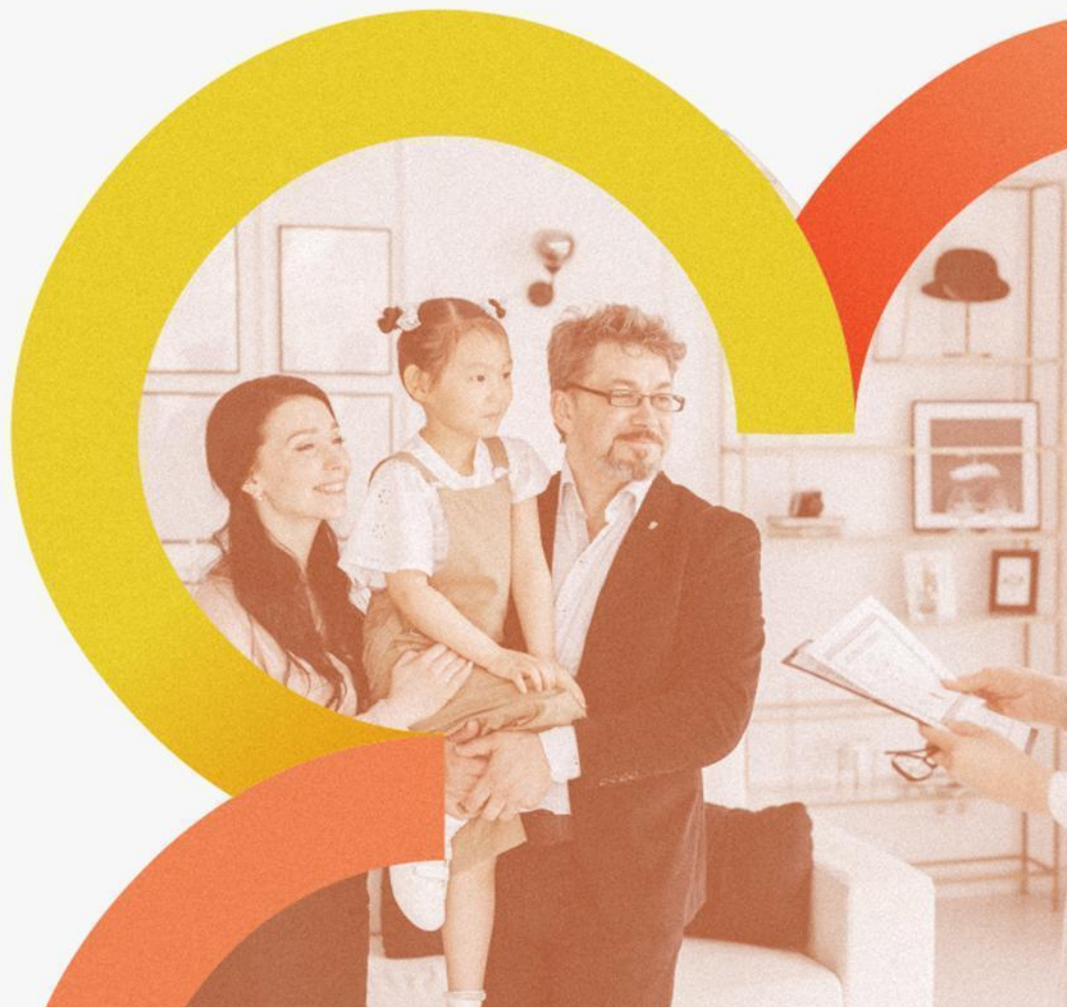




Creating Care

PR4 - Training course on communicating skills and strategies in the process of recruiting foster families

Project number: 2021-1-AT01-KA220-ADU-000028452





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Introduction

Welcome to the Training Course designed by the partners of the Creating Care project. The present document encompasses modules and activities for professionals in the field of fostering care to provide them with a practical tool, and increase their skills to engage all families and raise awareness in the community towards the need for foster carers and the deinstitutionalisation of unaccompanied minors. The created modules include strategies to enhance their expertise and effectiveness in recruiting foster care families by directly implementing them in their work environment. The curriculum also includes accompanying literature review to support the trainer in the activities' implementation.

The literature review serves as a foundational resource, offering a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical underpinnings, best practices, and evidence-based approaches relevant to each country of this project (Austria, Greece, France, Czech Republic, Portugal, Italy & Romania). By thoroughly reading and comprehending this section, you will gain valuable insights and a deeper appreciation of the context and rationale behind the activities.

Here's how you can maximise the benefits of this document:

- **Start with the Modules:** Begin by exploring the activities outlined in the modules. Each activity is designed to be practical, actionable, and directly applicable to your work.
- **Engage with the Literature Review:** After familiarising yourself with the activities, delve into the literature review. This section provides essential background information, supporting research, and theoretical frameworks that underpin the activities.
- **Connect Theory to Practice:** Use the insights from the literature review to enhance your understanding of why each activity is structured the way it is. This will not only help you implement the activities more effectively but also allow you to adapt them to suit your specific needs and context.
- **Reflect and Apply:** As you integrate these activities into your professional practice, take time to reflect on the outcomes and consider how the theoretical knowledge informs your practical experiences.

By taking this comprehensive approach, you will not only enrich your professional practice but also contribute to a culture of continuous learning and improvement within your organisation, colleagues, professional network etc. We encourage you to make the most of these resources and look forward to seeing the positive impact they will have on your work. Thank you for your commitment to professional development and for choosing to engage with our modules.

Module overview

| Module | Activity | Materials needed |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1: Awareness Raising on Fostering Care of Unaccompanied Minors | Foster Care Awareness Brainstorming Session | Papers Pens |
| | Let's create our own campaigns! | Printed handout Pens |
| | Factors in helping children's "Safety", "Stability" and "Well-being" | Whiteboard and board pen |
| 2: Combating Stereotypes/prejudice Beliefs and Their Impact | Foster care. Comparing perspectives | Big white poster Pens Coloured post-it Printed handouts |
| | The toothpick game | 1 box of coloured stickers 1 complete box of toothpicks 3 cultural cards |
| | Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity | Cards explaining each stage of Bennett's model |
| 3: Effective recruitment and communication with potential foster parents | What would you do if...? | Printed handouts (offline piloting) Handouts in separate word documents (online piloting) |
| | How to effectively recruit potential foster parents | Paper Markers Post it notes |
| | Communication Plan | Printed tool or shared excel file |



Module 1: Awareness Raising on Fostering Care of Unaccompanied Minors

Introduction

Unaccompanied minors arrive in a foreign country without a parent or legal guardian, which places them among the most vulnerable target groups. They often face unique challenges and uncertainties, making it imperative that we, as a global community, take proactive steps to ensure their safety, well-being, and integration.

This module along with the Literature Review provided to you, aims to equip you with the knowledge and tools needed to understand the critical issues surrounding unaccompanied minors, the legal and ethical responsibilities associated with their care, and the ways in which individuals and communities can contribute to their successful integration. By fostering a sense of awareness and empathy, we can collectively make a meaningful impact on the lives of these young individuals, providing them with the care, support, and opportunities they deserve.

For this module is important to follow the activities in the order they presented to you. After it's completion participants should be able to:

- Understand foundational principles for effective awareness-raising campaigns.
- Develop innovative awareness-raising strategies.
- Apply knowledge to create customized campaigns for potential foster parents, children, and the general public.
- Design key elements of targeted campaigns.
- Utilize developed messages in day-to-day work to enhance child safety, stability, and well-being.
- Focus on factors contributing to child safety, stability, and well-being, along with effective listening skills.
- Analyze common listening mistakes to improve listening skills.

Total Duration: 2h:15m.

Learning activities

1.1 Foster Care Awareness Brainstorming Session

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| Activity Title | Foster Care Awareness Brainstorming Session |
| Duration | 45 minutes |
| Learning Objectives | <p>Share diverse awareness raising experiences and strategies among foster care professionals.</p> <p>Understand the foundational principles of creating effective awareness-raising campaigns.</p> <p>Develop innovative awareness-raising strategies tailored to participants' institutions.</p> |
| Materials | Paper, pens |
| Instructions | <p>Introduction (5 minutes):</p> <p>Welcome participants and briefly overview the session's objectives. Highlight the importance of collective learning and collaboration in creating impactful awareness campaigns.</p> <p>Phase 1: Sharing Experiences (15 minutes):</p> <p>Initiate a sharing circle where experienced professionals share their success stories and challenges in raising awareness about foster care. Encourage them to discuss strategies that worked well.</p> <p>Phase 2: Introduction to Campaign Principles (10 minutes):</p> <p>Present key concepts of creating awareness-raising campaigns: goals, target audience, messaging, channels, and evaluation. Share real-life case studies of successful foster care awareness campaigns, highlighting their impact and strategies.</p> <p>Phase 3: Brainstorming and Strategy Development (15 minutes):</p> <p>Have participants brainstorm in small groups to generate innovative awareness-raising strategies tailored to their institutions. Encourage creative thinking and thinking outside the box.</p> <p>Group Sharing and Reflection (5 minutes):</p> <p>Invite participants to share their chosen strategies and key elements with the larger group.</p> <p>Open the floor for brief feedback and insights from the audience.</p> |
| Tips for facilitators | Foster an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages active participation. |



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| | <p>Keep the discussions focused and encourage participants to share personal anecdotes and real-world examples.</p> <p>Use open-ended questions to stimulate deeper conversations.</p> <p>Manage time effectively to ensure each phase is adequately covered.</p> |
| Handouts | N/A |
| Adaptations for the online environment | <p>Use video conferencing platforms for panel discussions, sharing circles, and group discussions.</p> <p>Utilize breakout rooms for smaller group interactions.</p> <p>Share case study videos or presentations for online viewing.</p> <p>Create collaborative documents or online whiteboards for brainstorming and strategy development.</p> <p>This Foster Care Awareness Brainstorming Session aims to harness the collective expertise of foster care professionals, fostering a vibrant exchange of ideas and strategies. By the end of the session, participants will be equipped with insights and plans to enhance awareness-raising efforts within their institutions.</p> |
| References | |

1.2 Let's create our own campaigns!

Key concepts for the activity

When preparing for a communication campaign, the following shall be taken into account¹:

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| Goal of the campaign | The goal of the campaign pertains to what you aim to achieve. Your objectives should be realistic, measurable and clearly defined before you start developing your campaign. For example, your goal might be to increase the phone calls made by potential foster parents to receive information by 20%. |
| Audience | You should also define your audience and their key characteristics. Try to identify your audience's habits, behaviours, beliefs, fears, as well as other characteristics that can be useful to know to achieve optimal results. Try to gather further information about the ways they like to receive information, the language they use and where they are more likely to search or receive information and be receptive. For example, you can outline where people who are thinking of becoming foster parents but are reluctant are more likely to go, in order to disseminate relevant posters. |
| Message | The message pertains to the key concept(s) and idea(s) you want to promote. You need to make sure that the message you choose is relevant to your audience and can stimulate their thoughts and feelings, resonating with their needs. You also need to use appropriate language and expressions. For example, if your audience is in the age range of 30-40 years old, you can use expressions they use in their everyday life and avoid any slang commonly used by younger ages. |
| Messenger | The person delivering the message needs to be credible and speak the same language as your audience. They need to be someone that your audience can believe and trust, may it be an organisation or an individual. When selecting the messenger, you should think about whether the audience will consider them relevant and will want to listen to them. For example, you might want to engage a couple who are foster parents, at the age of your target group. |
| Media | The media that you will use to communicate your message should be commonly used by the target audience to receive information. You should explore whether they use online or offline platforms and specify which ones they prefer. It is optimal that you also clarify which media they use to communicate, as having your campaign in these may encourage your audience to share your message and contribute to a multiplier effect. For example, your audience may be more familiar with Facebook rather than TikTok. |

¹ Based on the RAN GAMMMA+ model: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-12/ran_cn_academy_creating_implementing_effective_campaigns_brussels_14-15112019_en.pdf



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| Action | Your campaign should include a call to action addressed to your audience, resonating with their emotions and being easy to understand. Your call to action should be directly correlated to your campaign's goal and be adjusted to the platform that you will use. It is recommended that it is simple, direct, and easy to do, and includes strong command verbs. For example, if your goal is to increase the phone calls asking for information, your call to action could be 'Ask us!'. |
| Duration | When deciding on your campaign's duration, think about your resources and for how long your message can be relevant and up-to-date. For example, things you may want to consider can include the duration that the call centre providing information will operate and how much money you can spend on the platform's ads. |
| Monitoring and evaluation | Monitoring and evaluation can be separated into four phases: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before starting the campaign, when you need to gather all the necessary information about the different aspects mentioned above and set your measurable goal. 2. Testing the different elements and make adjustments if and when needed. 3. During the operation of the campaign, to assess the progress made in terms of outreach to your audience and towards your desired goal. 4. After the completion of the campaign, when you will need to gather the results and measure how close you were to your goal, as well as draft lessons learnt for future actions. |

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| <i>Activity Title</i> | Let's create our own campaigns! |
| <i>Duration</i> | 45' |
| <i>Learning Objectives</i> | Upon the completion of the activity, learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Apply the <i>acquired knowledge and tips</i> to develop customised campaigns for three populations: potential foster parents, children and the general public. ➤ Design the <i>key aspects of a targeted campaign</i>. ➤ Determine ways that the <i>developed messages can be used in their day-to-day work</i>. |
| <i>Materials</i> | Printed handout, pens |
| <i>Instructions</i> | After having learned and brainstormed on the core aspects of creating awareness-raising campaigns, ask participants to reminisce for 2-3' on all the times they talked about the importance and benefits of foster care -in |



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| | <p>formal and informal settings-, may it be to potential parents, friends and family, or children themselves.</p> <p>Divide the participants into three groups and tell them that, based on their experience and roles, their supervisors have selected them to design an awareness-raising campaign. One group was selected to develop a campaign on the benefits and importance of foster care, addressed to potential foster parents, one to children and one to the general public. Distribute the campaign development template found in the handout section of the present activity and ask them to work for 20' on the task.</p> <p>Each group will have to select a representative to present the activity to the plenary. [5' per group, 15' in total]</p> <p>During the presentations, ask prompt questions to the groups to help them contemplate what could work better.</p> <p>Upon the completion of the activity, briefly summarise the key points mentioned and invite the participants to exploit the messages created in their day-to-day work. Collect a few thoughts on how this could be done and invite them think this upon the training.</p> | | |
| <p><i>Tips for facilitators</i></p> | <p>During the development of the campaigns, support the three groups in terms of answering questions, briefly discussing ideas and encouraging them to work on the next steps.</p> <p><i>The facilitator needs to familiarise with the following chapters of the literature review, focusing on their national context:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction. The significance of foster care, with a focus on its role to unaccompanied and separated children</i> • <i>Legal and institutional framework for foster care</i> • <i>Approaching and communicating with candidate foster families</i> • <i>Approaching and communicating with children</i> • <i>Strategies for recruitment</i> <p>The facilitator needs to introduce relevant information, depending on the topics and issues participants will bring up while developing the campaign plans. For example, if they build the campaigns on statistics, the facilitator has to provide information on the statistics relevant to the national context. Respectively, if the campaign is built on the foster parents' legal rights, they need to introduce relevant information. The facilitator is responsible for the introduction of information, based on the participants' responses.</p> | | |
| <p><i>Handouts</i></p> | <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p>Goal of the campaign (<i>what will the aim target to achieve?</i>)</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> </table> | <p>Goal of the campaign (<i>what will the aim target to achieve?</i>)</p> | |
| <p>Goal of the campaign (<i>what will the aim target to achieve?</i>)</p> | | | |



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| | <i>Audience (who will be the target audience for this endeavour? – be as precise as possible)</i> | |
| | <i>Message (what will be the key messages of the campaign?)</i> | |
| | <i>Messenger (who will disseminate the messages?)</i> | |
| | <i>Media (which media will be exploited for the dissemination?)</i> | |
| | <i>Action (which actions will be developed for the campaign to reach the set goal(s)?)</i> | |
| | <i>Duration (how long will the campaign last?)</i> | |
| | <i>Evaluation (how will the campaign be evaluated and by whom?)</i> | |
| <i>Adaptations for the online environment</i> | If the activity is implemented online, divide the three groups into breakout rooms and enter the rooms regularly to support the procedure and answer questions. | |
| <i>References</i> | The activity was developed by KMOP – Social Action and Innovation Centre. | |

1.3 Factors in helping children's "Safety", "Stability" and "Well-being"

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| Activity Title | <i>Factors in helping children's "Safety", "Stability" and "Well-being"</i> |
| Duration | <i>45 minutes</i> |
| Learning Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To create list dealing with the factors in helping children's Safety, Stability and Well-being</i> • <i>To remember factors in helping children's "Safety", "Stability" and "Well-being" and effective listening skills.</i> • <i>To understand factors in helping children's "Safety", "Stability" and "Well-being" and effective listening skills.</i> • <i>To analyze the most common mistakes during listening, so as to improve listening skills.</i> |
| Materials | <i>Whiteboard and a board pen</i> |
| Instructions | <p><i>For the first round, the trainer won't give any clue about the objective of the training that is highlighting the importance of effective listening. The trainer will just split the whole group in couples and ask them to talk about the topic. In each round, one person of the couple will start talking about the topic below while the other person will listen. Whatever happens will be shared in the group, later. The couples talk about their listening and talking experience during the conversation, what could be better, which points were good.</i></p> <p><i>The topic</i></p> <p><i>Foster care plays an important role in helping children's Safety, Stability and Well-being. The couples will talk about how the foster children's basic needs Safety, Stability and Well-being can be ensured, the couples will talk about these factors.</i></p> <p><i>For the second round, there will be 5 rounds of exercises (the couples will stay the same) and they will practice the following keys for an efficient listening: The trainer present these keys and explain them briefly.</i></p> <p><i>Key 1: Face the speaker and maintain eye contact.</i></p> <p><i>Key 2: Keep an open mind.</i></p> <p><i>Key 3: Listen to the words and try to picture what the speaker is saying.</i></p> <p><i>Key 4: Wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions.</i></p> <p><i>Key 5: Don't interrupt and don't impose your "solutions.</i></p> <p><i>Key 6: Give the speaker regular feedback.</i></p> |



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| | <i>When the listening is over, the couples talk about their listening and talking experience and highlight the differences with the first talking. The couples will present criteria for the foster children's basic needs, Safety, Stability and Well-being, and the trainer will list these criteria.</i> |
| Tips for facilitators | <i>The facilitator can give some hints and examples on 5 rounds of exercises (the keys for effective listening) for the second round. In the first round, he or she should not mention effective listening skills, which is also the main objective of the activity.</i> <i>The facilitator needs to familiarise with the chapters 'Approaching and communicating with candidate foster families' and 'Approaching and communicating with children' of the literature review, focusing on their national context.</i> |
| Handouts | N/A |
| Adaptations for the online environment | <i>For the online settings, the trainer can divide participants into smaller groups for discussions and discussion can be implemented in breakout rooms.</i> |
| References | https://www.forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2012/11/09/10-steps-to-effective-listening/?sh=3e8033b93891 |



Module 2: Combating Stereotypes/prejudice Beliefs and Their Impact

Introduction

Many people have little knowledge of the foster care phenomenon, and this causes many prejudices in these people, as emerged from almost all the focus groups conducted in the partner countries. The prejudices, false myths and beliefs around fostering are numerous and different. They result from a lack of knowledge of the topic, cultural heritage, background, and the difficulty for many to conceive of parenthood unrelated to possession. This leads some people to make prejudiced judgements, such as "What will he or she do when the child returns permanently to the family of origin?" or "The child will never really be his or her own; who makes him or her do it?". The foster carer does not practice fostering out of a desire to possess but out of a desire to give love and help to a child and his or her family, knowing, moreover, that the end of fostering does not at all mean the end of the relationship with the child or his or her family, a relationship that, when formed and consolidated, like any affective relationship does not end with the interruption of a legal commitment.

For this module is not important to follow the activities in the order they presented to you. After it's completion participants should be able to:

- Create a dialogue to compare perspectives on foster care and address prejudices and stereotypes.
- Gain knowledge in intercultural communication, identify intercultural differences, and provide examples.
- Acquire the ability to evaluate someone's cultural awareness by observing their adaptability to different reactions.
- Promote a more open attitude by recognizing existing cultural differences and the uniqueness of each situation.
- Gain an understanding of Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity.
- Explore and analyze factors contributing to the most (prevalent) stereotypes.

Total duration: 2h

Learning activities

2.1 Foster care. Comparing perspectives

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| Activity Title | Foster care. Comparing perspectives |
| Duration | 45 min. |
| Learning Objectives | <i>Create a dialogue to compare different perspectives on foster care. Analyse and evaluate prejudices and stereotypes regarding foster care to create a shared model to apply.</i> |
| Materials | <i>big white poster, pen, coloured post-it, printed handouts</i> |
| Instructions | <p><i>Reading of the “Amelia” case study</i></p> <p><i>Divide into 5 groups</i></p> <p><i>Each group reads its own content.</i></p> <p><i>Brainstorming</i></p> <p><i>Each group writes their ideas on post-it notes and places them on the poster</i></p> <p><i>Commentary on the results</i></p> |
| Tips for facilitators | <p><i>The facilitator needs to familiarise with the following chapters of the literature review, focusing on their national context:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Legal and institutional framework for foster care</i> • <i>Approaching and communicating with candidate foster families</i> • <i>Approaching and communicating with children</i> |
| Handouts | <p>READING OF THE CASE:</p> <p>Amelia is a 7-year-old Italian girl. Her father is Polish and returned to Poland alone when Amelia was young. Her mother is called Monika and she is a woman with a drug problem. When Amelia was 6 years old, her mother fell down the stairs after abusing drugs and little Amelia called for help. Social workers, upon order of the juvenile court, protect the girl in an educational community for minors. The mother decides to go to a community for her drug problems, she is detoxing. After 4 months Amelia is entrusted to a family, many critical issues and fears have emerged.</p> <p>DIVISION BY GROUPS:</p> <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 1- AMELIA</p> <p><i>Reading:</i></p> |



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| | <p><i>I'm Amelia, I'm 7 years old and I go to school. I have lived with a new family for 6 months, Sofia and Luca, but I greatly miss my mum. They told me that Sofia and Luca will help me and be happy, but I don't want new parents; I already have my mom.</i></p> <p><i>Once a week I can video call Mom and she is working so hard because one day we will get back together. I like school but in my class, they always tell me that my mum abandoned me and that now I have a new mum and I can't have two! I am very sad because Sofia is good but I already have a mother! The social worker often comes to the house and when I tell them what my classmates tell me, she replies that my mother loves me so much and that Sofia and Luca just want to help me and my mother get better.</i></p> <p><i>I believe it, but I'm a little scared.</i></p> <p>Questions/Brainstorming</p> <p><i>Has Amelia fully understood the meaning of living with a foster family?</i></p> <p><i>Did the social worker explain in simple words to Amelia what foster care is??</i></p> <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 2- AMELIA'S MOTHER</p> <p>Reading:</p> <p><i>I'm Monica, 40 years old and live in a recovery community for people with drug problems.</i></p> <p><i>I made many mistakes; I put my daughter's life in danger and therefore, she was distanced from me. I realised I made a mistake, and I'm healing. I will do anything to get back with Amelia.</i></p> <p><i>Today my daughter lives with a new family, I don't agree. She will love them more, who are richer than me.</i></p> <p><i>The social worker told me that no one wants to replace me, but the little girl has the right to live like all children in a family and not inside the institution.</i></p> <p>Questions/brainstorming</p> <p><i>What are the prejudices on custody for the mother?</i></p> <p><i>Have you received enough information about the foster care project?</i></p> <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 3- THE FOSTER FAMILY</p> <p>Reading:</p> |
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| | <p><i>We are Sofia and Luca, we already have 2 children and we have decided to help other children in difficulty.</i></p> <p><i>Our friends tell us that Amelia won't be able to stay with us forever because she wants to return to her mother.</i></p> <p><i>We are scared because the mother knows where we live, and we don't want to have problems.</i></p> <p><i>It's not easy to help Amelia, she sees us as bad strangers, but we love her.</i></p> <p>Questions/brainstorming:</p> <p><i>Did the social worker explain the objectives and timing of the foster care well?</i></p> <p><i>Has the family also agreed to collaborate with Amelia's mother?</i></p> <p><i>What are the prejudices or stereotypes in the foster care project?</i></p> <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 4- THE SOCIAL WORKER</p> <p>Reading:</p> <p><i>I am Amelia's case manager social worker.</i></p> <p><i>After 4 months in the institution, I started talking to amelia and the foster mother.</i></p> <p><i>I know that there are many fears and prejudices, together we have defined goals between the child, the mother and the foster family.</i></p> <p><i>The Foster Care Project will last until Amelia's mother is healed and ready to live outside the community, with a job and a home. The foster family is available to welcome Amelia without cutting the bond with her mother.</i></p> <p><i>There are many weekly meetings with the help of a psychologist to accompany the family in the Foster Project.</i></p> <p><i>The mother is sometimes in the way.</i></p> <p>Questions/brainstorming</p> <p><i>Has the social worker sufficiently worked on the objectives of the Fostering Project?</i></p> <p><i>Could the mother's behavior be linked to poor communication of the goals of family custody?</i></p> |
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| | <p><i>Hypothesize an effective communication strategy to work on the prejudices related to custody.</i></p> <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 5- THE SCHOOL</p> <p>Reading:</p> <p><i>I'm Amelia's teacher. The little girl is good, but she cries now and then.</i></p> <p><i>We know that she lives in a new family because her mother is in a community for drug addicts.</i></p> <p><i>We often don't know how to behave. For example, when it is Mother's Day, Amelia is sad because she says she doesn't know if she should write the letter to her mother or to the new mother.</i></p> <p><i>We would like social workers to also explain to us what we have to answer and what to do. We're sorry that Amelia can't be with her mother and we're sorry that one day she too will have to leave her new family.</i></p> <p>Questions/Brainstorming</p> <p><i>Is it important to raise awareness of the issue of foster care in schools, involving teachers in the foster care project?</i></p> <p><i>Could the school organize meetings with parents to address prejudices related to foster care?</i></p> |
| Adaptations for the online environment | <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 1- AMELIA</p> <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 2- AMELIA'S MOTHER</p> <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 3- THE FOSTER FAMILY</p> <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 4- THE SOCIAL WORKER</p> <p>GROUP/PERSPECTIVE 5- THE SCHOOL</p> |
| References | N/A |

2.2 The toothpick game

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| Activity Title | The toothpick game |
| Duration | 30 minutes |
| Learning Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This activity will provide knowledge to the participant as they will be able to understand what intercultural communication is. Moreover, they will be able to <i>give original examples</i> of intercultural differences that may arise during a discussion with a person from a different culture. • It will also enable them to develop new skills, as they will be able to evaluate a person's awareness of cultural differences by <i>determining</i> whether they are able to adapt by responding to another person's reactions. • Finally, it will give them a more open attitude, as they will have acquired knowledge of existing cultural differences and will be able to recall what each person has shared in order to <i>recognise</i> that all situations are different and that it is therefore necessary to take a step back. |
| Materials | <p>1 box of coloured stickers</p> <p>1 complete box of toothpicks</p> <p>3 cultural cards</p> <p>→ The cultural cards are prepared in advance. These are cards on which a cultural specificity linked to a country is written. The card describes behavior that is culturally perceived as offensive in a given country, whereas this is not the case elsewhere.</p> |
| Instructions | <p>First, divide the participants into 3 groups so that they can't hear what is being said in the other groups.</p> <p>Each group receives some coloured stickers that they can stick on their jackets to distinguish themselves (for example, there is a green group, a blue group, etc.).</p> <p>Each participant receives some toothpicks that he has to keep in his right hand. These are the toothpicks he is going to give to other players. His left hand has to remain empty so that he can keep the toothpicks he will receive.</p> <p>Each group receives a cultural card. This is a card prepared in advance by the leader of the game on which a cultural specificity appears. This specificity corresponds to a custom of a particular group and, more specifically, a behavior considered offensive in a given country. For</p> |



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| | <p>example, "In Japan, it is frowned upon to look insistently into another person's eyes".</p> <p>Give each group a cultural card and ask them to read it and think about how they can act according to it (for example, if in their country it is frowned upon to look someone in the eye insistently, how will they behave when talking to someone?)</p> <p>Once all the groups have familiarized themselves with their cards, bring them together in a room and ask them to discuss with members of the other groups. There are no rules, except that they can't say anything related to their cultural specificity and that they can't reveal their specificity.</p> <p>Over their discussions, some people will be offended because they will be confronted with different customs (for example, a person will look the other person in the eye when talking).</p> <p>Whenever someone is offended by the other person's behavior because they consider it disrespectful, they will hand them a toothpick as a symbol of their embarrassment. The aim of all the participants is to win as few toothpicks as possible, and therefore to guess the cultural specificity of the other groups in order to avoid offending them.</p> <p>After fifteen minutes, the participants are regrouped into their groups and count the toothpicks they have won (those in their left hand). The group with the most toothpicks is considered to be the loser, and the group with the fewest toothpicks is considered to be the winner, because this means that it has been more able to adapt to the culture of the other group.</p> <p>Next, each group must come to an agreement on the cultural specificity of the other groups and each group makes a guess. Once all the groups have made their guess, each group reveals its cultural card and the participants can discuss it, saying whether it seemed obvious to them and how they felt when they discuss with people from this group.</p> |
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| <p>Tips for facilitators</p> | <p>At first, participants may be shy, so don't hesitate to have them discuss in pairs. If two people from the blue group want to discuss with two people from the yellow group, that's fine.</p> <p>At the end of the game, you can ask the participants what they have understood about intercultural communication and whether all the cultural specificities are easily perceptible.</p> <p>If you feel that the participants want to debate, you can suggest a bonus activity.</p> <p>Volunteer participants can recount a situation in which they were confronted with intercultural communication problems. For example, if someone went on a trip to another country and it took them a long time to realize that a gesture they considered offensive in their own culture was not offensive in that country, or on the contrary that a gesture customary in their own country was very badly perceived in the country they were visiting.</p> |
| <p>Handouts</p> | <p>Here are the 3 cultural cards that you need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Japan, it's frowned upon to look a person in the eye insistently, and you shouldn't stare at the person you're talking to. • In Lapland, you must leave a silence between each sentence. It's frowned upon to interrupt someone or to answer too quickly. You must take a few seconds before answering. • In Russia, smiling at a stranger is frowned upon, and a smile from someone you don't know can be interpreted as hypocritical or even self-serving. You must avoid smiling or laughing. <p>Here's a document you can use to print out the 3 cards.</p> |
| <p>Adaptations for the online environment</p> | <p>The main activity cannot be adapted for online participants, as people need to see each other face to face to capture their partner's reactions and therefore guess whether they have made them uncomfortable.</p> <p>However, the bonus activity can be done with online participants as it consists of telling stories about intercultural communication. If all the participants are gathered around the computer(s), they can all share their stories regardless of their location. We strongly advise you to make time for the bonus activity if people are attending the meeting online.</p> |
| <p>References</p> | <p>Here are the sources if anyone wants to explore the history of these (real) cultural specificities.</p> <p>Les cultures de la conversation (scienceshumaines.com)</p> |



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| | <p>Pourquoi les Russes sourient moins que les Occidentaux (huffingtonpost.fr)</p> <p>Dix erreurs à éviter au Japon - L'Express (lexpress.fr)</p> |
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2.3 Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity

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| Activity Title | <i>Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Duration | <i>45 minutes</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Learning Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To understand Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity</i> • <i>To understand factors in stereotypes.</i> • <i>To analyze the most common stereotypes</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Materials | <i>Cards explaining each stage of Bennett's model</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Instructions | <p><i>In this exercise Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity will be introduced. Before introducing the model, the trainer split the participants into small groups (4,5 participants and ask them to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Write down their own definition of intercultural sensitivity</i> • <i>Describe a person in their environment that you feel is highly sensitive to intercultural issues</i> • <i>Describe a person they have met who acted insensitive to intercultural issues</i> <p><i>Then participants try to put the six stages of Bennett's model into the right order.</i></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="background-color: #d9534f; color: white; padding: 5px;"><i>Stage - Minimization</i></td> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>The individual acknowledges cultural differences on the surface but considers all cultures as fundamentally similar.</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #d9534f; color: white; padding: 5px;"><i>Stage – Defense</i></td> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>The individual reacts against the threat of other cultures by denigrating the other cultures (negative stereotyping) and promoting the superiority of one's own culture.</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #d9534f; color: white; padding: 5px;"><i>Stage – Integration</i></td> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>The individual expands and incorporates well known worldviews into his own worldview.</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: #d9534f; color: white; padding: 5px;"><i>Stage - Denial</i></td> <td style="padding: 5px;"><i>The individual denies the difference or existence of other cultures by erecting psychological or physical barriers in the forms of isolation and separation from other cultures.</i></td> </tr> </table> | <i>Stage - Minimization</i> | <i>The individual acknowledges cultural differences on the surface but considers all cultures as fundamentally similar.</i> | <i>Stage – Defense</i> | <i>The individual reacts against the threat of other cultures by denigrating the other cultures (negative stereotyping) and promoting the superiority of one's own culture.</i> | <i>Stage – Integration</i> | <i>The individual expands and incorporates well known worldviews into his own worldview.</i> | <i>Stage - Denial</i> | <i>The individual denies the difference or existence of other cultures by erecting psychological or physical barriers in the forms of isolation and separation from other cultures.</i> |
| <i>Stage - Minimization</i> | <i>The individual acknowledges cultural differences on the surface but considers all cultures as fundamentally similar.</i> | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Stage – Defense</i> | <i>The individual reacts against the threat of other cultures by denigrating the other cultures (negative stereotyping) and promoting the superiority of one's own culture.</i> | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Stage – Integration</i> | <i>The individual expands and incorporates well known worldviews into his own worldview.</i> | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Stage - Denial</i> | <i>The individual denies the difference or existence of other cultures by erecting psychological or physical barriers in the forms of isolation and separation from other cultures.</i> | | | | | | | | |

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| | <p><i>Stage – Acceptance</i></p> <p><i>The individual accepts and respects cultural differences with regard to behavior and values. To accept however, does not imply ‘to agree’.</i></p> |
| | <p><i>Stage – Adaptation</i></p> <p><i>The individual develops the ability to shift his frame of reference to selected culturally diverse worldviews through empathy and pluralism. To adapt however, does not imply ‘to adopt’!</i></p> |
| | <p><i>The facilitator ask the participants compare their answers with Bennett’s model in the correct order and ask the participant’s experience</i></p> |
| Tips for facilitators | <p><i>The facilitator needs to familiarise with the following chapters of the literature review, focusing on their national context:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction. The significance of foster care, with a focus on its role to unaccompanied and separated children</i> • <i>Approaching and communicating with candidate foster families</i> • <i>Strategies for recruitment</i> |
| Handouts | N/A |
| Adaptations for the online environment | <i>For the online settings, the trainer can divide participants into smaller groups for discussions and discussion can be implemented in breakout rooms.</i> |
| References | https://organizingengagement.org/models/developmental-model-of-intercultural-sensitivity/ |



Module 3: Effective engagement with potential foster parents

Introduction

Social workers play an essential role in foster care and in connecting the system with families. In addition to their involvement with families, social workers also ensure that there is screening and training for interested families and aim to emotionally support parents and children in adapting to the new family environment. Thus, in the context of recruitment of foster families, professionals should cultivate the following competencies:

- Empathy and Sensitivity
- Effective Communication
- Collaboration and Teamwork
- Resilience and Stress Management
- Effective Engagement

After the completion of this module, participants should be able to:

- Apply basic communication principles with potential foster parents.
- Assist potential foster parents in addressing foster care inquiries.
- Provide support during crisis situations for potential foster parents.
- Develop effective recruitment announcements to attract potential foster parents.
- Create and implement effectively a communication plan.

Total Duration: 2h:15m.

Learning activities

3.1 What would you do if...?

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| <i>Activity Title</i> | What would you do if...? |
| <i>Duration</i> | 1 hour |
| <i>Learning Objectives</i> | <p>Upon the completion of the activity, learners will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Apply the <i>basic principles of communicating</i> with potential foster parents. ➤ Support potential foster parents in <i>solving queries</i> regarding foster care. ➤ Support potential foster parents in <i>moments of crisis</i>. |
| <i>Materials</i> | <p>Printed handouts (offline piloting)</p> <p>Handouts in separate word documents (online piloting)</p> |
| <i>Instructions</i> | <p>Introduce the participants to the present module and explain that it will focus on recruitment and communication with potential foster parents. Briefly recap the main points of Module 2 on stereotypes and prejudices about child fostering, which may deteriorate potential foster parents' interest and willingness. [5']</p> <p>Introduce the participants to the activity, concentrating on professionals' communication with candidates. Explain that professionals need to be prepared to answer questions and handle potential situations of crisis, such as potential parents getting anxious about the procedure or bureaucratic barriers, always trying to combat potential stereotypes and highlighting the advantages of foster care. Explain that in this session, participants will implement a role-playing activity and ask them to form three groups. Group A and B shall consist of three trainees – two will be the potential foster parents and one will be the foster care professional; Group C shall consist of two trainees – one will be a single potential foster care parent and one will be the professional. [10']</p> <p>Handout the scenarios presented in the relevant section and explain to the groups that they will have 10' to distribute the roles and prepare for the realisation of their scenario. [10']</p> <p>Each group will have 5' to present their scenario to the plenary and 5' to discuss it with the team. [10' per group 30' in total]</p> <p>During the discussion, you may raise some of the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there something you would have done differently? |



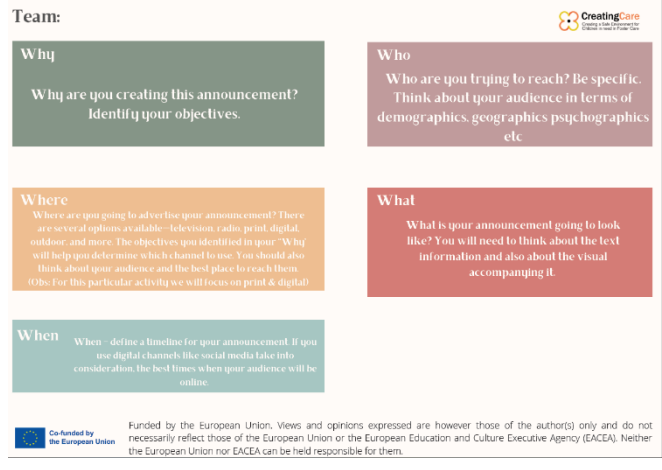
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel prepared for such a situation in real life? If yes, how could you better prepare yourselves? If not, what would you need to feel more prepared? • Are there any resources and/or materials that could support you in such situations? • After performing/witnessing the scenarios, are there any changes you could implement to your everyday work to improve your practice? <p>Upon the completion of this process, summarise the main points raised during the discussions, focusing on the preparatory steps professionals can take and the changes they can implement to better communicate with potential foster care parents.</p> |
| <p><i>Tips for facilitators</i></p> | <p>It would be beneficial to create a QR code for the Literature Review Report, which contains important information on the matters discussed, so that participants can scan it and read it on their own pace.</p> <p><i>The facilitator needs to familiarise with the following chapters of the literature review, focusing on their national context:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction. The significance of foster care, with a focus on its role to unaccompanied and separated children</i> • <i>Legal and institutional framework for foster care</i> • <i>Approaching and communicating with candidate foster families</i> • <i>Approaching and communicating with children</i> • <i>Strategies for recruitment</i> |
| <p><i>Handouts</i></p> | <p>Scenario – Group A</p> <p>Two candidates come to your office to enroll in the system as foster parents. During the discussion, you suspect that their motives may be financial, as they keep asking questions about relevant benefits. What do you do?</p> <p><i>(The professional could further investigate the issue and if their suspicions turn to be correct, the couple shall not be enrolled in the system)</i></p> <p>Scenario – Group B</p> <p>A couple was appointed to be foster parents of a child who seems distant from the big group of children staying in your service. Although you know that this is a consequence of the child’s separation from their biological parents and their refugee background, you realise that the foster parents are concerned and anxious about how to approach the child. What do you do?</p> <p><i>(The professional could provide information on UAMs and their needs, and how to approach the child)</i></p> |



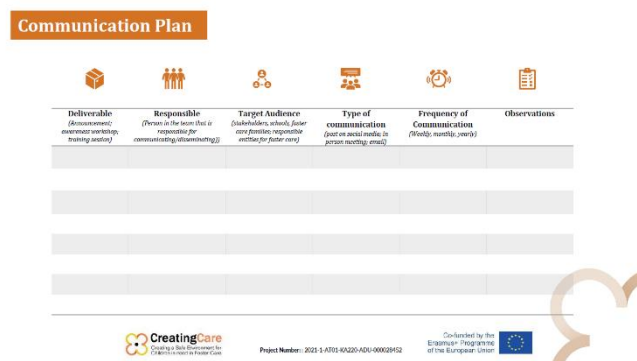
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| | <p>Scenario – Group C</p> <p>A candidate approaches your office to seek information about how they can become a foster parent. After realising the bureaucratic barriers they get confused and start crying. How do you react?</p> <p><i>(Ideally, the professional should try to simplify the procedures)</i></p> |
| <i>Adaptations for online environment</i> | If the piloting takes place online, you may divide the participants into break-out rooms and ask them to perform the scenarios in the context of online sessions. The scenarios shall be sent by the break-out rooms messaging. |
| <i>References</i> | The activity was developed by KMOP – Social Action and Innovation Centre. |

3.2 How to effectively recruit potential foster parents

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| Activity Title | How to effectively recruit potential foster parents |
| Duration | 30 - 45 minutes |
| Learning Objectives | <i>By the end of this activity the participants will be able to design an effective recruitment announcement and use it to attract potential foster parents.</i> |
| Materials | <i>Paper, markers, post it notes.</i> |
| Instructions | <p><i>Step 1. Divide the participants into teams of 3-4 people.</i></p> <p><i>Step 2: To create an effective recruiting announcement the teams will be encouraged to use the 5 Ws: Why, Who, Where, What and When.</i></p> <p>Why are you creating this announcement? Identify your objectives.</p> <p>Who are you trying to reach? Be specific. Think about your audience in terms of demographics, geographics psychographics etc.</p> <p>Where are you going to advertise your announcement? There are several options available—television, radio, print, digital, outdoor, and more. The objectives you identified in your “Why” will help you determine which channel to use. You should also think about your audience and the best place to reach them. (Obs: For this particular activity we will focus on print & digital)</p> <p>What is your announcement going to look like? You will need to think about the text information and also about the visual accompanying it.</p> |

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| | <p>When – define a timeline for your announcement. If you use digital channels like social media, consider the best times when your audience will be online.</p> <p>Step 3: After discussing based on the 5 Ws, each team will create an announcement. They can draw or describe what they would like to be in the visual part and write down the information in the announcement.</p> <p>After all teams are ready, each team will take turn to present its announcement and the other will provide feedback (is there anything they missed, who can it be improved, what are the strengths, etc.)</p> |
| <p>Tips for facilitators</p> | <p>Provide enough time for participants to discuss and come up with ideas. Give tips if they are stuck and offer encouragement. Avoid saying things like “that is not good”, instead offer the participants a new perspective to think about what they are trying to accomplish. You can also present them with examples of good and bad recruitment ads.</p> <p>The facilitator needs to familiarise with the following chapters of the literature review, focusing on their national context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction. The significance of foster care, with a focus on its role to unaccompanied and separated children • Legal and institutional framework for foster care • Approaching and communicating with candidate foster families • Approaching and communicating with children • Strategies for recruitment |
| <p>Handouts</p> |  |
| <p>Adaptations for the online environment</p> | <p>The activity can be implemented online using a word document and free software like Canva or paint.</p> |
| <p>References</p> | <p>Add the reference of the activity in case it is adapted from an existing manual/curriculum.</p> |
| <p>Resources</p> | <p>https://studionoel.co.uk/work/orkney-islands-council</p> |

3.3 Communication Plan

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| Activity Title | Communication Plan |
| Duration | 30min |
| Learning Objectives | <i>By the end of this activity the learners will be able to develop a communication plan and apply the foreseen dissemination activities according to the plan.</i> |
| Materials | <i>Printed tool or shared excel file</i> |
| Instructions | <i>Form groups of 3/4 people ask them to fill this sheet. The idea is to perform a brainstorming on what kind of information the team wants to communicate to their public (e.g. an awareness session to disseminate the foster care measure to the community). After that, the group has to establish a person that will be responsible for that dissemination/communication action, identify the public that this deliverable is meant to reach, establish the frequency that this will be disseminated as well as the type of communication that will be used. The tool has also a “observation” part, where all can write additional information. Explain that this tool can be used as an shared online file or in paper to plan the activities and to provide a standardized strategy to plan ahead in terms of what the practitioners wish to communicate in a way that will attract more people willing to foster children. Each group should have a plan of at least 3 deliverables. Ask one member of the group to present their plan.</i> |
| Tips for facilitators | <p><i>Provide time for people to brainstorm, to write the plan on the printed tool as well as to present to the rest of the groups their plans. Compare the results and summarized the ideas that were generated.</i></p> <p><i>The facilitator needs to familiarise with the following chapters of the literature review, focusing on their national context:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Introduction. The significance of foster care, with a focus on its role to unaccompanied and separated children</i> <i>Legal and institutional framework for foster care</i> <i>Approaching and communicating with candidate foster families</i> <i>Approaching and communicating with children</i> <i>Strategies for recruitment</i> |
| Handouts |  <p>The handout is a template for a communication plan. It features a title 'Communication Plan' in an orange box. Below the title are six icons representing different aspects: a box for Deliverable, a group of people for Responsible, a target icon for Target Audience, a speech bubble for Type of communication, a clock for Frequency of Communication, and a notepad for Observations. Below these icons is a table with six columns corresponding to these categories and several rows for data entry. At the bottom, there are logos for CreatingCare, the Erasmus+ Programme, and the European Union flag.</p> |



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| Adaptations for the online environment | <i>This activity can be implemented online in a shared excel file (or other where is possible to draw a table)</i> |
| References | <i>Tool adapted from initiative Schools&Solutions (2020) - IO3: Guide to Implement a Restorative School Center and partnering with local schools & community</i> |



Literature review on the foster care system and stereotype and prejudice-based beliefs around foster care families and unaccompanied children in the foster care system

Introduction. The significance of foster care, with a focus on its role to unaccompanied and separated children

The role of foster care is of critical importance for children who are unable to live with their biological families, as it provides them a safe, stable and caring family environment to heal from the past, grow in calmness and thrive into the future.

The reasons behind some children's inability to live with their birth families vary greatly depending on specific circumstances and needs of the children, including a parent's illness or death, the experience of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect, the witnessing of domestic violence or a parent's mental health problem or substance abuse.

Foster care is also rather significant for children on the move who are separated from their parents. Through it, unaccompanied and separated children are provided a protective setting where more than their basic needs, such as accommodation, alimentionation, healthcare are met. Foster families also provide emotional support and a sense of belonging to those children. Moreover, foster care ensures that there is continuity in their care. Their placement in foster families helps them maintain a routine as well as educational and social opportunities. Important is also the fact that foster care can facilitate the integration of unaccompanied and separated children into the societies they are living in, as by being part of a family, it is easier for them to learn the language, customs and values.

Although children may experience a fear that foster care may disconnect them from their birth families, this is not the case. Foster care serves as a temporary solution. Its ultimate purpose is their reunification with their birth families, once the reasons for their removal have been resolved. Only if this is not feasible, foster care may serve as a path to the permanent family-based care solution of adoption.

Definitions

Foster care is a temporary living arrangement for children who are unable to live with their biological families due to multiple reasons, such as: neglect, abuse, parental illness (Ferrara, et al., 2013). It includes the placement of a child who is living under such conditions by a competent authority in the family environment other than their own, without amending the legal relations of the child with their biological family or their guardian. Foster families are selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care.

A peculiar characteristic of foster care in relation to other forms of family-based care is that it aims at ensuring the well-being of the child while at the same time the issues that lead to their placement in foster care are being addressed (Ross, 1981, p. 905). Foster care is intended to be a temporary solution. Its ultimate goal is the reunification of the child with their biological family, once the reasons for their removal have been resolved (Katz, 1971, p. 283). Only if this is not possible, foster care may lead to the child's adoption, i.e., the permanent placement of the child in the foster family.

Children on the move living in a country different from their own without parental care may receive significant support by their placement in foster care. They may be either "separated children", i.e., children who are separated from a previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but who may nevertheless be accompanied by another relative or "unaccompanied", i.e., children who are not cared for by another relative or an adult who by law or custom is responsible for doing so (UN General Assembly, 2010, p. 6).

Statistics of children in foster care compared to residential care and the evolution of these numbers

EU statistics

Austria

More than 12,500 children and adolescents in Austria were not living with their biological parents as of December 2021. Around 5,000 live in foster families, while the rest are in residential communities, children's villages, homes or crisis centres run by child and youth welfare services (Wiener Zeitung, 2021).

| Quantity | | | Percentage % | |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Total</i> | <i>Residential homes</i> | <i>Foster care</i> | <i>Residential homes</i> | <i>Foster care</i> |
| 12678 | 7762 | 5061 | 60,5 | 39,5 |

Czech Republic

Like other partner countries the Czech Republic prioritises the possibility of placing the child in foster families over the option of residential (institutional) care whenever it is possible. A legal act (No. 363/2021) was agreed, allowing the placement of a child under three years of age in residential care only until 12/2023. In line with this intent, a wide

network of supporting organisations is created to actively help families who have opted for foster care. The national statistical data are reported as follows:

| | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <i>Foster care total (new arrivals that year)</i> | 10922 (1892) | 11362 (1935) | 11643 (1767) | 11931 (1722) | 12094 (1564) | 12351 (1656) |
| <i>Temporary foster care</i> | 692 | 730 | 671 | 703 | 616 | 665 |
| <i>Residential care total</i> | 6593 | 6677 | 6527 | 6799 | 6436 | 6173 |

France

According to the URM mission of the Ministry of Justice, in 2020, there were 9,501 minors entrusted to the Departmental Councils by decision of the judiciary in 2020, compared to 16,760 in 2019, this is a decrease of 43%. Of these URM, very few seek protection through asylum. In 2019, only 755 URM were asylum seekers.

Greece

According to the latest data in 10/2021 relating to fostering and adoption uploaded in the information system www.anynet.gr, there are currently 1.505 minors living in shelters, 589 of whom are eligible for foster care. 447 foster placements have been completed (as of 7/2020) and 274 applications for foster care have been filed (up to 4/1/22).

Italy

In 2019, 708 children entered the pre-adoption foster care in Italy. Between 2010 and 2019, the largest number of minors in the pre-adoptive phase was registered in 2013, when 1,126 infants were assigned to their potential future families. In 2019, 1,239 children were declared adoptable by the Italian Juvenile Court (Statista, 2021).

Portugal

Analysing the numbers of foster care children in the last years, it can be observed a 70% decrease between 2009 and 2018 (ISS, 2019). Some authors define this phase as a “regression” phase of the foster care evolution, as a consequence of the lack of awareness campaigns, technical support and initial training for the caregiver candidates and foster families (Delgado, 2013; Magalhães & Batista, 2021). Numbers from 2020 show that a total of 6706 children and youngsters were placed in some kind of protective

measure. From this total, 5787 were placed in residential care and only 202 were placed in foster care (that will consist in a 6% growth from 2019) (Social Security Institute, 2018; 2020).

Romania

The number of children placed in foster care centres has decreased in recent years as an overview between 2017 and 2019 shows.

| 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|--------|--------|--------|
| 18,197 | 17,096 | 15,572 |

However, a comparatively large proportion of children at risk are placed in foster care and only a smaller number in institutional/ residential care. Numbers of 09/2021

| | |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Children in foster family care</i> | 32.700 (out of which 17.177 to foster carers and 11.267 to the extended family) |
| <i>Children in residential institutions</i> | 13.097 |

Partner countries' realities

Austria

In Austria, it is emphasised that the primary goal of out-of-home care is to return the child to his or her family of origin as soon as the parental situation there improves. Therefore, foster parents should be prepared to separate from the child again. However, if it is in the child's best interest, a parent-child relationship has been established, or a return to the family of origin is no longer possible, foster parents can also apply for full custody or seek adoption. The custody of asylum-seeking and non-asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors follows specific rules: If a minor whose parents are unknown is found in the federal territory, the child and youth welfare agency assumes custody (§ 207 ABGB). As clarified by the Austrian Supreme Court in its decision of 19 October 2005, this principle applies to all minors regardless of their age and without distinction between Austrian and foreign nationals. But adolescents between 14 and 18 years of age who come to Austria



without parents, parents, or other guardians are currently largely on their own. As a rule, they have no accompaniment during their questioning by the police, the decision on whether to apply for asylum, medical examinations and any other examinations including age diagnosis. Only their accommodation in a basic shelter and their legal representation in the asylum procedure are guaranteed. Not until the young people are admitted to the asylum procedure, does the child and youth welfare service become active. This can take several weeks or months. In Austria, unaccompanied minors become capable of contract when they reach the age of majority (18) and are no longer entitled to custody. In addition, they must move out of the special care facilities for unaccompanied minors.

Greece

Foster care statistics and data in Greece are available in the open platform which provides all citizens with access to information on issues related to children of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, www.paidi.gov.gr. The data which are published there every three months are retrieved from the information system of foster care and adoption, www.anynet.gr. Anynet includes all the information and actions required for adoption and foster care. Responsible for the organisation and presentation of the data is the National Centre of Social Solidarity. It is noted that the available data refer to foster care and adoption in general. There is no separate data for unaccompanied and separated children, until now.

According to the latest data (04.04.2023), there are currently 1.377 minors living in Child Protection Units (National Centre of Social Solidarity, 2023, p. 3). As far as the completed foster placements and adoptions are concerned, from the start of the electronic proposal of connection (i.e., 01.07.2020) up until 03.10.2021, 419 foster placements and 386 adoptions have taken place (National Centre of Social Solidarity, 2021, p. 6). Whereas, from 04.10.2021 till 04.04.2023, 134 foster placements and 243 adoptions (National Centre of Social Solidarity, 2023, p. 6). As it may be inferred from the abovementioned, there is a notable decrease in both types of family-based care, even though the second period is three months longer.

Regarding the ongoing foster placements and adoptions, the applications for foster care (414) are remarkably lower than those of adoption (2.598) (National Centre of Social Solidarity, 2023, p. 8). This important difference points out the fact that the majority of candidate parents prefer adoption, because of its permanent character. In parallel, minors in the process of foster care (590) are much more than those who are in the process of adoption (144) (National Centre of Social Solidarity, 2023, p. 4). Taking into account the above facts, a disjunction is observed between minors in the process of foster care and candidate foster parents, i.e., there are not many candidate parents while there are many children in the process of foster care, and an opposite disjunction between

minors for adoption and potential parents for them, i.e., there are many candidate parents and not many children in the process of adoption.

Romania

Taking the most recent data (Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, [December 2022 statistics](#)) on the number of children in the care system, we see a significant positive change in terms of foster care placements. The number of children (30.400) in the care of professional foster carers (maternal assistants), relatives or other families/persons is visibly higher compared to residential care (11.629 - public and private). Furthermore, the number of active professional maternal assistants in the last month of 2022 is 11.542.

It should be emphasised that at national level, maternal assistance is the most important form of family-type care in the special protection system. Maternal assistance services are coordinated by the General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection throughout all the country.

The increasing number of children in family-based care is the result of the implementation of the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child 2014-2020, whose principles include *"Ensuring stability, continuity and complementarity of personalised care for each child and the paramount importance of providing a family environment for children in the special protection system"* (National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights 2014-2020).

The long process of de-institutionalisation, which started in the 1990s, is further supported by setting as a priority objective of the national strategy the continuous transition from institutional care of children to community care.

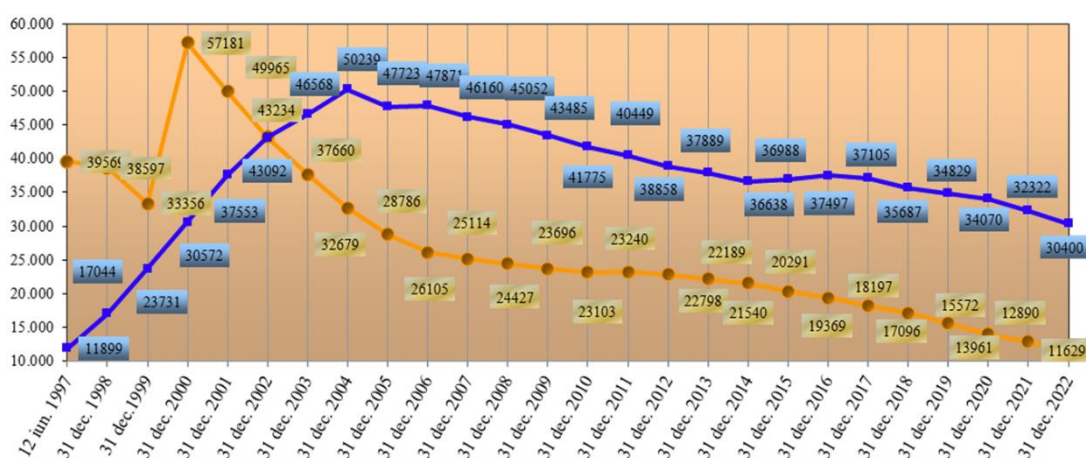


Fig.1 Changes in the number of children in the special protection system between 1997 and 31 December 2022

(Source: https://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/buletin_statistic/copil_2022.pdf. *The orange line marks the general downward trend in public and private institutional residential services from late 1997 to 2022*)

A series of objectives are aligned to this main objective, divided into the following levels such as increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the current system of family-type care services, prohibiting the institutionalisation of early-age children, developing alternative services to institutional care, developing children's independent living skills to prepare them for leaving the special protection system.

To highlight the difference in figures of the positive evolution of the deinstitutionalisation policy and considering Fig.1 above, we mention 22.798 children institutionalised in 2013 (Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, [Statistical data 2022](#)) which decreased to 11.629 at the end of 2022.

Also, another important aspect that has contributed to the decrease in the number of children in the special protection system is the development of services to prevent the separation of children from their parents such as day centres, rehabilitation centres, counselling centres.

Portugal

Analysing the numbers of foster care children in the last years, we can observe a 70% decrease between 2009 and 2018 (ISS, 2019). Some authors define this phase as a “regression” phase of the foster care evolution due to the lack of awareness campaigns, technical support and initial training for the caregiver candidates and foster families (Delgado, 2013; Magalhães & Batista, 2021). In 2017 of the 7,553 children placed, only 246 were in foster families. In addition, it should be noted that only 18 of the 885 children under six years of age were in foster families, representing only 2% of this age group. Despite a reduction of almost 25% in the total number of children with protective measures, institutionalisation increased from 91% to 97%, compared with foster care which went from 9% to 3%. Numbers from 2020 show that a total of 6706 children and youngsters were placed in some kind of protective measure. From this total, 5787 were placed in residential care, and only 202 were placed in foster care (that consists of a 6% growth from 2019) (Social Security Institute, 2018; 2020).

France

Generally speaking, in France, foster care is stigmatised, whether for the children in foster care or for the foster families. Children in care are often subject to permanent, negative and demoralising stigmatisation. They are frequently the victims of stereotypes: they are said to be rude, unruly, without a future, lost in advance and incapable of obtaining good



results at school (Viala, 2019). These prejudices – which the children face at school and in their everyday lives – do not reflect reality, can hinder their integration and are synonymous with suffering for many children in care.

Foster families are also subject to many clichés: they are perceived as cruel, overly strict and abusive, mainly because the media portray a negative and widespread image of the foster carer profession in France. Although unfortunately some foster families fit the cliché, the majority of children are well looked after and enjoy good protection and a balanced life.

The reality for foster carers in France is mainly a lack of interest in the profession, which is not valued enough. There is a real lack of recognition for the profession, which is losing its motivation to practice. Family assistants (foster family) feel neglected by the State and by the organisations that are supposed to supervise them and who sometimes fail to turn up for the visits that are created to support foster carers in their work. Similarly, it is difficult to recruit foster carers, as it is a precarious profession: their pay is sometimes not enough to cover the child's needs. Finally, a large proportion of foster families are elderly – the average age in the profession is 55 – which is a cause for concern for the future of the profession (Landreau, 2021). Very few young people are attracted to this profession which is experiencing a real vocational crisis. The Covid-19 crisis has also led to resignations, as professional difficulties have increased: lockdown has caused stress among the children in care and increased certain behavioural problems leading some professionals to resign (Illy, 2021).

Unaccompanied minors are not immune to stereotypes either, and are subject to a great deal of prejudice. They are considered to be failing at school, to have difficulty integrating into the host country and to be delinquent. In fact, they are mainly associated with delinquency, which in some political discourse leads to radical statements in which they are stigmatised. On October 1, 2020 the UN children's agency, *UNICEF* condemned the stigmatisation of unaccompanied minors in France (Ouest France, 2020). The cause: over-mediatization of certain cases of violence, leading to connotations stigmatising more and more unaccompanied minors. The situation of unaccompanied minors is also particularly criticised for the way they are treated by the authorities. When they arrive in France, unaccompanied minors are subject to an assessment of their minority by the prefecture. During this assessment - which is supposed to last 5 days - the minors are accommodated in hotels, which enables them to be sheltered for a short period. However, it turns out that the assessment teams are very busy, which delays the procedure. In 2017, the procedure lasted an average of 40 days, which is 40 days during which they are left to fend for themselves and receive no support (Duclos-Grisier et al., 2023).

Lastly, the reception situation for unaccompanied minors in France is unusual in that they are very regularly referred to the Child Welfare Services (*ASE: Aide Sociale à l'Enfance*)



facilities such as Children's social homes (*MECS: Maisons d'Enfants à Caractère Social*) or children's homes (*foyers de l'enfance*). Little is done to ensure that unaccompanied minors are referred to foster families appointed by the government. To remedy this situation, a number of associations have encouraged the creation of "solidarity families", families who take in unaccompanied minors for free, without the Département's support. However, the conflict in Ukraine since 2022 has had an impact on solidarity fostering in France. For example, the city of Lille called on all the networks of solidarity families and families appointed by the Département to take in Ukrainians. As a result, they were all saturated, and unaccompanied minors were unable to benefit from it.

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the foster care system plays an essential role in providing support and care for children who are unable to live with their biological families. It aims to ensure their well-being, safety, and overall development. However, like in many countries, foster care is not immune to stereotypes and the potential for bullying based on these stereotypes.

Stereotypes surrounding foster care can stem from various misconceptions and lack of awareness. Some people may perceive foster children as troubled or damaged individuals, perpetuating negative labels and stigmatisation. Such stereotypes can lead to bullying or exclusion, making it challenging for foster children to feel accepted and integrated into their communities.

Bullying based on foster care stereotypes can take various forms. It may involve verbal insults, social isolation or even physical aggression. Foster children may face additional challenges in dealing with these situations, as they might already be coping with the emotional stress of being separated from their biological families. Similar to bullied children, their parents also face a crisis if they learn about the bullying and the bullying begins to be handled. To address this issue, it is crucial to promote education and awareness about foster care within Czech society. By dispelling misconceptions and fostering understanding, we can reduce the prevalence of stereotypes and subsequently decrease bullying based on these stereotypes.

The situation of bullied children and their families can be very difficult, especially due to a lack of understanding and support from teachers and social workers. Parents of bullied children often feel helpless and blame themselves for their child's situation (Markéta Švamberg Šauerová, 2023).



Italy

In Italy, out-of-family placements are regulated by Law 184/1983 as amended. There are three main placements for children in need of temporary out-of-home care: children's homes (small residential services with professional caregivers, mostly social workers and social pedagogues); non-professional foster families (families or single people who care for a child in their home, without direct payment from the welfare system but with some income support); and professional foster families (families with one or both parents paid as professional caregivers, usually employed by a Voluntary Organisation). Generally, the main characteristics of foster care are temporality, maintenance of relations with the family of origin, the forecast of the return of the minor to the family of origin. Unlike legal adoption, which is a commitment for life, fostering is for a limited period of up to 24 months, with the possibility of a 24-month extension on the order of a judge; and ideally contact with the child's family of origin is maintained throughout. In addition, the law stipulates that by December 31, 2006, no minor may be placed in an institution, with preference being given to foster care or, as a secondary option, placement in a family-type community (Ciampa et al., 2014). Unaccompanied minors are facing special risks: These children - having no means of subsistence - are almost fatally pushed into the arms of organisations, criminals active in human trafficking or other forms of exploitation. Statistical data: In 2019, 708 children entered pre-adoption foster care in Italy. Between 2010 and 2019, the largest number of minors in the pre-adoptive phase was registered in 2013, when 1,126 infants were assigned to their potential future families (Statista, 2021). In 2019, 1,239 children were declared adoptable by the Italian Juvenile Court. The reasons that drive people to apply for foster care are many and varied: for example, a first motivation can be humanitarian, i.e., to help a minor and his family in difficulty, being aware that the minor could, however, return to his family when the parents regain their abilities and the uncomfortable situation is resolved. Another motivation may be wanting to educate one's children to make them understand that it is right to help others. The emotions involved in these cases are strong and can be positive and negative.

Stereotypes and prejudice-based beliefs around foster care, foster care families, and unaccompanied and separated children and their impact on the recruitment process

Many people have little knowledge of the foster care phenomenon, and this causes many prejudices in these people, as emerged from almost all the focus groups conducted in the partner countries. The prejudices, false myths and beliefs around fostering are numerous and different. They result from a lack of knowledge of the topic, cultural heritage, background, and the difficulty for many to conceive of parenthood unrelated to possession. This leads some people to make prejudiced judgements, such as "What will

he or she do when the child returns permanently to the family of origin?" or "The child will never really be his or her own; who makes him or her do it?". The foster carer does not practice fostering out of a desire to possess but out of a desire to give love and help to a child and his or her family, knowing, moreover, that the end of fostering does not at all mean the end of the relationship with the child or his or her family, a relationship that, when formed and consolidated, like any affective relationship does not end with the interruption of a legal commitment. Among the most widespread prejudices and false myths about foster care, it was possible to collect the following statements:

- *The family of origin will certainly interfere in the child's development*
Relations with the family of origin are planned or not and always mediated by social services. Their organisation depends on the reason for fostering, whether consensual or judicial, depending on the family of origin's difficulty in raising the child. Certainly, relations with the natural family can be a tiring aspect. Still, also a possibility for positive cooperation based on a common interest for the child, sometimes they can even become personal friendships.
- *Foster children always come from dramatic family situations*
When people think of fostering, they generally imagine severe parental deficiencies or even child abuse; in reality, the families' difficult situations are various. For instance, a family may struggle to deal with a significant medical issue and not have the time to care for a child fully. There may be organisational problems for huge families with only one parent. Work problems may lead parents to prolonged absences or sudden bereavement that disrupt the routine. There are not always conflictual or dramatic relationships behind the need to initiate a foster care project for a child.
- *To become a foster carer, you need to have a certain income*
The economic-patrimonial consistency of the beneficiaries is not included in the selection criteria of the applicant. Possessing sufficient economic stability contributes to the serene performance of the role to which the carers are called.
- *Custody is not suitable for biological children*
If well-prepared and adequately accompanied, foster care represents a great experience of growth and enrichment for the children of foster parents. Experience firsthand the solidarity, commitment and sharing towards one's age who is experiencing difficult situations can open them to a greater awareness of the family's value, responsibility, and closeness. Taking on small commitments of care or intimacy can contribute to their psycho-emotional maturation.



- *I want foster care, but I am single/ unmarried*
Single, unmarried cohabitants can do any foster care, full-time, part-time, emergency, etc. As married couples, I have to take the preparatory course at their local social services, and once they are eligible, they will have their match. Therefore, the only actual requirement established by law is that of majority age.

- *If you take a child into foster care, they will take him away from you sooner or later*
Fostering projects can have a variable duration: a few months, a few years or, in some cases, have no term, configuring themselves as definitive receptions until the autonomy of the accepted minor is achieved. Naturally, during the acquaintance interviews and preparatory meetings, it will be possible to establish, with the help of the operators, which project one feels most willing to commit to.

- *Better to foster a child than a teenager*
In this sense, the conviction seems to persist that foster care is delicate if the children are small; if they are older, the Community is fine. And instead, not only can children and young people between the ages of zero and 18 go into foster care. But pre-adolescents and adolescents are a relatively large group in great need of people willing to accompany them towards adulthood in a very delicate and vital period of life.

- *If foster care should only be a passing experience, it might as well be that the minor remains in the Community*
Communities are vital for the protection and help of children and adolescents, but staying in a familiar environment, even if only for a limited time, is generally a better solution for them. A family can ensure excellent continuity and specificity in caring for the minor, providing him with a "warm" and welcoming place for as long as he needs it. We know that it is essential for every child to be able to have privileged relationships that make him feel "special and unique" for someone.

Legal and institutional framework for foster care

Partner countries' legal framework

Austria

The development of parent and child law in Austria began with the introduction of the Austrian Civil Code in 1811. At the present time, adoption is regulated by Articles 191–203 of the Austrian Civil Code, which sets out the conditions for adoption: *'The adoption of a minor child shall be granted if it serves the child's well-being, and if a relationship [between the child and their adoptive parents] has been established or should be established'* (Art 194 Austrian Civil Code).

The tasks of The Child and Youth Welfare Agency are manifold. In regard to foster care, they include: Selection, preparation and assistance – The placement of a child under 16 years of age in foster care shall be appropriately prepared according to its importance for the development of the minor. Besides the responsible selection of foster parents and contact mediation to the foster child, the youth welfare services have the task of providing foster parents (foster carers) training and further education and counselling assistance to them as well as to the foster child and the family of origin. As in the case of adoption, applicants are checked for their suitability (ability to raise a child, ability to cope with stress, state of health, living and income conditions, etc.). The foster care permit is always issued for a specific child only. There is no official minimum age requirement for foster parents, but a certain amount of life experience and experience in dealing with children is required. The age difference between foster child and foster parents should ideally not exceed 40 years. Single persons can also take in foster children if they are otherwise suitable. In some federal states, it is possible to be employed as a foster parent under certain conditions. This involves further training, counselling, social security (pension, health, accident and unemployment insurance) and a salary just above the marginal earnings threshold.

Foster care allowance - Provincial legislation shall regulate the foster care allowance that foster parents receive upon their application to alleviate the burdens associated with foster care. Local conditions and maintenance costs shall be taken into account.

Communication with authorities: The above-mentioned offices of the Child and Youth Welfare Agency and the respective contact person at the municipal or regional level can be contacted for any questions or difficulties. In addition, home visits or meetings are held regularly, at least once a year, with the contact persons of the responsible local authority. Foster parents or persons who want to become one, can also turn to foster

parent rounds offered by e.g., parent-child centres or municipalities all over Austria for exchange of experiences, assistance, etc.

In Austria, general children's rights established by law are applied. They include:

- *Hearing rights.* From the age of ten, children must be heard by the court in proceedings concerning custody or contact rights. Younger children should also be questioned as far as possible; this can be done by the court, an expert or the family court assistance. The will of the child becomes more and more important according to his or her age. Child's best interests take precedence over the will in case of doubt. In principle, however, the older the child, the more likely it is that its wishes will be complied with.
- *Rights of petition.* From the age of fourteen, children have the right to file petitions in court independently, i.e., without the involvement of a parent, in proceedings concerning custody or contact rights.
- *Child advocate.* In proceedings concerning custody or contact rights, the court can appoint a child advocate. A child advocate is a psychosocially trained companion for children up to 14 years of age. His/her task is to inform him or her about the proceedings and to ensure that the child's will is heard and given weight in court. He may disclose the contents of the conversations to parents or the court only with the child's consent.

Greece

In Greece, foster care is regulated by articles 1655-1665 of the Civil Code, as well as law 4538/2018, named: "Measures for the promotion of foster care and adoption and other provisions" (Government Gazette A' 85, 2018). In addition, the ministerial decision 4489/11.10.2019 refers to the training that prospective foster parents shall attend (Poulopoulos, et al., 2019).

In order for candidate foster parents to be considered suitable, they shall fulfil the following requirements cumulatively: a. to be above 25 years old but not above 75 years old, while the minimum age difference of the child and the parent is 18 years and the maximum 60 years, b. foster parents shall have good psychological, intellectual and corporal health and shall not suffer from communicable diseases, c. foster parents and those living with them shall not be convicted definitively, as well as no criminal prosecution for the offences that give rise to disqualification from the parental responsibility, according to article 1537 of the Greek Civil Code and the existing legislation on drugs and human trafficking shall be pending against them, d. foster parents shall provide evidence that they can cover the basic expenses of alimentation, education and



medical treatment of the child, e. foster parents shall be registered to the National Registry of Candidate Foster Parents (article 8 par. 2 of Law 4538/2018).

A four-step procedure takes place if someone wishes to become a foster parent: a. filling of an application on www.anynet.gr and attachment of the required documents, b. social research/investigation exploring the environment of prospective foster parents, c. when social research is successfully completed, prospective foster parents shall attend a training that is the prerequisite of their registration in the National Registry of Candidate Foster Parents, d. candidates are put in contact with children who are considered suitable to be placed in that environment. The contact involves several meetings, always under the responsibility of the Child Protection Unit that has the care of the child. A multidisciplinary team consisting of scientists from the foster carer's supervisory body and the supervisory body of the Child Protection Unit with responsibility for the child will work together to make the final decision.

It should be noted that one of the novelties of the Law 4538/2018 is that in addition to the typical nuclear family, it refers that suitable to become foster parents are also those who have entered into a civil partnership (with or without children), or individuals, unmarried, divorced or widowed (with or without children), who may be related by blood to the foster child (kinship fostering).

Worth-mentioning is also the fact that for each minor registered in the National Registry of Minors, within 90 days of their placement, an Individualised Family Rehabilitation Plan is prepared by the Department of Child Protection and Care, which is responsible for their registration. This plan includes a reasoned proposal for their rehabilitation, considering the individualised needs and the child's best interest. As it is stated in the Greek Civil Code, in foster care *“the legal relationship between the minor and their natural family or guardian and in particular the competences of parental care of guardianship remain unchanged, unless otherwise specified in the Law”*. The child's return to its biological family is the goal.

Romania

The national legislation concerning the foster care system and maternal assistance is represented by Law No. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of children's rights, Order no. 26/2019 on the approval of minimum quality standards for family-type social services for children in the special protection system, Order No. 137/2003 on the approval of the analytical programme of professional training courses for professional maternal assistants, Government Decision No. 679/2003 on the conditions for obtaining the certificate, certification procedures and the status of the professional maternal assistant.



According to art. 62 of Law No. 272/2004, *the placement of a child is a special protection measure, of temporary nature, which may be ordered, under the conditions of this Law, as appropriate, to: a) a person or family; b) a maternal assistant; c) a residential type of service, as referred to in Article 123 (1). (2) and licensed in accordance with the Law.*

Government Decision No. 679/2003 on the conditions for obtaining the certificate, certification procedures and the status of the professional maternal assistant (foster parent) establishes the role of the professional maternal assistant. Therefore, according to *Article 1, a professional foster carer is a person, certified in accordance with the conditions of this Decision, who, by means of the activities carried out in his/her home, ensures the upbringing, care and education necessary for the harmonious development of the children in his/her care.*

Criteria for the selection of maternal assistants:

- By their social behaviour, state of health and psychological profile, provide a guarantee of proper fulfilment of parental duties in the upbringing, care and education of their children;
- Have full capacity to practice;
- Have housing that meets the food preparation, hygiene, education and recreation needs of their users, including children who are to be taken into care or custody;
- They don't engage in paid activities;
- They have participated in training courses organised by the public service for child protection or by the approved private institution that conducts the evaluation for the issuance of the certificate as a professional childcare worker.

Portugal

According to the Portuguese Social Security (2021), foster care has a wide-ranging responsibility for the development of the children and young people concerned. It is seen as a protective measure that consists in the placement of the child or young person to a family or a person, qualified for this purpose, in order to provide the children or young person with integration into a stable family environment that guarantees them the adequate care to their needs and their well-being, as well as the education and affection necessary for their integral development. The goal is to provide the child or young person with: conditions for the proper satisfaction of physical, psychological, emotional and social needs; the establishment of affectionate, safe and stable bonds, acquiring skills for their personal, social, educational and professional development; conditions that contribute to the construction of the child's or young person's identity and integration; promote the acquisition or strengthening of the competencies of fathers and mothers and/or holders of parental responsibilities so that they can exercise them with quality in the best interests of the child or young person. The application of the foster care measure is favoured over residential care, in particular for children up to six years of age (Law 147/99, updated by Law 26/2018).

Main Laws:

Ordinance No. 278-A/2020, of December 4 - It defines the terms, conditions and procedures of the application, selection, training, assessment and recognition of foster families, as well as the terms and conditions of the framework institutions.

Decree-Law No. 139/2019, of September 16 - It establishes the system for the implementation of foster care.

Law No. 47/2019 of 8 July - 1st amendment to the Foster Care Implementation Regime, approved by the Decree Law 11/2008, of January 17, establishing tax and labor benefits for foster families.

Law No. 23/2017 of 23 May - 3rd amendment to the Law on the Protection of Children and Youth in Danger, approved by Law No. 147/99, 1 September, extending the protection period up to 25 years.

Law No. 142/2015 of 8 September - 2nd amendment to the Law on the Protection of Children and Youth in Danger, approved by Law No.147/99, of 1 of September

The Portuguese Asylum Law (Law No. 27/2008, with amendments to Law No. 26/2014 of May 5), concerted with the Law on the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger (Law No. 147/99 of September 1), safeguards a specific reception framework for unaccompanied foreign minors in international protection.



Protocol for recruitment:

Interested families in Portugal contact the Social Security Institute and, after receiving the expression of interest, an informational interview is scheduled. It is the responsibility of the administration of the vacancies, in collaboration with the framework institutions, to select the most suitable foster families for the child or adolescent to be admitted and to notify the Children and Youth Protection Commissions (CPCJ) or the court of the start of the admission. Registration of foster families is recorded in a database, and the framework facilities are responsible for ongoing communication with families.

Upon application, the framework facility conducts a psychosocial study of the applicant's family. This examination allows the institutions to analyse whether the family is able to respond to the needs of children and adolescents, and to verify that home conditions, hygiene and adequate security are in place. The psychosocial study can be conducted through interviews, visits to the family, observation of family dynamics, and other technical procedures. At the end, the decision to accept or reject the application is communicated: If the decision is accepted, a foster care certificate is issued. If the decision is not accepted, the family can appeal within 10 days and resubmit the application and submit new documentation. (Social Security Institute, 2021).

Criteria to become a foster parent:

- Must be over the age of 25;
- Not be an applicant for adoption;
- Have physical and mental health conditions, proven by a medical declaration;
- Have an adequate home with hygiene and safety conditions for the reception of children and young people;
- Must be suitable for foster care;
- Not have been indicted, accused, sentenced or convicted by the judicial authority, even if not yet judged, for a crime against life, physical integrity and personal liberty, or against sexual freedom or self-determination;
- Not have been inhibited from exercising parental responsibilities, nor have their exercise limited, because they pose a threat to the safety, health, moral upbringing and education of the child.

France

Recruitment procedure for foster families

Applying for approval

To become a foster family in France, people need to obtain approval, which they must apply for from the council of their Département. For this approval to be granted, applicants must be French or citizens of the *European Economic Area* (EEA) or in

possession of a valid residence permit authorising them to work. They must not have been convicted of any offense relating to children. They must also pass a medical examination to ensure that their state of health allows them to look after children. Lastly, the childcare conditions must guarantee the safety, health and development of the children being looked after (physically, intellectually and emotionally) (Service-Public.fr, 2023).

To apply for approval, candidates fill out an application form on the government website "service-public.fr" and provide a medical certificate stating that they are fit to look after children. On its own, the council consults an extract from the criminal records of all adults living in the home where the children are to be looked after. If all these conditions are met, approval is issued by the Département within 4 months of the application. During these 4 months, the applicant's file is studied, one or more interviews are conducted with the applicant and several home visits are made. Prospective foster families are visited by a psychologist to assess their suitability for fostering; they also meet with a social worker, nurse, or childcare worker (Service-Public.fr, 2023).

Criteria for granting approval

To check that the conditions for granting approval are met, the Child Welfare Services (*ASE: Aide Sociale à l'Enfance*) or the Maternal and Child Protection (*PMI: Protection Maternelle Infantile*) have a grid of criteria consisting of two parts (Article Annexe 4-9 - Code de l'action Sociale Et Des Familles, nd.).

In the first part, the criteria focus on the abilities and skills required to practice the profession of foster family.

The first criterion measures the candidate's abilities and personal qualities for taking in minors or young adults. Their ability to promote a child's physical, emotional, intellectual and social development is assessed, as well as their ability to provide a coherent and structured educational framework. The second criterion checks the foster carer's knowledge of the profession, their role, and possibilities. This includes their ability to identify and assume their responsibilities, as well as their ability to work with a professional team on the foster carer's project. The third criterion concerns the foster family's command of French language and their ability to communicate and engage in dialogue. The person seeking approval must have a good command of French to communicate with the child and the professionals involved in the child's care. The fourth criterion concerns the foster carer's availability and ability to adapt and organise. The future foster carer's ability to reconcile fostering with his or her family lifestyle and offer the necessary availability to the fostered person is considered.

In the second part, the criteria focus on reception conditions and safety.



The first criterion looks at the size, condition, layout, organisation and safety of the reception area. It takes into account compliance with hygiene rules, the size of the home, the number of rooms and the number of people accommodated. The protection of dangerous areas, the securing of dangerous objects and the prevention of carbon monoxide poisoning are also monitored. The second criterion looks at the risk of danger in the home's surroundings. The third criterion is the existence of means of communication to deal with emergency situations. This includes not only the availability of means of communication, but also the display of contact details for the emergency services and the departmental services in charge of foster care. The fourth criterion concerns the presence of animals in the foster home. The future foster carer must be aware of the risks and the measures to be adopted to ensure safe cohabitation with the person being looked after, and must report the presence of animals that are likely to be dangerous. The fifth criterion concerns behaviour that puts the health and safety of the person being cared for at risk and therefore requires all people living in the home to take into account behaviour likely to have an impact on his development. The sixth and final criterion concerns transport and travel. The knowledge and application of the safety rules in force must be taken into account.

Training for foster families

Foster families must complete a 60-hour induction course - provided by the Département where they live - within two months of taking in their first child. Later, within three years of signing the first employment contract, the foster family must follow a sandwich course over a period of 18 to 24 months (Service-Public.fr, 2023). However, if one member of the foster family has a diploma as a childcare assistant, early childhood educator, specialised educator or nursery nurse, he or she is exempt from all training courses.

The procedure for receiving Unaccompanied Minors

Initially, when a person presents himself as a minor deprived of the protection of his family, the ASE service must organise a temporary emergency reception within a maximum of five days. At this stage, the person's minority and family isolation must be assessed. The assessment consists of a multi-disciplinary evaluation carried out by the Département's services. It takes the form of interviews conducted by professionals with knowledge of migratory routes, political geography, child psychology and juvenile Law (Duclos-Grisier et al., 2023). These interviews must address six points:

- Personal situation, country and region of origin
- Family composition in the country of origin (identity and age of parents and siblings), maintenance of links with the family since arrival in France, presence of family members in France or Europe

- Living conditions in the country of origin (geopolitical context, economic situation, current location of the family, level of education or training)
- Reasons for leaving the country of origin and presentation of the migratory route
- Living conditions since arriving in France
- Plans in terms of schooling and applying for asylum

Once all these issues have been addressed, the assessor sends the assessment report to the departmental council. If the young person is assessed as a minor who is temporarily or permanently deprived of the protection of his or her family, the public prosecutor or juvenile court judge may issue a provisional placement order. The minor is then entrusted to the ASE and may be placed with a foster family or in a children's home. Unaccompanied minors are rarely placed in families and are mostly referred to social welfare children's homes (Duclos-Grisier et al., 2023).

Czech Republic

Recruitment procedure for foster families

Contacting the foster care department

The first thing you need to do is to contact the foster family care department (or the relevant OSPOD worker) in the municipality with extended jurisdiction according to your permanent residence (you can also find it under the name of the Authority for Social and Legal Protection of Children - abbreviation OSPOD). You can use the Electronic Portal of Local Authorities (simply enter the municipality where you live in the search and the system will find the municipality with extended jurisdiction - ORP).

Appointment at the authority

We recommend that you make an appointment at the local authority by phone in advance so that the social workers have enough time to see you. After the first information meeting at the office, you will be asked to complete an application and questionnaire. You can also find samples of these on the MLSA website.

Evidence of safe care conditions

The office will tell you what other documents you will need to provide. This may include proof of health, income, etc. You will also need to assess the other people living in your household, including your children. The OSPOD worker will also want to arrange a home visit. She will want to know about the layout of your home, how you have adapted your home before the baby arrives, etc.

Submitting a complete application to the regional authority

Once the OSPOD has processed these documents from you, it will send your complete application to the regional authority, which is responsible for your professional and psychological assessment.

Professional assessment

The professional assessment will be carried out by the regional authority on the basis of all the documents; the psychological assessment will be carried out by a psychologist appointed by the regional authority.

The professional training

It is a legal requirement that applicants undergo 48 hours of training for "long-term" foster care and adoption and 72 hours for temporary foster care applicants.

Waiting for the child

Once the regional authority has issued a positive decision and you become a foster parent, you are waiting for a child for whom you will be the most suitable new parent.

Criteria for becoming a foster parent

The main motivation of the foster parent must be to provide help, care and support to the child. The foster parent should be a person who accepts the child as he or she is. A person who respects the child's good and poor characteristics, gives space to his or her interests, and cares for his or her cultural and ethnic identity. The foster parent sees the child in his/her uniqueness and accepts him/her with all the difficulties and negative experiences he/she brings from the original family.

In the Czech Republic, we have two forms of foster care. These are long-term foster care or temporary foster care. The requirements for foster parents are therefore slightly different, but for the most part they remain the same.

For both forms of foster care, it is required to have a criminal clearance, no debt, suitable housing conditions, a harmonious family environment, good health and psychological condition, the ability to cooperate in the system of social and legal protection, the ability to care for children with behavioural disorders, the ability to further educate oneself in the field of therapeutic parenting, emotional relationship disorders, etc., the ability to



help the child in processing his/her life story and setting up a relationship with the original family, the obligation to further educate oneself and the fulfilment of the obligation to further educate oneself. Other requirements differ for long-term and temporary care (Dobra Rodina).

Italy

In Italy, foster care can be ordered for a family (preferably with minor children) or even a single person, as long as they can provide the child with the maintenance, upbringing, education, and emotional relations he or she needs. The Law provides that if foster care of the child is not possible, the child shall be placed in a family-type community or, failing that, in a public or private care institution (Vassallo, 2020). The latter must be based in the place closest to that in which the family unit of origin permanently resides to ensure its effective proximity to the family of origin, in line with the inspirational rationale of the entire reform. An amendment to the Law (No. 149 of 28.03.2001) prescribes measures to fully realise the right of the child to his/her own family, which includes both the natural family of origin and the one to which the child may be entrusted due to the difficulties of the family of origin. With the present Law, the child is expressly granted the right "*...to grow up and be educated in his or her own family*", for which the State, the Regions and the local authorities provide support and/or assistance measures to overcome any difficulties related to the neediness of the parents or the parent exercising sole parental authority.

As mentioned above, Italian Law provides that by December 31, 2006, no minor may be placed in a residential care home, with preference given to placement in a foster family or, as a second option, in a family-like community. Placement in a foster family will continue to be ordered by the local social services department unless the parents or guardian have given their prior consent and have consulted the child who has reached the age of twelve and, where appropriate, the younger child, taking into account his or her capacity to judge. Therefore, in the specifics of the process, family custody consists of a temporary intervention that proceeds on two fronts: towards the parents, we take action with support actions so that they solve their problems and fully recover the possibility of following the growth of their children; towards the children, we take steps to temporarily transfer them to another family (identified, depending on the case, within or outside the parental network) able to accompany them during the parents' "support and recovery" intervention (Vassallo, 2020).

The local Social Services can make the decision to implement family fostering or, in the most serious situations, Juvenile Court. The Law also allows parents to "privately" entrust their children to other people. In this case, if the foster parents do not belong to the parental network of the minor, the private custody cannot last for more than six months.

In some cases, custody is decided by the territorial Social Service of residence of the minor who decides on custody (so-called "administrative custody"), without recourse to the Juvenile Court. This happens when the following three elements co-occur: 1) the parents in difficulty agree with the realisation of the family custody (for this reason, we speak in such cases of "consensual custody"); 2) the family situation, even if difficult, is not so serious as to cause significant prejudice to the minor; 3) the presumed duration of the assignment does not exceed 24 months. In such cases, the territorial Social Service can proceed with the family custody provision, notifying the territorially competent Tutelary Judge to obtain the enforceability visa (Giordano, 2022).

Finally, the Juvenile Court intervenes (with the so-called "judicial custody" or "jurisdictional") when at least one of the following cases occurs: 1) the parents in difficulty do not agree with the realisation of the family custody (for this reason, in such cases we speak of "forced custody"); 2) the family situation is serious and causes (or could probably cause) important prejudices on the minor; 3) the duration of the assignment exceeds 24 months (Giordano, 2022).

[Institutions and organisations offering services related to foster care](#)

Austria

The Child and Youth Welfare Agency in Austria is responsible for questions of child welfare and guardianship; contact partners are the local authorities in the federal states. Interested parties have to apply for a foster care permit at the Child and Youth Welfare Office, but this permit can only be issued for one specific child at a time. This means that if this child has returned to his or her family and you want to continue being a foster parent, you will have to submit a foster care permit for another child. Anyone who is interested in taking in a foster child will receive precise information from the social workers at the Child and Youth Welfare Service about the prerequisites and requirements for a foster relationship. For example, regardless of their previous education, foster parents must complete a foster parenting course, work closely with the child and Youth Welfare Services, and provide them with insights into their family life. The Child and Youth Welfare Services regularly check whether the child has integrated well into his or her new foster family and provide advice and support in challenging situations. For example, foster parents are accompanied by a specialist at the beginning of the foster relationship.

The process of Unaccompanied (Foreign/ Refugee) Minors is similar: To take in unaccompanied children, the family must be examined. This so-called suitability check is carried out by the local Child and Youth Welfare Office. Depending on the place of residence, this is the district administration or the magistrate. The Child and Youth

Welfare Services meet all persons living in the household, inquire about the motivation for taking in a child, and conduct a home visit to confirm that the living quarters are suitable for accommodating a child. From a legal point of view, taking in unaccompanied refugee children is a matter of foster parenting, too. Foster families are supervised and accompanied by expert organisations as described above. The youth welfare agency shall check at appropriate intervals, but at least once a year, whether foster children under 16 years of age are being granted appropriate care and education. The persons responsible for the care and upbringing of the foster child must make the care supervision possible. Help for the consolidation of the foster relationship: Foster care of a child under the age of 16 shall be prepared in accordance with its significance for the development of the minor. The Youth Welfare Office has to offer training and further education to foster parents as well as counselling support to the foster child and the family of origin.

Care Supervision: The youth welfare agency shall check at appropriate intervals, but at least once a year, whether foster children under the age of 16 are being provided care and education as defined in the General Civil Code. Those responsible for the care and upbringing of the foster child shall enable foster care supervision.

Greece

Multiple agencies and organisations offer services related to foster care in Greece. First of all, the [Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs](#) is responsible for the overall development and implementation of policies related to child protection, including foster care. Secondly, the [National Centre for Social Solidarity \(NCSS\)](#) is in charge of the organisation of the National Registries of foster care and adoption, candidate foster and adoptive parents, minors hosted in protection structures, as well as the registries of unaccompanied and separated children and professional guardians. It also cooperates with the competent judicial and administrative child protection authorities. Thirdly, the [National Council of Foster Care and Adoption](#) functions as an advisory and consultative body, aiming at enhancing the deinstitutionalisation of minors, by improving the development and implementation of policies related to family-based care. It is noted that both the National Centre for Social Solidarity and the National Council of Foster Care and Adoption have been established as initiatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The responsible institutions for the foster care procedure *per se* are the Social Services of the Regional Units or Regions, where the candidate foster parents reside, as well as the Child Protection Units, if that region has. Child Protection Units are structures that provide protection to children that evidently lack, either temporarily or permanently, a family environment or for their own interest cannot stay there. Their aim is the restitution of the children in a family environment, either through their reunification with the biological family or through their placement in family-based care or their preparation to

reside independently. Also, children's hospitals may provide children a stay if there is not a position for them in such a structure.

The role of the competent institutions for the foster care procedure starts from the receipt of the applications of the candidate foster parents, then follows the conduct of the social research (i.e., investigation of the environment and the capacity of a potential family on providing foster care) and the contact of candidate foster parents with children. Then, the signature of the contract with the foster parents follows, where the rights and obligations of the parties are defined. Last but not least, they are responsible to communicate in a regular basis with the foster family so as to provide assistance and guidance. It is pointed out that responsible for the issuing of an order regarding children's removal from their biological families and their placement to a safe environment (institutional or family care), when it is considered necessary, is the Juvenile Prosecutor.

Finally, there are various non-governmental organisations working in the field of foster care in Greece, such as: [SOS Children's Villages](#), [the Smile of the Child](#) and [Metadrasl - Action for Migration & Development](#).

Romania

The institution at the national level that monitors compliance with related legislation and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities.

At the local level, the county councils have a Child Protection Commission, a body without juridical personality, which is responsible for proposing the necessary child protection measures and validating applications for the issue of a maternal assistant's certificate.

The General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (Maternal Assistance/ Foster Care Service) is the public institution subordinated to the municipal/ county council.

For child protection and family welfare, the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection is responsible for the protection of the rights of the child through counselling services, prevention of separation from the family, and proposes and implements special protection measures (foster care) for children in difficulty or with disabilities.

Romania without Orphans Alliance gathers non-governmental organisations, companies, churches and public entities to join efforts to improve the situation of foster children by integrating them into families.

SOS Children's Villages organisation, present in Romania for over 30 years, supports children in need, promoting the mission that no child should grow up without a family.

The organisation also encourages and informs about maternal assistance through recruitment calls for foster families collected from the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection and through various national campaigns such as "Childhood must not hurt", 2021 - 2022.

Portugal

Child and Youth Protection Commissions (CPCJ) apply the family care measure and monitor its implementation in accordance with the terms set out in the promotion and protection agreement. The implementation of the foster care measure, decided in judicial proceedings, it is directed and monitored by the court designating the specific teams provided in the Law. The institutions and entities indicated in the promotion and protection agreement or in the judicial decision, define and implement the intervention plan, together with the manager of the process of the child or young person. The management of the foster care system is the responsibility of the Social Security Institute (SSI) and the Santa Casa of Misericórdia of Lisbon (SCML). Responsibilities: management of vacancies in foster care, awareness-raising campaigns and encouraging applications to host families; establish guidelines for the selection and evaluation of host families; develop a joint plan for the initial training of foster families, carry out the annual survey of training needs, etc. (Decree-Law No. 139/2019, of September 16). There are several organisations that established protocols with SSI and can implement this measure. E.g., Centro de Bem Estar Social da Zona Alta; Mundos de Vida; OSOD.

France

As explained hereinabove, in France, several organisations offer their services at different levels in the fostering process. While in the majority of cases unaccompanied minors are referred to large-scale foster care structures, they are sometimes taken in by foster families. In this case, foster carers can receive help from a number of organisations and this is what we present below.

Institutions and organisations offering foster care services

The first organisation involved in the fostering process is the ASE (*Aide Sociale à l'Enfance*). Its role is to take charge of children and identify the most suitable placement for them. More broadly, the ASE is also responsible for providing material, educational and psychological support to those placed in care and foster families. To do this, an ASE referent is appointed to monitor each child's individual project and discuss it with the foster care teams. The referent is a professional responsible for supporting the child and his family. He may be asked to approve documents relating to the child in the event of the parent's absence or partial withdrawal of parental authority. In addition, during the

period of foster care, the ASE remains in contact with the foster families, with whom it works to monitor and ensure the development of good communication and thus the successful integration of the foster child.

Associations are also organisations that offer services related to foster care. Numerous associations, such as *Accueil et Famille*, have been set up to deal with the problems of fostering minors. They provide resources such as meetings and conferences to better comprehend the fostering of minors, but they also have practical tools to help foster families (through mediation processes, for example).

Federations offering services related to foster care are also available to foster families. The best known in France is undoubtedly the *Fédération Nationale des Assistants Familiaux et Protection de l'Enfance* (FNAF/PE) (National Federation of Family Assistants and Child Protection) (*FNAF | La Fédération*, n.d.). It is committed to supporting and protecting foster carers and children in care, and it supports more than 2,000 foster carers by defending them before national bodies (e.g., Senate, National Assembly, Ministry of Solidarity and Health, Secretary of State for Children and Families).

Institutions and organisations offering services related to the reception of unaccompanied minors

As explained above, unaccompanied minors are rarely referred to foster families and are most often referred by the ASE to other structures. Here are the two structures most involved in the reception of unaccompanied minors.

The *Maisons d'Enfants à Caractère Social* (MECS). These are social or medico-social establishments dedicated to the temporary reception of children in difficulty. This type of facility may be either a private structure run by an association or foundation, or a public establishment. The MECS come under the jurisdiction of the Council of the Département, which issues an authorisation to take in children under the care of the ASE.

In the north of France, there is also another type of institution offering services related to the reception of unaccompanied minors: the *Dispositif d'Hébergement et d'Insertion des Mineurs Non Accompagnés* (DHIMNA) (Accommodation and integration scheme for unaccompanied minors). This reception unit offers a range of coordinated services designed to promote educational and/or professional integration. Professionals work to create personalised educational projects to help unaccompanied minors with administrative, financial, educational and professional matters (Afeji Hauts-de-France, 2023). This support aims to help young people become independent when they reach the age of majority, in particular by giving them access to working life and accommodation.



Czech Republic

The first institution that people interested in foster parenting meet is the [OSPOD](#). OSPOD is a department of social and legal protection of children at the municipal office of the municipality with extended competence. An [authority](#) that ensures that children's upbringing is not disrupted and that also represents the interests of children in court proceedings. It supervises troubled families, mediates the adoption of children, helps to resolve certain family situations involving children when a court decision is not necessary, etc. This body may also itself make applications for court decisions in the case of minors if it considers it necessary, for example an application to order the child's institutional upbringing. It is most often part of the municipal authority. Thus, those interested in foster care first submit their application to the OSPOD, which later, after further steps, forwards it to the municipal office. Each [county](#) has a department for foster care in its office.

By Law, every foster parent must have a so-called [accompanying organisation](#). The term "accompaniment of foster families" encompasses several basic services to which foster families are entitled under Act No. 359/1999 Coll., on the Social and Legal Protection of Children. This entitlement is exercised on the basis of a contract on the performance of foster care, which is concluded with one of the authorised entities (social-legal protection of children authority, authorised legal entity, authorised natural person), abbreviated as 'accompanying organisation'. These [services](#) are: purposeful respite care, non-purposeful respite care (respite care), provision or mediation of professional assistance, provision of ongoing education of foster parents, support for the relationship with parents and other close persons and supervision of the implementation of the agreement on foster care.

Italy

For the success of family custody, the role of the Institutions, Social Services and the Judicial Authority is fundamental. The national association of adoptive and foster families (ANFAA) mentioned the institutions involved in foster care, which are:

The Regions: At the legislative level, they take the necessary measures to make the interventions required to ensure the right of every minor to grow up in a family, according to the priorities indicated by Law 184/83. They commit the bodies managing the interventions to prepare the necessary deliberative acts to make this right concrete and define the operating procedures concerning the awareness and finding of people available for foster care, the preparation and evaluation of aspiring foster parents, support for the minor and his family from reimbursement of expenses to foster caregivers about the conditions of the foster caregivers the insurance coverage of the entrusted and the fosters, the forms relating to the consent of the assignors and the fosters to the specific project of fostering and the modalities of relationship with the juvenile judicial

authorities. They take steps to find adequate funding and an adequate distinction of the necessary social welfare and health personnel.

The local social service: i.e., the body managing welfare interventions, such as for example Municipality, Consortium of Municipalities. It provides for family custody, with the consent of the parents or guardian "after hearing the minor who has completed twelve years of age or even the minor under the age of 12, in consideration of his capacity for discernment" (consensual custody) implements the provision of the Court for minors "in the absence of the consent of the parents exercising parental authority or of the guardian" (judicial custody). It also carries out educational and psychological support for the minor's family, foster caregivers and, if necessary, the entrusted within the scope of its competencies, in agreement with the health and psychological services of the ASL, facilitate relations with the family of origin and the child's return to it according to the most suitable methods, also making use of the professional skills of the other structures in the area and the work of family associations indicated by the foster parents (articles 4 and 5 of Law 184/ 1983 as amended).

The assignment, consensual, is rendered enforceable (i.e., endorsed) by the guardianship judge and cannot last more than two years but can be extended by the juvenile court "if the suspension of the assignment causes harm to the minor". The assignment can be arranged in case of necessity and urgency even without putting in place the aid and support interventions for the family of origin, given the seriousness of the situation.

The competent social service must immediately report to the guardianship judge or to the juvenile court any event of particular relevance regarding the progress of the assignment. He must present a six-monthly report on the progress of the assistance programme for the foster subjects, on its presumed duration and the evolution of the conditions of the family of origin.

The juvenile judiciary: In ordering the judiciary assignment, the Juvenile Court is required to specify the managing body responsible for carrying out the assignment, which can make use of the collaboration of other services (e.g., health services), the foreseeable duration of the assignment itself, to the personal and family situation of the minor himself, indications on the modalities of the relationship of the minor with his family members, the extension to the custodians of the provisions according to art. 80 of the Law 184/1983 and subsequent amendments (family allowances, tax deductions, parental leave etc).

The health and psychological services of the ASL collaborate with the local Social Service in analysing the personal and family situations of minors because of possible fostering (including the assessment of parenting skills), in preparing the fostering project and in the next support.

The school, which has recorded a significant increase in the frequency of adopted or fostered minors: can concretely contribute to a correct process of socialisation of every minor, to overcoming stereotypes (for example, the representation of the family-based only on biological ties) and to the promotion of cultural change which must see minors as subjects of rights and not objects of adult needs.

Finally, the family fostering intervention designed in collaboration between local operators and the fostering team is implemented through various professional figures, such as social workers, educators, and psychologists. Their role is indispensable in analysing the situation of the minor in difficulty and of his family of origin and in developing the written and shared foster care project.

Approaching and communicating with candidate foster families

Types of candidate foster families

Relative/Kinship Foster Care (Informal and Voluntary kinship care that does not involve the child entering Formal kinship care)

It is the first placement option for children who are in the special protection system. Members of the birth family or relatives such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, who can take care of the child, being directly connected with him/her. Therefore, family connections are maintained and there is no total separation of the child from his family circle once is placed in the foster care system. This category also includes persons from the community who know the child and already have a relationship with him/her.

Traditional Foster Care

It includes both individuals and families willing to become foster families for one or more children in the protection system. They will provide foster children with a safe and healthy environment and emotional support. They attend a series of training sessions to certify and qualify them as foster parents. They either become foster/ adoptive parents on a voluntary basis or receive a monthly income (as is the case with the foster care system in Romania, where the profession of maternal assistant comes to the fore as a form of employment).

Difficulties that candidate foster families face and the needs that they have

Austria

Most of the families with whom interviews were held stated that they had had problems with the families of origin. There were many difficult situations that the foster families were confronted with and had to deal with, but were often not so easy. For example, the L. family said that on the one hand, the foster child wanted contact with the biological parents, which the L. foster family respected. But each time after the visit, the child was hardly responsive for a few days. Once, the foster family even had to call a social worker. The foster child was then sent to a crisis centre. This situation was highly dramatic for all involved. In order to deal with these ambivalent and problematic situations, the families would like to have targeted supervision from the authorities.

The interviews prove that most foster parents were afraid that the children might be returned to the family of origin at some point. This thought is very stressful for many families, even if the probability of a return is low for many families. Another point that was often mentioned in the interviews was the fear that the children would be stigmatised and discriminated against at school or among friends. In the beginning, even their own parents or grandparents would react sceptically to the decision to take in foster children, according to foster family P. *"Exclusion is the worst thing that can happen to foster children"* said foster father P., who had two biological children of his own and took two into care. Another foster family says that their two foster children came with stressful experiences from their home environment and that the two needed therapeutic treatments in the beginning to deal with their traumatised experiences. *"That alone demanded a different, more intensive attention and care in the upbringing than with our biological children"* was the comment of one foster mother.

Another point mentioned by almost all families is that the birth parents would always try to take back the foster children. As a result, the children would suffer again. Another result from the interviews is the many intimate questions that foster parents get from outside, especially families who, instead of taking in a biological child, prefer to take in a foster child. *"Quite intimate questions from distant acquaintances, practically from strangers, why you didn't want a biological child or who was infertile"* was the succinct formulation of one foster father.

Despite all the difficulties with the families of origin, most foster parents also refer to the difficult situation in which the natural parents find themselves and demand more recognition and respect.



Greece

Candidate foster families in Greece face numerous difficulties. First of all, there is a general lack of awareness about foster care and issues related to it. Foster parents referred during the focus group conducted in the context of the project that needed to receive adequate support, direction and counselling throughout the process but also afterwards which was and is lacking. This is considered extremely important given the fact that those children have been deprived of family protection, in many cases they may have experienced neglect or abuse, while their living in institutional conditions has increased the difficulties they have to face.

Secondly, another challenging point is the difficulty of foster families in including children in the family structure and rules. In particular, unaccompanied and separated children are a special group with increased vulnerability and needs. Their placement in foster care may bring significant challenges for their foster parents, including – inter alia – traumatic experiences, psycho-emotional difficulties, complex legal cases, lack of knowledge of the Greek language, difficulties in integrating and adapting to the Greek society. Another difficulty mentioned is the relation with the biological parents, due to their different cultural background. Biological parents may find it difficult to understand how their child has arrived in Greece, lived in a camp, then moved to a hospitality structure and finally, ended up in the care of foster parents. At the same time, they may worry about what fostering their child in Greece might entail in terms of preserving their cultural identity.

One of the main needs of foster parents is that of continuous education. Proper and thorough preparatory training of foster parents is much needed in order to be sufficiently supported to undertake their parental role. Frequent and quality follow-up is also needed so as to ensure that the foster parents are framed to respond adequately to their role and to have a person with whom they can share their concerns. An experiential form of training, based on the participants' participation in activities, such as reflection and self-awareness exercises, etc. is considered the most impactful one. In addition, supportive in their new role may be their contact with other foster families, with whom they can talk about their experiences and difficulties, and exchange advice.

Romania

Firstly, during the focus groups, there was highlighted a poor education of the wide public, as well as of the staff of some public institutions regarding the foster care system in Romania. There has been identified a stigmatisation of children placed in foster care, a fact which leads to their marginalisation and discrimination while in social contexts, especially in school. Moreover, the participants stated that these problems start even from kindergarten and they have noticed that parents and even educators are often reluctant to address the institutionalised children's situation. As a result of this



discrimination, children in times of crisis do not feel they belong to a family or group. In this case, the foster parent has a fundamental role to assume, giving the child security, affection, patience, and a sense of belonging.

Secondly, another obstacle is the bureaucratic one. The carers state that they need more consistent help from the authorities when they encounter some special situations with their child in placement. A major problem is a term that refers to the maternal assistant/foster carer profession, which is still unknown at the macro and institutional level. Around this issue, it is important to mention the cases of children who are stateless, whose process of obtaining citizenship is difficult, and whose cooperation with the responsible authorities is not smooth.

Thirdly, the financial recompensation and support were another downside of the profession. The carers shared that they are paid quite low and receive an amount of money to support the child that is insufficient to accommodate their needs. As an example, the foster care allowance per child is about 200 euros, regardless of the child's age and needs. Thus, the foster parent often needs to compensate for the child's necessities with their own money. Moreover, during the holiday period, no food money is given to children over 14 years old.

Another aspect the participants shared is that their profession doesn't provide holiday periods. Accordingly, they need to perform despite tiredness, stress accumulation or any other situations that might occur.

Portugal

Several obstacles faced by professionals working in the field of foster care, from the point of view of the national context, have been mentioned. The most common one mentioned is work instability, that is, the overload of tasks and the number of cases that are assigned to each professional, making it difficult to follow up on cases and associated families. The difficulty of having resources to select and evaluate families was also mentioned, which suggests a lack of instruments with reliability and validity that are adapted to the Portuguese context. Lack of human resources and sometimes poor collaboration and communication between teams can cause breakdowns or even damage to cases. Another obstacle was linked to the recruitment process, namely, it was mentioned that even though a lot of families apply to become foster care families, during the initial interviews and the foster care training, a lot of them opt to give up after understanding what really means to foster a child (e.g., visits with biological families, psychological problems, adjustments needed within the family).

Regarding the challenges experienced by the foster parents themselves or even families hoping to become foster family, one can see several obstacles. One of the challenges can



be exercising parenting while considering the child's difficulties, whether behavioural and/or cognitive. This is because *"these children have trajectories of danger and abuse with previous experiences of deprivation, which leads to changes in psychological functioning, i.e., in addition to the same typical needs as other children who grew up in a healthy environment, they have added challenges"*. Another difficulty concerns the relationship with the child's biological family, since this relationship is fundamental and beneficial, if the intervention plan so states. Thus, the foster family should be the mediator that does not compromise or harm the child's relationship with the biological family, but rather promotes this in an adaptive and healthy way. A different obstacle and possible consequence is the fact that there are several dropouts in foster families, which happens due to the lack of support given by professionals to these families. In other words, families feel the need for more support, with strategies and assistance from other entities, to be able to help these children with psychological, emotional, and behavioural problems. For families who have the desire and the purpose of becoming foster families, one of the obstacles mentioned in the Portuguese national context is the lack of response by the entities and the bureaucratic process being very extensive. Also, another issue was reported, namely, the fear that some foster parents feel about *"not being able to bond with the child"* or even *"not having a good relationship with the child's biological family"*.

Children face a variety of obstacles, according to the professionals, namely, separation from the biological family, which results from a rupture with the child's primary relationships. This challenge is even more significant when the separation is highly recurrent and children are constantly changing environments, causing further disruptions. However, this aspect has been reported to be common internationally, but rare nationally, as few foster families in Portugal exist. The process of integration and adaptation of the child to the foster family is another obstacle, as challenges or conflicts may arise with some family members and the functioning of the family itself is affected by the integration and expectations of the adopted child. Indeed, it was also mentioned that children face many challenges in terms of contact with their biological family, which, despite being considered crucial, sometimes causes distress in children returning to the foster care family after visiting the biological family.

France

In France, the focus group with the foster families was not easy to set up. Indeed, generally in France, unaccompanied minors do not live with host families, whether they are volunteers or work for the department; this is rare and often informal. Furthermore, the conflict in Ukraine since March 2022 impacted on the sense of solidarity in our department. In fact, the city of Lille has asked all the networks of solidarity families and host families working for the department to welcome Ukrainian families. The reception



system in France is therefore unsuitable, which has an impact on the reception of unaccompanied minors in foster families.

The volunteer foster families who were interviewed explained that although there are advantages to being a foster family, there are still difficulties. They emphasise on the fact that host families and unaccompanied minors can be confronted with cultural differences which can have repercussions in everyday life. Some young people arrive with completely different living habits from the host family, for example at mealtimes they want to sit on the floor. Social codes can be opposed and cause misunderstanding and discomfort for both host families and unaccompanied minors.

Sometimes, they think that unaccompanied minors have high expectations of foster families, they may place them as saviours and thus establish a non-stimulating (wait-and-see) relationship for the complex issues of their integration. Young people also find themselves in conflict of loyalty, where they can jeopardise their plans not to leave the host family, in particular plans for mobility or professional integration in another sector. Lack of availability can also be an obstacle, as volunteer host families work and also have to consider the needs of their own children.

Moreover, foster families describe the young unaccompanied minors as dependent on the department. For example, they cannot leave the French territory except for holders of a residence permit, the young people must ask the department for authorization, and the process can take time. In our region, they cannot go to Belgium, whereas this is a neighbouring country where the population of this area frequently travels.

Foster families also emphasise that the legislation governing unaccompanied minors in France and support for administrative tasks are complex and need to be strengthened. To achieve this, host families still need to be supported and supervised by the social workers who work with unaccompanied minors. Training could be useful, particularly for new foster families, to understand the needs and specific characteristics of unaccompanied minors such as their specific rights or be aware of the trauma they may have suffered during the migratory journey. Finally, remuneration and recognition from the department for volunteer foster families who welcome unaccompanied minors would be appreciated.

Czech Republic

Foster parents face various difficulties in their role. They often lack access to quality education and the public's understanding of foster care is insufficient. The definition of "ordinary matters" that foster parents are expected to handle on behalf of the child is unclear, leading to inconsistencies in decision-making. Foster parents may be unaware of the benefits they are entitled to under the Law, such as free nursery school or after-school



care, resulting in unnecessary expenses. Insufficient information about the child before placement in foster care can pose challenges, and there is a need for a standardised methodology to provide mandatory information to foster parents. There is a shortage of experts in the field of substitute family care, including psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, pedagogical staff, and doctors. Children in foster care often experience high levels of trauma from early childhood, leading to non-standard behaviours. However, these behaviours are sometimes misunderstood as being "naughty" or indicative of conditions like ADHD, resulting in a lack of appropriate therapeutic care. Excessive bureaucracy creates additional burdens for foster parents. Understanding the legislative system and the workings of foster care can be challenging.

While the responsibilities of foster parents are clear, their rights are often unclear. Inconsistencies in the information provided by different offices further complicate matters. Authorities may show a lack of interest in the problems faced by foster families, preferring to avoid difficult cases rather than address them. The quality of judges in the area of family Law may be insufficient. Information about children in care is sometimes withheld from foster parents. Foster carers who apply to become foster parents often encounter a non-partnered approach, lacking information and communication about the process. Children from abroad without all the necessary documents may experience delays in receiving necessary medical assistance due to bureaucratic procedures.

These challenges highlight the need for improved support, training, and communication for foster parents and addressing systemic issues within the foster care system to ensure the well-being and rights of both the children and their caregivers.

Italy

Considering the different types of foster care that families can involve, i.e., intra-family foster care or extra-family foster care, the difficulties that families face are precisely linked to this difference. In general, the families involved in intra-family foster care in Italy believe that the greatest obstacle is determined by the impact of having small children in the house after so many years. This is because these children are often their grandchildren, children of their children that the "foster parents", in this case, the grandparents, have to raise in delicate moments such as childhood or adolescence. This is a real challenge because these foster parents are often people over 60 years of age and whose energies are not like those of a young couple in their thirties. In fact, one of the needs closely connected to this difficulty is precisely that of finding a point of reference in professionals (social workers, counselling centre operators), someone who will listen to them and give them support and the right advice, keeping up with the times in terms of education and behaviours to be adopted with foster children.



Another difficulty that families often face is the weight of expectations. Foster parents inevitably create expectations about what their foster care journey will be like, and sometimes these expectations are disregarded for various reasons ranging from feeling alone and abandoned along the way to communication difficulties with the child, difficulty managing the new family reality and coexistence. Closely related to this, there is another obstacle: learning to create contact, a bond with the foster children. In this sense, one of the most common needs among foster families is being able to compare themselves with other foster families who have already gone through certain phases of the journey. What also emerged from the focus groups is the importance of exchanging experiences, advice but above all all-round support (that is, support from institutions, the community, one's family network).

Finally, there is the difficulty and, therefore, the relative need for adequate training. Most of the families who took part in the focus group expressed the need to be trained at the beginning of the process on the rights and duties of being a foster family, during the process on how to deal with the children, how to manage the other children and any situations of discussion and at the end of the process to, in turn, be of help to the new potential foster families.

[Addressing the needs of the candidate foster families](#)

Family Foster Care (FFC) serves as an alternative family environment for children who have been removed from their biological families that experienced neglect or abuse. The primary aim of FFC is to ensure effective and individualised care that addresses the specific needs of each child, considering their developmental and permanence requirements. When it is not possible for these needs to be met within their birth families, FFC placement is considered preferable over residential care (Bick et al., 2017; Gouveia et al., 2021).

Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of FFC on children's development (Gouveia et al., 2021). Numerous studies found that children placed in FFC demonstrated better behavioural and psychosocial outcomes compared to those placed in residential care. This consensus extends across several countries, supporting the notion that placing children in FFC is more beneficial than residential care.

Despite the generally positive perception of foster parents and Family Foster Care, it seems that the FFC system is not as highly regarded as other social services. One notable issue is the shortage of available foster parents to satisfy the demand for out-of-home care placements for children in need.



Children's social care services face the challenging responsibility of recruiting and retaining suitable foster parents able to provide supportive care for children. These children may also have mental health problems such as mood and anxiety disorders, and cognitive development deficits. To recruit and retain more foster parents, it is essential to examine their motivations and understand the factors that influence their intention to become and remain foster parents. Intrinsic motivation, associated with individual strengths, is a key factor in fostering children (Sebba, 2012). It includes the desire to help and protect children in need, indicating altruism and promoting prosocial behaviours. Altruistic motives in fostering lead to higher job satisfaction and increased retention of foster parents. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation, driven by rewards or external expectations, is less enduring and often linked to lower retention rates. Some foster parents may be motivated by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Successful foster parenting requires high commitment, warmth, affection, and the ability to handle multiple challenges simultaneously (Hamilton & Harris, 2018). In order to meet the needs of foster family candidates, we need to know what motivation current foster families have to become foster parents and what factors help them remain in foster care. The study (Gouveia et al., 2021) identified five primary factors that can influence the decision to become a foster parent:

- Motivational factors. These encompass various motives guiding individuals' behaviour, ranging from self-centred reasons to others-centered motivations.
- Foster parents' personal and family characteristics. This involves the personal attributes of foster parents or prospective parents, as well as characteristics of foster families.
- Values and beliefs. Representations and attitudes that underlie the decision to become a foster parent.
- Social context influences. A set of contextual and environmental circumstances that impact the decision to become a foster family.
- Familiarity with the FFC system. The extent of people's knowledge about the Family Foster Care system.

The literature review in the same study examined factors related to the retention of foster parents, revealing four distinct factors influencing the decision to continue fostering:

- Child protection system: support, relational problems with professionals, satisfaction as a foster carer, and bureaucracy. Bureaucracy and relational problems negatively impact foster families' retention, while satisfaction has a positive



influence, and support can have both positive and negative effects on their retention.

- Foster parent's personal and family characteristics: personal attributes/ characteristics of foster parents, foster family functioning, demographic characteristics, personal or family changes, and experience as a foster family.
- Foster child's characteristics: The foster child's characteristics were found to be highly significant for retention, comprising three subfactors: psychological problems, problems with the child, and few child improvements. Greater psychological problems and general difficulties with the foster child were associated with lower retention rates, as were few child improvements.
- Placement challenges: This factor pertains to the FFC process and includes one subfactor - reunification with the birth family. Reunification with the birth family yielded inconsistent results, impacting both positively and negatively the decision to continue fostering, as it was associated with perceived difficulties when the child leaves.

Based on these studies, we can conclude the importance of recruiting and retaining foster families. Recruitment efforts should highlight intrinsic motivational factors and necessary resources. Providing accurate information about the foster care system is essential. For retention, support from services, empathic relationship training, and foster parent involvement in decision-making are crucial. Continuous training and efficient participation processes can enhance foster parents' confidence and willingness to continue fostering.

Approaching and communicating with children

Difficulties in the fostering process that children face with a focus on unaccompanied and separated children

Difficulties for children in care

Among the partners

In Austria, the main difficulty faced by children in foster care is that they are torn between their biological parents and their foster family. Contact with their biological parents can lead to conflict - particularly over questions of loyalty - which is very distressing for children in care. In Italy, families explained that the main obstacle faced by children in foster care is learning to live with a family, as the child has not always known his foster carers and may find him in situations where he has to learn to adapt to them. Children



also have difficulties accepting that they are alone and need to be looked after by people other than their parents.

In Romania, children in foster care are stigmatised and discriminated against, particularly at school. It seems that parents and educators are often critical of their situation, which marginalises them and prevents them from feeling that they are in their proper place. In Greece, children placed in foster care have in many cases been deprived of protection and have been victims of neglect and abuse. In Greece, unaccompanied minors are a special and vulnerable group who have difficulty integrating into foster families because of their traumatic experiences, their complex legal cases and their lack of knowledge of the Greek language. In France, the main obstacle to the reception system is that it is unsuitable. Very few unaccompanied minors are placed in foster families, and most are directed towards institutions such as DHIMNAs or MECs, where they are gathered together. Few minors even know that they can be taken in by foster families, as there is such a lack of information on the subject. In Portugal, children's psychological problems are the biggest obstacle because unaccompanied minors have been exposed to traumatic things at a very early age, which still have an impact on their behaviour.

Among EU member states

In several EU countries, there is a noticeable shortage of foster families. Indeed, the number of foster families is unevenly distributed across Europe, and in several countries, there are very few: this is the case in Croatia, Estonia, Romania and Greece. Furthermore, support services for foster families are rare or inadequate in Croatia, Hungary, Moldova and Ukraine. Often, the allowances do not even cover children's basic needs, which does not encourage citizens to become foster families.

In some EU countries, foster families are even losing interest because of the lack of consideration shown by governments for their work. In Poland, the number of foster families in 2018 was 0.7% lower than in 2016. This may be due to a lack of public awareness, insufficient professional support and low pay for foster families. In France, the number of foster families is falling for the same reasons. In three years, the number of foster families has fallen by almost 23%.

Difficulties for unaccompanied minors

Example in France

Although unaccompanied minors are cared for by the ASE in the same way as children of French nationality, they are mainly referred to children's homes and not to foster families appointed by the Département. Sometimes volunteer foster families called "solidarity families" choose to take in unaccompanied minors, but this is uncommon. Moreover, the conflict in Ukraine since 2022 has had an impact on fostering solidarity in France. For example, the city of Lille called on all the networks of solidarity families and families



appointed by the Département to take in Ukrainians. As a result, they were all saturated, and unaccompanied minors were unable to benefit from it.

In EU countries

One of the difficulties that unaccompanied minors frequently face is culture shock. It turns out that foster families are not always well informed about the country of origin of the people they are taking in, that they do not always master the language or the culture, and that this can be an obstacle to good communication and therefore an additional burden on the shoulders of the unaccompanied minors.

The language barrier is a significant obstacle at the beginning of the reception process, as the people being looked after may not be completely familiar with the language of their host country, and the carers may have little or no knowledge of the language of the person they are looking after. This can cause communication problems, particularly at the beginning of the relationship. In fact, one might think that it would be wiser to place unaccompanied minors with families that are culturally close to them, but it turns out that negative consequences can also result from these situations. Some children fear that host families with similar origins will pass on information that could put their biological family at risk, and may therefore be distrustful.

Last but not least, unaccompanied minors also face a major obstacle: prejudice. They are seen as violent, even dangerous, and are regularly associated with delinquency, which gives them a bad image with host families who become reluctant to take them in (Ouest France, 2020).

[Addressing the needs of the children. A children-centred approach](#)

Children are the most vulnerable members of society, and it is vital that their needs are addressed and that their well-being is ensured. A child-centred approach prioritises the unique needs, rights and perspectives of children. It recognises children as active participants in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

We have seen in the previous project results that foster children often experience various challenges due to the circumstances that led to their placement in foster care. These challenges can have long-lasting effects on their physical, emotional, and cognitive development. In fact, in a study conducted by Turney, K. (2020), they find that “*children placed in foster care or adopted from foster care, compared to their counterparts, were more likely to experience parental divorce or separation, parental death, parental incarceration, parental abuse, violence exposure, household member mental illness, and household member substance abuse*” (Turney K., 2020). Thus, foster children are at a



higher risk of experiencing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as abuse, neglect, and trauma.

Why the need and the benefits of a child-centred approach?

A child-centred approach places the child at the centre of decision-making and recognises their unique experiences, perspectives and rights. It emphasises children's physical, emotional, cognitive and social needs and recognises them as active participants in their own development². This approach includes involving children in decision-making, ensuring their safety, providing them with quality education and health care, promoting healthy relationships and protecting their rights.

Developing plans that focus on mitigating risks and effectively managing challenges is critical to meeting the needs of foster children. Some strategies might include:

Providing stable and supportive foster care placements. This minimises disruption and promotes positive relationships. Implementation of trauma-informed care approaches to address emotional and behavioural challenges as a result of past experiences. Educational support through individualised education plans, tutoring and resource access. Empowering foster children by involving them in decision-making processes and providing advocacy services.

To address these needs, several publications are available to inform the public about a children-centred approach such as: [“Promoting Protective Factors for Children and Youth in Foster Care: A Guide for Practitioners”](#) as well as [“The impact of Trauma and the experience of Young children in the child welfare system”](#).

Strategies for recruitment

Foster care professionals. Difficulties that foster care professionals face & the needs that they have

Austria

There are significant differences in the treatment of unaccompanied minor refugee children/ youth whose parents do not live in Austria or are unknown. Refugee children and youth are often disadvantaged by the system. The shelters and assisted living

² “A child centred approach means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families” (Working together to safeguard children, 2018).



communities often have much less money available. In addition, these care facilities are inadequately equipped-unlike residential communities that house local children.

Refugees do not have parents on site and are often at the mercy of caregivers and also the system in the asylum system. Opportunities for caregivers and professionals working with refugee children are also very limited, he said. Foster families with refugee biographies are hard to find for the children in question.

Many do not know what they are getting into. Foster families are in constant contact with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate and the birth parents (if they live in Austria). Foster families live in constant fear that the children they have become accustomed to will be taken away from them at any time.

Placement in homes/residential communities or in foster families is only temporary for native children, they say. The children also suffer from being shuffled back and forth again and again. Many of them would have experienced violence and abuse. It is a problem with refugee children if the foster parents are not familiar with the legal conditions. Everything is much more complicated. There is also a lot of bureaucracy. You always have to act in a way that positively impacts the lives of the children involved. In addition, many children and young people are severely traumatised, and trauma work is not really possible because of the legal framework.

Secondly, the children who have fled must first learn the language and familiarise themselves with the host country's realities. Third, it makes little sense to do sufficient trauma work if the children have been in shelters for quite some time and have had little opportunity to be taken in by foster parents. Foster parents would almost have to undergo complex training and gain practical experience before taking in such refugee children. And that is often too complicated for many foster parents.

Care facilities that have taken in foster children should improve conditions significantly. Especially in facilities that have taken in children who have grown up in Austria, the conditions for the care staff are a pure catastrophe (e.g., 24-hour duty without counting the night as working time, a lot of overtime, poor pay, travel distances that are far too long, etc.). In addition, the homes are located far too far away and in very remote areas.

Greece

Foster care professionals - namely social workers and psychologists which are typically adequate to handle such cases in Greece - claim that one of the main challenges they face is that their university studies have not equipped them with the knowledge and tools required to effectively deal with such a sensitive and demanding issue. Thus, their experience in the field was mainly built out of their attendance to relevant training programmes. There is also an absence of adequate number of professionals in this field,



making the realisation of the duties of the existing one's even harder. Moreover, the whole procedure is characterised by long delays due to officialism and bureaucracy. A rather challenging point of their work is the emotional burden they may carry throughout the procedures, due to the fact that there is a significant part of people who are willing to become foster parents, but do not satisfy the requirements and thus their applications are cancelled. Three out of four focus group's participants pointed out the psychological and emotional impact of the cancellation, not only for the candidate foster parents but also for them. As one of them mentioned: *"The couple was so excited. It was heartbreaking even to us to cancel the process due to the woman's minor health problems"*.

One of the main needs of foster care professionals is that of a specialised training. Regarding the topics that such a training shall contain so that better services aimed at foster parents are provided, the familiarisation with the legal framework around foster care is deemed important, as well as education in intercultural fields. As far as the tools and instruments that would facilitate their work with foster parents are concerned, foster care professionals mentioned: a. a clear and brief toolkit explaining the particular procedures and the accompanied legal framework of foster care, b. a common questionnaire intending to investigate foster parents' needs and expectations so that individualised interventions are provided, c. a specific assessment form which would indicate foster parents' psychological and emotional condition, d. supervision, multi-disciplinary cooperation and legal advisers' involvement. According to a participant: *"We feel relieved when we share our difficulties with other colleagues who experience the same situations. New doors open, new ideas arise"*. Finally, the reduction of officialism and bureaucracy will ameliorate the challenges foster care professionals face.

Romania

The main obstacles mentioned by the professionals include:

- The harmonisation of the existing legislation
- The system is too rigid; we need to be more flexible
- Better communication between actors and the lobby on promoting the placement family is needed
- Lack of awareness and informational campaigns for the wider audience (general public)
- The maternal assistance system needs to be reorganised
- Old mentalities regarding adopting (of the general public)
- Public's understanding of the difference between placement and adoption
- The long process of adoption



Portugal

Several obstacles faced by professionals working in the field of foster care, from the point of view of the national context, have been mentioned. The most common one mentioned is work instability, that is, the overload of tasks and the number of cases that are assigned to each professional, making it difficult to follow up on cases and associated families. The difficulty in having resources to select and evaluate families was also mentioned, which suggests a lack of instruments with reliability and validity that are adapted to the Portuguese context. Lack of human resources and sometimes poor collaboration and communication between teams can cause breakdowns or even damage to cases. Another obstacle was linked to the recruitment process, namely, it was mentioned that even though a lot of families apply to become foster care families, during the initial interviews and the foster care training, a lot of them opt to give up after understanding what it really means to foster a child (e.g., visits with biological families, psychological problems, adjustments needed within the family).

Regarding the challenges experienced by the foster parents themselves or even families hoping to become foster families, one can see several obstacles. One of the challenges can be exercising parenting, considering the child's difficulties, whether it's behavioural and/or cognitive. This is because *"these children have trajectories of danger and abuse, with previous experiences of deprivation, which leads to changes in psychological functioning, i.e., in addition to the same typical needs as other children who grew up in a healthy environment, they have added challenges"*. Another difficulty concerns the relationship with the child's biological family since this relationship is fundamental and beneficial if the intervention plan so states. Thus, the foster family should be the mediator that does not compromise or harm the child's relationship with the biological family but rather promotes this in an adaptive and healthy way. A different obstacle and possible consequence is the number of dropouts in foster families, which happens due to the lack of support given by professionals to these families. In other words, families feel the need for more support, with strategies and assistance from other entities, to be able to help these children with psychological, emotional, and behavioural problems. For families who have the desire and the purpose of becoming foster families, one of the obstacles mentioned in the Portuguese national context is the lack of response by the entities and the extensive bureaucratic process. Also, another issue was reported, namely, the fear that some foster parents feel about *"not being able to bond with the child"* or even *"not having a good relationship with the child's biological family."*

According to professionals, children face a variety of obstacles, including separation from the biological family, which results from a rupture of the child's primary relationships. This challenge is even more significant when the separation is highly recurrent and



children are constantly changing environments, causing further disruptions. However, this aspect has been reported to be common internationally, but rare nationally, as few foster families in Portugal exist. The process of integration and adaptation of the child to the foster family is another obstacle, as challenges or conflicts may arise with some family members and the functioning of the family itself is affected by the integration and expectations of the adopted child. Indeed, it was also mentioned that children face many challenges in terms of contact with their biological family, which, despite being considered crucial, sometimes causes distress in children returning to the foster care family after visiting the biological family.

France

In France, the focus group took place with professionals working in a facility that receives unaccompanied minors. They were mainly social workers, psychologists and heads of educational services. These professionals work with more than 40 unaccompanied minors from the age of 14 who are housed in a collective where they each have their own room and a common kitchen.

These professionals face many difficulties in supporting unaccompanied minors. Indeed, the educational team would like to collaborate with more host families, but there are too few of them. In France, we have foster families who are mandated by each department and who are therefore trained and paid, and foster families who are volunteers. Foster families appointed by the department generally do not take in unaccompanied minors because the department does not make them aware of or train them to take in unaccompanied minors. All that's left are the volunteer host families, which are not easy to find.

According to professionals, most families are already strongly solicited for voluntary and charitable actions. They contribute with financial donations but do not move on to the stage of exchange, of contact with the unaccompanied minors. There are also prejudices linked to the public, often generated by incidents that are in the minority, but provoke mistrust.

Moreover, there is a question mark over the reception of unaccompanied minors before the age of 18, because after the age of majority, if the host family no longer wants to accompany them, unaccompanied minors find themselves on the street and cannot continue their integration. If these unaccompanied minors are taken in every day and the family wants to stop taking in the young person, it's complicated, because the establishment cannot reintegrate them. There are no vacancies in the institutions. The duration of care for unaccompanied minors is generally short (less than a year) and does not allow for the establishment of a solid and lasting relationship for the continuation of



the reception after the majority. It's also difficult to support a young unaccompanied minor who is approaching the age of majority, because in France, from the age of 18, unaccompanied minors must obtain a valid residence permit to be able to stay in the country, and these administrative procedures and French legislation are complex and not easy to put in place.

During the focus group, professionals described their needs for a successful foster care system. According to them, the right factors to ensure a good network of foster carers are training and supervision of foster carers and remuneration for other children in the care of child welfare. Unaccompanied minors do not have the same rights and opportunities to grow up in a safe environment when they have experienced significant trauma before or during their migration. Professionals also think that the Creating Care application tool could be interesting to mention all the useful contacts not only for the integration of unaccompanied minors but also for their civil and medical information.

Finally, professionals would like host families to receive comprehensive training on the specific legislation governing unaccompanied minors in France, as well as knowledge of the traumas of migration, their relationship with norms, lifestyle, habits and medicine. Their reactions can be destabilising for untrained and uninformed people. It is important that host families are involved in an intercultural process and that they are aware of the issues at stake. The integration of unaccompanied minors is complex because in addition to administrative regularisation, there are issues related to schooling, work, housing, etc.

Czech Republic

Foster care professionals face several difficulties, including:

- *The amendment of the Law.* The amendment process was insufficiently prepared, with limited public input before its acceptance. The amendment itself allowed for multiple interpretations, resulting in confusion among professionals and inconsistent information provided to families. This lack of clarity undermined the perceived reliability and competence of professionals. Currently, the Law is undergoing another round of amendments.
- *Lack of institutional cooperation.* Professionals working with foster families desire a collaborative team approach involving professionals from OSPOD (The Public Child Protection Service) to ensure effective support for foster families.
- *Training of foster parents.* Some cases arise where foster parents are inadequately prepared or unsuitable for foster care. Disagreements may occur between the Regional Court, OSPOD, and professionals when one entity does not recommend a candidate as a foster parent, while another approves them.



- Education for teachers, judges, and state office workers. There is a need for enhanced education to help these professionals understand the critical needs of children, how to handle children with hidden traumas, and how to expedite the process of placing children in foster care to minimise their time in institutional care. An application could be helpful in providing guidance on working with children who have experienced trauma or abuse.

Addressing these difficulties requires comprehensive efforts, including improved Law-making processes with broader public input, enhanced collaboration among institutions, and comprehensive training programmes for foster parents and professionals involved in foster care. By addressing these challenges, the foster care system can better support the well-being and development of children in need.

Italy

Normally, foster families can contact Social Services if they want advice and assistance. This includes: having information on the path to take, listening to the experience of other families, knowing rights and duties and subsequently welcoming the child with them; providing for his care, maintenance, education and instruction by assuming the necessary psychological, emotional and material attention; guarantee respect for the history of the minor, his significant relationships, his affections and their cultural, social and religious identity; ensure maximum confidentiality on the situation of the minor and his or her family of origin; take care of and maintain relations with the family of origin and with all the other subjects involved, favouring the return of the minor to his own family, according to the indications contained in the foster care project (Ciampa et al., 2014).

This all works but assumes that you have found and are already in contact with foster families. Instead, what the professionals complain about is precisely the lack of foster families! From the focus group with them, the need emerged to find ways and forms to establish first contact with couples and potential foster families since they are scarce. It is a need to raise awareness of the community on the subject, a way to make known the existence of foster care, which is often a taboo subject, wrapped up in beliefs, fears and stereotypes. Another obstacle that professionals often face is the need for training that concerns both themselves and their profession and the families who have already started a fostering process or are about to do so. However, this last obstacle is contextualised in the area where the focus groups took place, which is small and mostly rural and where the professionals themselves have never had so much experience with families.

Towards a new approach to recruitment

Skills that foster care professionals should cultivate

In the field of foster care, the expertise and cultivation of competence of professionals are essential to promote the well-being and positive development of both foster children and foster families. The multifaceted nature of their roles requires a diverse set of skills, particularly in relation to core recruitment strategies. As important facilitators of the recruitment process, foster care professionals play a key role in identifying and nurturing potential foster parents who can provide a supportive and nurturing environment for children in need. This article explores the key competencies that foster care professionals should adopt to optimise the recruitment process and subsequently provide primary support to foster children and their families (Fulcher & McGladdery, 2011). In the context of a new approach to the recruitment of foster families, professionals should cultivate the following competencies:

- *Understanding Children's Needs.* Professionals need to have a deep understanding of the specific needs and challenges faced by children in foster care, such as trauma from previous experiences. This knowledge allows them to identify suitable foster families and provide targeted support.
- *Empathy and Sensitivity.* Developing empathy and sensitivity enables professionals to connect with foster children, biological families, and potential foster parents on a personal level. This connection fosters trust and creates a supportive environment for everyone involved.
- *Effective Communication.* Strong communication skills are essential for building positive relationships with all parties. Professionals must effectively convey the benefits of foster care, address concerns, and provide comprehensive information to successfully recruit and engage potential foster parents.
- *Support and Training.* Providing ongoing support and training to foster parents is vital. Professionals should be equipped to offer guidance, educational resources, and tools to help foster parents navigate challenges and provide the best possible care for the children.
- *Collaboration and Teamwork.* Foster care professionals should work collaboratively with other agencies, services, and professionals involved in the child's welfare. A multidisciplinary approach ensures a holistic and comprehensive support system for foster families.
- *Resilience and Stress Management.* The nature of foster care work can be emotionally challenging. Cultivating resilience and effective stress management techniques is crucial for professionals to maintain their well-being and continue providing quality support to foster families.
- *Recruitment and Engagement.* Professionals should possess effective recruitment skills to attract suitable foster parents. Engaging potential foster families,



addressing their questions and concerns, and providing accurate information will encourage more individuals to consider becoming foster parents.

In conclusion, the field of foster care demands competent professionals who possess a diverse skill set to effectively promote the well-being and positive development of foster children and families. Foster care professionals, as crucial facilitators in the recruitment process, should focus on cultivating the identified competencies to optimise recruitment strategies and provide essential support to foster children and their families. Embracing this new approach to recruitment can lead to better outcomes for all involved, strengthening the overall foster care system and enhancing the lives of vulnerable children in need of nurturing and supportive environments (Brown et al., 2014).

[The role of the professionals in demystifying myths around foster care. Practical strategies focused on - but not limited to - foster care for unaccompanied and separated children](#)

As in all subjects, people create myths around foster care, but acting on these myths or prejudgements does not produce positive and desired results for the recruitment of foster families. It's essential for professionals in the field to demystify these myths, since these arise due to preconceived judgments that are often incorrect.

Social workers play an essential role in foster care and in connecting the system with families. In addition to their involvement with families, social workers also ensure that there is screening and training for interested families and aim to emotionally support parents and children in adapting to the new family environment.

It is also crucial for case workers and agencies to adopt a different kind of behaviours to use with foster families and engage them, such as professionals meeting the family where they are and planning with them (not for them), setting mutual goals, providing relevant and beneficial services for the families and finally, professionals spending sufficient time with the families in order to provide everything essential needed.

So, in order to demystify them, the community needs to present knowledge on the topic. Some myths around foster care are:

- *“There is non-financial remuneration for foster families”*
- *“Teenagers are the most difficult to foster”*
- *“All children in foster care are juvenile and have psychological problems”*
- *“I can't foster because I would get too attached”*
- *“Foster parents should never adopt the foster child”*
- *“I must be already a parent”*
- *“Foster care and adoption are similar processes”*

- *“Foster parents take the children from their biological families”*
- *“Foster families compete with the biological families”*

What strategies can we use to demystify these myths?

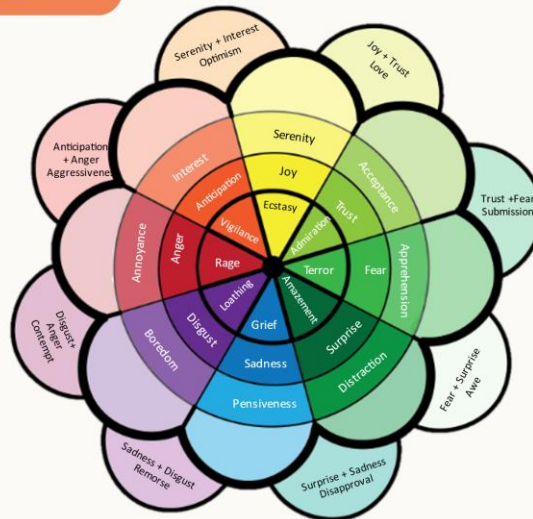
- Engaging the potential foster care families as key decision-making partners;
- Provide clear and simple material with information regarding the fostering process from the beginning to the end (including simple summary of the legislation, criteria, rights and responsibilities);
- Identifying possible droughts around the foster care process early in the recruitment process;
- Tracking and acknowledging progress within the process regularly;
- Promoting transparent discussions of possible problems and identifying the strengths;
- Listening to the potential care family's concerns and providing resources/ support;
- Focusing on bettering family skills instead of providing insights;
- Sharing transparently the procedures implemented by the responsible entities (e.g., courts, social security);
- Discussing openly expectations;
- Guaranteeing frequent visits with all the main actors of the process (foster care parents, children, family of origin) under the supervision of the professionals responsible for the process;
- Organising meetings between experienced foster carers and newly qualified ones to share experiences and obtain testimonials.

Practical tool for the professionals to engage all families and raise awareness in the community towards the need for foster carers and deinstitutionalisation

Creating Care partners developed a tool to engage families in foster care. This tool (**insert link of the website directing to the tool**) intends to help professionals that contact potential foster care families (case workers, social workers, psychologists, etc.), to engage the community and raise awareness about the need to increase the number of foster carers as a strategy towards deinstitutionalization. It was designed as a practical instrument that provides comprehensive information to encourage social solidarity and responsibility among all members of the community. This document also offers some activities that professionals can implement with foster families or potential foster care parents to engage and motivate them to foster a child. The exercises are exemplified below:

#The Wheel of Emotions

Activity



#The Wheel of Emotions

Duration: 1h

Instructions

- Present the wheel of emotions and explain the 8 primary emotions: Anger; Anticipation; Joy; Trust; Fear; Surprise; Sadness; Disgust.
- Know that primary emotion has a polar opposite, based on the physiological reaction each emotion creates. E.g.: Joy is the opposite of sadness (Connect vs withdraw); Fear is the opposite of anger (Get small and hide vs get big and loud); Disgust is the opposite of trust (Reject vs embrace).
- Have a prepared box with some cards, each with a different emotion.
- In turn, each person draw a card and tell the group about the emotion and an episode in which he or she experienced that emotion and how they dealt with that.
- After one complete circle, ask whether everyone would have felt that way in that circumstance, whether anyone might have felt differently and above all whether the needs were the same for everyone and alternative ways of dealing with that emotion.
- The facilitator exemplifies with scenarios where those emotions could emerge in a context of foster care.

#The Box of Beliefs & Myths

Activity

Myth 1.

My family and I will get too attached to the child and it would be too hard to see the child leave us.

Myth 2.

Fostering a child will be an opportunity to adopt more easily.

Myth 3.

All foster children are delinquents and have psychological trauma that is beyond "repair".

Myth 4.

Write my ththere

 _____


Myth 5.

Write my ththere

 _____

Myth 6.



Write my ththere

 _____

#The Box of Beliefs & Myths

Duration: 1h

Instructions

-  Ask the group to write a believe that they have regarding fostering a child or use the myths available in this tool.
-  Go through all the statements, one by one and start a discussion around the myths and believes that emerged. Provide the "Truth" of each "Myth".

Truth 1.

One of the main goals of foster care is to offer love, stability and a safe environment to a child. Before fostering it's important to discuss with your family about your expectations, having in mind that foster care is temporary, and the goal is (when this is possible and in the best interest of the child) to return to the biological family. Though it can be emotionally hard to see a child go back to the biological family, it's important to focus on the fact that the child received the love and stability they needed during a rough period of their times and now it's safe for them to return to their family.

Truth 2.

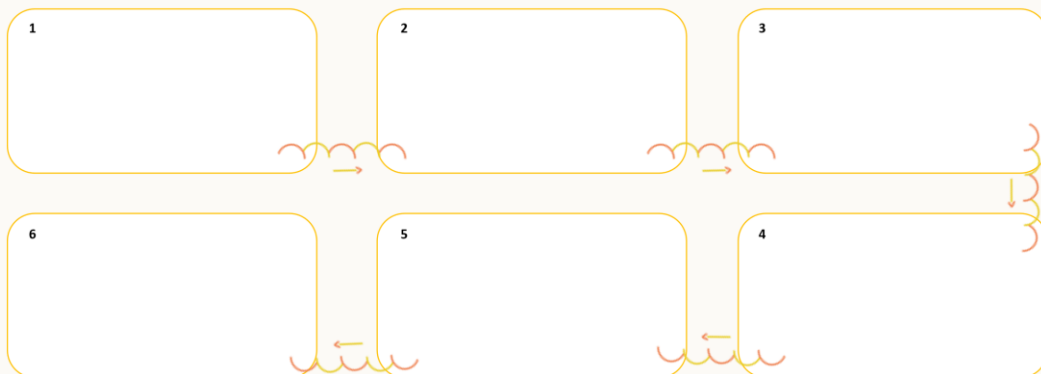
One of the main goals of foster care is to offer love, stability and a safe environment to a child. Before fostering it's important to discuss with your family about your expectations, having in mind that foster care is temporary, and the goal is (when this is possible and in the best interest of the child) to return to the biological family. Though it can be emotionally hard to see a child go back to the biological family, it's important to focus on the fact that the child received the love and stability they needed during a rough period of their times and now it's safe for them to return to their family.

Truth 3.

The main goal of foster care is to provide a secure environment for a child temporarily and it has different procedures, recruitment process and legislation from adoption. In some countries is not possible to adopt the child that you foster.

#The Journey of a Foster Care Family






Activity



#The Journey of a Foster Care Family

Duration: 45min

Instructions

-  Ask your participants to **write** or **draw** what is for them the journey to become a foster care family since the manifestation of interest until integrating a child in their home, and share it with the group.
-  Take the opportunity to explore/manage expectations and clarify possible doubts around this process.
-  If you see that your participants are blocked or not sufficiently aware of the steps, help them with the main key processes, such as manifestation of interest/ contacting responsible entities, interview with foster care families, initial training, being a part of a foster care data base, etc.
-  If you have in your group a family that already fostered ask them to draw and describe their own journey and share it with the rest of the group.
-  Additional tip: refer to your participant that this exercise can be very helpful to do with the future foster children or biological children to discuss expectations. The potential parents can suggest their children to draw their journey before the foster care process and the expectation on how the journey will develop during the fostering process.

#True or False

Activity

True or False

To become a foster care parent, I must:



- 1.... have experience in raising and caring for children
- 2.... be married or have a stable partnership
- 3.... be at least 18 years old
- 4.... be an applicant for adoption
- 5.... have a paid job
- 6.... not engage in paid activities
- 7.... be a citizen of the country I apply to become a foster parent



#True or False

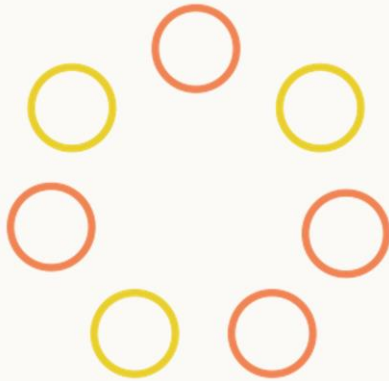
Duration: 30min

Instructions

-  Conduct a "true or false" game with the group, in the following manner:
 1. explain that to become a foster care parent there are some fundamental criteria;
 2. Present some quotes and ask participants to respond if they believe the quote is true or false.
-  Additional tip: you can conduct this activity using Kahoot (<https://kahoot.com>) or other online interactive platform.

#Circle Time

Activity









Rules:

- ✓ Listen actively
- ✓ Speak only when you have the totem
- ✓ Take turns
- ✓ Respect the time given by the facilitator to speak
- ✓ Pass if you don't want to answer a question
- ✓ Respect confidentiality
- ✓ Speak from the heart

#Circle Time

Duration: 1h


Instructions

-  Place chairs in a circle and ask all participants to sit;
-  Explain that the communication in a circle takes place according to shared rules, such as that the participation is ritualised by the passing of an object (the totem can be a toy, a pen, etc.);
-  Do some rounds focusing on more general topics to show the participants how this works in terms of rules and also as a teambuilding exercise that will allow participants to know better each other. Some topics to be addressed could concern favourite games, hobbies, favourite vacation etc.
-  **Conduct a circle on the fears associated with foster care** (or other that you consider relevant);
-  After finishing the circle make sure that you make a restitution of the contents that have emerged, highlighting the important elements and enhancing the emotional experiences of each person with respect to the activity carried out;
-  Remember that this exercise is to validate the fearful feeling but also to demystify some potential misconceptions around foster care.

#Letter to myself

Activity

Dear "Future me"...



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.....

.....

#Letter to myself

Duration: 30min

Instructions

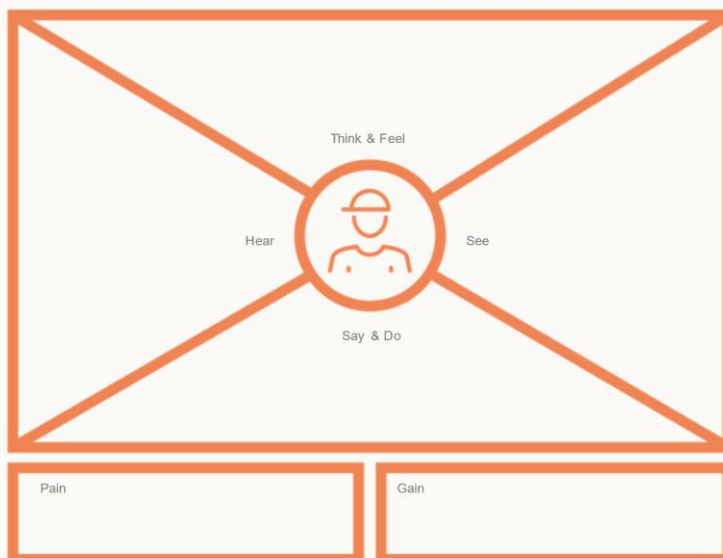
-  Challenge potential foster care parents to write a letter to themselves that should reflect their motivations to welcome a child, how the child will be integrated within the family, and what are the benefits for the child and for the family to be a part of this process.
-  Tell the parents that after writing the letter they may share with all what they have write or keep it to themselves . If some participants opt to share the letter, take this opportunity to discuss the benefits and motivations that emerged and point out similarities or disparities.
-  Ask if after hearing other letters they would change their own. Suggest that they keep this letter and consult it after fostering the child and to reflect if their expectations suffered changes.
-  Additional tip: If there are some participants that face difficulties in starting the letter, provide them some quotes as guidelines, for example: *My main motivation to become a foster care parent is... My family will benefit from us welcoming a child in the following manner... We will ensure that the child that we welcome will receive... When facing challenges, I will remind myself that...*

#Building Empathy

Activity

Consider this Persona to fill the Empathy Map:

"Gabriel is a 6-year-old boy that fled war and come to your country as a refugee. He has lost his father during the conflict and came with his mother, that is not able to provide for him. He has lived for the past year in a residential care home. He will be soon placed in foster care and hopefully return to the biological mother when possible."



#Building Empathy

Duration: 25min

Instructions

- Present the empathy map tool to the participants and explain that all participants must fill this tool individually and explore the perspective of a foster care child.
- If you prefer, you can build several "personas" and allow the potential foster care parents to build empathy towards different children.
- Ask participant to consider the scenario/persona included in the activity to fill the empathy map with what Gabriel
 - is thinking/ feeling;
 - sees around him;
 - hears about his situation/what others say about himself;
 - does/says about being in this situation and about being placed in foster care.
- Ask participants to finalize the map by indicating the obstacles (pain) and the benefits (gain) of being placed in foster care.



Practical tools on how foster care professionals can monitor and evaluate foster parents after the decision on foster care

In the partner countries

In Austria, the youth protection service must check at appropriate intervals - but at least once a year - that children under the age of 16 in foster care are receiving appropriate care and education. To this end, the persons responsible for the child's care and upbringing must make it possible to monitor the care. In Austria, the *Child and youth protection agency* is required to offer training and further education to foster parents, making it possible to monitor them fairly closely. In the Czech Republic, the supervision and monitoring of foster families is quite extensive. The authority responsible for the social and legal protection of children (the OSPOD) prepares an individual child protection plan for each child, which the foster family follows with the help of support organisations. Each foster family chooses a support organisation and a person from that organisation is then assigned to them as their main working partner. Together, they sign an individual child protection plan, which must be respected by the foster family. Once the child has been admitted, regular contacts and visits are organised to check whether the situation is evolving positively or whether any problems have arisen. Every six months, the accompanying organisation draws up a report for the OSPOD on how the child is doing, what progress the foster parents have made and whether they are fulfilling their legal obligations. In France, foster families are required by Law to undergo an annual inspection to check the physical and moral conditions of the foster home. The checks focus mainly on the child's living space, the material aspects of the foster home (clothing, games and belongings) and the health and safety of the premises. In Greece, regular and special meetings are scheduled with the foster family to ensure that the child lives in a safe environment. At the same time, the body responsible for monitoring foster care draws up and submits an activity report every six months to the public prosecutor responsible for minors. However, in the event that exceptional information needs to be reported, the public prosecutor may be informed immediately. In Portugal, monitoring mechanisms include face-to-face visits in the residential context of the foster family, supervision of the child or young person's contacts with his or her family and private time with the child at least once a quarter, to be carried out outside the context of the foster family. The child's living conditions and emotional environment are also monitored, as are the technical assistance needs of the child in care and his or her foster family.

In the European Union



The situation regarding the assessment of foster families is very different within the European Union. In Germany, a lot of resources are allocated to supervising foster families. In most services that supervise foster families, a professional is generally responsible for 12 to 15 children in care and therefore has much more time for children and families than in other Member States where professionals are overloaded. This is particularly the case in France, where families are supposed to be visited by an educator once a year, but sometimes do not receive any monitoring visits for several years due to a lack of resources.

Generally speaking, the timing and management of checks vary greatly from one Member State to another. In Belgium, inspection tests must be carried out every five years. In France and Romania, checks are part of the approval procedure for foster parents, which must be renewed every five years in France and every three years in Romania. In the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, foster parents must be assessed every year and a new certificate of good conduct may be required (Reimer et al., 2021). In Ireland, the general provisions stipulate that police clearance certificates must be renewed every three to five years. In some Member States, such as Hungary and Poland, the Law lays down the frequency of examinations of foster parents' state of health and psychological fitness, but there is no provision requiring criminal record checks (Reimer et al., 2021). In other Member States, such as Greece, there are general provisions stipulating that the initial requirements (including a clean criminal record) must be applied throughout the placement period. However, there are no specific provisions stipulating the frequency and procedure for reviews.

The monitoring tools, frequency and nature of reviews therefore vary widely from one Member State to another.

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