



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

**Department of Social Work**

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*International Master of Science in Social Work*

**SEPARATED AND UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN PLACED IN CARE**

Perspectives and experiences of Professionals working in Sweden



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***'My Rome is not your Rome'***

To all the ones who struggle in each and every day of their life for a better and brighter  
future.

To my *niece* and *nephew*, *Luna Mar* and *Enzo Rafaelo*

## ABSTRACT

**Title:** Separated and unaccompanied children placed in care – Perspectives and experiences of Professionals working in Sweden

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**Key words:** Separated and unaccompanied children, care placements, best interest of the child, integration, social inclusion.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency nearly half of the thirty four million people registered as refugees are children. In 2012, Sweden received 2915 separated and unaccompanied asylum seeking children, the highest number ever registered in the Country; and by the end of August 2013, there were already 1958 new applications.

This research has been developed in order to understand and acknowledge the situation of separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden using the perspectives and experiences of Professionals working in the field, with a special focus in Västra Götaland and Göteborg regions.

For this purpose a qualitative research has been conducted and 25 semi-structured interviews were followed with Professionals working in this field.

Hence, five main research questions have been formulated:

- How do Professional's perceive separated and unaccompanied children and their needs?
- How do Professional's perceive care provided to separated and unaccompanied children?
- Which are Professional's considerations regarding separated and unaccompanied children's integration in the society?
- Which challenges Professional's identify, commonly, when working with separated and unaccompanied children?
- Are principles such as '*participation in decision-making*' and '*best interest of the child*' being taken into consideration?

From the findings of this research it is possible to highlight the challenges that Professionals face within this field of practice: structural challenges and individual challenges, such as: the differences and challenges of care provided; resilience and structural barriers which influence the child's social inclusion and integration; the vulnerable circumstances of children under the Dublin regulation; family reunification and its implications in the child's responsibilities; and the enforcement of principles such as '*best interest of the child*' and '*participation in decision-making*'.

Finally, this research provides an examination of the situation of separated and unaccompanied children placed in care, identifying the inconsistencies that exist within the care provided and their needs. Thus, this research aims to provide recommendations for practice based on Professionals understandings from challenges identified.

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# CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Introduction

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency nearly half of the thirty four million people registered as refugees are children. When fleeing from danger many of these children get separated from their families due to persecution, international conflicts, civil war and trafficking, in various context and forms.

## 1.2. Problem Statement

Children seeking asylum is not a new phenomena, however it has sharply increased in recent years due to civil wars and numerous conflicts in various parts of the world. Sweden registered, during 2012, the highest number of asylum seeking children in the country, with 2915 applications, of which 65% were granted decisions.

Separated and unaccompanied children have been a topic of main focus during the last years, as the number of children looking for protection and a better life has been increasing considerably in Europe. However, care provided to these children, as well as, criteria to grant decisions vary among countries and migration policies in force. Therefore, several studies have been conducted to understand how do separated and unaccompanied children live in different countries and which barriers do they face.

Academic studies in this field have explored the reception of separated and unaccompanied asylum seeking children internationally, as well as their care, integration and resettlement; however, few were the studies conducted regarding separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden.

## 1.3. Aim of the study

This research has been developed in order to understand and acknowledge the situation of separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden using the perspectives and experiences of Professionals working in the field, with a special focus in Västra Götaland and Göteborg regions.

### 1.3.1. Research Questions

In order to proceed with a qualitative research, the following research questions were formulated:

- How do Professional's perceive separated and unaccompanied children and their needs?
- How do Professional's perceive care provided to separated and unaccompanied children?
- Which are Professional's considerations regarding separated and unaccompanied children's integration in the society?
- Which challenges Professional's identify, commonly, when working with separated and unaccompanied children?

- Are principles such as ‘participation in decision-making’ and ‘best interest of the child’ being taken into consideration?

### **1.3.2. Disposition**

This research has been structured into two major divisions: the literature review and the data collection and analysis; therefore, these two divisions have been divided into eight chapters.

The first chapter comprises the *Introduction* of the research, including problem statement and research questions.

The second chapter regards the *Background*, which intends to provide basic knowledge on catch-all-terms, as well as provides a brief explanation of migration flows in Europe and Sweden and introduces care provided to separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden, analysing the Swedish context of children’s rights and Municipalities responsibilities in the provision of care.

The third chapter consists in *a Legal framework for the protection of separated and unaccompanied children*, in which national and international legal instruments are taken into consideration.

The fourth chapter regards, *Theoretical points of Departure*, which presents a brief discussion of concepts and theories related to separated and unaccompanied children, essential in providing a better understanding of their circumstances in order to proceed to the next chapters.

The fifth chapter, which is the *Field of Research*, aims to discuss questions approached in the previous chapters into a Swedish context/framework.

At last, the sixth chapter regards the *Methodology* used to proceed with this research, which described the different quality methods used for the research and includes perceptions regarding ethical considerations, transcriptions, validity, reliability and generalization and, at last, a brief discussion of methods.

The seventh chapter is composed by the *Findings and Analysis* and here is provided a description of the informants, as well as a in-depth analysis of the 25 interviews and its results.

At last, the eight chapter, *Conclusion*, provides an overview of the recommendations for practice, as well as a conclusion of the research.

## CHAPTER II. BACKGROUND

This chapter serves as a support of the research, as it provides definitions of some catch-all terms, historical and demographical knowledge on migration flows to Europe and Sweden, as well as provides an introduction to the situation of separated and unaccompanied children, based on the Swedish context of children's rights and focusing on Municipalities responsibilities.

### 2.1. Definitions of some catch-all terms

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency nearly half of the thirty four million people registered as refugees are children. However, this number comprises only on refugees who fall under the mandate of the UN Convention on the status of Refugee, which can lead us to assume that there is actually an even greater number of children and adults involved (Akasereh, 2011).

For a better understanding of this catch-all terms it is, first of all, important to remind the distinction between *refugee* and *asylum seeker*.

The 14<sup>th</sup> article of the Declaration of Human Rights states that “*everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution*”. However, the fact that everybody has the right to ask for asylum does not mean that everybody has the eligibility to get an asylum permit, since this eligibility is determined after undergoing a careful investigation of each application.

A refugee is “*any person who owing to race, nationality, religion, membership of a particular social group of political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to avail himself of the protection of that country (...)*” (UNHCR, 1989).

According to the Council of Europe's Parliament there is no single definition of unaccompanied children, as this term changes according to the international reports, national frameworks and other guidelines. However, in this research, it is fundamental to understand the differentiation between ‘*separated*’ and ‘*unaccompanied*’ is needed.

Thus, to distinguish both terms, we follow the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which refers *separated children* as “*those who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These, may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members*” (UNCRC, 2005, p.6). Moreover, *unaccompanied children* are, therefore, defined as those who “*have been separated from both parents and other relatives, and are not being cared by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so*”. The EU framework added to this term that these children are “*third country nationals below the age of 18*” (UNCRC, 2005, p.6).

Consequently, in this research both terms of ‘*separated*’ and ‘*unaccompanied*’ are going to be used, as we intend to include both categories; at the same time, preference will be given to the concept of ‘*children*’, as considering every individual under 18 years old, as recommended in the UNCRC and following a principle of equality.

## 2.2. Historical and demographical context

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), non-governmental Organisations and the international communities in general are giving increased attention to unaccompanied children (Steinbock, 1996) as separation from families and caregivers is one of the five main global priority issues with regard to refugee children (UNHCR, 2006).

UNHCR (2006) noted in its program of action that the increasing instability of the world has created a massive population flow, which affects particularly children.

Separated and unaccompanied children's situation is, in many ways, special and exposed. Escape and separation from caregivers is almost always initiated by parents or other important family member, usually associated with war, violence and poverty. This experience of being sent away can be traumatizing in itself and it might be difficult for the child to understand or process the causes of the flight.

Over the last hundred years, separated and unaccompanied children arrived to European Countries, from all over the world:

- ❖ 1915 to 1923 - Armenians were deported by their Ottoman rulers; Approximately 132.000 Armenian children were rescued.
- ❖ 1936 to 1939 – Spanish Civil War; around 90.000 children lost their parents or were orphans (Ayotte, 2000).
- ❖ Nazi period/II World War/ 1933 to 1945 - A large number of children were separated from their; in Rome, Milan and Naples, it is estimated that around 180.000 children were living on the street after the war (Ressler, 1998, p. 20)
- ❖ 1945 to 1951 - Around 22.800 unaccompanied children were assisted by UN Organisations.
- ❖ 1948, Greek Civil War - Around 23.000 Greek children in the neighbouring countries.
- ❖ 1975 – 1990 - The '*boat people*' who left Vietnam; 30.000 to 40.000 children arrived in Europe, from which 22.000 unaccompanied (Ressler: 1998).
- ❖ During the 80's, children were coming to Europe from many different countries and reasons as well. Many young boys from Iran, who were escaping into military service in order to avoid becoming '*martyrs*'; unaccompanied Tamil children who were coming from the conflicts in Sri Lanka; As well from Eritrea, before getting the independence from Ethiopia (Jocenhövel-Schieke, 1990, p. 192)

According to Ayotte (2000), it is estimated that around 100.000 to 200.000 separated and unaccompanied children are seeking asylum in Europe; and it is estimated that around 20.000 arrive in European countries every year.

The number of separated and unaccompanied children arriving in European countries vary among years (see Fig. 1, p.123), as it depends on the different policies applied by countries for the reception of asylum seekers, as well as it depends on the waiting time for decisions.

In 2006 most of separated and unaccompanied children were received in the United Kingdom. However, since then, Norway and Sweden appeared as crucial receivers of asylum seeking children. Sweden was, in 2011, the country with the highest number of asylum requests from separated and unaccompanied children, with 2.657 requests, followed by the United Kingdom and Norway, with 1.277 and 858.

## **2.3. Separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden, Västra Götaland and Göteborg**

### **2.3.1. Swedish Context**

During the II World War, Sweden was one of the countries helping the Jewish Community to face the conflicts in Germany, receiving, in 1938, 200 German Jews, most of them children and youth. During these years, a special Children Committee was created in Stockholm, in order to plan and organize the reception of refugee children, so-called '*Children quota*', which selection was largely dependent on the ability to place them in Swedish foster families (Lagnebro, 1994).

As well, during the Finish war (1939-1945), 70.000 children moved from Finland to Sweden. Organisations such as Redcross, Save the Children and Salvation Army were involved in the help (Persson, 1979).

Moreover, the Hungarian revolution (1956-1958), also had its reflect on the movements to Sweden. By this time, around 6.500 refugees were transferred to Sweden (Svensson, 1992).

There are no statistics available regarding separated and unaccompanied children arriving in Sweden during the following years (1958-1988). However, it is known that whenever there are large refugee groups, there will be children that can be accompanied, separated or unaccompanied;

Even though there are no statistics available regarding separated and unaccompanied children until 1996, the Migration Board was since 1988 demonstrating preoccupation with the children arriving without guardians (Hessle, 2009).

Thus, the number of separated and unaccompanied asylum seeking children has varied through years, but it is a visible factor that numbers have increased in recent years; from 388 children, in 2004, to 2113, in 2012, which means an increasing of more than 500% (see Fig. 2, p.124). The Swedish Migration Board estimated that Sweden would receive 3.300 separated and unaccompanied children in 2013; However, updated documents estimate this number to increase to 3.500.

Over the last three years the average age of children seeking asylum has been 16 years old and mostly from Afghanistan and Somalia.

Afghanistan and Somalia are, from far, the countries that registered the highest amount of separated and unaccompanied children coming to Sweden (see Fig. 3, p.124). However, a huge increase of asylum seeking children coming from countries such as Albania, Morocco, Syria and Algeria has been registered as well. From the separated and unaccompanied children arriving to Sweden, the highest number registered is in the ages between 13 and 17 years old, being this number significantly higher either for girls or for boys (see Fig. 4/5, pp. 124-125).

It is possible to compare asylum seeking children according to their gender and age. Thus, if, in one hand, there is no such difference in children between 0-6 years old, this difference is very high when comparing the amount of children above 13 years old; the amount of boys is almost 7 times higher in these two groups of ages (see Figure 4 and 5, p.141).

As well, when comparing the amount of children, that arrived in Sweden until September 2012, differentiated by age and gender, it is possible to notice that the

amount of children is still higher during the ages 13 to 17 years old; and boys still represent the majority of children coming to Sweden, being this number 5 times higher (see Fig. 5, p.125).

Until last August, 2012, the Swedish Migration Board received 2113 applications for asylum from unaccompanied or separated children, from which 331 were girls (16%). From these 2113, there were, in September, 1931 decisions, of which 1213 granted (63%); From the 283 rejections, 264 were according to the Dublin Convention (Migrationsverket, 2012).

Regarding the placements of these children, from the granted decisions above mentioned, 376 were assigned to the Municipalities where relatives or close relatives live, which represents 18% of the placements; However, placing these children is still one of the main issues faced by the Migration Board (Migrationsverket, 2012).

The Swedish Migration Board elaborated a prognostic regarding the number of separated and unaccompanied children expected to be received in Sweden, depending on the developments in countries of origin and wars in the whole world (see Fig. 6, p.125).

### **2.3.2. Västra Götaland and Göteborg**

Västra Götaland is a County composed by 49 Municipalities and represents 17% of the Country populations, around 1.5 million people (Länstyrelsen, 2012). As any other County, Västra Götaland has an Administrative Board, which is responsible for negotiating with the Municipalities the care placements for the reception of separated and unaccompanied children.

In 2011, 39 Municipalities, out of the 49 total, had an agreement with the Migration Board regarding the provision of housing. By the end of 2011, 231 separated and unaccompanied children were allocated in this area of the Country.

Until July 2012, the Swedish Migration Board allocated 239 children within 32 different Municipalities. Out of these 239 children, 98 are in an arrival Municipality and 141 in Municipalities of introduction; Until August 2012, Västra Götaland have received 168 separated and unaccompanied asylum seeking children, of which 157 were proved to be under 18 (Migrationsverket, 2012).

### **2.3.3. The responsibilities of Municipalities**

In Sweden, the responsibility of separated and unaccompanied children has rested with the Municipalities since 1 June 2006, previously the Swedish Migration Board was having these responsibilities. The reason for this transfer of responsibilities was the fact that authorities looking after asylum applications are also in charge of taking youth applicants into care, which can result in conflicts of interests; also because Municipalities were considered to be better able to respond to the needs of separated and unaccompanied children (NIDOS, 2010; European Migration Network, 2010).

Municipalities are the first place where these children manifest their appearance. There are two types of Municipalities: Municipalities of arrival and, the so-called, Municipalities of introduction. The last ones are the Municipalities which provide accommodation to separated and unaccompanied children when “*the child cannot arrange his or her accommodation themselves with a relative (...)*” (Migrationsverket,



20012); these Municipalities are responsible for ensuring the best interest of the child and care provided.

When a separated and unaccompanied asylum seeking children arrives in Sweden, it is offered to the child a temporary placement in the Municipality of arrival. Any Municipality can be a Municipality of arrival, but most of separated and unaccompanied children arrive in Municipalities that have Authority Offices, in which they can apply for asylum (Migrationsverket, 2012).

In 2010, out of 290 Swedish Municipalities, 127 of them had agreements with the Migration Board in order to accommodate unaccompanied children. By then, Tobias Billström, actual Minister of Migration and Asylum Policy, mentioned that there is a '*risk of collapse*' of the system for receiving unaccompanied children, since there were close to 800 children waiting to be directed towards a Municipality by that time.

In 2012, there were 237 Municipalities which have a current agreement on placements for a certain number of children. However, even if this number doubled, the number of places for separated and unaccompanied children is still insufficient. Therefore, agencies are working together in the reception of separated and unaccompanied children and young people; Migration Board, Municipalities, Counties, Provincial Governments and Welfare are responsible for different duties on the reception.

Municipalities' responsibilities are:

- ❖ To investigate the child's needs and decide which is the suitable accommodation and placement for the child.
- ❖ To conduct an investigation with family members or relatives, when they exist, in order to find out if the placement is suitable and for the best interest of the child.
- ❖ To appoint a legal guardian/trustee.
- ❖ To assure that the child has access to education.
- ❖ Once the child gets a residence permit, Municipalities are also in charge of assuring of following the best interest of the child, work with their integration and make efforts to investigate child's family (Migrationsverket, 2012).

According to the Swedish Migration Board, as long as separated and unaccompanied children cannot be directly assigned to an Municipality of introduction, there will always be a lack of places.

The increased number of separated and unaccompanied children place great demands on a Municipality of arrival. In the current situation, nearly 400 asylum seeking children are placed in Municipalities of arrival and, as long as, these children cannot be immediately allocated in Municipalities of introduction, the Swedish Migration Board considers the lack of places acute.

#### **2.3.4. Processing asylum requests and type of permits for separated and unaccompanied children**

Any procedure involving a child must be handled as priority. In this sense, when separated or unaccompanied child arrive in Swedish territory, the first procedure is an initial interview within the applicant and the Swedish Migration Board, in the presence of an interpreter. This first interview is intended to determine the child identity and to verify if Sweden is responsible for examining his/her request; During this interview, the



child must briefly present the reasons that obliged him/her to flee and seek asylum in Sweden, as well, needs to provide his/her full name and can be also asked for relatives in Sweden, ethnicity, religion and state of health.

The asylum procedure begins as soon as a ‘*Godman*’ (Legal guardian) is appointed to represent the child. Sometimes, an in-depth examination is needed and, in those cases, the Swedish Migration Board is responsible for assigning a lawyer for the child.

Later on, the Swedish Migration Board will perform an in-depth examination interview, in which the goal is to clarify the child needs for protection through asylum application, as well as to examine the child’s current situation, his/her emotional and psychological state and his/her future projects (European Migration Network, 2010).

Completed the investigation of the asylum application, the Swedish Migration Board decision can result in recognition of protection in three forms: refugee status, ‘*in need of protection*’ and under ‘*particularly distressing circumstances*’, corresponding with humanitarian protection or, at last, based on family ties. However, it can also result in a rejection and, in that case; it means an order to leave the Country, the so-called deportation.

According to the Swedish Migration Board, Sweden received, in 2012, 2915 asylum requests from separated and unaccompanied children, from which around 65% have been granted. However, during 2012 Sweden took 2984 decisions (some were regarding previous applications) and from this, 1119 decisions have been according to the ‘*Refugee Convention*’, 1596 according to the status ‘*in need of protection*’, 218 according to ‘*particularly distressing circumstances*’ and 51 for ‘*other, for example temporary residence permit*’.

Moreover, during the analysis of the asylum application, the Swedish Migration Board might have to guarantee that the applicant is less than 18 years of age. In these cases, age assessments can be required and performed through different ways; it can be performed through a so-called ‘*orientation*’ interview or ‘*visual assessment*’, in which the Professional in charge of investigating the asylum application meets with the applicant who claims to be a child. Afterward, if doubt remains regarding the age of the applicant, Professionals can ask for medical examinations, which are usually conducted by x-ray or dental-ray and interpreted by specialist physicians. However, age assessment cannot be fully precise, demonstrating a margin of error of three years, which can be crucial if considering a youth with 17/18. In these cases decisions should always be taken for the benefit of the child/youth.

According to the average of the cases, the Swedish Migration Board defends that, 3 months is the period that separated and unaccompanied children wait for a decision. The average processing time, in 2010, was 140 days, but, in 2012, has been around 100 days, which represents an improvement in reducing the waiting time for asylum applications (Migrationsverket, 2012). However, several factors can still affect the processing time, such as the increasing number of cases received and the complexity in determining applicant’s identity or age. One of the important factors that contribute to the acceleration of the asylum process is the stability of the child process, by not being transferred through Municipalities and by not being lodged to different legal guardians or professionals.

However, there are, as well, consequences on receiving quick decisions, such as the fact that Municipalities find it difficult to deal with the increased number of children with a residence permit and, in cases of rejection, difficulties in dealing with the rejection

when the child/youth has to wait longer to be deported, this is the case of certain separated and unaccompanied children who are under the regulation of the Dublin Convention.

### **III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF SEPARATED AND UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN**

To describe the legal basis of the migration and asylum affairs in an international, national and regional perspective requires an extensive study which is beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, in this Chapter will be provided a brief information regarding Swedish and International legal instruments considered to be important for the understanding of this research.

#### **3.1. Swedish and International Legal Instruments**

There are many legal instruments concerning human rights and the rights of the child and migrants, such as:

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights
2. European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights
3. European Convention for the protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
4. UN Convention relating to the status of refugees and its amending protocol (1967) and the principle of non-refoulement
5. Convention relating to the status of stateless persons
6. UN Convention on the rights of the child
7. Guidelines on policies and procedures in dealing with Unaccompanied children seeking asylum
8. Dublin Convention
9. General Comment n°6
10. Strategic Development Framework: The separated children in EU Programme
11. Statement of Good Practice
12. European Return Platform
13. Aliens Act

In short overview, this chapter focuses on 5 instruments which are going to be mentioned along this *Dissertation*, however, the Guidelines on policies and procedures in dealing with unaccompanied children seeking asylum, the Strategic Development Framework: The separated children in EU Programme and, at last, the Aliens Act will be possible to find as an attachment in this *Dissertation* (Appendix III, p.154).

### 3.1.1. European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights

Since December 2009, this Charter is legally binding for all the EU Member States and has the same value as the Treaties. The 24<sup>o</sup> article of this Charter states that:

1. *Children should have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. They may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concerns them in accordance with their age and maturity.*
1. *In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interest must be a primary consideration.*

(EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2000)

### 3.1.2. UN Convention relating to the status of refugees and its amending protocol (1967) and the principle of non-refoulement

The Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed the principle that every human being shall enjoy the fundamental rights and freedoms without discrimination. Thus, considering that in some situations these rights and freedoms were not assured, it was necessary to extend the scope of the protection for these people.

The UN Convention related to the status of refugees was adopted in 1951 and it is the key instrument to provide basic legal standards to protect and respect refugees.

This Convention was ratified by 147 States and it has been subjected to only one amendment in the form of Protocol (1967), which removed the geographical and temporal limits of the original Convention, from “*before 1951 and within Europe*” to universal coverage (UNHCR, 2010).

This Convention demonstrates its importance from the 1<sup>o</sup> article where endorses a single definition for the term “*stateless person*” as “*a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law*”.

Thus, this Convention is both a status and rights-based instrument underpinned by a number of fundamental principles, such as non-discrimination, non-penalization and non-refoulement, which provides a minimum standard that States should abide when making a decision in regard to the expelling of the individuals to a country where they might be at risk. The Convention further stipulates that although to specific exceptions, there should be no penalization to refugees which are due to their illegally entry or stay in the country; this means that seeking for asylum can require refugees to infringe immigration rules.

Finally, the Convention lays down some basic minimum standards for the treatment of refugees, without injury to States granting more favourable treatment. These rights contain access to the Courts, to primary education, to work and the provision of necessary documentation.

In this Convention, gender is not specified as a foundation for persecution, but this does not mean necessarily that unaccompanied and separated children should be automatically entitled to refugee status rather like adults, these children must also prove that they had a well-established fear of persecution linked to one or more of the five

grounds mentioned in the article 1<sup>st</sup> A (2) of this Convention “*Race and nationality or ethnicity, religion, political opinion and membership to a particular social group*”.

Although when we look to any situation, it needs to be analysed for the ‘*best interest of the child*’, which means that the situations such as ‘*persecution*’ need to be assessed from the child’s perspective and analysed regarding how the interests and rights of the child are affected by the harm. However when we look for the best interest of the child there are some other issues that come across to us, specially, when we are talking about an asylum seeking child or an adult, such as ill treatment, which “*may not emerge as a case of persecution for an adult may do so in the case of a child*” (UNHCR, 2005).

### **3.1.3. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was the first instrument to incorporate the complete range of international human rights. It was adopted in 1989 and came into force in 1990, after the ratification of the required nations. This Convention applies to all children, independently of their race, religion or abilities. Its article 2 guarantees the principle of *non-discrimination*, so that no child is treated unfairly based on any basis; reinforced by article 3 which safeguarded the best-interest of the child and is the primary concern in decision-making that affects them.

According to this Convention, States Parties should respect “*who is capable of forming his or her own views should be assured the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child*” (CRC, 1989). Thus, according to the same Convention, “participation” in decision-making is a democratic principle and a general interest in the child welfare and policies. This Convention provides the framework and guidance to address aspects dealing with the children’s rights but as well the responsabilization of the Governments for its provision.

### **3.1.4. Dublin Convention**

The Dublin Convention is a collection of regulations in Europe that aims to determine which country will be responsible for asylum applications. The original Dublin Convention was signed in June 1990 as an intergovernmental convention between 12 member States of the European Community; however it only came into force in 1997 after long ratification process.

There are objectives and hierarchical criteria’s that are defined in order to identify the Member State responsible for an asylum application. These criteria’s are: the principle of family unity, the issuance of residence permit or visas, the illegal entry or stay in a member State, the legal entry in a member State and the application in an international transit area or airport. However, there are some exceptions as well, such as, if no Member State can be designated with basis on the criteria defined above, thus the responsibility of examination will go to the first Member State with which the asylum application was lodged.

The ratification and long-time discussion, defined above, due to the setting of common standards on the responsibility for asylum claims but as well due to the fact that agreeing on a common criteria for State responsibility also implies that States may use

such a system to go pass through their obligations under international law, since this intergovernmental framework hampered the implementation of this Convention.

But in order to improve the effectiveness of the system, the Dublin Regulation, or so-called Dublin II Regulation, was adopted and entered into force in 2003. This Regulation has maintained the main structure and criteria of the Convention but with some differences in the limits.

The identification of these children is done by fingerprinting, if the child is over the age of 14, his/her fingerprints are registered in the database Eurodac; with this system it is possible to see if the child has applied for asylum in any other country before (Migrationsverket, 2012). In 2007, the total number of requests of transfer from one country to the other represented 10% of the total amount of asylum applications in these States (European Commission, 2007).

### **3.1.5. General Comment n°6**

The General Comment number 6, created by the Committee for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, intends to “*draw attention to particularly vulnerable situation of unaccompanied and separated children; to outline the multifaceted challenges faced by States and other actors in ensuring that such children are able to access and enjoy their rights; and, to provide guidance on protection, care and proper treatment of unaccompanied and separated children based on the entire legal framework provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child*”, with a particular emphasis on principles such as non-discrimination, best interest of the child and the right of the child to express their views freely (CRC, 2005, p.5).

In this General Comment are specified ‘*Applicable Principles*’, such as: legal obligations of State parties for all unaccompanied or separated children in their territory and measures for their implementation; principle of non-discrimination; the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in the search for short and long-term solutions; the right to life, survival and development; the right of the child to express his or her views freely; the respect for the principle of non-refoulement; and the respect for the principle of confidentiality.

Also, is given a response to general and specific protection needs, such as: initial assessment and measures, appointment of a guardian or legal representative; care and accommodation arrangements; and other measures. And as well is explained the access to the asylum procedure, legal safeguards and rights in asylum. Family reunification, return and other forms of durable solutions are also questions addressed in this Instrument

These international instruments have been crucial in this research as they provide a better understanding of the rights, duties and recommendations for practice which have implications in the life’s of separated and unaccompanied children.

## IV. THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

In this Chapter is presented a brief discussion of concepts and theories related to separated and unaccompanied children, such as: *Perceptions of family*, in which is included a brief description of family construction; *The principle of the Best Interest of the Child*; *Children as agents in need of belonging*, which is related to the interaction, systems and attachment theories and an ecological perspective; *Resilience and Resettlement*, which show the relation between risk, trauma and adaptation; *Integration and social inclusion*, which permit a clarification of the different ways of adaptation to an unknown society, addressing concepts such as ‘*resettlement*’ and ‘*social inclusion and exclusion*’; and, at last but not least, *Social Capital*, which permit an in-deep knowledge of how unaccompanied and separated children and youth contribute to the ‘*capital*’ of the society as a whole.

Here, the theoretical points of departure of this thesis are going to be described in accordance with previous research conducted in the different areas.

### 4.1. Perceptions of Family

Every asylum-seeking child is unique in terms of their social and cultural background, pre-flight experiences, journeys to a new country and experiences of arrival (Franklin, 2002). However what these children have in common is the fact that they are separated from their families: parents or primary care-givers.

There is no standard or internationally recognized definition of family, since the concept of what constitutes a family varies from State to State and, in some circumstances, within the regions of a State.

Accordingly with the Humanitarian Law it is possible to define broadly this term, even if there is no exact definition agreed upon it. Thus, family can be considered to be “*objectively, a group of people living together, and subjectively, a group of people wanting to live together*”; or in the narrow sense, as suggested by the Commentary to the Additional Protocols of Geneva Convention of 1949, considered as covering “*(...) persons related by blood and living together as one household. (...) all those who consider themselves and are considered by each other, to be a part of a family, and to wish to live together, are deemed to belong to that family.*” (Intergovernmental Consultations on Asylum, Refugee, and Migration Policies in Europe, North America, and Australia, 1997, p. 357).

Present in all individuals life, family has been for a long time the focus of attention of Social Sciences researchers, who tried to understand the transformations occurred within the family. Family can be considered as a basic social group created by ties of kinship or marriage that are present in all the societies; influenced by an numerous circle of social and personal conditions and, at the same time, the product of social interactions and communications, which makes it ‘*socially constructed*’ (Coltrane & Collins, 2001).

Several studies describe the term ‘*Family*’ as one of the most important factors for well-being; however, as said before, this is something that unaccompanied asylum seeking children lack. According to UNICEF, a large number of children deal with the division and separation of the family as one of the most difficult things in their life (UNICEF, 2007).



When thinking about family it is not least important to consider that its structure is not static, is composed by different events in an everyday-life in which all participants interact. In kind, families are the subject of an active process of negotiations and re-definitions, being in constant adaptation to the transformations (Morgan, 1999). When considering unaccompanied and separated children, these re-definitions are obvious, in situations such as when the child, or youth, is living in care or, in situations when there is reunification with the natural family.

#### **4.2. The principle of the *Best Interest of the Child***

Children were not considered as individuals with rights, or even valuable, until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when new ways of looking at the child within the families emerged; transformations in this concept undergone around two central ideas: love and privacy. From the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and mostly due to the new sciences, new parental models have been raised and a new vision of the importance of the family for the well-being and good development of the child was created (Costa, 2011, p.5).

Until 1989, when the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was elaborated, there was no international regulated instrument framing any specific right to children. Before, as described in the Geneva Declaration, from 1924, and in the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, from 1959, the child was seen as an '*object*' in need of attention and protection, even though there were already defended principles such as:

*“The child shall enjoy special protection, in the enactment of laws for this purpose the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.”*

(Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1959)

The 1989 Convention cannot be considered as a neutral text, since it promoted numerous rights for children and most of all, made children be understood as subject of rights, which was not the case until then.

The CRC (1989) recognizes in its preamble that:

*“(...) in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration,*

*Taking due account of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child, Recognizing the importance of international co-operation for improving the living conditions of children in every country, in particular in the developing countries (...)”*

Consequently, it devotes special attention to the protection of children. In this domain, it establishes principles such as the protection from abuse, work and sexual exploitation; and while developing some of these principles, introduces protection into new domains, as: prevention of torture, the involvement of children in armed conflict, drug trafficking, privation of freedoms and other important principles.



In short, between all the principles and rights that the CRC provide to children, the article 3 (1) proclaims what is now essential to analyse:

*“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”*

Thus, with this article, CRC intends to ensure that when making any decision regarding the child is required to apply the best interests principle by always considering how children’s rights and interests are, or will be, affected by other individual’s decisions and actions. Therefore, the principle of ‘*best interest of the child*’ is a fundamental legal principle, which has been developed in order to limit the extent of adult authority over children.

After this brief explanation of the principle ‘*best interest of the child*’ and its origin, it is now important to describe two different models approaching this principle: *Best Interest of the Child-model* and the *Social Ecology of children’s rights* approach.

#### **4.2.1. Best Interest of the Child (BIC)–model** (see Fig. 8 e 9, pp.128-129)

The *Best Interest of the Child (BIC)-model* purposed by Kalverboer & Zijlstra (2006; 2008) is based on the CRC from 1989. This model presents an analysis of the necessary conditions in the environment of the child for a positive development.

According to the *BIC-model*, there are fourteen preconditions for development, which are aggregated into four main groups: family conditions (the present); family conditions (the past and the future); societal conditions (the present) and societal conditions (the past and the future).

Kalverboer & Zijlstra (2006; 2008) defend that to determine the quality of the living situation of a child, Professionals have to look at the preconditions for development because when these preconditions are absent for long periods of time, it can lead to development damage on the child development and consequent vulnerability.

#### **4.2.2. The social ecology of children’s rights** (See Fig.10 e 11, pp.129-130)

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) has developed the ‘*social ecology of childhood*’, which demonstrates that proximal interactions are fundamental for individual’s development. Based on this, a ‘*developmental child rights framework*’ can be used to discuss and implement a ‘*rights-based approach*’ (Cook & Toit, 2005).

In this approach, the child is placed at the centre of multiple interactions and support networks. Here, the child’s basic human developmental needs are embodied in the inner physical, emotional, cognitive and social levels. The closest level to the centre is the family, followed by the community, which is composed by cultural values that influence the children and his/her development and by community structures in which the child participate. Moving further from the centre, the next level addresses the various forms of government, at a national, provincial or local level. The last level, the least near from the child, represents the cultural, social, spiritual, civil, political and economic levels that influence the child (Cook & Toit, 2005).

Therefore, the four guiding principles of the CRC are drawn on the levels around the centre (child) and represent the themes that emerge from each of these levels, which can be strengths or weaknesses, promoting the ‘*rights-based approach*’, which aim is to monitor the well-being of children contributing to an improved understanding of the interrelation and interaction of policy-makers and practitioners.

### **4.3. Children as agents in need of belonging**

As referred before, the concept of child did not appear in a specific time, it has always been implicit in all societies, but it has been seen in different perspectives, according to different cultures and values.

The role of the families, family ties and sense of belonging has been discussed. However there is not much written about belonging when concerning children, as it is a presumption that children are nested to families and families to communities.

The family is, therefore, considered to be responsible for protecting its children. This is the case when family bounds are stable, however, if these boundaries are breached and the child is removed or separated from his/her family, belonging can be questioned: “*what is family and what is belonging?- If the child is removed from a family and community early in his/her life, does the child still ‘belong’ to that community?*”(Hearst & College, 2012, p. 14). Still, belonging can be considered as the reflective process of self-identification and which determines experienced degree of inclusion or exclusion (Fangen et al., 2012).

Hence, journeys are integral and shaped - on and into - child’s life, which means that social and emotional support are, then, crucial for the well-being of every child, as this means much more than the simply presence of people (Foley & Leverett, 2011; Nestler, 2007); close relationships result, then, in a protective effect in terms of tackling the crisis and adapt to the life changes, at the same time, that help individuals to maintain their identities and increase their self-esteem.

In conclusion, children are social actors, shaping and being shaped (by) the surrounding, being part of an interactive process, which creates meaning to their existence from the moment the child feels belonging for his/her social context (Hedin, 2012). Therefore, theories such as: interaction theory, systems theory, attachment theory and ecological perspective will be used in this research as a way of understanding how different environments and contexts affect unaccompanied and separated children when struggling for safe journeys and safe carrying. At the same time, understanding the bonds that are created, differently by children and young people placed in care, foster families or residential, and understanding how these dimensions contribute to their sense of belonging and ‘*fitting*’ in the society.

#### **4.3.1. Interaction Theory**

Interaction theory is not new; authors have explained this theory in multiple different ways. Collins (2004) when writing the *Interaction Ritual Chain Theory* focused on understanding the interactions within children, family and community. According to the author, the culture of daily life reinforces membership and belonging in informal

groups, which involve the way people communicate with each other and the way they express their ideas.

These '*rituals*' or '*interactions*', purposed by Collins (2004) can be successful or failed; when based on a mutual focus of attention and shared mood, they are, usually, successful and the outcomes of this success will be in the forms of group solidarity, '*emotional energy*', symbols of social relationships and shared standards of morality; Failed '*rituals*' or '*interactions*' conduct individuals to a deprivation of emotional energy and can conduct to feelings of boredom and depression (Collins, 2004).

Thus, there is always an interaction between all the members in the society, which influence and are influenced (by) each other.

According to UNHCR, the best way to help any child is by helping their families and one of the best ways to do that is by helping their communities, which means that programmes defined to help families assisting children, should, at the same time, be focused on assisting the community in supporting the family and protecting the child (UNHCR, 1994).

#### **4.3.2. Systems theory**

Systems, or systemic, theory has been, for decades, dominating the social work field on both theoretical and practice levels. It was founded by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who concerned about the compartmentalization of science and defended, that, general ideas could have relevance across a broad spectrum of fields/disciplines (Bertalanffy, 1950).

This theory proposes the idea that all organisms are systems, which are part of super-systems, forming a whole, and divided into subsystems; all these systems are composed by complex and reciprocal connections and interrelationships that exist among the whole society and which are mutually influenced (Payne, 1996; Trevithick, 2005). For example, children are part of their own families and, as well, part of other systems, such as school; there is an interaction within different subsystems that form the whole society.

According to Bertalanffy (1950) and some other researchers there is a core of elements of the systems theory, such as: the change in one part of the system influences the other parts; the individual exist in a '*web of relationships*'; people influence and are influenced (by) the systems with which they interact; the behaviour of people shall be understood in the context of these interaction and relationships; and, at last, human beings are viewed as open systems.

Thus, this theory is viewed as concerning relationships, problems, structures and interdependence of various parts of the system. This theory has a comprehensive view of phenomenon, incorporating social and psychological elements of practice. Here, the change agent has the function to enable the target system to establish contact with the client system (Payne, 1996). If we consider, for instance, the '*reunification process*' above identified, Professionals can be seen as '*change agents*', children as '*client system*', natural families as '*target system*' and the process of reunification as an '*action system*'.

### 4.3.3. Ecological Perspective

Ecological perspective derives, such as systems theory, from the principle of the existence of a system composed by parts and in which, a change in one of the parts affects the whole (Payne, *op. cit.*). This perspective provides a better understanding of human behaviour and social functioning, justifying that individuals are in constant creation, reconstruction and adaptation with the environment, at the same time that the environment affects them (Ungar, 2002). Thus, this perspective proposes the understanding of which factors in the social environment have positive and negative impact on the individuals.

For instance, it is important to understand how care affects the child or youth, either in a family or residential care; as well to understand how the contact (or no contact) with natural families affects their '*resettlement*' and their well-being, or if, on the other hand, it creates more suffering and is more harmful for the child.

In this perspective, Bronfenbrenner (1994) identified four parts of environmental interactions for individuals and families, which are: microsystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (see Fig. 11, p.130); Microsystem is considered to be the immediate environment in which a person is operating, such as the family, classroom, peer group, neighbourhood and others; Mesosystem is composed by the interaction of two microsystem environments, such as the connection between a child's home and school; Exosystem is the environment in which an individual is not directly involved, which means that even affecting them, is still external to individuals experiences; Macrosystem is the larger cultural context in which the individual is included; and at last the chronosystem considers the events that occur with the time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Thus, since individuals act differently according to circumstances, environment and systems, each of these systems can be characterized by different roles, norms and relationships. This explains why some people or groups are at higher risk of vulnerability, while others are more protected from it.

### 4.4. Resilience and resettlement

Separated and unaccompanied children, as well as adult refugees, arriving in Europe are confronted with the difficult task of making peace with their past, while facing an uncertain asylum procedure. To regain control over their lives, '*resettling*' and '*integrating*' into a new and unknown country, are not easy tasks when being in a powerless position.

Therefore, it is not possible to understand the '*inclusion*' and '*integration*' of refugees and asylum seekers, children or adults, without understanding the term '*resettlement*', which is originally related to "*the move as a sequence of forced migration*", but as well the '*coping strategies*' and resilience they find in order to '*fit*' in the society (Kohli, 2007, p. 16).

The study of '*resilience*' has been the focus of researchers since the 50's, being the attention centred on the outcomes and on the absence of intrinsic qualities, such as temperament, which interact with the social environment of people; Other researchers have been investigating the protective mechanisms and processes of resilience, arguing that resilience can be understood as a dynamic interaction between people and environment (Giddens, 1987; Rutter, 1987).

More recently, the focus of *'resilience'* studies changed to the assets of children and young people, with the arguing that positive development, coping strategies and resilience are composed by internal and external resources (Lerner & Benson, 2003). However, Liebenberg & Ungar (2009) defends that the way we understand and theorize resilience is negotiated discursively and influenced by the culture and context in which we are.

The concept of *'resilience'* is not homogeneous. Different authors have distinguished between various kinds, levels and stages of resilience. Fraser & Galinsky (1997) classified resilience into three main categories: overcoming odds, in which "*(...) a child attains positive outcomes despite high-risk status*"; sustained competences under stress, in which the "*(...) focus is on coping skills and the ability to 'bounce back' despite various stressful situations*"; and, recovery from trauma, which considers that individuals "*(...) who recover well from trauma are those who are able to find significance in a traumatic experience and continue their life meaningfully*" (Besthorn, 2005, pp.122-123).

Thus, *'resilience'* is known as the experience of health under stress and the dynamic processes that contribute to positive developments, at the same time that is considered to be the interaction between the family or child with their physical and social ecologies. However, it is not possible to study resilience without studying risk, as resilience is considered to be "*(...)the positive end of the developmental continuum that occurs for children who experience both acute and chronic exposure to stressors like poverty, abuse, war, violence, neglect, drug addictions, mental illness, disability, marginalization, racism (...)*"(Liebenberg &Ungar, 2009, p.3).

This means that to be able to study *'resilience'*, assessments regarding the level of risk have to be considered. Consequently, studying resilience means understanding not only the threats that are faced by young people, but also the interactions between their exposure to risk and solutions found to cope with personal and environmental challenges (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009).

According to Goyos (1997), risk concerns variables that increase individual's liability of psychopathology or their susceptibility to negative development outcomes. Some risk factors can be found internally and have a great impact on resilience, such as temperament and humour; other risk factors can be external, resulting from environmental factors such as poverty or war and which are, most of the times, the cause for inhibition of a *'healthy development'*. However, the same risk factor can represent different reactions to different people (Goyos, 1997; Garbarino, 1999; Bernard, 1995).

Protective factors are then, contrary to risk factors. These can be intrinsic or extrinsic and are associated to *resilience* and *coping*. Intrinsic factors are related to the dimension of vulnerability, such as: secure base, self-esteem and self-efficacy, while extrinsic factors fall on the dimension of adversity and help to promote resilience, such as secure attachment relationships (Mann, 2001; Rutter, 1985);

Nevertheless, when concerning about risk factors and resilience, it is extremely important to relate it to *coping*, which are considered to be strategies found by individuals to reduce mental and physical pain after severe life events. *Coping strategies* are thus both in an inner and outer plan; and can be divided into two main areas: *'emotionally focused'*, which aims to reduce, control and regulate difficult emotions; and, *'problem-focused'*, which refers to prevent or alter a problematic situation (Lennér-Axelsson, 2010, p.75).



In kind, children and youth who have been through situations of risk and are able to remain hopeful about the future, flexible and adaptable, are owners of ‘*coping strategies*’ or ‘*problem-solving*’ skills and assume, more easily, the control of their life’s when facing vulnerable situations (Punamäki, Qouta & El-Sarraj, 2001).

Thus, these ‘*coping strategies*’ and resilience manifested by children victims of war and other armed-conflicts are crucial in their process of ‘*resettling*’ in a new and unknown country.

*“Refugee resettlement is the process by which some refugees are allowed to leave a country of (initial) asylum and start life anew in a third country that is willing to receive and protect them on a permanent basis. Resettling refugees are, in this way, distinct from asylum seekers, who arrive without prior authorization to seek refugee status.”*

(Newland, 2002)

Newland (2002) originally described ‘*resettlement*’ using it distinctly for refugees and asylum seekers, while Gray and Elliott (2001) suggested a definition for ‘*resettlement*’ more generalized and related it to other concepts and notions such as ‘*acculturation*’, ‘*assimilation*’, ‘*integration*’ and ‘*settlement*’, which are used within the literature to analyse the processes and outcomes that help refugees and asylum seekers to become part of the so-called ‘*host community*’.

Thus, ‘*resettlement*’ is, as well, a process composed by events and experiences encountered commonly by refugees and asylum seekers.

Berry (1991) proposed a framework which explains the phases, events and experiences during a refugee career, according to a multi-faceted perspective, which includes psychological and social perspectives and a time-frame explaining the different periods (see Fig. 12, p.131). The ‘*settlement*’ and ‘*adaptation*’ phases proposed by this framework are the ones that link us, more easily, to the ‘*integration*’ process. Therefore, Berry (1991) notes that in these final phases most refugee populations succeed in ‘*fitting*’ into the new environment. However there are differing aspects of life adjusts that will influence the individual capacity to look back or forward, according to their cultures and individual/group preferences.

*In sum*, people resettle themselves and are seen to be resilient to the changes, when they are able to rebuild networks of support and care over the time.

#### **4.5. Integration and social inclusion**

Along this *Dissertation*, the use of the term ‘*integration*’ is due to the fact that this term can be understood as the process of engagement, not only regarding migrants but also institutions and people in the whole society; However, during this research the term ‘*social inclusion*’ will be preferably used, as this term is more towards a rights-based approach, not predetermining that this group of people is, from the beginning, excluded from the rest of the society.

The concept of ‘*social inclusion*’ can be perceived as a proactive and social development approach to social well-being, which is based on the principle of removal of barriers of risk (Saloojee, 2003); In this line of thinking, social inclusion refers to policies designed to ensure that all people are able to participate in society regardless of their background or specific characteristics, such as: race, language, culture, age, gender, among others. Thus, social inclusion is based, as referred before, on a rights-

based approach, considering that everyone has equal chances for participation in the society. In this sense, an *'inclusive society'* is characterized by respect for the identity of all individuals and a reasonable balance between the rights and duties of individuals and society as a whole (CIDH, 2012).

According to Fangen, Johansson & Hammarén (2012) one way to understand the differences or similarities between social inclusion and exclusion set on concepts such as *"condition, transition and situation."* (p.12). Inclusion or exclusion as *'condition'* refers to permanent conditions and is more used in a structural level to determine who is *'inside'* or *'outside'* the system; as *'situation'* refers to occasional feeling of not fitting into the system; as *'transition'*, in the way that individuals change between different excluding and including processes in the society. Consequently, individuals can be excluded in some arenas and included in other ones, or even, both excluded and included in the same arena, depending on how individuals and society interpret the situation.

Thus, the term *'integration'* has been being defined since the 1920's, however it is still not easily understood and has been subject of many critics regarding its connotation of *'assimilation'* and blamed of placing migrants in an inferior condition from the rest of the society, for emphasizing race relations and cultural differences.

*"An individual or group is integrated within a society when they achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health etc. which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities; are socially connected with members of a (national, ethnic, cultural, religious or other) community with which they identify, with members of other communities and with relevant services and functions of the state; and have sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship."*

(Ager and Strang, 2004, p. 5)

In accordance with Ager and Strang (2004) there are situations that put the individual in equal or different positions of the *'host community'* such as employment, housing, education and others; this means that it is not possible to consider *'integration'* without relating it to *'social exclusion'*, as if there are no differences between the members of the society, this means that everyone is *'fitting'* and there would be no need for being *'integrated'*. Thus, the term *'social exclusion'* is applied when individuals suffer from a number of social problems. However migration policies, welfare state models and different social processes in each country influence this process of *'inclusion'* or *'exclusion'*. This means that all this process of *'fitting'* in the society is influenced by structural, positional and individual levels (see Fig. 13, p.131).

According to Westin (1999), *'integration'* can have three different meanings: a general meaning in which *'integration'* is related to *'cohesion'* and here terms such as *'regimentation'* (society based on the foundation of common norms and values) and *'differentiation'* (different people have different roles that are interdependent of each other) are meaningful; the second meaning, stresses the terms *'cohesion'* and *'participation'*, as through integration childity groups retain their cultural distinctiveness and have an opportunity to participate in the public sphere; at last, the third meaning emphasize a *'process approach'*, *i.e.*, the process by which ethnic and

cultural childities are incorporated into a new society. It is important to have in consideration that integration is not a single process; it takes place across economic, social, cultural and political domains

Thus, '*integration*' is a complex process that takes place across economic, social, cultural and political domains (Entzinger, 2000).

Koopmans (2010), compared different countries immigration policies, based on how well immigrants succeed in their integration into the labour market; or crime and segregation; In the article "Trade-Offs between Equality and Difference: Immigrant Integration, Multiculturalism and the Welfare State in Cross-National Perspective", the author reported that the cases he observed of successful integration were dependent on the migration policy model of each Country; In this research, Koopmans results showed that Countries such as Austria and Germany, which policies are closer to the segregation model, were countries where he observed higher rates of successful integration; On the opposite, Countries such as Sweden and Netherlands, which have a multicultural model, showed a low participation of migrants in the labour market, a strong segregation and comparatively high levels of crimes committed among migrant communities.

When researching about refugees and asylum seekers, independently of which theories and frameworks are chosen to be followed, the most important is to always have in mind that the task for this target group is to "*solve an existential riddle and find a way to live a meaningful life despite what has happened to them, in the face of extremely difficult conditions in the present and an often still uncertain future.*" (Bala, 2005, p. 169).

Also important to consider that in order to generate trust and confidence with separated and unaccompanied children and/or youth, conversations and dialogues must be based on each individual needs and desires. Therefore, children and youth integration is done through guidance with schools, recreational activities and other agencies that can promote education and knowledge of different social structures in the society (Lundberg & Estabraghi, 2008, p.17).

#### **4.6. Social Capital**

The first developers of the concept of '*social capital*' were Bourdieu, Coleman and Putman, but all of them focused on different aspects of this term (Biddle et al., 2009).

While Bourdieu was focused on social class and the opportunities that social connections provided as a mean of obtaining access to economic and cultural resources; Coleman was focused in viewing communities and families as repositories of '*social capital*' and viewed specially parents as the ones who play the primary role; at the same time, Putnam viewed '*social capital*' as trust, norms and networks that work within communities and which promote cooperation between its members (Biddle et al., 2009).

The term '*social capital*' refers to the attributes and qualities of families, society and community networks that facilitate the cooperation between the individuals and their communities. '*Social capital*' theory suggests that people make investments in social relations with expected return in a market that might be economic, political, labour or community, which means that people engage in interactions and networking in order to produce profit (Lin, 2001).



Thus, the quality and extent to which individuals feel engaged with these networks have, usually, a great impact on the educational and social development of children and youth (Semo & Karmel, 2011); and these social ties and relationships influence the individual's social capital, by reinforcing identity and recognition.

Young people in their move towards autonomy and independence from their families or care givers transfer their dependability increasingly to the peer group, which means that their identity conflicts and their uncertainties are most probably to be solved in this transition to adulthood with the peer-group.

Young people's networks and trust-based relationships are not only a manifestation of growing up as a sub '*cultural response*', but as well, a manifestation to the oppressive structures and instruments of coercion of the adult world. When families represent for youth the sharing, cooperation and contribution to a '*common good*', such as by intergenerational ties, they are automatically contributing to '*social capital*', since it is in small communities that reciprocity has its effects.

A role of community-building is usually possessed by youth; however, they need to learn the skills that are necessary for civic engagement. Youth are usually involved in three different types of communities: family, school and extracurricular groups. It is in these places that they learn what it is expected of them and what can they expect from others. Thus, these three communities create social capital and depend upon it (Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2011). Thus, schools and extracurricular activities contribute to social capital by teaching the basic skills that are necessary to participate in civic life and by being a community of choice, rather than by circumstance.

As a multi-dimensional concept, related to different types of relationships and norms, '*social capital*' can be measured in different ways; this measurement may provide insights into social functioning and understanding of how networks and links can be used in order to contribute to positive outcomes for the individual, group and community.

The ABS framework (see Fig. 14, p.132) is one of the approaches to measure '*social capital*' and the one chosen to be developed as it gives a description of how social capital can be measured according to the different systems. Thus, in the centre of this framework are networks based on family, friend, acquaintances, colleagues, organisations and groups; and these networks are composed by four attributes: qualities, structure, transactions and broad network types. Thus, these networks influence and are influenced by the political, institutional, legal and cultural level of the society and the effects of all this interactions between systems can result in positive or negative effects of social capital.

Therefore, when considering the target group of this research, separated and unaccompanied children, it is important to consider the positive and negative effects of their social capital, looking into the composition of their networks once they are in the '*resettlement*' country.

## CHAPTER V. THE FIELD OF RESEARCH

This Chapter explores a discussion of the research field with a focus on: *Separated and unaccompanied children and their circumstances*; *Separated and unaccompanied children placed in care*; *Participation and decision-making of separated and unaccompanied children*; *The Swedish context of children's rights*; *The meaning of resilience and resettlement for separated and unaccompanied children*; *Family separation and reunification*; and, at last, *Social work with separated and unaccompanied children*.

### 5.1. Separated and unaccompanied children and their circumstances

Children or young people who arrive in a new country without parents or any other care-giver, present a wide range of needs, which are likely to be fully described by Maslow in the hierarchy pyramid of needs that represents: psychological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem, knowledge, understanding and, finally, self-actualization. Maslow defended that these basic needs need to be met before higher needs, however, when considering the needs of the child we have to be aware of how ethnocentric and overgeneralized views may affect it (Hopkins & Hill, 2010)

Thus, these children present the same needs as every child; however, they present, as well, additional needs as a result of their journeys and backgrounds, which are identified by Hopkins and Hill (2010) as being related to responses to their unique legal position or as the result of being in an environment that was unfamiliar. Thus, these authors identified the special needs of these children as being the result of three stages of their migration process: circumstances regarding prompting flight; journeys to a distant place; and the adjustment to a society that was new and strange to them.

When researchers consider the needs of separated and unaccompanied children, they mostly focus on a range of health, medical, social and welfare-based requirements.

*“ (...) the primary focus was on the ‘here and now’ and the practicalities of resettlement – providing shelter, care, food, money, schooling, medical support, welfare advice, making sure the young person had good legal representation in relation to the asylum and a safe network of friends and community to hold them in place and mind.”*

(Kohli, 2006b, p.5)

#### 5.1.1. War, Trauma and Vulnerability

War and armed conflicts affect millions of people around the world every year, which means that thousands of them flight from their homes in hope of escaping from chaos and violence (UNICEF, 2007).

By the end of 2008, the UNHCR estimated that globally there were approximately 42 million forcibly displaced people, including 15.2 million refugees and 827,000 asylum

seekers, from which 44% were children and young people under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2009).

*"To be sent away without any preparation and explanation generates many unanswered questions. Being the family's 'chosen one' with everything that can contain result in a positive sense and simultaneously ejected from the family unit and meet the stark reality is for most an intractable paradox. They have a- same carry on and out deny the difficulties and disappointments. They end up in difficult conflicts of loyalty that can create unconscious guilt and shame. These feelings of- reinforced when they do not always succeed in living up to family expectations. They worry about and takes responsibility for his remaining (if at all know where they are) which is an overwhelming task for children and teenagers. "*

(Nestler, 2001)

Children are especially vulnerable in situations of war and armed conflicts. It is a fact that, as a result from these events, thousands of children are exposed to high levels of risk and when experiencing and surviving these stressful situations, many of them become separated from their families or even, unaccompanied. At the same time, the exposure to these events may punish them in various different ways; most of the times, they have witnessed the torture and/or deaths of close family members and friends, but they may themselves have participated in such acts of violence, for instance when they are recruited to be child soldiers.

When children are exposed to trauma associated to war and armed conflicts, they may increase their risk of assuming behaviour as a way to 'cope' (Astor, R. A. et al., 2011). Thus, adaptive behaviour might help these children and youth to confront the stress they experience and to alleviate symptoms of distress.

*"Destruction of schools, houses, religious buildings, fields and crops as well as torture, rape and internment become commonplace. Modern warfare is concerned not only to destroy life, but also ways of life. It targets social and cultural institutions and deliberately aims to undermine the means whereby people endure and recover from the suffering of war."*

(Bracken & Petty, 1998, p. 3)

For many of these children and youth, the route out of a war zone is faced with uncertainty and fear. In this line of reasoning, studies found that exposure to these events and the arrival to the 'country of resettlement' causes a range of mental health and developmental squeals, such as the post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, sleep and behavioural problems (Garbarino & Kostelney, 1996; Almqvist & Brandell-Forsberg, 1995).

Therefore, trauma is defined as an emotional wound or shock resulting from exposure to an event or situation that causes substantial, lasting damage to the psychological development of any individual, often leading to neurosis. However, according to Hjern & Jeppsson (2005), "(...) not all studies demonstrate such high rates of poor mental health. Studies of South-East Asian refugee children in Australia and Bosnian children

*in Sweden have indicated a general level of mental health which in some respects is actually better than that of the general child population in the country of reception (...)*". These authors propose an ecological model assessment as a way of identifying major factors that should be taken into account in the provision of the mental health care of refugee children in exile. This model distinguishes between three levels of factors that can influence the well-being of children: stress experienced by the children themselves (forced migration and process of resettlement); available social support; the societal, cultural and political context (employment, schooling, attitudes of the society).

Nevertheless, one important issue when concerning about trauma of separated and unaccompanied children, is their silence; sometimes these children and youth maintain themselves as a '*closed book*' (Kohli, 2007), which can be justified for being told by their families not to reveal some facts, feelings or thoughts. However, war can be by itself the reason for children to be silent, since the silence is considered to be a way to survive intolerable loss (Turk & Melzak, 1992). Sometimes, it is not only that they don't want to talk about their experiences, but they might have forgotten them or became confused about what happened, losing the capacity to tell the story in a sequence of events.

Some studies suggested that these symptoms can decrease and recur over time and are related to other variables, which can be intrinsic, or extrinsic (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1993). However, it is important to understand that every individual has different '*coping strategies*' and factors of '*resilience*' and not generalize the idea that all individuals who have been through states of warfare and conflicts are traumatized; at the same time it is important to highlight their positive capacities, their desire to adapt to the new country and their large resources to mobilize with the right attitude.

In a research conducted by Jeppsson & Hjern (2005) with refugee children, arrived in Stockholm, in 1986-87, from Chile and the Middle East, has been possible to verify that symptoms of poor mental health decreased with their '*resettlement*'. Authors also suggested that most of the children have the capability to recover from these symptoms without professional help. However, symptoms such as loneliness and incidents of low moods were commonly identified.

Summerfield (2005) defends that child victims of war cannot recover properly without emotionally debate or '*work*' through their experiences. The *Survival and Adaptational Framework* proposed by Silove (2005) is adapted from the *Psychosocial Model* and other previous works. This framework aims to have flexibility in its design and implementation of programs, in order to match them as closely as possible to the specific context, culture and needs of individual societies recovering from mass-conflicts. This model is based on the notion that human beings are capable of attempt to survival and adapt to changing environments, as individual's strategies are based in universal systems of behaviours and social organisation (Silove, 2005).

## **5.2. Separated and unaccompanied children placed in care**

*"States parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both the parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interest."*

(UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and to Swedish Legal Instruments, the contact with biological parents is always seen as an imperative. However, separated and unaccompanied children are alone and, in most of the cases, this situation can only be predictable in a long-term journey and it is not always possible, depending on the different types of permits given by the Migration Board.

Therefore, the emotional support of close relationships has a protective effect in helping these children and youth tackling crisis situations and adapting to their new life.

It is the responsibility of the State to provide care to these children. The best care solution for separated or unaccompanied children, depends on the particularities of each case and each individual, however, whichever decision is made, the child or youth should always be informed and take part on the decision-making process, at the same time that all the decisions should be taken according to his/her best interest.

Separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden are, in its majority, either placed in foster families, either in residential care; When fostering placement occurs this is, in its majority, in families which have some connection to the youth, the so-called '*referenced foster families*', which are families with the same background and most of the times from the same nationality or with some connection to their birth family; not families recruited by the Social Welfare System. When placed in residential care, there are specific arrangements for these children and youth, in order to meet their specific needs.

One of the challenges that has been appointed by the Swedish Migration Board regarding the accommodation for separated and unaccompanied children is the fact that, when children or youth are placed into the so-called '*referenced foster families*', there is no investigation and no such large control, which has conducted, in some cases, to situations of neglect; At the same time, the Swedish Migration Board has also appointed as a challenge the fact that each Municipality works in a different way, which creates inequalities in the care provided.

Meanwhile, when talking about separated and unaccompanied children, is also fundamental to have in consideration the factor '*culture*'. It is important to consider that there is care across borders, the so-called '*transnational care giving*', and which can be characterized by different degrees of communication and interaction. In transnational contexts, commitments are often negotiated and influenced by the particularities of family relationships (Grillo, 2008).

When considering '*cross-cultural placements*', Professionals have to work having in consideration each other culture and how that might affect the child or youth, and their relationships with the caregivers. Most of these young migrants are from societies which way of life is opposed to Europe: Western individualistic way of life *versus* collectivist way of life (Lundberg & Estabraghi, 2010). A Western individualistic way of life is characterized by the ability to work, to live independently and to take initiative; however, it is needed to consider that not every unaccompanied child or youth knows what it is to be young in a society with democratic ideals. Therefore, concepts such as *participation* and *dialogues* are fundamental.

Thus, the social network of these children and youth is fundamental in their '*resettlement*' and '*integration*' into the new society; It is important for them to have a parental image around them, which can be represented in a trustee, in a teacher or in the staff. Children and youth who arrive alone tend to create a large network around them,

composed by other youth or adults from the same country, same language-speakers, same culture, with whom they identify and connect themselves.

However, ‘*integration*’ seems to be a lacking concept, among Europe, when it comes to issues related to asylum and refuge.

In conclusion, separated and unaccompanied children and youth are a particularly vulnerable group and also very dependent on Professionals, mostly while they are still seeking asylum; The risk of a lacking in socially including these children and youth might result in feelings of dislocation and direct them to the margins of the society, where much of their potential will be misused. Therefore, if there is no effective integration, there is the risk that these children and youth will no longer feel that they can have long-term opportunities, and that can conduct them to take steps towards marginalisation, segregation and exclusion.

When considering separated and unaccompanied children and youth placed in care, it is, thus, much important to remember that it is in care placements that Professionals have greatest opportunities to work towards integration in the host community; being education and schooling complementary, as by placing a child promptly into an educational setting is an important step in reintroducing stability and normality into their world.

However, one of the challenges that have also been appointed in previous studies is when it comes to leaving care; Leaving care placements has been an issue addressed all over, not only regarding separated and unaccompanied youth. According to Atlas (2007), separated and unaccompanied youth seem to feel much lonely, powerlessness, with lack of information and preparation when they leave care, due to the lack of work within social services and the migration office.

*“The transition from care to independence is widely recognized as a difficult time for young people in the care system as they have to cope with the responsibilities and challenges of major life changes at a much younger age than other young people.”*

(Atlas, 2007, p.21)

### **5.3. Participation and decision-making of separated and unaccompanied children**

All children and youth are vulnerable to suffer abuse of every form, however separated and unaccompanied asylum seeking children and refugees are particularly in a vulnerable position, as they have often suffered from traumatic forms of abuse and neglect in the context of wars and human rights violations, which have usually forced them to flight; And the flight itself leaves, usually, children and youth open to violence, to disruption of community and social structures.

*“To flee from one’s home is to experience a deep sense of loss, and the decision to flee is not taken lightly (...).”*

(Graça Macher, Education Minister of Mozambique)



Considering that these children and youth are, thus, in particular situation of vulnerability and deprivation is it important to ensure that they are evolved in participation and decision-making for the realization of their rights.

As referred before, in the III Chapter, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the international instruments which introduces the concept of ‘*evolving capacities*’, by stating that “(...) *direction and guidance, provided by parents or other with the responsibility for the child, must take into account the capacities of the child to exercise rights on his or her own behalf.*” (Lansdown, 2005, p.10).

Therefore, this principle establishes that children acquire competences and great capacity to take responsibility for decisions affecting their lives; However, this Convention also states that children in different environments, different life situations and different cultures may acquire these capacities in different ages; at the same time that children’s capacities may differ according to the nature of the rights to be exercised. Consequently, different degrees of protection, participation and decision-making are required across the different areas and contexts.

Lansdown (2005), defended the importance of examining the inter-relationship between the concept of evolving capacity, which is embodied in the Chapter V of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the concept of participation, embodied in the same Convention.

*“All children capable of expressing a view are entitled to do so and to have it taken into account.”*

(Lansdown, 2005, p.21)

However, due to deprivation and neglect, separated and unaccompanied children may find it challenging to take full advantage of the opportunities they have to participate in questions regarding their life. This might be because they are traumatised by their past experiences and feel afraid or reluctant to contribute or share ideas. Therefore, being provided with opportunities to participate in decision-making process, may also be a totally new experience for children and youth in this situation, as most of them come from cultures in which children are not usually afforded such opportunities and where even adults are not able to raise their voices, with fear of repercussions.

Even though, there is no formal definition for ‘*children’s participation*’, Smith (2005) identified in his research two broad consensus aspects which have influence: firstly, allowing the children to participate in decision-making process which affects them; secondly, enabling them to introduce the design of the services that they will use.

When talking about children and youth participation we are, at the same time, talking about power and empowerment, which has been sometimes a concept avoid by families and guardians, who are afraid of losing control on their children and youth. (Seraphine, 2010). To involve children and youth in decision-making means to face their needs, but is also important for their emotional development (Moonga, 2007).

Hence, for participation to be taken into account effectively, children and youth should have to have access to all relevant information and have to be empowered to express their views and opinions. Smith (2007), stated expressions regarding participation from two youth interviewed during his research; one of them defined participation as “(...)

*the power to manage your own life(...)*” and the second one stated that “(...) *it means your views are carried along, including decisions.*” (Smith, 2007, p.19).

In this sense, opportunities for children’s participation and self-advocacy should be provided; this can be expressed in many different ways, for example, through emotions, drawing, painting, singing and drama. Lansdown (2005), defended four levels of involvement that can be identified in the *decision-making* process, which are:

- To be informed;
- To expressed an informed view;
- To have that view taken into consideration;
- To be the main or joint decision-maker.

When considering the process of transferring the exercise of rights to children, emerges the concept of autonomy, which is fundamental and highly valued within democratic traditions and embodied in civil and political rights promoted by the State; However, this discourse of autonomy has raised concerns in non-Western countries, where the cultural emphasis focuses on mutuality, reciprocity and inter-dependence instead of individuality; When considering separated and unaccompanied children and youth, we have to consider that their culture and background context is in many ways different from their recent context, which means that they cannot be approached by assuming they know what is it to grow up with this concepts and values.

Children and youth participation is fundamental for their social development, as well as, to develop their sense of responsibility and independence. By participating in projects, children and youth stimulate their ability to share, to communicate, to share their feelings and all this can improve their decision-making, confidence and self-esteem.

Several studies have been done in this field of children and youth participation. Davis (2007) conducted a research on children and youth participation in the UK, in order to understand the reason that conducted them to be prevented from full participation in normal activities of the society and he realised that in most of the times it was due to lack of money, lack of local facilities, lack of trust and opportunities, among other reasons.

According to the ‘integration theory’, mentioned in 4.3. *Children as agents in need of belonging*, p.25, individuals are attracted towards some types of situations and away from others on the basis of what the author terms ‘*emotionally energy*’, which means “(...) *taking the initiative in social interaction, putting enthusiasm into it (...)*”. This means that emotion energy is itself generated through participation in interaction rituals, which are composed by: group assembly, barriers to outsiders, mutual focus of attention and a shared mood (Lundberg & Estabraghi, 2008).

In conclusion, as a way of providing security and a shared understanding of belonging and to work towards inclusion, integration and a human rights approach, it is important to raise children and youth participation, since working in group provides, as well, support to develop and practice individual’s personal skills (Adams, 2003).



#### **5.4. The Swedish context of children's rights**

As referred in the previous Chapters, the principle of the *Best Interest of the Child* is defended in numerous national and international instruments.

Such as adults, children who are victims of persecution are entitled to be protected by any Member State of the European Union; however, each Member State might present different procedures of tackling asylum applications and care to separated and unaccompanied children.

CRC promotes internationally recognized children rights and these rights are applied, as well, for separated and unaccompanied children, as, independently of their status, they are children and owners of rights.

Although the rights stipulated in CRC cover almost every aspect of a child's life, there are three rights considered as fundamental and underlying, which are: '*best-interest*' rule, principle of non-discrimination and the right to participate. These three rights are, thus, so important and inter-related that they form a '*triangle of rights*'. However, there are different procedures in every State when it regards to separated and unaccompanied children as this depends not only on international instruments, as well as in national instruments.

In Sweden, the concept of Best Interest of the Child was introduced through a national regulation, with the Aliens Act, in 2005; This Act stipulates that every child (under 18 years old) can request protection from the State, on the basis of particularly distressing circumstances; and does not have to provide reasons with the same degree of severity and weight as any adult.

When it regards to separated and unaccompanied children, there are complementary forms of protection that ensure safety and security for the child. Here, we intend to discuss the '*right to education*', '*right to health*', '*right for a legal representative*' and considerations on the best interest of the child when it comes to '*right of residence*' and '*removal procedures*' (Appendix IV, pp.137-140).

#### **5.5. The meaning of resilience and resettlement for separated and unaccompanied children**

As described in the previous chapter '*resilience*' and '*resettlement*' are two meaningful concepts when researching about separated and unaccompanied children, as both are interrelated and contribute to their '*integration*' and '*social inclusion*'.

Separated and unaccompanied children and youth have, usually, been living in a society undergoing political violence and being witnesses of war and violence; and their perceptions of what is happening around them affects their capacity of resilience.

According to Borge (2005) there are three levels of psychosocial risk: the individual risk, which is related to internal factors of individual personality; a family-based risk, which regards adult's ability to fulfil the parental role; and the social danger, which regards human and environmental disasters; The individual risks referred by Borge (2005) regard factors such as age, gender, child's perception of the situation, kind of violence suffered and the child's own capacities do deal with the situation. However, even if the child or youth have their own capacities do deal positively with the situation,

parents support as well as support from the networks, are extremely important for children who have been exposed to war (Pynoos, 1993).

Theories related to resilience and trauma give a better interpretative framework on understanding how children and young people handle the different situations in their life's when arriving to the unknown and new country.

Still, many children and youth have good *coping strategies* and are able to deal with these situations, which is due to their personal resilience to stress and trauma (Hessle, 2009). However, silence is commonly a manifestation of fear and looking for protection, but a risk, considering that these children and youth do not trust, at a first stage, in any Professional and they carry, many times, secrets about their life's.

Therefore, it is also important to consider factors which might help in these processes of distressing, such as: feelings of belonging; being able to think about their experiences in safe relationships with adults and peers; agency, by feeling that they can be active in decision-making in their lives; and by cultural integration, finding a sense of continuity between the culture of their own country and the one from the new country (Blackwell and Melzac, 2000).

Hence, separated and unaccompanied children who have been exposed to war, manifest mixed feelings such as '*hope*' and '*fear*', which makes crucial the support they get from the networks around them, as well their own perception of what is happening around, in order to increase their capacity of dealing with the situation (Pynoos, 1993).

Thus, factors such as feelings of belonging, being able to talk and share experiences, having safe relationships with other adults and feeling ability to participate in decision-making, are extremely important for the process of '*resettlement*'.

Ressler et al. (1988) when describing unaccompanied children escaping the Spanish Civil War from 1936, defended that:

*“Once the children had been separated from their families, there were many obstacles to return. First, the war continued longer than expected... Some children lost contact with parents as a result of population movements, or death or imprisonment of parents during their absence. Some parents did not wish their children to return for other reasons, believing it better for them to remain in interim care. In some cases, children were so integrated into the foster family that neither the child nor the foster family, wished to separate. Some children did not wish to return for other reasons, such as better educational opportunities in the host country, and some could not return because of logistical difficulties and political problems... During these years children grew to young adulthood, sometimes married, took jobs, and became integrated into the host society.”* (p.16).

In the same line of reasoning, Kohli (2007) defended that the prospects of unaccompanied children are the same, sixty-five years later. The author defends that the only wish of unaccompanied children, in the asylum seeking process, is to receive a positive answer from Migration Board and only this can contribute to their '*resettlement*', in the way that allows them to be able to *“(...) stop in a place of their own choosing, or at least to move at a pace that they themselves dictated, not others.”* (p.142).

Thus, when being unsure about their asylum process and afraid of being deported, these children represent greatest signs of tension, which does not facilitate their '*resettlement*'.

*“To help with resettlement he needs his immigration status sorted. Otherwise you don’t know when or if you’re going to be sent back home. The likelihood is he won’t, but you just don’t know. How can you start making roots in a place and start developing when you don’t know whether you’re going back? I think stability is what this particular child wants.”* (Kohli, 2007, p.143)

Thus, it is important to understand ‘*resettlement*’ on the inside and on the outside, *i.e.*, by considering the structures in the society, for instance, access to education; and by understanding how care placements contribute to the ‘*settling*’ of feelings of belonging. However, it is also important to have in mind that even if these networks of support contribute to the child resettlement, it continues being more important to look inside the child, as they can feel integrated and belonging to the supportive networks, but inside themselves be confused and worried.

## **5.6. Family separation and reunification**

There are many reasons that conduct to the separation of the family and, mostly, to the separation between children and their families. Separation can occur either accidentally, when fleeing from danger, or deliberately, when children are abandoned or given to the care of another individual or residential centre (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004).

In situations of crisis, in which communities and State are unable to protect their children, humanitarian actors should follow a complementary approach to action, composed by three forms of protection activities: a ‘*responsive action*’, aimed at stopping or reducing the immediate effects of a specific pattern of abuse; a ‘*remedial action*’, which takes place when the abuse has already occurred and is aimed at restoring people’s dignity and ensure adequate living conditions; and ‘*environment-building*’, which aims at creating structures that conduct to the full respect for the rights of individuals, in accordance with the relevant law organisms (Caverzasio, 2001).

However, in some situations, separation from the family is not possible to avoid or control, which means that adequate measures need to take place, either when regarding separated or unaccompanied children. The most important is to see them as individuals, owners of rights and in need of protection. First of all they are children; the condition of migrant is secondary.

Children separated from their families, by whichever reason it happens, are among the most vulnerable group. Displacement entails a core of multiple and interconnected experiences that most of the times are negative and traumatic for the child, such as fighting for survival and a whole journey left behind with the uncertainty of ‘*losses*’ and, at the same time, the arrival in an unknown new country with a different culture and language. Of extreme importance when a child or youth is separated from the family are the relationships and bonds left behind, which can have devastating social and psychological consequences on the child in case of deprivation, or in cases of fatal ‘*losses*’ (Mann, 2001).

Hence, the term ‘*reunification*’ emerges as the process of bringing together the child and family, or previous care giver. Under the human rights and international humanitarian law, unaccompanied and separated children have the right to be reunited with parents, relatives or guardians, as “(...) *family is the natural and fundamental*

*group unit of society and is entitled to protection by Society and the State.”* (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004, p. 37).<sup>1</sup>

UNHCR prioritize the reunification of unaccompanied children with their families, considering that children and youth are “(...) *in particular need of stable family environment to ensure the development of their personal and social skills (...)*”. However, considers, at the same time, that ‘*family reunification*’ may not be always “(...) *the best solution for a child or adolescent (...)*”, since there are many “*tensions and dysfunctional situations (...)*” that can be found in the families, such as abuse and neglect. Thus, it is important to have in consideration the ‘*best interest of the child*’ in order to determine, with an assessment approach, elements in the relationship between the child and the family, that can be crucial for this process (UNHCR, 2001, p.7).

The reunification process of separated and unaccompanied children with their families appears to be difficult and time-consuming, since apart from the assessments that need to be done, documentary proof of relationship and other evidences are different requirements among Countries.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (2004), there are procedures recommended to be followed in these situations, such as: assessment; identification, registration and documentation; tracing, and verification.

An assessment to establish the extent of family separation and the situation of the child is considered to be one of the first steps of interventions, which should be carried out at the earliest stage of asylum process; The second stage of this intervention includes identification, registration and documentation: the process of identification regards which reasons led the child to be separated from the family and where can the family be found; registration is the compilation of key personal data for the purpose of establishing the identity of the child, for protection and to facilitate the tracing; and documentation is the process of recording further information in order to meet the specific needs of the child; Tracing, the third stage of this intervention, is the process of searching for the child’s family or care givers, but at the same time, can be the opposite process, look for the children which parents are already looking for; At last, verification will be the process of establishing the validity of relationships and confirming the wish of child and family members to be reunited. During all this process of reunification, confidentiality and protection of data collected, is one of the most important aspects.

Family reunification is, therefore, crucial for the well-being of any individual, mostly when regarding unaccompanied and separated children, which are in an additional stage of vulnerability and which represent a greater risk of being victims of exploitation and abuse (UNHCR, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup>Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 December 1966; Article 10 of the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights of 16 December 1966; the Preamble of the Convention on the Rights of the Child of November 1989; Article 16 of the European Social Charter of 18 October 1961; Article 18 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights of 26 June 1981; and Article 17 of the American Convention on Human Rights of 22 November 1969.

## 5.7. Social Work with separated and unaccompanied children

*“The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being(...). Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.”*

(BASW, 2001, in BASW,2003, p.2)

The emergence of social work as a profession, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was due to the development of the ‘*modern nation-state*’, as with the globalisation resulted new relationships within the ‘*nation-state*’, increasingly recognized by patterns of mobility, rather than national boundaries; therefore, systems of social regulation were created to respond to personal problems and public issues (Howe, 1994, Lorenz, 1994, Parton, 1994).

During the 80’s, asylum seekers and refugees became a central topic in social policy debates in Europe (Bloch & Schuster, 2002).

Nowadays, while processes of globalisation influence the way ‘*social work*’, ‘*childhood*’ and ‘*welfare*’ are constructed, professional social workers are also able to influence the outcomes of globalisation, *i.e.*, professional social workers are increasingly expected to work in individual and group levels, having particular influence on global inequalities in groups, such as separated and unaccompanied children and youth; being able to influence at a local, national and international level.

State intervention into individuals and groups/families has a dual function: in one hand, intervention means to provide care for the one in need, on the other hand it means to have control on ‘deviant’ behaviours. This represents, as well, the ambivalent role that social workers play in any community, by “*expressing society’s altruism (care) and enforcing societal norms (control)*” (Hayes & Humphries, 2004, p. 60).

According to Hayes & Humphries (2004, p. 69), many professionals working with asylum seekers and migration, interviewed in his research, felt “*(...) uncomfortable with the inquisitorial role they were required to adopt, which one described as ‘gatekeeping’ rather than social work*”.

Kholi (2003,p. 1), defends that separated and unaccompanied children and youth “*(...) live in circumstances of material deprivation, and carry the psychological burdens of forced migration.*”, which oblige social workers to face two tasks: caring for the child and youth in ways that are practical and helpful, *versus*, have an emotional balance.

In Finland, a research based on behavioural difficulties experienced by separated and unaccompanied children seeking asylum found that, around half of the children have been diagnosed as having some form of psychiatric disorder (Sourander, 1998). This is one of the challenges appointed by social workers working with asylum separated and unaccompanied children - *How to deal with war-affected refugee children?*; Professionals listen, very often, stories of human atrocities and violence, which can make them feel overloaded with these situations and might increase professional’s vulnerability to have overwhelming emotions and reactions.

Moreover, there have been also appointed factors that influence positively and facilitate the communication within professionals or care-providers and separated and unaccompanied children, such as, having different educational/professional backgrounds, different language skills, diverse ethnic backgrounds and cultural

knowledge. In some situations, it has also been appointed that “*Professionals and children originating from the same culture had a common way of handling things which brought a feeling of safety for child.*” (Mohanathas & Söer, 2011, p.49).

However, such as facilitator factors that can be extracted from professional’s own skills, there are also other ways of facilitating the work within professionals and this target group, in order to promote the good communication and understanding within each other, but at the same time avoiding situations of ‘*burnout*’<sup>2</sup> for the professionals. This can be such as education, by providing special trainings, where professionals can learn how to deal with situations that might be not comfortable for them, such as situations in which children and youth talk about their past experiences or about their families, their insecurity and their loneliness. In this way, training professionals and giving them the skills to improve their knowledge in dealing with situations, will, at the same time, relieve professionals and avoid situations in which they feel helpless or confused.

In conclusion, the various roles of professional social workers will become increasingly complex with growing mobility. Therefore, professional social workers have to be proactive in the development of practices that promote ‘anti-racism’, ‘multi-culturalism’ and ‘social inclusion’, at the same time receive support themselves to avoid situations of ‘*burnout*’.

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<sup>2</sup> *Burnout* is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when professionals feel overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands (<http://helpguide.org>)



## CHAPTER VI. METHODOLOGY

In this Chapter is aimed at describing the circumstances *Behind the research*; the *Design of the research*; the *Research Participants*; the *Procedure for accessing respondents*; the *Limitations of the Study*, the *Multi-methodological research*; *Data processing*; *Ethical considerations*; *Transcriptions, validity, reliability and generalization*; and, at last, a *Discussion of methods*.

### 6.1. Behind the research

This master thesis results in the accomplish of a two years Master's study in Social Work and Human Rights, at the University of Gothenburg, in Sweden. The empirical material collected and the practical experience achieved, throughout interviews with professionals, was a process which has taken around one year to be finalized.

The focus of this research is to understand and acknowledge the care provided to separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden using the perspectives and experiences of Professionals working in the field with a special focus in Västra Götaland and Gothenburg regions.

The motivation to choose this topic for my research emerged as soon as I started realizing how many separated and unaccompanied children arrive in Sweden every year, as well, when I accomplished more knowledge regarding the Child Welfare System and the different care placements provided. It is a fact that asylum, refuge and migration are topics of our understanding and knowledge, as individuals and professionals, but the topic comes differently into our minds and hearts when we start tackling issues and challenges connected to it. Back home, in Portugal, I have done an initial research on refugees and their integration into the Portuguese society, however the dimension of refugees and asylum seekers, children and adults, is considerably different from Sweden.

Knowing, in advance, that Swedish Municipalities have different regulations and ways of working, namely on the reception of separated and unaccompanied children, I tried to extend this research to other areas such as Malmö and Stockholm, in order to get a feedback from Professionals working in other areas of the Country, to be able to compare with the feedback from Professionals working in Västra Götaland, with special focus in Göteborg.

### 6.2. Design

For the elaboration of this research, a multi-methodological qualitative approach was taken into consideration

#### 6.2.1. Qualitative research

According to Gilbert (2001), there are three main aspects to take in consideration when conducting expecting interesting results from a social research, which are: the construction of theory, the collection of data and the design of methods in order to gather the data. These considerations were followed and no need for measuring numerical variables derived.



*“Qualitative research can give us compelling descriptions of the qualitative human world, and qualitative interviewing can provide us with well-founded knowledge about our conversational reality. Research interviewing is thus a knowledge-producing activity (...).”*

( Kvale & Brinkmann, 1996, p. 47)

As referred in the statement above from Kvale & Brinkmann, qualitative interview is one of the most important gathering tools in qualitative research as it enriches experiences, opinions, values and aspirations; To proceed with a qualitative interviewing, we have chosen a semi-structured interview method, which allow us – researchers- to manipulate the interview, according to the information we want to gathered or to the feelings and answers of the interviewee.

At last but not least, my work experience in the field of research was useful, not to highlight or retract human relationships; but to reflect and explore the field of research, a way of acknowledgment and understanding of all procedures that separated and unaccompanied children go through.

### **6.2.2. Research Participants**

In a qualitative research, *‘participant’* is defined as those individuals who provide information to researchers about the topic which is being studied (Polit & Beck, 2004). Therefore, the researcher may choose to interview informants with a broad and general knowledge of the topic or those who have had specific experiences (Morse, 1989). In this research, the sample consisted in two major groups: Professionals and Separated and unaccompanied children and youth. As there were numerous limitations at the beginning of this research, the focus has been on the *‘Perspectives and Experiences of Professionals working in Sweden’*.

As such, Professional’s perspectives and experiences were taken in consideration as a way of analyzing questions such as separated and unaccompanied children’s *‘best interest of the child’*, *‘integration’*, *‘social inclusion’*, *‘resilience’* and *‘resettlement’*; at the same time co-relating these topics to *‘culture’*, *‘religion’* and *‘ties of kinship’*.

Professionals interviewed in this research were working in different Units and were chosen randomly, as the only criteria taken in consideration to have these Professionals as interviewees was that they should have direct contact with separated and unaccompanied children. Out of 25 interviews performed, 20 were conducted individually and 5 of them were conducted in a group; one group of 2 Professionals and one group of 3 Professionals, as this was preferable to the Professionals. Not least important to refer that 2 of the interviews performed individually had to be totally adapted to the Professionals, as even though they work with separated and unaccompanied children, they field of work was more specific than the questions proposed on the Interview Guide.

Table 1. Presentation of the Informants

	County			Total	Age				Total	Background		Total
	Västra Götaland	Malmö	Stockholm		20-30	30-40	40-50	>50		Social Work	Other	
Male	6	1	1	8		5	1	1	7	1	7	8
Female	16	1	-	17	6	4	5	2	17	12	5	17
Total	22	2	1	25	6	9	6	3	25	13	12	25

In the figure above are represented all the participants interviewed for this research. As it is possible to observe, out of 25 Professionals interviewed, 22 were working in the region of Västra Götaland, 2 in Malmö and 1 in Stockholm. It is also possible to observe that out of these 25 participants, 17 were female and 8 were male, being the majority within 20 and 50 years old. Regarding their education background, 13 out of 25 participants have performed education in Social Work and 12 in other field of studies.

Apart from the Professionals interviewed, my newly experience from the field was also useful when contextualizing the research as researching is commonly a matter of ‘finding the right question’; In this case, having a visual perception and acknowledgment of separated and unaccompanied children and youth’s daily life, either as a elicitation technique or as data collection, was very convenient.

### 6.3. Procedure of accessing respondents

Before contacting professionals working in the research field, I wrote a ‘Letter of Informed Consent’ (see Attachment III), which was approved by my Supervisor. As my research was to be conducted assuring the confidentiality of the participants, it was important for me to ensure that all interviewees know the research topic and are aware of their rights as participants; as only in this way I could guarantee me that my research meets the ethical requirements for a good research and that respondents would trust me as a ‘stranger’ interviewing them.

The Interview Guide (see Attachment IV) was also formulated and approved before start accessing professionals, however as it was relevant; some questions were being added to the original Guide. At the end of the research the Guide had two extra questions and a total of 21 questions, excluding gender, nationality and age.

Afterwards, when to start contacting Professionals in order to invite them to participate in the research, I used 3 contacts of Professionals I have interviewed in a previous study and contacted new Units in Göteborg, Stockholm and Malmö region’s in order to introduce my research and request the participation of more Professionals.

### **6.3.1. Interview Contexts**

When booking the interviews with professionals, it was requested the participants to choose the date, time and preferable place and time to conduct the interview. Therefore, most of the professionals choose to conduct the interview in their working place/office, only four interviews were done in a different place (library and coffee shop), chosen by the participant.

### **6.4. Limitations of the study**

As soon as contacts with the ‘unknown’ Units started, it became obvious that this task would not be easy; one of the reasons for this was a language barrier; most of the times, professionals in the reception and professionals suggested to participate could not speak English. This was a time-consuming process and, at the same time, demotivating.

This process of trying to find respondents lasted for around 5 months (March-July); By May only 3 interviews had been conducted. The reformulation of Swedish Migration Board Units was also appointed as one of the reasons that Professionals could not find time to participate in this research. With this, the dates of the interviews were postponed for August and September, in order to interview as many professionals as possible and to be able to produce a research of good quality.

*“A good interviewer knows the topic of the interview, masters conversational skills (...).”*

(Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p. 166)

When finalizing the interviews the understanding and expertise on the field of research was obvious. As well, it was understandable that the inexperience as a researcher was a great limitation in the beginning of this study, which produced a different impact when searching for interviewees and when applying the interviews. These limitations of being a beginner researcher were also felt when analyzing the data, as one of the challenges found was to build the bridge within researcher concerns and participant concerns and to separate professional experience of the research field from a researcher experience; as well as when filtering the important information from the irrelevant.

Nevertheless, it was evident that for a beginner in researching, to transcribe and analyze 25 interviews that could proof the trustworthiness of findings, through reliability and validity, was not an easy task. For this, verbatim descriptions were used in all the interviews, which was, as well, a time-consuming process.

### **6.5. Multi-methodological research**

This is a multi-methodological qualitative research, based on literature review combined with the analysis of international and national legal instruments and semi-structured interviews.

### **6.5.1. Documentary Analysis**

The very start of this research was done by having a literature review on the topic of asylum and refuge for separated and unaccompanied children, in Sweden and Europe. In order to proceed with this research and literature review, the University Libraries from Gothenburg University were used as a first preference and primary source of research. Meanwhile, literature research was done through internet, data bases and other official web addresses.

As separated and unaccompanied children or asylum seeking and refugee children are topics of great importance in Europe, it has not been difficult to access international documentation. However, a lack of information was found, when it concerns to professionals experiences and perspectives working with this target group, or with this target group itself, in the Swedish territory, Västra Götaland or even Göteborg region.

Literature and document review was fundamental in this research as it provided a greater knowledge of issues regarding migration, asylum and refuge linked to childhood and linked to national and international instruments, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **6.5.2. Semi-structured interviews**

A total of 25 interviews have been conducted with professionals working with separated and unaccompanied children and youth. Even though, professionals interviewed were not having the same role working with the youth, what was considered to be important was their relation or connection with the target group. As such, professionals interviewed were working in special Government Units, Residences (Transit and PUT) and in NGO's.

A semi-structured interview was prepared, through an Interview Guide, and conducted, as this method allows participants some latitude and freedom to talk about their experiences and perspectives (See Attachment IV). Before the start of the interview, it was provided to the participants the Interview Guide, in order to make them feel comfortable with the questions that were going to be followed and not to make them feel in pressure.

The questionnaire is composed by simple and projective questions, as the aim of the research is to know professionals considerations and points of view in various issues; therefore, questions such as “ How do you perceive separated and unaccompanied children, more dependent or more autonomous?” were performed.

Not last important to remember that out of the 25 interviews conducted, 5 of them were conducted in two groups; a group of two participants and another group of three participants. All the interviews were conducted in English and recorded with participant's permission; being its duration within 45 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes.

### **6.5.3. Field of Work**

Apart from my experience as a researcher, my newly experience as a professional working with separated and unaccompanied children placed in care has been a great achievement to my understanding of all the issues, matters and challenges that this research discuss.

## 6.6. Data processing

Collected data was organized and transcribed in order to facilitate the writing process and to generate text for data analysis.

A code in qualitative research is most often a word that is captured from interviews transcripts, participant observation and other methods. Coding method suggests a routine of mechanical processes and is a procedure which combines organizing the text of the transcript interviews and discovering patterns within them, however it is common that this stage generates overwhelming feelings in the researcher, as the researcher struggles within two main issues: thinking that everything is important for the research *versus* being worried about what to chose, or what to leave behind (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

According to Auerbach & Silverstein (2003), the best way to work in coding, against this paralysis, is by remembering that the interpretation of the data will be only one, out of several ways to do it.

The central idea of coding is to move from raw text to research concerns in small steps, each step succeeds another just as a staircase, in which we go from lower to higher, but only being able to see as far as the next step. Here, the raw text (interview transcripts) might show a gap between research concerns and data, which can create difficulties in linking both.



The coding process consists in three main stages: making the text manageable, hearing what was said and developing theory.

Kavle & Brinkmann (2009) defended, as well, that categorizing is fundamental when processing data-collected into the analysis of texts, as it involves linking key-words into a text segment. Therefore, data collected from the interviews was divided into 5 main themes:

1. Presentation of the Informants;
2. Conceptual meaning;
3. Considerations on care provided to separate and unaccompanied children
4. Considerations on integration, obstacles and challenges;
5. Social Work with separated and unaccompanied children - considerations for improvement.

Final discussions will be drawn according to the findings and literature review, which allow the researcher to present theoretical constructs and narratives.

## 6.7. Ethical considerations

*“An interview inquiry is a moral enterprise. Moral issues concern the means, as well as the ends of an interview inquiry. (...)Consequently, interview research is saturated with moral and ethical issues.”*

(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 62)

As Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) defended, when preparing and conducting an interview, ethical considerations should be taken into account. Therefore, being aware that interviewing is a moral inquiry, a Informed Consent was elaborated before accessing the interviewees. This Informed Consent stated the aims of this research, as well as, the possibility for the participant to refuse his participation, even after the interview has been done.

In the planning phase of this research, it was decided to involve in the study only Professionals working with separated and unaccompanied children or youth, once unaccompanied and separated children and youth themselves undergo already many interviews due to their asylum seeking/refuge process, but also due to the limitations of this research, such as language barriers. However, even if this decision was seen as the best option due to the limitations, it is also known that the research will be based only on Professional's perspectives and experiences and not based on the child's point of view, which would also be interesting to research.

Thus, the Informed Consent and a brief summary with the aim of the research was provided to Professionals when accessing them; and once undergoing with the interviews, Professionals were required to signed two Informed Consent, one for them and one for the researcher.

As confidentiality is one of the ethical questions taking into consideration when requesting Professionals experience, it was guaranteed to the participants that all the information would be processed in ways that participants cannot be identified. At the same time, files with interviews recording's and transcriptions are to be destroyed as soon as data has been gathered, analyzed and finalized.

## 6.8. Transcription, validity, reliability and generalization

*“Transcription are constructions from an oral conversation to a written text. The constructive nature of transcripts appears when we take a closer look at their reliability and validity.”*

(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 183)

When transcribing an interview, it is important to be careful with the quality of the recording, as this can influence negatively; therefore interviews shall be conducted in quite places, which allow the researcher to proceed with a more clear transcription of the interview.

According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) there is no correct transcription method, however verbatim descriptions, which include pauses, repetitions, and tone of voice might be more relevant for psychological interpretations. Therefore, verbatim descriptions were conducted to the 25 interviews, as one of them was not recorded, being just an informal and descriptive interview regarding one of the projects conducted with separated and unaccompanied children.

Reliability and validity were, thus, two main considerations during the whole analysis process, as the aim of this research is to be as much *objective* as possible, even though this goal has its limitations as “*Objectivity is a moral concept before it is a methodological concept (...)*” (MacIntyre, 1978, p.37).. Therefore, in order to ensure the elaboration of good transcripts, these interviews have undergone 3 processes: first a verbatim transcription, followed by coding elements which described silences and pauses, so that it could be understandable in the contextualization of the interview; and at last, the interviews were thematized one by one to ensure that all the important information was kept into the analysis of the interviews and in order to produce good findings.

As reliability and validity appear related to consistency and trustworthiness of findings, it was also important to reflect whether participants experiences on this subject could be generalized or transferred, this is, if the same answer would be given in different occasions. However, this research analyzes questions related to the process of migration – migration flows and its effects and migration policies and its impact in care provided - which means that Professionals experiences and perspectives might change according to the actual situation.

The results of this research have shown that professionals share common perspectives and ideologies regarding separated and unaccompanied children; principles such as ‘best interest of the child’ and ‘participation in decision-making’. However, results have also shown that care provided to separated and unaccompanied children differs on the circumstances of the child: their legal status – asylum seeking or refugee; the policies followed by the Municipality in which the child is placed; the type of care placements, among other aspects.

Therefore, the generalization of the results of this research can be controversial as professionals interviewed are not a homogeneous group, in terms of profession, working place and area of work. Their practices of work are dependent on specific considerations, such as: policies of their working place/organization and policies of the local Government, which affect and influence the care provided to these children.

As apart from a researcher in this field, I am also a Professional working with separated and unaccompanied children, it has been important to challenge part of the research and not to jump into conclusions prematurely, minimizing prior knowledge and following the data analysis step by step.

## **6.9. Discussion of methods**

The purpose of this research was to find out how Professionals consider the situation of separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden, Västra Götaland and Göteborg; which challenges do they find and which considerations they have for improvement; to understand care provided and, at last, to acknowledge and understand how are separated



and unaccompanied children protected according to the International and National law and how is this protection applied into reality, producing, therefore, recommendations for good practice based on Professionals (participants) point of view.

In all the 25 interviews, Professionals were given the opportunity to express themselves, sharing their perspectives and experiences and give recommendations for good practice, by answer to *“Is there anything you consider that should be improved in prol to the best interest of these children?”* or *“Is there something else you would like to add before we finish this interview?”*.

Even though a qualitative method research has its own limitations, this methodology seemed to favored my intention in approaching Professionals, giving them the possibility to, openly, share their experiences and perspectives working with this target group. In this way, face-to-face interviews were also very important, as it gave the possibility not only to establish a engaging and interactive contact with participants, as it also allowed me to visit different placements where care is provided or where activities are conducted.

As described before, this research limits in Professional’s perspectives; as well Professionals working in different Units, which shows us also that Units can have national recommendations, however work differently. Therefore, ideally, a future research should include Professionals working in various areas of Sweden, in order to gain a wider perspective of what needs to be improved commonly; at the same time, a child’s perspective should be taken in consideration in order to provide greater recommendations for good practice at a national level.

## CHAPTER VII. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This Chapter aims to provide a relation within the theoretical framework of the field of research presented in the previous chapters and the findings of the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews combined into an analysis, in order to address the research objectives and research questions of this *Dissertation*. As Kavle & Brinkmann (2009) defended, the process of categorizing and thematizing is crucial when managing data-collected into the analysis of texts. Therefore, a set of themes and sub-themes emerge when performing a first analysis of the interviews.

Hence, the main themes are: *Presentation of the Informants*; *Conceptual Meaning*; *Considerations on care provided to separated and unaccompanied children*; *Considerations on Integration: obstacles and challenges*; and, at last, *Social Work with separated and unaccompanied children*. Each of these themes is also followed by subthemes which will be described further in this chapter when analysing each of the respective theme.

### 7.1. Presentation of the Informants

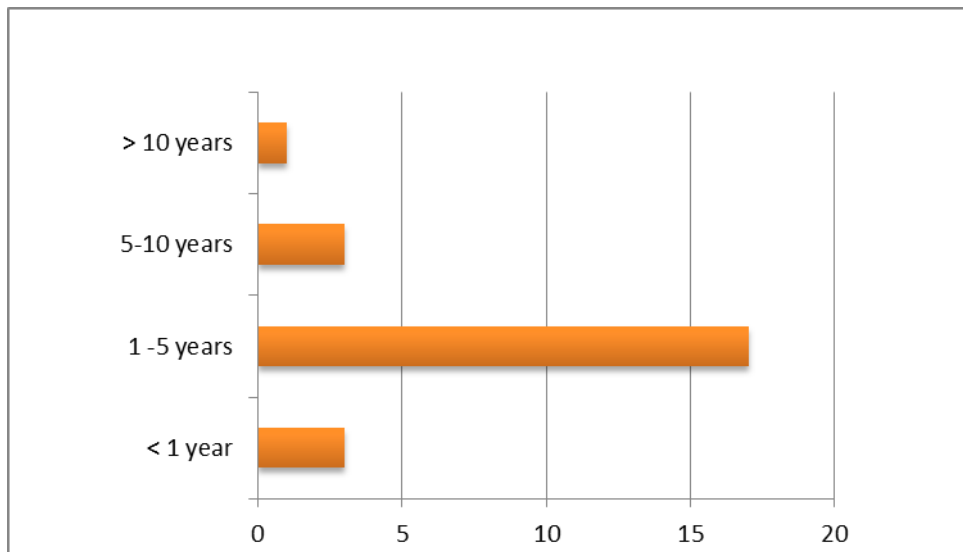
This first theme, *Presentation of the Informants*, aims to provide a brief introduction of the Professionals interviewed; having as sub-themes: Participants characterization, education background, work experience and an idea of the number of cases that Professionals are responsible of.

As referred in the previous chapter, this qualitative research was conducted by performing semi-structured interviews with 25 Professionals working in Sweden, with a special focus on the region of Västra Götaland, however with informants working in Malmö and Stockholm, as well. The criterion taken into consideration to choose the 25 participants was their field of work: separated and unaccompanied children, asylum seeking and/or refugees.

As possible to see in the Table 1 (Presentation of the Informants), illustrated in the previous Chapter, most of the informants were female (17/25) within 20 and 50 years old. When concerning about the educational background of all informants, the responses covered a various different range of fields, from Social Work to Public Administration or Arts, from Bachelor to Masters and other kinds of specialization; indeed 13 out of 25 informants have done their education in Social Work field.

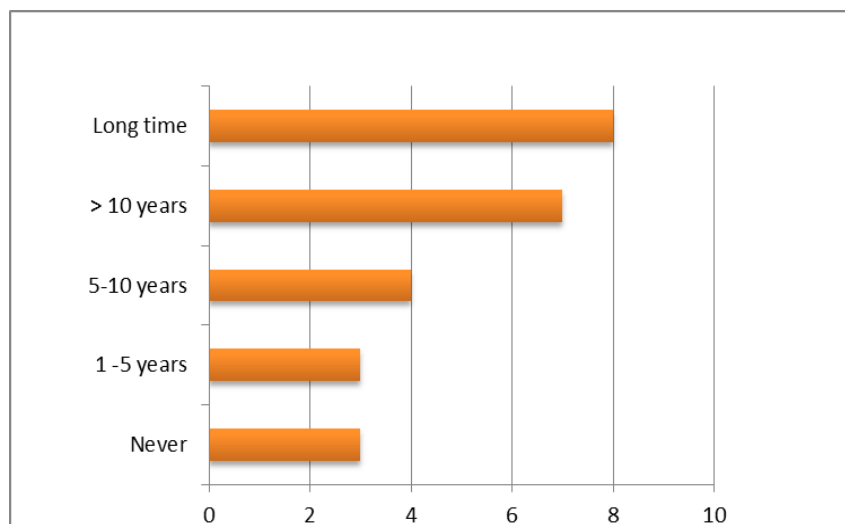
When conducting the interviews, Professionals were also asked about their work experience specifically with separated and unaccompanied children, by questioning “*For how long have you been working with separated and unaccompanied asylum seeking children/refugees?*” and the majority of the answers were in between 1-5 years.

Table 2 – Informants work experience with separated and unaccompanied children



However, when questioned “*Have you worked before with children/youth?*”, the number of years of experience was much higher as we can see in the Table below. From the 25 informants, 4 of these Professionals have worked with children and youth for more than 20 years; 3 said they have worked for more than 10 years; 4 have worked for more than 5 years; 3 for less than 5 years; 3 have never worked before with children or youth; and the remaining 8 have said they have worked with children and youth for “*a long time*”.

Table 3 – Informants work experience with children and/or youth



To finalize the presentation of the informants it is important to refer the last question in the initial part of the questionnaire “*For how many cases of unaccompanied asylum seeking children or refugees are you responsible of?*”; this question was made in order to understand the differences among Municipalities and Units; However,

even though by analysing all the interviews it is possible to say that Professionals have in average 15 cases on their responsibility in each moment; it is not really possible to generalise any conclusion, as many of the informants were responsible for specific projects leading with separated and unaccompanied children or responsible for the whole Unit, therefore any conclusion in this matter would generalize discrepancies and misrepresentation of the results which is not viable, as it could remove the reliability of the research.

## **7.2. Conceptual Meaning**

In order to start the semi-structured interviews with a contextualization of separated and unaccompanied children, was necessary to acknowledge Professionals perspectives and experiences regarding this target group and their needs. Therefore, this theme is divided in two sub-themes: *Perceptions on separated and unaccompanied children* and *Perceptions on separated and unaccompanied children's needs*.

### **7.2.1. Perceptions on separated and unaccompanied children**

Children and young people who arrive in a new country without their families, present a wide range of needs; therefore, Professional's perspectives and considerations regarding separated and unaccompanied children are crucial to understand further developments of this research, therefore, one of the first questions of the research was "*Do you perceive these children as dependent or autonomous?*"; Responses to this question did not vary in a large range of beliefs, in fact, the opposite occurred. A common idea among all the Professionals is the child as a unique individual who has been throughout different experiences which influenced who he/she is today.

#### **a) Separated and unaccompanied children as resourceful**

*" Ahmm (...) I think -- you usually perceive them as in need of lot of help, that's like a general idea of the kids before they come and then people get not shocked, but -- they are not prepared for the kids who are independent and autonomous and they actually know a lot of stuff and they actually can do lot of things (...)." (P17)*

The statement of these participants shows that it is not uncommon that people perceive separated and unaccompanied children as "*in need of lot of help*" and point out the fact that usually people are not prepared for their autonomy and independence in certain matters; instead of seeing them as "*strong individuals*" who have been through many circumstances in their life's before arriving to Sweden. However, Professionals participating in this research demonstrated a good understanding regarding separated and unaccompanied children and with the situations in which they reveal to be more autonomous and more dependent and pointing out also some reasons or factors for certain kinds of dependency.

## b) Separated and unaccompanied children as young adults

*“I would say that many are independent, I guess because they take much responsibility. (...) I would say they are used to take responsibility and they see themselves as the caretakers of their mothers and sisters/brothers.” (P10)*

As it is possible to see from the expressions above, Professionals perceive separated and unaccompanied children as autonomous; they referred as well that these children are used to take “*much responsibility*”, being used to “*live alone*” and “*pay their rent*”, considering them as, perhaps, “*caretakers of their mothers and sisters/brothers*”. On the other hand, one of the respondents indicated already in this statement that some of these children are emotionally more dependent, referring that “*all of them need contact with people like everyone, every human needs people who look after them and who are asking “how are you today, how was it in school?”*”; As well in the statement above the participant referred to the child’s history and observed that “*maybe they don’t tell or if they tell you can’t know, because there are things they don’t tell anyway*”, as a way of reminding that these children have been through different experiences in their lives that might be difficult to deal with or which can be still affecting the child in various different ways.

*“Is extremely hard to say, of course they have been travelling all over the world, there are lots of things they are capable of, but there are also a couple of things in Swedish life that they cannot do or cannot handle (...)I think what they need is often guiding, perhaps not really care but guidance..” (P5)*

When separated and unaccompanied children arrive in a new country, they have a story and a journey behind them, in which they, most of the times, have to take the same responsibilities as an adult. In the statements above, Professionals referred precisely these conditions of maturity. As well, Professionals identified as dependency, apart from the emotional needs, questions related to the new host country, the “*Swedish life*”, referring that there are things in these matters that they might not be able to handle, as it has been described in the settlement and adaptation phase to which separated and unaccompanied children go through (review 4.4. *Resilience and Resettlement*, p. 27).

Still, different Professionals also referred that these children appear to be more dependent on the Staff, which reveals the fundamental role of Professionals around the child/youth and the importance of positive interactions among the systems (review 4.3. *Children as agents in need of belonging*, p. 25).

*“I would say when they show up they are more independent but after a while they get more dependent (...) But it depends some they really become independent, but I would say the majority is dependent much more than when they show up.” (P18)*

Thereafter, separated and unaccompanied children are seen by Professionals as autonomous children, who have achieved some stages of maturity from the moment they have been forced to take adult responsibilities. Professionals also determine that apart from the consequences of the long journeys, being in a new country, in a different

society, with different rules, they still appear to be more dependent, revealing more emotional support and guiding. Some of the Professionals responsible for activities with separated and unaccompanied children demonstrated as well that these children and youth reveal more autonomy when they are not with their leaders/professionals, which emphasizes, in a way, the dependency on the care-taker, at the same time, that emphasize the role of the leader as an adult and protective figure.

Through the analysis of the interviews and the findings from these two sub-themes: '*Separated and unaccompanied children as resourceful*' and '*Separated and unaccompanied children as young adults*', we can easily relate it to the theme 5.1. *Separated and unaccompanied children and their circumstances* (p.33), in which has been described the situations that children go through in a war conflict which leads them to be separated from their families.

As Astor, R. A. et al. (2011) referred, separated and unaccompanied children are exposed to several events which punish them in various different ways and which force them to assume certain behaviours as '*coping strategies*', one of these behaviours is the adult behaviour, as many of these children have been taken care of their siblings or assuming their parents responsibilities before fleeing, or even during their journeys. Therefore, even if these children present situations of trauma and special needs, as it will be described later on in this Chapter, Professionals consider that these children have been through circumstances of their life which force them to find *coping strategies* to behave as '*young adults*' and to be strong and resourceful individuals.

### **7.2.2 Perceptions on separated and unaccompanied children needs**

Children's needs is a very subjective concept, to individual concerns and opinions; however, the question "*How do you perceive and deal with the needs of these children?*" seem crucial in order to understand which are the needs that Professionals can identify as obvious from their work with these children; at the same time to understand which methodologies do Professionals use to deal with these needs.

As a base of understanding children's context in Sweden, it is known that Sweden has "*(...) a legislation that puts the child in the middle of the social welfare legislation. (...)*" (P9), following the BBIC-model (Barns behov i Centrum). The BBIC-model aims to strengthen the child's situation in the welfare, enhancing the cooperation within family, care-givers and the social network. This method is based on the BIC-model, proposed by Kalverboer & Zijlstra (2006) (review 4.2. *The Principle of the Best Interest of the Child*, p. 23; Fig. 8 and 9, pp. 128-129).

#### **a) Identification of children's needs**

Through the following sentence we can observe that children's needs are taken in consideration in a practical level among different working environments.

*"Once they get here, we have a meeting to find out their needs (...) to find out their physical and psychological needs, as well which activities do they like. (...) So, I would*

*say they have different steps: the 1<sup>st</sup> step is to get the papers and once they get it they want to get their lives, get a job, study – (...) But I would say their needs after they get the papers are to bring their families.” (P18)*

Here, the participant revealed the practical concern to find the child’s “*physical and psychological needs*” through professional meetings: however, the participant also identified the different needs among children in different states of their process: seeking asylum and with their residence permit; while children and youth who have not received their permit are more concerned and worried about their process and its durability and have therefore more emotional needs; children and youth who have already received their permit face more needs which regard their practical life, to study, to get a job and to seek asylum for their families, which suggests the emergence of more practical needs.

One of the participants referred that “*(...) many of the children, they are not used to talk about personal problems (...)*” (P1), identifying it as a limitation when trying to understand the real needs of the child.

#### **b) Inherent factors influencing children’s needs**

Inherent factors such as background experiences and culture were also indicated to affect children in various different ways:

*“I think you need to have some aspects in mind, some of them are traumatized (...)they often have a feeling that they have been deserted, they are very lonely I think, and they are(...) very linked to the family system and they do not function on an individual level (...) being here without their family is like an organic lost, like they have lost an arm or something.” (P3)*

In the above description, one of the Professionals referred the fact of separated and unaccompanied children being without their families as the greatest need they have, sometimes not due to the fact that they are separated but due to the disruption of the family. In fact, most of the professionals mentioned that one of the greatest needs of these children is to keep contact with their families in order to keep some kind of stability in their life’s.

#### **c) Emotional needs**

*“(...) authorities and policy-makers need to be -- need to listen to these children needs much more (...) is basically security, education, and of course the family back home (...).” (P15)*



During the interviews, Professionals mentioned that some of the separated and unaccompanied children have contact with their families and some do not. They referred that the ones who don't have any contact with their families have more emotional needs as they are more worried about their family condition's or even the survival of their family members; however, they also mentioned that some of the youth who do have contact with their families might feel responsible for the security of their families back home and many times responsible for providing some kind of support.

#### **d) Practical needs**

Apart from the emotional needs referred above, Professionals also mentioned more practical needs, such as basic learning in cooking and cleaning, but also practical knowledge about the Swedish society in general.

*“That is an enormous question!!! [Laughs] (...) I mean, they are young, they are without families -- they need a context, they need guidance, they need practical things, but what we are trying to emphasize is that they are competent, they are not sick, they don't need treatment (...)” (P11)*

#### **e) Socializing and need for belonging**

At the same time that informants identified separated and unaccompanied children as ambitious and motivated; they also distinguish their needs of socialization and social inclusion:

*“They want to become a part of the society, they want to come into school, they want to participate in activities and that is really the first thing they ask for. (...) what they are going through is very different, but they expect the same (...).” (P5)*

Separated and unaccompanied children are first children and secondly in a condition of migrant and in increased vulnerability for being without their legal care-givers or family; However, it is important to have always in mind that not all of these children have a trauma for their past experiences, at the same time that, not all of them have a good mental well-being. Therefore, such as with any other child, to access their needs, it is important to do it individually and having in consideration each specific case. However, basic needs were addressed by Professionals, during this research, as the more obvious needs during their work with this target group: emotional needs, the child need to feel that someone cares about him/her; schooling, as ways of increasing self-esteem and their knowledge; socialization as ways of social inclusion in the society; at last but of major importance, the need of having contact with their families, as a basic need which has a major impact on the child well-being, resilience and resettlement.

Understanding the fifth sub-theme regarding *Perceptions on separated and unaccompanied children's needs* made it easier to co-relate theories which concern this matter, such as the hierarchy pyramid of basic needs proposed by Maslow which regards the needs of separated and unaccompanied children described above: psychological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem, knowledge, understanding and self-actualization. Thus, separated and unaccompanied children present the same needs

as any other child, however, also additional needs which regard the circumstances they have been through; trauma is one of the additional needs referred by Professionals, as we could understand, even though Professionals don't see these children as victims, they referred that in some circumstances "(...) *some of them are traumatized (...)*" (P3) and trauma is defined as an emotional wound resulting from the exposure to situations that damage the psychological development of individuals; this damage might not be visible but affect the child in certain specific situations (review 5.1. *Separated and unaccompanied children and their circumstances* and 5.1.1. *War, trauma and vulnerability*, p.33).

Also, it has been possible to understand that separated and unaccompanied children demonstrate to have practical needs, such as guidance, supervision and the need for a protective figure are the needs that Professionals found more obvious and which have been described by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) through the Social Ecology of Children's rights, a rights-based approach which place the child in the centre of multiple interactions of the support network (review 4.2.2. *The Social Ecology of children's rights*, p. 24). However, Professionals had also referred their needs for socializing and belonging, which are related to their role of social actors, '*shaping and being shaped*' by the surrounding (Hedin, 2012).

The theme '*4.3. Children as agents in need of belonging*' (p.25), of this research, provide us the theory to better analyze and understand the needs referred by Professionals; thus, we can analyze this '*need of socializing and belonging*' through three different theories: interaction theory, systems theory and ecological perspective.

The interaction theory together with the *Interaction Ritual Chain Theory*, proposed by Collins (2004), helps us understanding the interactions needed between children, family and community and how this interactions influence positively and negatively the child; The interactions within children and family in the home country and the interactions with the network in the resettlement country can be considered as successful or failed, as the successful interactions can be translated through symbols of relationship, solidarity and 'emotional energy'; while, interactions which are failed can result in feelings of depression and loneliness (Collins, 2004). As Professionals referred these feelings of socializing and belonging can simply be represented by the wish to be part of the society, to go to school, to be integrated and to have a "*network with Swedes*" (P4); therefore, it is important to make efforts and ensure that these interactions are successful as all of these situations will influence the child's resettlement, integration and social inclusion.

As well systems theory and ecological perspective help us in understanding the importance of the systems around the child and how they contribute to '*socialization and belonging*'; The systemic theory, as well as the ecological perspective, defend that all organisms are systems, composed by super-systems forming a whole and in which any change in one of the parts affects the whole (Bertalanffy,1950; Payne1996).

Thus, considering that separated and unaccompanied children, such as the organisms around them, are in constant process of creation, reconstruction and adaptation with the environment, it has been important to understand how these processes affect their emotional needs and their needs of socializing and belonging. In the Fig. 10/11 (pp.129/130), we can easily understand the interactions referred above and how each of the systems affect and turns around separated and unaccompanied children.

### **7.3. Considerations on Care provided to separated and unaccompanied children**

The number of separated and unaccompanied children arriving in Sweden has increased considerably among the last years and is expected to continue increasing. Therefore, it is important to understand how is the provision of care to this target group in a practical level; 4 sub-themes were chosen for this analysis: Perspectives regarding care placements; Perspectives regarding Foster care with separated and unaccompanied children; Perspectives regarding the Godman; and Perspectives regarding separated and unaccompanied children leaving care.

#### **7.3.1. Perspectives regarding care placements**

As referred in the previous chapters, in Sweden, separated and unaccompanied children can be placed either in residential care or in foster care. Thus, in order to understand care provided to separated and unaccompanied children, it was questioned: “Which considerations do you have in mind when placing unaccompanied asylum seeking children or refugees into care?”; answers to this question can provide a better understanding of the reasons that Professionals have in consideration when deciding between placing this target group in residential care or in foster care.

##### **a) Considerations on the choice of care placements**

Among the various different answers obtained from the 25 interviews, an assessment on the best interest of the child, an age perspective and the child’s own motivation were considered as the major reasons to choose between these two types of care placements.

*“I think that -- in that question you also need to look at each individual child and just as you would do with a Swedish child, who is maybe 14 or 15, and who have maybe lost his parents in a car accident-- I mean “what is the best solution for this child?” (...).  
(P15)*

As it is possible to observe from the previous statements, Professionals consider that an age and needs assessment should be taken into consideration in order to place the child adequately; however, it seems commonly agreed that younger children should be placed in foster families rather than in residential care and the opposite with older children; as a reason for this belief, professionals mention the fact that when it is a smaller child there is a need to have adult figures who are close and with whom the child can connect and trust, while if it is an older child, the more important will be ways of practicing their independence.

One of the participants also referred that if a child is under the regulation of the Dublin Convention, in those cases the child is bond to stay in a transit home, which apparently is a challenging situation under the condition of being a child.

## b) Residential Care versus Foster Care

It was possible to understand during the performance and analysis of the interviews that care placements vary among nationalities; while children from Somalia are placed more commonly in same-culture foster families, children from Afghanistan are mostly placed in residential care.

From the statement below mentioned can be understood that from the participant's experiences, these children are placed in both foster homes and residential care regularly; however this answer was depending also on the field of work of the participant.

*“I think they adapt very well, that's not their main question, they are very mature, they have travelled all over the world so if they are in countryside they will find a bus to go to the city, I don't think that is a problem. Of course, the most important thing is not to be isolated (...).” (P6)*

Furthermore, participants described which kind of placements they consider more adequate to the child and here answers were, as well, varying according to the Professional's field of work; however, similar answers were given concerning the positive points of each of them.

*“I think they are so good in different ways, you get different needs fulfilled, and also depends on which kind of personality the youth have of course. Ahmm -- generally we say, when they are younger that is better for them to stay in the families but it depends on their life situation -- if they have been living a very independent life before, it can be really difficult to come to a family (...). (P11)*

## c) Cross-Cultural placements

Participants also mention the importance of the child's "life situation" as decisive when providing care, as it is important to have in consideration the kind of life maturity the child was used to have back home, if he/she was used to be independent, working and supporting the family or the other way around. From the statement provided above, it is also possible to understand that separated and unaccompanied children manifest their wish for being in a Swedish family, regardless of their cultural differences.

*“(...) for many people they had the security being in these homes, or, in this houses, because they were from different cultures, but they know what they have been through, so they can be like sisters and brothers (...)! So, they all can do stuff, so they call each other -- maybe, brothers and sisters. They make themselves as family I think.” (P23)*

When analysing experiences from separated and unaccompanied children placed in residential care, Professionals referred commonly to the child's bonds of being like "sisters and brothers" inside the house, as even not having the same cultures they have been through similar situations and treat each other as a family.

*“I think it depends, because if the foster family is good, I think that is really good for the child because you get long-lasting relationships (...).” (P25)*

“(...) I think it is generally good idea that they come to a foster home. (...) a lot of them wants to stay in swedish families(...).” (P3)

Foster care has also been referred among all the interviews. Professionals perceive foster care as able to provide a familiar environment to the child, promoting “*long-lasting relationships*” and working on their specific needs; however, it could be understood that most of the times professionals were referring themselves to the regular cross-cultural foster care which, according to them, is almost inexistent for separated and unaccompanied children.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that most of the separated and unaccompanied children placed in foster families are placed in same-cultural families, to which the child or his/her family has some connection, either by blood or by ties of friendship.

The aim of this research has been to understand how care is provided to separated and unaccompanied children, by analyzing different types of care placements and reasons which take Professionals to choose among these placements.

As it has been described above, Professionals have as a instruments the BBIC/BIC-model, based on the CRC from 1989 and proposed by Kalverboer & Ziljstra (2006;2008); however, Professionals also described a ‘*child rights framework*’ which Urie Bronfenbrenner has developed in 1979 and which states that the child is in the center and the closest to the centre is the family, followed by the community, which is composed by cultural values that influence the children in their development (review 4.2.1. *BIC-model* and 4.2.2. *The Ecology of children’s rights*, p.24). All Professionals referred to take their decisions having in consideration the principle of ‘*best interest of the child*’, as well as, an age and needs assessment.

As referred above, the emotional support of close relationships have a protective effect in helping separated and unaccompanied children tackling the crisis situations of their lives. As such, has been questioned the reasons which made Professionals taking a decision of placing children into residential or foster care, as well as through same-cultural or cross-cultural background; Through the recommendations provided by national and international instruments it is possible to understand that the best care solution for these children are dependent on the particularities of each case and each individual and the answer were also obvious in the responses of Professionals: “*It depends on what the child wants.*” (P24)

When considering care placements, it has been possible to realize that Professionals consider residential care and foster care as the best types of care which can be provided to the child and each of them only depends on the child particularities and needs.

Cross-cultural placements are mostly regarding residential care, as in these situations Professionals have to undertake knowledge about culture and values which differ from a Western individualistic society and a collectivist way of life (Lundberg & Estabraghi, 2010; review 5.2. *Separated and unaccompanied children placed in care*, p.35); Professionals refer this type of cross-cultural placements are important for separated and unaccompanied children to learn faster the Swedish culture and values, without losing their own and refer that by providing cross-cultural placement we would emphasize the importance of having a diverse network and provide a long-term network to the child, in which the family is not only seen as professionals, but as families. However, cross-cultural foster families are almost inexistent in Sweden and Professionals refer the importance of investing on them.

### 7.3.2. Perspectives regarding same-cultural foster care

As referred previously, foster care can be referred to those Swedish families who receive the child; or, can also be referred to those families to which the child has some connection and which the child makes reference when the meeting at the Migration Board. Here, the aim was to understand “What makes you decide between placing them in a Swedish foster family or in a foreigner foster family (or with similar background)?”; however, it was easy to understand from all the interviews that the number of separated and unaccompanied children placed in Swedish foster families is almost inexistent.

*“When they move to families, is someone that they actually know or some relative, not Swedish families (...).” (P18)*

Due to this limitation faced when proceeding with the interviews, we will, during the findings examine only care provided by referenced foster families, this is, families to which the child comes directly and which are, in most of the cases, from the same background.

*“It’s very different, some municipalities don’t think is a good idea to place them in foreigner families, at least until they have really evaluated (...) so that is the main issue in many municipalities they have the concern that maybe we shouldn’t keep this child in this family until we have done a proper evaluation and I think that is -- to me, that is according to the rule book, that’s something that you should really think about(...).” (P17)*

According to the legal national instruments, these foster families have to undergo the same evaluation and requirements procedures as any other foster family; therefore, it was important to understand how are these foster families prepared, in reality, to receive these children. Professionals opinions on this topic were in agreement:

*“I think is good to have some preparation as a foster family, since this is a group of young people who need so much and they lack so much, they are new in the society, in the Swedish society (...) so I think that only because of this they should have some training or some education about the group, what they need, the problems they would face.” (P7)*

As we could observe from the statements above, even if professionals refer that there is an evaluation of the family before the child’s placement and that Municipalities make their efforts in order to proceed with a good evaluation and provide good care; all the participants have stated a lack of preparation and support to foster families. At the same



time, some participants also stated that in many cases this is rigorous evaluation is not really taken into practice, as if the child wants to stay in the family, preference is given to that even if the family does not present the best conditions to receive the child.

*“(...)I think it’s important to see what are the needs of these foster families(...)it is crucial that this foster families receive the same support as in a Swedish foster family would and maybe even more support in other ways, like with the language (...) so it’s important that social services answer -- make individual judgements on the (...)”*  
(P15)

In conclusion, participants suggested that if priority is given to the principle of ‘*best interest of the child*’, by allowing the child to stay in the family regardless of rigorous criteria; there has to be a better support provided to these families who have themselves special needs. In order to do so, participants suggested trainings to the families, by learning Swedish or basic knowledge regarding the Swedish culture, which can provide the families with skills and abilities which can contribute to improve care provided to separated and unaccompanied children. However, participants pointed as well the lack of Swedish foster homes as one of the matters that the Swedish system is lacking, by referring that:

*“Most of the children coming to Sweden are 16 years old, that means when they get their permission to stay in Sweden, they are very close to be 18, that means that they don’t meet with the foster families, because they are already treated as adults and that’s a problem, because then some of these children are kind of alone trying to find apartment and everything and it is here that we can do more for these children or young adults.”* (P4)

Hence, apart from more support to referenced families, which can provide a more natural environment to the child by being a family from the same background; it is also important to invest in placing these children in Swedish foster families in order to promote a familiar environment into their new social context.

Same-cultural and cross-cultural placements have been one of the topics discussed by Professionals, apart from residential care, a focus on foster care; As possible to understand through the interviews, separated and unaccompanied children when placed in foster care are mostly placed in same-cultural context, which above have been also referred as ‘*referenced foster families*’.

Professionals have manifested their opinions regarding same-cultural placements positively and negatively; they consider that there are numerous positive factors when placing a child with a family from the same background, however they also mentioned situations in which the child is neglected due to the circumstances of the family. Professionals believe that same-cultural placements or ‘*referenced families*’ are a great resource, however, they consider that there is not enough following-up in order to ensure that the needs of the child are covered and that the ‘*best interest of the child*’ is being followed. Therefore, Professionals have provided considerations for practice in this matter, which will be described later on in this Chapter.



### 7.3.3. Perspectives regarding the Godman/Legal Guardian

Every separated and unaccompanied child has the right to legal representation (DRC, 1959; review 4.2. *The principle of the Best Interest of the Child*, p.23). The Godman, or legal guardian, is the representative of the child during the time asylum seeking process; when the child gets his positive decision, this legal guardian change to a ‘*special appointed custodian*’, which can still be the same person, if it is of their both interest, however, has different responsibilities.

As the Godman appears as one of the most important persons in connection with the child, to know more about his characteristics, role and the way they carry their function, became crucial in order to keep understanding care provided to separated and unaccompanied children. Therefore, Professionals were questioned “*Which characteristics do you have in consideration when you choose the “Good man” for these children? And what is his role?*”; these questions were adapted according to the participants being interviewed.

#### a) Process

Överförmyndarförvaltningen is the Department responsible for legal representatives all over Sweden; at this Department there is a responsibility of selecting and matching the legal representative for separated and unaccompanied children, however, this Department might work differently according to the different Municipalities.

In Göteborg, before selecting the person which wants to become a legal representative, Överförmyndarförvaltningen, in accordance with the Swedish Migration Board and Save the Children, provide a training composed by 8 appointments in which different professionals talk about these children. Here, the selection of candidates to be legal representatives is dependent on their attendance to the training and proof of capacities to develop this role; however, other criteria are taken into consideration when selecting them, such as:

*“(...) they have to take these trainings first in order to be able to be a guardian. But the criteria are: not having criminal history or problematic credit records. We want guardians to be older than 25 years old but not older than 75. And we don’t choose relatives or care-givers of the child, because the guardian is supposed to make sure that the living situation is good and you cannot do that when you are the one who provides the care.” (P16)*

Therefore, fulfilling these legal requirements are the first step to become a legal representative of the child.

## **b) Matching**

Matching the legal representative with a child who is separated or unaccompanied appears to be a simple task, not due to the process itself, but because the information provided by the Swedish Migration Board is very basic and the urgency of choosing a legal representative which can help the child, as well as, accelerate his/her process, is emergent:

*“Well, with the other children perhaps we need to call someone, we do more research, with these children is more simple, we just need to find a guardian because we only receive the basic information about the child: gender, age, nationality and spoken language.; we try to make sure that the recently trained get their first case and the most important is to make this process fast.” (P16)*

## **c) Limitations**

According to the law, there is no limit regarding the number of children that the legal guardian can represent, however professionals referred *“A guardian should not have more than three children who are during the asylum seeking process, since there are many meetings.” (P16).*

As referred before, once the child gets his/her permit, the legal representation change from the status of *‘legal guardian’* to a *‘special appointed custodian’*; the representative can be the same person if it is of both interests; however in case there is a transition, this process might take some time to get concluded and the *‘legal guardian’* should keep developing his/her tasks with the child until the new representative is appointed.

## **d) Characteristics**

Participants seem to agree upon the characteristics that the legal representative of the child should have and pointed out characteristics such as:

*“One important characteristic I think the trustee should have is to be available for this child, you need to be very clear of what your task is from the beginning, that you are not a parent, but when the child needs your support you should be available for that.” (P5)*

*“(…) But also you have to be a good listener – (…)” (P17)*

As referred above, characteristics such as availability, engagement, good listener, to have life experience and knowledge about Sweden were described as basic characteristics that Professionals consider the legal representative should fulfill; at the same time, participants manifest, as well, that there should be a clear definition of roles and tasks and that should be understandable for children and professionals.

## e) Role

As well when concerning about the role of the legal representatives, participants seem to agree upon it and reinforced the need for professional's roles to be defined in order not to create speculations about each other's tasks.

*“So, the guardian is supposed only to be there to ensure that what is right for the child is being done. Make sure that the child goes to school but not follow the child to school. To make sure is the key word. Be as a guide; make sure everything is being done. Make sure others do what they are supposed to do.” (P16)*

From the responses above stated, it is clear that Professionals have had questions on which should be the legal representative role's; and among all the answers, to be a guide was the most repeated statement, to be a person that make sure what is for the '*best interest of the child*' is being followed, to help the child in practical needs, giving financial support and helping with the asylum process; however, participants seem to be, as well, very much aware of the great role that legal representatives have in ensure that the rights of the child are not violated.

Participants also referred that some of the child's expectations from the Godman are such as:

*“ They want the guidance too, but caring is even more important.” (P7)*

From the above transcripts, we can also observe the important role that the legal representative have in the child's life; being much more an adult figure of trust and care.

## d) Education

Even though Överförmyndarförvaltningen is the Authority/Department responsible for legal representatives, Municipalities conduct their work in various different ways. While conducting the interviews, it was clear that Göteborg is one of the few Municipalities which has training for legal representatives as mandatory; participants working in other Municipalities referred that this is a great issue that Municipalities are working on, at the moment.

*“The Godman, the guardian in Göteborg, in the municipality, has go to basic education and I think that's... that should be for foster families as well... yeah and for people working in care centres and so on--Ahmm... a basic education-- “What are the questions we are dealing with”-- it should be mandatory through all the system— (...)” (P15)*

As participants agreed, education/trainings to legal representatives appear to be crucial for a good development of the work being conducted with separated and unaccompanied children. However, Professionals working in Göteborg have, as well, critics to the training which is provided and mentioned a lack of follow-up of the cases:

*“(...) I think that, first of all, it’s a lack of training and the Godman, in a legal way (...).*

*The following up is the hard part, to know if a person is suitable for this task or not. (...). And I also think that a super part is that the kids should say how this person is and how it works, somehow you should make the child have an evaluation of the Godman and that should be done continuously.” (P17)*

Therefore, from what can be understood by analyzing the interviews, participants consider that apart from educational needs, there are also follow-up needs, which should include the child’s participation and his/her own opinion regarding his/her legal representative.

#### **e) Participants perspectives**

Participants manifested various different opinions regarding the legal representative; all of them have cases in which the legal representative developed a good role with the child, as well as the opposite.

*“Some of them are new so they don’t know everything but that is okay; but some of them are over engaged, they want to do so well that gives a wrong picture to the youth actually.” (P11)*

Situations such as being new as a legal representative, over engaged, or with many children, were some of the reasons that participants said affecting negatively the work developed by the legal representatives with these children; however, professionals suggested that by following-up more the legal representatives can have implications in the improvement of their work by identifying and being able to work on points which are less favorable.

Informants added as well that there should not be a misinterpretation of the Godman’s role; Godman should help the child with his/her asylum process but not to give false hopes that can the vulnerability of the child increase, such as in the situation below:

*“We had a kid who was Dublin and the good man kind of promise that the kid would stay, because that’s what he wanted.” (P18)*

The legal representative is, from all the professionals present in the child life in the host country, the most important adult figure, as the legal representative is the one who follows the child during the whole process of seeking asylum and is able to establish a connection of trust with the child more easily than any other professional.

Separated and unaccompanied children have the right for legal representation, as it is considered that guardians have a major role in ensuring that the rights of the child are not violated or abused (review 5.4. *The Swedish Context of children’s rights*. p.39; Appendix IV, pp.137-140). Above has been described the process that legal

guardians go through when to become a representative of separated or unaccompanied children, as well as, considerations from Professionals interviewed regarding the guardian's role, education and other perspectives.

Through the analysis of this section, it has been possible to understand that all Participants consider that guardians have a major importance in separated and unaccompanied children's life; Professionals have described guardians differently according to their experiences, however along all the interviews they referred that guardians are more prepared now than before. Still, from the interviews it has been possible to understand that Professionals consider that Guardians should have better defined their role in order to avoid situations of misunderstanding or neglect to the child, as well as education for Guardians should be mandatory among all Municipalities. As well, a common understanding among Professionals is the role of the guardians: to ensure the rights of the child are followed and not abused or neglected.

### **7.3.4. Perspectives regarding separated and unaccompanied children leaving care**

#### **a) *'Suddenly you are a grown up'***

According to the Care of Young Persons Act (1990:52), the termination of care should happen when care under this Act is no longer necessary; therefore, it shall cease no later than when the child turns 18, if decision has been taken according to the article 2<sup>nd</sup>; or shall be phased out when the young is 21, if the decision has been made according to the article 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Act.

*"It is pretty cold when you turn 18 and in the legal sense you are a grown up. (...) turning 18 in the social sense doesn't mean nothing, in a legal sense means everything. So, when we work with this group we know that we need to keep the contact with these guys."*(P6)

As participants referred, becoming 18 years old does not mean anything in the "social sense", but "in a legal sense means everything"; Participants shared the idea that even though separated and unaccompanied children are resourceful and with good networks, they are not ready to live an independent life from the moment they become 18, as they still need practical support and to keep contact with professionals.

#### **b) Moving out**

The transition from care placements to an independent life can be very challenging for separated and unaccompanied children; for this reason it was important to identify the perspectives that Professionals have of this transitional process.

In order to better accomplish the differences regarding care-leaving within separated and unaccompanied children placed in different care placements, a division was made

between “cross-cultural perspective” and “same cultural background”.

#### *From a cross-cultural perspective*

*“(…) so what the State and the Migration Board thought is that you have to have a basic education; gymnasium is the lowest way to get out on the labour market, if they can't when they are 17, they are not finished when they are out of the care, then, if they get an apartment they have to rely on the social welfare to get food and the rent.” (P9)*

As we can see from the statements above, Professionals consider that even though these children appear to be very independent, there is a great need for more support and more assistance in the leaving-care process, in order to assure that they have a good transition to the independent life and to avoid their reliance on the social services economic support. Participants referred that the expectations are higher when comparing the transition to independent life of this target group; as the limit for care is considered as 21 years old and when comparing to normal situations, Swedish children only live an independent life when they are “(…) sort of 28 or 25 (…)”.

Therefore, Professionals identified the transition from care placements to apartments with supervision as a majority measure for separated and unaccompanied children leaving care; this training apartments allow youth to maintain the possibility of receiving assistance, at the same time that prepares them for their independent life.

#### *From a same-cultural perspective*

*“Ahmm, the law says that we (...) -- people in foster families -- we have the responsibility to – (...) when they are getting adult, you help them to get a good life, but this depends, sometimes we can help them to have like a training flat (...) or they can leave in a (...) kind of a residential care. (...) sometimes they choose to stay in the foster family (...).” (P1)*

From participants experiences in foster care, it is still common that separated and unaccompanied children move to training apartments when they are about to leave care, however, it is also an option to maintain in the foster family; in this last case, the youth have to pay the agreed amount of money to the foster family.

Again, it was possible to identify a lack of preparation and support in the process of care-leaving, which is crucial for separated and unaccompanied children, as these target group lacks very often a supportive network and practical knowledge to manage alone in the new host society.

#### **c) Lack of flats**

*“The number of unaccompanied children is raising, we started 6/7 years ago with 300 people coming every year, now we have 3000 coming, so it is a big change also for*

*municipalities and for children getting stocked in transit houses.” (P4)*

The lack of apartments has been pointed out as the main concern when the process of leaving-care; participants referred that in many situations youth are not able to move from their care placements or from the training flats, due to the lack of apartments in Gothenburg city; however, participants from Stockholm and Malmö referred the same challenges.

At the same time, professionals referred some structural challenges regarding the lack of flats, such as:

*“There are those apartment companies who promise apartments for all youth in general, and they do this if children have 12 months with support, which means, someone has to come 2/3 times a week to check and give support; and the contract of the apartment will be on the name of the person who comes to visit them those times a week, just after 12 months if you have done everything right, the contract is from the youth.”*

Participants referred that this accompaniment is useful as it can provide youth a support and prepare them to their independent life; however, they referred that in many cases the problem afterwards is that for the youth to have the contract on their own name (after the 12 months) they have to have “(...) someone who will sign that they will pay if he can't pay (...)” and in most of the situations “(...) he doesn't know anyone – (...) – So -- they are very lonely I think (...)”. This demonstrates a structural challenge which can imply serious challenges for youth self-esteem and sense of autonomy.

#### **d) Challenges**

*“I have heard that when researchers do follow-ups, they see that these kids, to a large extend, don't have enough schooling, which does not put them in a better place, if you compare with to other Swedish kids who are born here.” (P17)*

Apart from the challenges identified before regarding the lack of preparation and support for care-leaving, the lack of the flats and structural challenges to sign a contract; Professionals identified other challenges such as lack of schooling or poor education background, lack of supportive networks and difficulties in finding a job; Participants defend that all these challenges are easier to be worked out if these children and youth are followed by supportive adults, who can help them in practical questions in the Swedish context of life.

#### **e) Coping strategies**

After an understanding of the challenges identified by Professionals, it was also necessary to understand the coping strategies used to deal with these situations; participants referred that they try to give support and to prepare youth to the process of care leaving and they also referred that, in some situations, they advise the trustees to



keep contact.

As a strategy to ensure that youth have knowledge about all practical concerns and all the basic skills for their autonomous and adult life, a new project has been brought up by Professionals working in one of the houses ruled by Göteborg Stad. The project is named "*Hitta rätt*" ("*Find the right*") and it aims to provide material to the youth about how to manage by themselves in questions such as health, education and identity.

*"(...) this is very interesting as a check list -- so, if the child -- don't complete -- or miss some of this parts -- needs to face a problem (...) So-- this is health, education, identity, find relationships, to manage yourself in social life, so-- we -- go through every question-- and we have a protocol here, we sign, the person sign, the contact person sign -- so -- at the end you can see development--. When he comes to the age 21 you should have been able to do everything but for us, for the evaluation, it is good to say-- some can manage before 21 -- some cannot finish before 21 -- so just to give you an (idea) -- how is she or how is he doing --!" (P22)*

When questioning about separated and unaccompanied children leaving care, participants showed to be reluctant as they haven't had much experience of their children leaving residential or foster care; however, all of them referred situations which they considered as important when thinking about moving out.

Firstly, one of the expressions "*Suddenly you are a grown up*", which fulfilled almost all the responses from Participant, considering that from the moment the child turns 18 or latest 21, he/she is expected to have acquired all the skills to live independently without guidance or support; Professionals identified it as a difficult task as most of these children have a lack of network to rely on once they become 18/21; however, differences have been found between situations in which separated and unaccompanied children stayed in cross-cultural placements, mostly residential care, and in same-cultural placements, as Professionals referred that in foster care, sometimes the child stays in the family longer than 21, as they can rely on the family and they do not want to leave the family without being prepared or finishing their studies.

Other situations pointed out by Professionals along all the interviews has been the lack of flats and the strict rules; they referred that in some situations children get stuck when they are ready to move out due to the lack of flats, in other situations they have mentioned the strict rules to have a flat contract which sometimes, if the child doesn't have a strong network, prevents him/her to do so.

As challenges of these situations, Professionals referred the lack of preparation and support provided to children in this stage; The project *Hitta rätt* is being developed by one of the Teams working to Göteborg Stad and aims to ensure that children get the skills they need for an independent life, while living in their residences, by ensuring that can manage situations regarding "*health, education, identity, find relationships, to manage yourself in social life*" (P22).

## 7.4. Considerations on Integration: obstacles and challenges

### 7.4.1. Perceptions on Integration

Integration has been a concept discussed among different ranges and disciplines of social sciences. Local integration, social inclusion and exclusion have been pointed out as some of the main criteria for the resettlement of refugees and other migrants in the host Country or community.

Therefore, it has been important to understand the perceptions of Professionals interviewed regarding integration; “What does the word ‘integration’ mean to you?” was the question asked in order to understand their ideas and definitions of integration.

It is important to refer that when this question was made, most of the Professionals laughed and became stuttering when answering, which showed that they were reluctant on the answer they would give; however most of them ended up referring their concept of integration according to their own experiences and perspectives, and not a theoretical definition given by any other author, which was a great starting point to understand starting points related to this enormous concept.

#### a) **Integration as a two-way process**

*“Well, I think it means that you have to fit into the system, the swedish system, without losing your identity.” (P3)*

*“(...) it is a two-way process, both need to adapt, both need to have something new to build, society and children (...)”.* (P4)

From the statements above it has been possible to understand that Professionals consider integration as concept which is difficult to describe, integration has been considered as ‘*something in between*’, or a ‘*two way process*’ between assimilation and segregation; Professionals referred integration as a process in which individuals and host community adapt, a process in which individuals do not have to leave behind their values, culture or religion, but have to acknowledge the context (culture, religion and values) of the host community.

#### b) **Rights, duties, values, religion and social culture as main aspects of Integration**

*“Yeah, it is not a question about assimilation, integration is something else, to feel that you are part of the society, know your rights and obligations and of course try to create some kind of social network.” (P6)*

While participants approached what integration means to them, they also referred to the inter-relation between rights, duties, values, religion and social culture in the integration process. Participants referred to the importance of cultural aspects and the respect for each other's point of view; It has been also consider as important that Swedish foster families can provide a better context of the Swedish society to separated and unaccompanied children, which, according to some participants, is a way to provide a better context for integration in which they can acknowledge both cultures and understand the different contexts.

Being part of the society, by acknowledge and defending the same rights, responsibilities and social culture, have been overall manifested as essential for integration.

### c) **Individual integration and society acceptance**

*“The Government talks about integration but their decisions are about assimilation.”*  
(P4)

When responding regarding integration, Professionals could not avoid talking about segregation, which is considered to be a the greatest barrier for integration, mostly in cases in which asylum seeking and refugee children do not have much contact with the Swedish community.

By approaching Professionals perspectives regarding integration, it has been possible to notice that, in many situations, participants consider integration to be linked to the knowledge about the society and to the condition of rights and duties holder, which allow individual participation in the society.

Participants referred that the concept of integration is very broad. However, if considering integration as individual autonomy, knowledge about rights and duties and participation in the society, it means that Governments are responsible for creating and implementing measures which facilitate all these matters. It is according to this principle of State's responsibilities for the society that Professionals referred:

*“And in Sweden we have a discussion -- in Sweden, and probably in other European Countries -- you tend to put it as, the individual should be integrated into the society, you know? And I think that is flipping the whole sentence, matter, in a wrong way. I think we should say that the society has to integrate the person, which in my world will help for a better society and a better individual.”* (P17)

According to participants, even though Government's discourse about integration, their policies are much more towards the opposite: assimilation approach and to an individual integration into the resettlement country; this is, therefore, a contradictory approach if considering integration as the *something in between*;

**d) “To find your own way in the society”**

*“For me it means to have the knowledge of the society you are in, that you know what to do, where to go, when. Having this basic knowledge of the society but also to feel a part of the society, to feel that you are not someone outside looking to it, be participating and feel that you can contribute.” (P7)*

As referred before, Professionals identified ‘*integration*’ as a ‘*two way process*’ and as ‘*something in between*’ segregation and assimilation; meanwhile, they referred that integration is about finding ‘*your own way in the society*’, by acknowledging the social culture, the Swedish system and finding a way not to lose the culture of origin but at the same time understanding other cultures, religions and beliefs; a balance between the country of origin and the country of resettlement in which the individual is able to feel ‘*part of the society*’, to participate “*and feel that you can contribute*”.

All along this Dissertation, the terms ‘*integration*’ and ‘*social inclusion*’ have been used; a rights-based approach give preference to the term ‘*social inclusion*’ instead of ‘*integration*’ because ‘*social inclusion*’ can be perceived as a proactive and social development approach to social well-being, based on the principle of removal of risk barriers (Saloojee, 2003; review 4.7. *Integration and social inclusion*, p.29).

When using the word ‘*integration*’ during the interviews, Professionals seemed to be reluctant when defining integration, but they identified it as a ‘*two way process*’, between assimilation and acculturation; a long process which takes time.

Professionals related integration to a perspective of rights-owner, individual integration and society acceptance, to know the language, to have a network, which is a closer definition of ‘*social inclusion*’ that defends this principle linked to policies designed to ensure that everyone can participate in the society, regardless of the race, language, culture, gender, etc.

Considering an ‘*inclusive society*’ a society characterized by the respect for the identity of all individuals and a reasonable balance between the rights and duties of everyone and of the society as a whole, we can consider that along all the interviews, Professionals have been talking about the need for social inclusion.

Moreover, Professionals have also identified that meaningless of the designation but the procedure, Governments tend to talk about ‘*integration*’ without providing the structure for it, promoting situations in which separated and unaccompanied children feel ‘*not fitting in the system*’, excluded.

#### **7.4.2. Perspectives regarding Children’s integration in the society**

After a process of understanding Professionals ideas and perspectives regarding integration and its complexity, it became important to understand their perspectives and ideas linked to the reality of separated and unaccompanied children.

Therefore, it has been questioned “Regarding your experience, how do you think these children feel integrated in the society?”; Professionals opinions on this topic are diverse, however this diversity could be better understood when related to the barriers pointed out as the cause for separated and unaccompanied children to be more or less integrated

in the society.

After an analysis of Professionals responses, their answers were divided into 5 different categories: Previous knowledge/Educational background barriers; Care provided and network; Residential Care *versus* Foster Care; Lack of network and Loneliness feelings; Contact with home country as key to resettlement; Asylum status (and structural segregation); Swedish Educational System barriers; Municipalities and their different plans of action.

#### **a) Previous knowledge/ Educational Background barriers**

As it has been referred before, many reasons were pointed out while Professionals were saying their perceptions of children's integration in the society. One of the common statements was the child's previous knowledge/education background which appears as a barrier to their integration.

Professionals referred that integration is a process, but it might be easier and faster according to the circumstances around the child; however, they also pointed out that Countries of origin are determinant for the child's integration, as their integration depends on their capacity to learn a new language, for instance, most of the Professionals referred that children who have been thought English language have a better capacity to integrate and learn Swedish much faster than youth who have only read the Qua'raan in Arabic letters and have never learned any other vocabulary.

Professionals have referred that all these matters are very important when considering youth integration and adaptation into the host society/community.

*“I don't know, some of them they learn how to speak the language very fast and then that is maybe easier but I can't tell cause I see them here and we have an interpreter and sometimes we don't have, because they want it anymore, they feel they can already express themselves.” (P25)*

As we can understand from all the statements above, separated and unaccompanied children's integration is dependent on their education background, as their development in the school is dependent on which kind of knowledge do they have from their home countries; As it is possible to acknowledge from these responses, children from Afghanistan have usually better education background than children from Somalia due to the fact that most of them already know some English language and latin vocabulary, while children from Somalia mostly know only Arabic.

As well, it has been referred that the route they had done before arriving in Sweden might also help their knowledge of different languages and vocabulary and provide them the skills for a faster learning and adaptation.

#### **b) Care provided and Network**

In this same question, Professionals provided a various different range of responses. Care provided and network has been again one of the aspects referred as barriers for integration; Professionals referred the barriers that separated and unaccompanied

children face when integrating themselves into the host society and how it also differs from the care provided and the networks around them.

*“I think it takes time, it is a process --.” (P20)*

*“(...)it is a process that takes a long time -- even me -- I am not integrated as I wish, when I am living for more than 20 years in Sweden -- when these guys are living for one--two--not more than that--so--they have a long way to go – inside -- is a process -- they have a chance to integrate in their schools (...) -- everything what we have -- the environment -- so -- I think they are in the right way --.” (P22)*

### *Residential Care versus Foster Care*

Professionals have been referring consecutively that integration is a process which takes a long time, it is not a simple and easy process, it involves adaptation and it depends on all other factors around the child; however they have also referred how residential and foster care contribute in different ways towards the child's integration.

*I don't think they are integrated enough -- and I think that is the problem -- I think is good that they come to their relatives, I must say that -- but the problem is when their relatives are not integrated -- they don't have their own model and actually they don't have somebody who can help them (...).” (P14)*

Professionals perspectives vary according to their own experiences, as some have more experience working with children in residential care and other in foster families; however, they tried to provide responses which could be generalized according to what they can refer from the majority of their experiences. Therefore, most of them have referred that positive and negative points from both types of care: in one hand they have referred that youth are better integrated in residential care than in foster families due to the contacts they make and in the other hand, it is referred that the fact that usually there are many children from the same nationality in the residential care results in a segregation, as the children tend to talk more on their own language and be more with other children of the same group; At the same time, it is believed that in the foster families they learn faster about the host society, culture and traditions, however it has also been referred that it becomes a problem when the foster families are not integrated themselves in the community ( review 5.2. *Separated and children placed in care*, p.35).

### **c) Lack of network, Loneliness Feelings and contact with home Country as key to Resettlement**

*“(...) to feel at home in Sweden I think you really need to settle what you have left and - if there is possibility to visit your family or your home country, this is something that social services and other people working with these children really should support (...).”(P15)*



The lack of network which provides loneliness feelings has also been commented as one of the major barriers for children to feel integrated in the society. As referred in the statements above, the way which Professionals referred as good to go through these questions of loneliness feelings is the contact with the family and with their home Country, which appears as essential in the process of resettlement.

As described through the interaction and systems theory, all the interactions around the child influence positively and negatively, thus, by placing a child into a family without giving the proper support and the needed follow-up, might have a negative effect into the child life, settlement, adaptation and inclusion.

#### **d) Asylum status and structural segregation**

There are numerous barriers to separated and unaccompanied children integration, however these barriers become even more noticed when they are structural barriers conducting to segregation instead of integration and this matter has been pointed out by the participants.

*“If I look at these two groups again I would say the Dublin boys struggle a lot, they are very much put outside the systems, even though they are allowed to go to school and so on, it is different from the kids that have permit to stay, even though they have been here for 6 months, they are treated as beginners, they never advance in school, they only have basic Swedish.” (P5)*

As we can understand from the statements above, being an “asylum seeker” and being a “refugee” means to be under different circumstances; Participants referred that separated and unaccompanied children receive different treatment according to their legal status and it becomes more noticed in cases in which these children are also “Dubliners” (under the Dublin regulation), as their treatment will not be as children who can move forward in their lives, as the opposite will happen: they will always be treated as beginners in the system and no opportunities will be given to them.

At the same time, participants referred that in many situations children who are seeking asylum and haven’t received their permit, such as cases of children who are during months under the Dublin Regulation waiting to be deported, feel hopeless and can’t see a future further themselves, being always worried about their life circumstances and being not able to put effort into their integration.

#### **e) Barriers of the Swedish Educational System**

*“(…) From our experience, it is very difficult to get a good atmosphere in the classes, because when the child arrives to the class, you need to rebuilt the process of being a group together  
(…)Because the problem is that in some class they focus too much on teaching Swedish*



*language and they forget other subjects such as history or maths, and when they come to normal class then they are very away behind of others.” (P4)*

Professionals were concerned about the barriers of the Swedish Educational System which, according to the participants has a high demand for children who are not at the same level of education, as well questions related to situations in which children are thought only Swedish language due to their status which does not allow them to improve into different courses and methods and also because of situations that oblige the classes to be re-built each time when a new child comes or leaves the class.

These have been considered the main disadvantaged points which Professionals referred

#### **f) Municipalities and their different plans of action**

*“It should be the Municipalities interests to see that this kid is part of the Municipality and will start building a life here (...) that’s a challenge for me and for people working with this, that all Municipalities have to take this issue as a whole and make decisions regarding these kids (...). You have to look at it as: the Municipality is receiving this kid, what can the Municipality do, as a whole? The Municipalities are big organizations with many different parts of it and an idea of what do you want and --.” (P17)*

As we can understand from the statement above, Professionals are also concerned about the different ways Municipalities provide care to separated and unaccompanied children, namely schooling which affects their integration in the community; Professionals referred that Municipalities shall be looking at these children as children with potential instead of looking at them as victims. Participants emphasized the importance for Municipalities to consider what they can improve for the well-being of the community and what can be done for separated and unaccompanied children.

Once understood the meaning of integration and social inclusion for participants of the research, it was important to question *“Regarding your experience, how do you think these children feel integrated in the society?”* and responses were various as during this question Professionals identified a large range of factors which might prevent the child’s integration, such as their previous knowledge/educational background that has influence in their learning; the care which is provided, as it differs of the kind of network they have to facilitate or not their social inclusion – the positive and negative outcomes from the interactions; and asylum status which contributes in the process of resettlement.

Resettlement is the process that separated and unaccompanied children, as well as other refugees, go through once they have flee their Countries to another and try to live with their past facing the uncertainties of an asylum procedures. Thus, resettlement is originally related to *“the move as a sequence of forced migration”* in which *coping strategies* and *resilience* can be found (Kohli, 2007, p.16; review 4.4. *Resilience and Resettlement*, p. 27).

As Professionals referred from the beginning, separated and unaccompanied children are very resourceful and strong individuals usually with *‘coping strategies’* and

'*problem-solving*' skills which are crucial in their process of '*resettling*' in the host country (Newland, 2002). Therefore, resettlement is a process composed by events and experiences commonly found in refugees and asylum seekers.

Factors that condition integration, or, social inclusion are the same that condition resettlement; Berry (1991) proposed a framework which explains the phases, events and experiences that influence separated and unaccompanied children during this process. As possible to see in the Fig. 14 (p.132), separated and unaccompanied children, such as other refugees, are through different stages and experiences since the moment they prepare to flee their countries; The claimant, settlement and adaptation phase are the phases which Professionals identified when the child has arrived in Sweden, since he/she applies for asylum through the next stages.

Considering that resettlement, integration and social inclusion are processes to which the child goes through, it is important to have in consideration the structural barriers identified above by Professionals such as: the lack of network provided to the children, loneliness feelings and the contact with the home country as a key to resettlement; the asylum status which places children in different categories and give them different opportunities; the barriers identified with the Swedish educational system which some Professionals considered as too demanding in comparison with other children and, at last, structural questions regarding the different plans of action of Municipalities which promote situations of inequality.

#### **7.4.3. Methods & Ways to achieve specific goals towards their integration**

*“We work as well in integrating them having economy classes, how to avoid being in the bad trends of the State, how to pay your builds rights, we have certain things like this, because they might move in with another person who is Swedish, a boy or a girl, whatever, and most of these guys don't know how to handle an apartment by themselves. These very small things are a way to integrate them, individually and in the society as well, to not make them feel outside or in “need of assistance.” (P18)*

Statements above show us how Professionals work towards separated and unaccompanied children's integration, by motivating their autonomy and their "*self-sufficiency*", providing the basic skills for their independence; Simple tasks such as paying the builds and know how to look for a job are mentioned all over the interviews as the main tasks that separated and unaccompanied children have to learn and be able to manage before moving out of this kind of care system.

As well, Professionals referred the importance of promoting the connections of these children with other groups, by "*(...) placing them into sports, like boxing, table tennis (...)*" in order to achieve good levels of interaction and integration.

*“Ahmm -- we have something -- it's a paper where you write the goals you know to-- for each specific child-- ahmm we are trying to -- do you know BBIC? (...)The possibilities to manage your own life (...)" (P14)*

*“(...) we want to work a lot with the article 12 in the CRC, I mean the right of the child to express his opinion and so on-- I think that’s one of our special goals in integration -- in integrate the children in decision-making also, we have a project with 5 schools where you meet Swedish children (...)” (P15)*

Professionals referred among all their interviews to be working towards integration through promoting self-efficiency and autonomy among children in order to prepare them for the “moving-out” stage and for adulthood; Among methods and ways to do it, Participants referred to follow the BBIC model, which has been described along this Dissertation in the Chapter IV.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has been described, as well, as the instrument followed in order to achieve integration. Among all basic rights referred before, Professionals also described as fundamental rights towards integration the process of “participation in decision making”, which puts the child in the centre and gives him/her a voice to be heard.

Integration is a process understood in different ways by Professionals and methods and ways taken into account when working towards integration vary according to the field of work. Participants working with the Municipalities have in mind that to work towards integration means to prepare and empower Municipalities with “*the capacity to receive immigrants refugees or unaccompanied children*”, by providing places in the Municipalities and a multi-cultural and friendly environment instead of an environment of indifference and discrimination.

*“We have a method-- it is called “hitta rätt” (find the right) -- we have like a checklist, so this is just the beginning now -- so we may evaluate when one child comes to (...) and leave after 2 years or 3 years, so we can see the timeline, is it enough or not enough, is she or her integrated or not-- How long does it take -- so-- this time we have a prognostic -- but yeah -- it is a long process --.” (P22)*

Just as each Professional has its own way and method to work towards integration of separated and unaccompanied children, they also create, as Teams, methods to facilitate this work. One of the examples which has been described during the interviews has been a newly developed manual from a Team of Professionals working to Göteborgs Stad, which is named *Hitta rätt* (Find the Right) and it is a material organized through different sections aimed to give to these children the skills they need to be integrated in the Swedish society and to better understand their own development.

As described in the statement above this manual is organized through different themes such as: Health, Education, Social Cooperation, Independence, Family relations, Identity and development; and while reading and working on this manual children will be interacting with the Professionals who will help them to fill out the information and with other youth, at the same time that they will be able to develop and improve their skills knowledge and skills regarding their own integration in the society.

*“Do you work towards specific goals in terms of these children integration? (If yes, which ones and how?)”* was the question that followed all the discussion about integration and social inclusion. Here, most of the Professionals referred not to have a specific way or method to work towards integration and social inclusion, but defended that they try to follow the child needs and work more in practical questions, preparing

them for the moment of leaving care. Other Professionals referred to be working in a specific project “*hitta rätt*” which has been described above, aiming to provide to separated and unaccompanied children skills for an independent life.

## 7.5. SOCIAL WORK WITH SEPARATED AND UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Social work has been developing during the last two centuries and globalisation influences the way social work is constructed, thus, professional social workers are increasingly expected to work with vulnerable communities and communities at risk, such as refugees and separated and unaccompanied children (review 5.7. *Social Work with separated and unaccompanied children*, p.44)

### 7.5.1. Challenges identified by Professionals

#### a) Lack of network

Professionals identified various different challenges on their daily work with separated and unaccompanied children and said that many aspects, namely at a structural level, have to be improved.

*“Humm, giving them a-- chance to have a network, a network with adults or others-- because these children are very lonely, they don't have friends from their own ages or nationalities, (...) when they are 18/19 and move to their own apartments, they don't have this support that other Swedish children have, they have their grandparents, their parents, other adults nearby (...)” (P2)*

*“Is to help them to get their own persistent network, people who are there when we are gone.” (P11)*

Among the responses of all the participants, the lack of network has been pointed out as one of the main challenges faced. Professionals had in mind that this lack of network has important consequences in the way these children integrate into the society, at the same time that it has repercussions in their future, as they do not have any adult figure of reference to whom they can ask for help when they need, for instance, when they move out from the residential or foster care.

Therefore Professionals stated that to have a ‘kontaktperson’ who can help in this process of integration and knowledge about the society is important for these children as an adult-key in their lives; However, Participants referred the fact that these ‘kontaktperson’ is not paid once these children are out of care and the link within the child will have to be broken, which is also one of the challenges of the moving-out stage.

At the same time, when considering the child network and activities promoted, Professionals defended that one of the challenges is that activities and projects promoted to separated and unaccompanied children usually exclude them from the rest of the society instead of including them, as these activities and projects are usually exclusively for these children and do not involve other children with whom they could interact and establish relations.

## **b) Municipalities Responsibilities**

Between the challenges identified, Participants said, as well, the numerous challenges which appear within the Municipalities, starting with the number of places to receive separated and unaccompanied children which is smaller than it should be, as well, the differences of handling these cases among municipalities.

*“(...) right now is concerning the spots, we need a lot more spaces and that’s a really big deal for the Government right now, so that is the main part (...) I think the challenge is to inspire the Municipalities and to make the Municipalities see that this is something that all Municipalities do as a whole (...) We are trying to discuss with the Municipalities that are not receiving kids and we discuss with the Municipalities that already have places, one or two, but we are still far from numbers of spots.” (P17)*

Therefore, Professionals said that efforts are being made in order to increase the number of Municipalities receiving separated and unaccompanied children and to improve care provided, by decreasing the differences of treatment among Municipalities and to reduce situations of discrimination or, even neglect.

## **c) Separated and unaccompanied children in the centre**

Meanwhile, other Participants said that there are also other kinds of challenges, which can be due to culture and/or life circumstances to which the child has been through; these situations are such as: to gain the trust as a person from the Authorities or to make them understand that they have rights, apart from duties, through their networks.

*“I think, at the beginning, it is to gain the trust as a person from the authorities, that you are not dangerous and that you don’t want to harm them.” (P24)*

Challenges such as the ones described above have been referred as common among Professionals due to the fact that Professionals are most of the times representing Authorities and the child does not usually know if the Professional whom to trust or with whom to share different situations; On the other hand, Professionals found also hard to understand if all the Professionals around the child are doing a good work with the child and telling them about their rights and duties. This can be understood as a dual situation which occurs due to the structure Professionals follow in their daily practice and due to the interaction within the child and all the different roles of Professionals involved in their process.

The Fig.15 (pp.133-134) has been provided by one of the Professionals interviewed in this research and it represents the situations described as challenges, from the Professionals point of view.

As we can observe in Fig.15 (pp. 133-134), the process that each separated and unaccompanied child goes through and the connections within different organisms of the society who represent different roles creates a tension and, in many situations, a conflict to with the best interest of the child.

Following the Fig. 15 (pp.133-134) we can see the development of all this Professional network and the connections between all of them; through the stages described we can understand the role of each Authority in the process of separated and unaccompanied children, seeking asylum and/or with a refuge permit; These stages which involve numerous Professionals and numerous different roles put the child in an unfavourable situation, in which their best interest is threatened for the simple fact that they are uncertain in whom to trust or with whom to share different parts of their lives at the same time that increases they worries each time they face someone from the authorities.

When requested to identify challenges found on their daily work, Professionals mentioned mostly the three situations described above: Lack of children's network; Municipalities responsibilities; Resilience and identification of children's needs.

As referred during this Chapter, while analysing other themes which have been discussed with Professionals, the lack of children's network is crucial as it influences their process of resettlement and social inclusion, described above; Therefore, special attention should be placed into these situations in order to promote children's interaction with other organisms and individuals of the society, to avoiding social exclusion and promote social inclusion.

As well, Municipalities responsibilities have been one of the challenges found by Professionals as interfering with their practice. Municipalities in Sweden assumed their responsibility with separated and unaccompanied children since 2006, previously it was the Swedish Migration Board having this responsibility. As described before, there are two types of Municipalities, Municipalities of arrival and Municipalities of introduction; however, the concerns Professionals have are related to the fact that, in 2012, out of 290 Swedish Municipalities only 237 are Municipalities of introduction which generates a lack of placements for these children.

The number of separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden has been growing, however, there is still a lack of placements for these children; Professionals consider that it is about inspiring Municipalities to receive these children and to discuss with them about the social capital of separated and unaccompanied children.

Combining the two challenges identified: the lack of network and lack of municipalities responsibilities with these children; and working with them in a positive way, such as by creating projects or programs which provide these children the interaction with other youth or adults in ways that they can extend their networks; or even creating different structures for care placements, for instance, by promoting cross-cultural foster care; and by raising consciousness and awareness in the Municipalities to receive their children; the result would be not only the extension of the child's networks, as well as, developing the role of community-building possessed by the youth and civic engagement, which is by itself a synonym of using social capital (Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2011; review 4.8. *Social Capital*, p.31)

At last, separated and unaccompanied children in the centre has been also considered as one of the concerns from Professionals participating in this research. Through an analysis of what has been commented, we can understand these concerns by having as reference an interaction and systems theory as well as an ecological perspective, which allow us to understand the interactions within all the systems which can influence positively or negatively the child with those interactions. Here, the concerns of the Professionals are the amount of systems represented by different turning around the



child, which limits, or prevents, their participation in decision-making (review 4.3. *Children as agents in need of belonging*, p.25).

### **7.5.2. Professionals perspectives, considerations and coping strategies regarding asylum seeking rejections**

#### **a) Dublin rejections**

*“The rejection is mostly Dublin cases. Some of them know, some of them have been told when they come here, and some of them have been living in Europe for quite a long time, but others, they don’t understand at all.” (P5)*

*“And Dublin is horrible, horrible and I think everyone agrees with that.” (P9)*

As we could understand from the interviews, when working with separated and unaccompanied children, most of the cases which Professionals meet are Dublin cases, this means, cases which are under the Dublin Regulation and there are almost no rejections considering other cases.

Being Sweden a Country in the extreme North of Europe, rare are the cases in which children haven’t been through other European Countries, so these children who haven’t been marked as ‘*Dubliners*’ are considered to be ‘*the lucky ones*’.

#### **b) ‘Living in worries’**

Moreover, Professionals shared their perspectives and experiences regarding these situations of rejection, how do these children manifest their feelings, how do situations of rejection affect the group and how do professionals cope with these situations.

*“Some people got rejected, and it is difficult to work with it, they feel so bad, you have to support them but you need to keep your professionalism. As youth councilors we never go through this discussion, we are just care providers that is the function of the trustees. (...) But it affects the people living there, you can see that when someone is rejected, so many things happen in the house, conflicts in the house-- “A small thing happens and the whole house explodes”, they lock themselves in the room--.”(P7)*

From what it has been possible to understand during the interviews, all Professionals referred to feel very uncomfortable with the situations of separated and unaccompanied children who are under the Dublin Regulation; they manifested many times that the ‘*Dubliners*’ are under special circumstances in their lives, they said that these children have, most of the times, been through harsh situations before arriving in Sweden; they have mostly been through Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, Germany and other countries

until they reach Sweden and the conditions in which they have been in those Countries were not the most desirable. Once getting to Sweden, they are still under special circumstances for being ‘Dubliners’; most of the times (except cases of Countries such as Greece, to which Sweden is not deporting refugees) they wait for their answers during several months and when they receive their rejection they wait for being deported.

According to Professionals and also to statistics provided by Migrationsverket, the duration time to receive an answer regarding the asylum process is decreasing significantly, as professionals referred:

*“My experience is that since the law change they get the answer within 2 months, but of course you have cases when you wait one year, but rarely.” (P7)*

However, even if the process time to provide an answer regarding the asylum request is decreasing, many Participants referred that these children, when receiving their rejection and/or when they understand that they are going to be rejected and consequently deported, are forced to go through ways such as criminality, in order to be able to stay inside the country; or to run away, as it has been understood to be the most common situation among separated and unaccompanied children.

### **c) Care provided after rejection**

Professionals referred that their practice is governed by the Social Act, which states that the child has the right to receive care independently of his/her status; therefore, even if the child has received a rejection from the Swedish Migration Board and is not allowed to be in the Country, it is not the responsibility of Professionals working with these children to take an action, it will only be the duty of the Police to do so. Meanwhile, Professionals referred as well that children are afraid of being caught by the police when being under these circumstances of possible deportation.

*“Our responsibility is to work according to the social act, not according to the migration law, so if we have a minor, it doesn’t matter if he has a permit or not. It is our responsibility to take care of them, we have children who have been here for 3 and 4 years without permission to stay but they still go to school and we support them. (...)” (P24)*

Situations in which separated and unaccompanied children ‘non-Dubliners’ receive rejections are, as said before, uncommon; However, as participants referred it can happen in situations in which the Migration Board considers that the region from where the child claims to be is not dangerous enough for the Swedish State to provide asylum to the child. Still, in these situations, even if the child has received a rejection, he/she cannot be deported without any member of the family or acquaintance to receive him/her; therefore, in these cases, the Swedish Migration Board tries to conduct an investigation in order to find someone linked to the child to be able to deport him/her.

#### d) Strategies to deal with rejections

*“We cannot do much, what we can do is the meetings with them, the discussions individually, but as well trying to motivate them to learn English, to make them understand that we have to be realistic (...) so that’s the way to try to strengthen themselves before they have to leave or before they decide to leave by themselves. (...)So in a way we try to strengthen them before they leave.” (P18)*

Professionals referred that they do not really have coping strategies to deal with situations of rejection, however they manifested that they try to talk with them, to advice and give them skills, such as teaching them English, which can be useful once they ‘are gone’ or deported; they referred that they have to keep their role in order not to give hope and not to discourage, at the same time, not to interfere with the role of the Guardian and Migration Board.

#### e) ‘Living in hiding’

Moreover, all of the Professionals manifested their worries regarding the situation of separated and unaccompanied children under the Dublin Regulation, justifying that many of the children who actually ‘run away’ before being deported, live ‘in hiding’ under circumstances which place them in even more disadvantage and vulnerable conditions.

*“I think, all of Government Agencies who work with these issues, together with the Municipalities, have to discuss that, because that is an issue that no one discuss and it’s a large number of kids who disappear, not only the Dublin. (...)I think we have to address this issue concerning kids that disappear, because some kids disappear and they live in ‘hiding’ so that they can after 1,5 years apply again and then the Dublin Convention is not applicable, which means that living in ‘hiding’ for one or two years it has its risks for the kids, for the society -- I cannot say whether we should keep following the Dublin Convention or not, I think that that discussion is a lot longer -- There are life stories on how bad system in those countries [Greece, Italy--] are and I think that we have to listen, you know -- reconsider, like we do with Greece or Malta, but that’s a question that addresses and lift us a lot higher, to discuss it nationally about kids disappearing.” (P17)*

Therefore, Professionals think it is important to discuss these situations of children who are under the Dublin Regulation and who end up disappearing from the system during several years; they refer that new solutions have to be found to avoid such situations of increased vulnerability and exclusion.

In Sweden any procedure involving a child must be handled as priority. Separated and unaccompanied children are not exception; however, being under the Dublin Regulation generates the difference (review 3.1.5. *Dublin Convention*, p.20). Therefore, Professionals have been describing situations of rejection, represented mostly by ‘Dubliners’; situations in which separated and unaccompanied children are living ‘in worries’, being afraid of being rejected and caught by the Police Officers; running away

and living in *'hiding'* not having fulfilled their basic rights.

In these terms, many questions are raised. Professionals mentioned that 9 out of 10 'Dubliners' run away; perhaps some of them are living in *'hiding'* inside the Country not having their basic rights fulfilled and perhaps even being neglected and abused.

In Sweden, every child has the following rights: 'right of being recognized as children', 'right to education', 'right to health', 'right to legal representation', 'right of residence and removal procedures' (review 5.4. *The Swedish Context of Children's rights*, p.39; Appendix IV, pp.137-140); In situations in which their asylum is rejected, due to the Dublin Convention or for other reasons, separated and unaccompanied children are still able to be under the care of social services and, as Professionals referred their responsibility is "(...) *is to work according to the social act (...) so if we have a minor, it doesn't matter if he has a permit or not.*" (P24). However, as we could understand from the discussions during the interviews, the children who receive their request denied are mostly children under the Dublin Regulation, who have been through other countries before arriving in Sweden, such as Italy and Greece; Professionals referred that these children understand, most of the times, their critical situation and they "*live in worries*" for the day they will be rejected or the Police Officers will get them to be deported.

In such situations, when children have already received their asylum request denied, Participants said that either they try to go through criminal ways in order to stay in jail in Sweden, or they *'run away'* which is the most common situation as "*9 out of 10 of the ones who have Dublin process actually leave by themselves, either during day or night*" (P18). Professionals showed their worries particularly with these situations in which children get rejection and *'run away'*, as they consider that many of this children might be still in the country living in *'hiding'* and in such situations they are living without fulfilling their rights, mostly their rights to education or to health because they are afraid of being found or denounced. *'Living in hiding'* contributes to abuse and violations of Human Rights, therefore, Professionals consider that this is one of the situations which has to have an emergent focus in order to avoid situations of deportation to countries which are not able to provide desirable circumstances for these children, as well in order to avoid these situations that force children to *'live in hiding'* and see their rights violated and abused.

*Coping strategies* used by Professionals to deal with situations of rejection are based on Professionals experiences, as they try to have "*(...) discussions individually, but as well trying to motivate them to learn English (...)*". Professionals believe that children who get rejection are not going through an easy situation, as apart from all the process of being rejected, deported or to simply *'run away'*, is all the expectation from the family that this children should find their way safely; to be deported to their own countries might have drastic consequences for the whole family.

### **7.5.3. Considerations on children's *'participation in decision-making'***

#### **a) Children's participation in decision-making**

Professionals ideas regarding separated and unaccompanied children's participation in decision-making were not unanimous; Some Professionals said that these children are just as any other child and youth who has his/her own demanding which not always

come as they wish, however some Professionals said children do participate in decision-making as even if they “don’t get what they want”, they get “what they need”.

*“Yes, they do, even when they live here, we have those meetings and in the meetings they express if they have anything to say or --. Think about it, if they have a problem with anything here they have a way of trying to change it, if they don’t like their Godman, they can change it, if they don’t like their school, they can change their school, but of course they have to have valid points to change.” (P18)*

Professionals have referred that in many situations children can raise their voices, such as situations in which they want to change their school or their Godman; Also it has been referred along the interviews that in the residential care, Professionals promote weekly meetings in which children can discuss and raise their voices to manifest their opinions. However, barriers such as coming from non-democratic countries can contribute negatively to the child participation in decision-making, which means that Professionals have to work with these children since the beginning to make them understand that they have the right to participate in decision-making which concern them.

#### **b) What is decision-making about?**

On the other hand, other Professionals manifested the idea that these children are not well included in decision-making about their own lives, by stating:

*“I think the child should be as much involved as possible, as much as he can and also that professionals need to become better listeners (...) Then there needs to be assistance that takes care of these issues when the child wants to make a decision and so on -- But also the professionals need to have extra equipped and need to be extra specific when they meet the child in decision-making (...)” (P15)*

Thus, some of the participants also referred that decision-making is becoming more part of the system when considering separated and unaccompanied children, however they consider that it is still not good enough, as Professionals are also not well “equipped” to take children to be part of such a process.

#### **c) Decision-making in a circle**

One of the major challenges pointed out by these Professionals who consider that participation in decision-making needs to be improved when considering these children is the fact that there are always several Professionals involved in the meetings, which, at the same time, creates an uncomfortable situation to the child who will not so easily manifest his/her own opinion.

*“In some way they participate. But in the other hand, when you sit 6 grownup: Godman, socialsekreterare, translator, personal--. Who easy it is to participate? You have to*

*have really good confidence if you want to participate fully --. And we have a very important role in that but I don't think it is fair to say that they participate in situations like that. After these meetings they talk with us personally, but still --." (P13)*

As it is possible to understand from the statements above, Professionals have been concerned about the role of each Professional in the child's life and in how that affects their participation in decision-making; As it has been described, in situations and meetings which involve various Professionals with different roles together with the child, it is normal that the child will feel less confident to manifest his/her own opinion regarding specific topics and, perhaps, will not be able to oppose the other decision-makers even if having the contrary idea. Therefore, it is important to have in consideration that the child have many Professionals around him/her due to the asylum process and it is important to make clear each other's role in order to promote the child's participation in decision-making (See Fig.15, pp.133-134).

According to Smith (2005), there is no clear definition for '*children's participation*', however, it is possible to have a consensus regarding situations of participation in decision-making; this decision-making is a synonym of empowerment and which can help to find out children's needs more easily (review 5.3. *Participation and decision-making of separated and unaccompanied children*, p.37)

*Decision-making* has been discussed along all the interviews; therefore it has been pertinent to question "*In your opinion, do these children participate in decision-making about their lifes?"* in order to understand the situation that separated and unaccompanied children face, according to Professionals points of view.

Here, the responses were ambiguous, as some Professionals considered that children participate in decision-making in their life's and processes, others consider that children do not participate as they should.

In situations in which Professionals had in mind that children participate in decision-making they referred to situations such as regarding care placements, legal guardian and school which they are able to change if they provide a valid reason; Professionals referred that they try to motivate these children to participate in decision-making by having, commonly, meetings to discuss about specific circumstances regarding the children placed in care or hypothetic situations; however Professionals also referred that most of these children come from non-democratic countries and for them, at the beginning, is hard to raise their voices.

Professionals who questioned the meaning of 'decision-making' and who considered that '*decision-making*' should be improved, justified it relating to situations such as '*Decision making in a circle*', i.e., situations in which a decision is being made regarding a life circumstance of the child, who is involving numerous people from different organisms of the society and the child; here the question made was "*How can the child have participation in decision-making when there are, sometimes, more than 5 Professionals around him?"*

Through the interaction and systems theory and an ecological perspectives we can understand the importance of these systems around the child, however as we can understand from the Fig. 15 (pp. 133-134), children are in the centre with interactions of systems around him/her and in these situations of having a meeting with so many Professionals can inhibit the child to participate in decision-making even if he/she has an opinion about the topic.



Hence, Professionals suggested that there should be a restructuration in terms of these meetings, so that the child could feel comfortable to manifest his/her own opinion and have better circumstances to participate in ‘*decision-making*’. Therefore, it is possible to remind that, according to Lansdown (2005), decision-making involves: to be informed, to express an informed view and to have that view taken into consideration and, at last, to be the main or joint decision-maker (review 5.3. *Participation and decision-making of separated and unaccompanied children*, p.37)

#### **7.5.4. Considerations for improvement towards the ‘*best interest of the child*’**

“*Is there anything you consider that should be improved in prol to the best interest of these children?*” was the question made to Professionals in order to understand their considerations for improvement towards the ‘*best interest of the child*’; All the Professionals referred that care provided and treatment for separated and unaccompanied children is improving, however, they have also referred that there are still many aspects which should be better.

*“The capacity of the reception system, of course, should be improved, we don’t have capacity to receive 3000 children every year, and we definitely don’t have the capacity to receive 6000. We do have that if municipalities do what it needs to be done, but now they are just blaming each (...)”* (P4)

Participants considered that many aspects have to be improved for the ‘*best interest of the child*’, such as the examples described above: to offer more support to the families which are receiving these children and to the children themselves, being able to do more follow-ups and to identify their needs; to offer them a varied support which is individual, not by assuming that their needs are all the same as a group and “*treat them more or less the same*”; to improve the capacity of Municipalities to receive these children as there is a lack of flats and it results in children staying for long time in these camps and not being able to be transferred, for instance, when they have acquired their skills, age and are ready for moving-out. Situations as such result in feelings of frustration and exclusion in the youth; the waiting time for the decision, which in some occasions is too long and it creates situations of anxiety for the child.

*“I do believe that we have to do changes in the structure of this, maybe in the laws, in a legislative part and regarding to your last question, I do think that we listen to these kids, not enough (...)”* (P17)

Furthermore, Professionals also defended that in order to follow the principle of ‘best interest of the child’, there are situations which first have to be solved in the structure of the process of seeking asylum, or even in the applicable law, such as: Municipalities do not have a unique regulation, which means that Municipalities have autonomy and the treatment/care of separated and unaccompanied children differs among Municipalities. As Professionals shared during the interviews, there are Municipalities which provide



trainings for the legal guardians and others who don't. These situations can have positive and negative impact in the care provided to the child and in his/her integration in the society.

Professionals had in mind that “integration, democracy and training” are important to be improved when considering separated and unaccompanied children and training is reflected in the schooling of the child which should be flexible in ways that allows the child to follow the system in his/her rhythm, but also training in terms of education provided to professionals working with the child, such as their legal guardians.

One of the recommendations suggested by participants is to have a “*contact person or a contact family*” which can follow the child and provide a strong network to rely on; participants suggested that if this a “*contact person or a contact family*” is not attributed to the child right away when the child arrives, due to the amount of processes that the child has to worry about, it should be something to take into consideration, for instance after six months when the child is starting the process of resettlement.

According to the principle of ‘*best interest of the child*’ Professionals said that these situations could help improving the child situation, avoiding situations of neglect, difference in treatment, exclusion and promote integration and participation, placing the child in the center.

The General Comment n°6, created by the Committee for the UN Convention on the Rights of the child, outlines a special attention to the circumstances of separated and unaccompanied children, due to their vulnerable situation; as well outlines “*the multifaceted challenges faced by States and other actors in ensuring that such children are able to access and enjoy their rights(...)*” (CRC, 2005, p.5; review 3.1.6. *General Comment n°6*, p.21). Thus, as Professionals referred there is a large number of concerns which should be improved for the ‘*best interest of the child*’, such as: providing more follow-up to the cases and support the foster families; improve the situation of the Municipalities which are not Municipalities of introduction in ways that make it possible to increase the number of Municipalities receiving these children; improving the situation of children under the Dublin Convention and other situations which have been described above. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that even though all Professionals believe that the circumstances of separated and unaccompanied children are improving, there are still many aspects to have in consideration for a better practice.

### **7.5.5. Considerations on reunification policies and the role of Municipalities**

#### **a) Misconceptions regarding reunification**

“*Regarding the new changes in the policies about reunification, what do you think about this? And how do you think Municipalities are ready?*” was the question made to understand what Professionals think about the policy changes on reunification for Somali children, who have been since mid 2012 able to request to be reunited with their families in Sweden through the Family Reunification policy, which was not allowed since 2006, as Sweden considered that it was not possible to certify the credibility of documentation provided from Somalia due to the conflicts and lack of recognized Embassies; the situation has in 2012 changed and families are now able to proof their identities through ADN tests.

Considering family reunification and its impact, Professionals showed their worries regarding numerous situations such as: the responsibility of the child to take care of the whole family; situations in which brothers/sister get left behind because they are more than 18 and Municipalities responsibilities, lack of flats and lack of work opportunities.

Starting with worries regarding the responsibility the child assume when receiving the whole family through their residence permit and thoughts regarding these children, Professionals referred:

*“There is a belief in Sweden, they are called anchored children, that means that people believe that they come to Sweden just to bring their families to the Country because of social benefits and stuff and now statistics from the Migration Board shows that this is not true. Statistics showed that 1 out of 10 do actually bring their parents here, Sweden is not the country of choice for this children.” (P4)*

As mentioned above, many thoughts and myths took place when considering separated and unaccompanied children arriving in Sweden; Political parties which are against immigration have been criticizing this children of arriving in the Country to bring their families afterwards, which has already been proofed wrongly throughout the statistics of the Swedish Migration Board which showed that the number of children being reunified with their families is, in fact, very low when comparing with the total number of separated and unaccompanied children in the Country which is due to the fact that as P7 referred, children have to apply for this reunification before they turn 18 and have to get proper help in order to proceed with the process.

*“Most of our children cannot apply for reunification, because their permit does not allow them to do it. However most of them would like to do it.” (P13)*

It has been also discussed along the interviews the type of permits conceived to these children (review 2.3.4. *Processing asylum requests and type of permits for separated and unaccompanied children*, p.16), which can also be pointed as one of the reasons that takes less children to apply for family reunifications, as only children who have been granted PUT (Permanent Residence Permit, under the Refugee Convention) are eligible to apply for family reunification.

#### **b) Child’s responsibility for family reunification**

*“I think if we are discussing unaccompanied children and the relatives that come here in relation to them, I think that Municipalities have to have a better system to actually support the child, because unaccompanied children, they tend to get a position like -- they tend to represent the whole family and I think that is, in my opinion, maybe too much to put on a child, and the Municipalities have to have support for the entire family and for the children(…)” (P17)*

As well, Professionals manifested their worries regarding the situation of these children

who receive pressure and tension for having so much responsibility during the process of reunification with their families, not only at an early stage, but as well, when their families arrive; the responsibility of guiding the families, of teaching them the culture, the values and the language, among other responsibilities that they have to face when they have been in the Country for some years and receive newly arrived members of their families.

### **c) Family separation or Family reunification?**

At the same time, Professionals were concerned about situations in which families get separated due to different reasons: perhaps one of the children in the family is 18 years old and cannot accompany the rest of the family throughout the reunification to Sweden; in some cases, there are children in the family who have grown up with the family but are orphans or children of only one of the parents and in those cases they are not considered as family, as the DNA tests do not prove any blood relation to the child who has originally been granted the permit.

*“(...) The problem that arises now after the decision is “what happens if you have a child or maybe an adult that wants to bring the children or the wife and when you do the DNA test it shows that 7 children are children of that male, but 1 child is the child of another male, or has been mixed up at the hospital” -- and also it’s a war, you take care of other children, maybe because their parents are dead and you treat the child as your own. But this will need to be decided when these cases arise, and they can be solved in some sort of way.” (P4)*

Situations such as the ones described above happen in such processes of reunification and Professionals defended that a special understanding has to be given to this kind of situations in order to avoid the collapse of the family and the rupture of family links.

### **d) Reunification and the responsibility of Municipalities**

Along all the interviews, responses were unanimous regarding what they think about policy changes and reunification: Municipalities are not prepared to receive an even higher amount of refugees: adults and children; Reasons for this belief were mostly regarding the lack of flats and work opportunities which is already visible with the actual situation of refugees and immigrants; Professionals stated:

*“I think this question is well discussed in the municipality. We don’t have many apartments and we can’t build more houses. But what we say? Is the legislation we have! And we have to fix it when it appears, with my experience from before is that if you are in a family who are relatives you have to open the door for more people but if you are in a home for just minors, you cannot open the door to a family who is coming for a minor there, so if we talk about Somalis, mostly they are in foster families, but is hard to think if 5 more people are coming to the family, and some of the ones who are still minors and just left the care, they are leaving somewhere in a second hand apartment with one room and they can’t take care of their parents (...)” (P9)*

As it is possible to understand from the statements above, Professionals consider that Municipalities are not ready to receive a higher number of separated and unaccompanied children or families to be reunified due to the lack of flats and the structural position of Municipalities; Participants referred also other worries such as the lack of opportunities for work and even how this situation of reunification might affect other families, as with the lack of flats, families might share their apartment for solidarity and it will end up that large families are living in apartments for only one family.

Strategies to solve this situation among the Municipalities have been discussed as well and Professionals referred that there is a need of solidarity within Municipalities, but as well a consciousness of the importance for all the Municipalities to receive separated and unaccompanied children and other refugees; in this situation, some Professionals have defended the idea of having the reception of refugees as mandatory to all Municipalities, while other Professionals have opposed that idea.

#### **e) Policy changes regarding reunification**

*“(…). A lot of Municipalities in Sweden have had issues on dealing with kids and so on. Every Municipality in Sweden has been through that, so I think that probably here is more about the number of kids that the Municipality has to handle and I think that with good information and trainings, it shouldn't be a problem. (...) That is the first thing, but whether it should be mandatory or not, right now I believe that it needs to be mandatory, because I believe that the situation in Malmö or Mönldal, for example, is not good for the kids either. For a period of time it might have to be mandatory to make the situation better in the future.” (P17)*

Responses on this matter were all towards an idea of solidarity, consciousness and awareness amongs Municipalities; Professionals interviewed referred the importance of receiving this children among all Municipalities instead of allocating them in specific regions, however they also referred that there needs to be information and training to show to Municipalities the good reasons to be a 'receiving Municipality'; Questions regarding whether it should be mandatory to all Municipalities to receive these children were ambiguous, if in one way some Professionals consider that it wouldn't be worth to place a child in a community where the child is not welcome, other Professionals believe that there is no solution for that and if the situation maintains these children are going to be allocated only in specific regions and the resources are not going to be enough for them. In any of these circumstances, all Professionals had in mind the importance of having dialogues with the Municipalities in order to show them the importance of receiving separated and unaccompanied children, for the community and for the children.

There are numerous reasons that force families to be separated and mostly situations in which children become separated from their families. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (2004), separation can occur either accidentally, when families flee from danger, or with purpose, when children are abandoned or given to care to another individual or residential centre (review 5.6. *Family Separation and*

*Reunification*, p.42).

In some situations separation from families is not possible to avoid and this is the situation of separated and unaccompanied children arriving in Sweden; therefore in these situations humanitarian actors take place and, in Sweden, there are three different types of permits conceived to separated and unaccompanied children: a permanent permit according to the *Refugee Convention*; permits for children ‘*in need of protection*’ and permits according to ‘*particularly distressing circumstances*’ (review 2.3.4. *Processing asylum requests and type of permits for separated and unaccompanied children*, p.16).

Once the child has received a permanent permit, he/she can apply for family reunification; family reunification emerges, then, as the process of bringing together the child and the family, or previous care-giver. According to the International Humanitarian Law, separated and unaccompanied children have the right to be reunited with their parents, relatives or guardians following specific procedures such as: assessment, identification, registration and documentation, tracing and verification (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004, review theme 5.6. *Family Separation and Reunification*, p. 42).

The reason that required us to understand Professionals perspectives regarding reunification is due to the policy change in middle of 2012, which allowed Somali children to request family reunification to their families; Somali children granted permit were not allowed to request for family reunification since 2006 due to the lack of veracity or impossibility to proof identity.

Thus, through the question “*Regarding the new changes in the policies about reunification, what do you think about this? And how do you think Municipalities are ready?*”, it has been possible to understand all the concerns around this topic. As identified above, misconceptions regarding the situation of separated and unaccompanied children who were blamed for being ‘*anchored*’ children trying to get their families into Europe.

However, Professionals identified also other situations which they consider as important to have in mind, such as, the child’s responsibility for bringing the family and in some situations the blame for not being able to do so, in cases which their permits does not allow them; as well, situations in which they are reunified with their families and are the support for the whole family, assuming responsibilities of including the family in the society.

Also situations in which members of the family get left behind in the process of reunification due to factors such as: not being a blood member of the child in the resettlement country or being a brother/sister older than 18 years old; Professionals believe that such situations have to be better analysed and taken into consideration by Professionals working at the Migration Board in order to avoid that instead of being reunified, families are, again, separated.

Professionals interviewed believe that the new changes in the policy are a great development and achievement, as they believe that “family reunification is needed” for separated and unaccompanied children; however, they also pointed out the fact that Municipalities are not ready to receive these families due to the lack of places and due to the situations, described above, concerning Municipalities responsibilities in receiving separated and unaccompanied children and other refugees. Consequently, Professionals believe there needs to be a restructuration of the system in order to

provide better care and follow up for separated and unaccompanied children and their families.

### 7.5.6. Implications for practice

*“Is there something else you would like to add before we finish this interview?”* has been the question made before finalizing each of the 25 interviews. Professionals always had something more to add or to repeat as they seemed to be very much concerned about the needs and the situation of separated and unaccompanied children.

Some of the Professionals emphasized again the importance of having dialogues with the Municipalities and also to ensure that Municipalities take care of these children giving them the opportunity to resettle, integrate and have a better life.

*“(…) municipalities to have capacity to take care of all this people because it’s not just housing people, it’s taking care of them and give them the opportunities to Integrate and have a good living and a good life.”* (P2)

Also, to keep dialogues and discussions with Politicians and groups of people who are against refugees in general, by reinforcing the positive sides of having a multi-cultural society and immigration in the Country; even though Sweden has been receiving refugee children from decades, Professionals believe that this feelings of rejection are due to the uncertainty of receiving people from Countries as different as Afghanistan and Somalia, with such a different culture and religion; Professionals reinforce the need to work with all these questions in ways that Municipalities and communities can understand that these children are good resources and a great social capital for every community.

*“(…) I think that you have to have discussions with those people who don’t want these kids in the Municipalities as well. There are political parties in Sweden who don’t want those people and you have to keep the discussion going, you have to inspire them -- it’s not going to change like that, in Sweden we have been immigrants for -- forever! (…)”* (P17)

To promote activities within separated and unaccompanied children and Swedish or other foreigner children has also been discussed as an essential point that Professionals should consider as implications for practice; A recommendation has been to promote other children as guides, with whom separated and unaccompanied children can share their lives and enjoy leisure time together.

*“(…) you cannot expect a 16 year old to be a guide for another 16 years old, so what we try is to organize more group activities (…)”* (P11)



At last, Professionals reinforced the situation of separated and unaccompanied children under the Dublin Regulation; Professionals shared their worries regarding the situations in which these children are when they live in ‘*hiding*’ or even when they have been deported to countries who are not able to provide desirable conditions, such as Greece and Italy.

*“I think we need to co-work more internationally, especially when it comes to Dublin cases -- ahmm -- I think that these children who have a Dublin -- are living in fear, cause they know--they know they need to get back to Italy or whatever it is --.” (P19)*

In situations in which children get rejection, Professionals referred that it is important for the child to have an adult to rely on and, in these cases, they said legal guardians have a major importance in guiding the child and ensuring that the rights of the child are not violated.

Separated and unaccompanied children under the Dublin Regulation are in crucial situation of vulnerability and exclusion and, as Professionals referred, by allowing them to live ‘in hiding’ in a Country, we are allowing an enormous violation on the rights of the child, as well as, violations of other essential rights.

As implications for practice, Professionals made an overview of situations described along the interviews which shall be improved; Mostly they referred to situations such as: the responsibility of Municipalities to receive these children and to provide equal treatment, i.e., equal care provided to children, equal opportunities and trainings for legal guardians; programs and/or projects promoting activities not only within separated and unaccompanied children but as well involving other children in order to promote their social inclusion; to provide these children with a large network such as by promoting always a ‘contact person’ for the child in whom the child can rely on; as well, more international co-work and more attention with cases regulated by the Dublin Convention in order to avoid such violations and abuses of Human Rights.



## CHAPTER VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### 8.1. Summary – Recommendations for practice

Along this Dissertation, Professionals have mentioned a range of challenges in their practice with separated and unaccompanied children; therefore, the following recommendations focus mostly on ways that Professionals working in this field address the needs of this population across practice, research, education and other policy concerns.

- ***Socializing and belonging – Lack of supportive network***

The need for socializing and belonging has been identified due to the lack of supportive networks around separated and unaccompanied children; therefore, Professionals suggested the improvement of programs in which these children interact with children from different backgrounds; as well, suggested the implementation of programs which can provide to the child a ‘*contact person*’ or a ‘*contact family*’, as these connections and interactions are important for situations of resettlement.

- ***Support, follow-up and guidance for same-cultural foster families***

Same-cultural foster families have been identified as a great resource in care placements. However, more support, follow-up and guidance has been recommended in order to ensure that the principle of ‘*best interest of the child*’ is taken into consideration and to ensure separated and unaccompanied children are not neglected or abused.

- ***Cross-cultural foster families as resourceful***

Foster care placements have been considered to be resourceful for separated and unaccompanied children. However, a lack of cross-cultural foster care has been identified; Professionals consider that such care should be promoted and the number of cross-cultural foster families should rise.

- ***Legal Guardians as protective figures***

Legal Guardians have been considered as protective figures for the child, as the Legal Guardian is the person responsible for ensuring that the ‘*best interest of the child*’ is followed and his/her rights are not neglected or abused. However, two great needs have been identified: to define their roles and to have education and training as mandatory. Even though Professionals consider that Legal Guardian’s work with separated and unaccompanied children is improving, they consider that these have been great needs which affect their work.

- ***Leaving care – ‘Suddenly you are a grown-up’***

‘Suddenly you are a grown-up’ has been one of the expressions mentioned during the interviews; Leaving care is a challenge for any child who is in care placements, however an increased challenge for separated and unaccompanied children, due to their

lack of network. Professionals recommended that there should be a better preparation for 'leaving care' situations and consider that better opportunities shall be given in these cases. "Hitta rätt" is one of the projects implemented by one of the Professional's Teams interviewed and aims to provide skills of autonomy and independence while separated and unaccompanied children are in care; There is a great need of more programs and projects as such.

- ***Social inclusion and integration***

Structural and individual barriers, such as the lack of networks or individual's resilience, have been identified as challenges for separated and unaccompanied children's integration in the society. Professionals mentioned that there is a great need to include these children in the society; promoting better schooling programs and interactions within the community will help these children to find their understanding of the society, as well increase their sense of responsibility, compassion, tolerance and belonging, offering, at the same time, a great bridging of social capital

- ***The responsibility of Municipalities***

Municipalities have the responsibility to receive and provide care to separated and unaccompanied children; however, every Municipality has the right to allocate, or not, care placements for these children. Due to the rising number of separated and unaccompanied children received in Sweden during the last decade, the lack of care placements became a great challenge to Professionals. Therefore, Professionals suggest that rising awareness and consciousness shall be the principles for increase the number of Municipalities providing care to these children.

- ***Asylum rejections and Dublin Convention***

Asylum rejections are, in most of the situations, due to the Dublin Convention, which states that the first country of arrival is responsible for the asylum decision of any asylum seeker. Separated and unaccompanied children under the Dublin regulation are in particular and vulnerable circumstances; therefore Professionals consider as emergent to improve the strategies to deal with such cases in order to avoid situations in which these children are 'living in hiding', as such circumstances increase their vulnerability and the probability of seeing their rights abused and neglected.

- ***Decision-making: Decision in a circle***

One of the situations described by Professionals regarding children's participation in decision-making has been the meetings within Professionals and the child, which position the child in a vulnerable position and prevent him/her to participate; situations described as such have been those in which there are several Professionals representing different organisms of the society and the child. Professionals consider that in such situations there should be methods or other kind of mechanisms to ensure that the rights of the child are followed and to ensure that the child is able to participate, without receiving pressure from adult figures.

- ***Improvements for the Best interest of the Child***

The principle Best Interest of the Child has been mentioned from the Professionals as a basic principle which is followed on their interventions; however, Professionals mentioned that in order to ensure that this principle is secure, situations such as the described above shall be improved.

- ***Reunification and its implications***

Challenges identified regarding reunification are related to the child and its position as responsible for bringing the family together and assuming the responsibility of including the family in the society in the process of resettlement; as well, situations in which the reunification means other separations in the family as, for instance, it is not possible to reunify a brother who is 18 years old; or even in situations in which the family is not blood-related to the child. As well, when referring to the changes in the policy regarding the reunification of Somali children with their families, which mean a considerable rise of the number of families to be reunified; professionals manifested their worries due to the lack of placements for these families, as well as recommended more support to these families and children.

## 8.2. Conclusion

Every year, millions of people get affected by war and similar armed conflicts in different parts of the world, forcing thousands to flee their homelands and be separated from their families when escaping chaos and violence (UNHCR, 2007).

Sweden has received an increased number of refugee families and separated and unaccompanied children; in 2012, out of 43887 asylum applications received, 14150 were children and 3578 of them were separated and unaccompanied (Migrationsverket, 2012).

Earlier, studies have been conducted on the circumstances that compel separated and unaccompanied children to flee their homelands and to be separated from their families; however, an utmost need for this research emerged as a consequence of the circumstances that are faced by these children in Sweden, as their resettlement country.

This research uses a combination of qualitative methods useful to explore the perspectives and experiences of Professionals working with separated and unaccompanied children placed in care, in Sweden, with a special focus on Västra Götaland. Thus, this research uses an interaction and systems theory combined with an ecological perspective that underscores the child's development when interacting within the different environmental cultural contexts experienced during the resettlement phase. Hence, this research intends to understand the situation of separated and unaccompanied children placed in care, their needs, their care placements and care provided, their inclusion and integration in the host community, their '*best interest*' and their '*participation in decision-making*'. Through the findings and analysis of this research it is intended to obtain Professional's recommendations for practice in order to improve the actual situation of separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden.

From the responses given by the 25 Professionals interviewed it emerged, undoubtedly, a wide range of perspectives regarding the situations of these children; if in one hand responses regarding '*best interest of the child*' and '*participation in decision-making*' were unanimous among participants; on the other hand, participants manifested their concerns with the distinct practices and policies followed among Municipalities.

Every individual Professional had a different experience, every story described was a new enlightenment. However, regardless of whom was describing their narrative, the concerns and worries were the same: the well-being of separated and unaccompanied children, the situations that forced them to flee their homeland and to be separated from their own families, the circumstances that they have been through during their journey to Sweden, the care they receive in their country of resettlement and how they are integrated and socially included in the hosting society, their '*best interest*' and their '*participation in decision-making*', their vulnerable position when being an underage asylum seeker and mostly a '*Dubliner*', their responsibility when requesting for family reunification; and all the other parts of the stories described along this Dissertation.

Settled, this research discusses a complementary approach between evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence. In this approach, Professionals applied core competencies and recommendations for practice aimed at improving the actual situation of separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden. By addressing structural and individual needs, this research, underscores the need for cultural engagement in order to apprehend local meanings of care provided, well-being, resilience, resettlement and social inclusion. Consequently, the research concludes with recommendations for

practice which address some of the disparities that exist within the care provision to separated and unaccompanied children in Sweden.

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## Figures References

### Appendix I

Figure 1, Migrationsverket (2012), available at:

<http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.3661b62b13980fa9cb280007260/Aktuellt+om+september+2012.pdf>

Figure 2, Migrationsverket (2012), available at:

<http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.3661b62b13980fa9cb280007260/Aktuellt+om+september+2012.pdf>

Figure 3, Migrationsverket (2012), available at:

<http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.3661b62b13980fa9cb280007260/Aktuellt+om+september+2012.pdf>

Figure 4, Migrationsverket (2012), available at:

<http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.95fff51133976f7baf800028780/Asyls%C3%B6kande+2011+-+Asylumseekers+2011.pdf>

Figure 5, Migrationsverket (2012) available at:

<http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.95fff51133976f7baf800045477/Inkomna+ans%C3%B6kningar+om+asyl+2012+-+Applications+for+asylum+received+2012.pdf>

Figure 6, Migrationsverket (2012) available at:

<http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.478d06a31358f98884580001605/Migrationsverkets+verksamhets+och+kostnadsprognos+22+februari+2012.pdf>

Figure 7, Migrationsverket (2012), available at:

<http://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.3661b62b13980fa9cb280007260/Aktuellt+om+september+2012.pdf>



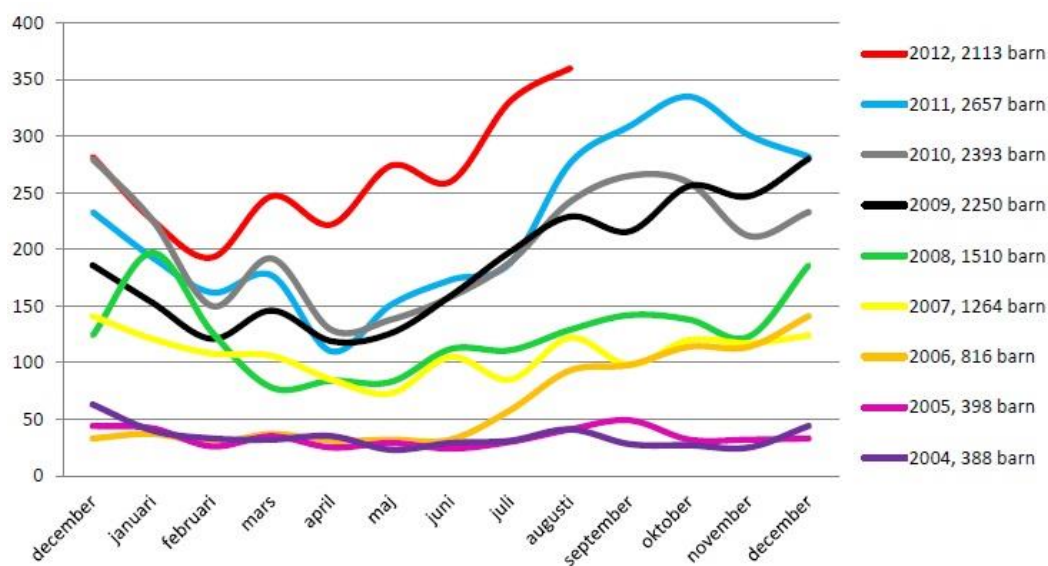
## Appendix I

**Figure 1. Reception Countries of Unaccompanied asylum seeking children, from 2006 to 2011**

	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Belgium</b>	633	519	470	711	1081	860
<b>Denmark</b>	104	84	297	542	428	282
<b>Finland</b>	108	98	706	557	329	153
<b>France</b>				447	610	596
<b>Germany</b>	186	180	305	375	499	667
<b>Ireland</b>	136	94	73	56	37	26
<b>Netherland</b>	410	433	726	1039	701	484
<b>Norway</b>	349	403	1374	2500	892	858
<b>Sweden</b>	822	1264	1510	2250	2393	2657
<b>Switzerland</b>	267	231	606	449	213	313
<b>Great-Britain</b>	3247	3138	3300	2991	1364	1277
<b>Total</b>	6262	6444	9367	11917	8547	8173

Source: Migrationsverket, 2012

**Figure 2 . Unaccompanied Children in Sweden, from 2004-2012**



Source: Migrationsverket, 2012

**Figure 3 . Nationalities of unaccompanied children, 2011-2012**

	Jan-Aug 2011	Jan-Aug 2012	%
<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>879</b>	<b>1230</b>	<b>+40%</b>
<b>Somalia</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>+88%</b>
<b>Morocco</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>+436%</b>
<b>Algeria</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>+214%</b>
<b>Eritrea</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>+20%</b>
<b>Albania</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>+330%</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>+725%</b>
<b>Stateless</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>-36%</b>
<b>Ethiopia</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>+113%</b>
<b>Others</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>+17%</b>
	<b>1428</b>	<b>2113</b>	<b>+48%</b>

Source: Migrationsverket, 2012

**Figure 4. Unaccompanied children, per ages, 2011**

<b>2011</b>			
<b>Age</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>0-6</b>	29	30	59
<b>7-12</b>	52	93	145
<b>13-15</b>	113	764	877
<b>16-17</b>	206	1370	1576
<b>Total</b>	400	2257	2657

Source: Migrationsverket, 2011

**Figure 5. Unaccompanied children, per ages, 2012**

<b>2012 (until September)</b>			
<b>Age</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>0-6</b>	21	22	43
<b>7-12</b>	32	69	101
<b>13-15</b>	77	502	579
<b>16-17</b>	141	915	1056
<b>Total</b>	271	1508	1779

Source: Migrationsverket, 2012

**Figure 6. Prognostic on the reception of unaccompanied children, 2012-2016**

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>New Asylum Seekers</b>	28.000	28.000	28.000	28.000	28.000
	36.000	36.000	36.000	36.000	36.000
<b>Of which unaccompanied children</b>	2.800	2.800	2.800	2.800	2.800
	3.500	3.500	3.500	3.500	3.500

Source: Migrationsverket, 2012

**Figure 7. Municipalities with agreement on the reception of unaccompanied asylum seeking children**

<b>Västra GötalandLand</b>	
<b>Bollebygd**</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Borås</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Dals-Ed</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Färgelanda</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Gullspång</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Göteborg</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Götene</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Herrljunga**</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Hjo</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Karlsborg</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Kungälv</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Lidköping</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Lysekil</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Mariestad</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Mark **</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Mellerud</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Munkedal</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Orust</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Skara</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Skövde</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Sotenäs</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Stenungsund</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strömstad</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Tjörn</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Tranemo**(Jan,2013 )</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Töreboda</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Uddevalla</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Ulricehamn** (Jan,2013)</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>Vara</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Åmål</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Ale</b>	<b>5 children</b>
<b>Härryda*</b>	<b>5 children</b>
<b>Lerum</b>	<b>5 children</b>
<b>Tranemo</b>	<b>5 children</b>
<b>Ulricehamn</b>	<b>5 children</b>
<b>Öckerö</b>	<b>5 children</b>
<b>Total places:</b>	<b>293</b>
<b>Total children:</b>	<b>30</b>

## APPENDIX II

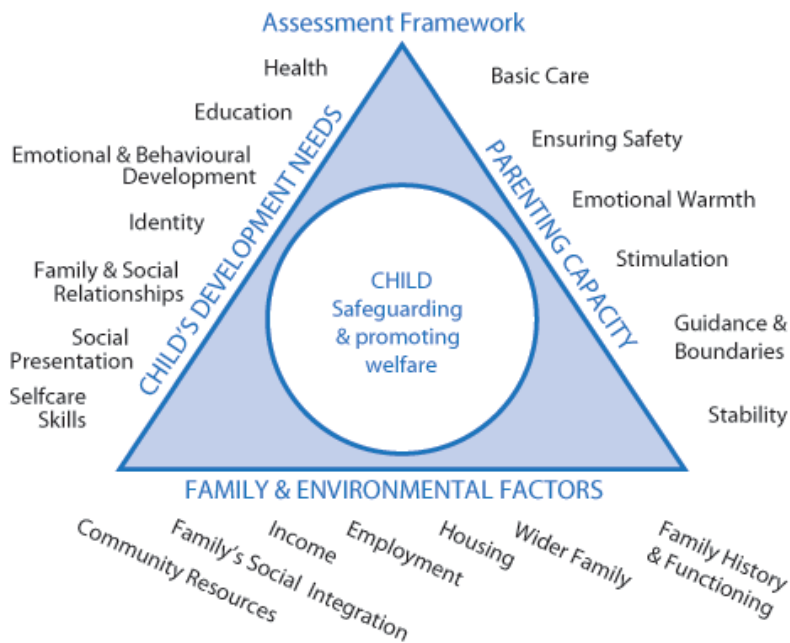
### Figure 8. Best Interest of the Child (BIC) – model

- A. Family conditions: the present
  - I. *Physical wellbeing*
    - 1. Adequate physical care
    - 2. Safe physical direct environment
  - II. Care and upbringing
    - 3. Affective atmosphere
    - 4. Supporting, flexible upbringing structure
    - 5. Adequate examples by parents
    - 6. Interests
- B. Family conditions: past and the future
  - 7. Continuity and stability in upbringing conditions, a future perspective
- C. Societal conditions: the present
  - 8. Safe wider physical environment
  - 9. Respect
  - 10. Social network
  - 11. Education
  - 12. Contact with peers or friends
  - 13. Adequate examples in society
- D. Society: the past and the future
  - 14. Stability in life circumstances, future perspective

Source: Kalverboer& Zijlstra, 2008, p.18

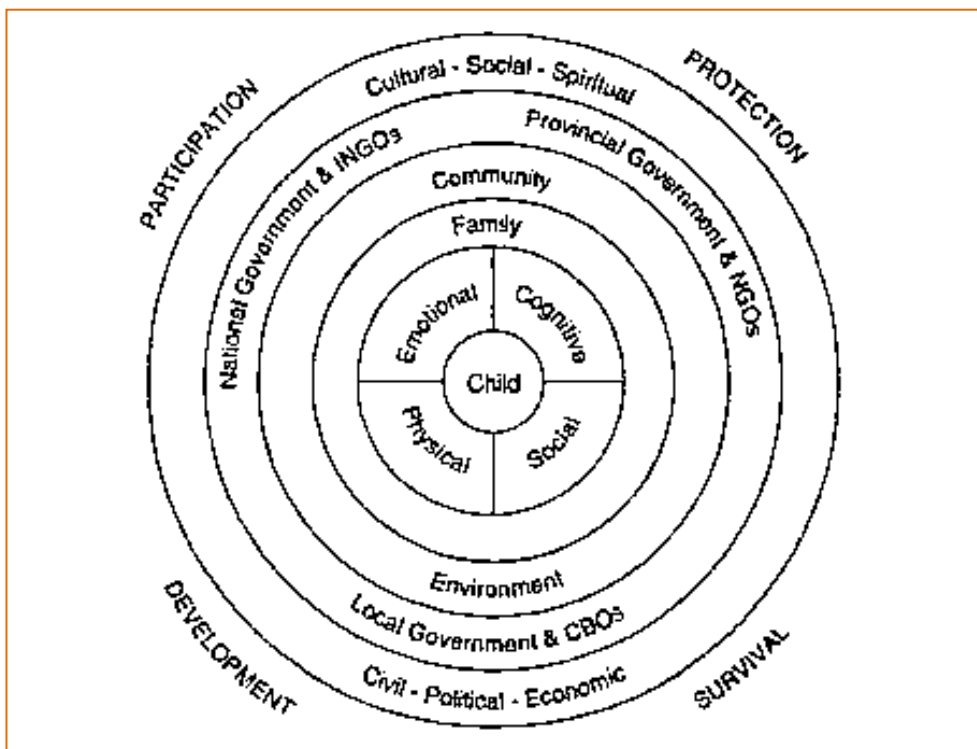


**Figure 9. BIC –model / BBIC –model**



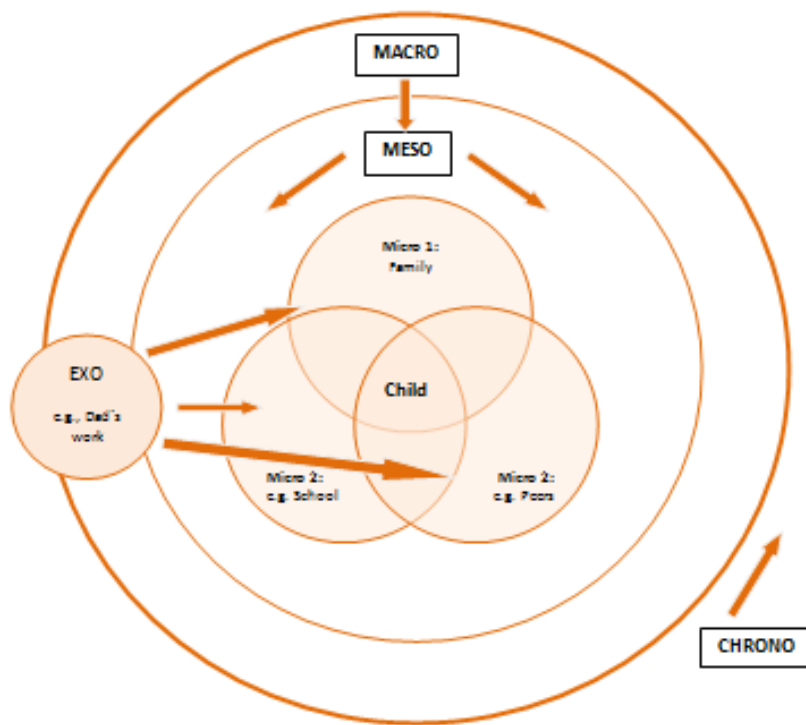
**Source:** [http://www.workingtogetheronline.co.uk/chapter\\_five.html](http://www.workingtogetheronline.co.uk/chapter_five.html)

**Figure10. The Social Ecology of Children’s Rights**



**Source:** Cook & Toit, 2005, p. 255

**Figure 11. Ecological Perspective**



**Source:** Bronfenbrenner, 1994, pp. 37-43

**Figure 12. Phases, events and experiences during a refugee career**

<b>EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES</b>						
					Acceptance of/by host society	
					Social and health services	
					Paranoid/depression conditions	
					Conflict with host society	
					Resentment	
					Elation/relief	
		Uncertainty about outcome/fear/anxiety				
		Loss of property, community and family				
		Camplife/institutionalization				
		Imprisonment/loss of civil rights				
		Torture/injury				
		War/famine				
	Pre-departure phase	Flight phase	First asylum phase	Claimant phase	Settlement phase	Adaption phase

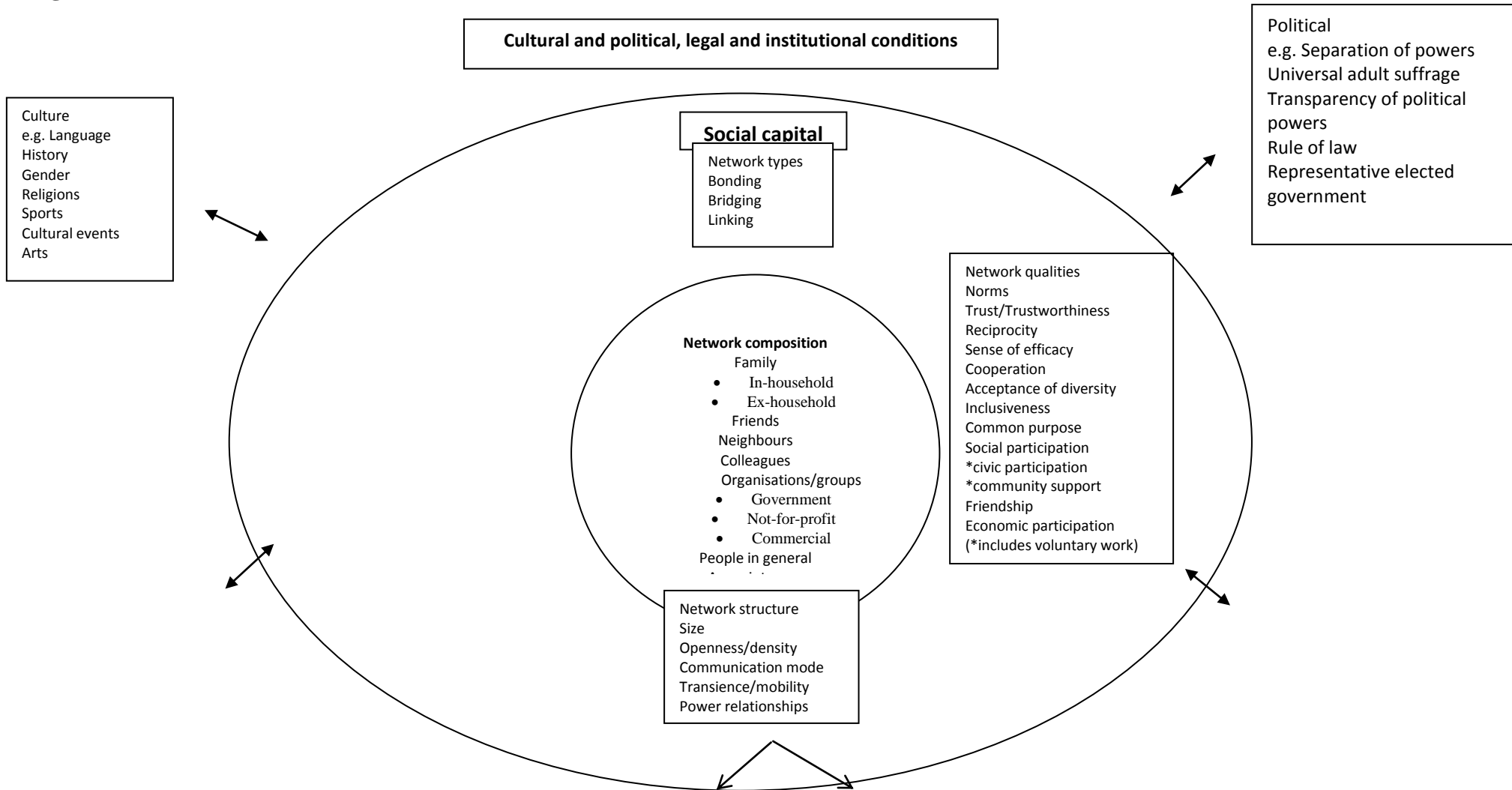
Source: Berry, 1991, p. 130

**Figure 13. Theoretical model of social exclusion/inclusion**

<b>Levels of analysis</b>	<b>Processes</b>	<b>Social systems</b>	<b>European level</b>
<b>Structural</b>	Redistribution	<b>Economy:</b> (Welfare Regimes)	Liberal Conservative Social Democratic
<b>Positional</b>	Recognition	<b>Social/cultural:</b> (Immigration Policies)	Assimilation Segregation Multiculturalism
<b>Individual</b>	Self-Identity	<b>Personal:</b> (Identities)	European, Global National Local (or 'either/or', 'both/and', 'neither/nor')

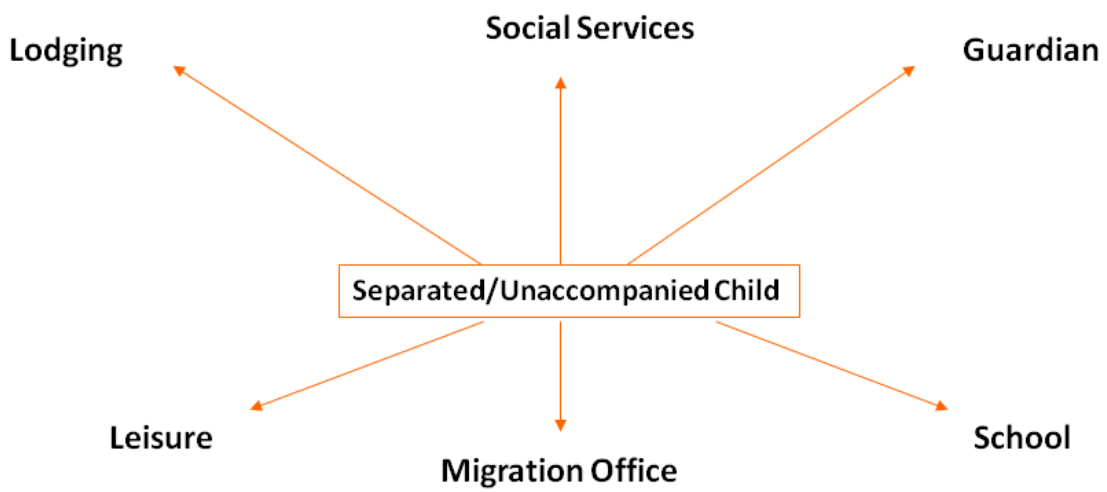
Source: Fangen, Johansson & Hammarén, 2012, p.13

**Figure 14. ABS Framework**

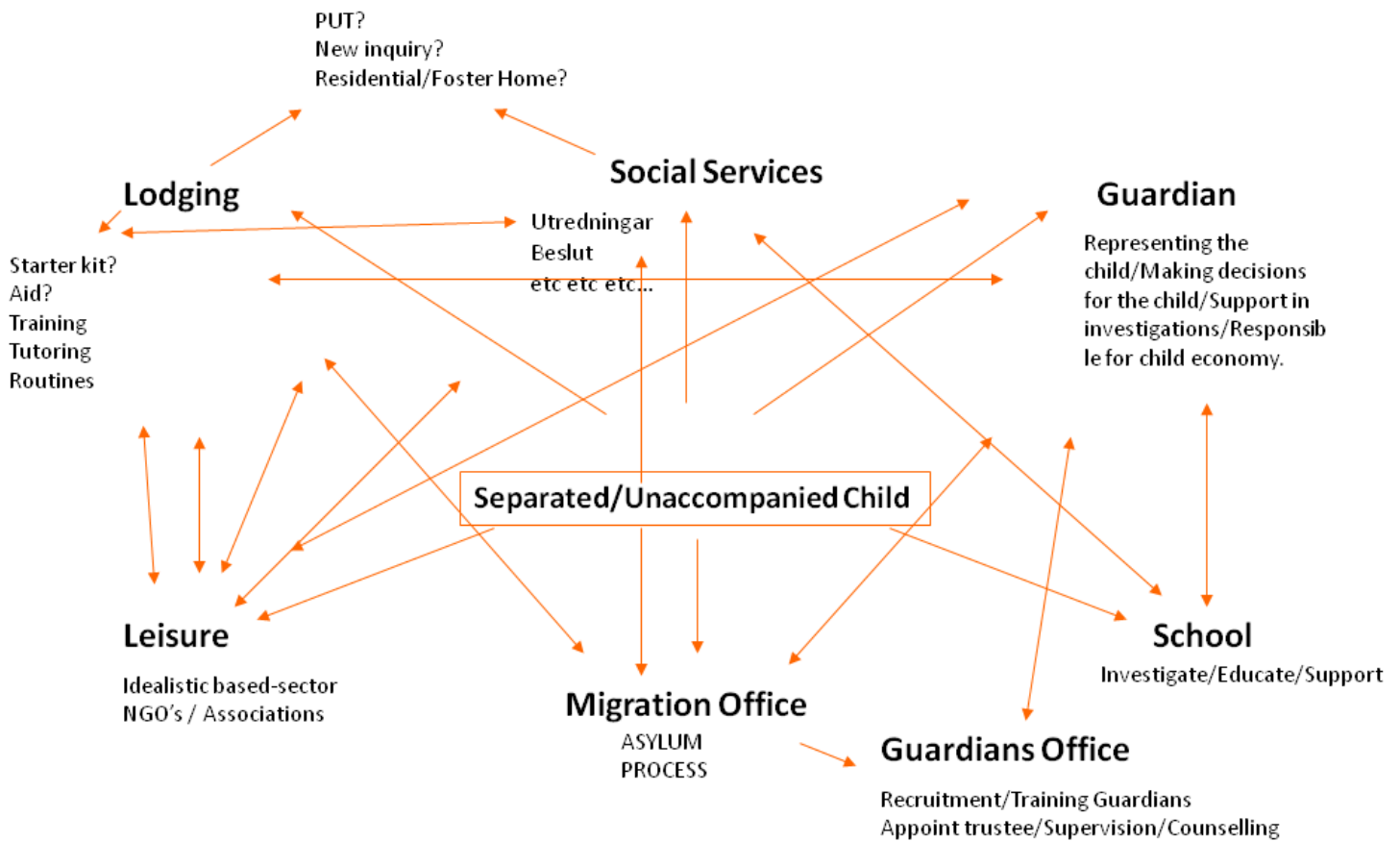


**Figure 15. Decision-making in a circle**

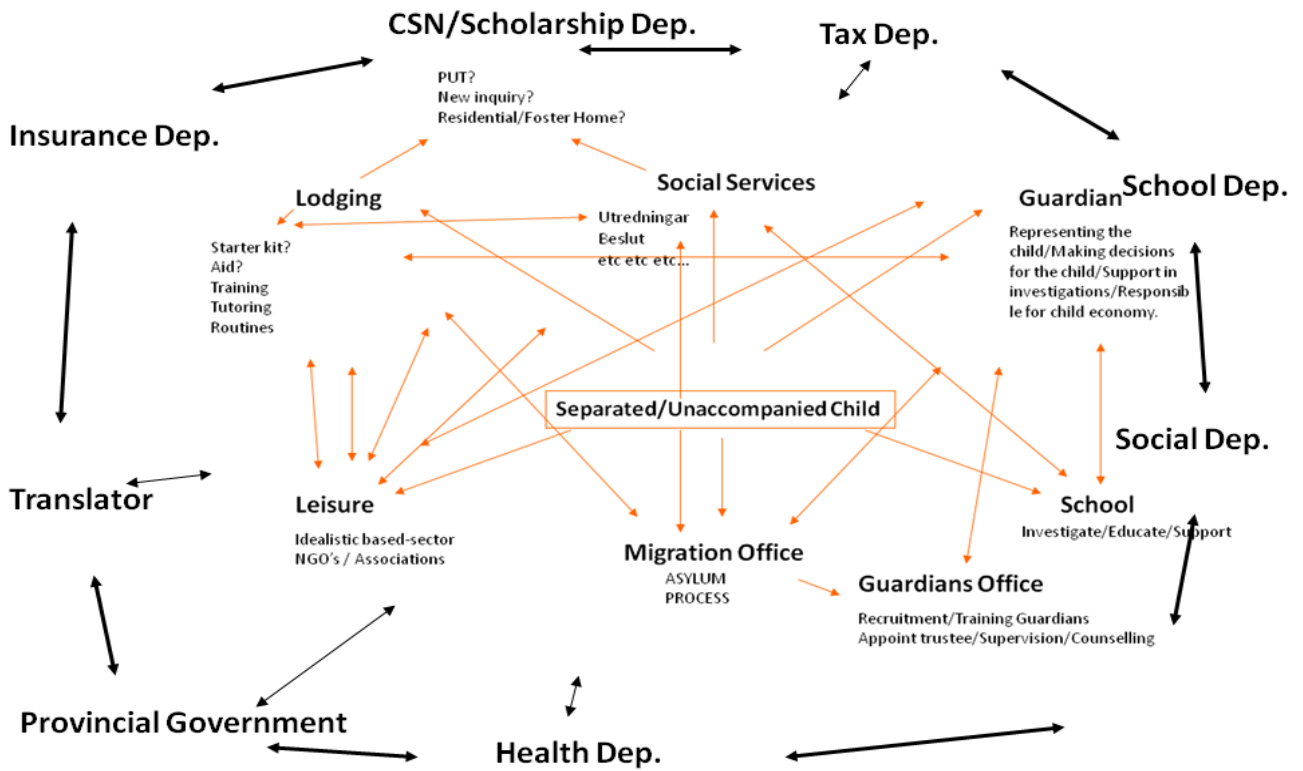
**Stage 1:**



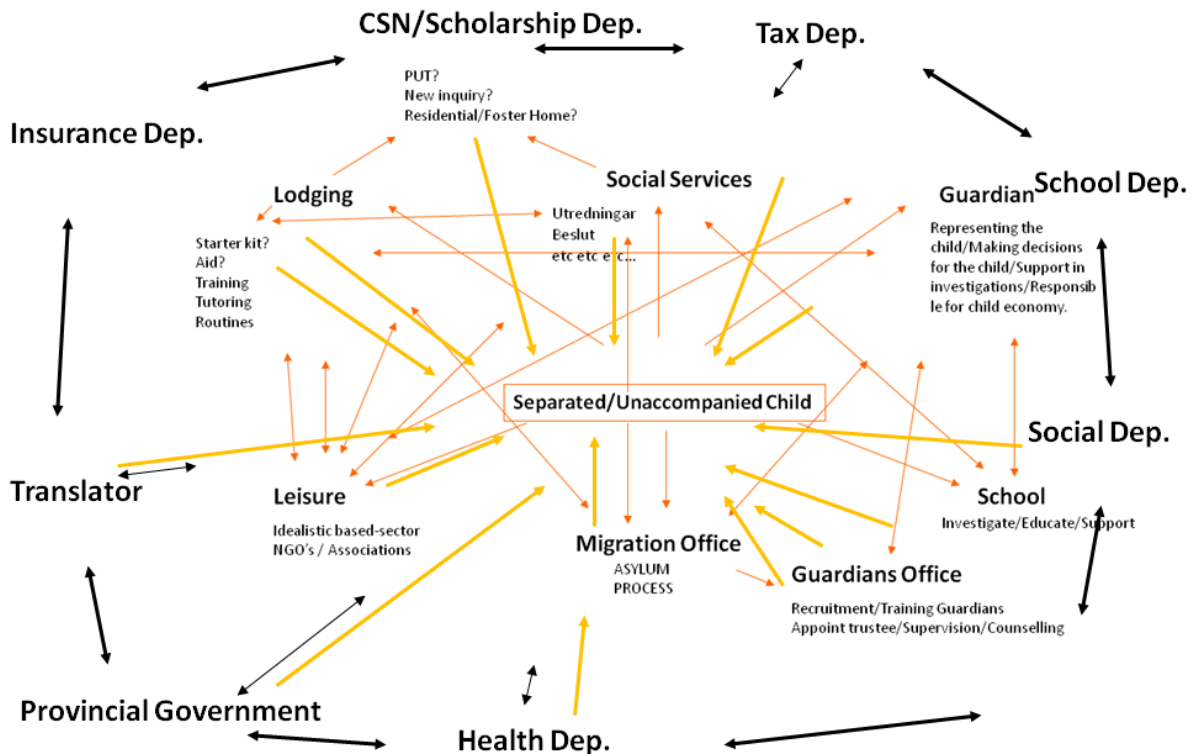
**Stage 2:**



**Stage 3:**



**Stage 4:**



Source: Marcus Wihk, Länsstyrelsen Göteborg

## APPENDIX III

### **Guidelines on policies and procedures in dealing with Unaccompanied children seeking asylum**

These guidelines are based on the principle *Best Interest of the Child* and according to them “*effective protection and assistance should be delivered to unaccompanied children in a systematic, comprehensive and integrated manner*” (UNHCR, 1997, p.1).

The main topics that are concerned with these guidelines are related to the ability to ensure that legal, social, medical and psychological needs are met, in the same way to ensure that these children have access to the territory, access to asylum procedures, refugee status determination, identification and implementation of longer solutions, agreements and co-operation within agencies and individuals, the right to have a legal representative, among other measures.

In order to follow the best interest of the unaccompanied asylum seeking children, these recommendations are supposed to be practiced along with UNHCR Guidelines on Refugee Children.

These Guidelines states the role of the guardians or legal representatives as: they shall be a link between the unaccompanied asylum seeking children and the agencies that provide the care. These Guidelines also states that the detention is not an appropriate measure for these children; they should not be kept under prison-like conditions, since the main focus is not detention but the provision of care.

Thus, it also regards recommendations for determining the refugee status, according to their vulnerabilities and special needs, but as well determinates that the best interest of the child shall be followed, even if the child is considered not to be an asylum seeker; and in this cases the child should not return unless there is a “*suitable caregiver agency such as a parent, other relative, other adult care taker, a government agency, a childcare agency in the country of origin has agreed, and is capable to take responsibility for the child and provide him/her appropriate protection and care*” (UNHCR, 1997, p.3).

Instrument.

### **Strategic Development Framework: The separated children in EU Programme**

The Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP) was initiated in 1997. This Programme has had a great impact in both policies and practices related to separated children. A large range of documents, including national assessments, comparative studies, analysis of European Union asylum and immigration policies and the effects with separated children; training and lobbying guides have been some of the achievements of SCEP. As well, the Programme’s Statement of Good Practice (SGP), which is recognized as an important baseline from which to gauge practice. The aim of this Programme is to share experiences between the partners NGO’s, in order to contribute to the development of good practice and contribute to advocacy positions at regional and national levels (The Separated Children in Europe Programme, 2008)



## **Aliens Act**

The Aliens Act is a Swedish instrument used since 2005. This instrument is divided in 23 chapters and each chapter is further divided in sections that contain provisions on the conditions related to migrants and their rights and obligations to stay in Sweden.

Thus, its chapters are regarding: conditions on which an alien may enter, stay and work in Sweden, questions regarding the possibility for visas and permits as well regarding refusal of entry and expulsion, controls and coercive measures, enforcement of refusal-of-entry and expulsion orders, duties to provide information, public counsel, liability for costs, penalty provisions, temporary protections, tribunal witnesses and special authorizations.

Regarding asylum seeking processes, this Act describes the criteria to be in need of asylum and required protection, as well it describes rights and obligations for asylum seekers; and considers Dublin Regulation in some cases. As well, Aliens Act contents are questions related to deportation of migrants, custody and supervision, detention, expulsion and other measures (Aliens Act, 2005).

## APPENDIX IV

### Right of being recognized as children

In the same line of reasoning, Hopkins and Hill (2010) referred that, from their research, Professionals working with these children suggested that the child's need of being recognized as children was fundamental, which led many service providers to state that *"their status as children is more important than their status as asylum seekers"* (p.401).

### Right to Education

Connected to the importance of being recognized as children, is equally important the significance of education, as *"(...) education is a basic right for every child, and it is one of the ways children can reclaim their normal childhoods"* (Argent, 1996, p.25). School perform not only educational functions but provide, as well, a safe place for children to be and learn. However, the fact that many children have not had any access to education, previously, might be a great challenge when considering their integration or 'fitting' into the educational system itself. Although most of the researches conducted in the field conclude that separated and unaccompanied children have a *"strong desire to be educated, to work hard and gain experience and opportunities"* (Hopkins & Hill, 2010, pp.401-402).

*"(...) every unaccompanied and separated child, irrespective of status, shall have full access to education in the country that they have entered(...)"*

(Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment n.6, 2005)

Even though, the implementation of the right to schooling seems satisfactory; in Sweden, it is not enough to be a child in order to have access to schooling, as this child or youth has to be registered in the Swedish System, even if as an asylum seeker or refugee. Therefore, the access to education is linked to the child's legal status; If a child has been authorized to remain in Swedish territory it means that the child has total access to the educational system; If the child is in the process of seeking asylum, it means he/she can access the school (only public) but is not obliged to do so; However, if a child or youth is 'in hiding' or residing undocumented in the Swedish territory, he/she cannot have access to education, even though some of them go to school with the permission of the School Directors, as there is no rule or law preventing it.

Due to this limitations when it comes to 'right to education', the Committee on the Rights of the Child pointed out, in 2009, during its concluding observations that this Committee is still *"concerned that children without residence permit, in particular 'children in hiding' and undocumented children, do not enjoy the right to education."* (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p.54).

Carlier, Donato & Pavlou (2010) appointed in their comparative study on "The reception and care of unaccompanied children in eight countries of the European Union", some suggestions to improve the access to the ordinary educational system, such as to *"Guarantee an unconditional right to schooling for all unaccompanied child, under the same conditions as national child."*; and also that educational measures should be adapted such as to *"Provide a sufficient quantity of educational*

*adaptation measures, specifically dedicated to unaccompanied children, allowing them to join the ordinary educational system through the acquisition of the necessary basics, in particular from a linguistic point of view.”* (p. 125).

### **Right to Health**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates the “(...)right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health”. However, the implementation of this ‘right to health’ is variable according to different interpretations.

Swedish law stipulates that asylum seeking children or ‘*children in hiding*’ who have been through an asylum process, can receive healthcare and medical services under the same conditions as children residing legally in Sweden (Swedish Law 2008:344 - Health care for asylum applicants). Thus, Hospitals and Health Care Professionals need to take their own measures in order to apply and respect the law. This equal right also means that they must pay the same expenses for health care as other children, however, in Sweden, coverage of healthcare costs depends on regional authorities; On the other hand, the purchase of medications is not covered by the law, which means that former asylum applicants will have to pay the full rate of medicines without receiving any assistance.

Meanwhile, according to Swedish Law, undocumented children who have never been through an asylum procedure or request are not entitled of health care assistance, as the laws that ensure health care do not include this ‘*category*’ of children. Thus, there is no law which bans healthcare for these children, but at the same time, no law which facilitates their access. Accordingly to Save the Children (2008, p. 109):

*“(...) for children to be divided into groups with varying access to a fundamental right like healthcare is in apparent violation of the Convention of the rights of the child’s requirements of non-discrimination.”*

The care provided to these children is, therefore, to discretion of the healthcare Professionals and of regional authorities, which is criticized by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) that considers that States should:

*“Take the necessary steps to ensure that all children, including undocumented children, have a right to healthcare and medical services under the same conditions as children legally residing in the country.”*

### **Right to legal representation**

Regarding the legal representation system, there is no exact definition of ‘*Guardianship*’ in Europe, as it is depending on each Country national law. Garreau (2011, p.6) defends that this concept can be defined as “*the role of a person who is legally responsible for the care of someone who is unable to manage their own affairs*”.

The right to have a representative or guardian is crucial when it regards to separated and unaccompanied children, either in an asylum seeking process, or already with a refugee status. Akasereh (2001), described that from the results of her study “*There was a*

*common expectation among all the UMAS interviewed, to have access to guardians' support after reaching the age of 18.*" Therefore, it is possible to consider that guardians have an irreplaceable role in these children and youth life's, in promoting and respecting their rights, at the same time that they are crucial when it comes to identifying their needs and in facilitating the communication within children and youth and the Authorities.

According to the Swedish law, the appointment of their legal representative, or so-called 'guardian' or 'trustee', should be done as soon as possible. But, once the child receives his temporary or permanent residence, a second representative may take over (Carlier, Donato, Pavlou *et al*, 2010); and the same happens if the Municipality responsible for the child is changed. However, these separations can cause, on the child, difficulties to develop new and meaningful relationships and cause developmental damage from a psychological point of view (Willigen, 2010).

In Sweden, the selection of legal guardians is made by the Social Services of the Municipalities, usually according to the candidate police records and to their finances statements. However, there are some Municipalities which provide specific trainings for legal guardians, but this is not mandatory in all the Municipalities.

In 2005, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended Sweden to do efforts in order "*to ensure the suitability and adequate qualifications of such guardians*" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, p.3).

### **Right of residence and removal procedures**

*"It is fundamental to ensure that (...), regardless of their immigration status, citizenship or background, all children are treated as children first and foremost."*

(European Commission Action Plan on Unaccompanied Children, 2012-2014, p.3)

Even though, many national and international instruments have specific considerations on asylum and refuge procedures when it comes to a child, it is a fact that the status as a 'foreigner' continues to be preeminent in areas such as the access to the territory and the right of residence and removal; In these situations, migration policies can undermine the imperative of the principle '*best interest of the child*', which conducts to situations of abuse and neglect by the State itself.

The '*right of residence*' is, in Europe, taken in consideration according to the child's expressed wish for asylum in the territory. In these circumstances, Sweden has several types of residence permits in asylum procedures, which are: refugee status (residence card for 5 years); permanent residence permit based on the need for protection; temporary (2 years); permanent residence permit based on humanitarian reasons; and permit based on family ties.

When considering the '*right of residence*' it is also important to consider those children to whom this status has been refused, such as children under the Dublin Convention, who in some circumstances, end up running away from the care placements and remain '*in hiding*', fearing to be returned to their home countries; but as well, those who have never applied for this status and stay illegally in the Country, the so-called '*undocumented children*'. Between these two groups of children, the ones '*in hiding*' have additional possibilities in terms of rights, than the ones residing as '*undocumented*',

which means that a child or youth legal status will not change on the basis of his/her age.

Consequently to situations of rejection, there are removal procedures, which can be characterized by ‘forced removal’ or by ‘voluntary return’. Nevertheless, there seems to be no such difference between both when it comes to respecting the ‘best interest of the child’, which appears here more as a regulation of migratory flows from the Member State initiative.

In Sweden, when Authorities decide that the child or youth no longer needs protection and should be as soon as possible reunited with the family or placed into care in the home country, it means that the final decision of the asylum process was the rejection and in this case, the child should leave the Swedish territory as soon as possible.

In these circumstances of removal procedures, the Authorities encourage the child or youth to return ‘home’ voluntarily. However, the connection between voluntary and forced return is not linked to the child’s desire or best interest, it is exclusively “(...) *an enforcement mechanism(...): voluntary returns are carried out by the Migration Board, while forced returns are the responsibility of the police.*” (Carlier, Donato & Pavlou, 2010, p. 38). Therefore, if the child agrees in a voluntary return, these procedures will be taken in consideration with the Migration Board and would be a faster procedure, however, if he does not want to return or stays ‘in hiding’, this procedure will be taken by the Police.

Such as by the enforcement mechanisms referred above, Swedish Government implemented, in 2008, a pilot project to improve the identification of families of separated and unaccompanied children from Afghanistan and Iraq, by sending their names and relatives names to the authorities in those countries, in order to return these children as ‘family reunification’. And, in March 2010, the Swedish Government announced also a new policy intended to encourage the return of separated and unaccompanied children to Afghanistan, being determined to finance on-site childhood protective centres, in order to allow children present in the Swedish territory to be sent to Afghanistan. Later on, during 2010, the construction of these Centres was confirmed and similar plan was made to Iraq.

Therefore, such cases of ‘forced return’ implemented by the Swedish Government result, most of the times, in the child’s deprivation of freedom, which means that the following principle defended by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, is being subjected to different interpretations by Member States.

*“(...) in all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child’s best interest must be a primary consideration”.*

(Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000/C 364/01, art.24.2)

In conclusion, the ‘best interest of the child’ shall be applied over a long-term provision and even if there is the identification of a child’s family or relatives, their reunification should not be taken without properly assessing and examining the best interest of the child and the results of such reunification.

## APPENDIX V

### Letter of Informed Consent

My name is Eloísa Nair Costa and I am conducting a research on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children placed in Foster Families. This research Project is part of my education in the International Master Programme in Social Work and Human Rights at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

In order to ensure that my project meet the ethical requirements for a good research, I promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Interviewees/respondents in the Project will be given information about the purpose of the Project;
- Interviewees/respondents have the right to decide whether to participate or not in the research even after the interview has been concluded;
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorized person can view or access it.

The interview will be recorder as this will make it easier to me to document what is said during the interview and also help in the continuing work with the Project.

During analysis, some data may be changed so that no interviewee/respondent will be recognized. After finishing the Project, the data will be destroyed. The data I intend to collect will only be used in this Project.

Participation in the Project is voluntary and therefore you have the right to decline answering any questions, or terminate the interview without giving any explanation.

You are welcome to contact me or my supervisor in case you have any question.

Eloísa Nair Costa

[nair420@hotmail.com](mailto:nair420@hotmail.com)

Ingrid Höjer

[ingrid.hojer@socwork.gu.se](mailto:ingrid.hojer@socwork.gu.se)

*You have read and understood this consent form, and you voluntarily accept to participate in this research study. . You will receive a copy of this form to keep.*

**Date**

**Signature**

## APPENDIX VI

### Interview Guide for Professionals

Male

Female

Nationality: Swedish

Age:  <20  20-30  30-40  40-50  >50

What is your Profession?

Which is your education background?

For how long have you been working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children/refugees?

Have you worked before with children/youth?

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For how many cases of unaccompanied asylum seeking children or refugees were you responsible of, during the project?

Do you perceive these children as dependent or autonomous?

How do you perceive and deal with the needs of these children?

Which considerations do you have in mind when placing unaccompanied asylum seeking children or refugees into care?

What makes you decide between placing them in a swedish foster family or in a foreigner foster family (or with similar background)?

When you place unaccompanied asylum seeking children into Foster Families, do you usually



prepare the families to the specific needs of these children? (If yes, how?/If no, why?)

Which characteristics do you have in consideration when you choose the “Good man” for

these children? And what is his role?

What does the word “integration” mean to you?

Regarding your experience, how do you think these children feel integrated in the society?

Do you work towards specific goals in terms of these children integration? (If yes, which ones and how?)

Which challenges do you find when working with this target group?

How do you deal with the situations of asylum seeking rejection? Which coping strategies do you find?

What happens when asylum seeking children leave care?

In your opinion, do these children participate in decision-making about their life's?

Is there anything you consider that should be improved in for the best interest of these children?

Regarding the new changes in the policies about reunification, what do you think about this? And how do you think Municipalities are ready?

Is there something else you would like to add before we finish this interview?