



BEST PRACTICE REPORT

RECRUITING FOSTER CARE PROVIDERS

IN MIGRANT COMMUNITIES



U-CARE Project
Unaccompanied Children in Alternative Residence

March 2021



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FAB	Fostering Across Borders
FBC	Family-based care
IOM	International Organization for Migration
U-CARE	Unaccompanied Children in Alternative Residence
UMC	Unaccompanied Migrant Children

ABOUT THE PROJECT

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

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

The project focuses on four main activities:

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

This report outlines the context of fostering for UMC in several European countries, by mapping existing recruitment practices of foster care providers in migrant communities. In particular, it identifies effective recruitment methods for foster care providers within migrant communities and obstacles that might stand against a successful recruitment process. To this end, a mixed data collection methodology combining desk research and calls with practitioners and researchers was used, followed by an analysis of identified practices.

The findings, as summarized in the report, will form the basis for upcoming activities of the U-CARE project: piloting a foster care recruitment campaign in migrant communities and setting out guidelines into standard operating procedures (SOP). These will support European stakeholders and professionals, working in the field of alternative care for UMC, in their efforts to engage and recruit FBC for UMC, particularly from a migration background.

The report has been structured as follows:

- The [methodology section](#) outlining the techniques used for data collection and analysis;
- The [findings section](#) encompassing a contextualization of current practices in several European countries, the criteria assessment, the obstacles that might entangle recruitment within migrant communities and some key recommendations on successfully recruiting foster care families within migrant communities;
- The [final section](#) specifying the conclusions of the analysis;
- The [annex](#) of best practices for an easy identification of organizations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research in Europe dedicated to child protection outlines that family-based care and small-scale alternative care systems should be prioritized in line with existing child protection standards and guidelines. Both researchers and practitioners tend to assume that family-based care (FBC) is a better placement option for UMC compared to living alone or in large scale centers, because it offers a context with increased protective factors.

Furthermore, studies¹ also have shown that UMC tend to integrate better in foster families from migrant communities, as they had better (mental) health outcomes and performed better at school; they were also less isolated and lonely, participated more in group activities, and considered themselves more successful in making friends. The recently released European Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child guarantee² outlines the strong correlation between social exclusion of children and the lack of access to key services; thus, those who experience particular disadvantages (i.e. being placed in institutional care, having a migrant background) will be also more likely to face barriers in accessing key services that foster their emotional, social and cognitive development.

Despite these potential benefits for UMC – additionally to the importance of speaking the same language, having the same cultural norms and religion with their foster families - the recruitment of foster care providers with a migration background has proven to rarely be the result of a targeted outreach to migrant communities.

Either due to the lack of a specific recruitment strategy for these communities or to additional barriers - i.e. in terms of legislation, financial resources, language, lack of knowledge on fostering, including confusion around compliance with religious practices - there is generally a **shortage of foster care providers** across Europe, and within migrant communities in particular. In order to change this trend, the recruitment campaign must be adapted to the national context and needs of both foster families and UMC.

Extensive research, conducted within the scope of this consolidation report, has shown a **lack of good practices** with regards to recruiting foster care providers with a migration background. In this sense, foster care agencies in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the innovative Foster Family Homes in Norway have established successful practices of recruiting within migrant communities with countries like Belgium, France, Greece and Italy regularly exploring targeted outreach campaigns with varying degrees of success.

To determine whether a recruitment practice/project/methodology of a (foster) care organization could be considered a good practice, different approaches grouped under four criteria were assessed according to relevance, effectiveness and impact.

¹ Bates, L., Baird, D., Johnson, D. J., Lee, R. E., Luster, T., & Rehagen, C. (2005). *Sudanese refugee youth in foster care: The "lost boys" in America*. Child Welfare League of America, 84, 631–648;

Bronstein, I., Montgomery, P., & Dobrowolski, S. (2012). *PTSD in asylumseeking male adolescents from Afghanistan*. Journal of Traumatic Stress, 25, 551–557;

O'Higgins, A., Ott, E.M., & Shea, M.W. (2018). What is the Impact of Placement Type on Educational and Health Outcomes of Unaccompanied Refugee Minors? A Systematic Review of the Evidence. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 21, 354–365. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-018-0256-7>

Wade, J., Sirriyeh, A., Kohli, R., & Simmonds, J. (2012). *Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People*. London: BAAF.

Zijlstra, A. E., Kalverboer, M. E., Post, W. J., Knorth, E. J., & Ten Brummelaar, M. D. C. (2012). The quality of the child rearing environment of refugee or asylum seeking children and the best interests of the child: Reliability and validity of the BIC-Q. *Behavioral Sciences and The Law*, 30, 841–855

²European Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child guarantee, [link](#)

- **Outreach:** the key figure and the word-of-mouth approach generally generated the most success in recruiting foster carers with a migration background. Engaging aged-out UMC or raising awareness in places (such as places of worship, malls, community centers) was also relatively effective. Stand-alone telemarketing or written advertisements were in general not effective.
- **Foster incentive:** it is undeniable that the motivation of giving back, a sense of reward or altruism (related or not to faith) is of primordial importance and should be the main driver to become a foster carer. Nevertheless, a monetary compensation (to cover the needs of the foster child), an additional fee and/or temporary housing can be considered significant enablers for motivated potential foster care providers, including those who are financially less stable.
- **UMC's needs:** even though there is not a univocal preference of UMC in being hosted by families with a migration background, this can be an added value for both their integration into society and their continuous contact with the language, (religious) values and traditions of their origin countries. An effective approach is undoubtedly the one where the wishes and needs of the UMC are given consideration.
- **Recruitment target and beneficiaries:** effective recruitment campaigns preferably focus solely or primarily on potential foster care providers with a migration background. Furthermore, a preference is given to recruiting them specifically to take care for UMC, as they have different needs in terms of finding a foster family than a local child would have; foster families' expectations will therefore also be clearer and a better match can be envisaged.

Even when the recruitment methodology of a care organization seems perfect on paper, there are various **obstacles** that can stand against a smooth recruiting process that have been identified when reaching out to and recruiting within migrant communities. There is, for example, mistrust towards the state or social workers, lack of knowledge about fostering, confusion around religion practices and fostering, lack of language skills or financial resources; but also shortage of social workers (with a migration background) and a lack of sufficient training for them. Taking these into consideration is important to mitigate the risks and to generate a positive impact on the outreach, recruitment results and well-being of UMC.

The findings of the consolidation of good practices identify several tools and key recommendations to consider for the European stakeholders interested in setting up a recruitment strategy for foster care providers with a migration background.

METHODOLOGY

Identifying best practices for the U-CARE project required a prior, extensive analysis of relevant elements and criteria which can determine the success of recruiting foster care providers within migrant communities. These four criteria were identified as relevant elements:

- Outreach
- Foster incentives
- UMC's needs
- Recruitment target and beneficiaries

For each of these criteria, an analysis was done on which tools or methods work/do not work and why, as well as on the benefits of the methods for the UMC. The tools, methods or approaches used by organizations were then classified under **effective**, **relatively helpful**, and **less successful**. Extensive research and calls were conducted with experts, scholars and practitioners, whose assessment of the criteria was key in classifying the tools. Finally, to determine whether an identified project's or organization's recruitment processes can be considered a good practice for the recruitment of foster care providers with a migration background, an assessment was done of all four criteria based on the classification of the approaches.

While the identification of best practices was done according to these established indicators, it was not limited to those, as to also reveal obstacles that might stand against recruitment activities within migrant communities. The research activities and analysis resulted in a mapping of existing best practices from seven countries.

The methodology used to identify best practices in Belgium and in other European countries embodied several approaches, from drawing on previous IOM projects and carrying out desk research, to contacting other IOM missions in Europe and reaching out to experts through enquiries via emails, calls and webinars.

Draw on previous IOM projects

U-CARE project builds on the good practices and tools developed under the Fostering Across Borders (FAB) project, coordinated by IOM United Kingdom. Implemented in six European countries, FAB aimed to improve the quality and expand the availability of family-based care for UMC. Experts who contributed to the FAB project were the first ones approached when establishing the best practice mapping for U-CARE. Through the "snowball" effect, our research was extended to their partner organizations in several European countries. This method proved to be pertinent in covering both Southern and Western Europe, whose approach on the matter revealed different challenges.

Desk research

Desk research was the primary method used to identify projects, analytical papers and potential good practices in the field of family-based care in European countries.

IOM Missions – UMC Focal Points

IOM missions across Europe were contacted, with particular attention being paid to IOM missions with expertise in the field of alternative care, including family-based care, or dealing with a high number of UMC. The exchange of information allowed to have an insight on potentially relevant national or local practices to be included in the mapping. The project team reached out to IOM UMC focal points in the following missions: Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom.

Webinars

Through the participation in relevant webinars, the opportunity was seized to introduce the U-CARE project and establish new contacts to further organize calls with experts and relevant organizations working in the same field across Europe.

Following the above-mentioned methods to identify experts, relevant organizations and best practices, the exchange of information took place through calls via Microsoft Teams and enquiries sent through emails. For both approaches, an agenda and a set of questions relevant to the indicators of the mapping were prepared beforehand.

- **Calls with experts, IOM focal points and relevant organizations** – organized via Microsoft Teams; agenda and questions were prepared in advance.
- **Interviews/inquiries through email** – when organizing calls with experts and project officers was not feasible due to time limitations or conflicting agendas, a set of questions was sent through email.

FINDINGS

STATE OF PLAY IN EUROPE

One of the most important findings of the research, which aimed at identifying good practices with regards to recruiting foster care providers with a migration background in Europe, is the actual lack of European good practices. Even though there are foster care providers with a migration background, in many European countries this is linked to kinship placements, where relatives, close family friends or acquaintances are being contacted to take in and take care of the UMC. The recruitment of a foster care provider with a migration background is therefore rarely a result of a targeted outreach to migrant communities. The **absence of a specific recruitment strategy** for these communities together with additional barriers, as described below, leads to a rather uniform pool of foster care providers.

In general, we can say that mainly organizations in the United Kingdom and in the Netherlands have a more successful/effective and established practice of recruiting foster care providers in migrant communities, with Norway implementing an innovative approach in Europe. Nevertheless, care organizations from other countries, who were reached out to for this research, actively turn to these expert organizations for guidance in setting up their own recruitment strategy and/or have experimented with targeted outreach campaigns -with **varying degrees of success**-, such as in Belgium, France, Greece, Italy.

Recruiting requires a lot of time and resources, and it has been largely facilitated in countries where the legislation is advanced or friendly to the topic (i.e. in the Netherlands, the guardianship system is well coordinated with social workers and foster families). Other countries will benefit from a more comprehensive legal framework that addresses gaps and will put in place procedures that are mindful of relocation processes for UMC. Generally, there is a **shortage of foster care providers** across Europe.

Migrant communities or minority groups are often underrepresented in the pool of social workers, who in some countries lack the adequate training to reach out and recruit potential foster care providers in a culturally sensitive way. The role of **social workers, legal guardians and intercultural mediators** is, however, considered of paramount importance. Not only do they positively impact the recruitment campaign, but also act as bridge-builders between UMC, foster families, recruiters and national authorities.

It is recommended **to adapt the methodology** of recruiting to the national context and look at what kind of support and incentive - depending on each country's specificities - would be better adapted for the foster care providers. Rightly adapting the recruiting strategy to the needs of foster families is essential in motivating them to foster and obtain beneficial results for UMC.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

In this section, recruitment methodology will be analyzed according to the four identified criteria, i.e. outreach, foster incentive, impact on UMC, recruitment target/beneficiaries, and will be assessed in terms of effectiveness and relevance. Furthermore, where needed, the shortcomings will be discussed for the approaches. It is also important to note that what worked well in one context does not necessarily work in other contexts, and vice versa.

Criteria 1. Outreach

In terms of outreach procedure, organizations have approached: key figures/role models; foster care providers (peer to peer); contacts of persons that had previously established a network within communities; former kinship providers; aged-out UMC; places of worship, such as churches, mosques.

An effective approach proved to be connecting through **key figures/role models**. This technique is facilitated by a trustful environment already created between the key figures and migrant communities. They act as a bridge between recruiters and potentially foster care providers. The key figures play an important role in encouraging families to become foster carers, many times by linking it to the core values of the communities. They often accommodate potential differences within the same culture, due to their awareness of cultural sensitivities (i.e. In the Muslim culture, the women do not wear hijab at home in the presence of family members; more than once, the question arose whether women must wear the hijab at home when fostering an UMC). Places of worship and community centers remain the primary source of approaching both key figures and potential foster care providers. The foster care guidance organization, the Fostering Network in the United Kingdom, showed the success of “Fostering Friday” where Muslim leaders were actively engaged in recruiting foster care providers from the Muslim community. Waltham Forest Fostering Team, a local authority fostering service in the UK, as well as Pleegzorg Vlaanderen (Dunya) were indeed present in churches, mosques and community centers to raise awareness on foster care.

Another effective approach for reaching out to migrant communities was the so called “**word of mouth**” from current foster care providers. Practice shows that when current foster care providers share their experience about fostering, chances are increased in convincing others to do so, to a larger extent than more impersonal approaches, such as advertisement campaigns. CoramBAAF, for example, noted a significant increase in Eritrean and Bangladeshi foster carers after hearing about the good experiences of befriended couples or community members with foster care and the excellent support received from foster care agencies.

The drawback of those two approaches is the large number of resources (in terms of time and personnel) to be invested in identifying and maintaining a regular contact with the key figures/role models and with the current foster care providers.

As those approaches rely on the role of key figures among communities and foster carers, they might benefit the UMC by facilitating a faster identification of a trustful pool of potential foster care providers, thus filling the needs from the fields both faster and with reliable foster families.

For these two efficient methods in setting a strategy for recruiting, Nidos (in the Netherlands) and various members under the umbrella organization CoramBAAF (in the United Kingdom) could be referred to as having extensive experience.

Engaging aged-out UMC for reaching out to migrant communities is a **relatively helpful** method. This approach is facilitated by an already created network of trust between UMC and migrant communities/ Equally important is the former UMC's wish to engage in helping other UMC. Moreover, aged-out UMC can inform the potential foster carers better about the needs and challenges of becoming a foster carer for a

UMC. A weakness of this method to be taken into consideration is the limited available time of aged-out UMC.

Another **relatively helpful** method is the organization of awareness raising sessions by foster care agencies in places where diaspora or migrants frequent, such as places of worship, community centers, local malls, etc. The intention of these sessions is to “plant a seed”, as put forward by Waltham Forest Fostering Team, to stir the interest of passers-by in foster care. The Fostering Network also indicated that some of their member foster care agencies target postal codes where there seems to be a big migrant community. The success of these kind of awareness raising sessions depends on many factors, such as the support of key figures, the language of the flyers, the location, etc. It is noted that sessions led by the state, a local authority or social workers with whom passers-by do not identify with are less successful in convincing people to foster, as these actors generate mistrust, skepticism or even fear. Additional training, engaging intercultural mediators or a partnership with a civil society organization may counter these barriers. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the independent sector recruits twice the number of foster carers compared to the state, and in many cases, it pays higher allowances than the state-led agencies.

A **less successful** technique is stand-alone phone and written marketing campaigns, such as flyers, posters, social media, but also calling phone numbers. SOS Children’s Villages in Norway indeed indicated that the advertisement campaign was not successful at all, because advertisements are not personal enough.

Criteria 2. Foster incentive

In terms of incentives to motivate interested families in fostering UMC, they range from money (allowance, fees, taxes reduction), to housing (Norway) as well as faith-related motivation (in the Muslim culture, it is a duty to help the children left without families or in need), altruism, the motivation to give back by helping children from a similar background, to help children in need or the feeling of reward.

All methods proved to be effective; nevertheless, each of them must be adapted to the national context and to the targeted migrant community in order to be effective.

Depending on the national legislation, families interested in fostering either must possess enough financial means to sustain themselves (Belgium), or they may live on state subsidies/benefits (the United Kingdom). In case of the latter, an additional fostering fee can enable and motivate families who are willing to foster in the United Kingdom, i.e. the Eritrean community which was primarily living on state benefits represents a big share in the fostering pool as the allowance and the fee can equal a minimum wage in the United Kingdom. In this case, the intervention is considered a good practice both in terms of flexibility of the national legislation and the aid from the state, allowing families, who are motivated to become a foster care provider regardless of their financial situation.

Many foster care organizations offer compensation to foster families to cover the needs of their foster child. According to practitioners and researchers contacted within the scope of this report, the absence of compensation to cover the needs of the foster child can be a significant barrier for families to foster; and even though the motivation (faith-related, altruistic, empathic) is of primordial importance, the significance of this kind of compensation cannot be underestimated.

Within Muslim communities helping children in need is a civic duty. Recruitment in this community is often facilitated by referring to the moral obligation of being a good person, as mentioned in the Quran. For example, in the United Kingdom they are recruiting through events such as “Fostering Friday”, facilitated by Muslim leaders. These Muslim leaders are also included in challenging the misinformation in Muslim communities surrounding foster care. This intervention has been considered a good practice as it benefits those UMC who would like to integrate families that maintain a strong link with religion and tradition.

An innovative and unique model in Europe in terms of structure and incentive is the family model, implemented since 2016 in Norway. The municipality provides the house to the child and to the foster parents, who move in together; the idea is not only to provide them with a house, but to encourage children and foster parents to create a home together. Additionally, the foster parents also receive a fee. This method is facilitated by the state. It has proved to be highly beneficial for children as they receive a participatory role in their new families. Furthermore, given the fact that the child can stay within the home in case of failed matching, the intervention is considered a good practice for its long-term design, with the well-being of the child at the center of it, as disruption in the foster relationship does not necessarily mean a disruption in the environment and network of the UMC.

A majority of the foster care providers indicate the motivation to give back by helping children from a similar background, to help children in need or the feeling of reward as important incentives to engage in foster care.

Criteria 3. UMC's needs

In order to evaluate whether these approaches lead in practice to good results, the impact of recruiting among migrant communities was assessed based on UMC's testimonies, gathered either through experts, recruiters or based on desk research. It has been generally agreed that, while there is not a univocal preference of UMC in being hosted by families with a migration background, this can be an added value for both their integration into society and their continuous contact with values and traditions of their origin countries.

An effective approach will undoubtedly be the one where the wishes of the UMC are given consideration. On the one hand, some UMC expressed their desire to be fostered by families whose understanding and integration into the country was advanced, to facilitate their language learning process and assimilation of a new culture. Others refuse to be placed within families with the same religion, as they fear a too restrictive environment from a religious point of view, a slower integration process (language) or some may have fled their community because of cultural customs. On the other hand, for other UMC being taken care of by a foster family with migration background and similar cultural aspects, was an important element in feeling connected to their country of origin and religion.

UMC living with family members or in a family with a migration background had better (mental) health outcomes and performed better at school; they were also less isolated and lonely, participated more in group activities, and considered themselves more successful in making friends.

From Nidos' (the Netherlands) perspective, foster care with families from migrant communities had better results, due to cultural similarities. From a different perspective, SOS Children's Villages (Norway) has put an emphasis on a "balanced" background of the foster carers: on the one hand being from a migrant community in order to ensure cultural similarities with the children, on the other hand being integrated in the Norwegian society, thus accustomed with the country's environment. Practitioners and researchers consulted have agreed that there is no "right or wrong" approach and the needs of UMC must always be considered.

Criteria 4. Recruitment target and beneficiaries

The recruitment target and the beneficiaries are two additional criteria to consider when assessing the impact of a good practice. They will be evaluated together, as they are interrelated.

Organizations in charge of recruitment target their campaign differently depending on the current needs and availability. The recruitment target can be classified as follows: 1) only potential foster families with a migration

background; 2) primary focus on foster families with a migration background; 3) foster families with a migration background of subsidiary importance. A sub-classification was also done in some cases, either by religion (i.e. Muslim community in Austria, Belgium or the United Kingdom) or by country of origin (i.e. Eritrean community in the United Kingdom; Moroccan community in Belgium or more specifically, African community in Brussels).

As far as beneficiaries are concerned, the recruitment for the foster families has been addressed to 1) solely UMC or 2) both UMC and local children.

An effective approach in recruitment proved to be the match “only potential foster families with a migration background” – “solely UMC”, as well as the one “primary focus on foster families with a migration background” and “solely UMC”. All actors targeted will fully benefit from this technique, as their needs and expectations have more chances to be met. UMC have different needs in terms of finding a foster family than a local child would have, as the former may have different traumas and emotional needs. They do not only miss the safety and support of a family, but also the guidance to integrate into a new environment; a foster family with a migration background will be aware of the challenges and steps of integration. More than once, UMC also feel the absence of a connection with their roots, religion and culture of their country of origin. Thus, matching those with a foster family belonging to the same religion or community -if this corresponds with the wishes of the UMC- was evaluated as an effective technique. The drawback of this approach is that some UMC do not want to be placed within families with the same religion, as they intend to avoid a too restrictive environment from a religious point of view or they have bad experiences with certain cultural customs. An assessment of UMC’s preferences in these particular cases must be done beforehand.

A relatively helpful approach was the combination “primary focus on foster families with a migration background” - “both UMC and local children”. This method takes into account the preference of UMC to be hosted in a foster family with a migration background but does not focus mainly on the needs of UMC. From this perspective, it might not benefit them entirely; research shows that an important number of potential foster families prefer to foster an infant or a child under 14 years old, and the majority of UMC are teenage boys, older than 15 years old. Nevertheless, this technique might be considered as a first step in integrating the UMC in the pool of beneficiaries, for countries in the incipient stage in terms of recruitment experience.

A less successful experience was observed when “foster families with migration background of subsidiary importance” were recruited for both “UMC and local children”, as recruitment campaigns that did not explicitly target migrant communities are rarely successful. Due to the different needs to be met (in terms of language, financial assistance or explaining foster) and questions to be addressed (in terms of cultural and religious sensitivities), migrant communities must be approached differently than the non-migrant interested foster families.

OBSTACLES

The process of recruiting foster care providers is one of continuous efforts that do not always generate the positive results that care organizations hope for. There are various obstacles linked to working with migrant communities that can hinder the outreach and recruitment of foster care providers with a migration background, even when the methodology ticks all of the above-mentioned criteria boxes. Being conscious about these obstacles and proactively thinking about ways to avoid or moderate them will have a positive impact on the outreach and recruitment results. Below we will specify some of the main obstacles observed by researchers and practitioners when reaching out to and recruiting within migrant communities.

- Some migrant communities have a possible **distrust, suspicion and/or skepticism** towards social workers, official or governmental organizations. Especially when it comes to foster care, there can be the misconception that the social workers of the foster care organization can take away the family's own children or have strong negative opinions about the family's pedagogical methods. It may therefore take a long time and effort to gain trust and cooperation.
- The lengthy and sometimes intrusive assessment processes may generate a **feeling of control**, of being interrogated and not "being worthy or enough" to be a foster care provider. Clearly explaining the procedure, timeline and goals of the assessment process may be reassuring.
- Theological or cultural **misinterpretations and prescriptions** (i.e. linked to verbal and/or non-verbal communication, body language) can be a barrier in some cultural contexts or religious communities to foster, such as for some Muslim communities. There is a general understanding that adoption or foster care is *haram*³ and Muslims can therefore not engage in adoption or foster care. It is important to include theologians, scholars or religious community leaders in countering the misconceptions. Moreover, in certain cultures it is expected that women should adopt certain practices (i.e. wear hijab/niqab in some Muslim communities) in the presence of older boys. Showcasing good practices of how other foster families deal with this matter could be reassuring.
- The **lack of knowledge** on the social care system and foster care can lead to people not engaging in foster care or dropping out when the UMC situation and needs are finally explained to them. Some people sign up for foster care thinking of taking care of a baby; however, UMC are mostly older boys. Unclear expectations can lead to dropouts in the recruitment procedure.
- The **perception of older unaccompanied migrant boys** within the general public, even those with a similar cultural background or coming from the same country of origin, is quite negative. Prejudices and generalizations ("all migrant boys are criminals") amplified by negative stories in the media can make people fearful and anxious of fostering older migrant boys. The latter can also be seen as a threat to the female household members (daughter(s), wife). These can constitute reasons for refusing to engage in foster care.
- Practical considerations, sometimes linked to **legal requirements** for fostering, such as adequate housing, having a separate room, difficulty to obtain travel documents for a UMC, sufficient financial means to foster, not living off of social allowances, may be a huge obstacle for families who want to foster. People who struggle financially but with a desire to foster, therefore, see themselves stranded in the assessment procedure.
- Linked to the previous point is the lack of sufficient compensation for fostering. Having an allowance to cover the costs of the child, combined with a "volunteering fee" (i.e. the United Kingdom) or the provision of housing (i.e. family homes in Norway) can actually be an enabling factor for people to foster, including

³ Haram is an Arabic term that means "forbidden". It can refer to acts that are prohibited under Islamic law or in the religious texts of the Quran and the Sunnah.

those who are mostly faced with practical or financial obstacles. Establishing a **fair compensation system**, as explained also during the subsection on incentives, seems therefore recommended.

- When the message of your recruitment campaign is convincing some members of the family, but not all, this could jeopardize the continuation of the recruitment and selection procedure. It is important to have **all family members on board**. Spend extra attention to those family members who do not feel comfortable or motivated to foster and address the reasons why. Make sure that family members know that the engagement of all members is necessary to proceed with the foster care application.
- People with a migration background do not always feel related to the message or **language** used in outreach activities. This does not only refer to the need for translation, but also the use of too many technical words.
- Foster care organizations often require foster care families to have a good understanding of and **integration** in the host community. For recent or newly arrived families, this is not always evident.
- Social workers do not always possess the necessary **cross-cultural competencies** and they can be biased by misconceptions on the language skills of the families, which can lead to an early rejection of interested foster care providers, because families do not tick all the boxes or seem to have “strange habits”. Moreover, the way of communicating (i.e. body language, direct versus indirect) can be heavily subject to cultural differences, which can be a turnoff for both social workers and potential foster carers. Working with intercultural mediators and/or providing social workers with additional training for cultural sensitive outreach could be helpful to assess the ability of candidates to become foster parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Becoming a foster carer is an enriching experience with fulfilling results, as an impact is made in the life of a child in need of support and care. As primary consideration, the best interest of the child should always be of paramount importance and the starting point of designing the recruitment procedure and the foster relation. Due to the fact that fostering is a challenging journey, several risks need to be considered in order to have a positive impact on both the outreach and recruitment results, but also to ensure that efforts are made to minimize potential negative effects on a child's life and maximize the benefits of the intervention (*do no harm*). Below we will list several suggestions to reflect on, which might turn out to be useful when setting up and implementing a recruitment strategy.

- ✓ Develop a clear recruitment plan, where recruitment targets and beneficiaries are defined. The primary consideration must be the UMC's preferences, so take into account their wishes in terms of what kind of foster family would better meet their needs (i.e. with the same cultural background; with an advanced level of integration in the country etc), so as to avoid missing the "right match" between foster families and UMC.
- ✓ Build an environment of trust between your organization, social workers/government representatives and migrant communities, as distrust, suspicion and/or skepticism from migrant communities might appear. Take into consideration that this is an ongoing process that will require efforts and time. Communicate clearly the role and responsibilities of each actor involved in the process of recruiting.
- ✓ Clearly explain the procedure, timeline and goals of the assessment process, as well as responsibilities and benefits. Make sure you inform interested parties about the age and background of the children, in order to avoid dropouts at a later stage of the recruitment process (i.e. expectations on fostering babies/infants, which is not in line with the general UMC population which are older boys).
- ✓ Prepare beforehand key messages and a clear explanation about what fostering entails, in order to fill the gap of knowledge on the matter or to counter misconceptions or difficulties in accommodating fostering and cultural/religious practices. Avoid technical terms or too pretentious wording and adjust it to the (level of) language spoken by each foster family.
- ✓ Do not hesitate to mention the financial assistance covering the expenses of the child offered (by the State or agency) to those families interested in fostering but not meeting the financial requirements. Get informed on all legal requirements and provide potential foster carers with this information as to advance the assessment procedure in the smoothest way possible and to avoid withdrawal at a later phase.
- ✓ Diversify your messages, because different things motivate different people. Financial assistance may motivate more pragmatic family members, while others will relate more to the message of altruism (linked to faith or sense of community) and making a difference in a child's life. Make sure that all family members are on board for foster care; pay additional attention to those family members who have doubts or worries.
- ✓ Be aware of potential cultural and religious sensitivities, and adapt the explanations depending on the migrant community you are addressing to. Do not hesitate to involve current foster carers, scholars, religious figures or practitioners to better convey the message. Showcasing good practices of how other foster families deal with these sensitivities could be reassuring.
- ✓ Engage key figures within migrant communities, aged-out UMC and diaspora or migrant associations in your recruitment campaign. Together with awareness raising events in places where many people with a migration background frequent (such as churches, mosques, community centers, malls, etc.), they are very effective in recruiting new foster carers within the migrant community.

- ✓ Provide excellent services: be welcoming, respond fast to issues and questions, and have a respectful, objective approach. Word-of-mouth marketing following a good foster care experience has been proven very important in recruiting new foster carers.
- ✓ Train social workers on cross-cultural matters and include intercultural mediators and interpreters at any stage of the recruitment process, if needed. This will prevent potential foster carers from not feeling understood or being disoriented.
- ✓ Identify potential interested foster families and do not exclude them from the pool if they initially do not meet all requirements or there is no UMC identified for them; make sure you maintain frequent contact with them to give them the opportunity to become foster carers at an appropriate time.
- ✓ Make sure everyone in your foster care agency (from management to caseworkers) is ready and committed to put additional efforts in recruiting foster carers within migrant communities. Those practices where recruiting foster carers with a migration background is solely of subsidiary importance have proven not to be successful. Tailor your recruitment methods to families with a migration background and, if possible, recruit specifically for UMC, as it will allow you to better inform potential foster care families, but also to find a better match for the UMC's needs.

CONCLUSION

While the benefits for UMC of being placed in foster families with a migration background are broadly recognized across Europe by both researchers and practitioners, the recruitment of foster care providers with a migration background is rarely the result of a targeted outreach to migrant communities, due to the lack of a specific recruitment strategy for these communities and additional barriers in terms of legislation, financial resources, language, lack of knowledge on the topic, confusion around accommodating religion practices when fostering, etc.

Recruiting requires a lot of time and resources and it has been facilitated in countries where legislation is advanced or friendly to the topic. There is generally a shortage of foster care providers across Europe, and in order to change this trend, a recruitment campaign must be adapted to the national context and needs of both foster families and UMC.

In terms of outreaching to migrant communities, the key figures/role models and word of mouth proved to be the most effective approaches. The former was facilitated by a trustful environment created by the key figures with the migrant communities; the latter, by foster care providers sharing their experiences about fostering, using more convincing approaches than rather impersonal ones, such as advertisement campaigns.

Regarding the most effective incentives to motivate interested families in fostering UMC, the following were identified throughout the mapping: money (allowance, fees, taxes reduction), housing (SOS Children's Villages together with the municipality in Norway), as well as faith-related motivation (in the Muslim culture, it is a duty to help the children left without families or in need), altruism, the motivation to give back by helping children from a similar background, to help children in need and the feeling of reward.

In order to evaluate whether these approaches lead in practice to good results, the impact of recruiting among migrant communities was assessed based on UMC's testimonies. It has been generally agreed that, while there is not a univocal preference of UMC being hosted by families with a migration background, this can be an added value for both their integration into society and their continuous contact with values and traditions of their origin countries. UMC living with family members or in a family with a migration background had better mental health outcomes and performed better at school; they were also less isolated and lonely, participated more in group activities, and considered themselves more successful in making friends. An effective approach will undoubtedly be the one where the wish of the UMC is given consideration.

Last but not least, various obstacles standing in the way of a smooth recruiting process have been identified when reaching out to and recruiting within migrant communities, such as mistrust towards the state or social workers, lack of knowledge about fostering, confusion around religion practices and fostering, lack of language skills or financial resources; shortage of social workers (with a migration background), lack of sufficient training for social workers, etc.. Taking these into consideration and mitigating the risks will have a positive impact on the outreach and recruitment results.

This report will be a good basis for the next step of the project activities that aim to set up and pilot a recruitment campaign for foster care providers within migrant communities in Belgium. Based on the findings in this report and the feedback received during the piloting phase, a Standard Operating Procedure document will be compiled that will support European stakeholders interested in setting up their own foster care recruitment campaign in migrant communities.

UMC	Needs assessed by organization	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Recruitment target	Only potential foster families with a migration background	x					x			x	x		x
	Primary focus on foster families with a migration background		x	x	x	x		x	x				
	Foster families with a migration background of subsidiary importance					x (overall target: broad)		x (overall target: broad)	x (overall target: broad)			x	
Recruitment beneficiaries	Solely UMC			x	x					x		x	x
	UMC and local children	x	x (primary focus: UMC)			x	x	x	x		x		