



THE NET FOR U PRACTITIONERS' MANUAL FOR WORKING WITH UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

The Manual aims to provide a guide for practitioners who work with unaccompanied minors (UAMs) providing for the involvement of their family, in different way and situations, always taking into consideration the best interest of the minors.

It must be emphasized, that the manual can must be considered the key to better understanding the other output of the project – the 'Toolkit'.

The Manual seeks to provide useful guidance for the practitioners, and used together with the Toolkit, can help practitioners to guide their work with UAMs and their families.

Working with unaccompanied minors (UAMs) is challenging and complex, requiring practitioners to continuously re-invent their approaches on the basis of individual needs. While much has already been done at the EU level to provide practitioners with concrete guidance, this tool focuses on the key concept of family, as indicated in the Preamble to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. As such, work with children deprived of their families - such as unaccompanied minors - needs to work towards the establishment of a healthy family environment that supports the minors' well-being.





The role of family for UAMs varies from case to case, at times representing a source of pain and trauma, at times a source of support, at times both. Regardless of the individual situation, practitioners, in working with UAMS, need to put all of their professional and interpersonal skills and competencies into play in order to best address this difficult, but essential issue.

In the *first part*, the Manual provides the definitions necessary to work with unaccompanied minors; it:

- defines the notion of unaccompanied minors;
- illustrates the international context;
- defines the best interest of the child;
- indicates the significance and importance of unaccompanied minors' families.

After providing a definition of the unaccompanied minors, The Manual provides guidance in relation to the international context and points out how Conventions and Regulations give importance to the role of the family in daily life.

Furthermore, the manual goes on to define the best interests of the child, highlighting also how this interest does not necessarily coincide with the family reunification: the operators must be able to make a tailored assessment, case by case, since sometimes the involvement of the family could prove traumatic for the child. In the light of that, the Manual continues asking and suggesting questions to the practitioners in order to gather a full understanding of the children and their history.





The second part focuses on the assessment of subjects' needs and on the perceptions that the child has of reality. This part offers suggestions for daily work speaking about: relationships based on trust, the offer of real possibilities, assistance to distinguish between myth and reality, as UAMs often have trouble doing so. It is stressed that it's fundamental to understand their perspective, the mental categories and patterns and personal concepts.

In general, the Manual indicates to the operators a better way to approach this target group always taking into consideration history, expectations, culture and habits. Often, the need to deconstruct the myth and the reality is emphasised, in order to support the child in understanding what is actually real and what is not.

The third part focuses specifically on the role of the family of the UAMs, and on the way in which the practitioners have to deal with expectations and needs of these families, always taking into consideration the best interest of the children. Indeed, some guidelines and plans are provided for the family evaluation. Moreover this section provides:

- several suggestions to the practitioners on how to set up relationships with family;
- important instructions on how to assess the family relationship, both emotionally and geographically, through what is called "Mapping geographical and emotional distance". The mapping exercises represent the starting point for exploring the nature of the relationship between the children and their families.

It's stressed that this evaluation should still be aimed at ensuring the future life of the minor bearing in mind his/her positive path. The Manual points out the importance of the expectations that the minors have for their future, and suggests questions and inputs for the practitioners that they have to set to support the personal paths.

