



# CONSOLIDATION REPORT

ALTERNATIVE CARE FOR UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN

TRANSITION TO ADULthood



**U-CARE Project**  
**Unaccompanied Children in Alternative Residence**

April 2021



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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FAB	Fostering Across Borders
IOM	International Organization for Migration
U-CARE	Unaccompanied Children in Alternative Residence
UMC	Unaccompanied Migrant Children
SGB	Sozialgesetzbuch
B-UMF	Bundesfachverband Unbegleitete Minderjährige Flüchtlinge

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Unaccompanied Children in Alternative Residence “U-CARE” project is implemented for a duration of 20 months, from January 2021 until August 2022, and is funded by the European Union’s Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The activities are implemented by the International Organization for Migration offices in Belgium (coordinator), Greece and Germany in cooperation with Belgian local partner Pleegzorg Vlaams-Brabant en Brussel and Greek partner ARSIS.

The project aims to develop and improve alternative care systems for unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) in Belgium, Germany and Greece. Through an inclusive child-centered approach and the exchange of good practices, knowledge and experiences, existing systems and tools will be strengthened which will allow for better support and a more tailored response to the needs of younger and older UMC.

The project focuses on four main activities:

1. **Recruitment of foster care providers** to respond to the needs of younger UMC; a special focus will be on the recruitment of foster care providers with a migration background. To this end, a recruitment campaign and a Standard Operating Procedure document on recruiting foster care providers in migrant communities will be created.
2. **Development of alternative living arrangement prototypes** for older UMC, through the creation of user guides which will allow to apply the prototypes to existing systems.
3. **Training and capacity building** of foster care providers and professionals on caring for UMC, by using, adapting and expanding the training manual developed under the [Fostering Across Borders project](#) (2018 – 2019).
4. **Awareness raising and (trans)national exchange** on the topic of alternative care for UMC, through national stakeholder dialogues, thematic workshops and awareness raising sessions.

The goal of the project is to inspire both experienced and less experienced European countries to develop, strengthen and promote alternative care systems, such as family-based care (FBC), as a more appropriate response to the needs of UMC.

# PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE REPORT

This consolidation report of existing good practices has been produced as part of the Unaccompanied Children in Alternative Residence (U-CARE) project founded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (2014-2020), with the aim of developing and improving alternative care systems for unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) in Belgium, Germany and Greece.

This report outlines existing alternative care options for unaccompanied minors and young adult migrants (respectively former or aged-out UMC), by describing the current reception and care system in Germany and providing a conceptual overview of practices in different European Member States. Given the limited scope of the report differences in the national legal frameworks as well as subsequent differences in the child protection systems respectively youth welfare systems cannot be discussed in detail.

In this context, “alternative care options” refer to forms of care apart from foster care<sup>1</sup>. Thereby a special focus is put on forms of assistance and accommodation which support the transition to adulthood and the situation of the so-called “care leaver”. Available options in this regard include supervised semi-independent living units, residential youth homes with a specialized concepts and student/community homes or small collective structures shared with other UMCs and national youth.

The presented “promising practices” comprise care arrangements that address key challenges in the transition to independency by providing alternative approaches of assistance and accommodation. The identification of these practices were based on desk research, exchange with experts, practitioners, and other IOM missions as well as the practical field experience of the author. The presented practices do not constitute an exhaustive list of promising practices in Germany and Europe as this is not the objective of the report.

Together with the future consultation of UMC and experts, the findings of the report will form the basis for upcoming activities of the U-CARE project and particularly in drafting three care prototypes for the target group of UMCs.

The report has been structured as follows:

- The [care section for UMC in Germany](#) outlining the legal framework applicable in Germany and the differences between and within German states with regards to care for UMC, as well as giving a general overview of accommodation, care and assistance for UMC in Germany;
- The section on [transition to adulthood](#) encompassing a short analysis of obstacles with regards to care for UMC transitioning to adulthood as well as contextualization of promising practices in several Germany states and European countries;
- The [final section](#) specifying the conclusions with regards to the transition to adulthood for UMC;

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to IOM's internal document “Best Practice report: recruiting foster care providers in migrant communities, produced in March 2021 under IOM's U-CARE project, for more info on foster care.

# INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the situation of unaccompanied migrant children arriving in the European Union has been of particular relevance for the different stakeholder working on migration issues. In 2015, over the course of one year, more unaccompanied minors arrived in the EU than ever before. Especially Germany experienced a sharp increase in the numbers, which created a big challenge for the existing structures of accommodation, care and assistance.<sup>2</sup> Next to the above-mentioned drastic increase in numbers of unaccompanied minor refugees in Germany, the measures taken to overcome the challenges also mark a turning point in the further development of the relevant care systems. Parallel to the expansion of the existing structures in relation to the number of the newcomers, the challenges have led to a revision of measures and the creation of new concepts in the Youth Welfare System all around Germany.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, despite the actions taken to improve the social services for UMC as well as a distinct decrease in the numbers of UMC arriving to Germany in recent years, the appropriate care and assistance of unaccompanied minors and young adult refugees remains a challenge.

Whereas the reception services and subsequent care measures have been noticeably improved since 2015, it is becoming increasingly clear that the transitions from the care system into an independent life and the abrupt end of the support structures often deteriorate the positive developments achieved in the previous years. These difficulties, arising from a lack of necessary structures which should accompany this critical phase are not limited to Germany alone. The transition to adulthood of UMC has been identified as a central challenge all over the EU and is a matter of concern for UNHCR, UNICEF and other UN agencies, Council of Europe, as well as a range of non-governmental organizations.<sup>4</sup>

To outline alternative care systems for UMC, the report starts by describing the existing reception and care system in Germany. Thereby, the underlying legal system and resulting differences between federal states and municipalities are briefly discussed. In a second step challenges of leaving the care system and start in an independent life are addressed and followed by promising practices which display opportunities to strengthen the UMC's capabilities needed for a successful transition to adulthood.

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<sup>2</sup> Zeller/Sandermann 2017: 1; Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018: 5; Müller 2014: 10

<sup>3</sup> Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018: 5; Zeller/Sandermann 2017: 2

<sup>4</sup> Pasic 2018: 15

# ACCOMMODATION, CARE AND ASSISTANCE FOR UMC IN GERMANY

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK APPLICABLE TO UMC IN GERMANY

The legal framework regarding the principals of protection and the required care of unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) are defined by a variety of international agreements. The basic framework is formed by the four principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): (1) non-discrimination, (2) the best interest of the child, (3) the right to life, survival and development and (4) and respect for the views of the child. In the EU, the international agreements are supplemented by the European legal and policy framework and completed by the national legislations of the respective Member States<sup>5</sup>. Despite the common EU legal framework, the differences regarding national legislations of the Member States result in different structures, instruments and overall, in differences in the embodiment of the national child protection systems within the European Union. These national differences seem to be closely related to the welfare state model and the imbedded family policies of each Member State<sup>6</sup>. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned differences of the national care and support structures in all Member States, unaccompanied minors find themselves caught between the child protection systems, respectively youth welfare systems and the resident law. In other words, the tension between migration control measures and the legal framework serving to the primacy of the best interests of the child comes out as a common challenge.<sup>7</sup>

In Germany, the so called “primacy of youth welfare” lowers this tension to a certain extent. This underlying principle, based on the German Constitution, states that “it is primarily the provisions contained in Book VIII of the Social Code (Sozialgesetzbuch VIII: Kinder- und Jugendhilfe; henceforth SGB VIII), in which the Child and Youth Welfare Act is codified, that apply as to their accommodation, care and assistance, and only then do the Asylum Act and the Residence Act apply on a secondary basis”<sup>8</sup>. As a result, unaccompanied minors are assisted, cared and accommodated by the regular youth welfare system in the same way other minors and young adults are, regardless of their residence status. However, with the transition to adulthood, or, in other words, their exit from the youth welfare system, the “primacy of youth welfare” becomes inoperative and the residence status becomes decisive.<sup>9</sup>

Germany’s child and youth care services are regulated by the SGB VIII. The pivotal point of this framework, pertaining to all young people aged up to 21 (in exceptional cases until the age of 27), is the child’s right to assistance in its upbringing and education. Likewise, the Social Code defines and categorizes all services provided by the youth welfare system, such as, support of youth work (Section 11, 12 SGB VIII) support services for parents (Section 17, 18 SGB VIII) or support of the development of children in day care (Section 22-25 SGB VIII). Within every section, different measures and forms of care are included. Measures and forms of care (more precisely assistance) applying to unaccompanied minors fall into the category of childraising support (Section 27-35 SGB VIII). The term “childraising support” (Hilfen zur Erziehung) covers a wide range of residential and non-residential forms of assistance as well as individual pedagogical and therapeutic measures including foster care

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<sup>5</sup> Zeller/Sandermann 2017: S.10; Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018: 16; EU Commission 2016: 2

<sup>6</sup> Helland 2019: 10

<sup>7</sup> Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018: 31

<sup>8</sup> Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018:17

<sup>9</sup> Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018: 5

(Section 33 SGB VIII) and residential care (Section 34 SGB VIII). Thereby, the care system for UMC and their overall living situation in Germany is formed to a high degree by the stipulations of the Youth Welfare Act.<sup>10</sup>

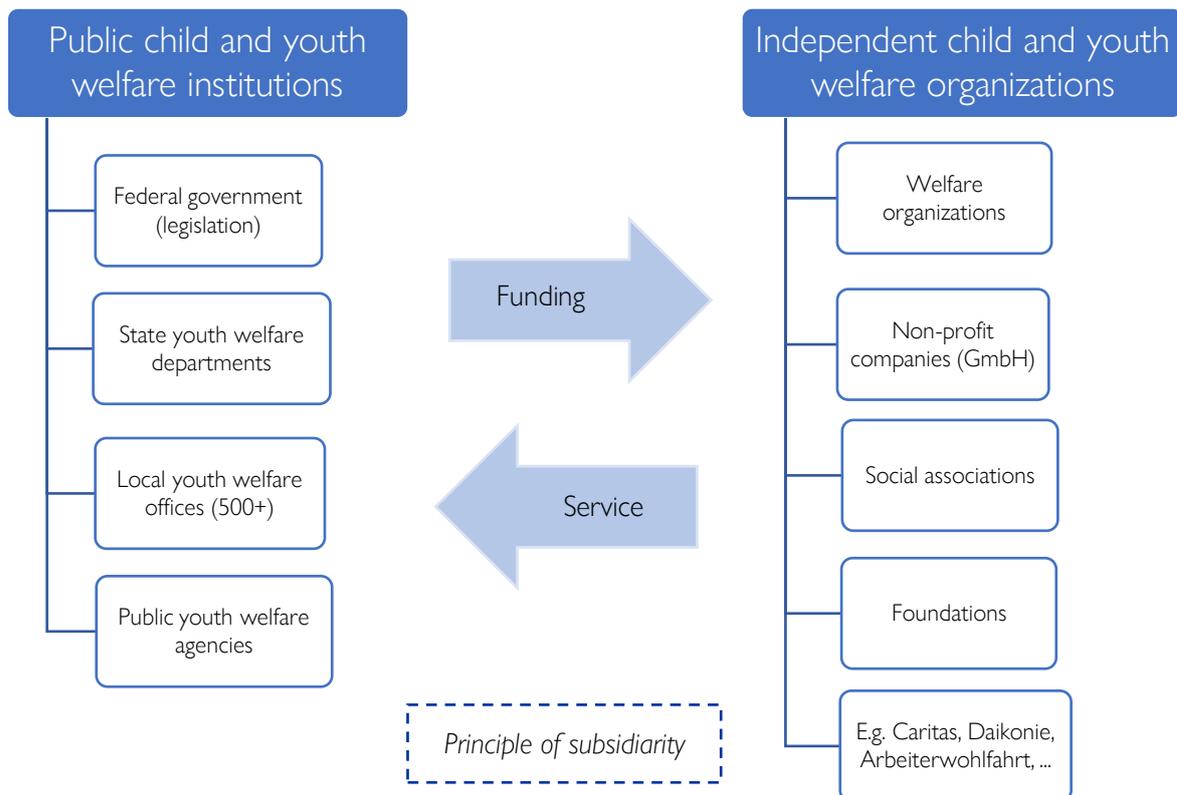
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<sup>10</sup> Hansbauer/Alt 2018: 186, Schröder et al. 2016: 4; Müller 2014: 39

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AND WITHIN GERMAN FEDERAL STATES

Although the German Social Code (as a federal law) provides a coherent framework and defines standards for the care, assistance and accommodation, the organizational structure leads to differences in the availability and thereof quality of the various forms of care. As Germany is a federal republic the implementation of the standards given by the framework is carried out by the youth welfare departments (Landesjugendämter) of the 16 federal states (Bundesländer), which have the rights and obligations to decide on the organizational structures and procedures. Furthermore, within each federal state, Child and Youth Welfare Services are organized by the municipalities, which decide the structure and support offered by the local Child and Youth Welfare Offices (Jugendämter).<sup>11</sup>

However, SGB VIII explicitly draws attention to the “variety of bodies”. This means that the local Youth Welfare Offices do not have to provide all these services themselves if private bodies can provide the needed support. In this context private bodies refer to independent youth welfare organizations (freie Träger der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe). These non-governmental organizations provide the needed services on behalf of the public Youth Welfare Offices. In fact, most of the childraising support is provided by such institutions. Nevertheless, the public Youth Welfare Office has a major role, as it is responsible for the overall care management process.<sup>12</sup> This interplay between public and private bodies originates from the “principle of subsidiarity”. To sum it up, the structure and the specific local conditions of Youth Welfare Services are characterized very much by the federal system and the interaction of public and private bodies, resulting in regional disparities as well as differences in the local supply structure.



**Figure 1** Graphic representation of “principle of subsidiarity” in German child and youth welfare system

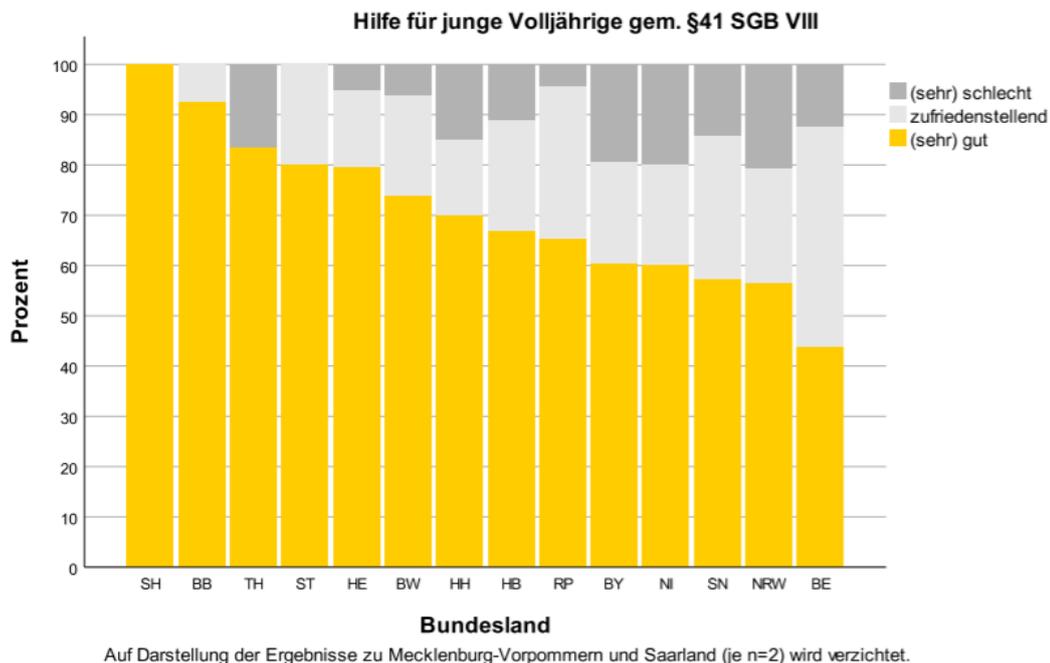
<sup>11</sup> Schröder et. al 2016: 4, Zeller/Sandermann 2017: 9

<sup>12</sup> Schröder et al. 2016: 5

For a long time, this regional disparities and local differences of youth welfare services did not have a remarkable impact on the quality of services provided to unaccompanied minors, as their arrival was widely concentrated to a few major cities and entry hubs, such as Munich, Dortmund, Aachen or Berlin, which have a long-standing experience and relevant structures for the adequate care, assistance and accommodation of UMC.

This situation changed in the course of 2015. Since some municipalities and cities were overburdened by the high influx of UMC and especially concerned about the lack of placements and qualified staff, the Act to Improve the Accommodation, Care and Support of Foreign Children and Youth was passed in November 2015 which introduced a nation-wide distribution procedure for UMCs.<sup>13</sup> This legislative change had a profound influence on the living situation of UMC in Germany. Municipalities which had neither previous experience in dealing with UMC, nor the needed infrastructure such as sufficient accommodation, relevant therapeutic options or specialized educational programs, were suddenly in charge of the reception and care of a new target group.

In the recent years, the care structures for UMC have been improved all over Germany and an overall adjustment in the standards and quality of care services took place. According to a survey conducted by the Association of Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (Bundesfachverband Unbegleitete Minderjährige Flüchtlinge; henceforth B-UMF), good and very good accommodation and care quality can be principally achieved in all federal states. This survey further suggests that different concepts and policies both on the federal state and municipality level can cause differences in the quantity and quality of tailored accommodation and care models.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, there are still notable differences between individual municipalities and especially between cities and rural areas regarding youth welfare services provided to UMC.



**Figure 2** Graphic - differences between federal states with regards to survey question on quality assessment of care, accommodation and assistance for young adult UMC<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Thomas et al. 2018: 17-18, Zeller/Sandermann 2017: 10

<sup>14</sup> B-UMF 2020: 37

<sup>15</sup> idem

## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ACCOMMODATION, CARE AND ASSISTANCE

As outlined above, the care services for unaccompanied minors are defined by the stipulations of the Social Code. The type of assistance to be granted is based on the individual needs of the UMC and is subject to an assessment process which follows a specific procedure. The different processes and steps which take place after the arrival as well as the possible subsequent assistance measures (i.e., forms of assistance and accommodation) will be discussed on the following pages of the report.

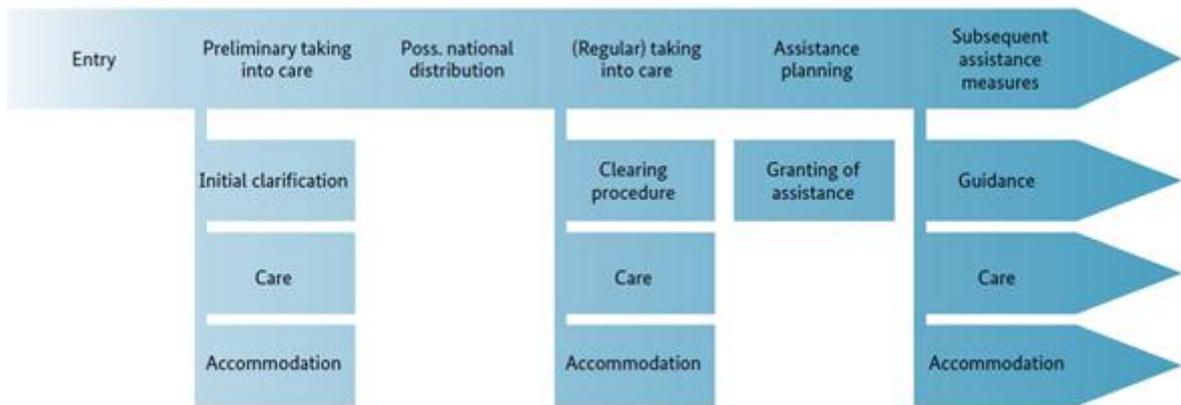


Figure 3 Overview - processes of the accommodation, care and assistance of unaccompanied minors <sup>16</sup>

### Temporary forms of assistance and accommodation

The first two steps “preliminary taking into care” and “regular taking into care” are temporary measures. When unaccompanied minors arrive in Germany, they are taken into care by the local youth welfare office. **Preliminary taking into care** often takes place in specialized reception facilities and is meant to be completed within the first 14 days after the arrival.<sup>17</sup> This measure can be understood as an initial step of care and clarification, pointing out basic information regarding the health and family situation. It entails their accommodation, health care, provision with basic material needs and an age assessment. Preliminary taking into care ends with the decision whether the young person is to be registered for the national distribution procedure or remains with the youth welfare office that provided the preliminary care.<sup>18</sup>

The second stage is called **regular taking into care** which is commonly known as “clearing”. This stage starts once the unaccompanied minor has arrived at the responsible youth welfare office. Most cities have so called “clearing houses” specialized in the initial reception and facilitate intensive educational assistance.<sup>19</sup> This whole process is actually meant to be completed within three months but in reality, can last up to half a year. As one of the first steps, a legal guardian (Vormund) is appointed by the Family Court. In Germany, if parents are unable to exercise parental responsibilities – and such is the case with UMC – a legal guardian fills this gap and ensures that all decisions are taken in the best interest of the child.<sup>20</sup> Simultaneous to the appointment of the legal guardian, the so-called clearing procedure is carried out: “A comprehensive

<sup>16</sup> Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018: 26

<sup>17</sup> MFKJKS 2017: 15

<sup>18</sup> González Méndez de Vigo 2017: 27

<sup>19</sup> Müller 2014: 36

<sup>20</sup> Zeller/Sandermann 2017:12

clarification of future prospects, biographical work, the clarification of the residence situation and an assessment of needs”.<sup>21</sup>

The clearing procedure includes the clarification of the following questions: Would a family reunification come into question? What are the options regarding education including language acquisition? Are there therapeutic requirements to be included in the service? Is an asylum application the best option? Would a foster family or a residential group home meet the needs of the UMC after the clearance process, or is assisted living an option? All these questions are assessed and finally decided at the so-called **assistance planning conference**.<sup>22</sup>

### Subsequent forms of assistance and accommodation

Based on the results of the clearing procedure and the following assistance planning conference, **subsequent assistance and accommodation** takes place. As described earlier, unaccompanied minors and young adult refugees are entitled to different forms of assistance pursuant to Sections 27-35 of SGB VIII of the Social Code and to integration assistance for children with a mental disability and juveniles pursuant to Section 35a SGB VIII.<sup>23</sup> In case of young adult refugees, respectively aged-out unaccompanied minors, assistance for young adults pursuant to Section 13 and 41 SGB VIII also comes into question.

The form of assistance thereby initially only determines the kind of socio-educational assistance which differentiates in the intensity. The measures are based on the individual needs of the UMC and can be provided in different forms of accommodation (e.g., residential units, semi-independent living etc.). The only exception in this context is the foster care (Section 33 SGB VIII) as this type of care is naturally only provided in a family living arrangement.

In line with the granted form of assistance, different forms of accommodation can be considered for UMCs, which are likewise defined by Book 8 of the Social Code. In other words, accommodation can take place:

- in a residential group home (Section 34 SGB VIII),
- in an assisted living arrangement (Section 34 SGB VIII),
- with a host or foster family (Section SGB VIII),
- in socio-educational supervised living arrangements (Section 13 SGB VIII),
- or in intensive socio-educational individual care (Section 35 SGB VIII).<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no exact data available displaying the distribution among the different forms of accommodation. However, the vast majority of UMC are placed in a residential group home (Section 34 SGB VIII), while a small part is placed in host or foster families (Section 33 SGB VIII). Results from an explorative study suggests that less than 15 % of UMC fit the criteria for a foster care arrangement.<sup>25</sup>

While the placement in a residential group home is by far the most common care arrangement, the services related to Section 34 SGB VIII are highly varied, as these “range from accommodation in a home facility with round-the-clock assistance on site, to assisted living groups in which more independent juveniles are

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<sup>21</sup> González Méndez de Vigo 2017: 44

<sup>22</sup> Zeller/Sandermann 2017: 12

<sup>23</sup> Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018: 29

<sup>24</sup> Deutscher Bundestag 2020: 72; Müller 2014: 39; Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018: 29

<sup>25</sup> Zöller/Sandermann 2017: 14

accommodated, with 'open concepts' of accommodation in which pedagogical assistance is ensured on a mobile, flexible basis".<sup>26</sup>

A further distinction can be made between integrative forms of accommodation, where UMC are accommodated with other children and juveniles, and accommodation that are specially designed for unaccompanied minors. Additionally, there are types of accommodation for specific target groups among UMC, such as groups of girls or therapeutic groups for UMC who are heavily traumatized.<sup>27</sup>

Overall, in the course of the recent years, a differentiation in regards to specialized forms of care took place: *"The fact is that it is virtually impossible to systematically categorize the vast range of possibilities which are now available on the market for placement in a foster home: Differentiation parameters that one finds are for instance the intensity of care (regular groups, intensive groups, arrangements with a low or high intensity of assistance), the specific nature of the target group (children and juveniles with mental illnesses, eating disorders, displacement biographies, sexual abnormalities, traumatization, reduced intelligence, etc.), age-specific educational needs (groups of small children, groups transitioning to independence, assisted living, etc.) or the place where the assistance is provided (home, non-residential accommodation group, family, activity abroad, etc.)"*.<sup>28</sup>

As outlined, the care systems for UMC in Germany covers a wide variety of different forms of assistance and accommodation. In order to make the existing structures more concrete and tangible five common forms of accommodation are portrayed:

#### **Residential group home**

Residential group homes or residential living groups usually provide space for six to ten young people. The residents are supported by social pedagogues working in shifts so that 24-hour support is guaranteed seven days a week. These houses are often part of a larger foster home respectively residential care facility.

#### **Assisted living groups**

UMC who are displaying already a high degree of independence can move on to forms of assisted living or "Semi-Independent living groups". Often this form of accommodation takes place in rented apartments and the juveniles are supported by social pedagogues according to their needs.

#### **Units providing intensive therapy based on curative education**

In this form of accommodation, the everyday routines of children und juveniles are strongly structured to provide a secure framework, often combined with additional therapeutic provisions for the young people.

#### **Family-like forms of residential care**

This type of care derives from host families with the difference that professional care givers are included. These are private households, where young people with special needs of support (e.g., traumatization) live with a care giver and possibly with the family of the caregiver. In most cases these arrangements provide curative education.

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<sup>26</sup> Deutscher Bundestag 2020: 73

<sup>27</sup> Deutscher Bundestag 2020: 73

<sup>28</sup> Hansbauer/Alt 2017: 187

### **Assisted individual residential care**

In this form of supported living, young individuals are provided with a fixed amount of support per week (e.g., one hour a day or three times a week, depending on the individual support that is needed).<sup>29</sup>

As outlined before, the presented forms of accommodation can differ regarding the intensity of assistance, feature different pedagogical concepts, or can be adjusted to the needs of a specific target group. In the following, the target group of UMC transitioning to adulthood, their situation, specific needs and challenges, that has often been in the spotlight of the current debate among experts, will be discussed. Additionally, promising practices, tailored especially for care leaver will be shown.

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<sup>29</sup> Schröder et al. 2016: 7; Deutscher Bundestag 2020: 73f.; Tangermann/Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2018: 34

# TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

The transition to adulthood and independent living is a challenging time for every young person. This is particularly true for unaccompanied minors, respectively aged-out UMC. The challenges these youngsters undergo are often described with the so-called concept of “triple transitions”: the transition from adolescence to adulthood, with its related socio-emotional and cognitive changes, that characterizes every human being; the transition related to migration, that leads to detachment from one’s context of origin and the need to build up a new life in a foreign cultural and social environment; and the transition related to overcoming traumas experienced in the home country or during the flight.<sup>30</sup>

Next to this overall difficult starting position, reaching the age of majority implies drastic changes regarding their legal situation, often combined with a lowering of living, care and assistance standards as well as a possible detention from the host country.<sup>31</sup>

The legal status of young adults respectively aged-out UMC is complex and varies both between and within the European Member States.<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding these differences, the transition to adulthood and missing legal standards regarding the provision of a smooth transition are central challenges for UMC all over the European Union.<sup>33</sup> These challenges can be generally summarized to six central aspects<sup>34</sup>:

- Access to education, vocational and on-the-job training,
- Access to adequate housing solutions,
- Access to the job market and risks related to informal labor and exploitation,
- Access to health care, recreation and psychological support,
- Maintaining formal and informal relationships,
- Social inclusion and participation in society.

Based on this difficult starting point, several projects have been developed to address the above-mentioned obstacles and guide UMCs through this difficult transition. In the following, various initiatives from Germany, Belgium, Cyprus, Austria Spain and Netherlands are briefly presented.

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<sup>30</sup> ISMU Foundation 2019: 8; FRA 2010: 87

<sup>31</sup> FRA 2010: 87; Müller 2014: 10; Pasic 2018: 9

<sup>32</sup> Pasic 2018: 3; FRA 2010: 87; Parusel 2017: 1; Helland 2018: 3

<sup>33</sup> UNHCR, Council of Europe 2014: 20; Hancilova/Knauder 2011: 72; ISMU Foundation 2019: 8

<sup>34</sup> For more in-depth information on these aspects, as well as to read children’s experiences with transitioning to adulthood, please refer to the research conducted by IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF: „At a Crossroads: Unaccompanied and separated children in their transition to adulthood in Italy.“ ISMU Foundation (2019)

## OPPORTUNITIES - PROMISING PRACTICES

### **Combining proven elements for a successful transition - SOS Children's Village; Düsseldorf, Germany**

This project, located in the cities of Düsseldorf and Essen, which combines key elements for a successful transition to adulthood, is a good example for a typical care leaver arrangement tailored for UMC needs. The setting consists of semi-independent living arrangements for UMC between the ages of 16 to 18, providing them with support and assistance up to 21. The juveniles and young adults live together in two- or three-bedroom apartments while the office of the care team is located in the same building. The project works closely with the local youth welfare office, education authorities, youth migration services and healthcare providers to establish a strong network for the next steps. Next to educational support for school and vocational training, the project carries out a range of activities to develop practical competencies such as managing household activities, organizing free time, practicing self-discipline in handling money, strengthening self-confidence and coping with crisis situations. Another key aspect of the project is the provision of legal counseling which aims at identifying realistic options and opportunities for a steady integration.

### **Strengthening digital skills for independence and integration - Ev. Jugendhilfe Godesheim; Cologne, Germany**

The Ev. Jugendhilfe Godesheim is an independent youth welfare organization located in the cities of Cologne and Bonn, providing various accommodation and assistance services to UMC who are transitioning from care to independent life. Next to various projects brought up within the framework of services for care leaver UMC, the organization created the project "independence 2.0" in 2020. This project focuses primarily on strengthening the digital skills needed for apartment and job search. The starting point was bringing an up-to-date approach and redefining the necessary skills needed to have a smooth transition phase to adulthood. Since 2020, UMC who are living in semi-independent living arrangements participate in weekly workshops which include topics such as official e-mail communication, online banking and job application training. Based on positive experiences, the project is planned to be rolled-out in further similar living arrangements and to become an integral part of the assistance services for older UMC.

### **Maintaining existing relationships for secure transitions – Jugendhilfe Werne; North Rhine Westphalia, Germany**

The Care Leaver Approach of the Jugendhilfe Werne, which is an independent youth welfare organization located in North Rhine Westphalia, supplements the existing residential living group "Oase". The project provides so-called "tandem apartments" for young refugees who have lived in the residential living group Oase and who are fulfilling the criteria to live independently. The same caregiver team continues to provide further assistance to juveniles and young adults in a more 'open' and independent context. The team provides a fixed amount of support per week and ensures a 24-hour on-call duty. The approach puts emphasis on maintaining the built-up relationships and mutual trust between caregivers and caretaker to provide the needed stability. Stability here is seen as a fundamental base to manage the upcoming challenges and uncertainties related the transition to adulthood. Maintaining the attachment figures is also favorable as they were involved in the clearing process of the UMC and have a profound knowledge about the UMC's biography and special needs.

### **House sharing with local youngsters to promote social inclusion for newcomers – CURANT project, Antwerp, Belgium**

The CURANT project ended in 2019 and was coordinated by the Social Welfare Department of the City of Antwerp, a public institution in charge of case management and provision of social housing. The project

offered different types of assistance, such as education, vocational training and psychological support for UMC and young adults between the ages of 17-21. A key aspect was featured in the accommodation arrangements: the newcomers were housed together with young Flemish people aged 20-30. The Flemish participants volunteered to be UMC's flat mates, or 'buddies', for at least a year, helping them to integrate into society. The 'buddy' and his or her flat mate set the agenda for themselves. Joint activities could include things like learning Dutch or building a social network. Both "buddy" and UMC received guidance from a social worker throughout the program. The Curant project thereby combined professional support arrangements with a peer-to-peer approach to strengthen social inclusion.

#### **Highlighting the role of local communities and legal counselling – TUMCA project; IOM Cyprus**

The TUMCA project (Transition of Unaccompanied Migrant Children to Adulthood) is managed and implemented by IOM in collaboration with the Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance of the Republic of Cyprus. The project provides semi-independent living units for 15 unaccompanied minors and young adults between the ages of 16-21. Young people participating in the project are supported to cope with everyday life and receive educational assistance for school and vocational training, access to health services and psychosocial support. A special focus is given to the inclusion of the juveniles in the local community and the protection of their rights. The related activities include the creation of a network with employers from local businesses and a network on local housing, meetings with community council members and schools to disseminate information and raise awareness on migration. In addition, weekly meetings with a legal advisor take place, who supports the youngsters regarding their asylum application, residence permits and related rights.

#### **Semi-independent living in student facilities - SOS Children's Village; Salzburg, Austria**

The project provides semi-independent living units for UMC and young adults up to the age of 21 and is implemented in partnership with local Child and Youth Services. In addition to covering children's basic needs, the living arrangement as well as the assistance measures focus on education and building a coherent career plan. Based on an individual assistance plan, the youth care workers support the UMC to achieve development goals, such as recognizing individual strengths, developing skills and interests and finally creating a realistic future plan. The special feature of the services is the SIL arrangement which is located in a student facility. This gives them the opportunity to easily interact with students from different countries, gradually integrate into the community and create a peer network. Overall, the location of their living arrangement allows them to be perceived as students and not automatically identified as "refugees".

#### **Promoting SIL and establishing a mentoring scheme for UMC – PROUD project; implemented in Greece, Germany, Spain and Netherlands**

The PROUD project (Promoting Supported Independent Living as an alternative care practice for unaccompanied minors) is a European project, funded by the AMIF Program. The project aims to promote independent living concepts as an alternative practice for UMC and thereby to strengthen the existing structures in the participating Member States. Proven practices are collected and then tested by the praxis partners. Based on this monitoring, a guide for the successful implementation of this type of care is created and provided to interested professional and organizations. Another key activity consists in the development of a mentoring scheme. A mentor from the host community will accompany the minors, providing them with an adult they can turn to outside their care facilities and support their integration process in their new living environment.

The presented projects give an impression of different constellations to overcome the obstacles young adults face. Although, the projects focus on different key aspects, they are all based on semi-independent living

arrangements which create an optimal base for building self-esteem, developing life skills and gradually taking responsibilities. The different pedagogical setting and education approaches and living arrangement that form promising practices will be further discussed in the conclusion.

# CONCLUSION – ALTERNATIVE CARE SYSTEMS FOR UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN

The number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the EU increased substantially in 2015. This challenge has led to a revision of measures and the creation of new care concepts for UMC in several Member States. While the quality and availability of care arrangements differs at the European level as well as within the Member States, the German Youth Welfare System is principally well-equipped with suitable and specialized care arrangements for UMC. The system comprises various forms of assistance and accommodation with different pedagogical approaches with a low or high intensity of assistance as well as special arrangements for individual target groups such as young women, LGBTQI+, traumatized children or juveniles with mental illnesses. This wide range of different care forms is crucial to facilitate an appropriate and needs-based assistance, as socioeconomic, cultural and religious disparities and diverse backgrounds exist within the target group. For instance, the need for specialized services becomes apparent in the case of LGBTQI+ refugees, as this group usually faces multiple discrimination in a common arrangement.

At the same time the German Youth Welfare System - as it is the case with all Member States - displays a particular weakness: sufficient support structures for a successful transition into an independent life.

UMCs are faced with more risks and encounter greater challenges on their path to independence than other children. These vulnerabilities can be described by the so-called concept of “triple transitions”. Without the support of their families, they need to overcome changes, possible traumatization and psychological distress linked to migration (i.e. experiences of torture, trafficking, exploitation, violence, stress related to the asylum procedure, to being in an irregular situation, or the family reunification procedure). Additionally, they encounter greater challenges related to starting a new life and building their own identity, while often confronted with social exclusion, discrimination, economic insecurities, etc. Among experts this in-between state is described as “double absence” which means that the person is not belonging to the country of origin anymore, nor the country of destination. This situation is especially devastating for this age group as the young person defines his or her identity in the transition to adulthood.<sup>35</sup>

The abrupt end of care, support and accommodation, which is linked to reaching the age of majority, often undoes the positive developments reached by the UMC in the past years. While some Member State, principally, allow youth welfare to continue beyond the 18th birthday and have after-care services for aged-out UMCs, there is no specific legal regime or safeguard and in particular no sustainable support structures for young unaccompanied asylum-seekers who have just reached majority. This leaves the UMC in a particularly vulnerable situation..

With a view to the legal and psychosocial situation, it becomes apparent that UMC in transition to adulthood have their own needs as a specific age category and need a supportive and caring environment in order to achieve autonomy and integration in the host society.

The portrayed projects, initiatives and organizations use various approaches and promising practices to prepare young persons for adult life and guide them through this challenging transition.

These practices cover:

- **living arrangements:** semi-independent arrangements, student facilities, house sharing with local youngsters

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<sup>35</sup> ISMU Fundation (2019): 19

- **educational approaches:** strengthening of digital competences, language courses, development of individual career plans, job application and vocational training
- **pedagogical settings:** maintaining existing relationships, promotion of self-esteem and resilience, recreational activities, participation in the assistance planning
- **activities that support their integration into the local community:** mentoring scheme, 'buddy' program, network on local housing, employees
- as well as **legal counseling** and **psychological support**

These different aspects outline key aspects for alternative care systems, that support the transition to adulthood and provide a solid starting point for the further activities of the U-CARE project and the drafting of care prototype for UMC.

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