

# NEWSLETTER

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Therapeutic foster care for  
unaccompanied minors and  
their foster families

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# 1. EDITORIAL: THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE FOR UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND THEIR FOSTER FAMILIES... INNOVATIVE WORK TO DO!

*by Jos Sterckx, Project coordinator Odisee University of Applied Sciences*

Not only adults and families with children try to reach Europe to start a better life but also youngsters and even children arrive in Europe without the guidance of a parent. Now more than ever with the tragic and ongoing war in Ukraine! This leads to a growing number of unaccompanied minors fleeing for conflict or unacceptable living conditions. Foster care services report an enormous need to offer therapeutic 'healing and development oriented' care for these youngsters and the foster families that are taking care of them. Furthermore, national authorities are extremely challenged on how these unaccompanied minor refugees (UMR) have to be taken care of, according to national and international standards of child care and children's rights.

In the project '**Therapeutic foster care for unaccompanied minors and their foster families**' (in short: FORM), 6 partner from **Belgium** (Odisee University of Applied Sciences, Brussels; Foster care East Flanders, Ghent), **Germany** (University of Kassel), **Italy** (Salesiani Per Il Sociale, Rome; ENSA European Network for Social Authorities, Veneto/Brussels) and **Cyprus** (Hope For Children Policy Center, Nicosia) join efforts to bring together knowledge and experiences for empowerment and social inclusion of UMR and their Foster Families.

The **main outcomes** to be shared are:

- A **literature review and 'knowledge base and on research and best practices** in the field of foster care for unaccompanied minors refugees on which the model and the training will be based on;
- A **guidance model** - to be used by professional foster care workers - for the delivery of therapeutic care for minor refugees and their foster families; it will be based on research, be very practice oriented, and shared with all foster care actors in the EU;
- A **training in exile on this model**, addressed to professional foster care workers;
- **Policy and implementation recommendations**.

The project has started in February 2022 and runs over 3 years. **Odisee** will lead and coordinate all activities, **University of Kassel** will develop the guidance model and the training, the 3 foster care partners, **Foster care East Flanders, Salesiani Per Il Sociale and "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center**, will run pilots to test the proposed guidance model and the training and **ENSA** will produce recommendations for foster care services and policy makers on the implementation. The EU-wide networks ENSA and the **Youth Care Platform** (coordinated by Odisee) will disseminate all project outcomes. A first project meeting took place already at the beginning of March in Ghent. All partners in this project are fully committed to the project aims and results. We hope to inform you in next newsletters on our achievements.



**Jos Sterckx**

## 2. THE KICK-OFF MEETING, 7TH-8TH MARCH 2022, GHENT BELGIUM

The meeting took place in the city of Ghent (Belgium). The Flemish partner Pleegzorg Oost-Vlaanderen organised the meeting with the supervision of Odisee and in collaboration with all project partners.

The main objectives of the meeting were, after Covid-19, to:

- meet in person;
- exchange information and experiences about the target group **Unaccompanied refugee minors** and their hosting families in foster care) and about guidance models (for the target group and on foster care guidance);
- establish a sufficient knowledge around the administrative and financial aspects of the project and the work method thereof;
- discuss the details of the following steps and stages within the project.

### Day One- 7th March, 2022

On the first day, partners met at the Clemenspoort Overwale in Ghent. It was the occasion to focus on the foster care system in Flanders with inputs given by care workers of Pleegzorg Oost-Vlaanderen **Emel Tuncel** and **Eyana Abboud**. In addition, a key point by Odisee researcher **Katja Fournier** was a “Literature and practice review” in the field of foster care for Unaccompanied minors refugees on which the FORM model and the training to be developed will be based on. The first day ended with a meeting with **Bart Claes**, project manager of EPOS vzw (National Agency Erasmus+) and **Tanja Nuelant**, director of the Social Work Department Odisee.





## Day Two- 8th March, 2022

The second day began at the Odisee Technology Campus in Ghent where **Karl Brabants**, manager of aid services and outreach presented the vision of the NGO Pleegzorg Oost-Vlaanderen and the Flemish welfare policies regarding the target group. Later, there were four workshops, including a detailed explanation of the most essential work forms and approaches in Pleegzorg Oost-Vlaanderen, given by several foster care workers of the same organisation. These workshops dealt with:

- preparative work in foster care by **Ineke Debacker**;
- different modules of therapeutic foster care in East Flanders by **Céline Staïesse**;
- culture-sensitive approach in foster care Pleegzorg by **Eyana Abboud**;
- unaccompanied refugee minors in foster care Pleegzorg by **Emel Tuncel**.

An interesting approach consisted in “Speed-dates” with a dialogue between the partners and foster care witnesses sharing their experiences with the target group.

Overall, this first kick-off meeting was a large success. Informative discussions were held, and partners were impressed with the work of other partners dealing with Unaccompanied Refugee Minors and their foster families. The meeting was a special moment for bringing together knowledge and experiences in this context and providing the basis to work out a model for the delivery of therapeutic care that can be shared with all foster care actors in the EU.



### 3. INTERVIEW



with Karl Brabants, Manager of Aid Services, East Flanders

***What are the problems faced by unaccompanied minors and their foster families in East Flanders and what are the answers put into place?***

Most unaccompanied minors who we supervise in foster families in East Flanders reside in kinship foster families. The youngsters live with a family from their own familial or social network. The foster parents themselves are often refugees who have not yet stayed in Belgium for a long period.

In addition to the great commitment and resilience of most youngsters and their foster families, we also see several vulnerabilities. Among these, the experience of uncertainty, such as worries about the future, and loss, for instance of loved ones or protracted separation from their native roots. Furthermore, there are many complaints of (post) traumatic stress and difficulties connected to the fact of raising and growing up between two worlds. On top of it, access to education, the development of future prospects, housing and the process of family reunification complicate the situation even more.

The answers consist in strengthening our attitudes and competences with a cultural-sensitive approach. Pleegzorg East Flanders provides trainings and interventions specifically oriented towards a supervision of foster care situations of unaccompanied minors. We work with employees and external partners who bring in specific expertise. *The role of intercultural mediators is extremely important.* We make efforts to adapt our way of communication to the target group (translations, paying attention to different holidays and traditions, ...).

In addition, we collaborate with partners who can provide important additional offers such as: trauma-oriented therapy, ethno-psychiatry, general welfare work (family reunification and housing), group sessions targeting the strengthening of capacities and stress regulation, as well as collaborating with guardians. Moreover, opportunities are offered through the organization of a world café, a themed meet and greet (and eat and dance) for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees in foster care and their foster families.

***Why do you think the FORM project is meaningful?***

The FORM project is really meaningful for us because:

- it develops tools and approaches towards a target group that is missing specific attention and care;
- it supports foster parents of unaccompanied minors who themselves have a migration background (cultural families) in order to strengthen their parenting skills. The cultural background and the new social context for the foster family and the youngster are taken into account.
- it ensures the strengthening of networks within the community with fellow sufferers in Belgium.

In Flanders, foster care has a strong experience in offering therapeutic foster care to foster families. A protocol-based and foster care-specific offer respond to a concrete need in a foster care situation that cannot be offered in the regular fostering cases. In this way, goals are better achieved and breakdowns are avoided as much as possible. However, there is yet no therapeutic foster care approach for the unaccompanied minors in cultural families.

*We hope that the FORM project will deliver a module that we can add to the range of our therapeutic approaches within foster care.*

## 5. WHO WE ARE: INTRODUCTION OF PARTNERSHIP

### ODISEE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Belgium,  
Brussels and Ghent

<https://www.odisee.be/en>



**Odisee University of Applied Sciences** is an open community of students, educational and professional practitioners who learn, teach and do research together. Odisee is a University of Applied Sciences with 6 campuses: in Aalst, Brussels, Dilbeek, Schaarbeek, Ghent and Sint-Niklaas. Each campus is dynamic centre of education, research and social services, located at the heart of Belgium. Odisee is one of the largest universities of applied sciences in Flanders and offers team-based education with a personal approach. Odisee is a member of the KU Leuven Association, a network of five universities of applied sciences and one university backed by an impressive system of national partners with more than 80,000 students in 23 cities and municipalities.

The FORM-project is carried out by the '**Centre for Family Studies**', which is part of the research group Social Work of Odisee (and part of the Social Studies department). The knowledge centre executes research on the living conditions of families, and how to support them. It has a history of 50 years of research and expertise. This has resulted in a wide offer of publications, conferences and short courses about families, relationships, and parenting. A lot of work has been done already on refugees and non-accompanied minor refugees.

### UNIVERSITY OF KASSEL

Germany,  
Kassel

[www.uni-kassel.de](http://www.uni-kassel.de)

U N I K A S S E L  
V E R S I T Ä T

**The University of Kassel**, founded in 1971, is a modern and vibrant university, characterized by its openness to new ideas. Receptivity, initiative, transdisciplinary thinking and unconventionality are traits we cherish and welcome in studies, research and teaching, but also in knowledge transfer and entrepreneurial ventures, to which the university provides special support. We aspire to develop, validate and implement ideas. The University of Kassel has an unconventional profile with fields of expertise in nature, technology, culture and society. Questions relating to the future of our planet and our existence such as globalisation, climate change, environmental protection as well as questions regarding the evolution of technical systems or demographic change are characteristic of our profile in both research and teaching.

It plays a key role in the development of the northern Hessen region, but its profile also attracts many students and scholars from across Germany and abroad. At the University of Kassel, the work of students with refugee families is much welcomed, especially for students in educational sciences and in school teaching: educating, raising and teaching (unaccompanied) minor refugees is considered an important topic and challenge for the students in the Faculty of Human Sciences. The Institute of Educational Sciences is fully aware of the enormous need among teachers and social workers, in the field of the intercultural and of the dynamics of exile. The actual proposed Erasmus+ training program on therapeutic foster care would be welcomed a lot in the context of our Institute of Educational Sciences, where teaching and parenting are central and where the mind of the adolescent and the influence of exile on the adolescent mind, are among the favorite themes of training and teaching.

**PLEEGZORG OOST-  
VLAANDEREN V.Z.W.**

**Belgium,  
Ghent**

**[www.pleegzorgoostvlaanderen.be](http://www.pleegzorgoostvlaanderen.be)**



**Pleegzorg Oost-Vlaanderen** ('Foster Care East Flanders') is a foster care service provider, recognized and funded by the Flemish Agency "Opgroeien" (part of the Flemish administration). The organization counts 207 staff members. In this project, Pleegzorg Oost-Vlaanderen will work in close cooperation with the foster care service providers in the other 4 Flemish provinces. This will be done via the '**Foster Care Knowledge Center**' (which is managed by the five Flemish foster care services). The Knowledge Center has the task of disseminating knowledge about foster care to the staff of the foster care services and to a wider audience. The Knowledge Center does this by making scientific research accessible and available. Pleegzorg Oost-Vlaanderen has a broad experience in cultural sensitive guidance in foster care situations. Since 2015, it works intensively on the fostering of unaccompanied refugee minors: in kinship foster families as well as non-kinship foster families, in Caucasian foster families, as well as foster families with a similar cultural background as the minors.

**CENTRO  
NAZIONALE OPERE  
SALESIANE SCS**

**Italy,  
Rome**

**[www.salesianiperilsociale.it](http://www.salesianiperilsociale.it)**



**Salesiani per il Sociale** was founded in 1993. It is an association promoted by the Italian Salesian catholic congregation with the mission of promoting socio-educational services; preventing youth discomfort and marginalization; coordinating Civil Service and voluntary activities in Italy and at international level. Salesiani per il Sociale is based on the human experience and teachings of St. John Bosco and the Salesian educational system. It has two main purposes: coordination and promotion of activities in the area of volunteering, of conscientious objection and civil service; dissemination of a culture of acceptance and respect for the human person, through the design and implementation of educational interventions in favor of children and young people, in conditions of marginalization and social exclusion. The main targets are vulnerable and abandoned young people/minors with justice and addiction problems and at risk of drop-out. Salesiani per il Sociale is present all over Italy with a network of services, operators and volunteers.

## HOPE FOR CHILDREN CRC POLICY CENTER

### Cyprus

<https://www.uncrcpc.org.cy/en/about-us/>



**“Hope For Children” CRC Policy Center (HFC)** is an International Humanitarian and Independent Institution based in Nicosia, Cyprus. The institution is established on standards and principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and European Union Law.

It works on humanitarian and development policy relevant to the defense and promotion of children's rights. It does so through research, grassroots program design and implementation, and advisory services offered to governments and international organizations. HFC operates two private children's shelters for the accommodation and support of unaccompanied minors in cooperation with the Social Welfare Services. The main aim is to provide multi-disciplinary and holistic services to the children, which would cover all aspects of their daily lives and attend to their needs in the fullest extent possible, with a special focus on psycho-social support and legal guidance to unaccompanied children. The organization has a Foster Care Department, which operates in collaboration with the Social Welfare Services. The program aims to ensure the protection, the care and the best interest of the child who is deprived of a family environment. HFC's role is to promote and support the institution of Foster Care while its services are multi-faceted and cover all the districts of the Republic of Cyprus. More specifically, the services provided include assessing the suitability of potential foster parents, providing psychological, psycho-emotional and psycho-social support to foster parents, regular monitoring and re-evaluation of foster parents and promoting the foster care institution through awareness campaigns.

## ENSA (European Network of Social Authorities)

<https://www.ensa-network.eu/>



**ENSA** is a network of cities and European Regions coming from 13 member countries that has the aim to promote international cooperation in the social field particularly in five subject areas of intervention, each with its own “thematic network”: elderly, youth, child issues, disability and social inclusion as a transversal issue. ENSA was established by the Veneto Region in 1999. ENSA represents an excellent opportunity for local and Regional Authorities to participate actively in European policy making and programmes. It has an experience of more than 20 years in the field of communication and dissemination and it aims at answering to social needs of its target groups through mutual learning and the transfer of good and “bad” practices. To reach this aim the working groups, led by Kind and Gezin from Flanders and by the Regional Department for Youth and Families from the Veneto Region's Social Services, are dedicated to a specific area in the case of minors, children and families.



## EU AND RELATED PARTNER'S NEWS

### European Commission/Eurostat

Asylum 2021: asylum decisions and unaccompanied minors

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20220504-1>

### Council of Europe

Age assessment of unaccompanied migrant children

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/-/italian-presidency-and-council-of-europe-joint-event-on-age-assessment-of-unaccompanied-migrant-children>

### Council of Europe

Protecting rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls: Council of Europe recommendation adopted

[Link](#)

**N.E.x.T.TO YOU** Network for the Empowerment, the social and labor inclusion of Trafficked minors and young adults, Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2019. Final conference Venice, 15 November 2022.

*Interested to learn more about the project?*

Visit our website at <https://form.ensa-network.eu>  
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**JOIN THE FORM PARTNERSHIP!**

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