GUARD-UP

D2.2. Good practices guide

from Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy & Poland

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Introduction

The *GUARD UP: Good Practices Guide* presents good practices of the guardianship systems for unaccompanied minors in Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Poland and is an integral part of the GUARD-UP project, which aims to strengthen the protection systems for unaccompanied minors in six European Union member states. The Guide offers a more in-depth review of the good practices identified and in use in the partner countries, along with the gaps and challenges faced as well as the lessons learnt from each good practice.

More specifically, this Guide is divided into 5 different chapters showcasing good practices relevant to the topic of the chapter. The **first chapter** focuses on the **recruiting and training of guardians** and the practices presented reflect these aspects of the guardianship system. **Chapter 2** follows up with the **mentoring and support** provided to guardians through different programmes that exist in the respective partner countries. **Chapter 3** dives into the **protocols and treatment** that are being followed with the UAMs while **Chapter 4** presents the **procedures** that are followed to **ensure the best interests of the minors** and **Chapter 5** the **protection mechanisms** that were adopted for the young migrants. Finally, **Chapter 6: Recommendations** presents the suggestions that have emerged from the partner counties after the implementation of their good practices to further improve and strengthen the guardianship of unaccompanied minors. The recommendations are divided into **policy and practical level** respectively.

The *GUARD UP: Good Practices Guide* offers a valuable opportunity to explore the good practices in place in the partner counties of the GUARD-UP project and to understand the challenges the guardianship systems face. It also outlines lessons learnt, which allow for the further development and strengthening of the guardianship systems through implementation of the useful tools and practices identified, promoting the protection and care of the minors. The insights from the partner countries can be useful also for other EU Member States and therefore contribute to the continued development and strengthening of the guardianship system in general, providing practical tools and strategies to ensure better protection and care of unaccompanied minors.

Chapter 1: Recruiting and training of guardians

The recruiting and training of guardians is the primary step to ensure the proper protection of and support for unaccompanied minors. Below, we will be exploring good practices in relation to the topic, by showcasing case studies from Cyprus and Poland.

1.1. Good practices

One of the good practices that can be found in **Cyprus**, is that the guardianship of unaccompanied minors is **assigned under a single entity**. Guardianship in Cyprus, according to the law, is under the authority of the Director of the Social Welfare Services (SWS) and is being exercised either directly from the Director or the allocated guardians/workers at the SWS who are trained and assigned to this position. More specifically, Article 10 of the Refugee Law 6(I)/2000[1], states that the guardian for all unaccompanied minors in the Republic of Cyprus is the Director of the Social Welfare Services (SWS), a governmental department operating under the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance.

The SWS has a wide remit of work and legal obligations, amongst which the guardianship of unaccompanied minors. The guardians of unaccompanied children are also responsible for national children whose physical and psychological integrity is at risk. For this reason, there is one unified system of guardianship in Cyprus. The SWS must act on behalf of the minors and must put the legal apparatus of protection, care and welfare into practice. In this way, it is ensured that no time is lost in procedural formalities and that guardianship responsibilities are centralized, avoiding the complications of shared oversight among multiple actors or entities.

The individuals who are selected to be guardians in Cyprus have a **relevant degree.** More specifically, they are either social workers, psychologists or sociologists, meaning that they have a clear understanding about the social sphere, especially the local one. The fact that the background of the workers is the same or similar shows consistency, which significantly contributes in a positive way to the overall system followed. As soon as a person is hired, they receive a training from the SWS officers in regard to the daily work that they will do but also further training within the year, including topics such as the work that they have to do with children in general, or more specifically with unaccompanied minors- for example their application for international protection as well as the practices followed by the guardians to ensure their protection and integration into society.

In **Poland**, the situation of many children traveling alone, along with the Ukraine war that led to a lot of people fleeing the country, led the Polish legal system to introduce the **institution of a temporary**

[1] Refugee Law of 2000 (Article 10)

guardian, which until then was unknown. According to the law, this new model of temporary guardianship applied only to unaccompanied minors—citizens of Ukraine who fled their country due to the Russian invasion after February 24, 2022[2]. The institution of a temporary guardian also addressed the issue of multiple legal representatives for unaccompanied minors in Poland. As far as non-Ukrainian children are concerned, they may be represented in different proceedings by different persons. A temporary guardian not only provides day-to-day care for the child and manages their property, but also represents the child in all judicial, administrative, and other relevant proceedings, as well as in other legal matters[3]. Therefore, there is no need to appoint a separate representative for each proceeding involving the child

1.2. Gaps & Challenges faced and how they were addressed

By identifying the challenges, it is essential to examine the gaps in policies to better address the needs of the minors and enhance the measures aimed at safeguarding their well-being. A policy lacuna needs to be addressed regarding the **recruitment of new employees in the humanitarian field** as there is always a need for additional staff. Temporary employment contracts often require individuals to start work within a short timeframe, leaving little opportunity to provide them with proper training and orientation. The guardian does not usually have adequate knowledge, training or skills on legal or asylum issues. As described above, it is vital that consistent training and education needs to be prioritised. The main gap is the fact that the training courses that guardians receive are not consistent and not mandatory[4].

Regarding the institution of a **temporary guardian** that is mentioned as a good practice from **Poland**, one of the challenges associated with its introduction is the difficulty in properly assessing candidates for this role. The Polish law stipulates that a temporary guardian should be appointed immediately, no later than three days from the date the application is received by the court[5]. In practice, this timeframe does not allow the court to conduct a thorough verification of the candidate for the role of temporary guardian[6]. Furthermore, the legislation enables the court, in certain situations, to limit the evidentiary proceedings to documents and to waive the obligation to hear the child or the candidate guardian[7]. Given the broad scope of the temporary guardian's duties, this raises concerns. Although the courts are no longer as overwhelmed with cases regarding the appointment of a temporary guardian as they were at the beginning of the war[8], the regulation has not been modified to allow for

[2] Art. 25(1) of the "Special Act".
[3] Art. 25(2) of the "Special Act".
[4] In 2014, only seven Member States consistently offered induction training for new guardians. Recent research reveals that this number has increased to 11 Member States. However, the European Guardianship Network highlights that the lack of training for guardians remains a persistent issue. Source: FRA 2022, GUARDIANSHIP SYSTEMS FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN THE EUROPEAN UNION — DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2014
[5] Art. 25(15) of the "Special Act".
[6] A. Tymińska, *op.cit.,* p. 78.
[7] Art. 25(13) of the "Special Act".
[8] A. Tymińska, *op.cit.,* p. 56.

a more thorough assessment of whether a given person will properly fulfill the role of a temporary guardian.

The challenge also lies in ensuring effective supervision of temporary guardians and the well-being of the children under their care. While the law states that temporary guardians of Ukrainian children are monitored by local social welfare services[9], it does not specify how this supervision should be carried out[10]. Additionally, considering the significant number of temporary guardians, it appears that the service does not have the resources necessary to provide consistent and regular supervision for each family.

1.3. Lessons Learnt

The lessons learnt from the above practices that have been incorporated into the guardianship system is that while collaboration amongst local actors might be challenging, it is not impossible. Cooperation and adaptability are the key points in the cases of both Cyprus and Poland.

The single entity approach in the case study of **Cyprus** helped centralise the needs and the tasks of guardianship under the services of the Director of the SWS. Nevertheless, this approach can have some drawbacks as to the implementation of daily work. For instance, guardians who might be psychologists or social workers are requested to perform duties and tasks out of their scope of expertise. This includes legal representation of the unaccompanied minors, and that the SWS must act on behalf of the minors and must put the legal apparatus of protection, care and welfare into practice. Although having a single entity brings the benefit of fast and non-complex procedures, it creates an overwhelming situation for the SWS workers, combined with being understaffed. This brings us to the idea that a single entity is a beneficial approach, but a **multidisciplinary approach** would be the optimal solution. The multidisciplinary approach incorporates all relevant entities and authorities to act in a collaborative and cooperative manner.

Additionally, the involvement of expert professionals in the SWS as legal guardians requires consistent training and education. Although they are already people who are experts in the field, and they have an academic background, continuous training and education is a need that was discovered during the process of research to identify gaps and good practices in the legal guardianship system in Cyprus.

In the case of the care system in **Poland**, it is evident that there is a need for supplementary funding. Although a guardian may receive remuneration for performing their duties, in practice, it is insufficient. In particular, it does not cover, for example, the costs of traveling to the minor or translation fees[11]. As a result, individuals who wish to diligently fulfil the role of a guardian may be required to bear these costs themselves.

[9] Art. 25(3) of the "Special Act".
[10] A. Tymińska, *op.cit.*, p. 72-23.
[11] Anna Trylińska, Małoletni bez opieki ubiegający się o ochronę międzynarodową. Rola kuratora, in Studia Prawnicze, 2018, 1(213), p 60.

Another issue that emerged was that, in most cases, unaccompanied foreign minors absconded before a guardian was appointed for them. This could have been influenced by the fact that the appointment of guardians by the courts took a long time, leaving children in a state of limbo. Additionally, numerous children treated Poland only as a transit country. This was demotivating for lawyers who had undergone training and were ready to take on the role of a guardian. Meanwhile, the further fate of these children after leaving Poland was unknown.

The institution of temporary guardianship can be positively assessed in the context of the urgent need to provide care for minor citizens who arrived in Poland in large numbers, especially Ukrainians after the outbreak of the war. Above all, it demonstrated that the Polish legislator, when necessary, is able to respond rapidly to crisis situations and to introduce legal institutions protecting the interests of unaccompanied migrant minors. Should there be such a will, legislative amendments to protect the interests of non-Ukrainian children could be introduced so that the type of representation does not depend on the nationality of the child. Nevertheless, despite the successes in addressing the urgent demands of unaccompanied minors, the institution of temporary guardianship has also revealed a number of challenges that need to be managed.

Chapter 2: Mentoring and support of guardians

Supporting guardians and making sure to provide them with a training and mentoring programme to ensure the best implementation of their services is a point of discussion in several EU countries, as it allows the guardians to further enhance their knowledge and gain more information on their role. The following practices have been selected – from Belgium, Greece, Italy and Poland – and we present them in more detail below.

2.1. Good practices

In **Poland**, the training and mentorship programme focused on addressing the gap in the quality of representation during procedures, especially in asylum processes, during which the law does not require guardians to demonstrate knowledge of legal principles, asylum and migration law, or the ability to work with children. Even if an appointed guardian is a lawyer (attorney-at-law or advocate), he/she may lack knowledge or experience in asylum and migration law. Similarly, there are no state-provided training programs to improve the competencies of future guardians. One of the goals of the program led by the Association for Legal Intervention was to fill this vulnerability by offering training for guardians.

Through this coaching, individuals willing to act as guardians gained essential knowledge in the areas of stay legalization, the role of a guardian (the distinction between legal and actual guardians), return procedures, international protection of unaccompanied minors, practical aspects of guardianship, international and EU standards for the guardianship of unaccompanied minors, psychological aspects of working with migrant/refugee minors, and human trafficking. The program also aimed to address the problem of the limited number of individuals eager to undertake the role of guardian. After the training, a list of individuals interested in becoming guardians was created. Moreover, the Program

also provided training for employees of childcare centers. The goal was to encourage foster care institutions to accept unaccompanied foreign minors.

Belgium's guardianship system consists of 3 types of guardianships: professional, self-employed and voluntary. As many guardians are self-employed or volunteer-based, they benefit from a dedicated coaching program, an initiative funded by the Guardianship Service and implemented by Caritas International Belgium for French-speaking guardians and the Red Cross Flanders for Dutch-speaking guardians. Both organisations employ professional guardians, creating an effective structure where experienced professionals offer peer support to independent guardians.

The program provides comprehensive assistance, **including individualised support, training sessions, and a Helpdesk accessible by phone and email**. The program's Helpdesk and training sessions enhance guardians' specialised skills, knowledge, and practical expertise, empowering them to provide more effective support to minors. Received feedback indicates that guardians appreciate the focused, case-specific insights offered, which bring a valuable new perspective. Each guardian can ask for individual support for an ongoing guardianship, especially in complex cases or during their first guardianship. For many independent guardians working alone, these sessions also fulfil an essential need for peer engagement and support.

The **Mentorship Project** initiated for the first time in **Greece** by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, represents a pioneering approach to support unaccompanied minors. The project employs six mentors, primarily former unaccompanied minors who have settled in Greece and previously faced similar challenges. It addresses several key challenges faced by unaccompanied minors, including a lack of guidance and adult role models, social isolation and difficulty integrating into their new environment. This peer-led model fosters connection, guidance and a path toward positive integration into Greek society.

The Mentorship Project has set clear goals to enhance the welfare and development of unaccompanied minors:

1. Identifying individual needs of children
2. Encouraging educational engagement
3. Partnering with various support organizations
4. Increasing referrals to the Supported Independent Living (SIL) program
5. Raising awareness about existing project and activities
6. Providing direct insights to inform policy decisions
7. Promoting child participation in the Teens Network
8. Developing child-friendly informational resources

Role of Mentors: The mentors serve as role models, providing peer-to-peer support, guidance and encouragement to unaccompanied minors. Their role includes assisting minors in their transition to adulthood, offering both practical advice and motivation. They act as a bridge between the Ministry and unaccompanied minors, facilitating communication and ensuring that the needs of the children on the ground are heard. Drawing on their own lived experiences, mentors offer relatable insights

and support that resonate deeply with the young people they assist, helping them navigate challenges and build resilience.

Engagement Activities and Focus Group Discussions: Mentors organize sessions and focus group discussions during field visits to shelters and Supported Independent Living (SIL) apartments, engaging unaccompanied minors on topics such as educational aspirations, employability, life skills and everyday experiences. These discussions provide a platform for minors to share and reflect on their goals and challenges, fostering a supportive community environment. To ensure all minors have access to these resources, mentors regularly conduct visits across various regions, extending the project's reach and support to children throughout Greece.

Community-Building and Development Activities: The Mentorship Project additionally offers a range of community-building activities to support and empower unaccompanied minors. Through the Teens Network, monthly online meetings and themed discussions foster active child participation, creating a shared space for expression and learning. Art workshops provide an outlet for creative expression, enhancing confidence and emotional well-being. Educational guided visits, led by mentors, offer experiential learning opportunities, while sports activities promote resilience, teamwork, and integration into the community. Additionally, peer-to-peer mental health support, guided by the "I Support My Friends" approach of "Look, Listen, Link", equips unaccompanied minors with skills to offer mutual support for mental well-being, fostering a supportive network among peers.

Impact and Benefits of the Mentorship Project: To date, 2,385 children have benefited from the project, including 1,964 boys and 421 girls from 18 nationalities, mainly Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, and various African countries. The project has conducted 197 field visits, reaching 119 accommodation centers and 79 SIL apartments. The Mentorship Project has proven to be highly beneficial in supporting and integrating unaccompanied minors in Greece. One of the core achievements of this initiative is the establishment of trust, which has fostered a safe environment where unaccompanied minors feel empowered to express themselves openly. This foundation of trust has also motivated these young individuals to actively pursue personal and educational growth, helping them build confidence and resilience.

The project has strengthened peer support networks, which facilitates the exchange of vital information within the unaccompanied minors' community and allows for mutual assistance among peers. Additionally, the Mentorship Project has connected them to critical social services and assistance programs, addressing their immediate needs and providing a supportive framework as they adapt to their new environment. A further essential benefit is the feedback loop created by the project, enabling policymakers to receive real-time insights directly from unaccompanied minors, which ensures that policies remain responsive and adaptive to their evolving needs. By achieving these outcomes, the Mentorship Project plays a key role in empowering unaccompanied minors and supporting their integration, resilience, and journey towards self-sufficiency in Greece.

In **Italy**, the **establishment of associations and informal groups of voluntary guardians** represents an important step forward in terms of enhancing and promoting the figure of the voluntary guardian and the culture of guardianship itself, and thus in terms of strengthening the guardianship system. The establishment of voluntary guardianship associations responds to the need to provide a space for sharing and confronting for people working in the field of guardianship, offering them practical

support and useful tools for the guardians' daily activities. At the same time, the guardianship associations offer the opportunity to deepen their training and implement their knowledge by organising, in cooperation with the regional Guarantors and other bodies in the territory, activities, training initiatives and thematic in-depth studies on specific issues, in order to improve the quality of guardianship and intercept the specific needs both of unaccompanied alien minors and of people working in the guardianship system.

In the framework of the experience spontaneously matured within the different regional and local informal associations and groups, the project Tutori in Rete (Guardians in the Network) was born. It is the result of the collaboration between the AccoglieRete association of Syracuse, the Association of Voluntary Guardians of MSNAs Tuscany Region and the National Volunteer Centre (CNV). The project is developed within the framework of the *Never Alone-Per un domani possibile* initiative, with the aim of promoting and supporting the establishment of associations of voluntary guardians and creating a network at a national level. After a two-year process, in 2023 the association Tutori in Rete was born, currently made up of 16 associations spread across 15 Italian regions, ranging from north to south. The main objective underlying the establishment of the association, in addition to the desire to promote and support the establishment of new associations of voluntary guardians, concerns the will to connect the various guardians operating on the national territory, promoting at the national level the construction of collective spaces organised at the local and regional level and favouring the networking of voluntary guardians aimed at sharing knowledge, good practices and experiences acquired by the various subjects belonging to the network during the course of their activities.

The creation of a national network also makes it possible to strengthen the effectiveness of its action in terms of promoting and enhancing the culture of guardianship, interfacing with bodies and institutions in an authoritative and representative manner in order to reinforce the guardianship system and improve the quality of guardianship offered to unaccompanied alien minors.

2.2. Gaps & Challenges faced and how they were addressed

Even though the practices from the abovementioned countries were successful, identified gaps in the sphere of mentoring and training of the guardians make their work harder.

A gap addressed by the project led **by the Association for Legal Intervention** is the lack of cooperation between different entities. In the **Polish** system, there is no formally structured systemic cooperation between guardians, foster care institutions, and other entities (such as communities, schools, volunteers, migrant communities, lawyers, and NGOs). Therefore, one of the objectives of the project was to strengthen this cooperation, which proved to be quite a challenge. Likewise, it was a challenge to communicate to judges that specific individuals had received training and were prepared to fulfil the role of guardians of unaccompanied migrant minors in a specific area. When the courts did not have this information, guardians were often appointed from among advocates or attorneys-at-law who did not have the knowledge or experience in asylum or immigration law. Therefore, the project's team contacted the courts, especially family court judges, to inform them about lawyers ready to take up the role of guardians for unaccompanied minors and to encourage

them to consider these trained individuals for cases involving minors applying for international protection.

Despite its success, the **Mentorship Project** implemented in **Greece** has faced several challenges and identified areas for further development. One significant concern is the limited resources available for projects that specifically target youth aged 18 and above, as the transition to adulthood presents increasing challenges for unaccompanied minors. Additionally, the team must quickly adapt to evolving policies, which require flexible and responsive program structures. The diversity of team members' backgrounds, while valuable, creates a need for greater cohesion and unity in approach. There is also limited representation of unaccompanied minors' various nationalities among the mentors, which affects the team's ability to fully address the diverse experiences and needs within the community. The geographic dispersion of long-term accommodation facilities presents logistical difficulties, impacting the project's ability to reach and support unaccompanied minors consistently across locations. Lastly, there is occasional reluctance from some stakeholders to fully engage with the mentors, which can hinder collaboration and limit the project's reach.

Given the plurality of actors involved, the main difficulty for **voluntary guardianship associations or groups**, and particularly in the case of the association Tutori in Rete in **Italy**, concerns the coordination of the parties involved and the fact that the associations that are part of the network are represented equally in the governing bodies. To address this difficulty, Tutori in Rete envisaged the appointment of a broad governing board that would be as representative as possible and capable of covering the territory from north to south. In addition, intermediate stages of consultation with all the associations, which in turn are carriers of the points of view of their members, are envisaged in order to ensure effective coordination and representation of the parties and territories involved. In the case of Tutori in Rete, there are also difficulties that are linked to the lack of resources capable of permanently guaranteeing the presence of staff taking care of the management and administrative aspects of the association. A further difficulty has to do with the need to acquire skills in planning, programming and advocacy, in order to translate ideas into concrete actions. In this regard, in co-planning with the initiative *Never Alone - per un domani possibile*, the association intends to promote capacity building initiatives to foster the acquisition of skills and knowledge on the subject by the various actors involved in the Network.

2.3. Lessons Learnt

The **Training and Mentoring Programme** for guardians, representatives, and foster care institutions organized by the Association for Legal Intervention in 2023–2024, in **Poland**, demonstrated the strong necessity for systemic and sectoral cooperation between different entities. Establishing such cooperation not only streamlines legal procedures but also ensures that children receive holistic care and adequate guardianship.

What is significant for taking away from the practice performed by **Belgium** is the essential day-to-day support that the guardians are provided with. Through the various services, the addressing of the needs that arise as well as the identification of the gaps for additional training of the guardians. The Coaching Programme and its services offer continuous support to the guardians, as well as addressing

the gaps for the necessary training on the ongoing challenges. Sustainable funding sources allowed for the continuity and appropriate development of the programme, maintaining high standards and quality of the support and training offered. Ultimately, helping the guardians to offer a better support and guidance to UAMs arriving to Belgium.

In the case of **Greece**, there are two takeaways. The Importance of Emotional Support and Community and Peer Networks Facilitating Integration. In the case of the former, building a safe and supportive environment where minors can express their emotions and challenges is crucial. The project highlights the need for mental health support and peer-to-peer assistance, promoting emotional resilience and well-being among vulnerable minors. Regarding community and Peer Networks Facilitate Integration, the project underscores the importance of creating peer networks, such as the Teens Network, where minors can share experiences, learn from one another and develop a sense of belonging. Such networks foster social cohesion and empower minors to take active roles in their own integration.

Finally, in **Italy**, the experience acquired within **associations of voluntary guardians**, first at regional and local level and then at national level, shows the importance for those who work as voluntary guardians to have access to spaces and opportunities for exchanging views and opinions with their peers. In fact, the establishment of collective spaces and moments of sharing allows voluntary guardians to have practical support in the difficulties encountered on a daily basis throughout the course of their work and to measure themselves with experiences different from their own, maturing skills and acquiring tools that are not only theoretical but also practical and operational. The creation of several voluntary guardians' associations at regional level shows how important it is for those working in the field of guardianship to have access to moments of mutual encounters, where they can express critical issues, doubts or needs existing in their own reality, actively intervening to strengthen the guardianship system. The fact that, starting from individual regional associations' experiences, it was felt necessary to structure a national network of voluntary guardians shows the will to acquire a fundamental role in the dialogue with institutions and local authorities and in decision-making concerning the protection of unaccompanied alien minors, presenting itself as an authoritative and representative subject, able to account for and bring together the different regional realities and to act in a unified and cohesive manner for the improvement and strengthening of the guardianship system, intercepting and giving voice to the real needs of the different subjects involved in it.

Chapter 3: Protocols for the treatment of UAMs

Despite the training and mentorship provided to the guardians for the support of UAMs, a number of partner countries also adopted protocols for the treatment of UAMs.

3.1. Good practices

Given the pressing phenomenon of UAMs going missing from the reception facilities in **Belgium**, the Belgian organisation Child Focus in collaboration with a wide range of partners, led by the Secretary

of State for Asylum and Migration and the Minister of the Interior developed a ***Guide Frontline Professionals on Missing UAMs***[12]**.** This guide is intended for those working with UAMs to support both prevention and follow-up in cases of disappearance. The primary target groups include police, staff at the arrival centers, guardians, shelter workers, and frontline outreach teams. The manual includes a section dedicated to prevention strategies, detailing proactive measures to reduce the risk of children going missing. It also provides clear, step-by-step guidance on how to respond effectively when a child is reported missing. Additionally, it outlines best practices for implementing both prevention and response measures, ensuring a holistic approach to safeguarding children.

Moreover, Child Focus has concluded a protocol with the Public Prosecutor's Office and the police services on cooperation on cases of missing UAMs and it has been incorporated into the Belgian legal framework as an annex to Ministerial order 04/2022 on search for missing persons[13], making the practice harmonised and standardised ensuring equal treatment and follow up for each reported case of missing UAM in Belgium. The protocol organizes the collaboration between these various bodies by specifying the role of each. It applies to all disappearances of minors (and of young adults between 18 and 24 in cases of worrying disappearances), including unaccompanied minors.

When it comes to the guardianship system for UAM in **Croatia** there is the introduction of the **Protocol on the treatment of UAM** (hereinafter referred to as: Protocol). UAM are a special population with unique needs, which makes it difficult to standardize case management in order to facilitate the work of guardians and other profesisonals working with UAM. Although it has been proven to be challenging, the standardization of case management was achieved to some extent through the introduction of the Protocol, which was first instituted in 2009. It was done under the authority of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Ministry of the Interior.

Given that the needs of UAM require interdisciplinary action, in 2013 the Protocol was improved to reflect the important aspect of interdisciplinarity, and the last version was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Croatia in 2018. The Protocol, although not a legally binding act but a document that provides guidelines for various stakeholders involved in the care of UAM, is a very useful tool and represents the most important document regulating the treatment of UAM in Croatia. It clearly defines the bearers of obligations, ways and deadlines in dealing with UAM, with the aim of timely and effective protection of their rights and interests. The Protocol also contains useful appendices such as: the form for the initial assessment of the needs of UAM, a schematic representation of the assessment of the needs of UAM, the legislative framework of actions in case of suspicion and identification of UAM as a victim of human trafficking, an address book of participants in the treatment of UAM, and a request form for approval of free legal aid, all of which serve as practical tools when supporting UAM.

The Protocol specifies (in detail) certain actions that must be taken when UAM arrive in the Republic of Croatia and obliges all relevant stakeholders in the system of protection of UAM (e.g. social workers, guardians, police officers, school staff, doctors) to act in accordance with it, guided by the best interest of the child. The procedures in the Protocol are listed and described in chronological order according to the logic of legal regulations that are in force and according to good practices.

[12] Childfocus, *" Guide on the disappearences of Unaccompanied Minors."* accessed July 20, 2024 Interactief draaiboek - verdwijning NBMV_FR.pdf (childfocus.be)

[13] Ministerial Directive COL 04/2022 19.05.2022, https://www.om-mp.be/fr/savoir-plus/circulaires

Each chapter, in addition to the described roles of the participants in the procedure, also contains a short explanation of the procedure itself. Unified treatment of UAM, which the Protocol aims to achieve, is crucial for several reasons. Every UAM has the right to be cared for in a manner that is in his or her best interest. Therefore, uniform procedures ensure that every child is given the same level of protection and support, regardless of their background, culture or other individual characteristics. Furthermore, UAM are often at risk of discrimination and uniform procedures help prevent discrimination, ensuring that every child is treated with equal respect and dignity.

3.2. Gaps & Challenges faced and how they were addressed

In **Belgium**, the main challenge for the implementation of the practice is awareness raising and appropriate training for all the frontline professionals involved. To address this challenge, Child Focus, the Guardianship Service and Fedasil have decided to launch an implementation project, consisting of several phases. In the first phase, some partners from the guide were consulted about the obstacles encountered in their daily practice. Based on these consultations, Child Focus identified key themes posing significant challenges and organized roundtables to address them. These roundtables aim to familiarize participants with the manual, explore how it can help overcome these obstacles, and foster better coordination and collaboration among partners. The first roundtable, held in October 2024, focused on immediate departures—cases where unaccompanied minors disappear shortly after contacting organizations or official bodies. The second roundtable, addressing unaccompanied minors in transit, is scheduled for March.

On the other hand, in **Croatia**, based on the Protocol, the Interdepartmental Commission for the Protection of Unaccompanied Children was established, with the goal to improve the cooperation of bodies involved in the protection of UAM. However, to date, although the introduction and use of the Protocol are positive practices, there are still very few visible indicators of significant changes in the strategic, financial, educational and operational plans that would strengthen the quality of protection of UAM in Croatia.

3.3. Lessons Learnt

The ***Guide for Frontline Professionals on Missing Minors*** exemplifies effective cooperation among essential services and authorities to report, locate, and support missing unaccompanied minors (UAMs). It highlights the importance of institutionalizing protocols and templates for collaboration within a legal framework, ensuring a structured and consistent approach to the missing UAMs. By prioritizing the child's well-being and long-term support, the Guide promotes a holistic strategy to achieve integrated child protection objectives.

The Protocol that has been actively used in **Croatia**, ensures that their rights, which are prescribed by international conventions and national legislation, are respected and protected. This includes the right to security, health care, education, family life and protection from all forms of violence and exploitation. In addition, when all relevant stakeholders working with UAM follow equal procedures, it increases the efficiency of the entire guardianship system. This means that UAM can be connected

with the necessary services and support more quickly, which is especially important in emergencies and crisis situations. Uniform procedures also facilitate cooperation between the different institutions involved in dealing with UAM, such as the police, the social welfare system, healthcare facilities and schools. When procedures are standardized, it enables better monitoring and evaluation of the quality of services provided to UAM.

Chapter 4: Procedures to ensure best interests of UAMs

The final chapter presents good practices in relation to procedures that are being followed by guardians in order to ensure the best interests of the minors.

4.1. Good practices

In **Greece**, the implementation of **Best Interests Procedures (BIP)** aims to ensure that the needs and well-being of unaccompanied minors are prioritized throughout reception and asylum processes. Guardians now play a central role in reception and asylum procedures by conducting Best Interests Assessments (BIA) to develop individualized case plans tailored to each minor's unique situation. The current BIP project introduces a structured, standardized approach through several core components. First, the BIP Toolkit includes short and comprehensive BIA forms, guidelines for completing them, and a theoretical and legal framework to establish a uniform procedure. This toolkit also included a confidentiality undertaking to ensure secure handling of sensitive information.

The project's training package offers "Training of Trainers" (ToT) sessions, which encompass adult education methodology, step-by-step guidance on the BIA process, child protection case management, theoretical and legal knowledge, and child-friendly communication techniques to ensure minors feel safe and understood.

To monitor progress and effectiveness, a comprehensive Monitoring & Evaluation framework has been implemented, which includes monthly narrative reports, sample BIAs, an online feedback form, and focus group discussions to gather qualitative insights from involved stakeholders.

Training initiatives have made significant strides. The Training of Trainers on "Best Interest Procedures – Best Interest Assessment" has already equipped, at the time of drafting this report, 69 focal points, with six sessions completed and one more scheduled for November 2024. These trainers are responsible for conducting secondary training sessions for field professionals, supported and monitored by the General Secretariat of Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection. To date, 34 secondary training sessions have been conducted, reaching over 300 field professionals. Certification is also underway for both trainers and professionals conducting BIAs, ensuring that standardized qualifications are met across all individuals involved in the procedure.

The project is supported by three partners from the National Emergency Response Mechanism, five emergency accommodation facilities, 82 accommodation centres for UAMs, supervised

semi-independent living apartments and dedicated child protection teams across safe areas. Monthly progress reports indicate a substantial advancement toward the project's objectives, establishing a foundation for a standardized, compassionate and legally aligned approach to safeguarding the best interests of minors in Greece.

Another good practice followed in **Cyprus** is the **complaint mechanism system** available to unaccompanied minors. Through this mechanism, minors can make their voices heard by sharing their thoughts or complaining about a situation they are found in through the **'**complaint box'. This mechanism allows each child to write down all their complaints or feedback on anything that may concern them and put it in the box or communicate their feedback to a family member/support officer of their case. The mechanism is an important tool and one that creates trust between the minor and the person whom he/she chooses to share his/her thoughts with.

The complaint box is a mechanism that promotes and strengthens Article 3(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that 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. Through the complaint box the child's needs are heard and considered. This practice recognizes the child as an equal member of society with the same rights and needs as anyone else. It eliminates the conception by state authorities that the child is generally a biased actor in society with less rights.

A good practice recently adopted in **Italy** concerns the guidance of unaccompanied foreign minors once they have reached the age of majority. According to the existing legislation, guardianship for unaccompanied foreign minors ceases when they reach the age of eighteen, but this does not mean that when they reach the age of majority they no longer need guidance. When a minor leaves the reception facility he/she is faced with challenges for which he/she often does not possess the necessary knowledge or skills; complex challenges related to autonomy, integration into the professional world, the management of social relations and possibly also the prosecution of his/her education.

In this regard, Article 13 of Law 47/2017 provides for the possibility for the Juvenile Court to assign unaccompanied foreign minors who have reached the age of eighteen to the social services until they reach the age of twenty-one. In the difficult moment represented by the transition to the age of majority, the possibility of guaranteeing continuous support to the minor constitutes a fundamental element in order not to risk jeopardizing the path of reception and protection carried out, ensuring support to the minor in the transition towards complete autonomy.

In this sense, a good practice recently adopted by the Region of Tuscany has to do with the signing of a Protocol aimed at **strengthening and promoting the figure of the social guardian**. The protocol, signed by the Region of Tuscany, the Juvenile Court of Florence and other local bodies, establishes the possibility for the person who has undertaken the role of voluntary guardian to continue in that role even after the minor comes of age (so-called social guardianship). The Protocol aims at strengthening and enhancing the figure of the social guardian. The recognition and strengthening of the role of the social guardian in the administrative continuation, guaranteed through the signing of this protocol, is a decisive part of the minor's path towards autonomy. The model developed and promoted by the Region of Tuscany makes it possible to ensure the continuation of the child's support and the

maintenance of a relationship of trust and protection even after the child comes of age, when formal legal protection has ended, guaranteeing the effectiveness and positivity of the guardianship process itself.

The novelty introduced by this protocol thus fits into and reinforces the idea of a guardianship that is not only formal but substantial and effective, aimed at the enhancement of individual capacities and the successful integration of the child into the social context, consistently with what is provided for at the regulatory level by Law 47/2017. In this sense, the model promoted by the Region of Tuscany not only makes it possible to respond effectively to the immediate needs of the minor but also contributes significantly to promoting his/her well-being and supporting the growth and inclusion in the social and work environments.

4.2. Gaps & Challenges faced and how they were addressed

Historically in **Greece**, BIA was not a standardized component in case management. Multiple organizations used different assessment forms, resulting in inconsistent procedures and fragmented information about each child. Additionally, the absence of formal guidelines, assessor training and a unified framework led to the risk of re-traumatization.

To improve the practice of participation of young people, and ensure their complaints are heard, the means available to the minors should be improved, in a way to make them keener to share their thoughts and ideas with their guardians. There have been instances where the youth do not want to speak with anyone as they feel like they cannot trust the guardian, or the social worker and have a feeling that the person will abandon them and send them back to the country where they seek refuge and protection from. In such cases, the guardian reminds the minor that they have a relationship of trust and mutual support so to make them feel heard and cared for.

The main challenge is to create and strengthen the figure of the **social guardian** (after the unaccompanied alien minor turns 18) throughout **Italy**, ensuring that this figure is recognized and legitimized both within public institutions and in civil society. The social guardian plays a fundamental role in accompanying and supporting migrant minors, but often his or her function is still not fully understood or valued. This prevents full legitimization of the social guardian, who may find himself operating in a context where his authority and professional value are not sufficiently recognized.

4.3. Lessons Learnt

Standardization is Key: One of the most significant lessons learned from the BIA good practice in **Greece,** is the importance of a standardized approach. The introduction of the BIP Toolkit with its comprehensive and consistent form, guidelines, and a unified framework, has greatly improved the consistency and quality of Best Interest Assessments (BIA). Standardization has minimized confusion and fragmented procedures, ensuring that all involved parties are aligned in their approach to child protection.

Comprehensive Training Promotes Effective Implementation: The "Training of Trainers" (ToT) model has proven to be an effective method for scaling up capacity across the field. By equipping trainers

with both theoretical and practical knowledge on BIA and child protection, the project has ensured that field professionals are not only knowledgeable but also prepared to deliver the assessment in a child-friendly and trauma-informed manner. The emphasis on adult education methodology has been crucial in making sure the information is accessible and impactful for the trainers, who in turn can convey it effectively to frontline actors.

Child-Centered Approaches Enhance Trust and Engagement**:** The emphasis on child-friendly communication techniques, coupled with the involvement of guardians in the BIA process, has been vital for ensuring that minors feel heard and understood. A child-centered approach fosters trust, which is essential for effective assessments and case planning. Ensuring minors feel safe throughout the process helps reduce the risk of re-traumatization and improves the overall quality of care they receive.

Monitoring and Evaluation Are Crucial for Continuous Improvement: A robust Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework has provided critical insights into the practice's progress and effectiveness. Monthly reports, sample BIAs, feedback forms and focus group discussions have been essential in tracking the impact of the practice and identifying areas for improvement. The continuous collection of qualitative data has allowed the project team to adapt and refine their approach, making the process more effective and responsive to the needs of children.

In regard to the complaint mechanism approach used in **Cyprus**, it was observed that engaging the young migrants' voices in the system helped to identify any possible gaps and what their real needs are. It is important to incorporate practices that involve the actual beneficiaries into the system and ask for their opinion, thoughts and feedback.

What can be learnt from the novelty introduced by the protocol regarding the figure of the **social guardian after the age of majority** in **Italy** concerns the importance of guaranteeing unaccompanied alien minors continuous guardianship over time, one that does not end when the minor reaches the age of majority but takes into account his/her progressive acquisition of skills and responsibilities in order for him/her to achieve complete autonomy. The valorization of the figure of the social guardian in the administrative continuation promoted by the Region of Tuscany through the signing of this protocol and the recognition of the possibility for this one to continue his activity also after the minor entrusted under his guardianship reaches the age of majority, shows the importance of putting the unaccompanied foreign minor in the condition to benefit from an effective and substantial guardianship. In fact, the recognition of the possibility of social guardianship in the administrative continuation demonstrates the importance of establishing and maintaining a relationship between the guardian and the minor or minors entrusted to him/her that is built on a stable and ongoing connection, based on trust and constant support, a relationship that reflects the needs of the individual child and allows him/her to fully develop his/her potential, with the appropriate support and adequate resources at disposal.

Chapter 5: Protection mechanisms for UAMs

The large influx of unaccompanied minors in Europe in the past few years has led a lot of counties to

develop mechanisms for the support and protection of the vulnerable youth arriving in their territory. Below, there is the presentation of good practices followed by Greece and Croatia.

5.1. Good Practices

The **National Emergency Mechanism (NERM)** mission in **Greece**, as defined in Article 39 of Law 4960/2022, includes tracing and swiftly placing homeless or at-risk children in emergency shelters. The mechanism is also responsible for planning and implementing specialized actions, in coordination with relevant authorities, to trace and safely accommodate unaccompanied minors facing danger, violence, trafficking, exploitation, or abuse.

Mission and Objectives of NERM: NERM seeks to create a protective safety net for unaccompanied minors in Greece, focusing particularly on homeless children or those in unsafe living conditions. Additionally, NERM operates as a preventative mechanism against human trafficking by identifying and supporting unaccompanied minors who may remain undetected or unregistered, lacking access to services.

The key components of NERM include:

1. Tracing Line:

    - Operated by a team of nine specialized professionals, social workers, social scientists, psychologists and lawyers, the Tracing Line is accessible via a fixed line based at the MoMA, a 5digit number (free of charge) and a mobile line, as well as via the applications Viber and WhatsApp,
    - Supported by METAdrasi's 24/7 interpretation service, it enables reports from field actors, authorities, civil society, and citizens,
    - The Tracing Line coordinates with Mobile Units and authorities to ensure immediate transfer to emergency shelters.

2. Info Desks and Mobile Units:

    - Located in Attica and Central Macedonia, the Info Desks and Mobile Units provide essential support services, including psychosocial and legal assistance, and conduct case management, age assessments, and Best Interest Assessment procedures.
    - The Mobile Units assist unregistered minors with police identification and transfer to emergency shelters.

3. Emergency Accommodation Facilities:

    - Operated by the International Organization for Migration, with three facilities in Attica and one in Central Macedonia, these centers provide 155 places for unaccompanied minors and offer psychosocial support, legal aid, and conduct Best Interest Assessments.

4. Support for Children Arriving from Ukraine:

- NERM has been designated as the competent authority for unaccompanied minors fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Registration and referral protocols were established at border entry points, with continued follow-up by municipal authorities as necessary.

5. Municipality Referrals:

- NERM collaborates with municipal authorities to ensure social support and conduct Best Interest Assessments for UAMs from Ukraine and other vulnerable children residing with adult relatives in precarious conditions.

Achievements: Since its launch, NERM has facilitated the safe accommodation of 5,688 unaccompanied children. It has also managed the cases of 604 UAMs from Ukraine since March 2022. NERM has become a recognized model for child protection, with international recognition, including presentations at the World Refugee Forum and an award from the EUCPN as a crime preventive mechanism.

Funding and Future Steps: NERM operations, including Info Desks and Mobile Units, were initially funded by UNHCR and are now supported by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum through EEA Grants, with further support from the Swiss-Greek Cooperation Program (2024-2025). Looking ahead, NERM will expand its services to other vulnerable populations at risk of homelessness, leveraging its Helpline to connect individuals with appropriate services.

To further illustrate the good practices in the guardianship system for UAM in **Croatia**, the innovative approach of one of the social welfare institutions is presented. **Zagreb-Dugave Community Service Center** (a social care institution that provides accommodation services for children and young adults with behavioral problems from the age of 7, unaccompanied children who find themselves outside their place of residence and to foreign UAM who find themselves on the Croatian territory without the supervision of their parents or another adult) represents one of the **social welfare institutions in Croatia that takes care of UAM who have opted to seek international protection in Croatia**.

Since the beginning of the migrant crisis in Europe in 2015, Zagreb - Dugave Center has been designated as one of the two control points in Croatia that accepts UAM and cares for them and has done so since 1996. In the beginning, these were mostly children from the former Republic of Yugoslavia, but as the global geopolitical and economic situation changed, so did the population they care for. In total, about 40 countries of origin of UAM were recorded. After the European migrant crisis worsened in 2015, Zagreb – Dugave was faced with an increased number of UAM and had to seek new and more efficient ways of supporting UAM in their care. In 2019, to facilitate their work with UAM, Zagreb - Dugave Center introduced a welcome leaflet and a welcome audio recording for UAM. Upon admission to the institution, each child receives a leaflet in their mother tongue and an audio recording is played in a language they understand, to familiarize them with their rights and everything that awaits them during their stay in the institution. The information contained in the leaflet and the audio recording includes information about where they are (in which institution, but also geographically - which region and country), words of encouragement not to run away but to stay in the institution so that they can get the help they need, and information on the right to a special guardian and legal assistance when expressing the intention to seek international protection.

The leaflet was created in cooperation with UNHCR, Croatian Red Cross and the Center for Missing and Exploited Children, each of which contributed their expertise to this important part of the initial integration of UAM. Audio recordings are available in Arabic, Pashto, Persian, English and Croatian and proved to be a very useful tool in establishing an initial relationship with the UAM, especially when the audio recording is played practically immediately upon arrival of UAM in the institution.

5.2. Gaps & Challenges faced and how they were addressed

Since 2015, **Greece** has experienced a significant influx of unaccompanied children (UAM), with recorded numbers reaching 5,424 as of February 2020. Due to limited accommodation options, many unaccompanied minors found themselves homeless or in precarious conditions, with some children placed in protective police custody for extended periods awaiting shelter availability. By 2020, an estimated 1,000 children were homeless, undetected, and lacking access to adequate protection, especially in urban areas like Athens and Thessaloniki. This exposure increased their risk of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

In response to these challenges, the Greek government enacted legislation in 2020 that abolished protective custody of unaccompanied minors and established the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors (SSPUAM) under the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. SSPUAM was designated as the primary authority for the protection of UAMs, leading to the creation of the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) in January 2021.

Since **Croatia** entered the Schengen zone in 2023, UAM no longer have any obstacles on their way to the countries of Western Europe (which are their most frequent destinations) and thus have no need to stay in Croatia for longer periods of time leading to a lot of UAMs fleeting the country.

5.3. Lessons Learnt

Holistic Approach to Child Protection: The NERM model demonstrates the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to protecting unaccompanied minors. By integrating various support services—such as psychosocial support, legal aid and age assessments—within a structured mechanism, the program ensures that children's needs are addressed from multiple angles, improving their overall well-being and safety.

Rapid Response and Flexibility**:** One of the key successes of NERM has been its ability to respond rapidly to the needs of unaccompanied minors, especially those who are homeless, undetected or at risk of trafficking and exploitation. The Tracing Line, available via multiple platforms (phone lines, WhatsApp, Viber), ensures that cases can be reported and acted upon quickly. This agility allows the program to trace and place minors in emergency shelters swiftly, preventing further harm.

Proactive Prevention and Outreach: By focusing not only on response but also on prevention—particularly in identifying and supporting unaccompanied minors who may remain undetected—NERM has developed a proactive strategy that prevents minors from falling into

dangerous situations. This preventative approach is critical in avoiding the risks of trafficking and exploitation before they occur.

In relation to the center in **Croatia**, it has been noted that when children are greeted with a welcome text in their own language, they become less distrustful, slowly begin to relax and mostly listen with curiosity, absorbing the initial information. Such an approach significantly facilitated their later involvement in the activities and the rhythm of the institution's work. Experts from Zagreb - Dugave Center who have worked with UAM for many years, have explained that the leaflet and the welcome audio recording worked very well for UAM. It has been noted that this innovative approach has helped many UAM to avail of the support they required and ensured their safety on their migration journey, irrelevant of whether they remained in Croatia or continued travelling to another country.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

Recommendations that derive from the successful practices outlined above. These recommendations are divided into policy-level and practical actions, addressing both immediate implementation strategies and long-term systemic changes in the partner countries for the guardianship system and the protection of all minors.

6.1. At policy level

1. **Aligning Policies with International Standards**: Policies should be aligned with international human rights standards, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the EU Asylum Procedures Directive. This ensures that Best Interest Procedures are legally sound and respect the fundamental rights of minors. Continuous review of national policies is needed to ensure they remain in compliance with international frameworks
2. **Establishing Clear Monitoring Guidelines**: Clear, standardized monitoring and evaluation guidelines should be created to ensure consistent adherence to procedures across all institutions involved in the care of unaccompanied minors.
3. **Ensuring Long-Term Impact and Sustainability**: Stability in funding and long-term planning are essential for the continued success and sustainability of child protection initiatives and mechanisms.
4. **Encouraging Stakeholder Engagement**: Policymakers should engage NGOs, international organizations and civil society in developing and advocating policies for the protection of unaccompanied minors, ensuring diverse input and collaboration in the process.
5. **Institutionalise and harmonise the practice for the response to the cases of UAMs going missing**
6. **Formalize structures for collaboration between different entities – Standardized multidisciplinary procedures:** NGOs, Migration Offices, international organizations, Border Guards, Centers etc., in order to improve the efficiency of guardianship services. There is a need for standardized multidisciplinary procedures, mainly in terms of case management and follow-ups. During these procedures all relevant actors that work with unaccompanied minors are involved, from the Social Welfare to the Police and Asylum Services. The

multidisciplinary and multiagency 'Barnahus' model developed to handle cases of child sexual abuse could serve as a great reference for this recommendation as it is used in a number of EU countries with successful results. (More information available here: Home - Barnahus). It would be beneficial for the professionals to attend more training courses and workshops on guardianship requirements as well as skills development.

7. **Extending and Strengthening the Role of the Social / Temporary Guardian:** Strengthen the role of the social guardian, ensuring that this figure continues to support young people even after the age of 21, particularly in cases where young people are still facing difficulties in acquiring autonomy. It is important that the social guardian is not limited to a monitoring role but becomes a concrete reference figure in the daily accompaniment. Despite the termination of legal guardianship, many young people are in a vulnerable phase and could benefit from prolonged accompaniment beyond the age of 21, especially if the social and economic context in which they live is precarious. This could serve as an inspiration to expand the scope of responsibilities for guardians and legal representatives, so that their role is not limited to just one specific procedure.
8. **Promotion of Good Practices at National Level:** Disseminate regional good practices, such as that of the Region of Tuscany (Italy), on a national and international scale, so that other geographical areas can take example and develop similar solutions, adapted to their own local realities. The positive experiences of some regions can be models to be followed at national and international level. Spreading these examples and stimulating comparisons between different regional experiences can contribute to improving the social support system throughout the country.
9. **Integration with Local Support Services:** Encourage the creation of integrated networks between social guardians and local social, psychological, health and educational services. It is essential that the social guardian does not operate in isolation but has direct and facilitated access to all the resources available on the territory, in order to offer concrete and personalized support to the young person. The social guardian's support can be more effective if it is supported by a network of territorial services that provide specialized answers. For example, collaboration with psychologists, educators and social workers can guarantee comprehensive and targeted support.
10. **Ongoing and Personalized Assessment of the Young Person's Pathway:** Introduce periodic and personalized assessment tools for the youth's transition pathway. These tools should be designed to monitor progress and to identify any critical issues or need for intervention. Each young person has a specific history and needs. It is therefore essential that the social guardian, with the help of the services involved, can adapt the accompaniment to the evolving needs of the young person, modifying or enhancing the support at critical moments.
11. **Economic and Financial Sustainability of the Model:** Ensure adequate economic and financial resources for the continuation of social support after reaching the age of majority. This includes both the support of voluntary social guardians and the strengthening of public and private services to support young people. Without adequate economic investment, the support model risks becoming ineffective. Funding must be stable and sufficient to ensure that social mentors can do their work effectively without time or resource constraints.
12. **Monitoring and Evaluation of Regulatory Implementation:** A robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework should be implemented, leveraging feedback, progress reports,

and regular assessments to identify gaps and continuously improve procedures. The system of continuous monitoring and evaluation of regulations concerning social protection after the age of 18, to verify the effectiveness of the policies adopted and identify possible areas for improvement will be useful. Continuous evaluation enables adjustments to be made in real time so that policies and practices are increasingly in line with the real needs of young people and the resources available.

6.2. At practical level

1. **Standardizing Assessment Tools**: Adopting the BIP Toolkit will help ensure uniform Best Interest Assessments (BIA) across all agencies, fostering consistent, fair, and comprehensive evaluations for all minors.
2. **Ongoing Training and Capacity Building**: Continuous, updated training for child protection professionals should be provided, with a focus on the "Training of Trainers" (ToT) model to effectively disseminate knowledge and best practices. The promotion of specific training programmes amongst guardians and other partners (volunteers, social workers) working with minors. Many of them unfortunately are not always prepared to deal with the complex situations that arise in such delicate situations. Common training will also be beneficial as this will help to enhance a wider knowledge of the protection of minors in migration, contributing to both personal and professional development of the guardians. Specialized training is crucial to address the dynamic circumstances of UASC arriving at reception centers. It is essential that social guardians have adequate tools to deal with the different problems that the young people in their charge may present, for example, training should be provided on handling incidents of human trafficking, preventing absconding, understanding culturally specific approaches for certain countries, and addressing other vulnerabilities and should be consisted of depending on the needs.
3. **Enhancing Child-Friendly Approaches**: It's important to prioritize trauma-informed, child-centered communication, ensuring that minors feel safe, heard, and understood throughout the assessment process. To improve the practice of participation of young people, the digital aspect can be taken into consideration in order for the minors to have the opportunity to share their thoughts and improve their participation easier through digital tools. For instance, specific means could be developed to enable the minors to virtually exchange their experiences with authorities, other national bodies and civil society, while also providing their advice in cases of successes and failures. Such practices would allow for greater involvement of the minors, contributing significantly also to their mental health as they will feel heard and included.
4. **Ensuring Data Protection and Confidentiality**: Strict confidentiality protocols should be adhered to, with regular audits to ensure that sensitive information is protected.
5. **Promoting Cross-Sector Collaboration**: Encouraging coordinated efforts across legal, healthcare, housing, and social service sectors to provide a holistic approach, strengthening the care and protection of unaccompanied minors.
6. **Develop prevention and follow up strategies and actions, organizing joint training to ensure their smooth implementation**

7. **Increase of remuneration of guardians:** At the practical level, it is necessary to increase the remuneration of guardians and legal representatives so that it reflects the actual scope of duties and responsibility associated with the performance of this role, as well as ensure that they are reimbursed for additional costs such as travel expenses and translation fees. Additionally, it is of utmost importance to arrange training for guardians and legal representatives of minors, involving specialists from various fields. It could also be considered to organize working group meetings, in which various entities in contact with unaccompanied foreign minors (NGOs, the Migration Office, international organizations, the Border Guard, and District Family Centers) would participate.

The proposed recommendations focus on the need to improve, extend and strengthen the support offered to young people going through this challenging and delicate phase, maintaining a system of protection that is not only limited to the legal level, but embraces a continuous and integrated social and educational approach. In this way, it will be possible to guarantee each young person a more solid, fair and sustainable path of growth and integration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the presentation of the good practices of the guardianship systems in Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Poland in the context of the Guard Up project, has provided valuable insights into the strengths, challenges, and opportunities within each country's system for protecting unaccompanied minors.

The information gathered shows that there is indeed a well-structured mechanism in the partner counties, however the need for additional work both on policy and practical level is vital considering the recommendations outlined in this Guide. The collaboration between NGOs, governmental bodies and national authorities as well as other relevant stakeholders needs to be further enhanced through a multidisciplinary approach. Ultimately, the goal is to create guardianship systems on a national level that safeguard the rights of minors and ensure their protection by building trust, while enabling also international collaboration to support all unaccompanied minors.