

*June 2015*

*Social educational work  
- with refugee minor asylum  
seekers*



*[www.aieji.net](http://www.aieji.net)*

## ***Table of contents***

<i>Preface</i> .....	4
<i>The purpose of the project</i> .....	6
<i>Project group and project material</i> .....	7
<i>Who are the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and what are their rights?</i> .....	8
<i>The voice and resources of the child or</i> .....	10
<i>the young person</i> .....	10
<i>An empirical study among AIEJI members</i> .....	11
<i>Facts about the interviews</i> .....	12
<i>Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Denmark</i> .....	13
<i>What the refugee minors say</i> .....	13
<i>Social educators in Denmark</i> .....	14
<i>The social educators about the refugee minors</i> .....	14
<i>The social educators about their job in general</i> .....	15
<i>About conflict management</i> .....	17
<i>About refugee minors who don't obtain residence permit</i> .....	17
<i>Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Italy</i> .....	19
<i>What the refugee minors say</i> .....	19
<i>Social educators in Italy</i> .....	20
<i>Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Israel</i> .....	22
<i>Social educators in Israel</i> .....	22
<i>Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Spain</i> .....	24
<i>Social educators in Spain</i> .....	24
<i>Reflections on empirical studies and theoretical perspectives</i> .....	25
<i>Trust</i> .....	26
<i>Resources</i> .....	26

Resilience - a theoretical view .....	27
Trauma-conscious care – a framework understanding .....	29
Life history work.....	31
The narrative – a theoretical view .....	31
Language and communications.....	33
Conflicts, wars and rights .....	34
Respect.....	34
Family and job .....	35
Fellowship and network .....	36
The common third – a theoretical view .....	36
Lifting everyone's spirits together .....	38
The social educator caught in cross-pressures.....	38
<i>How social educators can support unaccompanied minor asylum seekers .....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Concluding perspectives .....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Annex 1.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Annex 2.....</i>	<i>52</i>

## **Preface**

At the AEIJI General Assembly in Luxembourg in April 2013 it was decided that a project concerning refugee minors should be carried out. This was due to the assessment that supporting these children and young people is a very big challenge for the social educators working in this field. They work with a group of children and young people dealing with a very unsafe background, being all alone far away from their home countries and with no knowledge of their future life situations. Furthermore, the social educators also work within the framework of a system where decisions made on a judicial and governmental level have a fundamental impact on the life situations of the minors now and further on.

With this publication, our aim is to encourage and inspire social educators in their work with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. We hope that this publication will give pause to reflections and questions about the situation for the children and young people and shed light on the social educational work – especially how it is so very crucial for the refugee minors and a very challenging task for the social educators.



Benny Andersen  
President of AIEJI

## Introduction

During the years since the Second World War there have not been as many refugee minors as now. AIEJI was founded in 1949 when children and young people were placed in desperate situations because of the war. Due to the post-war issues at the time it was decided by German, French and Dutch professionals in the child care sector that a special effort would be made on the issue of these minors. The Association promoted special institutions and camps, even children's villages, to be created with help from volunteers and professionals, foundations etc.

Today the historical context is different in many ways. At the moment, we have global issues due to civil wars, economic crises, political and religious persecution, and especially the war in Syria entering into its fifth year in 2015. But we are still dealing with the same issues concerning refugee minors who cross borders. They have only limited rights in the countries they arrive at and they are especially challenged by the fact that no adults have the responsibility for them.

The starting point of this project is to find out more about the refugee minors: What are their conditions of life? How are social educators working with the minors? How (and if) inclusion strategies are present in societies? These were questions to be analysed for AIEJI - to focus on life possibilities and resources, and how social educators can work for a decent life for the children and young people who might stay in the new country for good, flee to another country or repatriate.

Early in the project it was decided to focus on *unaccompanied minor asylum seekers* – a vulnerable group because of their very insecure life situations, their solitariness and the fact that they are a minority within the broad group of refugees in vulnerable positions. But also a strong group considering the strength mobilised in order to accomplish fleeing under very challenging circumstances, a strength being so important for the social educator to see and work with.

Unaccompanied refugee minors are defined in this report as *minors who have fled not being with their parents or other adult(s) with responsibility. The minors are without permanent residence permits and*

*they do not necessarily have status as refugees pursuant to the Refugee Convention*<sup>1</sup>

### **The purpose of the project**

The intention has been to shed light on the conditions of life of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers - and especially how social educational work is being carried out in practice and how it benefits the minors.

The purpose is to gain and spread knowledge about good social educational practice across borders working with this both vulnerable and strong group and to inspire and motivate social educators in different countries to find ways to support the refugee minors in the best way. This of course also depends on the politics conducted in each country and hence the financial resources being spent on the minors. This report will only touch on the first. Not because the political priorities are considered unimportant. Not at all. But because it has been deemed of value to shed light on the social educational work in the field and how it influences and benefits the minors.

Hopefully this report will also reach actors who have the power to change the life possibilities of the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. A very good starting point is to get to know more about this group and the professionals who can give the needed support. Hence we request everybody place this report or the highlights from it in their channels – not only to professionals in the field but also professionals at the political level who must bear in mind that every country that has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has the obligation to protect unaccompanied children and youths which *Article 20 Children deprived of family care* and *Article 22 Refugee children* address.

---

1

- Article 1 in the Refugee Convention (1951) defines a refugee as a person, who has fled from home country and in consequence of a *well-justified* fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, affiliation with a particular social group or political views - and find oneself outside the country in which he or she has citizenship rights, and to which he or she is in no condition to or do not desire to return.

The UN Child Convention's article 20 concerns children without parents and the state's obligation to arrange for special protection, including alternative care, and the UN Child Convention's article 22 concerns in particular refugee children and the obligations of the states to arrange for special protection and to co-operate with responsible organisations on such.

### **Project group and project material**

The report presents the main issues from a study performed by a project group with representatives from Israel, Uruguay, Luxembourg, Italy, Norway and Denmark (AIEJI board members). But also including issues brought by experts in the field representing their knowledge at an AIEJI seminar in Rome September 2014.

The fundamental publications being used:

- Children on the move, IOM International Organization for Migration, 2013.
- Statement of Good Practice, Children in Europe Programme, 4th. rev. Edition, Save the Children, UNHCR, UNICEF, 2009.
- Refugee Children, Guidelines on Protection and Care, UNHCR 1994.
- The UN Refugee Convention 1951.
- Guideline for Alternative Care of Children, UN 2010
- Global Trends, UNHCR 2013
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and social education – children placed outside the home, AIEJI, 2012
- The Professional Competences of Social Educators – a conceptual Framework, AIEJI, 2010.

Empirical studies:

- Open qualitative interviews with social educators from Spain, Italy, Israel and Denmark.
- Open qualitative interviews with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers from Somalia and Sri Lanka (girls in Denmark, August 2014) and unaccompanied minor asylum seekers from Cameroon, Gambia, Tunisia, Iran and Bangladesh (boys in Italy May 2014).
- Questionnaires regarding quantitative data from a range of countries : Germany, Slovakia, Uruguay, Luxembourg, Norway, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland,

Finland, Australia, Italy, Spain, Croatia and the Netherlands.

*Thank you to*

The social educators and the refugee minors who were interviewed and were very important informants for the project. The informants from AIEJI's network who answered the questionnaire. Anna Sito (Italian social educator and in 2014 a Master's student) who has been supporting the project by summarising fundamental documents - and Miriem Solsona (from the Spanish AIEJI member organisation CEESC), who did the Interviews in Spain. But also thanks to the speakers at the seminar in Rome (September 2014): Viviana Valastro from Save the Children, Federica Sorge - Lawyer's Association Rights Project in Italy, Niccola Titta - supervisor at an Italian foster home for minors, Thomas Vollmer – former board member of AIEJI, Sibylle Fussen and Lara Lochmattel – social educators from Switzerland.

### **Who are the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and what are their rights?**

As already indicated two articles from the UN Child Convention are especially important for our issue and tell us the right of the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers who are the focus of this study:

*20. CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF FAMILY CARE - A child deprived of his or her family environment is especially entitled to protection and care, for example foster placement, or if necessary, placement in suitable institutions or adoption.*

*22. REFUGEE CHILDREN - A child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee shall receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. The state shall in co-operation with international organisations assist an unaccompanied child in being reunited with his or her parents.*

\*

A mixed picture is drawn of the refugee minor asylum seekers who are the focus of this study. Some are fleeing from civil war, a life as a child soldier, conflicts and poverty, while others are



fleeing violence within their own family or other kinds of unworthy conditions. The greater part of the minors are boys.

Some refugee minors arrive from refugee camps and others from a background with lots of resources, sometimes educated as well. Some flee from far away countries, while others stay in their country but flee to another region. Some arrive on boats where too many people are stuffed together, others arrive by plane, and some are running all most the entire way. Some are trafficked. Some have uncles, aunts or other family in the new country, while others have nobody at all. There are those who wish to reunite with their family, those who want to avoid ever seeing them again, and those who have lost their family.

What they all have in common is a wish to improve their life situation and hope for a better future. The route often has been carefully planned and involves many different people – and not only people smugglers. For some, fleeing has been distinctly traumatising, involving many stops along the way and including long periods spent in hiding. While fleeing, many have experienced conditions of constant fear concerning who to trust, and who wants to cheat or do one harm to them.

The number of refugee minors world-wide is hard to determine, but every year, just within the EU, some 10,000-15,000 are received and about 100,000 are already there. In 2013 UNCHR counted more than 25,300 individual asylum applications from refugee minors in 77 countries all in all. That is a lot more than in 2012 (Global Trends, UNHCR 2013). However these numbers only include the groups who are being registered by the authorities of the countries. They do not include all the minors living in the streets, working in factories or households, or under other slave-like conditions and without contact with the authorities. It is impossible to determine exactly how many children or young people this concerns.

*Some unaccompanied refugee minors never find their way to the systems for asylum seeking children or youth. They are drifting around, they disappear and cross borders. This is a problem in many countries and it calls for an increase in the international work for helping this group. These children and youths are due to the delimitation not included in this report – but never the less it is important to be aware of the obligation to shed light on these unaccompanied minors as well.*

### **The voice and resources of the child or the young person**

In 2010 a large conference was held in Barcelona entitled: International Conference on Protecting and Supporting Children on the Move. At this occasion, a broad variety of governmental and non-governmental organisations were represented and two main issues stood in the centre of the discussion. These were addressed afterwards in the publication "Children on the move", International Organization of Migration, 2013. The issues are:

- The importance of listening to the minors' stories about their flight, the background and the situation now – as a professional working in the field or on an administrative or political level.
- The importance of focusing on the special strength these challenged minors often contain. A strength that comes to manifest in their ability to flee and overcome unforeseen obstacles - skills to be adapted in the current life situation and in order to benefit from the possibilities this situation brings. In this perspective, the minor is not seen primarily as a victim.

Both issues have influenced the perspective of this report. We have chosen to incorporate both perspectives and they have played a role in the interviews with the professional social educators as well as the refugee minors (see the interview guide annex 1). The interviews have been carried out especially for this purpose to focus not only on their challenges due to their situation as unaccompanied minor asylum seekers but also on the possibilities for the social educators to provide support in order to improve life situations.

To be a child or youth cannot be viewed as a waystation on the way to becoming an adult. To be a child or youth is something in itself. The voices of children and youths must be heard, and their resources must be used actively to strengthen life as children and youths in the here and now. Such a view of children and youths also lies at the basis for the UN Child Convention, and "In Statement of Good Practice "(UNHCR, Unicef, Save the Children, 2009), a program that aims to protect the rights and promote the interests of refugee minors coming to or through Europe. It is

highlighted that the children and the young people *should always be enabled and encouraged to voice their views.*

### **An empirical study among AIEJI members**

Members of AIEJI from 16 countries answered questionnaires in the autumn of 2013 with a quantitative focus concerning the situation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in their country, and about the social educators who participated and roles in the work (see questionnaire annex 2). We will briefly present the answers here.

The countries that answered the questionnaire by the national organisation for social educators, members of AIEJI, were Germany, Slovakia, Uruguay, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Norway, Israel, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Australia, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Austria and the Netherlands.

The answers given represent only a small part of the world, but show that refugee minors flee from many countries with certain countries more represented in all contributing countries. The countries where the most minors are fleeing from are Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. Countries in Africa and the Middle East seem to be highly represented in the countries we have information about here. Most of the countries have a minimum of 20 nationalities among their unaccompanied minors. That means that every country needs to build their services for this group on a basis of being able to handle many different cultures and languages.

The numbers of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers vary widely. Italy is a country with very high number of refugees, and also minors coming alone. That is because Italy is a common way to go from Africa to Europe, and many people come by the sea. This gives Italy, and also other countries in the same situation, such as Spain and Australia, special challenges.

Everywhere, there seems to be a large amount of boys who have fled. Some countries, for example Germany, report that only 5 % of the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers are girls. The ages of the children are mostly between 15- 18. Switzerland reports for example that over 86 % are of this age when they arrive.

Most countries in our survey have special residential care for the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. Care in a residential home, foster care and living with relatives is common for these children. But it is also a mixed picture here as to whether the children or youths live with other children under public care, or with other refugees. It seems like the rights for these children are not as strong as for the nation's own children in several countries. In many countries it seems that most children and young people are given a trustee to help them make certain that their rights are being fulfilled.

In all countries, social educators are a larger or smaller part of the professions that work with the refugee minors, both where they live, and during their schooling and recreational time.

### **Facts about the interviews**

All in all, we interviewed 11 social educators, primarily women, and two unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (girls). In addition, 7 social educators answered questions from the interview guide in a questionnaire and 5 unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (boys) did the same. Five of the social educators work in residential homes in Israel, two at a residential centre in Denmark, 4 at residential centres in Spain, 6 at residential homes in Italy and 1 at a social service department in the District of Rome. The interviews in Italy were questionnaires. The minors who were interviewed were in Denmark at the time - and the minors who were given questionnaires were in Italy.

You can read the main issues from the interviews and questionnaires below. First, the voices of the refugee minors are represented and, afterwards, the voices of the social educators. You will see that the excerpts have different characteristics, which is due to the fact that the interviews and questionnaires were processed by different persons from different countries, and that has implied variations in presenting the empirical studies. When dealing with the empirical studies in Italy, issues brought up by the speakers at the AIEJI seminar in Rome (September 2014) also will be included.

## **Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Denmark**

Background: The refugee minors (12-18 years) are placed in refugee centres in the countryside. They are primarily from Eritrea, Syria, Somalia and Uganda. The average stay at the centres is 3 months. If they get a residence permit they leave the centre and most of them live together with other young people in a flat - or houseshares with social educators supporting them. Some stay with families.

When the refugee minors don't get a residence permit (after appealing three times) they may stay at the centre until age 18, but in many cases they will be transferred to special institutions because they are in need of special care.

### **- What the refugee minors say**

*"We feel good here, more than in our countries. We feel more safe here."*  
This was said by a girl from Sri Lanka who was interviewed together with a girl from Somalia. About the social educators, one of the girls says:

*"They are very good at taking care of us, if we have any problems or..."*  
*"If somebody is sad they come and speak to you. Before, we were living with the boys... And the boys fight sometimes, and the adults say "go to your room" and after that they come and ask us if we are fine."* In Denmark, boys and girls are separated at some locations into separate living units and the quotation evidences the benefits this can bring.

The girls are very concerned about learning the Danish language and they also express great will to improve their English. Their first wish for their life situation is to live in Denmark and they wish to be educated as nurses. They express satisfaction with the activities arranged for them at the residential centre. They mention school, swimming, fitness and shopping. *"But sometimes it is boring, especially Saturdays we have no activities. Well, we can go shopping . We can go alone. The staff cannot go with us because there are only two who work here and we're sixteen girls."* Being bored is probably a circumstance for all teenagers – and being a teenager is a life circumstance for many of the minors. Thus it is also important to view the children and youths first and foremost as children and youths, and subsequently as children and youths who have fled alone and whose futures are very uncertain.

- **Social educators in Denmark**

Social educators comprise the largest group of professionals in the work with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. Often, they are employed on shorter-term contracts, because there is great variability in the number of minors who come to the country. These short-term hirings and the uncertain situations of the refugee minors obviously provide the social educators with some especially challenging working conditions.

- *The social educators about the refugee minors*

*“Sometimes I think, I feel so sorry for them, they’re not very old, and they cannot do certain things alone. But they came up here by themselves. They can manage a lot more than you think. And those coming with the wildest scars and missing limbs, they are very patient and ask if they can see a doctor...”*

*“They show so much patience. We could not have a group of Danish children together and then have a house like this. It has given them something, all the hardship in life, they are so tolerant...”*

*“They show great respect towards us and each other, even though they are so many and so different...Also regarding religion”*

*“The biggest challenge is to trust adults. To trust that what you’re saying is also what is going to happen....You also see it if they obtain residence permit. They don’t really believe it”*

The social educators describe a very complex picture of the children and the youths. They are simultaneously both traumatised as well as strong. They are tolerant, respectful and inquisitive. In addition, they have an enormous will to learn the language.

*“They really want to learn Danish. On the weekends they sit with their homework and their books reading - one cow, one horse and so on...Sometimes they nearly have competitions in finishing as many exercises as possible...And they learn fast”*

*“We try to speak Danish with them, but sometimes I start speaking English. Once a boy said to me – why are you speaking English, I am in Denmark?”*

- *The social educators about their job in general*

The refugee minors find themselves in a waiting position, and the social educators experience having an important task in being in a position to give them support in being able to handle life in this waiting position. In this connection, it is crucial that they feel themselves to be welcome, respected and safe.

*“It is very important that we follow them from the bus to the room - that we show them everything in the kitchen, in the bathroom, and so on. And some of the other kids also help and show. They have a function. It's a win-win...the first introductory talk should also be as soon as possible. The procedure is so very important.”*

*“You must treat them with respect and acknowledgment. You get 100% back. And it can be many things. Of course you don't walk with shoes on their carpets. It is so disrespectful.”*

*“I need to support them being in a waiting position. Every day - if I can talk with the boys and girls about something else - if I can distract them, lead their thoughts away from what they come from... When we have been laughing and fooling about, just for 10 minutes, I have a good feeling. Of course they miss and think of people back home. I try to tell them that they have to keep in mind that they are here in Denmark now, they have a chance here, and if you are happy here it will make your family happy at home...”*

It is the present that is being emphasised: What does the child or youth need right here and now? Grand plans must not be made for the future, and the social educator must not dig into the past. The latter is far too vulnerable, because in the life situation that they currently find themselves in, there is nobody to “pick them up”.

*“What we do is that we act in the moment. We don't work with bigger plans for future, we're just there, and sometimes that is enough. And we also do service, I mean we are talking about kids. We guide them how to cook, wash and clean. We teach them how to brush teeth. Many from Eritrea have always been using a stick. We try to make them sleep without their clothes, but it is difficult because they have this flight instinct. We're being kind of parents for them. We are the only ones they have here.”*

*“It is my impression that it is not good to open the past. There is nobody to “pick up” afterwards. I never ask about it, I must say. But if some of them want to tell about it we listen, and that is how it is.”*

*“And then try to change the perspective in a way. I hear this is very hard and I cannot imagine how... But now you are here in Denmark and you must try to focus on the positive. There are lots of holes that you might want to ask more about but it is not the best for children...”*

As a point of departure, the children and youths have difficulty trusting others. The need to have extra security in order to build trust. In this connection, the social educator plays a special role. He or she must be clear in their expressions, create security and show themselves to be somebody that they can trust. The setting of boundaries obviously also plays a role in the social educator's ability to be able to preserve their personal integrity in a very demanding job.

The social educators try in addition to motivate the refugee minors to build a network outside the centre, so they can gain a feeling for life outside and perhaps in a small way build up some relationships. In this context, the “representative” of the refugee minor also plays an important role. The representative is a person from the local area who supports the children and youths and this at the same time establishes a connection with the civil society.

*“The representatives also take them out as a kind of guardian. Everybody under 18 has a representative, who has knowledge about their case and joins them for interviews and meetings. Last year there was a girl celebrating Christmas at home with her representative - it was a great experience.”*

There are also possibilities to create contacts through the activities that the social educators frame and participate with them in - through sports and excursions for example.

*“They are very happy to take part in activities. A lot of them like to sleep in shelters. And in the summer we also have the circus and so on. And to participate in Viking expeditions. They talk about it a long time after”*

*“Many are very good at running. I'm so proud. We participate in competitions and we cheer and we are totally crazy. It is a great thing to have together”.*



- **About conflict management**

The social educators express the importance of listening to all parties when conflicts arise – and of not taking sides. In some situations it is necessary to involve an interpreter. In all situations, it is important to follow up when conflicts arise. However, first and foremost, it is important that the children and youths have the trust that is needed in order to contact an adult when problems arise.

*“It is important to listen to all parties and you cannot take sides. And I don’t want to listen to others but only to the persons in the conflict. We follow up, sometimes with translation, and if it is serious also with Lisbeth (the leader). She’s an authority and they know that she has the power to say I’m sorry but you cannot live here...”*

*“They learn to tell us if somebody has said something, I mean racism for instance (does not happen often)...We simply will not have it. This centre is for everybody. We get kind of a relationship with the children, it is not deep, but they trust us to tell us that somebody said this and this... And then we can prevent a conflict.”*

*“And if they fight I just walk in between them. They would never touch one of us. They stop and others come and help”*

- **About refugee minors who don’t obtain residence permit**

*“Most of them go down. And some of them simply give up. It’s so...”*  
The situation is very difficult when a child or a youth receives a final rejection. The social educator must try in the best manner possible to inspire him or her with courage or a belief that there are possibilities, and the social educator must participate in discovering such possibilities.

*“..What can you do because this is your reality. Do you have a network? We need to make a little pressure. But many of them have experienced a lot of things that we don’t know of, and they say it’s not possible for me to go back. They will kill me. And I don’t know what he has been doing...But there is a high risk that he is going back to it...”*

*“Last week we had a boy. He got his second rejection, you can have three all in all, and then he collapsed. He went away for the weekend, came back Sunday and set his room on fire. He’s in prison now. And do you*

*wonder why? He's such a good boy and you cannot imagine what he is going back to..."*

A frustrating element for the social educators in their work is also that they are not involved in the processing of the cases of these minors:

*"It's like they (Governing For Foreigners) do not look at the person when deciding on a residence permit. They don't ask us who actually know them and know maybe how they will be in Denmark, and we write a lot. But it has no influence. I mean, some of them, they cannot go back, but with some, I mean you can see it will never make any sense."*

*"They look at the group not at the person. I had this boy – why me? And I told him you're just a number for them. It is about money..."*

In addition, there is criticism from the social educators on the manner in which they experience the interviews with the authorities that the refugee minors are summoned to in connection with their asylum applications:

*"It's insane. It's an inquisition. And we're talking about kids. And if your stories are not closely reasoned, it can spoil everything...If the story differs from the first conference. How many children 14, 15 years can tell the exact same story?..."*

*"And there was this boy. He converted to Christianity, had been that for long and went to church on Sundays. He was examined by Government for Foreigners. They asked him about things in the Bible. That is what I mean with rights. It is grotesque. I am an ordinary Christian person, but I don't know where to look it up in the Bible. They asked him for his favourite quotation, what it meant and why it was his favourite..."*

As the quotation shows, the social educators have the experience that the rights of the children and youths are in some instances trodden upon. For example when age is not taken into account or when doubts are raised concerning for example religion.

The statements show that the social educators are working in a field where a systemic rationality has determining influence on the working conditions. The social educators do not have a mandate to change conditions that have such large significance to the courses of the lives that they have to support in their daily

working life. This will be addressed in further depth in this publication.

\*

### **Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Italy**

Background: The unaccompanied minor asylum seekers live at residential homes together with Italian minors or in foster families. Most of the children come from Arab countries, but some are also from Albania and Morocco. According to Viviana Valastro from Save the Children in Italy (a presenter at the AIEJI Rome seminar 2014), they often view Italy as a transit location on the way to countries such as Sweden, Germany or the UK, where they hope to gain a residency permit in the long run. Some try to avoid having their fingerprints taken in Italy, because the Dublin Convention states that asylum applicants must have their applications for asylum processed in the first EU country of their journey into the union. Some refugee minors disappear in the dead of night and the majority of them in a northerly direction.

#### **- What the refugee minors say**

The refugee minors are very motivated to learn the Italian language, to go to school and to be trained in daily life tasks. They feel that the residential home is a good place to be and they consider it as an opportunity for a new beginning. But still they are very challenged by social integration, new language, culture and habits.

In their daily lives, in addition to school and help with their homework, they are offered different activities that they themselves have participated in deciding upon, and which they have an influence over. For example, sports, gardening and excursions. Most of all, they would like to learn the Italian language, participate in sports activities and work. In addition, they say that they would really like to take swimming lessons, to go on holiday – and to have the possibility to become professional football players and be pizza chefs.

The Italian language takes up a lot of the time of the refugee minors, and they state that what can help them on their way are specialised language courses, conversations with Italians, reading books and watching TV. In addition, they would like to learn about social manners, have documents for applying for jobs and

to help their families abroad. Last, but not least, they have a need for a calm existence, where they can think about the future. These are conditions they share, and expressions are also given of the significance of living together with someone who understands their life situation. Here, they can talk about their family, friends and home country. But at the same time, it is difficult... *"It makes me homesick" "I suffer thinking about my past" "I speak only about what I want to share"...*

While the refugee minors on the one hand value the calm that their temporary home gives them, they value at the same time spending time in the surrounding society. It helps them understand more about the Italian way of living and the cultural context they find themselves in. Examples of desires for their lives are opening a shop, becoming an actor or painter, having money to be able to live better, and being reunited with their family.

The young people say about the social educators in the temporary homes that it is him or her *who teaches, one who thinks of others and not of themselves, and one who always wants to help if one has a problem.*

#### - **Social educators in Italy**

As described above, the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers live together with Italian minors, who due to one or another reason have been separated from their families. The social educators experience a noticeable difference between these two groups. The first looks at their stay at the institution as helpful, whereas the other group sees it as a punishment. It is not surprising that it thus is also the refugee minors who are the most motivated to learn. They are described as strong-willed, courageous and determined. They have the capacity to form relationships and the ability to contribute to the fellowship and to their living together. They are thankful and show respect for the adults.

However, the social educators also experience that the refugee minors have difficulty accepting help, and they have difficulty speaking about their traumas, let alone approaching any coming to terms with them. Niccola Titta (supervisor at an Italian residential home for minors and speaker at the AIEJI Rome seminar) also describes the challenges the children and youths

face. Many are certainly motivated to learn, but they have difficulty recognising their own abilities and often exhibit self-effacing behaviour. The combination of this behaviour and their young ages often results in social educators overlooking those strengths that have contributed to motivating and carrying out their flights, describes Niccola Titta. This is in line with one of the themes that the report "Children on the Move" focuses on: that the child or youth has many resources and should not first and foremost be regarded as a victim.

In the responses to the questionnaires, the social educators give special weight to the importance of exhibiting patience, respect and tolerance. Any possible prejudices must be addressed and what fills up the time should not be compassion or feeling sorry for the minors. As a social educator, one is a reference point and a role model for the children and youths, however it is important to remember that it is not possible to solve all the problems that an individual has. One needs to listen, have empathy and have knowledge of socio-cultural and religious aspects that the refugee minor has been shaped by.

The social educators also state that it is important that the social educator learn basic words from the native language of the refugee minors. In special situations, it is appropriate to make use of cultural mediators and/or an interpreter. The non-verbal communication is important in all communications with the children and youths, however one also needs to be conscious here that body movements can be understood differently depending upon the socio-cultural background.

At the same time it is important to have insight into where the children and youths have fled from, why they have fled and how it occurred. This must be viewed in light of each life history being a part of a larger picture, where global political conditions also play a significant role. The social educator must also have a knowledge of the rights of the refugee minors and know the statutes that are decisive for the processing of the cases of the children and youths.

According to Niccola Titta, the really big challenge is however to be in a condition to build up the trust of the children and youths. There is to a pronounced degree a discrepancy between the trust that the social educator tries to build up and the distrust that is

created by previous experiences, and which simultaneously is fed by their insecure living situation, and created prejudices they are confronted with from the surrounding society. They are in part challenged by the cultural differences and in part by the difficult job situation that is currently the case in Italy and which does not contribute to creating a positive attitude towards those people who come from countries other than Italy.

### **Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Israel**

*Background:* In Israel, most of the unaccompanied minors are mainly from Eritrea and Sudan. They arrive to Israel via Egypt and the Sinai desert and are temporarily put into a kind of detention centre.. The courts enable the authorities to only keep them for a limited period of time (3-6 months) for identifying them, assessing them, verifying their age etc. After that, Ministry of Education is asked by the government to integrate part of these young people into residential homes.

#### **- Social educators in Israel**

Basically, the authorities are looking at minors under the age of 18. However, most of these UAM young people don't have any papers at all; hence the question of their age is rather often manipulated. Children decide on the age that seems to them to be the most profitable. When they don't receive what they want, they come back and claim their age is different. A perspective on this could be that in many African countries, as an example, knowing one's age is not important. Birthdays are not marked and age is not a reference. In all of Israel, there is only one medical doctor who specialises in determining their age by X-raying the heel of the hand. Hence the process of determining age is very slow.

When taken out of the “detention centre” the young people are placed in residential schools called 'youth villages'. They are offered full coverage of their basic needs: clothing, food, health care, and schooling. At the beginning they receive Hebrew classes and later general studies sometimes also vocational training. However, in most of the cases they are not collaborating happily with these programmes. They want to work and earn money to pay the ransoms and other loans their parents took for financing their flight abroad. This is one of the major problems social educators

face while working with these UAM youth. Social educators are eager to help by supplying a good education and learning opportunities, offering them a variety of cultural and social activities that adolescents usually highly value. However, these young people wouldn't allow themselves the luxury of 'wasting time' on such activities.

They apply constant pressure to have the possibility to work and earn money. Sometimes they even run away to the big city (mainly Tel Aviv) for a few days. They work there in very bad conditions in restaurants - washing dishes, and other hard labour, receiving very small payments. Several cases were reported about girls that were prostituted for money. This gap between the official program conceived for the UAM and their own wishes is the basis for most of problems social educators encounter while working with these young people. An important perspective is comprised of reflections on how the official programme could develop so as to be attractive for the minors.

On the one hand, police and immigration authorities are asking residential homes to take in these young persons so they can be released from the detention centre. On the other hand, the immigration office is not ready to allow them any legal status in the country. They are considered illegal and have to renew their temporary visa every three months. They are in constant danger of being put into an airplane and sent back to their home countries. The social educators are trapped inbetween two contradictory tendencies: one, they are expected to invest their love and energy in order to integrate these young people into the residential program. However, at the same time they know that every visit of the UAM youth in the immigration offices could end by their disappearance and expulsion from the country. Israeli youths who are being educated in the same residential home have the same conflict. Should they become friends and create meaningful relationships with young peers that are living with them on only a temporary basis?

The social educators interviewed showed an impressive attitude. In spite of the complexities, they are attracted by the humanitarian challenge. The stories of these young persons are really heartbreaking and very touching. They had suffered a lot on their way via Egypt and the Sinai desert, being tortured and threatened by Bedouin who saved their lives only after receiving large amounts of ransom money. This is a very frustrating situation for

social educators and they all mention it as their number one difficulty in coping with this special challenge.

\*

### **Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Spain**

Background: The unaccompanied minor asylum seekers are mainly from Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Nigeria, Guinea Republic and Romania, the average age is 15-18 years old. Each one of the seventeen autonomous communities that make up the state of Spain has their own authority for child protection. The unaccompanied minors stay at reception foster centres for no longer than six months. If they are considered abandoned or neglected children, the autonomous community takes charge of their custody and cares for them until they are 18. If they meet the requirements to take part in the ex-custodial youth programme they can get some protection until they are 21. They live in apartments with other young people supported by social educators. When they are over 18, the current immigration laws are applied to them. If they are not considered underage or abandoned, they are repatriated, or if they stay out of the child protection system as illegal - sometimes with valid passports stating that they are under 18.

#### **- Social educators in Spain**

The refugee minors have resources that they bring with them from their former life in their home country – resources that are still present in spite of the great challenges they are confronted with during the long and insecure trip. At the same time, many are traumatised and feel an overwhelming responsibility towards their family. They consider their current life situation as an obstacle in order to creating their own family and a better life for themselves and they are hence very eager to learn Spanish, whereas the community languages such as Catalan or Basque are found to be less attractive.

As in the other countries, the refugee minors are mainly boys. When they come from male-centred societies, it can give the women social educators (who are the greater part of the social educators) difficulties in being recognised and legitimised as valuable professionals in the eyes of some refugee minors. In these situations it is of course also very important to be able to communicate, be open-minded and open-hearted and show



empathy – and at the same time be clear on limits and attitudes. In general it is about working with no prejudices and to insist on a position as a respected adult. A culture of team spirit and teamwork is of great value in making this happen.

In most residential homes part of the staff is from the countries where the minors are originally from. The purpose of having people with the same origin work together with the social educators is to improve the communication and understanding of cultures and habits. This comprises support for the refugee minors and the social educators in improving their understanding of language and cultural habits. But sometimes complex and difficult situations can appear when social educators and people without a social educational background are supposed to work together. In these cases, social educational methods can be challenged by other ways of handling situations.

A daily routine is to support them in sharing households. For each individual there is a project: Research on education, training and leisure activities. In building up a personal life project, it is important to support the children in this process and pay careful attention to the voices and wishes of the minors. The social educators work in order to empower the minors and encourage them to make their voices heard in decisions concerning their current situation and support them in their dreams for the future. Patience, belief and hope are of high value in the social educational work, and at the same time having a constant awareness of the minors as people with a goal in life and a personal project. The social educators are very aware of key points for the success of integration – to support the minors in learning the language, building up a social network and being prepared for a job situation. All in all, it is of great importance to try and empower them as citizens. Also, when repatriation has been decided upon and the social educators provide support in preparing the minors to go back.

### **Reflections on empirical studies and theoretical perspectives**

There is no doubt that ending up in a place where basic needs are covered, and where there are adults to look after one, is of enormous significance to the refugee minors. Perhaps they haven't arrived at the country that was at the top of their wish list, but they do have a temporary refuge. Alternatively, they choose to

flee further, before the fingerprints are taken, thus binding them to seeking asylum from the country concerned.

- **Trust**

A lack of trust by the refugee minors runs like a red thread through most of the empirical studies. The experience of desertion, dangers, lies and risks have marked the children and youths. Niccola Titta from Italy views it as a huge challenge to build up the trust of the refugee minors, to have them dare to trust the professionals, that the adults wish to do good for them, that they keep their promises, that they can be called in when conflicts, etc. arise. It concerns quite fundamentally whether the children and youths feel themselves to be safe where they are, and that it for example becomes natural to go to sleep without wearing their outer layer of clothing – the latter being an example from the Danish empirical studies.

The social educator tries to build up trust, however it is a long and tough struggle with minors who during their flight had been on red alert and not had reasons to trust many of the adults who they have met on their way. And then their future is uncertain, and perhaps they will meet with prejudices in the surrounding society. The social educator has in other words high odds against them in this work to establish trust, and as a number of the social educators interviewed also indicate, it takes time to build this up among the children and youths.

- **Resources**

At the same time, many of the children and youths exhibit self-effacing behaviour, and this can contribute to social educators being able to overlook the resources the children and youths possess: that they are extremely ready to learn, that they have lived with taking responsibility for themselves, and that the long dangerous journey that they have been out on requires special strength. It thus is important in the social educational work to see these resources and to actively use them in supporting the child or the youth.

The refugee minor is first and foremost not a victim, but rather a person with a special strength, and this special strength must be used to master life in the here and now, where the uncertainty about the future and the radical separation from the home environment are such violent markers in the life of the refugee

minor. The separation thus concerns not only being secluded from family – but also from being separated from their own culture and trying to navigate in a new one. This is such a large intrusion into a life, and every sign of strength ought to be grabbed by the social educator, so the resources can be channelled into the life situation that the child or youth finds themselves in. He or she must be supported in building a personal life project, like every other child or every other youth does, and that it is his or her voice that must be heard, and his or her dream of a future that the social educator must motivate and be in together with him or her.

#### - **Resilience - a theoretical view**

In recent years the concept of resilience has played a continually greater role in the work with vulnerable children and youths. This has resulted in a change of perspective, where an increased focus on strengths and resistance among the vulnerable children has been emphasised and led to burdensome upbringing situations and traumatic events being regarded to a lesser extent as determinative and to a greater extent as something that can be overcome and potentially become a strength in the long run. The view of vulnerable children and youths as resilient, and thus not predetermined to have a poor future based upon the events of the past, has at the same time led to practical changes in social educational work with vulnerable children and youths in general as well as with refugee minors.

At present, work is being done in many countries to a large extent based upon an understanding of children as subjects and independent actors who react differently to the conditions of life and the conditions of upbringing that they are exposed to. The refugee minors are perceived as independent individuals who are in a position to overcome difficult challenges when support is at the same time available. Heritages and biological risk factors thus play a smaller role and are no longer perceived to necessarily be decisive for the further development of the child. In this sense, there has been a change in the direction of a more positive view of development. This is, among other things, expressed in the social educational efforts in a number of countries, but also in an international perspective in that the UN is currently working on an approach to unaccompanied refugee minors where the resources are in fact weighted and placed at the centre of the efforts. Resilience is thus an important point of focus in relation to the efforts taking place under the auspices of the UN.

Resilience arose as a theoretical paradigm back in the middle of the 60s, and since then it has developed into being a more nuanced concept today that draws in biological, psychological and environment-related factors. The Danish developmental psychologist Dion Sommer writes that *“Resilience involves explaining why some people who have grown up under extremely problem-filled circumstances manage ‘regardless’ and ‘better than expected’.* (Sommer 2011).

However the introduction of resilience as a theoretical perspective and a practical approach was as a point of departure interpreted as an absolute characteristic of individual children who were attributed a special lasting and permanent capacity for resistance. Over time, the understanding has become more nuanced and today resilience is regarded to a higher degree as a potential that can be realised in an interplay between a variation of internal and external factors. It thus is perceived to an increasing degree as a capacity or a potential with all children, who with the proper protection factors are in a condition to overcome extreme risk factors.

An immediate explanation for resilience and a resource approach playing a significant role at all in the work with unaccompanied refugee minors is that the capacity for resistance in many cases obviously finds expression in this group. It involves children and youths with resources regardless and who exhibit behaviour that illustrates that people are in a condition to overcome very burdensome conditions. It is on the overall those thoughts that formed the basis for the UN deciding back in 2009 that the efforts for unaccompanied refugee minors would in the future use a resource view as a starting point, just like it also is those thoughts that seem to be expressed in the social educational approach that is being elucidated in this report. An example is the Danish social educators, who emphasise focusing on those resources that are present in the here and now, whereas they devote less attention to the traumatic events. Such an approach is an expression of a social education that is in accordance with resilience and the resource-based approach.

The increased focus on resilience has gradually led to the more psychodynamic approaches that previously marked the methodology to a large extent now being used to a lesser extent.

Through a psychodynamic lens, coming to terms with the events of the past is observed as a precondition to obtaining a better future, and the past thus has a much greater role. When an approach with an emphasis on resilience is practiced, it is in contrast the present that is placed at the centre based upon a consideration that a good life in the here and now will create protection factors that can contribute to overcoming those risk factors that are applicable. This has resulted in an approach where a positive development potential is emphasised instead of those barriers that potentially stand in the way of achieving a better life situation.

In addition, there are also pragmatic grounds to focus on the present instead of the past in the social educational efforts. There is often talk of an unresolved situation, where the time perspective is unknown, and the resource approach is in this connection must more usable. *One risk is however that placing too much emphasis on resources can overshadow those traumas that the children and youths often carry with themselves as unaddressed on their future paths, unfortunately with a risk of creating larger problems in the future for the individual and the surrounding society.*

#### - **Trauma-informed care – a framework for understanding**

A significant part of the refugee minors have been subjected to traumatic events, which causes them to always be on red alert. They live in permanent fear of having to find themselves in new, unpleasant and painful situations. Brain researcher shows that traumatised children and youths often have a hypersensitive nervous system, where the "alarm" sounds in situations that actually seem to be calm and secure. When this occurs, stress hormones are injected out into the circulation, and the minor loses contact with that part of the brain that is reflective and sensible (Perry 2006), and their behaviour is affected to a significant degree by this.

Trauma-informed care (TIC) involves meeting the violated and traumatised minor with recognition and respect and with an understanding of why he or she has a special behavioural pattern – for example in the form of difficulties in controlling one's own feelings, in understanding one's self and one's own reactions, and especially difficulties in entering into relationships with other people. Trauma-informed care must be viewed as a framework for understanding the child or youth, and on the basis of this

understanding the interventions or methods are then selected that are assessed as being able to provide the best support.

The Australian Howard Barth, who is an international expert in the field, highlights three important primary pillars in the work with trauma-informed care: SAFETY, CONNECTIONS and MANAGING EMOTIONS. The first primary pillar, *safety*, concerns significant aspects of the empirical studies that has emerged in this report, where the work of the social educators with building up trust among the refugee minors is focused. According to the thinking behind trauma-informed care, an important prerequisite for human development is that the child or youth find themselves in an environment that provides safety. This involves not only physical frameworks, but also for example emotional, cultural and spiritual safety. To be able to participate in creating this safety is an interdisciplinary task that involves the social educator, the teacher, the doctor, the psychologist, the therapist or the possible volunteer, who are the adults who have the child or youth in their custody. Sharing of knowledge and a common approach to the efforts are of great importance.

The second primary pillar, *connections*, is closely related with the experience of safety. Children and youths exposed to trauma may very well connect adults with poor intentions or outright evil feelings. Hence they can meet adults with suspicion, avoidance or possibly unfriendliness, and thus the meeting with children and youths exposed to trauma who have demanding behaviour can be an extremely large challenge. When the social educator is met for example with anger, it is a natural reaction to also react back with anger. This can be viewed in light of the brain being equipped with mirror neurons, which limit those emotions that one can be met with (Hart 2008). However an imitation of these emotions is far from appropriate, and the social educator must continuously be attentive and reflecting in relation to their own reactions and have a respectful and appreciative approach to the child or youth so he or she gains a feeling of being surrounded by supportive and caring adults.

The third primary pillar is *managing emotions*, or the management of effects, which is an acquired ability in the primary socialisation of the child or youth. Children and youths exposed to trauma who might have acquired this ability in childhood can become regressive and after the fatal events not in a condition to "come

down” or calm themselves on their own. Brain research shows that traumatic life events can reduce activity in the frontal lobe’s frontmost sections in both halves of the brain, and this explains among other things a reduced ability to calm and control oneself (Van der Kolk 2003). Here, the children and youths exposed to trauma have use for the social educator’s support. This occurs through comfort, body language, vocal pitch, active listening and behavioural adjustment. Through this, the child or youth can learn to tackle feelings and impulses, to calm down and to avoid aggressive actions.

- **Life history work**

The work with the life histories of the children and youths, or choosing not to do so, is touched on in particular by the Danish social educators. They choose not to enter into a life history unless the child or youth very directly invites them to, which occasionally happens when the substantial work of building up trust has taken place. However, there are reservations also in this situation for what it is appropriate to talk about. This is based upon the device that there is not a professional to “pick them up”. Some of the social educators state that there is a substantial risk of re-traumatisation if traumas are opened up without having the resources to arrange for a process of coming to terms with them.

The question then arises: When do the children and youths ever have the possibility to talk about the past and come to terms with their losses, fears and risky behaviour? Could cutting off the life history in the social educational practices, and the omission of any possible therapeutic practices, not leave the children and youths with a feeling that the professionals who have the task of supporting them are only interested in seeing resources? One of the two main issues at the international conference on protecting and supporting children on the move, Barcelona 2010 (see page 5) was the importance of listening to the refugee minor’s stories about their flight, the background and the situation now. This raises a very critical perspective on the life circumstances of the children and young persons who are hoping and waiting for residence permits.

- **The narrative – a theoretical view**

The narrative approach in the social educational work is used on the overall to create space for the life history as a constructive story, in which the traumas are not necessarily at the centre. The

narrative approach is fundamentally based upon an observation of the history as creating meaning and being crucial for our experience of meaning and identity. Sharp differentiation is made from objective assessments of the individual's history as being right or wrong, in that the life history or the narrative is regarded as being subjective and thus as true to the extent that it is an expression of an experience of the person who is doing the narrating. That the narrative in that sense is always an expression of a truth does not mean that the story cannot be changed. To the contrary, the narrative or story is an expression of a situational interpretation, which evidences the perception here and now, but which may change in the future.

The narrative is expressed through the language, which is composed into a meaningful story. In the connection that thereby takes place between the language, story and identity, the narrative will be established as an expression that evidences our understanding of ourselves in relation to our surrounding world. Our stories about ourselves and our history are in this manner powerful testimony that gives an insight into the status that the underlying experiences have in the here and now in relation to the actual life situation.

Even though in the narrative approach there is an interest in the underlying, there are points of similarity with a social educational approach, which is oriented around resilience and the resource approach on the overall. A narrative approach also directs the focus on the life history as it is told in the here and now, and it operates with a positive development viewpoint in that traumatic events are attributed a status as surmountable rather than determinative. The language and the story are observed as an expression of the individual's understanding of the past, present and future, and the social educator's task then is to contribute to constructing a space where the life story is given room and where other perspectives become possible.

In the narrative approach, the story is viewed as giving meaning and a life history that expresses resilience and resistance thus is a story that can be constructive in that it produces a presentation of the future as being surmountable. The connection between resilience and the narrative is illustrated among other things in the definition of resilience by one of the big names in the field, the French psychiatrist Boris Curulnik. He defines resilience as: "... a



*process, a child's development, which from action to action and from word to word registers its development in an environment and its history in a culture. It thus is to a lesser degree the child who is resilient, but rather its development and history" (Cyrulnik 2002).*

The quotation illustrates the connection that exists between approaches that are associated with the concepts of resilience and the narrative, and between people and their surrounding world. In a culture where positive development is observed as a possibility despite traumatising events, it is probable that resilience will also to an increasing degree become a reality. In a narrative approach, one is not as in psychodynamic theory hunting after the history's traumas. Potentially traumatising events are observed not in themselves as traumatising, but are such to the extent that they are given meaning as such for the individual. However even in those cases where something is identified as a trauma, it is not final. The narrative or the life story can be changed over time and the interpretation of the past may assume another status through interaction with the surrounding world.

A narrative approach in social educational practice thus involves a fundamental respect for the individual's story. As a social educator it is crucial to refrain from adopting an expert position and in that manner putting oneself in control over what is right and wrong. The social educator's task is to create space where the narrative may unfold and where value is attributed as meaning-creating and a subjective testimony, which is recognised on those premises. The social educator ought to refrain from judging, interpreting and directing attention to an underlying meaning.

In the social educational work with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers a narrative approach can be a manner of making room for the individual's history, while at the same time creating space for it being able to become a history of strength and survival, instead of solely being about traumas and losses.

#### **- Language and communications**

Acquisition of the language is attributed great significance by the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. Through the language, one is in a position to communicate with and understand one's surrounding world, and in particular it is an important entryway to finding a job and getting an education. The acquisition of

language skills is also experienced by some of the social educators as being important in the other direction, in that a number of them emphasise acquiring large vocabularies and basis sentences from the respective native languages in order to be able to communicate with the children and youths. In addition to being important as a means of communication, it also signals at the same time obligingness and interest. The Spanish social educators tell of prioritising employees from those countries that the refugee minors come from, and that this can ease the communications across cultures. But at the same time, it can also create significant challenges when these employees do not have the professional social educational skills. A familiarity with the socio-cultural aspects, professional social educational skills and a smaller linguistic preparedness are in other words a good point of departure for support for the child or youth.

In special instances, for example interviews with authorities, conflict negotiating or therapeutic interviews, it is necessary to call in professional interpreters for support. In this context, a specially trained social educator from Israel places an emphasis on what is difficult in conducting therapeutic interviews with an interpreter as a mediator. There thus is a great challenge in establishing a safe and direct bridge when the communications goes through a third party.

#### - **Conflicts, wars and rights**

The Italian social educators highlight in specific the importance of possessing an overview of the areas with conflicts in the world. Where are the special flashpoints, and what political realities are the children and youths fleeing from? This is simply in order to have an understanding of what society that has surrounded the child or youth and consequently has also affected him or her.

In addition, it is important to know the rights of the child or youth, to work for such not being trodden on, including also being attentive to the processing of the case of the child or youth occurring as the law prescribes – and being able to communicate this case processing to the child or youth so that he or she knows how the system around him or her works.

#### - **Respect**

To have lived with taking responsibility for oneself can make for challenges when meeting with established structures for care. The

social educators can find themselves with very self-administrating children and youths, who perhaps do not really understand the point of giving a message about where they are going or accepting the kindness of social educators in providing support. The Spanish empirical study also placed an emphasis on the challenge that can arise when boys from more patriarchal societies meet female social educators. Entering into these relations is often a very demanding task. In this connection it is especially crucial to continue to show respect, not judge, to be listening, have empathy and be supportive, and in this situation the setting of boundaries is even more a requirement and a professional shield that often is quite necessary.

In general the children and the youths in the overall empirical studies are described as enormously respectful, patient and curious to learn new things, and a "good" adult is also to be understood as one who teaches. The flight is seen as a factor that has matured the children and youths, they have become humble with respect to life and do not in any manner expect to have everything handed to them. The Danish social educators also describe how externally reacting behaviour is never directed towards the personnel, who hence can safely enter into the management of conflicts when the atmosphere comes to a head between the youths.

#### **- Family and job**

The lack of family and family obligations is also a theme in the empirical studies. Many feel an overwhelming responsibility for the family they might have left behind, and the most tangible manner of helping is to have the possibility to earn money. In the empirical study from Israel, this is touched on explicitly as a challenge: that getting a job is far more in demand by many young people than going to school and participating in various activities – also even if many jobs take place under very poor conditions. The question is, how can going to school and activities awaken the interests of the minors to a greater degree? The Israeli empirical study also elucidates a theme that can be of significance to the degree of commitment to school and those activities that take place in residential homes where Israeli minors also live: in these cases it can be a challenge to establish good relations between the unaccompanied refugee minors and those of Israeli origin, because the former group will as a matter of course leave the place within a short period of time.

### - Fellowship and network

Especially in the Danish empirical study, social educators also place an emphasis on exploring the world outside together with the children or the youths. This could involve participating in for example a fitness run (many of the children and youths are extremely good runners) or in excursions. Here, there is a basis for "a common third", and the possibility for constructing experiences together, to laugh together, and to do things that for a moment place tragic life situations into the background. Some building up of a network outside the residential homes can also make a contribution to a construction that some of the social educators interviewed also expressed their support for – also because such can in the long run help the child or youth in the integration process after the stay at residential homes.

### - The common third – a theoretical view

The common third is one of the central concepts in contemporary social education. On the overall, it can be defined as an external condition that is established as a point of attention for the participants in a pedagogical interaction. As Michael Husen writes, the common third is: "*... central in an authentic manner of being together... It doesn't matter whether one is more clever, knows more, has more skills. The primary thing is that there is something external, a common affair that both are preoccupied by, and which they are preoccupied by together.*" (Husen 1996).

The common third is thus a practical approach, where the social educator establishes a fellowship with the or those people who are encompassed by a tangible social educational effort. At the same time, the approach stands in opposition to approaches with a more treatment-related aim. Pedagogical efforts with a focus on the common third are a manner of practising a form of social education that places an emphasis on the resources of the individual and which places less significance on diagnoses. A starting point is taken in what the person can do, instead of what he or she cannot do.

The potential in this approach is in part the integrating element, which is associated with the establishment of a fellowship around the common third, and in part that this fellowship can be used constructively in relation to supporting positive development for

the individual by realising resources through a constructive interaction with the social educator. In accordance with approaches with an emphasis on resilience and the narrative, a positive view of development is also being operated with in this connection. When the social educator and a child, youth or adult in fellowship direct the focus to the common third, it gives the possibility to meet eye-to-eye and thus to work constructively with motivation and relationship work. A starting point is taken in the positive potential – that is those resources that the individual has at their disposal, instead of focusing on unlearning undesirable behaviour. The task of the social educator is to create that space where the meeting with the common third can take place, and to work in that space in an objective-driven manner to develop that potential that becomes expressed.

In the work with refugee minors, this approach especially has potential. There is an emphasis on the positive relation in the here and now, where two people meet transversely and in fellowship direct their attention to a common third. When linguistic and cultural barriers are a reality, this can be a beneficial manner of meeting around something in common. Concretely, it can involve playing sports together, making food or supporting the children and youths in cleaning or in performing other domestic activities.

What is essential for the work with the common third is that the social educator is conscious of the power relationship that applies in the relations and uses it constructively. The social educator has by virtue of its position a superior power position, which must be thought into and made constructive in the meeting with the child or youth. This means that the social educator must take responsibility and teach, but at the same time refrain from adopting an expert position where he or she is making demands for knowledge. Hence it is crucial that the common third be represented with something that both parties can identify with and that both parties can contribute positively to. In the meeting between a social educator and for example a refugee minor, where both are focusing their attention on a common point of attention, the power relation that implicitly is present in the relationship is obscured. Social educators thus ought to do this consciously and assume the responsibility as a facilitator for a positive interaction, where the resources of the individual appear more clearly than any possible barriers.

- **Lifting everyone's spirits together**

In the Spanish empirical study, emphasis is given to the importance of having a workplace culture where team spirit and teamwork are given high priority. This involves very challenging work and lifting everyone's spirits together creates better preconditions for a successful social educational effort. To be the adult for children and youths who do not have others is a completely special and challenging situation, which is only rendered more intense by these children and youths being disconnected from the culture they come from - simultaneously with them being marked by the very violent situations they have had to survive during their flights. This encourages a working environment where the social educators support each other in providing the best care, considering the conditions involved, for the children and youths. But also support in jointly coming to terms with their frustrations in wanting these children and youths to have much better circumstances.

Systematic use of supervision can be a useful tool for social educators who desire to increase their professional competences and strengthen their abilities for constructive reflection on their work with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. Supervision can in this manner support a positive trend and create space for social educators to be able to provide support for each other by reflecting in fellowship. In the supervision, the ownership and responsibility thus is also taken for the different competences at a workplace being set in play in the best manner possible. In addition to this, neither is the individual professional left alone with the special challenges that he or she might have in their work with the unaccompanied refugee minors.

- **The social educator caught in cross-pressures**

Social educators find themselves in a high-pressure field, where he or she must accommodate the needs of the child or youth to tell and be listened to, and at the same time be very aware that the system is arranged such that the child or youth will perhaps be on their way again in a week. This can result in a stressed work situation, where it is difficult for the social educators to accommodate simultaneous and contradictory requirements. Not only in relation to delving into a life history, but also in relation to mastering investing in both the hearts and brains of the children and youths they know for a short period of time and most likely will never see again. The social educator has so-to-speak a triple

mandate: the children and youths have their needs, the authorities have theirs, and at the same time the social educator has their professional ego, where he or she must reflect over the structural policy conditions - and what such mean for the children and the youths and the professional efforts in their work with them. At the same time, social educators, in their daily practices, need to disconnect themselves from frustrations over policy conditions and focus on the humanitarian dimension in the face-to-face relation and accept that it is not possible to solve all problems.

This is among other things the case when Danish social educators on the one hand express a complete lack of comprehension of the system's premises in connection the interviews with authorities, whereas on the other they remain professional in their work with the children and youths regardless of whether he or she has been rejected for asylum or not. Another, and in this context last, example of how powerlessness comes close to the social educators is the frustration that Israeli social educators feel over the inhuman treatment Bedouins in the Sinai Desert subject children and youths to – a frustration that is deep and which is fundamentally due to conditions that the social educators have no possibility to change.

### **A proclamation against excluding mechanisms**

In the AIEJI publication "The professional competences of social educators – a conceptual framework" a social educational effort is described as being oriented around individual needs, but that it at the same time ought to aim at countering excluding mechanisms on a structural level. The question is, precisely what possibilities does the social educator who works with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers have in this space?

The structural level can be understood on different levels: A) the political authority level on the uppermost level such as legislation and the exercise of authority B) the political authority level on a more regional level in the form of decisions concerning local efforts and the allocation of resources C) the surrounding society understood as neighbours and the local community. Especially at the last level, the social educator has a possibility to counteract excluding mechanisms. Here, it concerns supporting the child or youth in the communications with people in the surrounding society and to a certain extent in setting the framework for individual children or youths to be able to invite relationships into

their lives. It can also involve "adapting" the surroundings: The social educator's conversations with for example neighbours, parents, business operators and others who in one or another manner meet the children and youths without getting to know them.

The two other structural levels lie *directly* outside the reach of the social educators, however the social educator possesses the knowledge about the life situations that children and youths find themselves in – and this knowledge is important to communicate so that the decision-makers hear it. This does not necessarily mean that social educators should find paths to the decision-makers. However the dialogue with local officials, networks, associations or organisations that work to improve the conditions of life of the refugee minors must be prioritised. This in an attempt to secure the rights of the children and youth, and the spread awareness of the framework that makes it difficult or perhaps impossible to meet the fundamental needs of the children and youths, which is central to the social educational efforts.

Communication of knowledge can be seen as a superstructure on top of the daily practice, where there is an emphasis on work with relationships in often very demanding situations. To be a mouthpiece for the children and youths, and for the professional practices in the work with them, requires a certain amount of surplus energy and can for some seem to be unmanageable or remote, and for others as a natural and significant part of the overall efforts. Whichever it is, it is then important to reflect on one as the professional adult for children and youths in such vulnerable positions being the resource that can disseminate the knowledge that in the long run can contribute to reducing the vulnerabilities of these minors. However, the children and youths can in themselves be a resource in the communication of knowledge, through stories of their daily lives, backgrounds and challenges faced in life, and the social educator should be attentive to whether the framework can be created for such.

In Switzerland, the "Speak Out" project is creating the framework for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers to collectively articulate their situation. This occurs through meetings where they discuss their special challenges, what is of significance to them, and who they would like to meet in order to ask questions and communicate knowledge. On International Refugee Day in 2013,



the group of children and youths participated in for example UNHCR stands in different Swiss towns, and later in the year in a camp where they made a film on their life situations and where they formulated a Charta with recommendations. In addition, they met with representatives of the Ministry of Migration, and created an exhibition on their life situations and legal status.

### **How social educators can support unaccompanied minor asylum seekers**

A number of important messages about social educational practices in the work with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers emerges in the preceding paragraphs. These messages are pinned down in the following and hopefully can give rise to inspiration, questions and reflection for social educators in this field of work.

#### *Presence*

To listen and be aware in the individual moments with the child and youth is essential, so the feeling of being seen asserts itself. In certain instances there will not be many of these moments - if for example the child or the youth flees again or is sent home - but every moment or every meeting with an adult who is present and providing care has significance to the child or youth, also in the long run.

#### *Life in the here and now*

The unaccompanied minor asylum seekers are children and young people just like all other children and young people. They are in the middle of a life as a child or youth and must navigate and learn during these life phases in line with others of their age. But what is special is that the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers have been disconnected from their family, friends and cultural context that they have been shaped by. The social educator is a professional adult in the life of the child or youth in the here and now, and the distinguished task is to teach and create a framework for a life where the child and youth feel looked after and seen, and where experiences of happiness are present - a life with a mind for learning, friendship and a community of interests.

#### *Belief in a future*

As other children and youths, the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers also have the dream of a future - with an education, job, friends, lover(s), leisure time interests and perhaps a family and

children. But the dream obviously has, due to the very uncertain life situations, more difficult terms and conditions. Nevertheless, it is the belief in a future that contributes to a lust for life despite the difficult circumstances. Hence it is crucial that the social educators do their best to support them in the belief in a future, regardless of whether this is a resident of the country where they are now, in their home country or perhaps in a third country.

*An integrated view of the child and youth*

The social educator's view of human nature is essential. Does one see the resources the child or youth has, and does one understand that this potential is to be utilised in the life situation in the here and now and in the work of getting the child or youth to believe in their future? And does one also see the special challenges and problems the child or the youth has, and understand to intervene in relation to such? For instance to identify trafficking and what influence this has on the child or the youth.

It is important that the child or youth experience that the social educator has an eye for and interest in all sides of life - including also stories and life histories about things that are difficult, perhaps caused by fear, desertion, murder and persecution, where it is important as a social educator to be a listening adult and to help the child or youth on their way in the best manner possible.

*A cultural and communicative view*

Fundamental knowledge about the cultural norms that the child or youth has grown up with has great value in the social educational work. Has the minor for example been shaped by a collectively oriented culture with an especially religious mindset and rituals connected with such? What does this mean for the child or youth in their daily life and patterns of action, and how and to what degree can such be accommodated? Knowledge and reflections in relation to this are important for the social educational practices – to try to understand the individual's motives and to arrange the work with the relationship in relation to this. This is work that, all other things being equal, is also strengthened by knowing selected vocabulary and basic sentences in the native language of the child or youth, and work that requires special preconditions if the communication takes place through an interpreter.

### *Knowledge about conflict areas*

Knowledge about the conflict areas that the child or youth has fled from is also of great significance to being able to meet the refugee minor and have an understanding of what he or she has removed themselves from, and also to be able to enter into a dialogue about it. Such can involve ethnic or religious conflicts, wars, suppression by those in power of sections of the population and global political measures.

### *Legal basis and rights*

It is important to know the laws that are decisive for the processing of the case of a child or youth in connection with an application for asylum, including also procedures upon acceptance and rejection. This is in order to be able to ensure that fair processing of the case takes place and to be able to communicate and explain to the child or youth the process that is taking place. Likewise, it is important to know the rights of the minor with respect to UN conventions – and to attempt to hold the authorities to such when the rights of the child or youth are being trodden upon. The social educator will not necessarily inquire directly to the political decision-makers, but it is crucial that the social educator communicate their knowledge to organisations, networks or resource persons who seek political influence in favour of the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.

### *Civil society*

Communications with the local society concerning the special life situation and challenges of these children and youths is also an important part of the social educator's efforts. Here, there is essentially a focus on a work task that is 'off the reservation', however an invitation 'into the reservation' can have a significant effect. That persons from the civil society meet the children and youths in their temporary home has significance to the construction of a somewhat stronger network, where the "home" tells an important history about the life that is being lived.

### *Co-operation and workplace culture*

To support and qualify each other as best as possible to be able to give the refugee minor asylum seekers the care and the support that they have a need for requires interaction within the personnel group concerned. It can be in relation to the social educational effort itself or in relation to having the feeling of lifting everyone's spirits together and being able to consult with colleagues, who

take ownership of the total social educational practices at the workplace, and see an honour in supporting colleagues when particularly challenging work situations arise. Supporting the child or youth is also an interdisciplinary task, and all adults around the minor must work together, whether it is social educators, teachers, psychologists, therapists, doctors or possibly also volunteers.

#### *Supplementary training*

Completion by social educators of a course of education where the above areas are a part of the syllabus would without doubt qualify personnel groups to perform still better work for the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. This requires that a goal-oriented and qualified course of training is developed. This requires resources and especially motivation among the social educators in order to qualify themselves still further, strengthen their competences and integrate new approaches into their work.

#### **Concluding perspectives**

The purpose of this report has not been to reveal the degree and specific manners in which the rights of children are being trodden upon. However the material bears witness in different contexts of experiences where the surroundings that set the framework for the well-being of minors could do so much better.

Guideline for Alternative Care of Children (UN 2010), which supports the UN's Child Convention, dictates that a proper and permanent solution must be arranged for minors in those cases where it is not realistic to return back to the family and this solution must be in accordance with the child's needs. However, as already indicated, excerpts from this report point to areas where doubts about compliance with this can be raised.

One example is, when authorities conduct interviews that of the social educators are experienced as inquisitorial instead of being forthcoming and revealing: system representatives, in connection with asylum applications, look for holes in the refugee minor's report and do *not* take into account that the child's narrative structure typically is different from an adult's. Examples are described in the material of the narratives of children and youths being doubted based upon unreasonable criteria, for example such as a knowledge of quotations from a religious book. One challenge is thus to equip the system representatives so that their

practices can create trust to a higher degree instead of the opposite and in general operate based upon ethical guidelines in accordance with the UN.

Another example, where the interests of the child or youth is not accommodated is when he or she is *not* given the possibility to tell about their past and their life situation. Social educators experience that it takes time, calm and therapeutic competence to start a course of treatment where traumas are addressed and lives analysed, and such may only with difficulty be combined with being in transit for perhaps a quite short time. Examples are seen in the material of social educators who in no manner motivate the children and youths to tell about what is torturing them – based upon the consideration that there is a great risk of retraumatisation if the requisite framework for these conversations is not present. The challenge thus lies in the system creating a framework where the child or youth will be heard and respected, and for the social educators to be attentive to the needs of the child – also when it involves talking about difficult things, regardless of whether he or she finds themselves in their temporary home for a longer or shorter period of time. Upon being sent home or being transferred, it must then be ensured that the child or youth is looked after professionally from here, including that the life narrative or therapeutic course of treatment that may have been initiated.

The material also points to the surrounding society being of significance to the well-being of the children and youths. This could be in relation to the building up of a network, but is also simply feeling welcome when one goes to the grocer's or takes the bus. Negative attitudes towards people who come from other countries as refugees obviously renders the situation of the minors difficult. There thus is a political upbringing element in restraining excluding mechanisms in those environments that surround the temporary homes of the children and youths, and the dialogue of the social educators with the community likewise has great significance.

The well-being of the children or youths is dependent upon systems and attitudes surrounding them being founded on respect for the special life situation that they find themselves in. The UN's Child Convention and the UN's Refugee Convention build on an ethics that takes fundamental rights into regard and

opposed discrimination, and the many countries that have ratified the conventions are hence also obligated to comply with these values when the country concerned has unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in its custody. Even though this theme is not central in this report, it is essential to emphasise that some countries due to their geographical location receive particularly many refugees, which places individual countries under intense pressure. It is a challenge that must be resolved at an international level, because it is of great significance at the present points in time for the work with the minor refugees - especially in countries that are located just inside the borders of Europe. However the highly dangerous flight on overfilled boats across the Mediterranean must be a highly prioritised political theme. The UN and various human rights organisations thus are appealing for an alternative asylum policy that minimises these illegal and highly dangerous flights. The EU Commission has at the time this is being written proposed that the asylum process be moved outside the EU's borders, so refugees may seek asylum with EU representatives in third countries, in order to reduce the incentives to risk one's life on the Mediterranean.

The above-mentioned problems may in fact seem to be far removed from the daily life where social educators provide the tangible efforts for the children and youths. However different levels work together and the more pressure there is on individual countries, the more difficult it becomes to provide a proper, stable effort in accordance with the UN's conventions. Social educators perform competent and crucial work every day for the children and youths, but they cannot solve the challenges alone. It requires political action on an international level and in the individual countries to ensure fair efforts on behalf of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers that contribute constructively to their well-being and the rest of their journey.

\*

In all of AIEJI's work, the people we work with are the focus of the projects and our main concern. In this publication the focus is on the social educational work with the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and the global responsibilities for these children and young people. In order to respect the rights of the refugee minors, we must fulfil our responsibility in each country. Furthermore, social educators are one of the professions who are most qualified and needed in this work. Hence it is also important

to ensure and develop qualifications and competences by focusing on the education of the social educators who work with the refugee minors.

As the closing salute, AIEJI desires to send a message about what is important on a national level to make sure that the minor's life situations will improve. This will ultimately have influence on the quality of the work with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.

- Children's rights, as they are expressed in the Rights of the Child, should be incorporated in all national legislation and administrations
- Children placed outside the home, or children without parents, must by law be ensured their rights during the placement as well as inside the home they are assigned to
- All countries should have a Children's Ombudsman who can monitor the implementation of the convention
- All professionals responsible for children and youth are obliged to comply with the convention and use it in their daily practice
- The educational institutions for social educators must ensure that the students know the rights of the child and gain the necessary competencies to fulfil these rights.

**Interview guide**

- regarding unaccompanied minor asylum seekers

Questions/social educators

*About children/youths*

1. What kind of institution do you work at? (Public, volunteer, other kind)
2. How do the children and youths come to you? (what process leads them to your institution?)
3. How old are the children and youths coming to you?
4. What is the division between boys and girls?
5. What countries do they come from and where were they born?
6. Do they speak the language of your country? If not, are they ready to learn your language and can you offer them the learning possibilities?
7. How long do they stay with you and where do they go afterwards?
8. What is the responsibility of your institution towards the youths and the children coming to you?
9. What are special characteristics of the youths and children?
10. What are the biggest difficulties they are facing?
11. What resources do they bring?



*About social educational work*

12. What kind of activities are you doing with them?
13. Are they happy to take part in these activities?
14. Do you ask them whether they would prefer other activities and do you have the possibility to take action on that?
15. If you were asked to guide a new social educator who was entering your working field – what would be the three most important pieces of advice to give concerning communication with the children and youths?
16. What competences does a social educator need in order to succeed in working with the children and youths?
17. Dealing with possible conflict situations in the children and youths group – what is important to manage as a social educator - to solve the conflict and to teach the child or youth to solve possible future conflicts?
18. Do you understand basic words or sentences in their original language – if yes, do you use them in your communication?
19. Do you think social educators in your working field should focus on integration into society – if yes, how?
20. Do you think you have enough resources and possibilities to ensure adequate care and treatment of refugee children?

*About political issues*

21. What is the legal status of the refugee children and youths?
22. What are the biggest differences between them and children/youths in general in your country – concerning life possibilities?

23. If political decisions dictate a return to their country of origin – do you think it is the social educator’s role to prepare them for reintegration in their homeland, also even if they don’t want to return?
24. If the child or the young person obtains a residence permit – what will happen to him or her afterwards?
25. Do you think that the rights of refugee children and youths are respected in your country?

\*

### *Questions/youths*

#### *About daily life*

1. What activities (school, spare time activities, hobbies, housework) are you taking part in where you are now?
2. Would you like to take part in other activities? If yes – what activities?
3. Is it possible for you to take part in decisions about your daily life?
4. Would you like to learn more of the language? If yes – what is a good way of learning for you?
5. What is important for you while staying where you are now?
6. What do you think of being together with other young people in the same situation as you – does it mean a lot to live and be together with them?
7. Are you spending time with persons outside the centre/the institution? If yes, what do you think about that?

*Thoughts, reflections and experiences*

8. Is it important for you to talk with others about your situation?
9. Is it important for you to talk about family, friends and life where you come from?
10. What would you like to learn while staying here? And what have you already learnt?
11. Is it important for you to learn more about the culture in the country where you are now?
12. If you had three wishes – what would they be?

*About the adults*

13. How can the persons who work where you are help you?
14. What is a good adult for you? (meaning the adults who work where you are)

### Summary of survey – AIEJI 2013

Material from empirical studies about unaccompanied refugee children and social educators

Two articles from the UN Child Convention are especially important for our issue:

**20. CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF FAMILY CARE** - *A child deprived of his or her family environment is especially entitled to protection and care, for example foster placement, or if necessary, placement in suitable institutions or adoption.*

**22. REFUGEE CHILDREN** - *A child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee shall receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. The state shall in cooperation with international organisations assist an unaccompanied child in being reunited with his or her parents.*

Unaccompanied refugee children are defined as: *Children who have fled not being with their parents or other adult(s) with responsibility. The children are without a permanent residence permit and they do not necessarily have status as refugees with rights pursuant to the Refugee Convention.*

Members of AIEJI from 16 countries answered questionnaires, in the autumn of 2013, with a quantitative focus about the situation of unaccompanied minors in their country, and about the social educators' participation and role in the work. We will only briefly present the answers here in this report.

The countries that answered the questionnaire from their national organisation for social educators, members of AIEJI, were **Germany, Slovakia, Uruguay, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Norway, Israel, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Australia, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Austria and the Netherlands.**

The answers, representing just a small part of the world, show us that minors flee from many countries, with some countries more represented on the overall. Those are Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. Countries in Africa and the Middle East seem to be highly represented in the countries we have information about here. Most of the countries have a minimum of 20 nationalities among their unaccompanied minors. That means that every country needs to build their services for this group on a basis of being able to handle many different cultures and languages.

The numbers of unaccompanied children vary widely. Italy is a country with very high number of refugees, and also minors coming alone. That is because Italy is a common way to go from Africa to Europe, and many people come by the sea. This gives Italy, and also other countries in the same situation, such as Spain and Australia, special challenges.

Everywhere, there seems to be a large amount of boys who have fled. Some countries, for example Germany, report that only 5 % of the unaccompanied minors are girls. The ages of the children are mostly between 15- 18. Switzerland reports for example that over 86 % are of this age when they arrive.

Most countries in our survey have special residential care for the unaccompanied children. Residential care, foster care and living with relatives are common for these children. But it is also a mixed picture here as to whether the children live with other children under public care, or with other refugees. It seems like the rights for these children are not as strong as for the nation's own children in several countries. In many countries it seems that most children are given a trustee to help them in looking after their rights.

In all countries, social educators are a larger or smaller part of the professions that work with the children, both where they live, and during their schooling and recreational time.

The questions follow here, with the answers from each country.

**1. How many unaccompanied refugee children – with legal and illegal status - are there in your country (approximately)?**

**Australia:** In 2013, 1,078 locked in immigration detention facilities. A total of 1,760 are detained in the community under residence determinations. A total of 1,816 are living in the community where their parents have very limited rights. It is difficult to find numbers for UM, but about 600 children are in alternative places of detention, but probably not only UM. In January 2015, there were 211 children in Immigration residential Housing, Immigration Transit Accommodation and alternative places of detention.

**Austria:** 1,781 in 2012.

**Croatia:** 5

**Denmark:** 268 in 2013.

**Finland:** 1,900 applied for asylum in 2008-2012.

**Germany:** 2012: 4,300 registered by youth welfare. In total there were approximately 9,000 in 2013, only 5 % are girls.

**Iceland:** 1-5 each year, in 2013 there were 2 children.

**Israel:** About 1,000.

**Italy:** 985 unaccompanied arrived in 2011: a total of about 7,750 UM in Italy, 90 % boys and 85 % are between 15-17.

**Luxembourg:** 23 in 2013

**Netherlands:** Approximately 2,000

**Norway:** In 2013 the population in reception centres was 479.

**Slovakia:** One in 2013.

**Spain:** in 2008: 8,080

**Switzerland:** 485 in 2012 (1.69 % of the total asylum seekers), 86 % of these are of an age between 15-18. Of these are 76.1 % are male and 23.9 % female.

**Uruguay:** 20.

**2. What countries are the children from, and what percentage from each country (approximately)? Please also name your source.**

**Australia:** Iran, Sri Lanka, China, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Bangladesh

**Austria:** Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria

**Croatia:** Somalia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Denmark:** Afghanistan, Algeria, Somalia, Morocco, Syria

**Finland:** Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan

**Germany:** Most of them are from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia and Iraq

**Iceland:** Syria and Tahiti

**Israel:** Most of them are from Sudan, Eritrea, Rwanda and Niger

**Italy:** Somalia, Eritrea, Gambia, Togo, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Algeria, Congo

**Luxembourg:** Afghanistan, Algeria, Albania, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco

**Netherlands:** Afghanistan, Somalia, Angola, Congo, China (90 nationalities)

**Norway:** Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Syria are the most

**Slovakia:** Afghanistan

**Spain:** Morocco (mostly), Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Guinea Conakry, Senegal, Ghana, Mali, Angola, Romania

**Switzerland:** Eritrea, Afghanistan, Tunisian, Guinea-Conakry, Somalia, Gambia, Syrian, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, DRK, Albania, Algeria, Belarus, Sri Lanka, Morocco, Mali, Nigeria

**Uruguay:** Dominican Republic (Haiti) and Colombia

### 3. In what kind of institutions do the children live in your country?

**Australia:** Living in off-shore or on-shore detention facilities, or they might be detained in the community under residence determinations.

**Austria:** In specific residential accommodation places. The quality is lower than for the national child welfare.

**Croatia:** Residential homes for children.

**Denmark:** Asylum centres with educated staff on behalf of Danish Red Cross or local communities. Some of the children live with relatives, and rarely also in foster homes or in special institutions because of special needs.

**Finland:** Under 16s live in group homes for refugee children. Many live with relatives. Over 16s live in reception centres. All children get a trustee.

**Germany:** They live in homes run by youth welfare mostly. Every child also needs to have a custodian (“vormund”). The quality of home differs from state to state. Some live with German youths, some in foster homes, and some in big residential homes.

**Iceland:** The national Child Protection finds a place for the child to live, foster care or residential care.

**Israel:** 150 are integrated in youth villages, others live with relatives and receive only educational services from the state.



**Italy:** Reception of asylum seekers. They want a family type community. Italy has very big challenges, because many asylum seekers and refugees come to Italy first. Children and other vulnerable groups have special rights to be protected and get support, and they have many different projects going.

**Luxembourg:** They normally live in refugee centres.

**Netherlands:** Foster families, most from the same culture, small living units specialised for unaccompanied minors, special units in centres for asylum seekers (not the best solution they think)

**Norway:** Reception centres mostly, some of them in ordinary centres, most of them in centres especially for UM. Those who are under 15 are in centres under the auspices of the Norwegian Directorate of Children, Youth and Family Affairs. Some are also in foster homes. When they have the right to stay, they move to a municipality, where the municipality decides how the children are to be taken care of. Most of them live in houses with other children.

**Slovakia:** Foster homes for unaccompanied children and children's home.

**Spain:** First reception Centres, Residential Centres (basic or specific for diseases), Autonomy Homes. In some regions they live together with Spanish children, in some regions not.

**Switzerland:** In 8 (the largest) of 26 cantons there are specialised shelters for minors, other cantons have to provide shelters for asylum seekers. Some are in foster families or children's residential centres or placed with relatives. Older ones are in normal shelters for asylum seekers if no specialised place are available.

**Uruguay:** The social ministry has the responsibility.

**4. Are social educators working with the children in the institutions? – other places, such as...?**

**Australia:** They do not have a human service or a profession called social education, but they have social workers, youth workers and welfare workers.

**Austria:** Yes, together with social workers and other professions with special skills.

**Croatia:** In residential homes for children with behavioural problems, together with social workers. Educational rehabilitators work in centres for education.

**Denmark:** Yes, together with several professions.

**Finland:** Yes. Social educators work with children who are taken into custody (17,000 in Finland), and where the children live and receive support.

**Germany:** Yes. Most of the staff members are social workers, social educators and youth educators, and some psychologists. In public youth welfare, mostly social educators, and they are staff in schools.

**Iceland:** Most of the social educators work with children with disabilities, and it is social workers and psychologists who work with child protection.

**Israel:** Most of the work is done by social educators, but also by volunteers.

**Italy:** Yes, together with other professions.

**Luxembourg:** Yes, there are some social educators working in the institutions, but they have time to care for the children for only few hours a day.

**Netherlands:** Yes.

**Norway:** Yes. Social educators are together with other professions in these institutions. They are present especially in the work with the children under 15.

**Slovakia:** Yes, together with other professions.

**Spain:** Yes, and in: autonomy development, social and laboral supporting, in schools, in the community, in offender minor centres.

**Switzerland:** Yes, together with other professions

**Uruguay:** Yes, both public and private.

**5. How many social educators (approximately) are working with the children in your country?**

**Australia:** They do not have a human service or a profession called social education, but they have social workers, youth workers and welfare workers.

**Austria:** 80-100.

**Croatia:** No numbers.

**Denmark:** Don't have exact numbers.

**Finland:** It is difficult to find exact numbers, 10,000 is the total number of social educators in Finland.

**Germany:** More than 1,000.

**Iceland:** No.

**Israel:** Around 100.

**Italy:** No numbers.

**Luxembourg:** 5-6.

**Netherlands:** More than 1,000 employees in 2000, most of them educated and social workers.

**Norway:** No statistic, but the social educators work with the children both in the institutions and in the offices that are responsible for decision-making and finding places for the children to be.

**Slovakia:** No numbers.

**Spain:** No numbers.

**Switzerland:** No numbers, but according federal regulation each child has to be assigned a person of trust and for a younger UMA a legal guardian.

**Uruguay:** No numbers.