



ANALYSIS REPORT

CONSULTATIONS ON FOSTER CARE



U-CARE Project

Unaccompanied Children in Alternative Residence

February 2022



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FBC	Family-based care
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics
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 Pleegzorg Vlaams-Brabant en Brussel and Greek partner ARSIS.

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

The project focuses on four main activities:

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

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

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE REPORT

This consultation analysis report 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 analyzes the findings of the focus group discussions and interviews conducted with UMC in foster care and UMC, currently residing in Belgian residential services, on the topic of foster care in families with a migrant background. The report also features the findings of the interviews and focus groups with foster care workers, legal guardians, foster care families and members of diaspora communities.

To improve alternative care for UMC in Belgium and other European countries, the discussions aim to receive inputs on questions such as: what constitutes good culture-sensitive foster care, what type of barriers persons with a migration background encounter in foster care and/or in their community, what level of assistance/supervision/support is most suitable, which type of recruitment strategy is the most suitable etc. It looks into what currently works and does not work for the participants, as well as gaps and needs they have identified and difficulties encountered as a result of religious or cultural barriers.

The aim of the rapport is to formulate concrete policy recommendations for the U-CARE project and Pleegzorg Vlaanderen. In addition, within the U-CARE project, we want to stimulate the participation of the target group concerned itself. More specifically, this is a step to see how collaboration can be optimized in the future. With this report, we aim to allow UMC, foster families, experts and members from diaspora associations to speak for themselves and to offer the opportunity to determine their own trajectory and to share their expertise. This will not only bring an important added value to the project but will also directly benefit future beneficiaries of the prototypes, namely unaccompanied migrant children.

Together with the Standard Operating procedure (SOP) and Best practices rapport, the findings of this analysis report will form the basis for upcoming activities of the U-CARE project, particularly in the optimization of the recruitment campaign for foster families with a migration background and key figures. Giving a voice to UMC and members of the diaspora communities through the focus group discussions and interviews will therefore allow the project team to include their insights and tailor the foster care for UMC in families with a migration background.

The analysis report has been structured as follows:

- The [methodology section](#) outlining which approaches and techniques used for the focus group discussions/interview and analysis;
- The [findings and discussion section](#) comprises the central aspects and inputs of the consultations of unaccompanied minors and experts and gives an analysis of the central themes and contributions of the consultations;
- The [final section](#) specifying the conclusions of the analysis;
- The [annexes](#) including the questionnaire used for the focus group discussions/interviews, the participant lists and the informed consent template.

METHODOLOGY

The experiences, opinions, and needs of the beneficiary group as well as the perspectives of experts, foster care workers and diaspora members form the most important basis for the development of suitable and needs-based foster care systems. In order to collect constructive input, it is imperative to clarify which aspects are relevant for this development process. Therefore, the starting point for planning the focus group discussions and the exchange with experts was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the target group (UMC, experts and members of the diaspora communities) as well as the objective and main emphasis of the project (culture sensitive foster care).

Each of these points of analysis encompasses specific aspects that need to be considered for a structured planning process. The target group of unaccompanied minors, for instance, is usually associated with specific needs and challenges. These include, for example, the clarification of the residence status, traumatization, and therapeutic offers as well as tasks related to integration. Care systems, in turn, can be differentiated regarding various aspects linked to the pedagogical approach, level of supervision, or forms of assistance and accommodation. Foster care in families with a migration background on the other hand is characterized by specific challenges such as access to the foster care system and cultural or religious barriers.

The research started from the following general research question:

What barriers do foster families with a migration background and UMCs experience in accessing foster care for UMC?

Since we focused on different target groups, we adapted the questionnaire (see annex 1) according to the different target groups:

- Questionnaire for UMC
- Questionnaire for foster families with a migration background
- Questionnaire for experts and members of diaspora associations

Based on these preliminary considerations, the consultations, methodology, and questions were prepared. The main planning steps are outlined below:

Composition of focus groups and relevant experts

The team strived towards a diverse composition of the focus groups in terms of age, gender and country of origin, however, this does not reflect the general group of unaccompanied minors currently residing in Belgium. Generally, UMC arriving in Belgium are aged 16 or older and 90% of them are male¹ and majority has roots in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, from the 11 interviewed (aged-out) UMC 3 were girls and 8 boys between the age of 14 and 19 years old. The majority of UMC had origins in

¹ Service Fédéral Public Justice., 2021, Statistics, [link](#)

Afghanistan, followed by Eritrea and Somalia. 5 of the interviewed youngsters were minor UMC and 6 were young adults (aged-out UMC).

In order to adequately shed light on foster care, it was important to include two different perspectives. On the one hand, the impressions and opinions of unaccompanied minors who are currently being cared for in a foster family and another group accommodated in residential organizations. On the other hand, the experiences of foster families who have already gone through the foster care process are equally crucial. We reached out to foster care families (male and female) from different migration backgrounds, such as Chinese, Moroccan, Congolese and Somalian origin.

Regarding the previously defined thematic points it was also important to include the perspectives of the following stakeholders: foster workers (practitioners), experts in cross-cultural sensitivity, members of diaspora groups and legal guardians. An online focus group was held in French with 14 members of the Congolese diaspora (4 female, 10 male) between the age of 48 and 72 years old. Furthermore, interviews were held with culture sensitive foster care workers with a Belgian and Afghan background.

Methodology of the survey

Holding a focus group discussion with a young, vulnerable group requires sensitivity and care. Therefore, using the internal “child participation” guidebook developed and provided by IOM Belgium U-CARE team was an important tool. Furthermore, consultations held with UMC were solely conducted by staff members who are recognized foster care counselors who uphold the highest standards to work with vulnerable children. For the questionnaires, we made sure to use easy and simple language with clear questions due to potential language barriers for the UMC. A trusted Farsi and Pashtu translator was consulted to guide us through the interviews as the majority of the UMC's did not speak enough Dutch to express themselves on this delicate topic. Lastly, UMC were clearly informed, in easy language, about the content of the informed consent, which was also discussed with UMC's foster parent, social worker and legal guardian for their approval and sent for their signature.

Legal, Logistic, and Technical Aspects

Due to the pandemic and the associated planning uncertainties some focus groups discussions were planned and prepared as virtual events. This required us to ensure that participants have the proper and necessary IT equipment. Additionally, an online-friendly methodology and a suitable video platform (Zoom) had to be selected and prepared. Due to a COVID outbreak in a residential group, a focus group with UMC in Fedasil was canceled.

Another key step was the clarification of the legal aspects. As mentioned before, the leading questions for the discussion do not address sensitive issues/topics and relate primarily to foster care, recruitment tools and cultural and religious barriers. Nevertheless, we made sure to inform all participants that all comments and input would only be reported anonymously to provide the necessary freedom for the participants' views, opinions, and criticism.

The discussions and inputs were evaluated on the basis of an audio recording. It was therefore necessary to obtain consent for participation as well as the audio recording of the discussion. Unaccompanied minors are represented and supported by guardians in all legal matters. Declarations

of consent were therefore requested. Following the participatory and child-centered approach of the U-CARE project, an information sheet for the participants was created. The letter explains the background, focus and objectives of the project in an easy, accessible language and was sent to the partners together with the declarations of consent. Unfortunately, some identified respondents could in the end not participate to the focus group discussions due to negative advice from legal guardians regarding participation in the study out of fear for negative consequences, which in the end led to fewer UMC participants than targeted.

Desk Research

Initially, a thorough literature study was carried out to bundle existing knowledge about the research question. In addition to the consultations, the team has complemented the results of the consultations with findings from a preliminary literature research on the topic, including previous deliverables (SOP, best practices rapport) and recent scientific articles and doctoral theses on UMC in foster care and challenges of diaspora communities. In the second phase, a qualitative research method was used. A qualitative study provides the opportunity to find out why there are certain prevailing opinions or behaviors about foster care in migrant communities. Qualitative research is about the meaning that certain people give to behavior. Moreover, this form of research provides the opportunity to obtain deeper information about social and human problems. Because the interviewees are not given any predetermined standard answer options, they provide answers from their own frames of reference and their own experience. Within qualitative research, the image of (social) reality that is presented by the researchers themselves and in which they find themselves in the middle, can thus be centralized². Cultural and religious barriers are a difficult topic. By specifically interviewing experts who have experience in making taboos a topic for discussion, any shyness of action can be removed.

² Verhoeven, N., 2019.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The exchange with practitioners and experts, and especially the focus group discussions with unaccompanied minors, provided an in-depth insight into the many challenges associated with foster care. While the panelists' contributions covered a wide range of topics, some topics stood out and were particularly frequently mentioned and intensively discussed. The central contributions and statements of the interlocutors are categorized according to the main topics, which is coupled with an analysis of the main discussion points.

Access to information about Pleegzorg Vlaanderen³ and foster care process

Almost all respondents agree that the information about Pleegzorg Vlaanderen is not sufficiently accessible for all target groups and is not sufficiently inclusive. The information brochures and channels such as social media are not sufficiently suitable for families including family members with diverse SOGIESC and cultural backgrounds. For newcomers who make less use of specific social media channels or existing institutions, the information is not considered to be sufficiently culture-sensitive.

Apart from the need to increase general awareness of Pleegzorg Vlaanderen, respondents also indicate that they have too little information about what a foster care process can entail. For example, respondents indicate that both foster families and foster young people need better preparation for the trajectory that awaits them.

- Language is seen as one of the biggest barriers. Despite the efforts made by Pleegzorg Vlaanderen and U-CARE to translate the recruitment flyers, the existing info material does not fully meet the needs of the target audience. Most also indicate that having the material available in their own language make it easier to make an informed decision.
- The info flyers and the recruitment video are not diverse enough and, according to some respondents, give the impression that U-CARE mainly focuses on Arabic-speaking families and/or Muslim families to accommodate UMC. It is not clear enough that there are also young people migrating from African countries. The current photos and visual material that was used is not sufficiently diverse and means that, for example, people with African or Asian roots do not identify themselves in the material. It can be concluded that more efforts should be done in developing recruitment materials that depict this diversity. The [podcast episode](#) with Burundi foster mom Sylvana Mpabwanayo-Ntaryamira can, for example, be a way to complement the current videos.
- Even though a single mom from Palestinian Territories was featured in the U-CARE recruitment video, the footage and the term “Foster Family” can give the impression that only heterosexual couples can apply. As a result, couples with diverse SOGIESC and/or individuals who are single may get the feeling that they do not meet the standards or conditions.
- Several key figures in the Afghan community indicate that the recruitment video is not inviting enough. Moreover, the flyers would not be enough to motivate people to apply as a foster family.

³ Pleegzorg Vlaanderen is U-CARE's partner organization and is the main foster care agency in the Flemish-speaking region of Belgium

Face to face/personal contact was identified as an important solution for the recruitment campaign. These findings correspond with the findings from our best practice report: it is needed to combine different methods of recruitment.

- For some respondents, the recruitment video did not meet their expectations, as they were looking for other types of information. For example, it is not clear what Pleegzorg Vlaanderen does and no information was given about financial and psychological support, the difficulties that may arise, the guardian and foster care counselor who usually do not speak the same language as the families, etc.
- In general, information from Pleegzorg Vlaanderen does not seem to reach UMC and foster families with a migration background. Some respondents indicate that they were first informed about the existence of Pleegzorg Vlaanderen through word of mouth. Information regularly reaches the target group by chance or contacts within their own network.
- The guardian is seen by kinship foster families as a crucial person to inform them of the support that Pleegzorg Vlaanderen can provide. During their training, guardians receive information about foster care that is clearly positive. The trust relationship in which this information was shared was considered important in order to be able to share personal information. In addition, another UMC was informed about Pleegzorg Vlaanderen by the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration and the CAW Center for General Welfare Work.
- The respondents (2nd generation) indicated that they had searched for information about Pleegzorg Vlaanderen on the internet or via the Pleegzorg Vlaanderen website based on their own motivation to want to receive an UMC.
- Information should be disseminated more through magazines that reach the diaspora and also should preferably be presented in a photographic format. The promotion campaign in Matonge magazine by Kind en Gezin, which uses colored children in photos, was experienced as very positive.
- A number of foster families indicated that they were not sufficiently aware of what guidance by Pleegzorg Vlaanderen and other services entailed.
- Diaspora communities and persons with a migration background indicate that they are not sufficiently informed about the expectations and procedures that foster care entails. Families often do not know what a screening process entails and they experience the visit and examination of a social worker as an invasion of their privacy. Furthermore, the decision for foster care can be made by a juvenile judge and not everyone feels comfortable to get involved in the juvenile system.
- According to some respondents, foster families are not sufficiently reminded of their responsibilities as parents at the start. They also have questions about the legal status of the child and the possible impact on their residence status.
- For many families the difference between foster care and adoption is not clear.

“When M. came to us and was assigned a guardian, we found out through the guardian. We received all other information after registering for foster care and on the basis of conversations with the foster care counselor and guardian.”

“After that conversation I did not receive any other information. I would like additional information in my language about foster care, even though I have been in foster care for a long time but my Dutch is not so good to understand everything.”

The role of civil society, diaspora, key figures

The respondents indicate that civil society has an important role to play in disseminating information about Pleegzorg Vlaanderen.

- They agree that key figures can bridge the gap between foster care agencies and foster families with a migration background. This is because they are closer to the community and have a common language and cultural habits which is crucial for building trust.
- According to the majority of the respondents, the distrust towards the government system and services is very high. Key figures can bring diaspora communities and government services closer together.
- Key figures know what is going on within the communities and families. This allows them to help in estimating whether or not families would qualify for Pleegzorg Vlaanderen. It is therefore suggested to train key figures and rely on them for word-of-mouth advertising.
- Foster families with a migration background are seen as experienced experts and role models who can provide great added value in promoting Pleegzorg Vlaanderen.

“A key figure already has prestige and connections in the community. These persons already have connections with families, organizations and communities and can contribute to the estimation in matching.”

“We need these people to pass on information in a good way. Few people know that foster care exists and call me to provide information about foster care or to ask whether they meet the conditions. I give them that information. so you can also call me a key figure for foster care. But I don't really know much about foster care, so I forward them to the office, but they don't understand that explanation very well in Dutch. For example, there was someone from Syria who could only speak Arabic and I had to explain everything to them.”

Members of the diaspora associations attach great importance to participation and recognition of their expertise which can contribute to the reception of UMC. Migration and the reception of UMC are themes close to their hearts.

- They consider themselves experts by experience because, like the UMC, they once arrived in their host country and experienced for themselves how difficult integration can be and what challenges this process entails in forming their own identity.

- Diaspora families and diaspora associations want to take responsibility for the reception of UMC and are asking for support from the government. This involvement contributes to a sense of belonging to society and can only be achieved through an inclusive policy.
- This is also linked to a moral and spiritual purpose to receive young people from their own community.
- According to respondents, expectations of taking care of siblings together should be reconsidered. Sticking to the placement of siblings has, according to some, sometimes led to negative experiences in the past.
- Some diaspora associations are asking for specific recruitment material for their community. For example, a short informative video about foster care can be prepared where both financial aspects and the availability of an Afghan foster care counselor are mentioned.
- Also, information sessions and flyers should be provided in own language. Afghan young people or foster families can, for example, talk in their own language during information sessions or other events/activities.

“Pleegzorg Vlaanderen should get closer to people by informing them during comfort zone activities like the Ramadan, Iftar, women's groups breakfast meetings. Focus on communication and visibility within certain target groups and within certain communities!”

Image about UMC and foster families

The qualitative research shows that both UMC and foster families do not always have a clear picture of each other. A number of UMC do not know what a foster family is and have never heard of alternative forms of care, such as foster care. The term 'foster family' also often causes confusion, since this is not a universal known concept and form of reception structure. Some respondents confuse foster care with adoption. In addition, the terminology of 'foster family' can lead to a conflict of loyalty towards the nuclear family. One UMC respondent indicated that he did not want to go to a foster family because he feared that his family would then no longer be allowed to visit and his family reunification would be jeopardized.

“I do not want to go to a foster family because then my family cannot come to Belgium. But if my family is not allowed to come, I might prefer to go to a family than stay in the community center..”

Under the influence of negative images and stories about migrants and the host country, ignorance or negative experiences, respondents from both target groups fall into stereotypes and prejudices towards each other.

- For example, a UMC respondent indicated that he does not want to go to a foster family because he does not want to end up with an older couple who may have conservative parenting rules than in the community structure.
- A number of UMC, members of the diaspora and future foster families are also suspicious of each other. This distrust of UMC strongly depends on the region from which the young people come.

On the other side, when the country of origin is a conflict or war zone such as Syria or Afghanistan. Some adult respondents fear the importation of a foreign conflict and/or religious and ethnic tensions.

- Respondents also wondered whether they might jeopardize their own safety by bringing in a young person with potentially radicalizing or extremist ideas.

“Can he be trusted? How can you be sure he wasn't a member of IS? Maybe later on he will carry out an attack or keep a Kalashnikov under his bed and that in my house?”

- The fact that not all foster families have received professional social training makes that some UMC feel safer with professionals in a community structure. Two respondents also indicated that, in contrast to educators within a community, foster families have not received any training to cope with the entailed care of UMC.

“Imagine you end up with such an old angry woman who is super strict and takes away your freedom? Then I prefer a community with young people where you can do what you want.”

Some UMC respondents see the ideal foster family as a Dutch-speaking Belgian family without a migration background. A foster family without a migration background is seen as a guarantee of integration. For example, a number of young people indicate that learning Dutch would go much more smoothly in a foster family without a migration background. Some respondents also feel that they can receive more support from a Dutch-speaking family than a family with a migration background or in the community.

“Migrants often have problems themselves, do not speak the language, how are they going to help me with my papers, school, etc. ?”

Social and financial capital

Respondents indicate that the financial situation of foster families with a migration background and their own social capital can create a barrier. Newcomers or persons with a migration background may still have to struggle with their own integration process and experience discrimination in the labor and rental market.

- Poverty would prevent them from taking care of a child as they sometimes do not have sufficient financial means to give their own children the life they want.
- Some also wonder whether they have sufficient social capital to offer the UMC the opportunities they need and deserve. They sometimes struggle with raising their own children, so that there is literally and figuratively no room to take in a child with extra worries.
- Moreover, some families fear that they will not be able to meet the logistical expectations of Pleegzorg Vlaanderen, such as providing each child with an own room.
- From an intersectional perspective, people with a migration background are more likely to experience structural discrimination and inequalities, which pose challenges at the micro, meso and

macro levels. Some respondents emphasize that they also experience inequality and structural exclusion within an organization such as Pleegzorg Vlaanderen.

- Own feelings and experiences of racism and discrimination create a barrier to foster a child who might face the same challenges. Some respondents do not feel capable enough for this. People with a migration background may be single mothers or fathers trying to deal with their own difficulties and family reunification journey ahead of them. Often, they have had to leave a part of their family behind and experience discrimination, which makes an engagement as foster care difficult.

“When I arrived in Belgium as a student in the 1970s, we went to the Ardennes on a 3-day trip. We slept next to a center where children were placed by the juvenile judge. I met an African girl of about 14 years old, she was all alone. I wanted to take care of her as a kind of mentor, but I could not because as a student I did not earn enough to take care of her. Today I have the same feeling: I am retired, the story of those young people alone here... it touches me, I would like to help them but I do not think I have enough financial means... Even if we want to take in a child, we are discriminated against.”

The significance of a foster family for a UMC

A foster family has different meanings and interpretations for the respondents UMC.

- A number of respondents indicate that they do not know what a foster family is. Moreover, some UMC no longer know what a family structure means because of their stay in a community center. They are, for example, no longer used to eating together, to adapt to the expectations of a family culture within a family, etc.
- Other youngsters indicate that they are mainly looking for “nesting warmth” and indicate that a foster family can offer them warmth and love, as with their own family.
- UMC also indicate that life in a community and/or reception center is very difficult due to the lack of privacy, constant social tensions and uncertainty in which they find themselves. A foster family would bring them peace and more confidence.
- In addition, language and integration is an important pull factor when choosing the care and/or support of a foster family.
- A foster family is also seen by members of the diaspora associations as the preferred place to receive young people with trauma.
- A foster family with a migration background is seen as an added value in overcoming any language and cultural barriers.

“I was hoping that I could go to a foster home because I feel so alone. I miss the love of a family like I had it. I wish someone took care of me like at home and that I can do everything with ... I don't like being alone: going to the store or something is really no fun alone.”

“In the residential group we only get something to eat, we can sleep and go to school and nothing else. A foster family can help you with everything: they know how it works. In the residential group there is always stress from the other young people.”

“Family is everything to us. The parents, children and grandchildren belong together, and we think it is very important that we can take care of our grandchild. She feels comfortable here, at ease and safe. She can be herself.”

Cultural and Religious Barriers

When we look at cultural kinship from the perspective of foster families and members of diaspora associations, the majority of respondents indicate that they see cultural kinship and a shared ethnicity as an added value and for some a necessary condition for taking in a child. A shared culture is seen on the one hand as celebrating diversity, shared differences and similarities.

All respondents agree that a UMC has the right to preserve his culture and that it is important to be able to further develop their individuality and identity. However, the fear for cultural or religious barriers is real for some respondents (i.e. different interpretation of Islam). At the same time, cultural and religious differences in non-culturally matched families can create the feeling with the youngsters that they have to distance themselves from their religion/culture and therefore assimilate with the host culture. On the other hand, clinging to one's own cultural and religious habits can create a new risk of overshooting one's own culture. For example, according to some respondents, out of loyalty to the parents, it is possible to resort strongly to religion or cultural rituals.

- Some foster families with a migration background and UMC prefer to be matched with someone of the same culture and religion. A cultural matching can prevent young people from being completely lost in a new world and prevent possible cultural and religious barriers. A number of respondents noted that the escape route, migration history and previous relation with religion in their home country determine whether young people find culture matching important; also the socio-economic and ethnic origin, country of origin, which war zone you come from (i.e. Taliban ruled), (il)literacy are determining factors
- Unaccompanied minors sometimes consciously choose a family with a migration background out of fear to lose their religion. A shared religion can ensure that Muslim women and girls can continue to wear a headscarf without questioning this. On the other hand, foster families with a migration background sometimes choose not to take in UMC because of religious rules regarding the headscarf, because according to their religious experience they then have to wear a headscarf.
- The cultural and/or religious perception of age is a determining factor within some foster families whether or not to receive a UMC. For example, in Afghan Sharia, boys are considered mature at age 14. Some families also attach great importance to the region from which the UMC comes out of fear for conflicts imported from cultural differences. (i.e. pro or contra Taliban, different cultural and religious ideology, etc.)

- A shared nationality alone is not sufficient for some foster families to speak of a cultural relationship. They find it difficult to raise a child of another when there are many differences based on region, philosophy, language, which also make them ask themselves questions such as “can the youngster be trusted?” or “Are they really as old as they claim?” According to Afghan Sharia, there are many rules associated with contacts between a foster child and foster mother, prescribing what is and what is not allowed (i.e. touching, appearing before the UMC without a headscarf, etc.)
- Cultural barriers depend on prevailing stigmas and spiritual beliefs in the country of origin. Within Congolese culture, for example, witchcraft is still part of daily reality, both in the country of origin and in the host country. The belief in witchcraft means that UMC can be seen in some families as children who are bewitched and therefore bring bad luck. This would prevent certain foster families from taking in a UMC, but could at the same time be a reason to expel youngster from their family. In this context, some respondents are concerned about the impact these harmful cultural practices may have on young people. Spiritual belief about exorcism, which is still common in some cultures, can lead to serious abuse and neglect of young people.
- Taboo and stigma surrounding mental health within various Muslim and African families is seen as a barrier and exclusion criteria to take in a child. Some respondents fear that a number of families with a migration background are not capable enough to deal with this problem. Respondents warn of the danger that some foster families will only resort to traditional medicine and allow young people with serious psychological problems to be cured through religion.
- Different cultural ways of looking at diseases such as psychosocial well-being were also seen by some respondents as a possible stumbling block.
- Cultural similarities, on the other hand, are seen as an added value and a necessary requirement to make the trauma of young people a topic for discussion within a sensitive context. Respondents believe that when you decide to take in a child from another culture, you should have a minimum of knowledge about their culture.
- A shared culture ensures recognition, trust and a smooth adjustment to a new culture. UMC are often young adults who have already been formed within a certain culture that they cannot and should not simply reject. Sometimes affirmative action is necessary to ensure that the child can maintain its culture.

“It is difficult to live with people who drink alcohol and eat pig. That is not acceptable with our religion.”

- UMC indicate that they are often not aware of the presence of ethnic minority groups in Belgium. Nor do they always know that there are organizations with the same cultural background that offer activities and get together. Some respondents indicate that they meet people with the same ethnic cultural background purely by chance and that they are not specifically looking for cultural affiliation. Some of the UMC respondents indicate that they do not know why they should associate with people from their country of origin. In addition, some respondents experience falling back on their own culture and language as an obstacle in their integration process.
- A number of UMC indicate that a shared religion or culture is not a requirement for them in the matching process with a foster family.

- Some respondents only want to take in a child from their own culture, skin color and country of origin for fear of not having sufficient knowledge about other cultures and eating habits.
- Taking in a child from outside the family or network can create tensions within the larger family network in the host country and country of origin. Some respondents fear social pressure from their own family members in the country of origin. This is because they receive young people with whom there are no family ties, while family members in the country of origin have needs and expect financial support that may be jeopardized by the reception of an UMC. *“Many people who are part of a collective shame culture are afraid of the reaction from the community. People are afraid of getting a negative stamp and putting their family name in jeopardy,”* said the Afghan key figure.
- Language is seen as a serious barrier to accommodate to a UMC’s needs. There are, for example, already 100 different languages in the Democratic Republic of Congo, so matching on the basis of nationality alone is no guarantee of success.

“It doesn't matter to me if someone is white, black, brown or whatever as long as there is respect. I just want to live a good life and be happy.”

“We are Muslim and we feel it is difficult sometimes. The girls come here with headscarves and they have to go to school and have to take off the headscarves. They do not accept that and look for another school. But OKAN school says they cannot choose the first year and that they have to take that off. It was a difficult decision. Then I could not explain anything because my Dutch was not good, but now I can stand up for them.”

“I think yes, the interpretation of religion and the rules linked to religion can be barriers. But that is not valid in every family. And I think that they can take it up with their imam or someone who can think about it with you: how can we adjust? Or what are the possibilities? And I think we have to adapt to that as foster care counselors.”

Age and Gender

Although percentage-wise girls are more likely to find a place in a foster family and UMC usually concern boys, opinions are divided. Gender and age depend on the culture of interest.

- For example, a number of respondents indicate that gender and age can create religious barriers while it is of no importance in other cultures.
- Younger children would find a family more easily within the Afghan community, especially girls.
- Families sometimes have the idea that girls are easier to raise than boys. There is also the idea that girls are safer in a foster family than in a community group.
- UMC are usually boys who are going through puberty. For some respondents, the fact that young people need space and the development of their own identity acted as a barrier to receive them. An adolescent needs coaching, primarily towards adulthood, which some respondents see as an added value and others as a stumbling block, as religious challenges or regulations are often linked to age.

Training & capacity building

There is a need for intensive culture-sensitive follow-up and support for foster families with a migration background. It is counterproductive if families and counselors are not properly prepared for an intercultural challenge.

- Some respondents indicated that families and foster care counselors are not sufficiently informed about migration, the migratory (hi)story and what it means to grow up in a conflict area.
- Families with a migration background do not always recognize themselves in an institution such as Pleegzorg Vlaanderen. There are not yet enough counselors with a migration background and language skills available.
- Investing in the matching process taking into account culture or religion can be difficult. However, matching based only on culture is too simplistic and is not necessarily what every person (family and UMC) wishes.
- Some respondents also agree that more meetings with “experience experts”, other foster parents and between UMC would be very helpful.
- Some also wonder whether foster care for UMC can also be integrated in more accessible organizations, such as “Huis van het Kind” (an info center on education, reception of youngsters/children).
- Respondents indicated that there is still too little general knowledge available within Pleegzorg Vlaanderen about cultures and legal challenges and statutes of newcomers or people with a migration background. Respondents want more follow-up and knowledge of different cultures within Pleegzorg Vlaanderen.
- Within Pleegzorg Vlaanderen there is also room for improvement to deal more carefully with foster children and young people who are often confronted with a breakdown or switch between different families and/or transition to a residential facility. Respondents also indicate that they need more support in dealing with family pressure and trauma of the UMC.
- There is a need for transcultural psychologists to process trauma. Knowledge of trauma and taboos associated with mental illness and differences in clinical pictures are seen as a requirement to properly guide UMC and people with a migration background.

“When I tell my flight story to people, many ask, they are in shock. They do not know what a refugee or migrant is. They often say it is the first time they meet someone like that, no one told them what running is or what my life was like... They need to tell more about that so they understand what that is.”

CONCLUSION

Ongoing conflicts, wars, structural economic inequalities and poverty force children, youngsters and families to flee and migrate to other regions or countries. Host countries therefore become very diverse, leading to an environment where social workers and foster families no longer speak the same language and do not always share the same cultural habits. As a result, organizations such as Pleegzorg Vlaanderen are challenged to deal with this challenging reality of diversity and to invest in inclusive work and recruitment strategy.

The consultations with diaspora communities, social workers, foster families and UMC, currently residing within foster families or in community centers, brought many important insights that will improve the recruitment process of foster families, as well as the general operation of foster care agencies, such as Pleegzorg Vlaanderen.

First of all, we note that there is an important role to play for diaspora communities and that there is a general willingness to take care of UMC. The shared identity, moral purpose and feeling part of the society are some of the reasons to get involved. Furthermore, key figures from the diaspora can overcome the mistrust of parenting within different cultures and bridge the gap between diaspora communities on the one side and policymakers and established institutions on the other. Despite the willingness and the added value, information on foster care rarely reaches these communities. Our qualitative research indeed showed that Pleegzorg Vlaanderen and the U-CARE project are insufficiently known among the target group and, despite the already delivered efforts within the project, need to diversify recruitment materials more. Organizing roundtable discussions where diaspora communities can get information about Pleegzorg Vlaanderen was seen as a possible key to success, as it recognizes diaspora communities in their expert role and allows to realize a needs-based, bottom-up policy.

From the consultations, it became clear that the traditional recruitment process does not necessarily work for families with a migration background. Word-of-mouth campaigns and setting up a space for dialogue are considered to be more successful in diaspora communities and this is where key figures can play an important role as well. Having diverse recruitment material is only one aspect. Information should also be available in various languages and should relay information regarding financial aspects, guidance, foster care selection process, etc.

The reason for recruiting foster families in migrant communities is that UMC should have the right to preserve their culture and have the option to be culturally matched if they want to. The qualitative research discussed some reasons, voiced by UMC and diaspora members, to step into the foster care journey, but also barriers and reasons not to. Shared religion and culture can be a motivating, but also a blocking factor. Diaspora's personal experience with discrimination and racism can be seen as an added value in the foster care relationship, but can also make it uncomfortable to receive a UMC. In addition, because of these factors, UMC sometimes see a stay in a foster family with a migration background as a barrier within their integration process, because they fear that those families cannot help them with learning the language, setting up a social network and navigating through the administrative processes. Furthermore, foster families and counselors often do not feel trained or informed enough to deal with traumas that UMC may face, cultural challenges or needs and the entire migration process. This illustrates the lack that had been identified by the U-CARE process related to the need to train foster families and foster care counselors on culture-

sensitive care, such as how to deal with racism, open the debate about taboos, self-care and resilience, etc. Also creating regular networking moments (“World cafés”) where foster families can come together to exchange on shared doubts and challenges is seen as a positive aspect.

The findings of the consultations will support Pleegzorg Vlaanderen and the U-CARE team to optimize their recruitment strategy and the capacity-building of counselors and foster families with regards to culture-sensitive care.

ANNEX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

General research question: *What barriers do foster families with a migration background and UMCs experience in accessing foster care for UMC?*

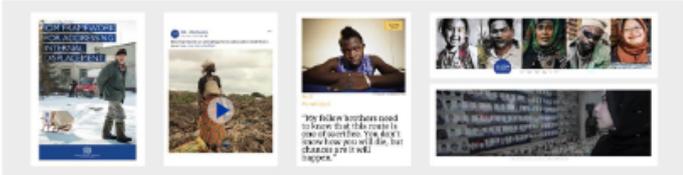
1. What information about foster care and the reception of UMC do foster families with a migration background and UMC have access to?
2. What is the role of civil society and key figures in disseminating information about foster Care for UMC? What channels are used to disseminate information?
3. What does a family and the reception of an UMC within a foster family mean for an UMC and (candidate) foster families with a migration background?
4. What barriers are there at the community level (such as traditional and religious practices) to receiving an UMC within a foster family?
5. Is access to Pleegzorg Vlaanderen different for boys and girls? Which gender-related or age barriers can play a role in the UMC or a foster family with a migration background? Can you give some examples of this?
6. Which elements are important for the matching of a foster family and UMC? Why could a shared cultural and religious background be an added value or just not an added value?
7. What barriers are there to making foster care more accessible for UMC and families with a migrant background? What can policy/foster care do to remove any obstacles?
8. How can existing projects such as U-CARE (to promote foster care for UMC within foster families with a migration background) be adapted?
9. How can the cooperation between foster care and communities with a migrant background and candidate foster families with a migrant background be shaped differently?
10. How can we from Pleegzorg Vlaanderen focus more on diversity and the inclusion of foster families with a migration background and UMC? What needs are there currently within foster families with a migration background? What are the needs of UMC who are cared for within a foster family or who are waiting for a foster family?

ANNEX 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



IOM AUDIO-VISUAL CONSENT FORM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is asking for your consent before collecting your personal information.

<p>Who are we?</p>	<p>IOM is a United Nations organization working on migration issues. IOM works to help ensure the orderly and human management of migration for the benefit of all. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants.</p>
<p>Why are we collecting personal data about you?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IOM collects your personal data to better understand unique aspects of migration in order to inform project design and implementation, document and promote IOM's work and increase knowledge and understanding of migration issues, through public media or fundraising campaigns, for example. • If you allow it, we may publicize the information you provide, or parts of it, in IOM and external media (e.g. publications, reports, websites, social media accounts).
<p>What personal data are we collecting?</p>	<p>We may collect any of the following that you choose to share with us. The indicated types of data will hereinafter be referred to as "Recordings":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biographical details (you can choose not to use your real name) • Image • Video • Voice • Your story, as you would like to share it <p>You can choose which information about you we can publicize. You can choose, for example, to hide your face and/or not use your real name or other personal details. Your information will be securely stored on IOM servers.</p>
<p>Where will these Recordings be shown?</p>	<p>The Recordings may be displayed in publications, promotional material, brochures, reports, articles, presentations, future exhibitions and display on the websites of IOM and other third-party electronic format media outlets.</p> 
<p>We are asking for your consent, but you do not have to provide it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will not make any Recordings of you unless you agree to it. • You can choose not to give any personal data at all or to give some personal data.

What are your rights?

- You have the right to request to see a copy of any Recordings you have provided us, including corrected, deleted and unpublished information.
- You can ask us to change or delete any Recordings you have provided us at any time. IOM will comply with your requests for the media that it controls but it might not be able to do so for external media that are not controlled by IOM.
- If you would like to make any requests or complaints about the way IOM is handling your personal data, you can contact the local IOM mission _____ or email pcu@iom.int

Do you consent to the Recordings?

If you consent to the Recordings, please confirm the following:

- I understand the information about my participation, and I have asked any questions I had about it.
- I consent to having the Recordings being shared publicly. I understand I can change my mind at any time and who I can contact if I change my mind.
- I acknowledge that I am not receiving any payment by IOM for the use of the Recordings.
- I understand my rights in relation to my personal data and how I exercise them

I consent to the inclusion of the following in the Recordings:

MY VOICE	MY FACE IMAGE	MY BODY IMAGE	MY REAL NAME
			
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO			

I, _____(name of individual or parent / legal guardian) hereby give my consent for IOM to collect personal data in the Recordings as described.

[Name]
(Signature or mark of individual or parent/legal guardian)

[Name]
(Signature or mark of the child)
[if applicable]*

* NOTE: The child's agreement is also necessary where the child's age and maturity reasonably so dictate. The consent of the parent or legal guardian must also always be obtained. If the child declines to give his/her own agreement, no Recordings shall be made notwithstanding the consent granted by the parent or legal guardian.

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