
Investing in quality care for children and youth on the move

Recommendations from practitioners participating in the conference “Beyond the emergency: Providing quality care for children and youth on the move across Europe”, Palermo, November 2017

Executive Summary

The current funding landscape for providing quality care and integration-related activities to children and youth on the move across Europe is flawed in three ways. First, it is fragmented across various thematic areas, prompting practitioners to finance activities via a range of different funds which undermines the overall potential and sustainability of their activities. Second, as the increased arrival of underage asylum seekers in 2015-16 has shown, there is a lack of long-term investments and funding opportunities beyond the emergency context. Finally, available funding opportunities are often difficult to access for practitioners due to a lack of information or transparency and complex administrative requirements.

Policymakers, legislators and administrators can mitigate these challenges and **strengthen the relevance of funds by revisiting their scope and eligibility and increasing practitioners’ awareness and skills to access them**. Another vital step is to enhance the design and key features of future funds by **conducting ongoing monitoring and comprehensive evaluations**, while recognising that thematic research could provide a valuable evidence base for future decisions on the design of funds. The adoption of a new Multi-Annual Financial Framework at EU level for the period 2021-2027 provides an opportune moment in time to listen to practitioners’ concerns and insights and take their recommendations aboard in order to improve the quality of care and integration trajectories of children and youth on the move across Europe.

I. Introduction

Ensuring that adequate financial support is available to develop quality care arrangements for children and young persons on the move is essential. **Providing quality care not only helps to prevent children (and their families) from disappearing** from poorly run or overcrowded reception centres as they seek out alternative channels and support bases to start a new life in the EU, **but also benefits their long-term integration path in European societies**. In this sense, **states do not only have a responsibility, but also an interest, to provide adequate care to children and youth on the move**. As a representative from the youth-led Union of Unaccompanied Minors in Sweden¹ has argued, benefitting from quality care allows beneficiaries to focus on their integration, succeed in school and explore their talents and interests to become engaged as active members of societies in destination countries.

¹ For more information, see ‘Ensamkommandes Förbund’, <http://ensamkommandesforbund.se/>.

In spite of these strong arguments for sustained investment to improve the quality of care arrangements for children and youth migrating to and through Europe, the problems that service providers and practitioners face to finance their activities are plentiful. Indeed, there are a **variety of challenges practitioners confront as they seek to access and work with funding instruments at local, regional, national or EU level**. This gives rise to the following questions related to the design and implementation of funds:

- How to strengthen the **relevance** of funds?
- How to define the **scope** of the funds **to maximise sign-up** and eventual impact?
- How to improve **information** on the funds available?
- How to improve the **accessibility** of funds available?
- How to move towards a more systematic monitoring and evaluation of funded activities, which allows for the **incorporation of lessons learnt in the next funding cycle**? This also relates to the question of how research can better inform the focus of funds.

The conference ‘Beyond the emergency: quality care for children and youth on the move across Europe’, held in Palermo from November 21-22, 2017, was organised with the support of EPIM with the aim of **bringing practitioners, policymakers, researchers as well as children and youth on the move together to discuss how care should be provided and what type of care is appropriate given beneficiaries’ differing needs profiles**. Participants are involved in complementary domains of expertise relating to care provision, and shared best practices and lessons learnt from across Europe, ranging from Greece, Italy, Belgium, Germany and Sweden. The **challenges and recommendations highlighted in this report constitute cross-cutting reflections of the more prevalent concerns and key insights from both providers and receivers of care**.

II. Strengthening the relevance of funds - Scope and eligibility

A. Key challenges

The **present funding landscape** that practitioners working with children and young persons on the move have to turn to finance their activities, is:

- Fragmented;
- Offers few opportunities for long-term investment; and
- Often difficult to access.

As such, the current funding landscape is **ill-equipped to foster the substantial, long-term changes that the sector needs to provide better care** for this target group.

1. Fragmentation of funds

Some civil society organisations finance their operations via a conglomeration of funds. Funds, whether at EU, national or local level, often zoom in on a particular theme (e.g. education), age

group (e.g. school-age children), activity (e.g. after-school homework club) and region (e.g. the region where the foundation is based), which are laid down in funding priorities or annual programmes. **Organisations seeking to provide a holistic set of services to migrant children and youth, often have activities falling outside of the scope of the funding call** and, hence, are **left to seek additional funding for those**.

Financing one's activities via a diversity of funds or funding mechanisms not only brings along high demands in terms of (financial) reporting and auditing, but also **undermines the potential outcomes of activities undertaken**, as conference participants reported. For example, for children to quickly learn the language of the host community, organisations may have set up a *package* of activities. Next to language classes for the children, these organisations may run after-school homework clubs, help children enrol in sports or hobby clubs where local children are members, and offer language classes for the parents – i.e. activities that mutually reinforce the steps towards language acquisition. However, **a shift in the focus and priorities of funds may suddenly render some of these activities no longer eligible**. While homework clubs are still funded, the argument that local friends help children to practice the language and that parents with a basic knowledge of the language can better support their children with school work is no longer heard. This then risks negatively impacting on the overall outcomes of the organisation's work, with language proficiency among the target group progressing slower than expected or predicted.

Conference participants pointed out that **funding calls or opportunities not only favour specific activities, but often also specific target groups**. Funding targeting particular categories can have the unintended effect of creating sub-categories within the group of the children and young persons on the move and give way to a hierarchy of 'more deserving' or 'needier' or 'more vulnerable' groups of children and young persons. This may in turn hamper their integration process, as service providers as well as the wider community perceive and treat these children and youths as 'problem children', 'difficult to manage' and alike. Moreover, experts stressed that **the rights of children, rather than the rights pertaining to various legal categories, should be at the centre of attention**.

2. Few long-term investments

The sustainability of care arrangements is not only undermined due to the fragmentation of funds, but also due to the fact that long-term investments are rare. **Funding programmes and cycles can be of a short duration, whereas improving the quality of care provided to children and youth on the move often requires a more long-term intervention**. As an example from the local context in Italy shows, the scope of the guardian system has been expanded beyond its more formal meaning in order to ensure the operability of reception facilities. In Palermo, being a guardian does not only entail mentoring activities and other non-financial support of children and youth on the move, as guardians themselves have become an additional resource for chronically underinvested local reception service providers. As such, the support presently offered by individual guardians complement the limited, often inadequate, assistance that local service providers are able to grant to beneficiaries. Charitable actions of volunteers include, among other things, buying clothes and other necessary items.

3. Difficulties in accessing funds

Practitioners working to provide care arrangements to children and youth on the move across Europe highlighted the challenges they were facing in terms of accessing funds at the local, national and EU level. At the EPIM conference, participants raised questions on whether funding is available to pilot or implement the forms of care for children on the move that their colleagues had introduced them to at the conference and/or to expand their existing care practices and, if so, how these could be accessed. Others criticised present funding opportunities for being **too heavy in terms of administrative requirements and paperwork**. Ultimately, the often scarce information on funds and labour-intensive application procedures are counterproductive to their intended objectives as they hamper the effectiveness of practitioners' work with children and youth on the move.

B. Recommendations

Practitioners and other stakeholders present at the conference argued for **legislators, policymakers and administrators to take action to strengthen the relevance of funds**, via **revisiting** their scope and eligibility. This includes the following recommendations:

- **Scope:**
 - Clearly set out which action (e.g. research; capacity building) and which theme a specific fund can finance;
 - Move from crisis response towards more long-term investment;
 - Offer both funds with a specific migration focus as well as a broader focus on other societal issues and a whole-of-community approach.

- **Eligibility:**
 - Clearly map out and broaden the group of actors eligible to apply for funding (e.g. CSOs; SMEs; private sector);
 - Increase flexibility regarding the type of activities can be funded (e.g. costs related to the core operations of an organisation; research undertaken by children and youth on the move themselves);
 - Adapt funding opportunities to the varying duration of different activities.

With regard to the often fragmented and short-term nature of funding, alongside issues of eligibility and accessibility of funds, several **present examples of how funding is being rethought on an EU, national and local level** warrant attention:

Box I. Rethinking funding at the EU level

In preparation of the adoption of a new **Multi-Annual Financial Framework** at EU level for the period 2021-2027, EU Member States have come to a provisional agreement that the envelope for migration is to be significantly increased. Alongside thematic decisions (i.e. *what* is the MFF to fund in that 8-year period?), the question of *how* this money is to be disbursed is a key discussion point. There is not only a commitment to address the present fragmentation of funds, but also to earmark a part of the budget for crisis situations. While the 2015-2016 inflows underwrite the importance of such *crisis management* measures, it also highlighted that *long-term investment* to enable Member States fulfil their obligations as laid down in EU *acquis* (e.g. special measures for children and young persons on the move) is long overdue.

Box II. Rethinking funding for youth involvement in research at the national level

On a national level, young researchers involved in the research project 'Becoming Adult' with the Universities of Oxford and Birmingham argued for national research councils to make the financial means available for fostering such **youth involvement in research**. Among others, this includes the suggestion to reimburse budget items, such as training youth to be involved in a (research) project in order to better capture their as well as their peers' views and experiences; to finance their participation in events such as the conference in Palermo to offer them an opportunity to make their views heard by legislators and policymakers; and to financially compensate them for their time spent on the project.

Source: 'Becoming Adult', <https://becomingadult.net/>.

Box III. Rethinking funding at the local level

Two innovative examples from the local level rethink funding mechanisms include the city of Antwerp and Palermo. In **Antwerp**, the civil society organization CURANT receives financial assistance from the Urban Innovation Fund for their co-housing project for Belgian youth and youth on the move transiting into adulthood. In the framework of the project, CURANT renovates houses and other types of accommodation which may incentivise other actors, such as local municipalities or private sector stakeholders, to become involved and jointly work toward improving the situation of children and youth on the move. In **Palermo**, a local restaurant (Moltivolti) uses its revenues to financially support non-commercial activities of children and youth on the move. Against the backdrop of a more general shift towards public-private joint ventures in the migration and integration sphere, this link between commercial activities and non-profit work could potentially become a model for broadening the scope of potential funders.

Source: 'CURANT Co-housing', <https://www.antwerpen.be/nl/overzicht/cohousing-curant-1>.

III. Improving the impact of funds – Awareness, accessibility and effective uptake

As a second step, legislators, policymakers and administrators can **take action to increase the awareness, access to and effective uptake of available funds**. Those designing, implementing and monitoring relevant funding mechanisms could usefully engage with the following questions:

- **How to inform on the availability of funds?**
 - Develop and distribute information tools (e.g. website link and information leaflets for distribution at conferences or meeting places where children and youth on the move as well as practitioners frequent);
 - Organise information sessions and training workshops for those working with children on the move (e.g. organised by foundations);
 - Given the cuts in local authorities' expenditure, create alternative forms of funding for local actors and practitioners.

- **How to improve funds' accessibility?**
 - Distribute information brochures on how to apply and FAQs;
 - Create handbooks guiding practitioners through application procedures;
 - Organise training/information sessions for those interested to apply.

For example, in Germany, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has published guidelines on buddy and mentoring programmes targeting children and youth on the move with the objective of setting clear standards for such programmes and streamlining the funding eligibility criteria for civil society organizations applying for grants from public funds.² Practitioners active in the German civil society organizations with a focus on migration and integration have expressed they found this a useful guiding tool in applying for funding.

IV. Upgrading the design of funds via monitoring, evaluation and broader research

In order to inform discussions on what funds with a migration theme should be focused on, the conference participants reiterated the **need for further monitoring, evaluations, and research on what type of care arrangements** are appropriate for which groups/profiles of children and under which circumstances. Without this evidence base, it is difficult to enhance the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of funding schemes.

Following the 2009 UN Guidelines for Alternative Forms of Care for Children, ongoing monitoring is one of the preconditions for providing quality care alongside a careful placement process and selection of care providers, adequate matching procedures and continuity of support.³ Apart from more consistent monitoring and evaluation efforts, conference participants proposed that

² For more information on the Ministry's guidelines 'Minimum Standards for the Protection of Refugees and Migrants in Refugee Accommodation Centres' (2017), please see <https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/121372/ab3a1f0c235a55d3b37c81d71f08c267/minimum-standards-for-the-protection-of-refugees-and-migrants-in-refugee-accommodation-centres-data.pdf>.

³ UN General Assembly A/RES/64/142 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children' (2009), <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/5416/pdf/5416.pdf>.

government actors and research funds could assign funding for this type of thematic research, which in turn **could provide an evidence base for future decisions on the work programmes for specific funds and the broader redesign of funds**. This will not only heighten the relevance of funds, but can also provide useful advice on their effective uptake and use.

Participants referred to the fact that **this research** needs to take into account the following considerations:

- Allowing for longitudinal insights to be collected;
- Offering cross-national comparisons;
- Meaningfully involving children and youth on the move (e.g. is there a role for them as researchers and why? Is data already available via second-hand resources and hence do you not need to conduct interviews with them?);
- Being aware of the ethical dilemmas that young persons may face as they participate in the research project;
- Being creative in terms of the research methods in order to capture the views and experiences of young persons (e.g. art; action research);
- Making sure to involve the key actors providing care to the young person (e.g. reception facility) in the research, as and when appropriate.

There are encouraging examples across Europe of how this could be implemented in practice. In the UK, a joint research project between the Universities of Oxford and Birmingham entitled 'Becoming Adult: conceptions of futures and wellbeing among migrant young people in the UK', funded by the ESRC, ran from October 2014 until September 2017 and involved young researchers from Albania, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Vietnam.⁴ The project's main aim was to gain a more enhanced understanding of the lived experiences of young women and men who arrived in the UK as unaccompanied or separated from their family members and assess to which extent young people's conceptualisations of their personal future match with those of immigration authorities and social service providers. In Belgium, in the wake of the CURANT's co-housing project with Belgian youth and youth on the move, the University of Antwerp has been closely involved since the inception of the project in order to monitor its progress and conduct evaluations.⁵

V. Conclusion

The present funding landscape for activities and care for of children and youths on the move is not conducive to ensuring the quality of care arrangements and their integration trajectories. Practitioners and researchers with expertise from a broad range of domains and geographical backgrounds across Europe identified **three key challenges policymakers**, legislators and administrators need to tackle, namely (1) **the fragmentation of funds**; (2) **the lack of long-term investments**; and (3) **the difficulty to access funding opportunities**. In order to strengthen the relevance of funds, their **scope and eligibility criteria must be revisited**. The upcoming adoption of

⁴ For more information, please see <https://becomingadult.net/about-becoming-adult/>

⁵ For more information on this project, see <https://www.antwerpen.be/nl/overzicht/cohousing-curant-1>.

a new Multi-Annual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027 offer an opportune moment in time to rethink funding at the EU level.

In addition, action needs to be taken to increase the awareness, access to and effective uptake of available and future funds. While **decreasing administrative hurdles and extensive requirements of paperwork, addressing the questions of how to disseminate information on funds' availability as well as how to improve funds' accessibility is crucial.** For example, the development of national or EU guidelines, the creation of easily accessible and comprehensive websites bundling relevant information, the distribution of information brochures or the organisation of training workshops could support practitioners in their attempts to identify, apply and successfully secure funding for care arrangements and activities with children and youth on the move. Apart from long-term monitoring and continuous evaluation on the use and effectiveness of different funds, **thematic research in this area could provide an evidence base for future decisions on the design, scope and criteria of funds.** Taking practitioners' concerns seriously and tackling these prevalent challenges in the funding landscape is a vital step to ensure both the provision of quality care and the integration of children and youth on the move into European societies.

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