CreatingCare
Creating a Safe Environment for
Children in need in Foster Care

**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Creating Care

PR2 - "Tool for Understanding Foster families' needs, perceptions and experiences".

Index:

1. Introduction

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children should have adequate living conditions for their physical, social and mental development in a positive family environment. Despite residential care measures being initially created to protect and provide for the needs of children, research has shown that institutional care is harmful, harms psychosocial development (OHCHR, 2011) and may be particularly dangerous for small children (UNICEF, 2011). On the other hand, foster care has a positive impact on the children, such as the recovery of language, attachment, psychological adjustment, recovery of behavioural problems and symptoms of post-traumatic stress, academic performance and employability (e.g., Nelson, Fox, & Zeanah, 2014; Ahmad et al., 2005).

In the past decade, Europe has followed a policy of deinstitutionalisation and the European Commission's recommendation is to eradicate institutions for children, focusing on foster care measures (European Commission, 2013), especially in the case of children between 0 and 3 years old and children with fragile life paths (Eurochild, 2010). In light of the recommendation towards deinstitutionalisation and the increased number of children living in residential institutions, especially unaccompanied children in Europe, the main aim of this project is to prepare and enable professionals how to deal, recruit and communicate with foster families considering their needs and the reality of the unaccompanied children. Given this, our proposal puts the inclusion of children at risk (with a special focus on unaccompanied children) at its core. It pushes for alternative care measures, as is the case of foster care measures, by training and supporting both professionals and foster families, addressing stereotype and prejudice-based beliefs around foster care families and unaccompanied children in the foster care system. More specifically, Creating Care project proposes to strengthen the professional development of professionals by developing a set of project results and activities to support them: a tool for family engagement, a Training course on communicating skills and strategies in the process of recruiting foster families, based on professionals and foster families' needs, that will culminate with an app to support foster families after fostering a child.

The project partnership is composed of Austria (Compass and the University of Innsbruck); Italy (San Giuseppe ONLUS); France (Afeji); Romania (EASI); Portugal

(Aproximar and Ainova); Greece (KMOP); Czech Republic (Mise-Hero) and focuses on developing structures of social support and care to fit the needs of both professionals and families, namely training professionals and enabling them with communication and recruitment skills and creating a support app for families. It is expected that foster families and potential foster families receive more support that is adjusted to their specific needs during recruitment. Therefore, more families may be encouraged to welcome children, and future/potential foster families may become more motivated to become foster families or more open to the possibility of welcoming an unaccompanied child. Additionally, a wider range of support not only during the recruitment process by the professionals that accompany the families but also after the fostering process is completed, through access to useful and nearby services, will facilitate the foster care period. Thus, providing the child with a healthier and more positive environment for their development and inclusion not only in foster families but in society and therefore taking a big step to achieve the needed transformation of foster care families and respective children's services across Europe.

Research shows that foster families need more available professionals to support them, listen and collaborate in resolving their problems, be more valued in terms of their role, and be more involved in the processes as partners (Triseliotis et al., 2000). The lack of contribution in decision-making processes is a reason for being dissatisfied or quitting fostering (Geiger, Hayes, & Lietz, 2013).

In the same line, *Article 12* of the United Nations (1990) states that whenever a decision which affects a child is taken, his or her opinions, wishes and needs must be taken into account regardless of his/ her gender, religion, social status or situation having in attention to his/her age and degree of maturity. With that in mind, and complementary to the PR1 Overall Transnational report, this document consists of designing a tool for understanding foster families' needs, perceptions and experiences, and conducting focus groups with them, having the additional benefit of including these families in a decisive data gathering process.

Additionally, we have included the children as participants to give a voice to unaccompanied children and to include helpful input from the children's perspective in the profile of these families. The participation of children, in this case, of the unaccompanied children, has been essential, allowing professional/foster parents/stakeholders to contemplate and act upon the views, perspectives and needs

expressed by children, ensuring that the information they provided leads to changes which are favourable for them (Council of Europe, 2009).

These papers guarantee the success of the recruitment process of foster families by building a profile of foster care families, complemented by the input of the unaccompanied children, across partner countries, in terms of their common characteristics. The main aim behind the focus group with the families and the profiling is to understand the reality of these families both before and during the fostering process by gathering information on their common characteristics, experiences, concerns and needs and to understand what kind of support they receive from the system and what kind of the support they would like to receive. Before conducting the focus groups, the consortium did a brief desk research on foster care families' reality at the national and international levels to understand foster parents' motivations, challenges and characteristics. This kind of input helps integrate foster parent feedback into the system and strategies, standards and framework in retention and recruitment policies.

It expected an increased knowledge of the foster family's realities on national and international levels, from the families point of view, as well as Result Description (including needs analysis, target groups, elements of innovation, expected impact and transferability potential) as from the unaccompanied children's perspectives, and understanding where the families stand in terms of fostering unaccompanied children.

2. Foster care families' reality in the partners' countries

2.1 Methodology

Each partner from Austria, Italy, Portugal, Czech Republic, Greece, Romania and France held desk research on the search for foster families' needs, perceptions and experiences. They collected data about the age of the foster families and foster children, the nationality of the foster families and foster children, and the geographical location of the families (this data can be important for the app development since it will have a geo-location feature). The tools used are Internal information, online research,

and related Institutions' research. The desk research regarding the foster families' needs, perceptions and experiences among the partners' countries intended to enrich the information and help the recruitment process of foster families by building a profile of foster care families, complemented by the input of the unaccompanied children, across partner countries, in terms of their common characteristics. The main questions we intended to tackle were "Who are these families? What do foster care families have in common on a national and a transnational level? What encouraged them to become a foster family in the first place?

This report intends to summarise what research shows in the partner countries and allows us to compare the realities of foster care families and foster care children across Europe.

Moreover, after collecting data, partners held two focus groups: one with families and one with children. The focus group with families aimed to build profiling of foster families and their needs and tackle the topic of unaccompanied children in the foster care system. Each partner met families and children/minors in person, online via Zoom or phone as in the case of the Czech Republic or Italy. All the partners had numerous difficulties reaching the fostering family, so professionals have been used as mediators to foster families for submission and collation of the pre-prepared focus group questions.

All the participants signed a consent form, but not the families who preferred to be anonymous; for them, partners just read the participants' information sheets and the lists of questions by phone. Each focus group lasted at least one hour and a half, and all partners adapted the questions according to the situation with families and also with children; after the focus groups each partner prepared a national report with the data collected from foster families.

In total, we reached and interviewed 32 families: three from Austria, two from France, seven from Greece, six from Italy, seven from Romania, three from Portugal and four from the Czech Republic. We also held activities with 72 children: forty-four from Greece, one from Italy, seven from France, seventeen from Romania, and three from Austria; unfortunately, no one from Portugal and the Czech Republic.

2.2. France

In **France**, a national survey "*National survey on family assistants | Direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques (solidarites-sante.gouv.fr)[1]*" conducted in 2019 interviewed the family assistants, with the collaboration of INSEE. They are contacted by telephone when possible or directly at their home to check that they are concerned by the survey and to organise the interview during which the questionnaire will be administered. The survey aimed to investigate the conditions of the practice of foster families, focusing in particular on their complex positioning, the obstacles to their professionalisation and the recognition and attractiveness of the profession. Still, the survey results are not available yet, but it is important to focus on the need to investigate this field. Other information in France comes from the 2018 book "*Foster parenthood in Europe Theoretical perspectives and professional practices*"[2], which focuses on the situation of foster families called "family assistant". The professionalisation of this role is a debate at the national level. The document shows that Europe is rich in various policy choices in child protection and care measures ranging from institutional to foster or extended family care or from professional to voluntary status. The European intersection opens up a dialogue allowing a better understanding of the political and institutional choices and practices in the different countries.

After Law No. 2022-140 of 7 February 2022[3] on the protection of children, which aims to improve the situation of children protected by the ASE (French child protection system), important measures were adopted, such as the recognition of the role of family assistants, with participation in the development and monitoring of the child's project; the revaluation and harmonisation of the remuneration of family assistants and the possibility of allocating a weekend off once a month. Despite this, however, it remains that statistics, data and research on foster care are scattered and insufficient. The place and the role of the family environment are not that clear; the exit from foster

---

[1] 2019, National survey on family assistants https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/sources-outils-et-enquetes/lenquete-nationale-sur-les-assistants-familiaux#:~:text=Avec%2076000%20enfants%20accueillis%20fin,l%27ordre%20de%2040%20000.

[2] 2018, Foster parenthood in Europe Theoretical perspectives and professional practices *https://books.openedition.org/pup/50093*

[3] 2022, Article "FAMILY ASSISTANTS: WHAT WILL CHANGE WITH CHILD PROTECTION REFORM" *https://www.cneh.fr/blog-jurisante/publications/organisation-sanitaire-et-medico-sociale/assistants-familiaux-ce-qui-va-changer-avec-la-reforme-de-la-protection-des-enfants/*

care family is often unprepared even though it is a major step, and family assistants do not feel supported enough in their professional activity.

In 2017, a study on *Study on the benefits of mentoring for unaccompanied minors[4]* conducted from March to July 2017, provided an opportunity to gather the testimonies of 10 young people, former UFMs (aged between 18 and 33) as well as those of 9 mentors. The sample for this study was drawn up with the contribution of the heads of the branches and presidents of associations in the France Parrainages network and shows how mentoring fosters inclusion, integration is a mutual enrichment. The mentors provide the youngsters with emotional stability and a permanent anchor. Testimonies show that the youngsters do not only know 1 mentor but also their husband/wife, children, mother/father, etc. Nevertheless, a section of the report is dedicated to one interesting argument; the absence of a family environment, a lack often mentioned by the young people met during the interviews.

2.3. Greece

In **Greece**, finding data and gaining a global picture of alternative care for children is very difficult, both in the public and private sectors. And although statistical data regarding foster care numbers are held, there is no qualitative data regarding the profile, background and characteristics of (potential) foster carers[5]. What we know from the first *Quarterly Report[6]* for the year 2022 released by the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) regarding the latest data related to foster care and adoption is that there are currently 1,482 minors (including 73 unaccompanied minors) living in child protection units in Greece, of whom 602 have been deemed suitable for foster care and 103 suitable for adoption. However, in the same period, there were 377 applications for foster care from interested prospective foster parents compared to 2,332 applications for adoption. But in general, there is a low interest and a lack of foster carers in Greece, as most prospective parents opt for adopting a child. Also, most children in need of foster care are 6 to 12 years old, but most prospective parents

---

[4] *https://www.france-parrainages.org/documents/47*

[5] 2022, *https://eurochild.org/uploads/2022/02/Greece.pdf*

[6] First Quarter 2022. Data and Figures of the Information System *https://paidi.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/entipo-APRIL-2022_BB.pdf*

prefer infants. As for the age of foster carers, anyone aged 25 to 75 may apply for fostering, and the age difference between the foster child may be from 18 to 60 years. In addition, there is a need to raise awareness about foster care and incentivise people to become foster care parents. Also, foster parents' rights and responsibilities do not align with everyday needs and situations.

In this sense, appropriate training and preparation of foster parents are considered essential to enable them to manage the challenges they may face. Based on the current legislative framework in Greece (Ministerial Decision 4489/11.10.2019), the successful completion of the relevant training is a necessary condition for the registration of candidate foster parents in the Special Registry of Candidate Foster Parents (article 6, paragraph 2 of Law 4538/2018) and their subsequent connection with children. The training[7] provided to prospective foster carers is free, lasts 30 hours and includes six teaching modules, such as expectations of foster parents, caring for children with special needs, understanding the parental role and so on. The aim is to provide foster carers with a better understanding of issues related to the context and procedures of fostering and the complexities of parenting in fostering. However, it should be clear that even if specific training exists for prospective foster parents, it does not cover all aspects of foster care. There is also a lack of continuous education and support for foster parents.

So, it is possible to note two major issues regarding foster care in **Greece** as shown in "Alternative family care in Greece; annexe to the ALFACA Manual[8]. The first is a lack of public awareness and knowledge of foster care leading to misunderstandings about the concept of family care, parental role, obligations and legal rights. This is attributed to the fact that Greece has a longstanding history in institutional care, and therefore deinstitutionalisation is not an ineffective practice yet. Moreover, families consider fostering an alternative form of adoption, leading to frustration and disappointment. Thus, prospective foster families apply for long-term fostering, which leads to complications for children about to be reunified with their relatives and need short-term placements. Also, prospective foster carers' expectations regarding foster children pose an additional challenge. It is observed that they set specific age, gender and origin criteria, being interested in fostering younger children originating from

---

[7] 2019, Training Manual for Prospective Foster Parents https://www.anynet.gr/pubnr/Training
[8] 2019, https://www.anynet.gr/pubnr/Training

countries whose culture is not so different as compared to Greece; therefore, unaccompanied minors are not usually preferred.

Furthermore, an *AMIF European project*[9] led by the Organisation CIDIS in Italy in collaboration with KMOP - Social Action and Innovation Centre from Greece, ISMU from Italy, Porcausa from Spain, HFC from Cyprus and JRS Malta from Malta offers some of the primary conclusions drawn regarding foster parents' profiles in Greece include a lack of information regarding what is foster care and the background of foster children. For example, prospective foster parents are often unaware that the foster child may have a different background from their own, such as being a refugee, migrant, or Roma, and also that the child may have a different skin colour, and cultural and religious background. Moreover, many foster parents are unaware that the foster child is not an orphan but has a biological family with whom they need to be in contact. At the same time, even parents who apply for fostering often retain the hope that fostering will develop into the child's adoption. In addition, professionals involved in foster care in Greece shared that prospective foster carers often place restrictions on the profile of the child they wish to foster. Thus, most want children of infant or toddler age, of the white race, of Greek origin, and without disabilities, making it extremely difficult to match them with the vast majority of children in child protection institutions. As a result, very few foster placements for unaccompanied or separated children have taken place, and professionals have faced particular obstacles and difficulties in achieving them. Specifically, foster parents were concerned about the psychological trauma the children may carry, the absence of a complete medical and psychosocial history, and the inability to support a child with a different cultural profile and religion.

2.4. Portugal

Data shows that in **Portugal**, the genesis and the practical implementation of the measure have significant disparities compared to the current legislation, namely when analysing the practice of the Social Security service. . From the Annual report[10] developed by Social Security Institute for 2020, it is possible to observe that the Porto district - in the northern region (Porto, Vila Real, Viana de Castelo and Braga) has

---

[9] 2022, FA.B! "Family-based care for children in migration", https://www.fabtogether.net

[10] 2021, CASA 2020 - Relatório de Caracterização Anual da Situação de Acolhimento das Crianças e Jovens https://www.seg-social.pt/documents/10152/13200/CASA+2020.pdf/b7f02f58-2569-4165-a5ab-bed9efdb2653

more children and young people placed in this measure response (62%; 73 children). The Autonomous Region of Madeira is the second area of the country with the most foster care families, representing 20% (40 children) of the national placements. On the other hand, Lisbon district had, at the time of this report only 18 children and young people placed in foster care during this year. The foster care system analysis in **Portugal** starts from the consideration that despite the approval in 2019 of a new foster care law, specialists argue that there are no adequate training and support available for foster families and that deinstitutionalisation must remain one of Portugal's priorities during the recovery process. This shows, in fact, a lack of a proper framework to develop integrated community support mechanisms[11]. Another important issue is related to the fact that foster care is weakly represented in the Portuguese protection system. In response to the relative scarcity of literature on family contact based on the experiences of children and adults in caring roles, a study has been developed by InED, the Center for Research and Innovation in Education from the School of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Porto, entitled "Contact in Foster Care: patterns, Outcomes and Management Models[12]." The general objective of the project is to investigate the results of contact between the child or young person in foster care and their family of origin or the reasons for its non-existence or cessation. The main study involved applying questionnaires to large samples of foster carers and supervising social workers focusing on the children's experiences, opinions, and feelings. The study responds to the relative scarcity of literature on family contact based on the experiences of children and adults in caring roles. The results pointed out the importance of developing monitored cooperation that improves communication processes to take into account the children's and young people's views in the decision-making process, and to develop more attentive and open working relationships with parents throughout the foster care placement. The results from the study show that:

•	Children and young people expressed their views on contact with biological parents and on the difficulties that were associated with it. These are intensely emotional experiences described with feelings of joy and loss, and longing and

sadness for not being able to spend more time with their families. In some cases, the visits were highly desired but considered scarce and short.

• 	Most children and young people stressed that they consider it important and good to be in contact with their biological parents and that they were well integrated in foster care, seeing this experience as mostly positive.

• 	Some children expressed how much they missed their biological parents; however, the fact they had contact allowed them to deal better with the separation.

• 	By looking at the perspectives of foster carers, biological parents, and social workers on the reactions of the children and young people before and after the visit, it is evident that they have different views on the same reality. Social workers are the actors who perceive fewer difficulties regarding the contact, which can be explained by the fact that normally they are not present during the visit.

Another aspect being considered is that foster care is weakly represented in the Portuguese protection system. Despite being considered the preferred response for child placement, data shows that in 2015, out of 8,600 children in foster care situations, only 3.5% were in foster families (CASA, 2016). The invisibility is a reality even in the works of the Portuguese scientific community (cf. Delgado, 2007). The research entitled "*Being a foster family in Portugal: motivations and experiences*"[13] contributes to greater visibility of foster families by giving them a voice, namely by trying to understand their motivations, expectations, needs and personal and family impacts.

In addition, research entitled "*Foster care practices and representations of foster families*"[14] aims to understand the practices and representations of these families regarding the fostering of children and young people. The study analyses various dimensions of the family and social sphere: the family structure, the attitudes towards fostering, the organisation of domestic daily life, the social support networks and the influence of social class on these representations.

Another study study[15] conducted in Portugal aimed to contribute to the understanding of the reasons for becoming a foster family. It adopted a qualitative approach, using carers' narrative interviews and practitioners' semi-structured interviews inspired by

---

[13] 2017, Being a foster family in Portugal : motivations and experiences *http://hdl.handle.net/10400.14/25873*

[14] 2008, Foster care practices and representations of foster families https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt/bitstream/10071/1630/1/Acolhimento%20Familiar.pdf

[15] 2019, How Do People Become Foster Carers in Portugal? The Process of Building the Motivation https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3fdc/1924b383dea39db8a9c80997d7293b4b9218.pdf

grounded theoryThe results showed that reasons for fostering are based on the values of altruism, and there is no evidence of economic or employment interests, as feared by some professionals. The conclusions point out the need for a deeper understanding of the profile of foster care families and ex-foster care families that will allow the adoption of strategies to attract more potential candidates. Namely, more awareness and involvement of the children of potential foster families in the decision-making process are necessary. The quality of support services and the performance of the foster care professionals are considered key elements in the success of the implementation of foster care, in raising awareness, in recruitment campaigns and in the selection, preparation and maintenance of candidates. According to another research[16], in Portugal, foster carers don't feel burdened because children are viewed as being a part of the family and integrated into the family for a long period of time. This research raises another topic related to the sex of foster care family members. Namely, the division of responsibilities within the couple seems to give the woman the essential tasks of fostering, such as the organisation of contact with the biological family and managing its consequences on the child. This points towards an uneven division of tasks and responsibilities within the foster care family.

Data shows that in **Portugal**, the practical implementation of the measure has significant disparities compared to the current legislation. From the Annual report[17] developed by Social Security Institute for 2020, it is possible to observe that the Porto district - in the northern region (Porto, Vila Real, Viana de Castelo and Braga) has more children and young people placed in this measure (62%; 73 children). The Autonomous Region of Madeira is the second area of the country with the most foster care families, representing 20% (40 children) of the national placements. On the other hand, Lisbon district had, at the time of this report only 18 children and young people placed in foster care.

2.5. Romania

---

[16] 2019, Foster Carers' Perspectives about Contact in Portugal and Spain
https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/4502-20423-1-PB.pdf

[17] 2021, CASA 2020 - Relatório de Caracterização Anual da Situação de Acolhimento das Crianças e Jovens
https://www.seg-social.pt/documents/10152/13200/CASA+2020.pdf/b7f02f58-2569-4165-a5ab-bed9efdb2653

In **Romania**, the desk research shows that there is no clear profile about the foster families because they prefer adoption or, in most cases, community and/or access to public or privately funded programs. Some inputs come from UNICEF Romania[18] that shows how a new life, full of love, for more and more children is possible, since the number of adoptable children and of the families certified for adoption increased by a third in the first three months of 2021. But it is evident that the first choice is the adoption and not the fostering.

Nevertheless, the priority in Romania, as evidenced by numerous studies, is to de-institutionalise[19]. In fact, when children grow up outside a family environment, their chances to develop to their full potential drop. Research has shown that every three months a child under three spends within an institution delays their physical development by one month. There is also a risk of delays in cognitive and language development, and social stigma adds to all this, as children from institutions are often regarded as different and marginalized.

2.6. Austria

In **Austria**, after a significant decrease in 2010, more children and adolescents live with foster parents and out-of-home care. Though foster families dominantly accommodate infants and children below the age of 6 for an indefinite time, more teenagers and adolescents live in residential homes. However, children are put in care either based on an agreement or following a court order[20]. However, the Austrian government provides legislation to cater for children and young people up to the age of 18; if the biological parents or those responsible for the care and upbringing of the child consent to such an offer of support, it is based on a written agreement between these persons and the child and youth welfare authority. If no agreement is reached, the court order will take effect. Anyway, there are no current figures online to show the current number of children living in foster care. Still, the report of 2018 shows that the largest percentage of children and adolescents living in care were found in Vienna and Carinthia at 12.3 per 1000 minors and 11.5 per 1000 children, respectively. The same

---

[18] 2021, Child Rights Strategy (The National Strategy on the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights) Child Rights Strategy | UNICEF Romania
[19] 2018, Deinstitutionalization: for every child, a loving family https://www.unicef.org/romania/deinstitutionalization
[20] 2018, Out-Of-Family Care of Children https://www.kinderrechte.gv.at/factbook-english/children-in-care/

report also indicates that Tyrol has the lowest of children living in foster homes at 1.8 per 1000 minors.

The report "*Opening Doors for Europe's Children[21]*" reveals that as of 2017, 13,617 children were already living in alternative care in Austria: 8,307 children in residential care (the so-called social pedagogical facilities) and 5,310 children in foster care. This has further stretched the availability of financial support and assistance rendered to child welfare services, making it a huge obstacle for professionals to take care of them in residential homes. Austria has continued through various projects to improve the quality and standards of foster care through training and retraining of families and raising awareness on the benefit of foster care as an adequate alternative. Moreover, the influx of unaccompanied migrant children contributed greatly to the rising numbers causing a major financial challenge. However, some international organisations have risen to the occasion in rendering support for residential homes. Austria is one of the 12 member countries fostering the opening doors initiative to ensure high-quality foster care in Europe. Nevertheless, according to Raphael Hoblings[22], the head of the department for Child and Youth Welfare in Tyrol, there is an urgent need for foster parents for these kids (0-3 years), and they should be ready to provide them with love and care; in addiction, foster parenthood is a very wonderful and meaningful experience that requires foster parenting course, work closely with the child and youth welfare services. The child and youth welfare services not only regularly check whether the child has integrated well into their new foster family but also provide advice and support in challenging situations.

So, what emerges in all the research[23] in Austria is the need for a specific kind of training for the mixed challenges in caring for children of migrant origin. There is also a high priority for professionals to understand the challenges faced by these unaccompanied migrant children to provide the highest standards of care and protection for them. Experience has shown that they need family-based care instead of residential homes, which is more prevalent in Austria. Many UMC housing units

---

[21] 2018, Opening doors for Europe's Children https://www.openingdoors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/country-fiche-Austria-2018.pdf

[22] 2020, Urgent search foster family to give love and security https://www.meinbezirk.at/innsbruck/c-lokales/pflegefamilie-soll-liebe-und-geborgenheit-geben_a5079412

[23] 2019, Fostering Across Borders https://eea.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl666/files/documents/FAB-Final-Programme-Report.pdf

have been closed since 2018 making it even more difficult to access these children except through stakeholders. Austria is also not providing adequate mental support for the UMC children. It is, however, difficult to connect directly with the foster parents.

2.7. Italy

In **Italy**, an analysis[24] of foster families analysed the point of view regarding this experience of welcoming foster families, social actors and territorial resources of primary importance in the custody of minors. The main objectives that have been set as the basis for the research include the identification of the main socio-demographic characteristics of the carers e of their family, the characteristics of the relationship with social services, the reasons for the assignment, difficulties encountered and emotions aroused from the experience as a whole.

A scientific article[25] published in the Educational, Cultural and Psychological Studies Journal affirms that foster care is a condition of welcoming children with families in serious difficulty, legally regulated, aimed at guaranteeing minors a suitable space for growth, and families of origin the possibility of overcoming the problems to consent the return of the children. It is a challenging educational condition to be deepened with research. The complexity of the backgrounds of origin and the co-presence of multiple risk factors generates in children and young people in foster care, important difficulties in development, which foster families have to cope with, also with the support of specialists, services and associations. The study makes it possible to investigate the reasons for the custody prevision, the relationships with families of origin, and the difficult life trajectories of the children in foster care (transitions, placements, discontinuities, years of foster care, and continuation of relationships after foster care). In this way, it is possible to identify the needs highlighted by the minors, the problems that emerge and the promising strategies adopted by the foster families.

---

[24] 2014, L'affido familiare, una ricerca quantitativa sulle esperienze degli affidatari
https://ainformazione.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/tesi-urso-affido-familiare.pdf
[25] 2001, L'affidamento familiare: le strategie educative elaborate dagli affidatari http://www.anfaa.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/L%E2%80%99affidamento-familiare_-le-strategie-educative-elaborate-dagli-affidatari.pdf

Among the documentation[26] about the foster system in Italy, there is a widespread prevalence of intra-family custody in the Southern Regions, all close to or above the threshold of 60%. Various factors affect the different family cultures and ties, the different roles and levels of structuring of social services, the different spread of family associations, the various general socio-economic characteristics, etc. One significant factor, although not unique, concerns the degree of policy development and local welfare, detectable by the municipal expenditure per capita for social services. The fostering of children with their relatives, for more or less prolonged periods, is a practice as old as the human genre. Grandparents, uncles, and great-uncles have always offered hospitality and care to their grandchildren, with very varied characterisations and meanings, both over time and in space. It is a fascinating and complex multidimensional reality in which a thousand social, cultural, economic, ethical, legal, geographical, etc. trajectories are intertwined.

2.8. Czech Republic

The **Czech Republic** offers suggestions for changes in the field of foster family care that have been elaborated based on practical experience from the field and by dealing with various institutions. The field of methodological guidance, with the interpretation of the law and recommended practices, vary from region to region, so the recommendation is to unify methodological guidance and support in foster family care. The field of selection and training of foster parents: professionals repeatedly deal with families who are unprepared for the specific issues and needs of often traumatised children, so the recommendation is a careful selection of foster parents, taking into account their family and relationship situation. So, it seems extremely important making the training of foster carers experiential, so it is not just about passively receiving information, providing information to foster parents on how to seek professional help. From the research, it appears that other fields should be implemented are the field of entrusting specific children to the care of specific foster parents; the field of cooperation with the OSPOD; the situation with labour offices, which means that officials need to familiarise themselves with foster care.

---

[26] 2021, L'AFFIDAMENTO FAMILIARE A PARENTI. Opportunità e criticità
https://fad.progettofamigliaformazione.it/pluginfile.php/111456/mod_resource/content/1/Laffidamento%20familiare%20a%20parenti.pdf

Also, the situation with aftercare services shows a lack of child psychiatrists and paediatricians with knowledge of foster care and a lack of awareness. But what emerges more is that the fundamental problem is the financial underestimation of the foster care sector.

Statistical data[27] show that in the Czech Republic, 7% of children are in temporary foster care, meaning a maximum of one year for children who will either soon be able to return to their original family or will probably soon be released for adoption. The 25% is in long-term foster care mediated for children who are unlikely to be able to return to their original families. Children stay here for several years, often into adulthood. The children usually stay here until their adulthood. Regarding data about foster care parents' gender, 56% are women, 37% pairs, and 7% are men; 34% of foster care families are aged between 51 and 60 years, 32% between 41 and 50 years, 20% more than 60 years, 11% between 31 and 40 years and 3% between 20 and 30 years.

In the Czech Republic, a survey[28] on kinship Foster Care[29] aims to identify the needs of foster parents who have children entrusted to kinship foster care; the findings from the needs analysis show a lack of consistent and comprehensive information about foster care during the period of decision-making about foster care and just after a child is placed in foster care; the need for consistent, complete and accurate information about foster care before it begins; inconsistency and non-transparency of individual institutions involved (OSPOD, courts) in the approach to kinship foster care. Moreover, OSPOD was identified as the main source of information. However, it turned out that the information given by different OSPOD offices was inconsistent. At the same time, some participants mentioned the diversity of information provided by workers in one OSPOD. Often the administrative actions of the OSPOD or the courts are also not understood by foster carers. Another aspect shown in the survey is the need for

---

[27] 2019, Foster families in the Czech Republic Basic characteristics of foster parents and children in foster care https://www.nadacesirius.cz/soubory/ke-stazeni/Analyza-Pestounske-rodiny-v-Ceske-republice.pdf

[28] 2020, Kinship Foster Care – needs analysis *https://www.nadacesirius.cz/vyzkumy/pruzkumy-v-oblasti-nrp/pestounska-pece-pribuznych-analyza-potreb*

[29] The difference between Kinship and foster care: https://fosterandadopt.jfs.ohio.gov/kinship-care/resources-for-kinship-caregivers/kinship-vs-foster-care#:~:text=Kinship%20caregivers%20are%20able%20to,and%20complete%20the%20homestudy%20process.&text=Kinship%20caregivers%20undergo%20a%20%E2%80%9Chome,%E2%80%9D%20and%20%E2%80%9Ccertification%E2%80%9D%20process.

.

professional support for kinship foster parents in the decision to take a child into foster care and in other moments of crisis in child care. Kinship foster parents thus need professional psychological, socio-legal, financial and other support before starting foster care. However, other crisis moments in fostering are also difficult, most often during the children's teenage years and the necessity of financial support of kinship foster parents by the state during the care of the children entrusted to them. Research shows that many kinship foster parents would find it unrealistic to perform the role of the foster parent without financial support because, unlike non-kin foster parents, they do not have time to prepare financially, and working foster parents find it difficult to combine jobs, childcare and compulsory education.

A conference entitled '*Current challenges in the system of care for vulnerable children*'[30] was also held on this topic, based on the following main issues:

• In the Czech Republic, the number of children growing up outside their own family is steadily increasing (+14% = 3500 children).

• There are numerous groups of children for whom it is impossible to provide foster care in the family (children with medical, mental or combined disadvantages; abused, neglected children; children and young people requiring increased attention; children with mental illness).

• The number of applicants for foster care has decreased significantly since 2014 (-60%!).

• The Czech system of substitute family care offers only limited solutions, and the transitions between different types of care are too radical. Types of care shared between foster parents, fostering practised as a profession (within an employment relationship), and long-term care of a child on the borderline between foster care and adoption are missing.

Based on the main issues and a key argument, which is "Nurturing in the family environment is crucial for optimal child development," several solutions have been proposed. They are following: a reform of substitute family care as part of the overall system change. Regarding foster care: strengthening the field of preventive services and other activities supporting families with children; clarifying the competencies of

---

[30] 2022, Substitute Family Care - how should it change to better meet children's needs. Conference "Current challenges in the system of care for vulnerable children" *https://www.nadacesirius.cz/vyzkumy/o-situaci-v-rodinach*

public authorities and unifying tools to help families; the implementation of new types of foster care, including professional foster care, to provide a family environment for children who are currently dependent on institutional care; implementation of motivational elements for finding new candidates for substitute family care, ensuring continuity of support for substitute families (before and after the child is placed); the emergence of new forms of foster family care (auxiliary families, shared foster care, professional foster care, emergency care - immediate placement of a child in crisis situations without the need for a court decision); partial professionalisation of foster care. Foster parents will be able to work as full-time employees; continuity of support for the child's foster and birth families - from searching for candidates to continuing care for young adults.

Further research investigated the failure of the foster care system in the Czech Republic; the data show that the number of children in long-term foster care has doubled since 2007. More than 15,000 children are currently growing up with foster parents, while fewer than 8,000 children live in residential care. This means that two out of three children placed in state-funded foster care are growing up in the foster care of their relatives or persons who have been foster parents. Despite the positive facts, there are critical voices that report that many children placed in foster care end up in institutions or that children experience repeated movements from one foster family to another. In the statistics that have been done so far, it is not possible to verify these claims. For this reason, Lumos decided to conduct a large-scale survey[31] among OSPODs (child welfare authorities) on the early termination of foster care. The authors consider a failure of foster care to be a situation where a court decision early terminates foster care.

the main findings of this research show that 9 of 10 foster care placement is well done (staying in care usually ends with return to the family, adoption or adulthood); 2,000 children end foster care each year, 150 to 200 of those end due to failure; failure most often occurs after seven years in care, when a child is 13-14 years old; the main reason is the child's behaviour and problems in the child's relationship with the foster parents; the transfer of children from one foster family to another is rare.

---

[31] 2020, Early termination of foster care in the Czech Republic - Is foster care in the Czech Republic failing? https://lumos.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/Lumos_SHRNUTI_predcasne_ukonceni_pp.pdf?

In light of this data, some recommendations to be made are: intensify the search for foster parents; improve the quality of training and professional assessment in mediated substitute family care; implement professional assessment in non-mediated substitute family care; improve the quality of matching; improve support to foster families by accompanying organisations and standardise the quality of accompanying foster families; improve the quality of monitoring of foster care performance; standardise the training of foster parents and support the establishment and development of community-based services for foster parents.

3. Results from the focus group and individual interviews with foster families

Following the analysis of the results of the first focus group held with the professionals and experts as far as the foster care system is concerned, the consortium did a second focus group to include the perspectives and experiences of foster parents and foster children to build profiling of foster families and their needs and tackle the topic of unaccompanied children in the foster care system.

The aim has been to compare and show the situation of foster families in all partner countries by reflecting on the difficulties, the need of foster families, and the perception of the minors thanks to activities held with them.

From the partners' experiences with national focus groups emerged a huge difficulty in reaching both foster families and minors. In most cases, professionals have been used as mediators to foster families for submission and collation of the focus group questions. This happened because of a lack of trust; families need to safeguard their privacy and a low number of foster families in the area. All these factors made it difficult to collect data and reach the expected number of the target group. The same happened with minors; in this case, the situation was even more complicated, as many partners did not have access to meet the minors, and professionals could not act as intermediaries. Specifically, **Austria** had contact with many authorities who took care of foster parents and foster children and asked for help, but with a low response and also finding foster parents and foster children on a private level hadn't been successful. The Austrian partner conducted the interviews with individual families and

children. Also, the method envisaged in the project to work with the foster children playfully was unfortunately not practicable.

In the case of **Italy**, they interviewed six families: three foster families in the category of intrafamilial fostering, i.e. the children were not placed with strangers but with relatives (uncles, grandparents, etc.) and three families in the category of hetero-familial fostering. However, it was not easy to get in touch with them and have the opportunity to talk to them. To conduct the focus group, the Italian partner requested the mediation of social workers, who acted as intermediaries, preparing the families for the meeting that was held on the phone individually.

In **Romania**, the partner conducted two focus groups with seven foster families, one online and one in a physical format. To gather participants, they sent several emails to public institutions with specific services for foster carers, finding in the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection from District 3 in Bucharest the two intermediaries to recruit families.

In **Greece,** the focus group was held in the Day Care Centre "ARIADNI" facilities, and the participants were seven families recruited through other initiatives regarding Foster Care.

In the **Czech Republic**, the interviews were conducted online with four foster families, even if finding foster parents willing to share their experiences had not been easy. They had encountered the obstacle of foster parents not responding.

In **Portugal**, the interviews were conducted with three foster moms that provided information on three different processes of foster care measures; in particular, one of the parents fostered the child as a couple, the other two as single mothers, and one of the mothers already had a biological child.

In **France,** it was very difficult to contact and interview foster families since young unaccompanied minors do not live with host families, whether they are volunteers or work for the department; this is rare and often informal. So, the focus group was carried out through a questionnaire to be filled in and involved two foster families who host unaccompanied minors voluntarily.

In general, given the high degree of difficulty in retracting and involving foster families in the focus group activity, each partner country has adapted the interviews to the specific situation; this is also the reason why many focus groups turned into direct

conversations with the families by telephone or meetings on Zoom, to facilitate the collection of. the necessary data and information.

3.1 Path to becoming a foster family.

In **Austria**, the interviews underlined different ways to take in foster children:

a) Foster families who could not have children of their own for medical reasons and therefore took children into foster care;

b) Foster families who decided to take in foster children even though they would have had the opportunity to have biological children;

c) Families who have biological children of their own and decide to take in foster children primarily for human reasons.

In **Italy**, some families explained that they had taken a course at the family counselling centre for about three months to understand what they would be up against and get useful tools for behaving once they became a foster family. Others said they did not have a real path; they just turned to Social Services because they were always helping two little brothers, children of a couple with big economic problems and social, family and educational degradation (the children have often abandoned themselves). The children were already in the care of Cerignola's social services for these very problems; with the municipality's social worker, they started to formalise the children's presence in their home; they were also heard by the court that decided to entrust them to them. One family recounted that they had turned to a national association in cooperation with the local foster care centre. They carried out interviews and home visits to assess their 'parenting skills'. Through this association, the family was contacted by the social worker of the Cerignola Municipality and the Consultorio Familiare to assess the possibility of getting to know two teenage siblings, of whom they are now foster parents, after about nine months. About **Greece**, what emerged from the discussion with participants is that some of them tried to have a child, but it was impossible due to medical issues. Looking for alternative ways, they found adoption. One of the participants decided on their own to adopt a child. Then they all contacted Organisations to direct them on how to carry out the adoption procedures.

In **Portugal**, the paths to becoming a foster family were very different. One of the participants stated that she always liked children and comes from a big family with many children. Her training is linked to children and special needs because she had a brother with down syndrome. During the training in special needs education, she visited a residential home sensitised towards the needs of the children to receive care and love and decided to be a candidate to foster a child, motivated by the changes in the foster care legislation. To become a candidate, she sent a mail to Santa Casa da Misericordia[32] and fostered a child that was 20 months at that time. Another participant explained that the process was quite different and atypical because the couple was neighbours with the biological family of the foster child. Due to a process of violence in the biological family household, they were involved as witnesses. Since they knew the child and already had a relationship with her, the couple welcomed the child into their household in an informal way. Later on, CPCJ[33] asked the couple to become a foster care family officially, and the process was formalised. There is to be said, however, that there is a worry of uncertainty in this path since, in Portugal, the foster care measure is reviewed every six months. Therefore, the biological family situation is evaluated once again to understand if the biological family managed to re-structured and if the child can return home. If that is not the case, normally, the foster care process continues for more than six months. Another participant said she applied to become a foster care parent after receiving a flyer via mail from Mundos de Vida[34]". After making a call to show her interest, she had a meeting with the technicians that work in Mundos de Vida and the process initiated with the initial training (that normally takes 4 to 5 months). Then she received a call to foster a child that was ten at the time. Now the child is 18, and despite the child already achieved the age of majority, it was decided that she will continue in foster care in line with the best interest of the child.

In **France,** they created an association helping refugees to face inequalities and there are cases in which volunteers of the association offer minors accommodations and take care of them in their families.

3.2 Obstacles faced to becoming a foster family.

---

[32] Portuguese Entity responsible of Foster care

[33] CPCJ (Comissão de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens) - non-judicial institutions, with functional autonomy, which aim to promote the rights of children and young people and prevent or end situations that may affect their safety, health, training, education or integral development

[34] Portuguese Entity responsible of Foster care

Most of the families with whom interviews were held in **Austria** stated that they 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 they were often not so easy. In some cases, families said that, on the one hand, the foster child wanted contact with the biological parents. 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. To deal with these ambivalent and problematic situations, the families would like targeted supervision from the authorities. Moreover, most foster parents feared that 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 obstacle faced by families was the fear that the children would be stigmatised and discriminated against at school or among friends and the influence of the stressful experiences from their home environment, which requires therapeutic treatments.

The biggest obstacle for the families in **Italy** was undoubtedly the impact of having the children home again after so many years. Some interviewed said that their children are now grown up, in their 40s, and that welcoming their grandchildren in their childhood and teenage years was a real challenge. At times, they felt lost, but the support of the counselling centre and social workers enabled them to create a relationship, become attached to the children and make them grow fond of them. Another intra-family foster family said that they often felt alone and abandoned by the system because it is taken for granted that because they are the grandparents, it is automatic that they have to take care of their granddaughters. Still, it is very difficult to 'be parents' at their age. Moreover, one of the families recounted that they often had to come to terms with the expectations they had created in being a foster family compared to the daily reality of living together. In their case, the presence of a large family of origin did not easily allow them to get in touch with the needs of the foster children.

For **Romania**, poor education of the wide public, as well as of the staff of some public institutions regarding the foster care system, is one of the obstacles faced to becoming a foster family. Another obstacle is the bureaucratic one, which means that carers need more consistent help from the authorities when they encounter special situations with their child in placement. A major problem is a term that refers to the profession of maternal assistant/foster carer, which is still unknown at the macro and institutional

CreatingCare
Creating a Safe Environment for
Children in need in Foster Care

Co-funded by
the European Union

levels. Around this issue, it is important to mention the cases of stateless children whose process of obtaining citizenship is difficult and whose cooperation with the responsible authorities is not smooth. Two additional downsides of the profession are the financial recompensation and support and the lack of holiday periods. In other words, the carers are paid quite low, and they receive an amount of money to support the child that is not sufficient to accommodate their needs since their profession doesn't provide holiday periods; they need to perform despite the tiredness, stress accumulation or any other situations that might occur.

Participants in **Greece** declared that they had thought a lot before deciding to adopt. Still, the difficulties they faced was the lack of adequate direction, support and counselling, which was missing. Another obstacle is the problems with the biological parents due to their different cultural backgrounds: they may worry about what fostering their child by a family in Greece might entail in terms of preserving their cultural identity. As far as prospective adopters are concerned, they lack information, as they are often unaware that the child they adopt may have a different background than themselves. Often, foster parents do not know that the child may be a refugee, immigrant, or Roma or have a different skin colour or cultural and religious background. At the same time, many foster parents are unaware that the child they will take in is not an orphan but probably has a biological family with whom they need to be in contact as much as they do as foster parents.

Among the obstacles in the **Czech Republic**, participants underlined the unnecessary bureaucracy and the difficulty in understanding the legislative system and how foster care works. The responsibilities of foster parents are clear, but their rights are not, and there is an inconsistency of information and a lack of interest of the authorities in the problem of foster families. Moreover, withholding information about the child taken in care and a non-partnered approach makes the experience difficult. A child from abroad who did not have all the necessary documents had to wait a long time for the authorities to take action. In the meantime, the child needed medical assistance, which he could not receive because he did not have the necessary documents.

The obstacles pointed out by the participants in **Portugal** were linked mostly to the characteristics of the child, articulation with the biological family, the time it takes to the court to decide regarding the life plan for the child, lack of support from the professionals, adaptation to the new family settings, as well as bureaucratic and logistic difficulties. Although one of the participants stated that she considers the foster

care process to be very successful, she pointed out some difficulties regarding the characteristics of the child. The main obstacle for this foster parent is how the system works, i.e., despite the biological mother not being an alternative for the future of this child (according to the professionals), it is mandatory to continue with visits from the perspective of the foster care parent, and sometimes children refuses to be with the biological family. Another issue mentioned by the participant is the lack of support from the social security institutions in the psychiatric help that the child needs. One of the participants, being involved in a long-term foster care process, showed a different perspective of the obstacles, stating that the obstacles changed a lot from when the child was 10 to now when she is 18, as well as the legislation changes shaped these difficulties. Moreover, the participants described bureaucratic issues as an obstacle. After all, foster care is a measure that is not very well known, which causes difficulties sometimes in not foreseen issues when dealing with bureaucratic entities such as enrolling children in a school, taking them to the doctor, getting them books, and the legislation does not provide enough parental leaving days. Other problems mentioned were the need to dialogue and articulate with a lot of people: own family, the biological family, the court, the responsible entity of foster care, the social security institute and the constant scheme of evaluation, which leaves less time for the child and personal life.

In **France**, families explained that the most important obstacle is the lack of availability because they work and have to take into account the other members of the family and this is extremely difficult.

3.3 Obstacles children face in foster care.

In **Austria**, the main obstacle mentioned is that children taken in are torn between birth parents and foster families. On the one hand, they want to maintain contact with their biological parents and visit them often. On the other hand, the contacts create loyalty conflicts, which the foster parents, in particular, are confronted with and have to find ways of dealing with so that the foster care practice is not broken off. The fear is that the visits arranged by the authorities can lead to serious problems for foster

children, who could have difficulties in the initial phase of processing the visits with the biological parents.

Another point mentioned by almost all families is that the birth parents always try to take back the foster children, demanding more recognition and respect. As a result, the children would suffer again.

In **Italy**, according to what families referred to, the children had to face the obstacle of 'learning' to live in a family. Although it was the grandparents, many families never had much contact with the children because they were rarely allowed to see them until they become foster parents. So many of the families told us that the biggest challenge for the children was settling in. Another obstacle that emerged from the interview is accepting that they are alone and need to be cared for by people other than their parents who have abandoned them.

From the **Romanian** experience, one obstacle has been identified in the stigmatisation of children placed in foster care. This fact leads to their marginalisation and discrimination in social contexts, especially in school. It seems that these problems start even from kindergarten, and parents and educators are often reluctant to the institutionalised children's situation. As a result of this discrimination, children in 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.

The participants from **Greece** answered that foster children have been deprived of protection and have experienced neglect and abuse. At the same time, their living in institutional conditions increases the difficulties they must face. Including children in the family structure and the family, rules are one of the most challenging points. Moreover, unaccompanied refugees and immigrant children are a special group with increased needs and vulnerability. Their placement in foster care brings significant challenges for the parents who have to deal with them. These include the traumatic experiences of these children and the psycho-emotional difficulties they may present, their often-complex legal cases and pending cases, their lack of knowledge of the Greek language, and their difficulties in integrating and adapting to Greek society.

In **France**, the main obstacle in the foster care system is that it is not suitable for young unaccompanied minors because unaccompanied minors do not live with foster families, whether they are volunteers or work for the department; this is rare and informal. In 2020, in the Lille region, out of 205 young unaccompanied minors taken

into care by the department, only four lived with foster families. Some of the young people interviewed did not know that it may be possible to live with a foster family full-time or occasionally because there is not enough information on this subject. For the moment, unaccompanied minors live together in an institution (DHIMNA). Still, they need a more secure and less collective environment.

In **Portugal**, since the foster care process was very different and the ages of the children of the foster families interviewed also varied a lot, it was possible to gather a wide array of obstacles. The most mentioned obstacles concern adaptation to the new reality and family; psychological issues, since each child has his or her characteristics and life story and to what they have been exposed to and what the impacts of that are important to understand. Other obstacles are eating disorders & health issues; school difficulties; the lack of routine, and the notion of family, since children need to be raised in a family with a sense of normalcy and have their clothes, toys, bed, and room... in the residential homes, this does not happen. Last but not least, articulation with the biological family is another important issue, recognized as an obstacle for foster children since they are forced to spend time with the biological family even though the situation that led to the protection measure to take place is not yet resolved, cause them a lot of suffering and instability.

3.4 Decisive factors in successful fostering.

The interviews in **Austria** indicate that the successful foster care practice is related to the fact that the foster families were informed in advance about the families of origin, the children and the legal provisions. For them, foster parent and child contact with the families of origin was very important to be successful and to develop appropriate contact strategies. For a good foster care practice, it is important to be well informed in advance to get an insight into the problems in the families of origin. It is always easier when foster children come to foster families directly after birth. Then they are unencumbered and have not grown up with traumatic experiences.

From the **Italian** discussion, it emerged that all the families agree that there are no common, general factors for successful fostering. Still, they depend on each child's and foster family's experiences. In general, what emerged from the focus group was that taking children gently, making them understand the rules and, helping them reflect

when they make mistakes, making them feel affection all the time is an effective ways to build the family relationship.

In **Romania**, experienced foster parents advise those beginning this profession to be committed and not to see fostering as a normal profession, as the affective component is essential. For this, it is important having the foster parent actively involved, offering affection, moral support, and openness to take the child to do different extracurricular activities, such as sports activities, where he/she can make friends.

The successful outcome of foster placements and the prevention of the foster child's return to forms of institutional accommodation are important in **Greece**. Frequent and quality follow-up by the relevant professionals is needed 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. Moreover, being ready to become a parent is the most important factor, together with a respectful approach to the children's history.

In the **Czech Republic**, participants identified cooperation between and with authorities, quality education and the awareness of foster parent rights as key factors for the success of the foster care system. Moreover, they underlined the need to have a list of professionals (psychologists, therapists, psychiatrists, …) as a reference to draw on financial stability.

Some of the factors mentioned by the interviewees in **Portugal** were good relationships with the foster care family because sometimes children compare what they had with what they have now, what is like to be loved and cared for, that sometimes is different from the love and care that they received in the biological family. This causes turbulence between the foster care family and the biological family. Other good factors are a good team of professionals that provides support; a real and not "sugar-coated" preparation of the foster care parents (it means having a real preparation, not an optimistic perception of this process. It's very difficult to have a child that we don't know can have problems, and the family needs preparation for the specific characteristics of the child); no pressure on the families towards school achievements and fast progress; clarification of roles; the right time to develop the relationship; successful articulation between all parts involved, for example between the social security institute and the entity responsible for the foster care, or between the judge and what the reports say.

In **France**, mutual respect, giving the rules of life, making the young person feel at home, having his room, and having the keys to the house is recognised as a successful

factor in the fostering experience; also the involvement of all family members, trusting the young person is essential for the families.

3.5 Benefits of being a foster family.

The benefits mentioned in **Austria**'s interviews are the children's bonds with the foster parents; experiencing this process is emphasised as positive. One foster mother said: "*No matter whether bodily, adopted or in foster care - when you see a child for the first time, you know: we are now the world for this child. And it's ours.*" Developing that bond of trust, if successful, is seen as an advantage for the future. Moreover, another key advantage is providing children with a familiar family environment.

For the interviewed in **Italy**, the positive aspect of being in a foster family is that the children live in a family rather than an institution. This means that they feel the warmth of a family environment, even if it is grandparents or other relatives. One of the families reported that they do not know if there are any real advantages, but that there is certainly an idea of improvement as a family and the willingness to be of help in the upbringing of children or young people, aware that it may not be forever.

For **Greek** participants, having a chance to help and support a child is indescribable. One participant who has already had a child before adopting said that this is a way to expand the family and teach the kids how to give help to other people.

In this question, all participants in **Portugal** agreed that the main benefit is to provide love, care and a safe environment to a child, even if it is always uncertain what kind of child they will foster and what emotional baggage she/he has. But the benefit is to see a happy and healthy child being raised in a normal family and having good relationships. The families said that they believe it's possible to make a difference even a little bit in the life of the child, even if it's only for a year; they will leave a positive mark, and they will demand love and care from others in the future. Others said that the initial potential of the child that was "stolen" from the children or the life project of this child was probably "dark", but after foster care, a window is opened for them, and they are here to support them, give them love and care.

Another benefit was to provide the biological family with the opportunity to organise itself to take in the child, which means contributing to the restructuring of a family, to provide them with that pause to re-group and the child to return to safety.

Personal development and raising awareness are also mentioned as important benefits of this measure; since people are very closed in their own world and have no space for this, they say they don't know how foster families can do this, so it is a process that teaches a lot.

In **France**, families explained that having an open mind, and exchanging on different values, and customs from one country to another is enriching and becoming a point of reference for the rest of the journey of the minors is a benefit both for the children and the families.

3.6 Support and useful tools in the process of being a foster family.

All the foster families interviewed in **Austria** have undergone appropriate training to master the special challenges and be better prepared for them. However, they would like additional training as accompanying measures and continuous exchange with other foster families to benefit from their experiences. Most of the families interviewed would like to know more about the foster children's history in advance so that they are well prepared; at the same time, for most families, it was very important to learn more about the families of origin from the beginning so that they could think about ways/routes to deal with it concretely. This included agreeing on a meaningful visitation arrangement with the birth parents. Thus, one family would like to see more rights for foster families.

According to the families interviewed in **Italy**, the assistance from the educators, and their guidance on going in the same direction educationally, is the best support in the experience as a foster family. Talking to social workers and counsellors is good because they become a reference point, especially for families who are just starting. One of the families says that despite two employment contracts, six of them and the contribution for foster families from the municipality is paltry: 150 euros per month for each child. The state should give more resources for the children's needs. Another of the families interviewed said that the foster care centre offers support through interviews with psychologists working with the children, psychologists working on

parental support and social workers. In addition, the social worker of the home municipality works in a network with the Foster Care Centre for support in the foster care project. Even if the services are present, a weekly schedule of support for the whole family could be useful; today, this support (except when explicitly requested) is provided at the foster care centre every 15 days. In addition, a little more financial support would be useful.

With regard to **Greece**, participants found a lot of help when they contacted other foster families and talked about their experiences and difficulties, and they gave them advice; some of them also pointed out that training is important before becoming a foster parent.

One of the tools mentioned several times during interviews in **Portugal** that reveal a need of these foster care families is the development of forms of foster care families to communicate with each other, such as WhatsApp groups or informal meetings, where families can discuss the difficulties and what works, what doesn't work. The foster care families revealed a need to understand by example and sharing of experiences of other families how to deal with problems that emerge in the process. Another tool is the support from the professionals who should be more present and assertive: having someone to talk to, discuss similar cases, and find solutions to navigate the system is very important.

3.7 The importance of training in the foster care system.

In **Austria**, most foster families interviewed had already completed training before taking in the children. Some have participated in specific supervision, and some in courses on legal conditions. Most need training related to the relationship between biological and foster children on the one hand and the relationship with the families of origin. Most problems and conflicts would arise in these two areas. Another area that was often mentioned is the stigmatisation and discrimination foster children experience in public and especially in the school context. Finally, families ask for more exchange opportunities to benefit from the experiences of other families.

Training is always beneficial, especially in the case of the families interviewed in **Italy**, who felt the need for a sort of 'refresher' on how to educate adolescents, on how best to raise them, how to know how to listen to them and understand their needs because

CreatingCare
Creating a Safe Environment for
Children in need in Foster Care

Co-funded by
the European Union

they belong to a generation that is too distant, and the difficulties may be many. Training is beneficial not only for content but also to have a point of reference and moral support to deal with problems and disappointments, which (adds one of the families) are never lacking.

In **Greece,** participants believed that continuous education is necessary for foster parents who need constant framing and support to fulfil their parental role. Proper training and preparation of foster parents are essential to enable them to manage their challenges. Moreover, the proposed training should be experiential, based on the participants' participation in activities such as reflection and self-awareness exercises, etc.

In **Portugal**, all parents agreed that the training is important and that families would benefit to be trained not only before the foster care process initiates but also during the fostering. Usually, the parents have a general session where it was explained what foster care is and the difference between foster care, adoption and residential care. There are basic contents delivered before becoming foster parents, including personal testimonies, real cases and legislation. Participants stated that in the selection phase, there should be content regarding the different age groups of the children and explain more in detail what is the reality of these children (e.g. physical violence context) to know how to deal with the behaviours, and to prepare the parents to know what to expect and the behaviour to not be a surprise. It was also mentioned that it is important to have continuous training since these pieces of training are important to remember important topics that, with time, can be forgotten, as well as to discuss and share experiences or alert the parents towards new aspects. This training, according to one of the participants, provides tips on how to deal with bureaucratic issues and to deal with the biological family. It was considered useful to have these pieces of training divided in the central moment of fostering "arriving", "being", and "leaving". Other pieces of training that these entities provide focus on different topics that may interest foster care families, such as comparison between different countries (Portugal vs Brazil), foster care after covid pandemic, sharing experiences, etc.

3.8 Issues to be known by potential foster families.

From the discussion in **Austria**, emerged numerous topics and issues such as learning more about the legal conditions at the beginning, learning more about the

children's life history at the beginning, learning more about therapy options, continuous participation in specific supervision sessions and developing constructive ways of dealing with authorities. In **Italy**, families talked about the legal aspect of fostering and the issue of raising young adolescents; however, some families feel that talking about psychological elements can also be helpful. One family raised the issue of raising awareness of the subject in schools or with doctors because it is often necessary to make medical examinations, kindergarten enrolments or simply trips with the court order in hand, showing that it has decided so in respect of fostering. One of the families emphasised among the many relevant issues to knowing what fostering is and thus knowing the difference with adoption, understanding the needs of children/young people and learning proper work/home time management, and finally knowing the service network. **Romanian** interviewed attended many courses for childcare assistance and babysitter and are aware of their benefits. However, they highlighted that this profession shouldn't be based on theoretical information, it should come from the heart, and one should adapt while they practice it. There is no one good method to be applied.

The goal is a better understanding of the foster carers on issues related to the context and processes of foster care and the complexity of parenthood. Still, the problem is a lack of awareness about fostering in **Greece** and a lack of interested foster parents. Some participants also noted a serious deficiency in the supervision and follow-up of the integrated undertakings due to an increased workload of the supervisory bodies.

In the **Czech Republic**, legislation, rights of foster parents, and raising teenagers are themes that follow the psychological states of the child and that participants want to learn more about. Accompanying organisations and the private sector offer many courses, whether online or face-to-face, but not all of them are of good quality, and they need to choose which one to attend.

The participants in **Portugal** talked about how time is a big obstacle in this process and how uncertain fostering a child feels like. Meaning that upon fostering, a child is not certain how much time the child will be in that foster home and if she/he will ever return to the biological family. Therefore, before fostering, people need to be prepared for this issue and search for the needed support. The families must also be prepared for what can go wrong and what obstacles they may face. The foster care parents also alerted to the fact that there is a need to keep realistically discussing foster care and not to "sugar-coat" the process. This issue regarding extension was mentioned several

CreatingCare
Creating a Safe Environment for
Children in need in Foster Care

Co-funded by
the European Union

times, and one of the parents stated that foster care parents need to try not to have expectations towards the evolution of the child. Having realistic goals towards the process is the optimal way to go. These can include: being comfortable in school, finding an activity that brings joy and pleasure to the child (reading a book, liking geography, sports), eating in a family, and having good hygiene. Another aspect mentioned was the importance of understanding that the monthly money provided sometimes is not enough for the child's expenses and that the foster care parents will have to spend more than they receive. Indeed, for some families, this can be complicated since the children have different needs, sometimes need psychological support, and academic support, which brings financial costs.

In **France** families mentioned the religion, the spoken language and typical food as topic to be know from the family as well as they recognised the importance to know the fears, the cultural differences and the level of education of the foster children.

3.9 Practices and methods used by foster families.

In the **Austrian** discussion, emerged some points like perceiving the children as individuals with their history, problems, but also resources; protecting the children from discrimination and stigmatisation; not making a distinction between biological and foster children; gradually building up a basic familiarity; treating the families of origin with respect, even if they cause difficulties; documenting the children's progress to resolve better any problems/conflicts that may arise later. In **Italy**, the method families underlined is considering the foster family and children as "normal": helping children understand when they are wrong, learning to talk and dialogue, and giving just punishments so that it is clear why to prevent children from feeling that they are different and stigmatised because they live in a foster family. One of the methods recounted is to welcome and educate children according to their aspirations, just as parents do with their natural children. They apply the everyday educational methods of a traditional family.

The participants in **Romania** noted that the child's upbringing was guided by parental feelings, given that they also have natural children. The foster parent's behaviour towards the child must be defined by moral and emotional support to give the foster

CreatingCare
Creating a Safe Environment for
Children in need in Foster Care

Co-funded by
the European Union

child a sense of belonging. The capacity to be empathic as a foster parent and the good communication between the foster parent and the child are two essential aspects.

Constant and increased care is required to ensure the child's smooth psychosocial development in **Greece**. The parents need a lot of patience, persistence, and calmness to confirm their unabated will and conscious decision to raise them. In addition, there may have problems related to material deprivation, abuse, health problems, lack of skills, learning difficulties, and consequences of living in an institutional environment. Joining a new family, managing expectations and possible crises and difficulties, and working relationships with the biological family naturally cause questions, even anxiety.

Foster parents in the **Czech Republic** talk about the needs of the child: every child is specific, and it is necessary to pay attention to the child's needs and to act accordingly. To raise children well, foster parents need knowledge of various fields, such as psychology and psychiatry; they need to know the traumas the child has gone through and how to deal with them. The support of foster parents is also essential at this point. The practices and methods included in the **Portuguese** interviews are developing autonomy in the children; promoting extracurricular activities (swimming, dancing, gymnastic); preparing the child before important events. (E.g. before having visits with the biological family); adjusting to the child's characteristics and needs; searching for psychological help that can give you tools; understanding that theory does not work in all situations*;* having a lot of patience, showing love and care; being flexible and compromising in some things; using the available resources as one does with biological children; finding available resources, because no family can do this alone. For **French** families, using the same methods as with their biological children is the strategy, which means presenting the rules of the family, allowing the children to be autonomous, offering them help for schooling and homework.

4.   Results from the focus groups and activities with foster children

According to the **Austrian** experience, It was not easy to find foster children with whom to have conversations in a familiar environment. Only through private contacts was it possible to find a few foster children interviewed individually. A few points that emerged from the interviews are:

a) The experiences of discrimination and stigmatisation that foster children are permanently confronted with and have to deal with. They would come from foster families and not from a "normal" family. They are often asked why they do not live with their biological parents.

b) The interviewed foster children often mention the ambivalent relationship with their families of origin.

c) They often compare their situation with their biological and foster parents and emphasise the advantages of foster families.

d) Living together in the foster family is described as normal.

e) Children find growing up in a foster family very nice but would also maintain good relationships with their biological parents, even if it is sometimes too difficult.

f) Some of them are happy to live in a foster family because they think they would not grow up so sheltered and well with their family of origin.

g) The foster parents are rated very positively, and none of the children mentioned behaviours or characteristics of the foster families which they would find problematic. And also, the time in a foster family has been rated positively, even if living together was not always harmonious.

In summary, in the narratives of foster children, it becomes visible how they process their partly traumatic experiences, take up life stories, reinterpret them and how they put together different perspectives, design their normality and develop life strategies and visions for the future from them. In addition, the findings show that the foster children were and are confronted with special challenges in their lives: the establishment of a familiar relationship with the foster parents, the separation from the family of origin and the processing of loss and the feelings that go along with it.

Regarding **Italy**, the only occasion to reach the foster children was via phone for privacy reasons, so it hasn't been feasible doing the activities with minors. Given the intra-family type of their fostering, the only children interviewed have said to be

relaxed and happy in staying in their grandparents' houses, having them as a foster family. This is because, in some way, they feel they have always remained in the family, as it is not strangers who have to take care of them. However, the only risk or negative factor they mention is due to the generation gap between them and their grandparents, who are many years older than them and belong to another seemingly distant generation.

In **Romania**, the activity with foster children consisted of two discussion sessions in an online format that were carried out with 17 foster children (from 12 to 18) in total, with the support of the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection in Giurgiu, Iasi and Suceava. What emerged from those activities is that they lead their lives "normally", going to church together (considered as a family activity and taking part in community life) or helping their foster parents with cleaning and housework. Regarding the communication and relationship with the foster parents, the children said that they get along well with their foster parents and their siblings, some living with other foster children or the natural children of the foster family. When they have a problem, they discuss it with the maternal assistant, sometimes with the social workers and the case manager in charge of their situation. The teenagers of the group described their relationship with the foster family and the maternal assistant with the following words: "peaceful, friendship, harmony, love, perfect, strong, open, affection, empathy".

Regarding their foster child experience, it emerged that children are grateful to the foster parents for taking them into their family and wanting to give their parents back by being better persons and behaving better. All of them said they would not change anything and that they get along with their parents and siblings. They mentioned that their foster family gave them a new lifestyle, support, encouragement, with a positive attitude.

Ultimately, the responses and perspectives of the children who participated in the discussion sessions mainly reflect their experiences and interactions with the foster care system and their foster families. They are not necessarily meant to generalise the reality of all foster children.

In **Greece**, the activities with foster children were held in a 3rd secondary school of Argiroupolis attended by children with migration/refugee backgrounds. The participants were 44 children from 13 to 14 and a teacher because it has been

challenging to talk to unaccompanied minors and children in the foster care system. So, they had the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the topics.

In general, finding unaccompanied minors living with foster families was not easy. In **France**, young 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 has impacted the solidarity welcome in our department. This is why the French partner had to adapt the target and the questions for the focus group. Thus, instead of only interviewing young unaccompanied minors living with host families, they also interviewed young unaccompanied minors who are currently living in an institution and who would like to live with host families. In total, they interviewed seven young unaccompanied minors, 5 of them live in an institution, and 2 of them live with volunteer host families. The five young unaccompanied minors expressed the wish to live with a host family at least for weekends or during the holidays. This would allow them to discover French culture (tradition, cuisine, etc.) and learn French more quickly, integrating more easily into society; they also aim to have a better education, learn about household chores, create a network and implement their opportunities to build their future. For participants, living in a foster family is better than living in an institution because it allows them to do more activities such as sports, visits, trips to Paris, visits to the family and feeling the warmth of a family.

In the **Czech Republic**, when partners tried to reach parents, they had problem to find someone willing to share the experience; moreover they experienced difficulties with focus group with minors, because foster parents were not open to the idea to interview them. So, they decided to respect the willing of foster parents and therefore they were not able to find minors to talk with.

In **Portugal** it has been impossible to held activities with children, because in the recent revision of the Portuguese child protection law, foster care is evidenced as the preferred measure for children up to 6 years of age, unless the consideration of the exceptional and specific situation of the child or young person in need of protection imposes the application of the residential care measure. As previously discussed, despite this recommendation, the number of foster care families in Portugal is still reduced and very small compared to other countries. During the interviews with professionals from the foster care field, the Portuguese partner realised that the next step of the project - the contact with families - would be

challenging. Considering the small amount of foster care families and the fact that in the last year this topic has been gaining the attention from researchers and media, foster care families and foster care children have been requested to participate in a lot of activities (e.g.: interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, etc.). Furthermore, in Portugal, since the foster care measure is reviewed every six months, children and foster care families are already subjected to evaluation processes and bureaucratic issues. Therefore, the feedback that the Portuguese partner received when contacting with the responsible organisations or families was thar their availability and willingness to participate in more similar activities (especially when involving their children) is limited.

5.   Profiling the foster care families

5.1 Who are these families?

The desk research and focus groups conducted in the project partner countries revealed many similarities that led to different profiles of foster families.

The foster families are married couples, couples with children similar in age to the one they will foster, married couples who don't have children and single individuals who provide temporary care to a child or adolescent in helpless situations. This care is protecting and sustaining the child physically, emotionally, psychologically and economically until he or she can return to their biological family if there are conditions. Foster families share the desire to take on the burden of minors in need, aware of the difficulties, advantages and commitment that this choice entails. The aim is to offer a family environment until their own family or close relatives can take care of them. There are many types of foster care; the long term is when a family of foster children cannot go back to their biological family, but don't want to be adopted (usually, the fostering is until children turn 18). The short term when a family foster children for a few weeks or months, while the biological family is solving the situation. Take care of a child who foster parents know or is still part of the family e.g. a grandchild for the grandparents. Foster children have disabilities, special educational needs or behavioural problems while their parents take a break. Foster families can be persons unrelated to the

CreatingCare
Creating a Safe Environment for
Children in need in Foster Care

Co-funded by
the European Union

children, but also persons belonging to the original family unit, such as grandparents or uncles. Although these are two different types of foster care, what they have in common is the desire to provide adequate care during childhood, to prevent serious and sometimes permanent consequences on the child's development.

In general, therefore, the foster care system allows children of all ages to grow up in a family that is different from their own but equally hospitable and supportive whenever they need it and for a certain period of time. Based on these experiences, fostering proves to be a possible and feasible system, with numerous aspects that foster families in various European countries have in common.

Challenges: The main challenge that every foster family faces are creating a basic relationship with the foster children, a trust as the foundation of their relationship that takes time and patience. Sometimes, however, for families who have already had biological children before taking a child into foster care, building a relationship with the children appears to be easy because they can draw on experience with their own children.

Obstacles: All foster families, regardless of the type of foster care (extra-family, intra-family, long-term or short-term), face the same obstacles; first of all, there is the bureaucratic one. The need to produce documentation certifying foster care creates inconvenience for both families and minors, who are forced to show their documents every time at school, at the doctor's, etc. The second major obstacle is, very often, the biological families of minors. Maintaining contact with the families of origin can be important. Still, in some cases, it is a source of stress for the minor who experiences a sort of suspended situation, a duality between the family in which he is entrusted and the biological one.

Needs: among the needs that all the foster families claimed, two recur in all the interviews. The first is that of training: families need initial training before becoming foster families; they need to know the limits and opportunities, any obstacles and have all the tools to deal with them. The second is networking and awareness: foster families need constant contact with the authorities, with social services so as not to be left alone in managing the experience and must have the opportunity to communicate with other families to share the same problems and the same worries. Furthermore, on the issue of awareness raising, all partner countries recognise the need for more foster families. In other words, it is necessary to invest to have more families, and more

families mean more profiles and more children placed in the right home. However, this implies that the system must also change since if most of the children continue to be placed in residential structures, even if there are foster families available to take them in, this causes the demotivation of the foster families.

6.   Conclusion

The purpose of foster care is to provide children with temporary 24-hour protection and care; give children temporary care to meet their needs until it is safe/possible to reunify them with their biological parents; give a recommended alternative to residential care. Foster children are matched with a foster family responsible for their care, which may last for days-years, depending on the situation. The ways for a family to start fostering a child are numerous and different from family to family. But the common thread in the choice of all families is to take in children in difficulty: the child needs protection, and sometimes children have psychological and health problems that foster parents can help solve.

However, what moves the foster families is the awareness of the need to build stability in the lives of the children in their care.

Each foster family knows that it is not easy and that sometimes one has to question oneself and even doubt one's ability to give the children what they need. Still, in the end, all the families in all the partners' countries agreed that it was worth it, which is an important decision, a tiring path, but with many positive aspects including being the world of the child as the Austrian family said, allowing children living in family and not in an institution as declared by an Italian family; expanding the family as one Greek family said; seeing happy and healthy children being raised as mentioned by a Portuguese family or exchanging and enriching the values as Romanian parents said. However, becoming a foster family and parenting can sometimes be challenging. Therefore, it is important that once the decision has been made, families are provided with the necessary tools and information, including comprehensive guidance on responsibilities, legal rights and what awaits them as foster parents. In addition, a child's physical, emotional and developmental needs must be met. Social services,

NGOs and foster care agencies then become the conduit to ensure families receive all the assistance and care they need. Overall, the foster families interviewed had good and positive experiences. Despite the difficulties, most parents have a pragmatic vision of foster care and tend to look positively to the future.

7. Annexes

Questionnaire for the foster families

The focus group has been implemented in two phases; the first involves family members to whom the moderator will ask the following questions:

1. What is the path you started to become a foster family?
2. What kind of obstacles do you face after becoming a foster family?
3. What kind of obstacles do the children face in foster care?
4. What factors do you think are decisive in successful fostering?
5. What are the benefits of being a foster family?
6. What sort of support or tools would help you in the experience of being a foster family?
7. Do you think training on the foster care system could be useful for you?
8. What are the essential topics and issues to be known from a foster family?
9. Please, describe practices and methods you are using as a foster family.
10. Do you want to share something else in the focus group?

Activities with foster children

The second phase involved children through ice-breaking activities to engage children, allow them to feel comfortable in the discussion, and encourage them to participate.

The ice-breaking activity "Catch the toy"

- Material: A softball or any soft toy to throw it.

- Description: The focus group facilitator needs to get all the children to stand in a circle. It can be played indoors. The activity begins when the facilitator throws the ball to a random kid and asks a question about them, such as "what is your favourite colour?" The kid answers the question, randomly tosses the toy to another kid, and asks a question such as "do you have a pet?" The next child grabs the toys and answers that question, and tosses it to another random child

with a question. The facilitator needs to have a list of questions prepared (that can be adapted according to the context):

✓ How old are you?
✓ What is your favourite food?
✓ What is your favourite animal?
✓ What is your favourite lesson?
✓ What is your favourite colour?

This video is based on short animation on the adoption process (please, consider adapting the video to your context): Adoption Story

It encourages free speech and can help tackle the language barrier because unaccompanied minors might not be fluent in each partner's national language.

8. References

- (2022), First Quarter 2022. Data and Figures of the Information System available at https://paidi.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/entipo-APRIL-2022_BB.pdf

- Cabral A. S., Macedo D., Banhudo S., (2020), CASA 2020 - Relatório de Caracterização Anual da Situação de Acolhimento das Crianças e Jovens available at https://www.seg-social.pt/documents/10152/13200/CASA+2020.pdf/b7f02f58-2569-4165-a5ab-bed9efdb2653

- Chapon N., Prémoli S., (2018), Parentalitè d'accueil en Europe - Regards théoriques et pratiques professionnelles, available at https://books.openedition.org/pup/50093

- Charbonnel A., (2022), Assistants familiaux: ce qui va changer avec la réforme de la protection des enfants, available at https://www.cneh.fr/blog-jurisante/publications/organisation-sanitaire-et-medico-sociale/assistants-familiaux-ce-qui-va-changer-avec-la-reforme-de-la-protection-des-enfants/

- Conigliaro S., (2021), Lo sguardo dei figli naturali nel percorso d'affido Il vissuto dei figli biologici di famiglie affidatarie durante il percorso di affidamento familiare available at https://tesi.supsi.ch/3938/1/Conigliaro%20Samantha%20tesi.pdf

- Delgado P., Bernedo Muñoz I., Carvalho J. M. S., Salas Martínez M. D., García-Marín M. A., (2019), Foster Carers' Perspectives about Contact in Portugal and Spain, available at https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/4502-20423-1-PB.pdf

- Delgado P., Pinto V. S., Carvalho J. M.S., Gilligan R., (2019), Family contact in foster care in Portugal. The views of children in foster care and other key actors available at https://recipp.ipp.pt/bitstream/10400.22/12179/1/Art2_Paulo%20Delgado_2018.pdf

- Diogo E. S., (2017), Ser família de acolhimento de crianças em Portugal : motivações e experiências, available at https://repositorio.ucp.pt/handle/10400.14/25873

- Diogo E., Branco F. (2019), How Do People Become Foster Carers in Portugal? The Process of Building the Motivation, available at https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3fdc/1924b383dea39db8a9c80997d7293b4b9218.pdf

- Direction de la recherche, des études de l'évaluation et des statistiques, (2023), L'enquéte nationale sur les assistants familiaux, available at https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/sources-outils-et-enquetes/lenquete-nationale-sur-les-assistants-familiaux#:~:text=Avec%2076000%20enfants%20accueillis%20fin,l%27ordre%20de%2040%20000.

- EuroChild, (2021), Better data for better child protection systems in Europe, available at https://eurochild.org/uploads/2022/02/Greece.pdf

- EuroChild, (2021), Foster care system in Portugal: challenges and improvements, available at https://eurochild.org/news/foster-care-system-in-portugal-challenges-and-improvements/

- FA.B! "Family-based care for children in migration", https://www.fabtogether.net/it/home-italiano/

- Fondation pour l'enfance, (2017), Etude sur les apports du parrainage pour les Mineurs Non Accompagnés, available at https://www.france-parrainages.org/documents/47

- Herrmann G., (2021), Pflegefamilie soll Liebe und Geborgenheit geben, available at https://www.meinbezirk.at/innsbruck/c-lokales/pflegefamilie-soll-liebe-und-geborgenheit-geben_a5079412

- IOM Un migration, (2019), Fostering across borders (FAB) available at https://eea.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl666/files/documents/FAB-Final-Programme-Report.pdf

- Konečná H., Landová T., (2020), PŘEDČASNÉ UKONČOVÁNÍ (SELHÁVÁNÍ) PĚSTOUNSKÉ PÉČE SLOVO ÚVODEM, available at https://lumos.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/Lumos_SHRNUTI_predcasne_ukonceni_pp.pdf

- Nadace Sirius, (2019), Pěstounské rodiny v České republice, available at https://www.nadacesirius.cz/soubory/ke-stazeni/Analyza-Pestounske-rodiny-v-Ceske-republice.pdf

- Nadace Sirius, (2022), Konference Aktuální výzvy systému péče o ohrožené děti, available at https://www.nadacesirius.cz/vyzkumy/o-situaci-v-rodinach

- Opening doors for Europe's children, (2018), Strengthening Families and ending institutional care - 2018 Fact Sheet, available at

https://www.openingdoors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/country-fiche-Austria-2018.pdf

- Paul S., Verrier B., (2013), Mission d'enquête sur le placement familial au titre de l'aide sociale à l'enfance, available at https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/33281-mission-denquete-sur-le-placement-familial-au-titre-de-laide-sociale

- Pruteanu C., (2021), A new life, full of love, for more and more children - The number of adoptable children and the families certified for adoption increased by a third in the first three months of the year, available at https://www.unicef.org/romania/press-releases/new-life-full-love-more-and-more-children

- Ramos Batalhas V. C., (2008), Acolhimento familiar práticas e representações das famílias de acolhimento, available at https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt/bitstream/10071/1630/1/Acolhimento%20Familiar.pdf

- Ricchiardi P., Coggi C., (2021), L'affidamento familiare: le strategie educative elaborate dagli affidatari, available at http://www.anfaa.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/L%E2%80%99affidamento-familiare_-le-strategie-educative-elaborate-dagli-affidatari.pdf

- Roots Research Center NGO, (2021), Country Profile on the European Semester and COVID-19 crisis from a children's rights perspective, available at https://eurochild.org/uploads/2021/02/GR-ECH-S20-profile.pdf

- Roth M., Parental Responsibilities - National report: Austria, available at http://ceflonline.net/wp-content/uploads/Austria-Parental-Responsibilities.pdf

- Unicef for every child, Child Rights Strategy - The National Strategy on the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights available at https://www.unicef.org/romania/documents/child-rights-strategy#:~:text=About-,The%20National%20Strategy%20on%20the%20Protection%20and%20Promotion%20of%20Children%27s,the%20objectives%20integrated%20into%20the

- Urso A., (2014), L'affido familiare: una ricerca quantitativa sulle esperienze degli affidatari negli ambiti del magentino e del castanese, available at https://ainformazione.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/tesi-urso-affido-familiare.pdf