Recommendations for and from practitioners

From the conference "Beyond the emergency: Providing quality care for children and youth on the move across Europe", Palermo, November 2017

Executive Summary

Following the events of 2015-16, when an increased number of children and youth on the move across Europe were in need for adequate care and accommodation, the questions of how to provide care and what type of care arrangements are adequate to cater to beneficiaries with differing and complex care needs resurfaced. Reflecting on how care is being provided – independent of the care setting – is crucial to ensure the well-being of beneficiaries. In addition to the UN guiding principles of 'necessity' and 'suitability', three key guiding principles emerged from discussions among youth representatives, practitioners and researchers: (1) Building trust, ensuring stability, promoting dignity; (2) Recognizing individual vulnerabilities, yet focusing on talents and strengths; and (3) Fostering a welcoming and caring environment. Implementing these principles in practice can be pursued without significant additional costs to practitioners or funding institutions.

Alongside these principled considerations, the use of respectful and dignified language and the adoption of an appropriate style of communication are crucial to increase the quality of care. Different degrees of participatory models, ranging from consultative to collaborative and child-led participation, can be employed to ensure political, institutional and social participation opportunities for beneficiaries. In each of these models, practitioners need to mitigate different ethical dilemmas and challenges to ensure that the aim of providing more inclusive care is achieved in a sensible manner.

The emergency context provided a momentum to capitalise and test alternative models of care to expand the menu of care arrangements for children and youth on the move across Europe. These different types of care arrangements include family-based care and foster care, semi-autonomous living arrangements as well as co-housing projects. While there is no one right model of care, the provision of a range of options of alternative care arrangements apart from big-scale residential settings should not be seen as a luxury. Even in an emergency context, the choice of care arrangements needs to cater to beneficiaries' particular needs and take into account the specific legal, political, institutional and socio-economic context across EU Member States in which care is being provided.

I.   Introduction

Quality care arrangements for children and youth on the move have long been the subject of controversial debates among practitioners, policymakers and children and youth themselves. The emergency context of 2015-16, when the number of unaccompanied and separated children and youth arriving in Europe increased fourfold in comparison to 2014,[1] highlighted the need to significantly rethink the objectives and approaches of care offered to children and youth on the move.

On November 21-22, 2017, practitioners, researchers and youth representative came together in Palermo for the conference 'Beyond the emergency: quality care for children and youth on the move across Europe', funded by EPIM. The conference's objective was to explore the variety of individualised and community-based care models and draw conclusions as to which of these models are most suited for beneficiaries with different profiles and care needs.[2] In addition, participants critically assessed the learnings, medium-term effects and transferability of different care models. The question of how to choose adequate care models for children and youth on the move emerged from the EPIM-supported workshop on quality care at the conference 'Lost in Migration: Working Together in Protecting Children from Disappearance' held in Malta in January 2017.[3]

II.   Care Arrangements: How do we provide care?

A. **Principles underpinning quality of care, as identified by youth advocates who have been in care**

The question of how care is being provided – independent of particular types of care settings – is primordial to the well-being of children and youth on the move. Especially in situations of hostile political environments or emergency contexts resulting in a lack of material and human resources, practitioners striving to provide quality care for girls and boys on the move may have to abandon their preferred option of care and opt for the second or third best option instead. This is why the need to have key principles underpinning all kinds of care arrangements is so crucial. As the discussions from the EPIM workshop on Quality of Care held at the Missing Children in Europe Conference highlighted, determining quality standards of care should never be a tick-box exercise, but rather driven by those receiving care themselves.[4] Thus, establishing such guiding principles

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[1] For more information, please see http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7244677/3-02052016-AP-EN.pdf/.

[2] For more information, please see https://minoristranieri-neveralone.it/news/la-rete-epim-palermo/.

[3] Conclusions from the workshop 'The role of quality care in encouraging children and youth on the move in Europe to seek support in protected spaces' held in the framework of the Conference 'Lost in Migration: Working Together In Protecting Children from Disappearance', in from January 26-27, 2017, in Malta, http://www.epim.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Quality-care-for-children-and-youth-on-the-move-in-Europe_Conclusions.pdf.

[4] Conclusions from the workshop 'The role of quality care in encouraging children and youth on the move in Europe to seek support in protected spaces' held in the framework of the Conference 'Lost in Migration: Working Together In Protecting Children from Disappearance', in from January 26-27, 2017, in Malta, http://www.epim.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Quality-care-for-children-and-youth-on-the-move-in-Europe_Conclusions.pdf.

can ever only add value if they originate from the ownership and observations of girls and boys who have lived or continue to live in care.

In Palermo, youth-advocates and representatives of youth-led organizations with previous experiences of varying care arrangements in different EU Member States shared their insights and reflections on what quality of care means. Three principled considerations were highlighted in particular:

- *Building trust, ensuring stability, promoting dignity.* Understanding the linkage between trust, stability and dignity is a key prerequisite for ensuring quality care arrangements. As a representative of the Union of Unaccompanied Minors in Gothenburg, Sweden, argued, the issue of trust is directly linked to children's emotional well-being.[5] While a person of trust may be found outside of children's care arrangements, such as school teachers, sport trainers, guardians or newly gained friends, employees within care arrangements or foster families have a particular responsibility for providing an environment in which such relationships of trust can flourish. In addition, participants recognised the importance of being sensitive to the use of language when speaking with and about the children with whose care they are tasked. Overall, the aim of care arrangements should not be to provide food and lodging, but rather to ensure stability and promote dignity.

- *Recognizing individual vulnerabilities yet focusing on talents and strengths.* A key issue regarding the shift from vulnerabilities towards talents is how to overcome the 'politics of infantilisation'. This observation reflects the need to strike a balance in between the spectrum spanning across the treatment of children and youth on the move as vulnerable and voiceless minors in need, to viewing them as fully independent adults with considerably less needs and a limited right to care. A related observation is the duality of care systems in place for asylum-seeking girls and boys, on the one hand, and for girls and boys within the destination society, on the other. This duality obscures potentially similar needs among both groups of children. In addition, the initiative 'New Young peers' by the Glasgow City Council[6] as well as the research project 'Becoming Adult' led by researchers of the Universities of Oxford and Birmingham[7] highlight this transition into adulthood as a crucial period of particular needs and concerns for youth on the move. A buddy and mentoring programme may provide an adequate framework to realise the shift in focus from vulnerabilities to talents, where reachable goals can be established jointly between a buddy and a child to boost self-confidence and provide targeted support.

- *Fostering a welcoming and caring environment.* Both guardians as well as care providers can play a crucial role to implement this principle. On the one hand, guardians have the potential of supporting children and youth on the move in boosting their self-confidence and assisting with administrative and social integration dynamics. Participants argued for a renewal of the guardian system to move beyond merely befriending children and shifting

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[5] For more information, see 'Ensamkommandes Förbund', http://ensamkommandesforbund.se/.
[6] For more information about the initiative, please see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irxlM82mTuQ.
[7] For more information about the research project, please see https://becomingadult.net/.

obligations of public authorities to civilians under the sheepskin of 'active citizenship'. Clearly defining and communicating all stakeholders' roles and responsibilities is key. The Italian Law "Zampa" aims to put increased emphasis on the relationship between guardians and youth instead of having more formal relationships to assist with bureaucratic needs only.[8] This can for example be achieved through more considerate matching procedures. On the other hand, professional care providers within care arrangements play a crucial role in fostering a welcoming and caring environment. Employees with migration backgrounds akin to children's own linguistic or cultural roots may serve as cultural mediators, assist with adequate communication styles and respond to situations in a culturally sensitive manner. For example, if a situation of concerns arises within care arrangements, calling the police may resolve the situation in the short-run but have negative implications for youth's trust and confidence with government authorities in the long-run. Involving employees with migration background may also come with particular challenges. In some cases, additional screening procedures in recruitment processes may be necessary to assess previous or ongoing ties with the country of origin, while colleagues need to bear in mind not to push employees with migration backgrounds beyond what they are trained to offer professionally. Recognising the key role all providers of care play to ensure the quality of care, ensuring a 'care for carers' by informing, training and capacitating them continuously, is crucial.

Conference participants agreed that **reflecting on and implementing these principles in practice** can be pursued **without significant additional costs to practitioners or funding institutions**. Indeed, in the context of both conferences in Malta and Palermo, EPIM grantees have demonstrated that **emergency contexts can also ignite a spark of creativity**, especially when organisations are flexible and adaptive to change.

B. The use of language, communication styles and the dissemination of knowledge

How practitioners and children and youth on the move speak of, and about, their experiences of flight and the new life in European societies can be both a rich source of information on individuals' well-being and experience of care settings, as well as a cause for conflict and misunderstanding. Conference participants stressed that **terminology matters**. While there is a need to refrain from referring to boys and girls on the move as 'victims', 'aliens', or 'irregular minors', it is just as important to critically reflect on the use of predominantly legal or administrative categories in order not to reproduce power imbalances present in the asylum system within the care setting (e.g. unaccompanied minor vs. child refugee). For example, presenting children and youth on the move as more 'deserving' than other asylum seekers may further alienate them and make their

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[8] For an overview of the a new legislation (law n. 47/17) regarding on "Protection Measures for Unaccompanied Minors", please see http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/04/21/17G00062/sg and https://www.unicef.org/media/media_95485.html.

integration trajectories more instead of less difficult. Generally, **the rights of children, rather than the rights pertaining to various legal categories, should be at the centre of attention**.

A related consideration regards **the style of communication practitioners use when talking with or about these boys or girls**. Using pictures, artistic forms of expression, music or story-telling can offer a gateway to identifying talents, aspirations or information about individual children, while also making care services more responsive to foster the talents and hobbies uncovered in this way. At the same time, one has to recognise that while **engaging beneficiaries through such creative means can be a valuable source of access and exchange**, certain methods, such as storytelling, may **risk reintroducing the procedural intricacies of the asylum system**, in which the ability to convincingly convey one's need for international protection relies on constantly reproducing potentially traumatic stories and personal experiences.

Given the persistent lack of data and knowledge about how children and youth experience care arrangements, and what they perceive to be quality care, it is important to include their perspectives into research on this theme. As conference participants have argued, the **dissemination of knowledge should be more creative and engaging**, for example, through the use of videos or spreading information and findings via social media where appropriate. For example, the Glasgow City Council, together with young persons on the move settled in Scotland, has created the initiative `New Young Peers' and made short movies called 'This is Scotland. You are Welcome' and 'Scotland. Our New Home', supported by a local film-maker, the city Social Work service, Anniesland College and a local NGO.[9] The videos target the community in Glasgow in particular and wider society in Scotland in general with the aim of fostering mutual understanding and giving inhabitants a chance to get to know their newcomers. Involving youth in a meaningful way in generating more research data as well as non-academic outputs needs to be done in consideration of confidentiality and data protection regulars, while remaining mindful of the emotional labour that working with their 'peers' can give rise to.

C. Participatory models and ethical dilemmas

Regardless of the type of care setting or activity in which children and youth on the move are involved or placed, **weaving participatory approaches into the care setting can foster children's sense of ownership of the activities and increase the overall quality of care**. In general, **children and youths should be understood as 'bearers of requests', 'not receivers of activities'**, a speaker argued. Not only can practitioners usefully inform young beneficiaries on the type of care setting they are involved in, as well as related ones, but they can also incentivise them to form their own opinions of the care provided via participatory mechanisms. Broadly, **three different degrees of involvement of children and youths in the design and implementation of various care models** can be distinguished:

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[9] See 'Scotland: Our new Home' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD--1v607Hs) and 'This is Scotland. You are welcome' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXK-pRivCbI).

- *Consultative Participation*. Children and youth on the move are consulted regarding decisions concerning them and have the opportunity to co-determine aspects regarding their living situation individually or together with their peers.

- *Collaborative Participation*. Care providers and children in different types of care arrangements make an agreement of how to share management tasks in order to tackle the power imbalance between them and increase children's feeling of ownership in their new short-term or long-term homes.

- *Child-led Participation*. Children and youth on the move take the lead on managing and implementing different tasks within a care setting and determine decisions on living arrangements themselves.

With regard to these different ways of involvement, **timing is key**. Practitioners need to reflect on when would be a suitable moment in time to incentivize children and youth on the move to be more actively involved in decisions regarding their care settings. For example, children and youth in transit, in a limbo period while waiting for asylum claims to be processed, or in a transitional phase into adulthood upon turning 18, may be less inclined to be actively involved than others. Another consideration brought up by a participant was to reach out to families to the extent possible, in order to involve them in decision-making processes concerning their children.

However, the issue of participation goes beyond making decisions about living arrangements and different types of care settings. As a representative from Youth Without Borders in Germany[10] pointed out, there are plenty of reasons why child and youth participation matters more broadly, such as to provide the opportunity to gain new skills, create networks, discover talents, tackle discrimination and prejudice, experience solidarity or rectify the power imbalance between children and adults. These aims may be more or less pronounced in **different types of participatory settings**:

- *Political participation*. Despite lacking the right to vote, this type of participation could be pursued by creating and sustaining solidarity networks of children on the move within and across Member States to gain a voice and possibly to influence policy-making.

- *Institutional participation*. The aim is to include girls and boys into the decision-making processes within different care settings and allows them to co-determine living arrangements together with care providers and peers.

- *Social participation*. By fostering children and youth's social participation, the main objective is to increase the ownership of individuals´ integration trajectories and incentivise a feeling of being welcome instead of feeling foreign. As a youth advocate from Sweden pointed out, this means actively involving children in order to channel their energy into the integration and education opportunities.

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[10] For more information, see 'Jugendliche Ohne Grenzen', http://jogspace.net/.

Contact points for children in care settings, such as care providers themselves as well as guardians, buddies and mentors, can allow for these different kinds of participatory approaches to flourish while being wary of the risks and challenges depending on the context. For example, the German Ministry of Family Affairs has developed Guidelines for buddy and mentoring programmes which set clear standards for all stakeholders and streamline eligibility criteria to receive grants from public funds.[11]

There are various **ethical dilemmas and challenges** practitioners need to mitigate with regard to participation. As a youth advocate from Germany argued, the **key obstacles** regarding children and youth's participation are **fragmented information as well as limited possibilities to participate, a lack of trust between children in care and care providers, as well as the existence of prejudice, discrimination and inequality preempting more involvement**. The notion of 'empowering' children and 'giving them a voice' may backfire as it may manifest, and not mitigate, power imbalances between children and adults. One conference participant stressed that children do not need to be 'given a voice' because they already have a voice. What needs to change is how practitioners and service providers listen to them.

In some circumstances, **the aim of introducing more participatory approaches may not be appropriate.** For example, the attempt to foster more participation of children may trigger trauma or negative experiences. In these scenarios, it is key to have the necessary support structures and skills to manage expectations accordingly while setting achievable goals in order to prevent misunderstanding and disappointment. In addition, as a young researcher stressed, involving children and youth on the move in research projects on their experience of quality within different types of care arrangements may come with considerable emotional labour on their part. While paying children to participate in interviews for research projects may not be difficult in an academic setting, there are different ways in which participants could be compensated, e.g. by organising fun outings or study visits together with researchers.

Overall, **not more participation in general, but rather more tailored participation at a suitable moment in time is necessary to mitigate these ethical dilemmas and challenges**. Thus, opting for appropriate styles of communication is an important aspect in redefining the roles and relationships of care providers, guardians, buddies and mentors as well as researchers vis-à-vis children and you on the move.

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[11] 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.

III.   Care arrangements for children and youth on the move: What type of care arrangement do we offer?

The debate on the suitability of different types of care arrangements for children and youth on the move – and how to determine good quality of care – has long been contested. However, **the emergency context** of many children and youth travelling to and through Europe, often with complex care needs, **provided a momentum to conceptualise and test alternative models of care**, with a spectrum of care arrangements emerging as a result. While choosing the right kind of care model for each individual child is crucial, it is important to note that each type of care has its place in the quality arrangements practitioners seek to provide to beneficiaries. Ultimately, the choice of care arrangements needs to cater to beneficiaries' particular needs and take into account the specific legal, political, institutional and socio-economic context across EU Member States in which care is being provided.

There is no one 'right' model of care. Different kinds of care settings and living arrangements may open up differential opportunities for catering to children's vulnerabilities, promoting their inclusion into the wider society, and fostering participation. To agree upon the criteria to consider when determining what type(s) of care arrangements to provide to which (group or profile of) children continues to be a difficult task. However, there is presently a variety of matching tools, mechanisms and principled considerations to guide practitioners in making adequate choices.[12] But even when agreement is attained as to what care arrangement would be best suited for a specific child or young person, it is crucial to recognise that **practitioners do not operate in a vacuum**. Indeed, the legal provisions, policy agendas, funding conditions, and the available capacity and expertise of partner organizations will impact on the possibility of offering, or setting up from scratch, that specific care arrangement in the applicable local and national context.

Box 1. UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children

Two key principles enshrined within the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (2009) are the principle of necessity, e.g. not to be placed in care unless there is a clear need for it, and the principle of suitability, e.g. providing a range of care options to choose from to find a suitable placement for each beneficiary. Key considerations when implementing these principles are the need to ensure a careful placement process as well as a careful selection of foster carers, adequate matching procedures, ongoing monitoring systems and the provision of constant and suitable support.

Source: UN General Assembly A/RES/64/142 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children', https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/5416/pdf/5416.pdf.

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[12] See for example 'Application of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children: A Guideline for Practitioners' (2001), https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/4990/pdf/4990.pdf.

While **some participants stressed the benefit of mainstreaming care within national systems** to ensure long-term sustainability instead of creating alternative channels of care, **others argued for de-centralising care arrangements and providing children and youth on the move with a greater range of options and more opportunities for participation and autonomy**. Across different types of care settings, the agility of organisations and care providers working there plays an important role with regard to ensuring a wide range of needs can be addressed, ranging from emotional well-being to sexual education to job-coaching. Even in the wake of emergency situations with increased numbers of beneficiaries in need of care, participants agreed that providing a range of options of alternative care arrangements apart from big-scale residential care settings should not be seen as luxury.

During the EPIM conference, participants presented and assessed **a 'menu' of different care arrangements.** Practitioners stressed the need for a more holistic view of these different options. This entails **a shift away from primarily focusing on the suitability of care arrangements towards paying increased attention to how people can gain autonomy and learn useful skills while ensuring access to adequate social and psychological support independent of the care setting**. Practitioners' reflections on the added value and challenges of different types of care included:

- *Family-based care and foster care*. Placements in family-based or foster care can be valuable in terms of providing the opportunity to live in a family-like setting, which may be especially important for young children. However, it can also be counterproductive to the child's path towards greater well-being or integration if s/he experiences the foster care as a temporary lodging arrangement where, in some cases, the family treats own children and foster children unequally. A conference speaker stressed that being flexible, building meaningful relationships through active bonding, being patient with regard to waiting periods in asylum procedures, and focusing on the child instead of his or her legal category are key success factors for this type of care arrangement.

- *Semi-autonomous living arrangements*. This type of care may be particularly relevant during the transitional phase into adulthood in which beneficiaries may not yet be fully autonomous to arrange their own housing and care. As a young researcher and advocate for the British Red Cross stressed, turning 18 is a challenge for unaccompanied beneficiaries as it may lead to a precarious legal situation or a loss of eligibility for particular care services. In Italy, initiatives of semi-autonomous living arrangements across the country have emerged in order to provide suitable care for the duration of one year after beneficiaries have turned 18. For examples in Naples and elsewhere in Italy, semi-autonomous living arrangements are linked with mentoring programmes for youths as part of the Never Alone initiative.[13]

- *Co-Housing projects*. Similar to semi-autonomous living arrangements, co-housing projects may be another viable model to consider for the transitional period into adulthood. For

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[13] For more information, see 'Never Alone Initiative', https://minoristranieri-neveralone.it/en/never-alone-initiative/.

example, in the city of Antwerp the civil society CURANT matches Belgian youths with children and youth on the move who have turned 18 to share a living space. The project, funded by the Urban Innovation Fund and monitored by the University of Antwerp, also includes training for both parties as well as screening procedures to ensure that collocation takes place in an open-minded and culturally appropriate way.[14]

Overall, the choice of a particular care setting for beneficiaries needs to be based upon the recognition that the questions of *how* care is being provided and *what type* of care arrangement is appropriate are interlinked. The three key principles of (1) building trust, ensuring stability, promoting dignity, (2) recognizing individual vulnerabilities but focusing on talents and strengths, as well as (3) fostering a welcoming and caring environment need to be reflected on and implemented in all types of care settings. The emergency context from 2015-16 provided an important momentum for considering alternative care arrangements and sparked new care models and youth-led initiatives to emerge across Europe. It is now crucial to learn from children's and youth's perceptions and experience of their care arrangements in order to increase the quality of care beyond the emergency context.

[14] For more information on this project, see https://www.antwerpen.be/nl/overzicht/cohousing-curant-1.