Alliance for Children on the Move:

Standard Operating Procedures for Guardians

ASP4G

National report on needs assessment of children & guardians

- Cyprus -

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Cypriot context: Legislative frameworks applicable to unaccompanied and separated children

The issue of unaccompanied and separated children has recently hit the priority categories of vulnerable children identified by the Cypriot welfare state mainly because of the unexpected and rapid increase on children arrivals. Nevertheless, several legislative policies that refer to the protection of children, and as such include the discussed case, have been identified during the last decade. It is also critical to note that Cyprus has been transformed from a country of emigration to a net immigration receiving country (Cochliou and Spaneas, 2009). Further to this, minorities previously existed and still live in Cyprus. Only around 86% of the population is Greek Cypriot and the remainder is composed of Maronites, Armenians, Latinos and migrant workers (Europeans and Third Countries Nationals) and their families (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2013). Demographic statistics also revealed that 13% of the Cypriot workforce is of non-EU origin, many coming from the Middle East (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2012).

For a period of time there was concern that Cypriot court practice and legislation was not in compliance with the best interests of the child (FRA, 2010). As a reaction to such criticism, the government adopted into Law the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-Operation in respect of Inter-country Adoptions through Law 19(I)/1995. Furthermore, due to the pressure from either internal stakeholders and/or external parties (EU policies) an Ombudsman's Office under the designation Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights was established in 2007 based on Law No 74(I)/2007. It is an independent institution and undertakes similar functions as most of its other European counterparts. Meanwhile, the first Law on the Trafficking of Children and their protection by the State (Law No 3(I)/2000) has been implemented some years earlier on. In addition to that law, the Government decided to implement measures to alleviate the psychological and other traumas of unaccompanied children through specialized services (Ministerial Decision 52.375 of 6 October 2000).

Although, at first look it might be argued that sufficient and compliant legislative measures have been adopted, a deeper exploration reveals gaps in this specific policy area. The legal

structure of Cyprus for unaccompanied children is governed by the Laws on Refugees from 2000 to 2004 (Law No. 6(I) of 2000). It was last amended by Law 241(I) of 2004), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified on 7th of February 1991 and incorporated as Law N. 243(II) 1990 (it was later amended by N. 5(III) of 2000) and the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights Ratified by the Republic of Cyprus on 25th of October 2005 and was incorporated as Law N. 23(III) of 2005.

The Law on Refugees discusses and provides the protection of unaccompanied children regardless their legal status. When such cases are met, following their registration into the Aliens Registration System, the Director of the Social Welfare Services acts as Guardian to the child and is responsible to provide the child with all the necessary and protective measures (Section 2 of the Refugee Law 2000). The Social Welfare Services (SWS) are also obliged to make an individual assessment on any decision taken regarding an unaccompanied child. Such decisions should always be taken on a personal, objective and impartial basis and be duly justified. General Comment 6 of the Committee of the Rights of the Child points (par. 33) that the States should appoint a guardian or advisor as soon as the unaccompanied or separated child is identified and maintain such guardianship arrangements until the child has either reached the age of majority or has permanently left the territory and/or jurisdiction of the State, in compliance with the Convention and other international obligations (CRC, 2005).

The Refugee Law is aligned with the international obligations as regards to the unaccompanied and separated children as well as with the asylum Directives of the European Union on the qualification of persons as refugees or as persons under subsidiary forms of protection, on temporary protection, on the minimum standards for the asylum procedures as well as for the reception conditions of asylum seekers (ECRI 2011).

The Council Directive 2003/9/EC of January 2003 (EU & CEU) setting the minimum standards on the reception conditions regarding refugees and unaccompanied children, affirms that unaccompanied children must be represented by legal guardianship or where necessary be represented by an organization that is responsible for the care and wellbeing of children or any other appropriate representation (EU & CEU Directive, 2003). In Cyprus, the Commissioner of the Rights of the Child acts as a legal representative in the asylum process for all unaccompanied children (Koursoumba, 2010). However, for the case of

unaccompanied children, their legal representative is their Guardian appointed by the Social Welfare Services Director (Refugee Law, 2000). Furthermore, another contradiction is noted in the General Comment 6, paragraph 33, which declares that the legal guardian should act as a link between the child and the agencies that provide the continuum of care required by the Child (CRC, 2005). In this case the SWS are both the legal guardian and the main care provider.

Some additional amendments have been introduced within the provisions of the Refugee Law (2000), which, in turn, provide new obligations for the Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of the Child. The legal representative has the opportunity to inform the unaccompanied children about the meaning and the possible consequences of the interview, and potentially assist in the preparation for the interview. Furthermore, it allows the representative to be present, to ask questions or to make comments during the interview. It is also important to note that the amended Refugee Law requires the interview to be conducted by a competent officer with the necessary knowledge of the specific needs of unaccompanied children (FRA, 2010).

The referral of an unaccompanied child to a reception centre is prohibited. However, for those who are above sixteen, they can be referred exclusively by the Director of Welfare Services. To proceed to such arrangements a number of criteria need to be satisfied as the prior examination of the reception centre's conditions as they are in a condition to provide satisfactory accommodation for children, including clear separation from any adult asylum seekers' accommodation. The Regulations also require that the Director of Welfare Services ensures that unaccompanied children are placed with adult relatives or foster families or accommodation centres with special provisions for children, or other such suitable accommodation and, where possible, siblings should not be separated, accommodation changes are kept to a minimum, and the best interest of the child is always taken into consideration (FRA, 2010).

In addition, the District Welfare Office is required to take into account the special needs of such vulnerable children when granting public allowance. Moreover, the Social Welfare Services under Regulations are obliged to ensure that children who are victims of any kind of abuse, negligence, exploitation, torture or harsh, inhuman or degrading treatment or who

have suffered by armed conflicts have access to rehabilitation services, and that the appropriate psychological care and specialized treatment, where required, is provided to them, alongside any other special medical or other assistance required.

Article 3 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child provides that any action taken by the contracting states must ensure that the rights of the child are guaranteed and that the interest of the child is paramount. According to the Children Law where a child, regardless of nationality or legal status, is in the care of the guardian, who is the Director of Social Welfare Services, it shall be the duty of the Director to exercise any powers with respect to the child so as to further the child's best interests (UNCRC, 1989).

Based on the above provisions in practice children —both those who have and those who have not filed for asylum—may be accommodated with a foster family; relatives; or a foster home, at the discretion of the Director of SWS; care arrangements, including provision of welfare allowance to children in need. Regarding education unaccompanied children have access to public educational institutions (primary and high school education is free and compulsory) under the same conditions that exist for Cypriot students (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2008). The SWS, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture have overall responsibility for the education of unaccompanied children.

In terms of health services these are free for unaccompanied and separated children under 16, as long as they have applied for the Medical Card and registered to Ministry of Health. Also, in this case, as they are adolescents, they have to be under the protection of the Director of SWS to be eligible to apply.

As far as integration support is concerned, the Law on Asylum and Refugees mentions that integration support needs to be provided to refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection status, regardless of their age. However, there are not any specific provisions for the integration support of unaccompanied children.

By an amendment of the Refugee Law in 2009, the Children's Commissioner was given competence to represent unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the asylum procedures so as to provide them with legal representation on their asylum claims. However, it has not been possible to exercise this competence but rather, in 2013 after a plethora of complaints from UNHCR and other NGOs, it was also transferred to SWS for social work practitioners to

exercise (European Network of Legal Experts in the Non-discrimination Field-Demetriou, 2012). Repeated appeals of the Commissioner to the competent Minister and efforts to have the law clarified by Parliament, if the authorities consider this as necessary measure to protect the best interest of unaccompanied children, have not been fruitful. As a result, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children remained, since 2009, without legal representation and their asylum applications were not examined as a consequence of which they, eventually, reached maturity and were deprived of the possibility to have legal representation by the Commissioner (Trimikliniotis & Demetriou, 2008, FRA, 2010).

In asylum proceedings children must be represented by the Commissioner for Children's Rights, who was employing private lawyers for this purpose. However, the Asylum Service – Ministry of Interior claimed that this was not in accordance with the Law and the Commissioner for Children's Rights must use its own staff to represent the children in question. As the Commissioner has no legally qualified staff, the procedure for interviewing children to determine their refugee status has ground to a halt. Around 50 children remained in a state of legal limbo (FRA, 2010; European Network of Legal Experts in the Non-discrimination Field-Demetriou, 2012).

2. Children's and Guardians' Needs Assessment

2.1 Objectives

The objective of guardians' needs assessment was to identify the perceptions of guardians over their role and tasks and their needs in terms of improving their practice and their competency (knowledge and skills), in order to inform and orient in that way the framework of upcoming training's curriculum as well as the content of the Handbook on SOPs for guardians. The objective of children's needs assessment was to identify the perceptions of children over the role and tasks of the guardians in terms of improving their practice and their competency as well as children's needs.

2.2 Methodology

Two focus groups with each between 10 to 12 participants (unaccompanied children) were conducted in two different residential facilities in Nicosia and Larnaca respectively. The one is run by an NGO, a kind of public-private partnership, whereas the other one is solely run by the state. There were differences noted in terms of social care personnel and social care professionals between the two facilities which might justify also the diversity in children's answers during the focus group.

A convenience sample composed of 15- and 17-year-old children was recruited. A total of 22 children (12 female, 10 male, Mage= 16 years) participated in the study. Age was included as a criterion as research reflects that group interactions with children are more interesting when the group members are similar in sex and age (Mauthner, 1997). Given the varied nature of the guardianship system experience, with some children being from 3 years into 4 days, we did not restrict the amount of time since they entered the country, but we allowed them to choose freely whether to participate or not. In this way we captured the experiences of children who went through the guardianship system recently as well as those further in the transition process.

Considering the sex of the children in the focus groups, we had one group with boys and one group with girls in Nicosia and Larnaca respectively; considering the age of the children in the focus groups both groups varied from 15 to 17-year-old children. The time between their arrival in the country and the time of the study ranged between 4 days and 3 years. The variation of children's country of origin was mainly from African countries. Thus, there was also great variation on speaking languages apart from English, two children were French speaking only and 12 only Somali. In both groups an interpreter was utilized to facilitate children's participation.

In addition, two focus group discussions were conducted with guardians and social welfare officers in two major cities, Nicosia and Larnaca.

2.3 Procedure and residential facilities

Children were recruited through Social Welfare central office which is also their guardianship authority with the mandate of legal representative as well as the guardian.

They were asked whether they wanted to take part in a discussion group with children of the same sex to discuss the topic 'Guardianship system and Unaccompanied Children in Cyprus'. Participation was only open to children who had been asked and chose to freely participate. In each focus group it was assured that all children were not forced to participate if not willing to. Since their arrival and according to relevant legislation, the standard rule in Cyprus allows Social Welfare Services to exercise guardianship authority over unaccompanied children. Consequently, we assumed that their permission for the child's participation included the consent of the other and included children in our research with the written informed consent of their guardian. By using this legally defined rule, we avoided any problems might arise doubting the procedure. All the participating children signed a personal informed ascent form that explained the research aims in clear language, plus all the text was interpreted in French and Somali accordingly. The focus groups took place in the two residential facilities and they lasted between 90 and 110 minutes. The children of each focus group only gathered for one session.

Before the group discussion started the children were once again clearly informed about the aims of the research and their right to quit participation without any justification. Each focus group was audio taped to ensure that participants' comments were recorded verbatim. Talking with children for research purposes in general (Mauthner, 1997), and especially with children who experienced conflict, war and loss has to be done very carefully. Attention was given to welcoming the children and making them feel at ease. To meet the criteria for validity and reliability, a standardized topic guide was used. The interview consisted of three phases: first, the moderators introduced themselves to the group and explained the aims of the project and the focus groups as well as the house rules, including confidentiality issues; secondly, all participants introduced themselves to the group (name, age, hobbies, time since arrival). In the third phase a topic guide was used, but without imposing too much structure on the participants. It was important to capture as many spontaneous descriptions as possible, therefore we asked children broad, explorative questions to capture their narratives

about the guardianship system. In the first part of the second phase the children were introduced to five main topics/themes:

- Role of the guardian
- Living Conditions of children
- Challenges in children's lives
- Positive aspects in their lives
- Suggestions for guardians

An example of a general question is: 'What do you think a guardian is?', an example of a specific probe: 'How do you know what a guardian is? Did someone tell you that theoretically this is what a guardian is or did you respond through your experience with your own guardians?'. This question aimed to indirectly provide information on how children experience the guardianship process. After this, the moderator gave a summary of what was said, and the children could give feedback. Finally, the focus group discussion ended with the opportunity to ask questions and make comments. Children were told what was going to occur with the data and they received a small present.

2.4 Data analysis

It is important to first mention that gathering the data proved to be a very emotional and rewarding process because of the way the children shared many rich and touching stories with the researcher. The children listened to each other carefully, took up on each others' stories or aligned themselves with what was said by others. They were also interested in how others experienced the same problems within the system (e.g. Dublin process for family reunification). The data was analyzed based on framework approach as described in the research protocol. An essentialist or realist method focuses on the experiences and meanings of the children. Consistent with our perspective on children, the aim of this part of the study was to display children's needs within the national guardianship system. Therefore, we stayed close to the words of the children during the coding process to resist interpretation biased by adultism and lack of cultural understanding. The focus group data were transcribed verbatim and the data analysis process was completed in several steps. The initial stage of the analysis was concept-driven: meaning construction and mattering were used as guiding concepts; the elaboration was, however, fully based on data-driven coding (Gibbs, 2008). In a first step all three researchers individually read the most elaborated transcript thoroughly and repeatedly. After a first reading, pieces of text concerning the same topics were marked and short notes about the content were written in the margins. From these notes the first themes were identified, and subsequently written on a separate sheet of paper and given an initial code. Next, we discussed the process of analyzing the first group and compared lists of themes, searching for common themes and connections from which to extract super ordinate concepts. The researchers discussed the similarities and differences among their derived categories, including exemplars of the different categories. The themes of the first group were used to help orient the subsequent analyses of the other focus groups: however, new themes were still discovered using the same methods as in the first group. By the end of each group discussion the moderator gave a summary using the words of the children and asked for their feedback. This was used as a first step to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, recognizing the children as full agentic beings with own experiences and meanings. At the same time special attention was paid to the limiting nature of summaries as many other themes emerge out of the data. Differences in meaning were discussed until consensus was reached. Finally, the authors took the analyses of all the groups, identified their

commonalities, refined the themes and chose exemplars for the final research report. The analyses had the aim of finding the essence of the experiences, getting a view on the unique character of children's meaning construction about their guardians.

3. Research Discussion

3.1 Guardians

3.1.1. Role of the guardian

According to the Refugee Law when an unaccompanied or separated child arrives in Cyprus, the Social Welfare Services (SWS) take the child under their care. The SWS are responsible for the protection of the rights of the child according to international conventions such as the Convention of the Children Rights and EU relevant Directives, based on the best interest of the child. This includes: access to education, health, protection, care, reunification with their family and preparation for the asylum procedure.

> *"Whenever a child arrives either unaccompanied or separated, we are called by the immigration police to go and take the child under the care of the SWS"*

> *"Children can arrive in the country from different routes, like Turkey and usually the occupied areas or with boats and of course from the occupied airport and then arriving on foot or smugglers bring them into the Republic".*

> *"Wherever they come from we have to go and pick them up them moment they say the word minor. Police officers will call us in the middle of the night in order to make sure that children are protected under the SWS care".*

According to the Refugee Law, the unaccompanied children are provided with the same rights with any Cypriot child that is away from their family. This means that the Director of the SWS is responsible for the protection of the child and their legal representation. Initially the guardian has to inform the child about his/her role, child's rights and take the child to a safer accommodation such as children's homes or shelters run by the SWS. After the accommodation is secured the Guardian will inform the child about his/her procedural rights, prepare the asylum application if it not already done and he or she will ask about the possibility of family reunification so as to initiate the process:

> *"Family reunification is an important issue for the children. The fact that they find out that they are not in the country that they were planning to be is very frustrating and they often think that it's the guardian's fault that the process is so delayed. It's difficult to explain that the guardian cannot do much."*

The guardian will also make all the necessary arrangements for the child to have his/her health checked, school registration and any other possible need which has to be attended to. From the moment of arrival to the Republic, the child is given all the information about the procedures and the fact that they are under the protection of the guardian. The guardian is responsible to accompany the child for all procedures (finger prints, interview with Immigration Police etc.) that need to be undertaken. The guardian is present to ensure that all procedures are implemented in a child-friendly manner and that the rights of the child are safeguarded. After all the arrival procedures are completed, the child is taken to one of the shelters in Nicosia, Larnaca etc.

> *"The first couple of weeks are difficult. There is not enough time to attend always all their needs and create also a professional relationship with them"*

> *"I think the most difficult issue to take care of is the school registration, especially in the middle of the school year, they never have available positions. Of course, the poor school background of these kids does not help at all."*

> *"Communication can be difficult…time is not on our side to make connections. We have very short time for preparation of the asylum application and the Dublin procedure which is just impossible."*

When the medical results are announced the child will be informed especially, if any kind of treatment is necessary. Following that the interview with the Asylum Service will be arranged. The guardian will arrange to interview the child with the help of an interpreter, in order to get more detailed information which might be useful for the asylum examination process. Then depending on each case, different issues might occur, for example with the shelter. The evaluation process of the situation of the child aims at preparing an individual care plan for the child (Personal Care and Rehabilitation Plan) done jointly by the guardian and the shelter's psychologist[1]. According to the personal profile of the child, their individual needs (psychological, health, educational or other), personalized aims are set for each child. Recreational activities are also included, but what is crucial is for the child to utilise their time here in a beneficial way.

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[1] Psychologists are not employed in all state children homes. Only Hope for Children shelter employs psychologists.

The processes described above, relate only to unaccompanied children who are going through the process for the governmental departments and not to the separated children who might have relatives in Cyprus or arrive with them in the country. In cases of children which have relatives in Cyprus, the child might stay at the shelter initially; then after the conclusion of all clearance procedures of the relatives and the confirmation that they have the abilities, the child is placed in the family. In other cases, the child might be placed in the family and the procedures are run in parallel. It is important to note that, even though the child is placed with their relative family, the SWS guardian is still responsible for the legal representation in any of the procedures described above. Additionally, if there are indications that the unaccompanied child is a victim of trafficking, then there are other procedures that need to be followed.

> *"The vast majority of foster families are relatives of the unaccompanied children, but there was an interest in some cases from Cypriot families to host unaccompanied children. There is one case in Nicosia where this has happened so far."*

A third type of accommodation usually utilized in cases where the child has been at the shelter in Cyprus for a long time and the guardians decide that the child is able to live in a semi-independent facility. This is usually beyond the age of 17 years old and when it has been evaluated that it would be useful for the child to live in this type of structure. There are extraordinary cases of course, for example the case of an unaccompanied with an infant child who could not be placed in a shelter, so she was placed at a semi-independent structure since her arrival. It has to be noted that if a female unaccompanied child is pregnant has to leave the accommodation facility before she gives birth. The support of these children is then restrictive as they are treated as adults asylum seekers meaning they have to take care of themselves and their newborn.

3.1.2 Drives in the Guardians' Practice

Regarding the drives to guardian's practice the participants described the process followed by the Director on appointing social workers in certain posts and duties. Selecting certain people for this position is not based on certain criteria. Thus, participants explicitly stated that

when they are assigned as guardians have not undertaken any kind of specific training. If there is availability and offer of trainings either in Cyprus or abroad regarding guardianship of unaccompanied children, then they might attend:

> *"Usually every 2 years we change posts. There is not a specific strategy on that. It just happens. Sometimes assignment of duties takes place after colleagues' promotions or retirements."*

Similarly, it was also mentioned that there is not any guidance regarding guardianship. An additional and very important point raised by the interviewees was the lack of official procedures in relation to the mandates of the guardianship system:

> *"There are only guidelines about the procedures that need to be followed in cases of UMs. We don't have them written somewhere, we had 2-3 seminars about these procedures and this is how we know them*."

> *"We follow the guidelines for the children under the care of SWS…there are not any special provisions for unaccompanied children."*

There was a discussion among the guardians whether there is really a written guide about the procedures related to unaccompanied and/or separated children. They mentioned some other guidelines and documents related to the rights of the children under child care and child protection, but at the end it was agreed by everyone that these procedures cannot be found in any official document, and they know what to do by practice and experience.

> *"There are some guidelines in a department circular, but they are not included in the Manual of Operation of the Department"*

Consequently, the practice followed is the one followed for any child in care as outlined in the relevant legislation, however, completed by the EU Reception Guidelines. The appointed guardians are not given any chance to prepare themselves and usually they might be transferred from a completely irrelevant position e.g. family violence, financial benefits etc. This lack of planning and criteria creates several difficulties on professionals' practice as well as in their adjustment in the new role of guardian.

> *"Sometimes we are transferred from one unit to the other in two-days time without explanations or preparation time. It's learning by doing, isn't it?"*

"It would have been better if there was appropriate training and time for adjustment in one's new duties".

Learning has been raised as a major issue during the discussion both individual and organisational. Participants discussed that their organisation does not invest in people who have tried to accumulate new knowledge through their positions either through in-service formal training or otherwise.

In addition, participants discussed about the formulation of the individual case plan (ICP) for each child. The ICP is conducted by the guardian after the child's arrival and his/her placement on the appropriate accommodation facility. The ICP includes primary needs, difficulties/problems and goals that in the short-term. The wishes of the child are also recorded, and care planning is implemented according to needs and wishes of the child. Participants were not familiar with specific tools for best interest assessment and determination neither with vulnerability assessment tools.

This process of course includes the formulation of the asylum case for each child and any applications which need to be prepared such as the application for family reunification. Participants mentioned that the asylum examination lasts from six to twelve months which for some children might result in their adulthood. Additionally, age assessment is a process which creates frustration and/or disappointment to them because they start the whole process and when the child is proved to be an adult, they feel very distressed as they have invested their time when they could have helped another child who really needs their assistance.

"When we have our doubts about their age, we can initiate an age assessment. It is not easy for us and every time we wish we had made a mistake."

"It's disappointing when you realise that you have spent all this time with someone who lied to you in the first place".

The guardians appointed by the SWS Director are also responsible for the legal representation of the children during their stay in Cyprus. They therefore do not necessarily have expertise or experience in the law pertaining to unaccompanied children, and these shortcomings can be harmful to the performance of their mandate. Also, they can be responsible for a high number of children at the same time, up to 100. Although, they are not geographically distant

from the living site of the unaccompanied children in practice, the increased numbers mean that their interaction with the children is limited and that the trusted contacts of the children tend more often to be members of the accommodation centre's personnel.

> *"It's impossible for me to have so many children under my authority. I know that I am not responding effectively to their needs".*

Moreover, decision-making about individual children's cases is taking place accordingly. In complex cases, a multi-disciplinary, inter-agency case conference may be called to develop a case plan. Specific, measurable, time-bound case objectives are set at this time and should ideally be reached prior to case closure. In a case conference apart from the appointed guardian other members include the residential facility officer and his/her coordinator, the team manager and guardian's coordinator, as well as their top managers if needed. Depending on the child's needs in the case conference might also participated school teachers, doctors etc.

3.1.3 Capacity-building

Regarding training availability guardians discussed the lack of a scheduled in-service training specifically targeted to unaccompanied children, their rights and their needs. However, they also mentioned that training does not exist in all other sectors too. Whenever opportunity arises through EU funded projects or invitations from organisations abroad the guardians participate. The quotes below demonstrate the inadequacy of the organization to provide a coherent organizational training strategy:

> *"No training was provided to the current guardians/personal officers before starting their work".*

> *"There was one seminar this year in the Larnaca shelter, which included guardians and all personnel of the shelter. That was only".*

> *"No specialised training was provided to guardians".*

> *"Such training seminars are provided from time to time".*

> *"I didn't know which procedures I had to follow and I was asking the translators"*

Recognising the importance of training the participants debated on the opportunities for training inside and outside the organisation as well as the significance of merging individual with organisational knowledge. However, for this to be possible the organisational structure and culture need to change in order to transform in a flexible, participative and collaborative organisation. Participants noted that all professionals working in SWS are graduates of social sciences who appreciate learning and ensuring that their practice is based on research evidence. However, they acknowledge that SWS need to create appropriate mechanisms and infrastructure to ensure that organisational knowledge is build upon practitioners' experience and research evidence.

Thus, the participants argued that guardians with a social work background are appropriately equipped to protect and ensure unaccompanied children's needs and rights are fulfilled. They clearly stated that it is very important for the guardian to have specialized background:

> *"Yes, this is very important as the guardian needs to have a solid understanding of child psychology and social work and be able to manage each case".*

Moreover, the participants referred to the skills necessary and how these can be further enhanced through training. Participants firstly recognized the need to be trained on research evidence and best practices on how colleagues in other countries handle certain challenges such as practical ways on how to handle specific problems. They also mentioned that more specialized training on vulnerable children is essential such as girls who have been through FGM, children who are victims of sexual or other type of exploitation. Training mainly for recognition and assessment of victims so they can be referred to Mental Health Services for psychological support. They also discussed the need for training in intervention models of social work practice in order to facilitate their approach with the children, their first interaction when the child arrives and smooth transition to the assigned guardian.

They also raised the need for intercultural training on a variety of issues relating to religious practices which a guardian needs to be aware of:

> *"When I first started working as a guardian, I didn't know what Ramadan is so I had to ask our Muslim translators".*

Cultural and religious awareness is complicated because it is influenced by personal and cultural beliefs but, despite being upheld by human rights legislation, they are not universally

valued. Social services for unaccompanied children, including residential child care services, have a poor track-record in addressing these rights, seldom doing so more than casually. Living in a rapidly changing world organisations need to move on from the religious past and embrace demographic change. Unaccompanied children's guardians and residential child care staff need training to develop culturally competent approaches to care which actively address the cultural and religious needs of the children and young people in their care. This will consequently lead to cultural differences being more highly valued, to better understand the inner self, promoting feelings of safety and well-being for unaccompanied children. Participants mentioned that SWS need to address children's cultural, religious and spiritual needs within their own organisational structure and culture.

3.1.4 Relationship with the children

In this section the participants asked to discuss the kind of relationship they develop with the unaccompanied children in their care. Traditionally SWS have accumulated a great extent of practice knowledge for children in care. However, this group of children has been a new and quite challenging area of practice for SWS practitioners. The main challenge identified regarding the professional relationship with the children was initially the large number of children:

> "There is no time to be that important person in the life of the child, to really help them. The guardian just runs all the basics, all the procedures (migration services, medical, …)".

> One person has the responsibility for too many procedures and too many children. There is no time to really implement things".

Heavy workload for guardians means that they are not able to build a trustworthy relationship or complete all the required procedures on time based on information gathered. The nature of the guardian's work with unaccompanied children sometimes requires that immediate attention to the safety of child rather than focusing on establishing a helping relationship. Designated guardians are expected to establish within 24-48 hours after referral whether an unaccompanied child is a child in need of care and protection. In order to make this decision, guardians must gather information during the initial contact with children. However, only after rapport is established will the child engage with the guardian and lower his or her

defences. Gathering information while the relationship is still weak might cause defensiveness or withdrawal from the client, who might not be ready to share difficult information. Social worker participants in this study reflected that once the relationship is established, information flows naturally. This created a dilemma for the social work participants. Participants explained

> *"Our role as guardians requires to pay immediate attention information gathering while you have less chance to first build relationship, but we carry on because we need certain information from the child, while there is no relationship present causing you to gain no information and making no progress with the child."*

Additionally, participants mentioned that the delays with medical exams and asylum procedures create frustration and disappointment. Thus, they have to face additional difficulties in their relationship with the children:

> *"In general, the fact that their demands are sometimes declined or delayed is the main reason for children's frustration which sometimes leads to bad reactions".*

Participants differentiated children between those who are going to leave the country because they have relatives in other EU countries, subject to the acceptance of their application with the Dublin procedure, and those children who are going to stay in Cyprus. Children that do not have relatives in other countries are sometimes easier to get used to the new environment and make a great effort to adjust and integrate. In this group of children two more categories exist, children who are in the age group of 14-15 years old and children who belong to 17-18 years of age. The former group needs to be prepared for its transition into adulthood whereas the latter for the transition into independent living:

> *"If the child is at the shelter from 14-15 years old, then they need to be prepared for transition to adulthood. If the minor though is already 17-18 then there is no time to support them towards this transition and independent living".*

It could be argued that the work of the guardian involves a variety of aspects which require also a variety or professional skills and knowledge. In a very short time appointed guardians have to respond effectively into extensive needs of the unaccompanied children themselves (i.e. children rights) and at the same time seek to achieve tasks and fulfill children's needs through interagency collaboration.

3.1.5 Interagency Collaboration

SWS are positioned in the centre of welfare services delivery and their mandate covers a great range of age and social phenomena. Although unaccompanied children are a new field SWS have come a long way in developing collaboration with other departments and services. More specifically for the case of unaccompanied children collaboration has been developed with Ministry of Education, Police Immigration Department, NGOs and the Asylum Service to name but a few. However, these collaborations are not institutionalized and there are not based on memorandums or agreements (apart from the NGOS which is funded to run the residential facility). Moreover, the participants mentioned that the good collaboration between the officers usually compensates the lack of structures and procedures between their organisations.

The issue recognised most strongly by participants as a barrier to collaboration was lack resources. This finding is consistent with previous research, indicating time pressures and lack of appropriate community resources make it difficult for guardians to complete their most crucial work. However, it is important to note that although insufficient resources can make collaboration more difficult, plenty resources will not necessarily make effective collaboration occur, and blaming inadequate resources can cover failures of the system.

An additional barrier discussed was unrealistic expectations. The items that defined this factor assessed the extent to which respondents felt child protection workers and mental health workers had unrealistic expectations about each other's authority to act. That this issue emerged as a separate factor indicates that substantial and important tensions are created by operating within a statutory framework that others do not understand. For effective collaboration to occur it is crucial that workers in both systems understand the constraints and opportunities afforded by the policy and legislative contexts.

Again, the establishment of joint training and good information exchange processes was suggested that could facilitate the development of this understanding. The final barrier pertained to workers protecting their professional identity and operating from different theoretical frameworks. While these boundaries can hinder communication across professional groups, professional identities are very important to workers. Directly attacking

the boundaries that form part of professional identity is, therefore, likely to fail, and the attempt itself may well result in decreased willingness to engage in collaboration due to an increase in defensiveness. Rather than dismantling professional identities, it is more beneficial to work at reducing the extent of 'otherness' and out-grouping, while utilizing the diversity of options and alternatives that arise from the different perspectives.

3.2 Unaccompanied Children

The research analysis revealed how the five main themes can be interpreted. These themes with subthemes will be discussed with reference to verbatim quotes from the different focus groups.

3.2.1 Role of the guardian

Our analysis revealed how important it is for children to understand what occurs within the guardianship system. Clearly, leaving their country and their families behind was a significant event in all the children's lives.

Regarding the first theme of the discussion, the participants of the first residential facility used a generally positive way of describing guardians. There was only one negative aspect, the matter of lack of time on behalf of the guardian. However, later on, the children expressed more negative aspects. Possibly, this was due to the fact that during the process and especially when we were discussing the living conditions, we explained again and reassured them that they were in a safe environment and they could express anything, as the results would not be shared with the shelter officers. Also, the general frustration that emerged during the discussion about food and lack of educational opportunities (see II. Living Conditions and III. Challenges), enabled the participants to express problems that they are facing with their guardians and the personnel at the residential facility as well.

The children's responses about their knowledge for the guardian's role varied extremely. It has to be noted that between the two facilities there was also great diversity in the responses we received.

> *"Someone who takes care of you and guides you"* (Boy, NIC)

> *"Take care about all the children in Cyprus….If someone has a problem she is there"* (Boy, NIC)

> *"She is responsible for us"* (Girl, LCA)

> *"She is our boss"* (Girl, LCA)

It could be argued that children did not really know of the guardian's role, his/her responsibilities to them and of course their rights. In the same respect the who somehow

knew stated that they knew through their own experience, which empowers the previous comments that unaccompanied children interviewed were not fully informed about the guardian's role and their duties towards them:

*"Through our experience with our own guardian" (*Boy, NIC)

The group of boys interviewed were able to identify certain attributes they thought were important for the guardian to have. For example:

"Guardians teach, inform, guide, advice, solve problems", "*Inform about the laws",* "*Security is very important", "Secure their future", "Encouragement", "How our future will meet our destiny"* (Boys, NIC).

Similarly, the children thought that every child should have a guardian. Regarding the experiences with their guardian in the Nicosia facility children shared mainly positive experiences,

- *"I want to talk about a positive experience. There is a Dublin process here. Anything that happens between me and my parents, she really takes care and consideration. All the papers, documents that is needed for the process to be successful. If she receives any news, she comes back here and informs me. So, this is the experience I've had".* (Boy, NIC)
- *"She is positive. She is interested, she is really a great woman. Shares information about our family. She is talking to me about education. I told her my problem and she said that she can understand. But no matter how much she is trying, sometimes she cannot help because of the regulations".* (Boy, NIC)

However negative experiences were also shared such as the lack of time on behalf of the guardian to listen to their problems and difficulties properly which might create further problems and nuisance to the children

"Sometimes they don't have the time to talk, you might have a problem and call her and she is busy, she is busy and after, she is forgetting. And the problem is there because it was not fixed". (Boy, NIC)

3.2.2 Living Conditions

Regarding the living conditions both groups reported no problems with the facilities apart from the lack of food sometimes and the lack of activities during afternoons. Food was discussed substantially by the participants and there was a general dissatisfaction and even frustration around food. The facilitator asked further questions to clarify what where the main aspects of the problem (variety, quality, quantity, cultural appropriateness, availability):

> *"The food is very bad, it's not good", "Food is not available at all times; if someone wants a snack or fruit beyond the breakfast, lunch and dinner time, then it is refused"* (Boys, NIC).

A participant explained that they are not allowed to go outside of the shelter and they don't have money, so if they are hungry at night and they are refused a cup of milk or some bread from the facilities, then they would need to go to bed hungry. Some of the children were used to having some milk before going for sleep. This is not provided. If they ask for it, they are told that the kitchen is closed or that it is not permitted. They also mentioned that the food is not culturally appropriate or pleasant to them:

> "*Every day it's the same; the menu never changes*" (Boys NIC).

> *"There used to be an African lady who would come to cook once a week so the children from African countries liked this, but then this discontinued"* (Boys NIC).

It could be concluded that food provision is quite a major issue for them especially in terms of quantity and quality. Food has a special meaning as well as it can bring back memories and keep connections and links with culture and civilisations. Thus, cultural integration in the local society is even more difficult for them because they are forced to eat food which they dislike.

The children did not mention any serious difficulties with their accommodation facilities as such. For all participant children in the focus group this facility was the one they were placed when they arrived. However, they did mention that school needs to be improved and that after-school activities are scarcely offered:

> *I am 3 years in this class and I haven't learned Greek"* (Girl, LCA)

3.2.3 Challenges in Children's Lives

Children in both facilities insisted about the lack of social and educational activities in the afternoons. They expressed feelings of neglect and solitude as they cannot occupy themselves with something other than talking to each other. They were interested to find learning opportunities such as Greek language courses which they were sure they will help them find a job and integrate more easily:

*"Need for more activities" (*Boy-NIC)

"It's very boring" (Girl – LCA)

A participant explained that he was attending Greek language classes the previous year and he asked to continue to the next level, but he was told that it is a very difficult language and he will not manage to learn it. He was discouraged that he was not given the opportunity to try the higher level. Each of the children have different interests, others want to go to school or do other learning activities (learn Greek or other languages etc.), others like sports, reading etc. The participants of the focus group felt that no opportunities are provided to them to participate in activities other than football. They felt the need of having more than just some physical activities.

The participants expressed their dissatisfaction about the lack of opportunities to learn and study in general. They expressed their fear and insecurity for the future, as they would need to leave the shelter once they are adults, but they are not prepared for this. Some also expressed their desire to finish school and proceed to university education and they expressed frustration with the realisation that they will be called to work in manual labour (farms, fields, petrol stations, car washing) because they are not given the opportunity to get education, which would enable them to work in other fields, or even fulfil their talents and potentials:

"I never saw a refugee in Cyprus going to university" (Boy-NIC)

Additionally, another participant mentioned that every Friday they are given pocket money by the shelter officers. One time, there was a place within the facility which was not clean, and they were told by the person responsible that they will not collect their allowance unless they clean that place. This created frustration because the children felt that they were

being used, as they were not asked on any week day to do this, but they were somehow forced to do it in order to get their allowance. They got the sense that they don't get what they deserve to get as refugees. The facilitator asked the participant to clarify if this was a unique incident or of this happened several times. The participant said that it definitely happened at least twice during the time he is in this facility and that it used to happen more often in the past, according to other people who had been there from before.

One of the participants said that he has discussed about all these challenges (food, education etc.) with his personal officer several times, but he is not satisfied with his current personal officer. The first personal officer he had was very good, he said, and she used to help him resolve any problems that he was facing. But then the second was not good and then the third officer was even worse. She doesn't listen to his problems. It happened for him to sleep outside for 2 days because he wanted to leave the shelter as he didn't feel that he was respected there. Thus, it could be argued that specialised needs, such as psychological or emotional distress might not be treated as it should.

3.2.4 Positive aspects in their lives

Although children interviewed had identified major difficulties, gaps and disappointments they were also able to illustrate many examples of positive aspects in their lives. Fleeing from war and persecution has been a great challenge in their lives. Arriving in Cyprus might not have been their goal; however, they could recognise that it was a life-saving opportunity. Many of the children participants, in both facilities responded that the friends they made in the shelter is the most positive aspect in their lives at the moment.

Additionally, all children participants stated that security is very positive for them, the fact that they can go to bed without fear and wake up safe. They also said that they feel free to move and hopeful that they will be able to enjoy freedom and peace as long as they live. They also recognised the opportunities they have to learn new things mainly at school and make themselves valuable.

3.2.5 Suggestions for Guardians

The change in their guardian can be quite frequent, which creates instability. Every time a new guardian comes, it is like starting from the beginning or they might give them different information about their case. Cases were mentioned of the personal officer not treating children in a professional manner. The officer would be very friendly when he/she is appointed but after a month their behaviour would totally change. Or they would hold things against the child if the latter had said something out of frustration, and then they would refuse to provide help due to the past incident. It was suggested that their cases should be treated individually, not using just the general law, but understanding and taking into account each person's individual needs and circumstances:

'Guardians should have more understanding and empathy towards the children.'
'Humanity should come before rules, when for example they ask for milk in the night and it is against the rules, they should bend the rules in such cases.'

'It is not a rule set by the government, so no harm will be done if it is not respected sometimes'.

Overall, children participants had mixed feelings about how the guardian responds to their needs. Some children reported a positive perception and others reported a negative perception of how the guardian responds. For example, many children felt that do not offer suitable time resources for them discussing and listening whereas others felt that the guardian addresses the issues as best they can. A female resident articulated this theme:

'Guardians should keep their word' (Girl, LCA)

This comment was linked mainly with the Dublin procedures and the time waiting for a positive response. The participant children could not comprehend the why the whole procedure takes so long to be completed. As a result, they felt disappointed with their guardian. An additional suggestion was that:

'Guardians should be more experienced and act accordingly.' (Boy-NIC)

In conclusion, according to children interviewed, it was made apparent that they wanted their guardian to have a more substantial role in their lives. Through the discussion they elaborated that they needed a more closed relationship with the guardian based on their individual

situation. In the last quote the most important quality for a guardian is raised that of professionalism.

4. Conclusions

4.1. Implications for the ASOP4G project in Cyprus

The main findings depicted a series of multi-level implications and raised issues of concern in various areas of practice. Although there is an effort to protect the rights of unaccompanied and separated children there are still protection standards still need to be improved. A plethora of international and European legislative frameworks and regulations concerning the protection of children and their best interests have being ratified or put into practice by the Republic of Cyprus. However, it was observed that state institutions are not able to effectively implement them.

An administrative fragmentation in relation to services' overlapping was also identified (ICRC, et al. 2004). Different sets of legislation applied as a result to the involvement of at least two governmental authorities, which are not in close collaboration through formal protocols and multi-disciplinary team meetings i.e. Asylum Service and SWS. Resulting to this situation, the service users fall through bureaucratic ambiguities. The relevant departments of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the Ministry of Interior have different approaches on the issue (Akasereh, 2011). Additional difficulties were also presented due to the lack of a co-operative approach or common goals and equal participation. Any communication is actually based on informal communication channels, apart from exchanging formal letters, where one service informs the latter about the progression of the minor or update of their legal status.

The respondents in the study have highlighted a range of issues which impede practice. Stress and uncertainty are the feelings which are met quite frequently among the social workers and other professionals. Social workers who are appointed as guardians to support and protect children are increasingly required to work on the edges of the system, balancing between their obligations as social carers and as public employees who cannot skip or interpret under a different perspective the current legislation as it was highlighted by the research findings.

The provision of an effective and appropriate guardianship system is fundamental in order to ensure the protection of rights of unaccompanied children. However, in Cyprus guardianship

functions are also pivotal for the concrete application of the best interest of unaccompanied children. In addition, it has been proved, in many cases, dysfunctional.

There were numerous factors identified that constitute barriers in the inclusion of unaccompanied and separated children such as the inability of the Social Welfare Services to keep up with the constantly changing settings and therefore predict the demand on their services and respond appropriately to children's needs and rights; the wide range of children's cultural and linguistic needs; lack of proper procedures and practices for age or needs' assessment; children's ignorance of their age, dropping out of school or moving out of the guardianship system's protection; inconsistency in counselling support and integration programmes; lack of public awareness on discrimination and diversity issues.

The appropriateness of response to children needs and rights also constitutes an undetermined subject. In practice, the holistic approach of children's guardianship is limited or focused on the residential accommodation, food and compulsory schooling. The State does not appear to be greatly involved and working towards establishing provisions for the rest of children's rights and needs. Considering unaccompanied children and adolescents as 'refugees', entitled to gain temporary protection and residence documents until they attain the age of maturity leads to minimal standards of care and reception and an important neglect of their psychological needs. Perhaps those attitudes lead some of the participants to comment on the lack of humanism and respect on the state's part towards them.

The above-mentioned gaps could be fulfilled with the introduction of a specific policy framework, where particular attention would be given to their personal needs for further development, supplementing by a network of supporting services, such as legal, psychological and mental health services. One of the primary shortfalls of the guardianship system in Cyprus is the limited opportunities for empowerment of the children. Experts should develop special modules to be provided to unaccompanied children in an ongoing basis. More specifically suggestions include:

Ensure Best Interest Determination of children under the guardianship system.

Children should be evaluated by qualified social workers, psychologists and/or child welfare agents as soon as possible after they are placed under the guardianship system, in order for their best interest to be established and incorporated into official decision making. Particular

attention should be given to the identification of potential trafficking or asylum cases, children and other aspects of increased vulnerability.

In case of allegations of trafficking and exploitation, children should be ensured that have access to appropriate reporting and review mechanisms (for asylum, access to legal representation, reporting of trafficking, etc.).

Establish regular meetings among public and private stakeholders involved in guardianship.

There is a miss-communication and lack of trust between public and private stakeholders involved in the guardianship system in Cyprus, which in extent limits the potentials of both to improve their work and the services provided to children.

Secure the involvement of experts and guardians in the guardianship system with an inter-disciplinary background.
a. Information and support on the arrival.

The guardians should develop and provide informational material and information sessions to newly identified unaccompanied children in Cyprus, providing them with all necessary information on their rights and possible risks. Important aspects for the development of such tools are their pedagogical effectiveness, related to the languages are provide and the structure and the information.

b. Decision making from the children to the children.

The guardianship system in Cyprus, as analyses in the relevant sections of the report is highly hierarchical and has limited flexibility in addressing various needs the unaccompanied children. Special procedure in the decision making related to food, activities, day program should be established, in order to secure the participation of children to such decision making. Children may vote or express their opinion on the services provided to them. Furthermore, the services provided, and the guardianship system should go under regular evaluation from the children. Such initiatives will also promote a sense of responsibility and educate them on civic engagement and democratic procedures.

Cultural Orientation Programs.

The Cyprus Government is organizing a variety of cultural orientation and mediation trainings and workshops for asylum seekers, persons with international protection status and migrants. In the same context it should also provide such trainings to unaccompanied children. In this context stakeholders should organize theatrical and musical events, fairs and cultural events where children could be actively involved.

4.2. Implications for state level action

Throughout Cyprus efficient and accurate collection of data on unaccompanied children is seriously lacking, making it more difficult to appropriately respond both to the overall phenomenon and to individual cases. It is recommended that Cyprus establish a functional and secure process for information sharing between local, national and regional child welfare organizations on unaccompanied children from point of first contact (apprehension/ detention) to repatriation/reintegration, which include appropriate privacy protocols and data protection.

A systematized process for aggregation of data on national/ regional unaccompanied children, interception and repatriation trends and practices should be established. This database should also provide information on child welfare agencies and civil society resources. The state of Cyprus continues to face many challenges in providing adequate resources and specialized services for unaccompanied children and the variety of protection needs they present. Additionally, social welfare services do not have adequate personnel numbers to cover these needs. It is recommended that a greater number of collaborative relationships be formed between governmental organisations and specialized civil society institutions, such as NGOs, to more effectively respond to currently unaddressed protection and service needs of unaccompanied children. At national level, the roles and responsibilities of different actors encountering and working with unaccompanied children, and the manner and scope of cooperation between them, should be systematically explored and developed, alongside an analysis of the current interactions between child protection law and border and immigration control as well as crime control measures such as trafficking to ensure that child protection concerns are addressed fully in all relevant procedures in a legal framework.

Staff training dealing with the protection of unaccompanied children.

Training of border guards, police, immigration officials, social workers and guardians dealing with the situation of these children is a key component of child protection safeguards. This includes training in:

(a) child-friendly approaches;

(b) detection and identification of situations of risk, including but not limited to trafficking cases (through training in child psychology and in detecting physical and behaviour revealing potential risks); and

(c) understanding the challenges associated with identifying the age of a child, and how to address any doubt as to the age of an individual and the necessary procedural safeguards that should accompany age assessment.

Set up services at the border to provide legal and social orientation, cultural mediation and interpretation for unaccompanied minors.

Ensure unconditional access to ordinary social protection for unaccompanied minors upon their arrival at the border, in order to assess their situation and to make a decision that respects the rights of the child.

For every asylum application submitted by an unaccompanied child, immediately appoint a legal representative having the necessary legal competences in order to provide accompaniment, and whose work can be assessed by an independent national authority. Thus, activate the Law regarding their representation by the Children's Commissioner.

Cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Social Welfare Services.

The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Social Welfare Services as the legal guardian of unaccompanied children within the guardianship system should develop a closer cooperation and communication on the issues of the educational and vocational training of the children, inform each other on the educational progress of the children and address in a timely and effective manners potential dropouts.

Revision of the educational curriculum.

Ministry of Education should infuse the new curricula with elements of multiculturalism, social justice and human rights. In this way it will secure the smooth integration of unaccompanied children in its educational system.

Teachers' vocational training.

The Ministry of Education and Culture is providing a series of training and workshops for teachers' professional development in a variety of fields. In this context it should consider including issues related to unaccompanied children, multiculturalism and provision of cultural orientation and inter-cultural mediation.

Establish after-school classes and support for unaccompanied children.

The Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus should provide specialized after-school classes for unaccompanied children in order to get extra support to their courses and address potential learning problems due to language and culture issues. In addition, the Ministry could appoint teachers for regular visits to homes and shelters to provide language courses to unaccompanied children. Part of this measure could also be the organization of sports activates within the school sports facilities.

In a variety of school units in Cyprus, after-class courses, primarily language courses are provided to children with migrant background. Such courses should be secured for unaccompanied children at the school but also at their shelters.

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6. Annexes

6.1 Discussion guide for focus groups with guardians (in Greek)

ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ

Σας ευχαριστούμε όλους για την παρουσία σας.

Η ομάδα εστιασμένης συζήτησης πραγματοποιείται στο πλαίσιο του προγράμματος ASOP4G (Alliance for children on the Move: Standard Operating Procedures for Guardians). Στο εν λόγω πρόγραμμα συμμετέχουμε τέσσερις Οργανισμοί από την Ελλάδα, την Ιταλία, την Κύπρο και τη Λιθουανία.

Σας καλέσαμε σήμερα εδώ καθώς στην παρούσα φάση του προγράμματος σχεδιάζουμε κατευθυντήριες οδηγίες και εργαλεία και συγκεντρώνουμε χρήσιμες πληροφορίες οι οποίες θα μπορούσαν να συμβάλλουν στο έργο του επιτρόπου. Θεωρούμε ότι είναι πρωτεύουσας σημασίας να ρωτήσουμε πρώτα τους άμεσα εμπλεκομένους, συγκεκριμένα εσάς και τα παιδιά, σχετικά με τις ανάγκες σας.

Η σημερινή συζήτηση θα επικεντρωθεί στο ρόλο σας ως κηδεμόνας, τις συνθήκες εργασίας σας, τις προκλήσεις που αντιμετωπίζετε και οτιδήποτε μπορεί να ενισχύσει την αυτοπεποίθησή σας ως προς τη διεκπεραίωση των επαγγελματικών καθηκόντων σας και την υποστήριξη των παιδιών.

Ο ΡΟΛΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΚΗΔΕΜΟΝΑ

(Αρχικά, κατά την άποψή σας,)

Ποιος είναι ο ρόλος του κηδεμόνα;

- Ποια είναι τα καθήκοντα ενός κηδεμόνα;

- Από πού αντλήσατε αυτές τις πληροφορίες;

(αν δεν είναι κατανοητό: διαβάσατε σχετικά γι' αυτό κάποιο νόμο ή κάτι άλλο ή απλώς το γνωρίζετε / έτσι πιστεύετε;)

Εφαρμόζετε στην πράξη όσα περιγράψατε παραπάνω;

ΟΔΗΓΙΕΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΟ ΕΡΓΟ ΤΟΥ ΚΗΔΕΜΟΝΑ

Γνωρίζατε τα καθήκοντά σας ως επίτροπος από τη στιγμή που αναλάβατε το ρόλο αυτό;

- *Αν ναι: Πώς ενημερωθήκατε σχετικά; (σημείωση: αν κάποιος αναφέρει   ως απάντηση την "εκπαίδευση" παρακαλείσθε να τον συμβουλέψετε να το αναλύσει στη συνέχεια λεπτομερώς)*
- *Αν όχι: Πώς σχεδιάσατε την εργασιακή πρακτική σας;*

Τι καθοδηγεί την καθημερινή σας πρακτική από τότε που αναλάβατε το ρόλο του κηδεμόνα;

Υπάρχουν σχετικές οδηγίες τις οποίες ακολουθείτε κατά την άσκηση του ρόλου σας;

- *Αν ναι: Μπορείτε να μας πείτε λεπτομέρειες σχετικά με αυτές;*
- *Αν όχι: Τι είναι αυτό που σας βοηθάει, η επαγγελματική σας εμπειρία ή κάτι άλλο;*
- *(π.χ. Αν όχι: Ρωτάτε τους συναδέλφους σας;)*

Ποιος επεξεργάζεται το σχέδιο δράσης για κάθε παιδί;

Όταν πρόκειται να λάβετε κάποια απόφαση για ένα παιδί, προβλέπεται κάποιου είδους συζήτηση με ειδικούς/επαγγελματίες;

- *Αν ναι: Ποιος συμμετέχει; Ποιος οργανώνει τη συζήτηση αυτή;*
- *Αν όχι: Ποιος αποφασίζει;*

ΠΡΟΚΛΗΣΕΙΣ ΣΤΟ ΕΡΓΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΚΗΔΕΜΟΝΑ

Ποιες είναι οι κύριες προκλήσεις που αντιμετωπίζετε;

- *Αυτές σχετίζονται με το σύστημα γύρω από το παιδί ή μπορεί κάποιες να οφείλονται στην κατάσταση του ίδιου του παιδιού;*
π.χ. «Οι διαδικασίες οικογενειακής επανένωσης απαιτούν πολύ χρόνο και δεν υπάρχει τίποτα που να μπορώ να κάνω γι' αυτό» ή

π.χ. «Πολλά παιδιά είναι άστεγα και είναι ανούσια η προσπάθεια εγγραφής τους στο σχολείο».

Πιστεύετε ότι μπορείτε να ανταποκριθείτε ικανοποιητικά στα καθήκοντά σας;

- *Αν όχι: θα θέλατε να μας πείτε περισσότερα γι' αυτό;*

ΑΝΑΠΤΥΞΗ ΙΚΑΝΟΤΗΤΩΝ

Από όσα γνωρίζετε, υπάρχουν διαθέσιμες σχετικές εκπαιδεύσεις;

Έχετε παρακολουθήσει κάποιου είδους επαγγελματική κατάρτιση με αντικείμενο το ρόλο του κηδεμόνα;

- *Αν ναι: Ποιος ήταν ο διοργανωτής; Πόσες μέρες διήρκησε; Πόσο συχνά διεξάγεται; Θεωρείτε ότι ήταν επαρκής; Κρίνατε την εκπαίδευση αυτή ως αποτελεσματική ή όχι;*
- *Αν όχι: Γιατί; Δεν υπήρχαν διαθέσιμες εκπαιδεύσεις; Δεν μπορέσατε να παρευρεθείτε; (π.χ. λόγω διαφόρων περιορισμών;)*

Ας υποθέσουμε ότι πρόκειται να σχεδιάσουμε τώρα μια εκπαίδευση για κηδεμόνες:

- Ποιες γνώσεις είναι σημαντικές για έναν κηδεμόνα;

- Ποιες δεξιότητες είναι σημαντικό να εξασκεί ένας κηδεμόνας;

- o *Σε ποιους τομείς θα θέλατε να εκπαιδευτείτε έτσι ώστε να αισθάνεστε πιο σίγουροι για το ρόλο σας ως κηδεμόνες;*

ΣΥΝΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ ΦΟΡΕΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΩΝ

Αν απαιτείται η παραπομπή ενός παιδιού σε συγκεκριμένο φορέα ή οργανισμό, γνωρίζετε πού πρέπει να απευθυνθείτε;

- *Αν ναι: θα μπορούσατε να μας δώσετε ένα παράδειγμα;*

Χρειάστηκε ποτέ να συνεργαστείτε με μία ή περισσότερες υπηρεσίες για την περίπτωση ενός παιδιού; (σημ.: με τον όρο «υπηρεσίες» εννοούμε όλους τους τύπους παροχής υπηρεσιών, αρμόδιες αρχές ή οργανισμούς).

- *Αν ναι: πώς θα αξιολογούσατε τη συνεργασία σας;*
  Θετικές εντυπώσεις; Προβλήματα;

ΤΕΛΟΣ ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗΣ

6.2 Discussion guide for focus groups with unaccompanied children

OPENING

Hi everyone! Thank you very much for being here today.

I am….. from the University of Nicosia and with my colleague…….., together with organizations from three more countries (Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania) have a task to train a number of people for becoming guardians of children arriving in this country without their parents. And to be sure that we are going to do it well, we need to ask you first a few things because your opinion matters. As you also know some all children here in Cyprus have guardians so we would like to discuss with you in order to better understand your needs.

Today we would like from you to let us know what are your thoughts on a series of issues; there is no right or wrong replies; we just want to listen to what you think.

ROLE OF THE GUARDIAN

Do you know what a guardian is?

What do you think he/she does?

- *And this you know it, because someone told you so? Is this what some guardians you know do? Is this what you would like them to do?*

Which of the things you just mentioned matter the most to you?

- *Why?*

To your opinion, is it good for every child to have a guardian?

- If no: *So, you think that there are children that don't need one. If so, why?*

Did you experience something where you felt that you were very happy to have a guardian? (or that you wished you had one?)

- If yes: *What was the case?*

Can you give us some examples where a guardian could be supportive/helpful to a child?

LIVING CONDITIONS

Do you like it where you stay?

- If yes: *please tell us what is the main reason for this*
- If no: *please tell us what is the main reason for this*

Have some of you stayed before in other places?

- If yes: *how many times have you changed place of living? How did the situation changed? Was it someone that you felt s/he helped you in these different places*?

CHALLENGES IN CHILDREN'S LIVES TODAY

Does anything trouble you now that you are here in Cyprus?

- *What would you like to be different (namely better for you)?*
- *Do you think that a guardian can make a difference?*

POSITIVE ASPECTS IN THEIR LIVES

What is it that you like most in your life now?

SUGGESTIONS FOR GUARDIANS

What would you advise a guardian that s/he should know better to be able to help children?

- *Could you please provide some specific examples?*

CLOSING OF THE SESSION

Thank you everyone for being here. We take everything you said in mind.

6.3 Informed consent form for guardian's participation in focus group discussion

Dear Sir/Madame,

The Institute of Child Health (GR), the University of Nicosia (CY), the Kazimieras Simonavičius University (LT) and Defence for Children International-Italia (IT) implement the project entitled "Alliance for children on the Move: Standard Operating Procedures for Guardians" [REC-CHILD-AG-2016-02/764244-ASOP4G, which is co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). The project consists of a number of activities that ultimately aim at implementing common standards on guardianship for unaccompanied children and enhancing the competencies and skills of guardians in order to better safeguard the rights of unaccompanied and separated children.

In this group discussion we are going to ask your opinion based on your knowledge and experience about your needs and practice as a guardian of an unaccompanied child. The aim of this study is to map children's and guardian's needs and develop a handbook on standard operating procedures, as well as a training curriculum for guardians that addresses best these needs.

For your participation in the focus group, you should be informed that:

- All appropriate rules of ethical research will be followed during the data collection and analysis.
- Discussion is anticipated to last approximately 120 minutes and for practical reasons it will be recorded. The sound file will be accessed only by the researchers present today in order to transcribe it and then will be erased.
- Excerpts from the focus group discussion may be made part of the final report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the research findings.
- Opinions expressed during the discussion should be discussed further with third persons.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary does not imply any individual benefit for the participants (financial or other).
- You are free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw at any time.

Should you have any question, please don't hesitate to ask us.

Having knowledge of the above mentioned conditions you are free to decide whether you will take part or not.

Would you like to participate in the group discussion?

1. Yes

2. No

Participant's Name   Researcher's Name

………………………………………   ………………………………………

Date …………………………….

6.4 Informed consent form for children's participation in group discussions

Dear Sir/Madame,

The Institute of Child Health (GR), the University of Nicosia (CY), the Kazimieras Simonavičius University (LT) and Defence for Children International-Italia (IT) implement the project entitled "Alliance for children on the Move: Standard Operating Procedures for Guardians" [REC-CHILD-AG-2016-02/764244-ASOP4G, which is co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). The project consists of a number of activities that ultimately aim at implementing common standards on guardianship for unaccompanied children and enhancing the competencies and skills of guardians in order to better safeguard the rights of unaccompanied and separated children.

In this group discussion we are going to ask children about their needs and what they would expect from a focal person, namely *guardian*, for them to do. The aim of this study is to map children's and guardian's needs and develop a handbook on standard operating procedures, as well as a training curriculum for guardians that addresses best these needs.

For the participation of the child under your care, you should be informed that:

- All appropriate rules of ethical research will be followed during the data collection and analysis.

- The discussion is expected to last for about 90 minutes and will be conducted with the help of an interpreter.

- The discussion will be recorded for the facilitation of the process.

- Excerpts from the focus group discussion may be made part of the final report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the research findings.

- According to national legislation, the only case to reveal any information is if we find out, or if a child tells us, that someone's life is in danger or a child is at risk of abuse.

- Participation in the discussion does not imply any individual benefit for the participants (financial or other).

- Any participant in the group discussion can withdraw from the discussion at any time.

Having knowledge of the above mentioned conditions you are free to decide whether you allow the child to take part or not.

Would you allow the child under your care to participate in the group discussion?

1. Yes

2. No

Professional's Name: …………………………………

Name & Age of child: …………………………………..

Date: …………………………………………

UNIC   ASOP4G

6.5 Assent form for participation in focus groups

Residential facility: ……………….

Dear child,

The Institute of Child Health (GR), the University of Nicosia (CY), the Kazimieras Simonavičius University (LT) and Defence for Children International-Italia (IT) implement the project entitled "Alliance for children on the Move: Standard Operating Procedures for Guardians" [REC-CHILD-AG-2016-02/764244-ASOP4G, which is co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). The project includes many activities that all aim at creating a common practice that persons representing and supporting unaccompanied children will follow.

In this group discussion we are going to ask you about what you want and don't want and how persons representing you can help you with that. The aim of this study is to collect information about your needs and guardian's needs and develop useful guidelines that will help the guardian to better secure your rights.

For your participation, you should know that:

- The discussion will have a duration of about 90 minutes and will be conducted with the support of an interpreter.

- The discussion will be recorded and as soon as it is all written down, the record will be deleted.

- Your answers will remain confidential, results will be aggregated and anonymized in the final presentation and all ethics rules will be observed.

- The content of the discussion will be kept non-identifiable and anonymous except for the cases that we will identify or you will inform us that someone's life is in danger or a child is at risk for abuse.

- Participation in the study does not imply any individual benefit (financial or other) for you; we cannot promise any type of support as exchange for your participation in the interview.

- In case you feel awkward or for any other reason you don't want to answer, you may do so. You can leave anytime you want, if you don't feel like taking part in the discussion anymore.

- If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask us.

Having knowledge of the above mentioned conditions you are free to decide whether you will take part or not.

Would you like to take part?

1. Yes

2. No

Name & Age: ……………………………………

Date: ………………………………………..

Co-funded by the European Union's
Rights, Equality and Citizenship
Programme (2014-2020)