourage self-care and comfort through the addition of soothing elements to the mental space created.

Materials:

Paper and drawing materials (optional); Imaginary box (participants can visualize it).

Optional: items to make the waiting comfortable (music, light, a couch, pillows, chocolate, etc.)

Instructions:

1. Introduce the concept: explain to the participants that when we have too many problems, we can become overwhelmed and anxious. "The Box of Release" exercise helps create mental space to sort out thoughts and worries.
2. Visualize the box: ask the participants to imagine a box and describe it. Inquire about the size, colour, material, and how it closes. Encourage them to form a clear mental image of the box.
3. Letting go of the **past**: instruct the participants to imagine taking everything from the past that feels difficult to carry at the moment and placing it into the box. Assure them that they can come back to it later. Observe how the things settle in the box.
4. Letting go of the **present**: similarly, guide the participants to mentally place everything from the present that feels burdensome into the box. Reassure them that they can address these things later. Observe how the things settle in the box.
5. Letting go of the **future**: explain that participants should now mentally release anything from the future that feels overwhelming, reminding them that it does not exist yet. Assure them that if these concerns become real, they can still come back to them. Observe how the things settle in the box.
6. Take a deep breath: encourage the participants to take a deep breath, promoting a sense of relaxation and release.

7. Creating comfort: once everything is calm and settled in the box, suggest that the participants imagine adding comforting elements to make the waiting inside the box more pleasant. They can think of items such as music, light, a couch, pillows, or chocolate.
8. Close the box: prompt the participants to visualize closing the box, symbolizing a temporary separation from their worries.
9. Find a place for the box: instruct the participants to choose a place where they can mentally “put” the box, emphasising that they can access it whenever they need to add or remove things.
10. Optional “Drawing the box”: If desired, participants can draw or illustrate their imagined box on paper as a visual representation.
11. Reflection and self-care: discuss with the participants the benefits of this exercise, highlighting that they do not need to verbalize what they put into the box. Emphasize the physiological effect of letting go.

Encourage professionals working with children and young people to have their own mental box as a self-care tool.

Note: Adapt the instructions and level of detail based on the age and comprehension abilities of the participants.

CONCLUSION

The exercises described here can be a great way of preparing unaccompanied migrant children in transition time, by providing them with tools, but also with a solution and resource-oriented look at who they are, what they are capable of and what the future could also look like. It is like preparing their backpack with equipment so that climbing up the mountains becomes more manageable.

Anything that can be done to accompany the process of transition smoothly will help them find their way in this emancipation process, remembering that they are children, often with a traumatic past, and that they may make mistakes and fail, as any other young person on the transition to adulthood.

Having trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive interdisciplinary teams will allow us to better identify and support the specific needs of unaccompanied migrant children in transition in their daily life. This does not replace but highly supports the work of mental health professionals.

MODULE 4 – Access to education, vocational training and the labour market

” Education should be directed towards the development of the child’s personality, talents and abilities, towards the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, towards the development of a responsible life in a free society in the spirit of peace, friendship, understanding, tolerance and equality, and towards the development of respect for the natural environment. ”

Convention on the Rights of the Child

In this chapter, we will look at:

- ▶ What is the situation of unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood in relation to work and education?
- ▶ Which rights and support mechanisms exist?
- ▶ How can you support young people in transition on these aspects?
- ▶ The role of non-formal education in transition to adulthood
- ▶ Access to the labour market

4.1. ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The right to education is a fundamental right of every child. The CRC provides that all children have the right to education, and this right should be realised without discrimination of any kind. Unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood have the same right to education as any other child, regardless of their immigration status. This means that unaccompanied migrant children are able to access education, and this includes providing access to appropriate language support, academic and psychological support, and any other necessary accommodations.

In the EU, the right to education for unaccompanied migrant children is further guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Charter provides that everyone has the right to education and that this right includes the possibility to receive free compulsory education. The Charter also prohibits discrimination based on any grounds, including age, and requires that education be accessible to all on the basis of merit. Additionally, the EU has adopted a number of directives and policies aimed at promoting equal access to education for all, including unaccompanied migrant children. For instance, the EU Reception Conditions Directive requires that unaccompanied children have access to education that is adapted to their needs and that they are not discriminated against on the basis of their age or legal status.

Reaching the age of majority means that unaccompanied migrant children no longer enjoy the children’s right to education. However, the situation in the country of origin and the migration trajectory may have limited the acquisition of sufficient knowledge and skills to function fully in the host state. That is why access to education and training does not stop after reaching the age of majority. Generally, the right to education of children is widely accepted. But this does not apply to continued education. Unaccompanied migrant children who have reached the age of majority are generally excluded from continued education or have to deal with all challenges related to their immigration status.

Main challenges in accessing education

Unaccompanied children face multiple challenges resulting from gaps and irregularities in their schooling. These, *inter alia*, include:

- ▶ the level of education of unaccompanied migrant children upon arrival which varies greatly, from illiterate children who have never been to school, children with only elementary school, to children who were in secondary school.
- ▶ the level of education in the home country is not always recognised in the host country.
- ▶ in some countries, school is not compulsory after the age of 16. Therefore, unaccompanied migrant children who arrive at that age may not get the opportunity to enter the school system. This hinders their social inclusion, their contact with peers from the host community, and their opportunity to learn the language and continue their education.
- ▶ unaccompanied migrant children who have started an education path or vocational training may not always be guaranteed the right to pursue their studies or apprenticeship when reaching the age of majority. This is counter-productive both for the young person who has already invested a lot of time and effort into this project, and for the host society which would benefit from more guaranteed social inclusion of these youngsters.
- ▶ unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood have to make important decisions under time pressure while trying to figure out our codes of conduct and the functioning of a whole new societal and cultural framework. This can create a lot of anxiety and frustration to unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood.
- ▶ unaccompanied migrant children turning 18 are often required to move, and to resettle in new regions or places. Being forced to move can have an impact on education and vocational training.

Unaccompanied children often reach adulthood without having finished school and are expected to immediately enter society, and significantly the workforce, without crucial knowledge and language skills. A key priority for professionals working with these youngsters in a period of “phase out” should be to ensure continuity of education and professional training.



Exercise 1: Participatory activity with unaccompanied migrant children “Creating a 5-year plan”

Objective: The objective of this exercise is to encourage unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood to create a 5-year plan, which can help them to visualize their future and set achievable goals for themselves.

Materials: A3 paper, scissors, glue, old magazines

Instructions:

1. Provide each unaccompanied migrant child with an A3 paper, scissors, glue, and old magazines.
2. Explain to them the objective of the exercise and encourage them to think about their future.
3. Ask them to write down three things they want to achieve in 2 weeks, 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, 3 years, and 5 years.
4. Emphasise that the goals should be realistic and manageable for them to achieve.
5. Encourage them to go through the magazines and choose images that relate to their 5-year plan.
6. They can cut the images out of the magazine and glue them onto the other side of the paper to create a collage.
7. Remind them that the plan is like a contract with themselves, and they can check it regularly to see where they are in their progress.

This exercise aims to empower unaccompanied migrant children to take ownership of their future by creating a clear vision and achievable goals.

4.2. THE ROLE OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

What do we mean by non-formal education?

As defined by the youth sector of the Council of Europe: *"Non-formal education (NFE) refers to planned, structured programmes and processes of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competences, that happen outside the formal educational curriculum, including in youth organisations. NFE is complementary to formal and informal learning."*³⁷

NFE refers to any organised learning activity that takes place outside of the formal education system. It can take many forms, including vocational training, apprenticeships, language classes, sports programmes, and cultural exchange programmes. One of the main benefits of NFE is that it is often more flexible and tailored to the individual needs of learners.

Why is NFE an important aspect of education, and why can it be helpful for unaccompanied minors in transition to adulthood?

NFE can provide valuable opportunities for unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood. While formal education is important, NFE can help unaccompanied migrant children develop skills, knowledge, and competencies that are essential for their successful integration into their new communities.

For unaccompanied migrant children, who may have missed significant amounts of formal education due to displacement or trauma, NFE can provide an opportunity to catch up on missed education, develop new skills, and build confidence. NFE can also help unaccompanied migrant children build social connections and networks, which can be particularly important for those who have been separated from their families or communities. Through participation in NFE programmes, unaccompanied migrant children can meet new people, develop friendships, and feel a sense of belonging in their new communities. Additionally, NFE can provide a bridge between education and employment. Many NFE programmes focus on developing practical skills and competencies that are directly relevant to the labour market. This can help unaccompanied migrant children transition into the workforce and become financially independent.

Finally, NFE can be an important tool for promoting social inclusion and addressing discrimination. By bringing together learners from diverse backgrounds and promoting intercultural exchange, NFE can help break down barriers and promote understanding and respect among different communities.

In conclusion, NFE offers many opportunities for unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood. By providing flexible and tailored learning opportunities, promoting social connections and networks, and building practical skills and competencies, NFE can support unaccompanied migrant children in their journey towards successful integration into their new communities.

Here are some general characteristics of non-formal education:

- ▶ It happens on a voluntary basis
- ▶ It takes a holistic approach, combining the development of knowledge (head), skills (hands) and attitudes (heart).
- ▶ Is learner-centered, and based on the learner's needs
- ▶ It is a planned educational process, with set objectives
- ▶ Is inclusive and accessible to all learners
- ▶ It contributes to developing life skills such as democratic citizenship, active participation, conflict transformation, intercultural dialogue or human rights education
- ▶ It is value-based work

Very often, non-formal education activities are organised by youth clubs, youth centres, youth NGOs or organisations working on/ with young people.

Non-formal education can provide unaccompanied migrant children in transition with another look into learning with others, through each other, and in a way that each and everyone has the expertise and something to contribute with. NFE can also help in developing a sense of belonging to a community, but also to a particular

37. Council of Europe, European Youth Foundations, [Definitions](#), last accessed on 9 January 2023.

cause, topic, activity or field of social activism. NFE has a transformative dimension, as it aims at reflecting on the way we co-create and develop social change in society towards more respect for human rights and democracy.

Young refugees are often tired of being consulted only when it comes to topics related to being a refugee. They have a lot to contribute to, as a young person, may be politically engaged, or interested in sports, culture, history, law, minority rights, human rights, and anti-discrimination. NFE provides a space for directly practicing citizenship education with others.



Exercise 2: Participatory activity with unaccompanied migrant children on non-formal education “Mapping Opportunities”

Objective: To identify and map out the non-education opportunities available to unaccompanied migrant children in their local community, and to facilitate their access to these opportunities.

Materials: A large sheet of paper, markers, and a list of potential non-education opportunities.

Instructions:

1. Begin by explaining the purpose of the activity to the unaccompanied migrant children participating. Let them know that you will be working together to identify and map out the non-education opportunities available to them in their local community.
2. Provide the participants with a list of potential non-education opportunities, such as vocational training programmes, apprenticeships, internships, volunteering opportunities, cultural events, sports clubs, and recreational activities.
3. Ask the participants to work individually or in small groups to identify and add any other non-education opportunities that they are aware of, and to mark their location on the map.
4. Once the participants have identified and added all the opportunities they know of, ask them to take turns sharing their findings with the group. Encourage them to discuss the benefits and challenges of accessing these opportunities, and to suggest ways of overcoming any barriers.
5. Discuss the opportunities as a group and identify any gaps or areas where more information is needed. Ask the participants to brainstorm ways of filling these gaps, such as contacting local organizations or community leaders.
6. Finally, work with the participants to create a plan for accessing the identified opportunities. Discuss any challenges that may arise, and brainstorm ways to address these challenges.
7. Encourage the participants to take ownership of the map, and to use it as a resource for accessing non-education opportunities in their community.

By mapping out non-education opportunities and identifying ways to overcome barriers to access, unaccompanied migrant children can increase their chances of success in transitioning to adulthood. This participatory activity empowers unaccompanied migrant children to take ownership of their own future and to access the resources and opportunities available to them.

4.3. ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood often find themselves in an urgent need to work in order to avoid the risk of destitution or in order to provide for family members in their country of origin. Under legislation in several European states, children above the age of 15 may be allowed to work. However, the right to work is often subject to strict and specific requirements as provided for in national labour law. The right to work may also depend on the immigration status of the unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood. The EU Reception Conditions Directive prescribes that asylum seekers shall have access to the labour market no later than nine months from the date of the asylum application.³⁸ The Directive does not specify that access to the labour market is limited to adults.

However, access to the labour market in the context of the EU Reception Conditions Directive is limited to applicants for international protection. Unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood without

³⁸. Article 15 EU Reception Conditions Directive.

lawful residence who seek to work often have no other choice than irregular employment. This may also apply to applicants for international protection who do not fulfil the requirements to work. This makes unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood vulnerable to exploitation in the labour market.

The perceived pressure to engage in paid employment to maintain the unaccompanied migrant children's own well-being or to support family members might not be in the best interests of the unaccompanied migrant children. Cultural considerations regarding practices in the country of origin can contribute to this pressure. The development of unaccompanied migrant children might be better served by focusing more on long-term professional development and less on actual employment.

It is important that unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood are educated on labour rights and legislation regarding legal working hours, the allowed annual leave, minimum wages, legal remedies in case the employer does not fulfil its obligations, the termination of a labour agreement, etc. Unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood often lack a network that can provide practical tips and knowledge. Because access to professional help and advice is often more limited after the unaccompanied migrant children comes of age, it is important that the unaccompanied migrant children are well-prepared to enter the labour market as an adult.

The process of entering the workforce represents, therefore, a crucial stage in the paths of unaccompanied migrant children and young adults. Achieving full economic autonomy is indeed the most challenging task that these boys and girls are called to face. There are numerous factors that affect access to the world of work, including, firstly, their legal status, as previously explained; the job market opportunities in the local context; the availability of adequate professional training opportunities; the possibility of having a social network capable of mediating with existing job opportunities, and language proficiency.

The urgency to access the world of work is a recurring theme in the stories of unaccompanied migrant children, who often struggle to fully understand the reasons for the wait and the importance of following the educational and training steps indicated by educators and/or guardians. Rarely unaccompanied migrant children have the opportunity to choose their own career path based on their own abilities and aspirations; the path is often random and/or guided by necessity.

Many unaccompanied migrant children have already had work experience in their country of origin (sometimes at a young age), or during the long journeys they faced to reach Europe.

The most common form of support for employment integration that unaccompanied migrant children have access to is the Job Placement Service, which is characterised as both an economic support tool and a means of finding employment in "protected" circumstances.

Job placement service is a programme that aims to support unaccompanied migrant children and young adults in finding employment opportunities in the host country. This service provides guidance, counselling, and training on job searching skills, resume building, and interview techniques. The job placement service usually works in collaboration with local employers and job centres to identify available job opportunities that match the skills and qualifications of unaccompanied migrant children and young adults.

The service also assists in ensuring that the employment conditions and contracts are fair and in compliance with the local labour laws. The goal of the job placement service is to provide unaccompanied migrant children and young adults with the necessary tools and support to achieve economic independence and self-sufficiency, which is an important step towards their successful integration into the host community.

The characteristics that make successful job placement paths similar involve the aforementioned structural factors, but social network availability and the ability of young migrants to make full use of it are also crucial, along with a certain degree of initiative and a desire to learn.

How to support access to the labour market?

Professionals working with unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood can implement a variety of actions to support them in accessing the labour market. Some important actions include:

- **Information on job opportunities:** providing information on job openings, job requirements, and the skills and qualifications needed to perform certain jobs is crucial. This can be done through job fairs, job boards, or by connecting unaccompanied migrant children with employers who may be hiring.

- ▶ **Career guidance:** professionals can provide unaccompanied migrant children with career guidance, such as helping them identify their strengths and interests, and providing information on different career paths they may want to pursue.
- ▶ **Language training:** many unaccompanied migrant children may not speak the local language fluently, which can be a significant barrier to accessing the labour market. Language training can help them improve their language skills and increase their chances of finding a job.
- ▶ **Job training:** providing unaccompanied migrant children with job-specific training can help them develop the skills they need to succeed in a particular job. This can include both technical skills and soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and time management.
- ▶ **Networking opportunities:** connecting unaccompanied migrant children with professionals in their chosen field can help them build their professional network and increase their chances of finding employment.
- ▶ **Mentoring:** pairing unaccompanied migrant children with a mentor can provide them with guidance and support as they navigate the labour market. A mentor can provide advice on job searching, career development, and workplace challenges.
- ▶ **Advocacy:** advocating for unaccompanied migrant children can help ensure that they have equal access to job opportunities and are not discriminated against due to their age or immigration status. Professionals can advocate for unaccompanied migrant children at the policy level, as well as within individual workplaces.

4.4. VOCATIONAL COUNSELLING

To enhance employability and vocational counselling, a scientific approach that focuses on empowerment and building psychological resilience of the young adults is more effective. Providing individual support and community-based psychosocial activities such as creating groups that emphasise children's identity, strengths, abilities, and defence mechanisms have been found to be helpful, particularly for those who have not followed a sustainable and enduring educational path.

On the one hand, skills refer to a combination of individual traits, attitudes, knowledge, and abilities, which can be inherent or acquired and enable a person to perform tasks with high quality. Typically, skills are associated with using tools and methods in a particular context for specific tasks. On the other hand, abilities or competencies have a wider scope, encompassing an individual's capacity to deal with unforeseen circumstances and changes, as well as utilize and apply their knowledge and skills independently and in a self-directed manner.

The development of skills and qualifications is of high importance in the vocational training implementation. The term "skills" includes both the hard and soft assets that people need to use and thrive during their professional life. Moreover, the way we work, learn, take part in society, and lead our everyday lives is changing with technological developments, and global and demographic challenges.

The development of necessary skills helps unaccompanied migrant children adjust to these changes and ensure their well-being while contributing to society, productivity, and economic growth in the host country. In this modern era, literacy and skills development, language, numeracy, and digital knowledge, as well as vocational or technical, entrepreneurial skills and transversal skills, along with secondary languages and personal development skills are considered as empowering factors for a successful employee.

According to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) skills are defined as "the ability to apply knowledge and expertise to complete tasks and solve problems". They can be characterised as:

- ▶ Cognitive (including the use of logic, intuition, and creative thinking) and
- ▶ Techniques (including manual skill and the use of methods, materials, and tools).

Here are some relevant definitions according to the EU European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP):

- ▶ **Basic skills** are the skills required to live in modern society, e.g., speaking, oral comprehension, reading, writing and mathematics.
- ▶ **Technical skills** (hard skills) are directly related to a job and can be easily observed, measured, and developed through training. They are basic conditions for responding to a job position.
- ▶ **Social skills** (soft skills), concern all professions, sectors, jobs, and are closely related to intangible personal attitudes, social behaviours, and abilities (trust, discipline, self-management, teamwork, communication, emotional intelligence). This makes them more difficult to quantify and develop.

- ▶ **Transversal or transferable skills** are the skills that are related to jobs and occupations that can be implemented in different employment positions. These skills depict the individual's readiness for transitions, the adjustment to a new reality, the exploration of possible opportunities and personal capabilities, the utilization of available learning opportunities, self-efficacy, active commitment to specific goals, conscious persistence, experimentation, and innovation. Among other things, emphasis is given on the development of the skills of professional adaptability, which includes the characteristics of self-esteem, optimism for the future, assertiveness, and combating dysfunctional thoughts.

By using these skills, the aim is to empower unaccompanied migrant children to:

- ▶ **Manage the complex transitions** that characterize modern education, training, and employment.
- ▶ **Explore personal opportunities**, including the use of available learning opportunities.
- ▶ **Strengthen their personal competencies** and, the exploration of a working lifestyle that differs from the traditional patterns that young adults may be aware of and are adapted to an ever-changing socio-economic environment.

4.5. THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR VOCATIONAL AND EMPLOYABILITY COUNSELLOR

It is important that professionals working with unaccompanied migrant children to know resources of information and have a general knowledge about many professions (branches, specialties, entry qualifications, types of education/training, educational institutions). However, while the level of information related to each field of the labour market and vocational education and training is quite extensive (and available in various media and from various sources), professionals should emphasise to unaccompanied migrant children that the research (job or education) is their personal responsibility, while they act as a supporter, perceiving their role as a "change agent".

Throughout the counselling session they support, empower, enable the expression of feelings, create a safe and positive context/environment, provide incentives to increase motivation, reward, listen to the needs and enable the young adult to achieve their goals.

The professionals' response and attitude towards the achievements of the unaccompanied migrant children include:

- ▶ Support
- ▶ Encouragement
- ▶ Provision of valid and reliable information
- ▶ Empowering them cognitively, behaviourally, and emotionally
- ▶ Highlighting appropriate unaccompanied migrant children correlation techniques (as well as alternative proposals) for ways of connecting them with critical places stations during the process of their work integration
- ▶ Developing skills to solve problems and manage difficulties that face and are likely to face in their job life.



Exercise 3: Identifying Transferable Skills

Objective: To help unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood identify their transferable skills that can be used in the labour market.

Materials: Paper and pen/pencil for each participant, a list of transferable skills (such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, etc.)

Instructions:

1. Begin by explaining to the participants what transferable skills are and why they are important for the labour market.
2. Provide a list of transferable skills and ask the participants to select the top three skills that they feel they possess.

3. Ask each participant to write a brief explanation of how they have used these skills in their previous experiences (such as school, volunteer work, or personal projects).
4. After everyone has completed their writing, have them share their answers with the group.
5. Encourage participants to discuss how they can apply these skills to the labour market and provide examples of job positions where these skills would be useful.
6. Finally, ask participants to set a goal for how they will showcase these skills to potential employers in their job search.

This exercise can help unaccompanied migrant children identify their strengths and transferable skills, which can boost their confidence and increase their chances of success in the labour market. It also provides a space for participants to share their experiences and learn from one another, which can be empowering and motivating.



TIPS for professionals supporting unaccompanied migrant children in access to education, vocational training and the labour market:

- ▶ **Develop a trustful relationship:** Building a trusting relationship with unaccompanied migrant children is crucial to understand their needs, aspirations and to gain their confidence.
- ▶ **Understand their background:** be familiar with the cultural and social context of unaccompanied migrant children and have knowledge about their educational background and language proficiency.
- ▶ **Provide information on vocational training and job opportunities** and support unaccompanied migrant children in developing their job-seeking skills.
- ▶ **Monitor their progress:** monitor the educational and vocational training progress of unaccompanied migrant children to ensure that they are achieving their goals and are on track to successful integration.
- ▶ **Encourage independence and self-advocacy:** encourage unaccompanied migrant children to develop their independence and self-advocacy skills, enabling them to assert their rights and make informed decisions about their education, vocational training, and employment opportunities.
- ▶ **Life Skills Training:** provide unaccompanied migrant children with life skills training, including financial management, health and hygiene, and other essential life skills that will help them become more independent and self-sufficient.
- ▶ **Mentoring:** provide unaccompanied migrant children with mentors who can guide them through the transition to adulthood and help them navigate the challenges of integrating into a new society (see good practices).
- ▶ **Access to Information:** ensure that unaccompanied migrant children have access to information about their rights, opportunities, and resources; this could include information about education and training programmes. Try to organise workshops where the education system and vocational training opportunities are explained in detail to the unaccompanied migrant children in transition.
- ▶ **Support Networks:** Build support networks for unaccompanied migrant children that include peers, mentors, and other supportive adults. These networks can provide emotional support, practical advice, and social connections that can help unaccompanied migrant children navigate the challenges faced on accessing education and labour. Invite former unaccompanied migrant children with various profiles to share their experiences, learnings, successes, but also failures. This can be very inspiring and encouraging for unaccompanied migrant children in transition.
- ▶ **Collaboration:** Collaborate with other organisations, including schools, social services agencies, and community organisations, to provide comprehensive support to unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood. By working together, organisations can provide a more holistic approach to supporting unaccompanied migrant children and ensure that they have access to the resources and support they need to succeed. Organising marketplaces, where young unaccompanied migrant children in transition can meet with professionals, get to know what exists, what is possible, and ask questions.

CONCLUSION

Access to education, whether it be formal or non-formal, access to vocational training and the opportunity to enter the labour market are key pillars for the identity construction of unaccompanied children transitioning into adulthood. They also provide the necessary tools and skills for unaccompanied migrant children to build a better future for themselves and their communities.

Unaccompanied migrant children and young people require regular information, guidance and support to navigate complex systems, and to build professional networks that build upon their existing skills and competencies. It is important to enable them to project themselves and to explore the question “what do you want to be when you grow up?” so they can aspire to a fulfilling and meaningful future.

Module 5 – Access to accommodation

” Housing is the basis of stability and security for an individual or family. The centre of our social, emotional and sometimes economic lives, a home should be a sanctuary—a place to live in peace, security and dignity ”

United Nations, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing³⁹

In this chapter, we address:

- ▶ Main challenges faced by unaccompanied migrant children in transition in relation to accommodation
- ▶ Stages for the move out of care and accommodation options
- ▶ Essential tips for professionals on access to accommodation and housing

According to Eurostat data, young people in Europe typically leave their family homes at around 26.5 years old.⁴⁰ However, unaccompanied migrant children are required to become independent much earlier than their peers, without adequate support and resources. As a result, these expedited processes of emancipation often lead to various challenges that significantly impact young people in the context of migration. For many unaccompanied children transitioning to adulthood, accommodation appears to be one of the most, if not the most, distressing aspect of the process.

5.1. MAIN CHALLENGES

There are various possible challenges in accessing accommodation for unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood including:

- ▶ **Lack of stable and suitable accommodation:** unaccompanied migrant children may have limited financial resources, little to no social support networks, and may be vulnerable to exploitation or abuse.
- ▶ **Discrimination:** unaccompanied migrant children in transition may face discrimination in accessing rental of living places when looking for housing due to their immigration status, ethnicity, or other factors. Landlords and housing providers may be reluctant to rent to individuals who are not permanent residents or citizens or may charge higher rents or require larger deposits which can make it difficult for young refugees and migrants to find suitable accommodation.
- ▶ **Limited access to housing support services:** unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood may not have access to housing support services due to their age, status, or lack of documentation. This can make it challenging for them to access social housing or other forms of support.
- ▶ **Lack of information and guidance:** unaccompanied migrant children in transition may not be aware of their housing rights and responsibilities or may not know how to access information and guidance on housing issues.
- ▶ **Cultural barriers:** unaccompanied migrant children in transition may not be familiar with the housing market or housing customs in their new country and may have difficulty navigating these systems.
- ▶ **Lack of support networks:** unaccompanied migrant children in transition may have limited social support networks, which can make it difficult for them to find housing and access support services. They may also face language barriers or other communication difficulties when seeking help.
- ▶ **Financial barriers:** even if unaccompanied migrant children are eligible for public housing, they may face financial barriers to securing housing. For example, they may struggle to afford the costs of rent, security deposits, and other fees associated with securing housing.

39. United Nations, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, [The human right to adequate housing](#), last accessed on 6 February 2023.

40. Eurostat, [Leaving home: Young Europeans spread their wings](#), 1 September 2022.

- ▶ **Lack of documentation:** unaccompanied migrant children may not have the necessary documentation, such as a rental history or credit score, to secure housing in the private rental market. This can make it challenging for them to find landlords willing to rent to them.
- ▶ **Fear of eviction or homelessness:** unaccompanied migrant children may be reluctant to report housing issues or seek assistance due to fear of eviction or homelessness. This can result in unaccompanied migrant children living in substandard housing conditions, which can have negative effects on their health and well-being.

? Let's reflect

Which additional challenges do the young people you work with face in accessing accommodation when turning 18?

5.2. MOVING OUT FROM CARE: KEY ASPECTS

The transition to adulthood for all young people, including unaccompanied migrant children, is about progression. For unaccompanied children, this may be a series of small or larger steps, both within care and also leaving care and beyond. Alongside housing options, the emotional well-being of young people leaving care is a critical consideration.

The following are some areas that we should consider when working on access to accommodation for unaccompanied young migrants:

Preparing for housing options and gaining independence skills

Young people should be given the opportunity to consider their housing options, if available, including information about the housing market in their area. They should be equipped with the necessary skills to become more independent and make informed decisions about their housing options. This includes support in household management, financial literacy, and budgeting.

Planning with young people for their accommodation and support options

It is important to work collaboratively with young people to develop a plan for their accommodation and support options when they are ready to leave. This involves identifying suitable available accommodation and providing sufficient notice for their move. Individuals responsible for providing services and support during the transition from a care placement to living independently should also be consulted throughout this process.

Accessing housing and support based on individual needs and circumstances

Young people may have different needs and levels of maturity. They will, therefore, need different types of housing and support, ranging from foster families, emergency or temporary accommodation, shared apartments, and social housing. As the needs and circumstances of young people change, they should be supported to find accommodation that best suits them. A well-planned transition to independent living should consider individual needs and available support mechanisms.

Accessing and managing longer-term move-on and support options

As they become ready, young people will need support to access longer-term housing, such as shared flats or long-term supported housing. They will need help to understand to navigate through the options available and know where to go if they need extra support in the future.

In addition to the above, it is crucial to underline the importance of:

- ▶ Supporting professionals in the transition process, including through care planning and review meetings.
- ▶ Considering the contribution made by key services such as social services, mental health services, housing-related support providers, education services, and employment services in the joint planning process.

5.3. ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

The options for accommodation for (former)unaccompanied migrant children may vary depending on the country and local context. Here are some possible examples of accomodation options:

Foster care

Unaccompanied migrant children may be placed with foster families who provide a family-like environment and support. Foster care is often offered to unaccompanied migrant children arriving at a younger age (14 or younger). This option provides the environment, the affective bond and the ideal context so that young people can progressively become independent. This is achieved through daily accompaniment, intensive emotional support, the improvement of the command of the local language, the possibility that the adults with whom they live become their mentors and the possibility of expanding the network and resources through the host family and the educational support. Although foster care usually stops at majority, in practice sometimes, families stay very close and support the young person, and often continue hosting or supporting him/her like family members.⁴¹

Shared accommodation

Unaccompanied migrant children may be placed in shared accommodation, where they live with other young people who are also in transition to adulthood. Shared accommodation can foster a sense of community and peer support. There are different models of shared accommodation:

- ▶ **Shared housing between local and foreign young people.** While each person resides in their own mini-flat, there are opportunities for shared community activities and self-management of the communal spaces. This approach fosters a diverse and inclusive living environment, with a focus on providing opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and mutual support among young people from different backgrounds.
- ▶ **Intergenerational housing** in which flats or residential spaces are shared between young people and elderly people.
- ▶ **Shared housing with “mentors”** in which persons (usually between 25-35 years old), with a similar past and who has successfully completed their transitional process, shares a flat (or if in individual accommodation, they share activities on a scheduled basis) with another person who is just starting out. As a result, the older person can advise and accompany the younger person on their journey, acting as a mentor and offering support.

Independent living

Unaccompanied migrant children may be provided with independent living arrangements, such as flats or apartments. This option allows unaccompanied migrant children to live independently, but with support and guidance from professionals. In semi-independent flats or apartments shared with other young people fees are sometimes covered, depending on the context, and unaccompanied migrant children can learn to live independently: to cook, clean the apartment, manage energy consumption, pay bills etc., whilst a social worker/ educator visits them regularly. This option is sometimes proposed to 16-18 years old to help them prepare for autonomy but can also be provided to young adults 18-21.

Temporary housing

Unaccompanied migrant children may be provided with temporary housing, which offers temporary accommodation while they wait for more permanent arrangements. Temporary accommodation refers to a programme that provides temporary housing support to prepare young persons for independent living in the long term. The programme is for a limited period of time and can offered by either housing organisations or social service providers. After completing the programme, the provider assesses the young person's readiness to move to long-term accommodation based on a standard tenancy agreement.

41. Fondazione ISMU (2019), A un bivio. La transizione alla vita adulta dei minori stranieri non accompagnati in Italia. UNICEF, UNHCR IOM, Roma.

Adequate housing goes beyond four walls and a roof, and includes access to basic services such as water and electricity, safe construction materials, sufficient facilities and infrastructures such as sanitation. It must also be affordable, habitable, and appropriate to the cultural identity of the occupants. It should be also close relatively close to other basic services such as schools, health centres, employment opportunities, etc.



Exercise 1: Scoping Exercise for Access to Accommodation and Housing

Objective: To gain a comprehensive understanding of the available accommodation and housing options for unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood.

Instructions:

1. Research the available accommodation and housing options in your local area.
2. Make a list of all the available options, including emergency accommodation, supported housing, shared housing, and independent living.
3. Evaluate each option based on the suitability for unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood, affordability, and availability.
4. Identify any gaps in the available options and brainstorm potential solutions.

5.4. WHAT CAN BE HELPFUL IN SUPPORTING ACCESS TO ACCOMMODATION?

When supporting unaccompanied migrant children and young people in accessing accommodation, it can be helpful to:

Understand the local housing system, including eligibility criteria, available housing options, and support services.

Involve unaccompanied migrant children and young people in the decision-making around housing options, taking into account their preferences and needs, thus sharing responsibility for the itinerary and giving them as much information, choice and control as possible.

Develop partnerships with local housing providers and support organisations to improve the availability and quality of housing options for unaccompanied children and young people. House-hunting involves multiple actors, such as social associations, religious groups, and the social services of municipalities.

Work with relevant authorities and organisations to ensure that unaccompanied migrant children are provided with safe and appropriate accommodation, and that their housing needs are regularly reviewed and assessed.

Ensure that unaccompanied migrant children and young people have access to clear and transparent information regarding accommodation options and limitations. This is crucial in adequately preparing them for their transition to adulthood, as it helps to alleviate anxiety and dispel rumours and fears. It is equally important to inform them about their rights as tenants. Providing logistical and financial details about living independently is also essential in preparing unaccompanied migrant children for their transition, as many of them have had limited access to educational information and may find themselves in a new cultural context with significant differences.

Ensure that unaccompanied migrant children and young people have access to general support services, addresses, guidelines, and professionals responsible for housing (social workers, etc.). Some countries also have local associations, networks, or charities that offer accommodation for young people undergoing vocational training or education. Therefore, it is helpful to provide unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood with these contacts.

Connect unaccompanied migrant children with former unaccompanied migrant children who can provide them with useful information and advice.

Overall, providing support to unaccompanied migrant children in access to accommodation and housing requires a comprehensive approach that addresses their individual needs and considers the local context.



Exercise 2: Role-Play Exercise for Accommodation and Housing Interviews

Objective: To practice conducting interviews with unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood for accommodation and housing.

Instructions:

1. Prepare a list of potential questions that may arise during an accommodation and housing interview.
2. Find a friend or colleague to role-play as unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood.
3. Conduct an interview with the role-player, asking the questions on your list and practising active listening skills.
4. Debrief with your role-player and reflect on any areas for improvement.



Exercise 3: Participatory activity with unaccompanied migrant children on accommodation and housing “My Ideal Home”

Objective: To explore the housing needs and preferences of unaccompanied migrant children transitioning to adulthood, and to facilitate a discussion on access to accommodation.

Materials: Paper, markers, magazines, scissors, glue

Instructions:

1. Ask each participant to create a collage or drawing of their ideal home. Encourage them to include as much detail as possible, such as the location, type of housing, number of rooms, amenities, and furniture.
2. Once everyone has completed their collage or drawing, ask them to present it to the group and explain their choices. Some questions to guide the discussion could include:
 - What is most important to you when it comes to housing?
 - What are some of the challenges you have faced in finding housing?
 - What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of different types of housing (e.g., shared accommodation, independent living, supported housing)?
 - What kind of support do you need to find and maintain housing?
3. After the discussion, ask participants to identify some practical steps they can take to work towards their ideal home. This could include researching housing options in their area, contacting housing providers, or developing a plan to save money for rent or a deposit.
4. Finally, encourage participants to share any resources or tips they have for finding and maintaining housing, and create a list of these to share with the group.

Note: It is important to ensure that the activity is inclusive and respectful of everyone’s housing preferences and needs. Avoid making assumptions about what is “normal” or “desirable” in terms of housing and be mindful of any cultural or personal preferences that may influence participants’ choices.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, access to safe and stable accommodation is a crucial aspect for the successful transition of unaccompanied children to adulthood. As professionals, it is essential to ensure that the accommodation options provided to unaccompanied migrant children are adequate and meet their needs. This module has highlighted the various challenges and barriers faced by unaccompanied migrant children in accessing accommodation and housing, including discrimination, lack of affordable options, and limited availability of social housing.

To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including local authorities, NGOs, and housing providers, to create more accessible and affordable housing options for unaccompanied migrant children. Additionally, unaccompanied migrant children should be supported in developing the necessary life skills and knowledge to manage their own accommodation and tenancy agreements.

The importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding of unaccompanied migrant children's diverse backgrounds and needs cannot be overstated when working on access to accommodation and housing. A trauma-informed and person-centered approach is necessary to ensure that unaccompanied migrant children's unique circumstances and experiences are taken into consideration.

ANNEXE I – Workshop programme proposal

Depending on how you work with unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood, you may use various formats of running workshops with them.

These examples are rather to be taken as a template, to then be adapted to your group, your context and the needs of the young people you work with.

The workshop proposal is based on three main aims:

(1) Developing personal competencies

Young people in transition to adulthood need a space to think about themselves, to reflect on who they are, where they are now in their life, and where they want to be. Providing a space for a guided self-reflection will help them to connect to motivation, trust and confidence, but also to develop ideas for the future, based on their already existing competencies and resources.

(2) Developing theoretical competences

Young people in transition to adulthood need to get an understanding of laws and regulations in their local context. They need to be provided with basic knowledge about child protection and migration law, in order to grasp what changes for them at the age of 18.

As importantly, if not even more, they need an introduction to human rights and human rights education, citizenship and democracy.

Understanding the principles of human rights, and being able to know what rights they have, how to recognise that their rights are being violated, and what to do to claim their rights.

This is also essential in making them understand that there is no hierarchy of rights.

(3) Developing practical competences

This part is really related to their capacity to plan the transition to adulthood in the best way possible: it includes the identification of challenges in each of the various fields (health, education, training, accommodation, access to information and rights, non-discrimination...).

This part should help them identify networks and resources to help them after turning 18 years old, to take concrete steps to prepare far in advance, and to be able to ask for the support they need.

Who should run the workshop?

The workshop can be run by a single person, but also by a group of different persons intervening on each specific topic. It can be interesting to involve former unaccompanied migrant children to share their experiences, as they will provide a different perspective on the challenges met.

An idea could be to run this workshop yearly, and to start involving former participants as junior trainers in the next session, in a way of promoting a multiplying effect, but also recognising and acknowledging competencies.

Therefore, providing participants with a certificate of attendance to the workshop can also be a useful document to add to their files.

How to prepare for the workshop?

Start preparing the workshop way ahead.

First of all, sit down with your colleagues, to have a common reflection on:

(1) What you want to achieve through this workshop (aims and objectives).

(2) Who should participate (identify a group of young people in transition to adulthood). Ideally, the group should be no smaller than 4 people, and not bigger than 10 people. If many more young people are concerned,

you should rather envisage running 2 parallel sessions. Smaller groups enable for more active participation of all, and more discussion. It can also be interesting to organise the workshop together with other associations/agencies, in order to get different experiences and enable young people to meet also beyond their own context

(3) Identify when it is best to run the workshop:

- ▶ Firstly, the earlier it takes place in the unaccompanied migrant children's transition phase towards turning 18, the more time he/ she will have to actively plan the transition and find solutions to the various challenges.
- ▶ Secondly, the time the workshop will be carried out is also important. If the young people in transition are in education or vocational training, it would probably need to take place in the evenings, on weekends or during holidays. Try to ask them in advance in order to find the best timeslot available. Please also take into account the needs of young people in terms of private and spiritual life (for example, avoid having the workshop during Ramadan, at the time when they fast or break their fasting).

(4) Identify who should run the workshop and invite people within your structure or from other organisations/associations.

(5) Prepare a short, youth friendly description of the workshop, with a draft programme. Start telling young people you identified about it and invite them. Explain to them why you think it could be important for them. They should commit to the workshop formally.

How to run the workshop?

- ▶ The workshop is constructed in a way to be run in a non-formal way.
- ▶ The trainer/ educator should rather take the role of a facilitator, who engages in debate and discussion, listens to different opinions and provides a safe space for opinions to be shared and ideas to be explored.
- ▶ Of course, there also needs to be some formal input, especially in relation to what concretely happens when unaccompanied migrant children turn 18, what the law provides for, and what human rights are about.
- ▶ Again, if you do not feel comfortable doing this in your role, it may be interesting to look for an NGO or outside resource person to run parts of your workshop.
- ▶ The workshop should take place in comfortable conditions, so that the young people can feel safe (creating comfort zones) and open up. Try to create a cosy atmosphere, make rather a circle of chairs than a formal school setting. Provide drinks, music or anything that could contribute to making the space welcoming. Try to plan a celebrative moment at the end of the workshop. It could be a common dinner, or even just a group picture, a common song, or something that symbolically recognises and celebrates the achieved competencies. This is also a moment to hand in a certificate.
- ▶ Ideally, the workshop, whether it takes place over a full day or 2 days, or is split into various shorter sessions, should take place with a closed group of young people in transition to adulthood who go through the whole process together. This will allow for security, creating links and sharing personal information.
- ▶ In the beginning of the workshop, explain the rule of confidentiality, by telling participants that everything they hear about others in this group needs to be confidential and stay within this group (include yourself in this rule). However, anything they learn about themselves, they are free to share.

WORKSHOP PROPOSAL

WHAT	TIME	OBJECTIVES
SECTION I: Exploring identity WHO AM I	2h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide a space for self-reflection about past, present and future ▶ Help unaccompanied migrant children in transition connect to their resources ▶ Remind unaccompanied migrant children in transition that they are much more than unaccompanied migrant children ▶ Create links and connections with other young people
SECTION II: Turning 18: what does it mean in our context	2h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide participants with concrete information about turning 18 ▶ Answer their questions about the topic ▶ Give information about the law ▶ Share concrete examples of previous young people in transition and what they did/ do today
SECTION III: Human rights and human rights education	2h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What are human rights? ▶ The principles of human rights ▶ Introducing human rights education through concrete activities ▶ How can unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood protect their human rights (resources, mechanisms, contact persons or organisations)
SECTION IV: Preparing MY transition	6h (in 2 parts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Access to education, housing, labour market, accommodation, health, psychological support ▶ Identifying challenges ▶ Identifying resource persons ▶ Developing clear action plan ▶ Planning next steps
		Celebration time
SECTION V: Evaluating transition process	1,5h (some time after the workshop) Individual coaching or group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What is the situation today? ▶ What worked well? what is still difficult? ▶ What do you still need?

DRAFT PROGRAMME (to be adapted)

Day 1

09:00 Welcome and introduction

Getting to know each other, icebreaking exercises

Aim and objectives of the workshop

09:30-11:30 SECTION I: Exploring identity

11:30-12:30 SECTION II: Turning 18, what does it mean?

12:30 Lunch break

13:30-14:30 SECTION II: Turning 18, what does it mean (continued)

15:00-17:00 SECTION III: Human rights and human rights education

Day 2

09:00 Welcome and short round of feedback

09:30- 13:00 SECTION IV: Preparing MY transition step by step

13:00 Lunch break

14:00 SECTION IV: Preparing MY transition step by step (continued)

16:30 Planning next steps

17:00 Evaluation and celebration

18:00 Closing

(Day 3, section V is to be planned a few weeks later to measure change and identify further support needed).

DRAFT SESSION OUTLINES

SECTION I: EXPLORING IDENTITY- WHO AM I?

Objectives:

- ▶ To create safe conditions and atmosphere for learning, sharing and common reflection
- ▶ Provide a space for self-reflection about past, present and future
- ▶ Help unaccompanied migrant children in transition connect to their resources
- ▶ Remind unaccompanied migrant children in transition that they are much more than unaccompanied migrant children
- ▶ Create links and connections with other young people

Materials/ preparation:

- ▶ Prepare the room in a cosy way, by putting chairs in a circle.
- ▶ Provide participants with paper, coloured pens and pencils, scissors and glue, coloured post-its
- ▶ Prepare old magazines, newspapers or any kind of images and pictures (*if you do the collage*)
- ▶ A big role of paper, or 2-3 flipchart papers stuck together (*if you do our common history*)
- ▶ A little ball for throwing
- ▶ A copy of the blob tree picture for each participant

Detailed session plan

You may choose to only use one or two of these proposals and spend more time doing it. These can be alternative ideas.

WHAT	TIMING	WHO RUNS IT
Introduction and name game	30 min	
Blob evaluation	10 min	
The flower of identity	30 min	
Creating a collage	45 min	
Our common history: From home to here	1 hour 30	

Instructions

General introduction

- ▶ If this is the first time this group gets together, welcome the group warmly, introduce yourself and give a short introduction about this workshop, why it is organised and by whom. Also explain the programme and respond to questions.
- ▶ If participants do not know each other yet, start with a little [name game](#) to break the ice and bring in some fun and create a light atmosphere (you can find many name games on the internet). For example, introduce yourself with your first name, and one quality that you have, that starts with the same letter as your name (*I am Maissa and I am mysterious*). Then throw the ball to someone else who will repeatedly say their name and an attribute.
- ▶ Explain [the rules of the workshop](#):
 - Respecting each other's opinions, even if we disagree.
 - Confidentiality: Anything we learn about someone else on these 2 days should remain in this room. What we learn about ourselves belongs to us.
 - Taking care of oneself: Do what you feel like doing, and don't do what you don't feel like doing.
 - It is OK to struggle with language. Make a sign when you do not understand, and everyone will try to explain in different ways.
 - Ask if there are additional rules participants can think of.

Blob tree

The blob tree is an activity that allows for self-reflection and self-evaluation.

1. Give each participant a copy of the tree.
2. Ask them to choose one blob which describes how they feel right now, at the beginning of the workshop. Invite them to pick a colour and colour their blob.
3. Then ask them to choose a blob to describe how they would like to feel at the end of this workshop, if it has been useful and enriching for them. Again, let them colour it.
4. Let participants share their 2 blobs one by one by sharing what they want to share (and if they want to share).
5. Tell them that you will get back to this at the end of the workshop to check where they are in relation to their wish.



The flower of identity

This exercise is already described in the toolkit.

1. Ask participants to draw their flower of identity with all aspects that make them be themselves.
2. Then invite them to share it with others. They can always add petals to their flowers if they are inspired by someone else's flower.
3. Ask them to add what they would like to be able to add to their flower in the future.
4. Have a common discussion on how they felt drawing their flower, what they realized, what they are particularly proud of, and what they learnt about themselves and others.

Creating a collage

Alternatively to the flower, and if you have more time available, you could invite participants to do an identity collage.

1. Explain to them that you have brought pictures and magazines, which they can look at, cut out and use.
2. Give them each a piece of paper (ideally A3 to have space). Invite them to search for images or words which describe best who they are. These could be many different pictures, also symbolic pictures which somehow have to do with them. They can also draw themselves.
3. Once they have chosen various pictures, they can stick them on their paper in order to create a collage. They can also add words, in the language of their choice, or ask for help if needed.
4. Then, in form of a little vernissage, invite each participant to describe their collage and what it has to do with them.
5. Open a discussion on how they felt doing it, what they noticed, liked, disliked. What they are proud of etc.

Our common history

This exercise can be a powerful way to connect past, present and future, both on an individual and group level. It does require time, so if you choose to do this one, you may focus only on this one rather than trying squeeze in too many activities.

1. Put a big role of paper on the floor and draw a timeline on it (or a river). Explain that this represents a timeline, with the past, the present (identify it on the line) and the future.
2. Ask participants to sit individually and reflect on:
 - Their nicest memories, or the 5-10 best moments in their life.
 - Resources that helped them move forward (persons, qualities, values, competences).
 - What makes them be here today.
 - 3 things they wish to achieve in the future.
3. Let them write these words on individual coloured post-its and put them in the river or the timeline.
4. Commonly go through the timeline, and let each of them tell their story the way they would like to tell it
5. Have a common discussion about how they feel, what they liked, how they chose the moments and things they wanted to put on the timeline

Ending the section

At the end of the section, ask participants how they felt about it, and if they would have particular needs for the next sections.

Be attentive to each participant, as it could be that some strong emotions come up when connecting back with the past, even if they connected with nice memories. If this is the case, refer back to the chapter about psychological support, and offer them to put things into a box, or do some grounding exercises with the whole group. Also check with participants if they would like to take their creations home. You could also take a picture of their creations and share them with the group.

SECTION II: TURNING 18- What does it mean in our context?

Objectives:

- ▶ To provide participants with concrete information about turning 18.
- ▶ To answer questions they could have about the topic.
- ▶ To provide legal information.
- ▶ To share concrete examples of previous unaccompanied migrant children in transition and what they did/ do today.

Materials/ preparation:

- ▶ Prepare the room in a cozy way, by putting chairs in a circle.
- ▶ Flipchart paper and markers.
- ▶ Video projector and computer if you wish to show a PowerPoint presentation or other visual support.
- ▶ Pictogrammes, pictures or any visuals which can help to understand the information.
- ▶ If you want to run a marketplace, you should invite various resource persons to join the session. These should be persons who have a specific knowledge or experience of transition to adulthood: professionals from various fields, but also former unaccompanied migrant children who can share their experiences.

Detailed session plan

WHAT	TIMING	WHO RUNS IT
Turning 18: general introduction to rights, responsibilities and consequences	30 min	
Questions and answers	30 min	
Market place	45 min	
Feedback and rounding up	15 min	

Instructions

Turning 18: general introduction to rights, responsibilities and consequences

- ▶ This section is going to be rather informative and theoretical. However, it is important to make the information graspable, simple and understandable. Any visual support, images or concrete examples that can be used will facilitate the process.
- ▶ Reassure unaccompanied migrant children in transition that you will be repeating this information within the next weeks/ months as they get closer to turning 18. Also explain that this is a first general explanation, and that you will be focusing on each individual situation at a later stage.
- ▶ Ideally, this session should be run either by a person with an overall overview of the situation or by a few colleagues with different fields of expertise, in order to be able to answer questions.
- ▶ Start by asking participants to brainstorm on what “turning 18” means to them. Here, in the host country, but also in their cultural context, in their traditions. Write everything they say on a flipchart. This can help you to go back to some things they said afterwards.
- ▶ Give a maximum of 30 minutes of input about what changes when turning 18 (from child protection to migration, housing, education, legal status, the person in charge, guardianship etc.)
- ▶ Another way of providing information could be to draw a mind map on the screen, explaining that each situation has other consequences.
- ▶ Make the presentation as interactive as possible, asking participants which aspects they think are to be considered, what they think changes when turning 18, what doesn't, what they see as advantages and disadvantages etc.

Questions and answers

- ▶ If the group of participants is larger than 8 people, split participants into smaller groups of 4 people and ask them to share what they heard, understood, and what questions they had.
- ▶ Collect their feedback and questions and go through them one by one. If you do not have the answer to some questions, tell them openly that you cannot answer but will try to find further responses until the next time you meet. *(It is OK not to be an expert on each specific situation. It can even be a relief to participants to see that even you do not grasp the complexity fully).*
- ▶ Have a short break

Marketplace

- ▶ Get the “experts” you invited to this session to briefly introduce themselves and what they would like to share today about turning 18.
- ▶ Get each to sit in one corner of the room, with a table and a few chairs around to sit.
- ▶ Invite participants to visit the experts for an exchange. These can be informal discussions, where participants can ask their questions from different angles.
- ▶ They can either stay the whole time with one expert or change tables and explore another expert from another angle.
- ▶ After a few rounds (depending on the time available), get everyone together again and ask participants for feedback on what they learnt from this session. Also, ask the experts for a final word they would like to share.
- ▶ Explain that you will be digging deeper into actual challenges and issues in the next sections.

Ending this section

This section can be quite nerve-wrecking, as it starts connecting unaccompanied migrant children in transition with their fears about the future.

End the session with a nice grounding exercise, such as 5 minutes of heart coherence, or a 54321, to relax the bodies again.

SECTION III: Human rights and human rights education

Objectives:

- ▶ What are human rights?
- ▶ The principles of human rights

- ▶ Introducing human rights education through concrete activities
- ▶ How can unaccompanied migrant children in transition protect their human rights (resources, mechanisms, contact persons or organisations)

Materials/ preparation:

This section should be a mixture of theory about human rights, and practical activities to practice and understand human rights through different lenses.

- ▶ Prepare a short presentation about Human rights. For this, you can use the manual "[Compass](#)"⁴², and in particular chapter 4, which provides you with a youth friendly introduction to human rights
- ▶ Flipchart, markers
- ▶ Room for small groups
- ▶ Specific preparation for each exercise

Detailed session plan

WHAT	TIMING	WHO RUNS IT
What are human rights	30 min	
Human rights education in practice: diamond ranking	60 min	
How to protect human rights of unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood	90 min	

Instructions

What are human rights?

- ▶ Ask participants to brainstorm on all human rights they know of. List them on a flipchart.
- ▶ Ask them to define what they consider as human rights.
- ▶ Explain that human rights are:
 - Indivisible and interdependent (you cannot divide them or consider them individually, as separated from each other. They come as a package).
 - Unalienable (nobody can take them away from you, you have them no matter what)
 - Universal (they count for every human being)
- ▶ Explain that human rights are based on the values of:
 - Human dignity
 - Equality
 - Freedom
 - Tolerance
 - Non-discrimination
 - Justice
 - Respect
 - Responsibility

Note to facilitators: It is often very difficult for young people to accept the principles of human rights, and especially the fact that they are unalienable, when there may be situations where their human rights may be violated. It is, therefore, important to explain that human rights can be violated, hurt, and attacked, but that nobody can take them from you.

- ▶ Ask participants to sit together in pairs and reflect on:
 - One situation when their rights were violated.
 - One situation when they violated someone else's rights.
 - One situation when someone protected their human rights.

42. Council of Europe Publishing, *Compass*, a manual on human rights education with young people, 2012.

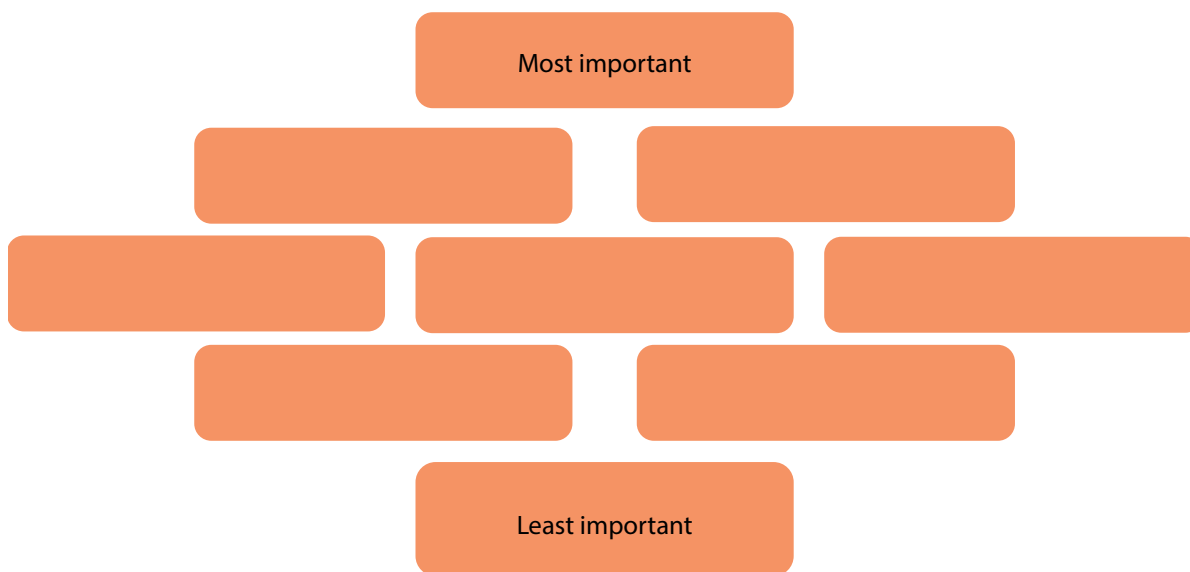
Discuss in the whole group which human rights are the most concerned by their transition to adulthood.

Diamond ranking

This exercise is adapted from the activity “[children’s rights](#)” in the manual Compass.

Preparation/ material:

- ▶ Prepare a set of cards with the [summary version of the European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#) or, if you prefer, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Choose 9 rights amongst all, which feel most relevant to your group. Prepare one set of 9 cards for each group (if you split into 4 groups, you need 4 sets)
- ▶ Split participants into smaller group. Give each group a set of cards and explain that these contain some human rights.
- ▶ Ask them to rank these rights from the one that seems most to the one that seems least important to them. They should do so by forming a diamond ranking:



- ▶ Give each group enough time to agree on their ranking.
- ▶ Then ask them to share their ranking and explain the reason for their choices.

Debriefing:

- ▶ Ask participants what they notice about the rankings, and on which basis they made their decisions
- ▶ Explain that some rights may seem more important to a certain community in a particular context, but that we cannot say that one is more important than the other.
- ▶ Which rights do they feel are not respected for them as unaccompanied migrant children in transition?
- ▶ Are there any rights that should specifically be added for young people between 16 and 25? Which ones?
- ▶ Are there any rights that should be specifically added for young refugees in transition to adulthood? Which ones?
- ▶ What can they do to have these rights respected?

Statement cards (to be adapted to your target group).

You have the right to life	No one ever has the right to hurt you or torture you. Even in detention your human dignity has to be respected.
You have the right to respect for your private and family life, your home and correspondence.	You have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. You have the right to practice your religion at home and in public and to change your religion if you want.

You have the right to responsibly say and write what you think and to give and receive information from others. This includes freedom of the press.	You have these rights regardless of your skin colour, sex, language, political or religious beliefs, or origins.
You have the right to go to school.	If you are lawfully within a country, you have the right to go where you want and to live where you want within it.
You have the right to marry and to have a family.	

You could also use the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, or the [European Social Charter](#), which would allow to address many of the social rights unaccompanied migrant children in transition are struggling with (access to education, accommodation, labour, health etc.)

How to protect the human rights of unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood

In the last part of this section, you should help young people to reflect on the existing networks and structures to protect their human rights.

You can list

- ▶ International
- ▶ National
- ▶ Local

NGOs, organisations, institutions, and explain how they can help.

Ideally, you invite some representatives of these structures to explain their work.

Tips for facilitators

Very often, such sessions are organised in a very dry way, completely abstract and disconnected from young people's realities. Try to avoid this by ensuring that whoever talks about protection of human rights brings in concrete cases and situations they can relate to.

Maybe a visit to some of these structures is possible too.

At the end of this session, participants should have a better understanding of what human rights have to do with them, how they can protect them, and who can be local resource persons in case of need.

To go further...

If you have more time to address human rights, you could add some other exercises, such as:

- ▶ [Where do you stand](#): Exercise on debating on human rights and expressing different opinions (from Compass)
- ▶ Working on concrete case studies where the human rights of unaccompanied migrant children in transition were violated. Ask participants to read the cases, analyse them, identify the human rights at stake and learn about what kind of support was offered (you can ask local human rights organisations to provide you with such case studies).

SECTION IV: PLANNING MY TRANSITION

Objectives

- ▶ Identifying challenges in relation to transition to adulthood
- ▶ Identifying resource persons who can accompany participants in their transition
- ▶ Developing a clear action plan related to access to education, housing, labour, accommodation, health, psychological support
- ▶ Planning next steps

Materials/ preparation:

In this section, participants will use all the information from the previous section to start working on their actual transition to adulthood.

You will need

- ▶ A printed copy of the challenges table for each participant
- ▶ White paper and pens, coloured pencils for the action plans

Detailed session plan

WHAT	TIMING	WHO RUNS IT
Creating a 5-year plan	60 min	
Identifying challenges	60 min	
Identifying fears and needs	30 min	
Identifying resources/ resource persons	60 min	
Developing a step-by-step action-plan for each challenge	60-90 min	

Instructions

This section should take place over a whole day, regularly alternating between individual work, coaching and group feedback.

Creating a 5-year plan

- ▶ It is easier to start such a process with a projection of what a better future would look like. Take the “Creating a 5-year plan” exercise included in the toolkit on page 46 and introduce it to participants. Ask them to take a piece of paper and start reflecting. (If you already did the collage on identity the day before, only focus on listing the action plan, and skip the second part with the collage).

Tips to facilitators

unaccompanied migrant children in transition to adulthood can struggle with projection into the future, as they have learnt to survive on a day-to-day basis. If this is the case, tell them that their vision can be related more to a wished-for state, and not necessarily to material or status achievements (instead of “I finished my studies and I have my own apartment”, it could also be “I feel relaxed and confident, I do not have a headache when I wake up in the morning, I sleep without nightmares etc.) Ask them how they feel if they achieved this goal, who notices, how other people notice etc.

- ▶ Get participants to share what they feel like sharing. This is an important part, as their visions also mutually encourage or inspire them. Also, give the option of not wanting to share and keeping it private.
- ▶ Ask them to go back to the river or timeline from the previous day and add post-its for the future perspective. Discuss how this feels.

Identifying challenges, fears, needs, resources and next steps

- ▶ After focusing on where participants see themselves
- ▶ Each participant should get a printout of the table attached below. Briefly explain that you are now moving to a very concrete diagnosis of everyone’s personal situation and transition to adulthood, in order to best accompany each process.
- ▶ Ideally, you should be a group of adult experts who can sit with the young people when they have a question, and offer coaching, mentoring, and advise on specific questions.
- ▶ If some fields remain empty, suggest helping the young person make research on where they can find help.
- ▶ Make them work on one theme at a time. After each theme, ask them to come back to the circle and share what they came up with, which ideas arose, which next steps they plan. In this way, it is both an individual and a group process.
- ▶ Plan regular breaks, or small grounding exercises to relax the atmosphere and allow them to relax.
- ▶ At the end of this section, make a copy of their tables, so they can keep the original and you keep a copy.

- Have a common discussion on how they feel about this process, what is different now, and what they will focus on first when leaving this workshop.

	CHALLENGES	FEARS	NEEDS	WHAT/ WHO CAN HELP (resources)	NEXT STEPS (step by step, detailed action plan)
Access to accommodation					
Access to health (physical and mental)					
Access to Education					
Access to the Labour Market					
Financial resources					
Administrative status					
Social inclusion					
Safety/ security					
Family reunification					
Other					

EVALUATION OF THE WORKSHOP

At the end of these 2 days together, plan some time for a common evaluation.

- ▶ Go back to the Blob from the previous day, and ask participants to share how they feel now, and whether or not this fits with their initial expectations.
- ▶ Have a little round of feedback on how they felt about the 2 days. It can be a word, a sentence, or anything they'd like to share.
- ▶ Ask what they leave with, what they take home from this workshop, and what has changed through it.
- ▶ Then explain what the concrete next steps will be (ideally, you organize a follow-up session 4-8 weeks after this workshop to check developments and answer further questions).
- ▶ Congratulate everyone for their hard work and distribute certificates of attendance.
- ▶ If possible, organize a little moment of celebration: a common dinner, a drink after the closing etc.

ANNEX II – Indicative bibliography and Council of Europe documents ⁴³

I. RELEVANT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ▶ EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2019), *Integration of young refugees in the EU: good practices and challenges*.
- ▶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *The contribution of youth work in the context of migration and refugee matters : a practical toolbox for youth workers and recommendations for policymakers : results of the expert group set up under the European Union work plan for youth for 2016-2018*, Publications Office, 2019.
- ▶ European Migration Network (2022). *Children in Migration: Report on the state of implementation in 2020 of the European Commission communication on the protection of children in migration*, 2017.
- ▶ EMN, *Approaches to Unaccompanied Minors Following Status Determination*, 2018.
- ▶ OXFAM, *Teach us for what is coming: The transition into adulthood of foreign unaccompanied minors in Europe: case studies from France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, and the Netherlands*, 2021
- ▶ ISMU Foundation (2019), *At a Crossroad. Unaccompanied and Separated Children in their Transition to Adulthood in Italy*. UNICEF, UNHCR e IOM, Roma.
- ▶ PICUM, *Turning 18 and undocumented: Supporting children in their transition into adulthood*, 2022
- ▶ SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, University of Strathclyde, *Prepare for Leaving Care, Practice Guidance*, 2017.
- ▶ UN General Assembly, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 24 February 2010, A/RES/64/142

II. RELEVANT COUNCIL OF EUROPE DOCUMENTS

Committee of Ministers

- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)17](#) on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls
- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)11](#) on effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration
- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)4](#) on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood
- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2016\)7](#) on young people's access to rights
- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2012\)13](#) on ensuring quality education
- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2011\)13](#) on mobility, migration and access to health care
- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2011\)2](#) on validating migrants' skills
- ▶ [Guidelines on child-friendly health care](#), 21 September 2011
- ▶ [Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice](#), adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 17 November 2010 and explanatory memorandum
- ▶ [Guidelines on human rights protection in the context of accelerated asylum procedures](#), adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 1 July 2009
- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2008\)10](#) on improving access of migrants and persons of immigrant background to employment

43. The compilation is non-exhaustive and indicative.

- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2008\)4](#) on strengthening the integration of children of migrants and of immigrant background
- ▶ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2007\)9](#) on Life Projects for Unaccompanied Migrant Minors *and* [Explanatory memorandum](#) to the Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors

Parliamentary Assembly

Recommendations

- ▶ [Recommendation 2190 \(2020\)](#) – Effective Guardianship for Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children
- ▶ [Recommendation 2056 \(2014\)](#) – The alternatives to immigration detention of children
- ▶ [Recommendation 1985 \(2011\)](#) – Undocumented migrant children in an irregular situation: a real cause for concern
- ▶ [Recommendation 1939\(2010\)](#) – Children without parental care: urgent need for action
- ▶ [Recommendation 1703 \(2005\)](#) – Protection and assistance for separated children seeking asylum
- ▶ [Recommendation 1652 \(2004\)](#) – Education of refugees and internally displaced persons
- ▶ [Recommendation 1596 \(2003\)](#) – Situation of young migrants in Europe
- ▶ [Recommendation 1093 \(1989\)](#) – Education of migrant’s children

Resolutions

- ▶ [Resolution 2449 \(2022\)](#) – Protection and alternative care for unaccompanied and separated migrant and refugee children
- ▶ [Resolution 2354 \(2020\)](#) – Effective Guardianship for Unaccompanied and Separated Migrant Children
- ▶ [Resolution 2324 \(2020\)](#) – Missing Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe
- ▶ [Resolution 2295 \(2019\)](#) – Stop Violence Against, and Exploitation of, Migrant Children
- ▶ [Resolution 2220 \(2018\)](#) – Integration, Empowerment and Protection of Migrant Children Through Compulsory Education
- ▶ [Resolution 2243 \(2018\)](#) – Family Reunification of Refugees and Migrants in Council of Europe Member States
- ▶ [Resolution 2195 \(2017\)](#) – Child-Friend Age Assessment for Unaccompanied Migrant Children
- ▶ [Resolution 2176 \(2017\)](#) – Integration of Refugees in Times of Critical Pressure: Learning from Recent Experience and Examples of Best Practice
- ▶ [Resolution 2159 \(2017\)](#) – Protecting refugee women and girls from gender-based violence
- ▶ [Resolution 2136 \(2016\)](#) – Harmonising the protection of unaccompanied minors in Europe
- ▶ [Resolution 2139 \(2016\)](#) – Ensuring access to health care for all children in Europe
- ▶ [Resolution 2097 \(2016\)](#) – Access to school and education for all children
- ▶ [Resolution 1996 \(2014\)](#) – Migrant Children: What Rights at 18?
- ▶ [Resolution 2020 \(2014\)](#) – The alternatives to immigration detention of children
- ▶ [Resolution 1946 \(2013\)](#) – Equal access to health care
- ▶ [Resolution 1810 \(2011\)](#) – Unaccompanied Children in Europe: Issues of Arrival, Stay and Return

Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees:

- ▶ [Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe](#) (2021 – 2025) adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 2021
- ▶ [Handbook on Family Reunification for Refugee and Migrant Children – Standards and Promising Practices](#), 2020
- ▶ [Promoting child-friendly approaches in the area of migration](#) Standards, guidance and current practices, December 2019

Documents, Publications, MultiMedia, reports, etc.

- ▶ [Report on the Consultative Meeting on Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood through Youth Work and Youth Policy](#) (DDP-YD/ETD (2020) 124), 2020
- ▶ [Report on Taking Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers Seriously: Knowledge, Policies and Youth Work Practices – European Reflection and Discussion Workshop](#) (DDP-YD/ETD (2020) 59), 2020
- ▶ [Age assessment for children in migration – A guide for policy makers](#), 2019
- ▶ [Your rights in the age assessment procedure - Information for children in migration](#) (2019)
- ▶ [We are children, hear us out! Children speak out about age assessment](#) (2019) Report on consultations with unaccompanied children on the topic of age assessment
- ▶ [How to convey child-friendly information to children in migration – A handbook for frontline professionals](#), 18 December 2018
- ▶ [Child-friendly information for children in migration: What do children think?](#) (2018)
- ▶ [STEP-by-STEP together: Support, Tips, Examples and Possibilities for youth work with young refugees](#), 2018
- ▶ [Age assesment: Council of Europe member states' policies, procedures and practices respectful of children's rights in the context of migration](#) (2017)
- ▶ [Report of the Group of Experts on Guidelines for Supporting Young Refugees in Transition to Adulthood](#) (DDCP-YD/ETD (2017) 190), 2017
- ▶ [Education pack, Ideas, resources, methods and activities for informal intercultural education with young people and adults](#)(Revised in 2016)
- ▶ [Handbook for legal practitioners \(2nd edition\), Protecting Migrants under the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter](#), 2016
- ▶ [Children's rights and social services](#) (2016)
- ▶ [Young people's access to rights through youth information and counselling, Toolkit on how to inform young people about their rights](#) (2015)
- ▶ T-kits
- ▶ [Report on the Regional Seminar to Develop Inter-Sectorial Cooperation in Assisting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Transition to Adulthood on "What Rights and Realities at 18?"](#) (DDCP-YD (2016) 150), 2015
- ▶ [Securing children's rights: a Guide for professionals working with children in alternative care](#) (2014)
- ▶ Council of Europe and UNHCR, *Unaccompanied and Separated Asylum-seeking and Refugee Children Turning Eighteen: What to Celebrate?*, March 2014.
- ▶ Life Projects for unaccompanied migrant minors, *A handbook for frontline professionals* (2010)
- ▶ [Brochure: Children and young people in care: Discover your rights!](#) (2009)
- ▶ [Leaflet: Children and young people in care: Discover your rights!](#) (2009)
- ▶ [Manual for facilitators in non-formal education](#), (2009)
- ▶ [Rights of children at risk and in care](#) (2006)

This toolkit was developed under the multilateral project “Building Futures, Sharing Good Practices: Migrant Children’s Transition to Adulthood – UACFutures”, funded by the European Union’s Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Council of Europe. It aims to provide professionals working with unaccompanied migrant children with knowledge, concrete tips, tools and ideas to better support these youngsters in their transition to adulthood. The toolkit covers a wide range of topics particularly important for unaccompanied migrant children during this critical period of their lives, including how to facilitate access to legal support, education, employment, healthcare and accommodation.

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