



## FACT SHEET IMPACT PROJECT 2020-2022

The IMPACT-project aimed at further improving alternative care systems in Italy, France, Sweden and the Netherlands, by building on previous project results (such as ALFACA and FAB), sharing knowledge and expertise and increasing the competency of professionals working with unaccompanied children (UAC) and foster carers through training. The project contributed to protecting UAC by making alternative care not only available to them but also adequate to their needs, thus ensuring better care and outcomes for children.

### Main results

- Exchanging good practises, including the views of children (Italy, the Netherlands, France) and care providers (Sweden) through workshops and consultation on alternative care provided to them.
- Developing and implementing an information campaign in Italy to increase the number of families interested in foster care for UAC
- Providing training to social workers working with children and working with families taking care of UAC to increase their competence in countries of project partners and other member states interested.
- Developing a pilot to ensure matching trauma care to UAC in Alpes-Maritimes, France.
- Providing made to measure national trainings in Italy, France, the Netherlands and Sweden on working with UAC or working with families taking care of UAC

IMPACT directly addressed the improvement of alternative care systems in the country of project partners and beyond, thus ensuring better care and better outcomes for children. To do so the assessment of needs and the best interest of children was a crucial element, as was supporting social workers in working with these children and families. Although alternative care is less expensive compared to institutionalised care, ensuring that it is a good alternative for large scale reception is something different: just organising alternative care is not ensuring the best quality of care, fitting the child's needs.

To provide the best quality of care the following points should be taken into consideration:

#### 1) Including children's views on alternative care is crucial

From a child's rights perspective including children's opinions on the (alternative) care provided and facilitating child participation, is taking their rights seriously. It is respecting the best interests of the child, ensuring UAC to develop in the best way possible and enabling them to share their views freely in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, this can lead to aligning care to their needs, supporting them in having agency and their integration in the host country.

Including children's views is also crucial when developing training materials for social workers and offering guidance that answers to their needs. Alternative care is just one solution, not fitting each child's needs. Alternative care systems like SIL are less expensive to institutionalized care, but for children to be able to become strong future citizens, sometimes additional funding is needed, e.g. to provide trauma care.



ALC, Save the Children and Nidos might regularly meet and work with the same children, as many travel through France, Italy, Sweden, and the Netherlands. Most of them have the same need for a place to feel safe and build a future. The country and national contexts they enter create the differences in alternative care systems, not the children themselves.

By investing in UAC from the start, giving them agency, it is more likely that they integrate in the host country and become resilient citizens in society, being able to stand on their own feet.

## 2) Capacity building on different levels

Through knowledge building, sharing expertise, tools and intervision front line workers build their capacities. One way to do this is by developing made-to-measure trainings. During the national trainings social workers expressed the lack of training for front line workers, thus lacking direct transfer to social workers on the ground.

Sharing of expertise and knowledge building is not only important for social workers in the front line, but for all professionals working with UAC and families, including the project partners of IMPACT. Working and learning together with professionals from different member states, can broaden horizons of alternative care systems. It creates a better understanding of the different national contexts in which alternative care systems are being developed and it strengthens the ambition to provide children with the same care and support throughout Europe.

IMPACT focussed on bridging the gap between standards of care at EU-level, the expertise available in member states and the experience of social workers providing care. Expertise was transferred *bottom up*, including experiences of families, children, and social workers, thus building the Training-of-trainings (ToT's), the national trainings and the pilot on trauma care in a way 'they, answered the needs of participants and UAC. Sharing experiences in the ToT's led to *cross loading*: broadening knowledge by participants coming from different member states. Finally implementing made-to-measure activities in each partner country really made an impact, bringing the knowledge gained back to the national and local contexts

## 3) Capitalize on knowledge and experience of professionals, UAC and families

Benefit from social workers experience in working with UAC and families. Use a bottom-up strategy when developing methodologies and tools and provide easy access for them to be used. Including their experience, strengthens capacity building. Not only the perspective of social workers is of added value, so are the views of UAC and families. For example: in the workshops youngsters indicated they find it most important that the guardian / social worker makes real contact with them: asks how they are doing, listen to them, at the same time sharing something of themselves. For social workers this can be challenging, being trained to keep their professional distance. Therefore, include guidance and support of the social workers in the methodology as well. In this way, the gathered knowledge and experience are brought back to the front line and capitalization & training results are more sustainable.

## 4) Taking in different perspectives bridges differences

Being able to take in different perspectives (that of the child, the family or network home and social worker) is important and necessary, to understand and bridge differences. Focus on normalising behaviour, resilience, and agency. At the same time, during the trainings it was very difficult for participants, not to view everything from the social workers perspective. Stepping into the shoes of all



involved can be a very strong intervention. Bringing in the different perspectives helps to clarify and create support for the specific needs of all involved: children, family, and social workers. When social workers have the capacity to take in these different perspectives, it improves the quality of guidance and reception.

### **5) Taking good care of front-line workers**

Working in alternative care systems requires relevant and up-to-date expertise, skills, and competences. It is a demanding job, asking a lot from front line workers. Listening to the youngsters' stories of events leading to their flight or events that occurred during their flight can cause secondary traumatisation or burnout in front line workers. It is therefore important not only to provide them with adequate training of knowledge, skills and competences, or specific tools but to focus on mental well-being (selfcare) as well. This is lacking for most social workers, but crucial. Taking one's own needs into account (selfcare) is important to be able to take care of others, thus improving the quality of care. Through intervision, front line workers can share their perspectives with others.

### **6) Active engagement of minors in society – a future challenge**

The way children are treated in alternative care has a long-term impact on society. Society, in turn, plays an important role as a forming community. It is therefore of utmost importance to regard UAC as future adults, engaging them and supporting them in becoming resilient and independent. Child participation needs to be continuously pursued, giving UAC agency while also enhancing integration. In most member states the care provided by alternative care systems ends at eighteen, thus leaving youngsters to fend for themselves. Care is often organised top-down, operationally and focused on professional integration. Instead, care should be organised in a way it strengthens youngsters in their agency, creating relations with both their own community and the rest of society. Care should help youngsters to feel included, to be able to create relations and play an active part in the society of their countries of residence, in the communities of their country of origin as well as to identify relevant role models and mentors. Thus, creating a broad supportive network without limiting it to only one part of life. This reduces the risk of marginalization and exclusion. Although good practices focusing on enhancing agency, integration and building a supportive network exist, it is small scale and relatively rare. Therefore, significant improvement of this type of care needs to be worked on by caregivers and child welfare institutions in the future.