



Funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)



FOSTERING ACROSS BORDERS (FAB)

A PROJECT TO SUPPORT, IMPROVE AND PROMOTE FAMILY BASED CARE FOR UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN IN AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, GREECE, LUXEMBURG, POLAND AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

Report
September 2019



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fostering Across Borders (FAB) project was run from January 2018 to September 2019 in six EU Member States: **Austria, Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg, Poland** and the **United Kingdom** (UK).

Led by the International Organization for Migration – UN Migration Agency, it was implemented in partnership with:

- Minor-Ndako and Mentor-Escale (Belgium)
- Croix-Rouge Luxembourgeoise (Luxembourg)
- Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej (Poland)
- Coram BAAF and Coram Children’s Legal Centre (UK).

The project was funded by the **European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)**, and co-funded by the London Borough of Croydon (UK) and the Croix-Rouge Luxembourgeoise.

Conceptualised in 2016, the project aimed to respond to the surge in arrivals of refugees and migrants to the European Union in 2015, when more than 90,000 Unaccompanied Migrant Children (UMC) sought asylum in Europe.

FAB sought to strengthen the capacity of the family-based care systems that support UMC arriving into Europe. To that effect, FAB engaged UMC through focus group discussions, as well as stakeholders and professionals working in the national context, gathering their perspectives on training gaps and needs. The result is a holistic foster carer training programme adapted to the local context and needs of each country, targeted at professionals and other care providers. The programme was piloted across four countries in 2019, reaching 173 professionals.

Additionally, FAB aimed to unite and engage stakeholders in the subject of UMC and their needs, promoting the family-based care model for UMC across the six member states. Focus group discussions were held in the UK and Austria to capture children’s voices, which were then used to inform the project materials and to produce a video. The latter was developed together with UMC and based on their experiences in family-based care. Other key outputs included an information leaflet on fostering UMC, and a set of country of origin information leaflets, giving new foster families insight into the culture and countries children had travelled from, to better meet their needs.

CONTEXT

In 2015, more than 90,000 UMC sought asylum in Europe¹. Most children were placed in residential care facilities. Efforts have been made in recent years to downsize these facilities and instead adopt the recommendation of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights that children should be placed in family-based reception and accommodation (foster care).

Foster care, or family-based care, is widely regarded as the best form of care for children. Reports show that fewer children go missing from foster care when compared to reception centres and institutions². Foster care has also been identified by the EU³ as better placed than residential care to provide children with a nurturing, holistic environment they need to allow for their needs to be met.

Despite the importance of family-based care, knowledge and expertise on how to care for this distinct group of children across national contexts is mixed and sporadic. Knowledge, experience and expertise across member states on family-based care for national children tends to be well established, but this same expertise varies when it relates to UMC.

Specific training for relevant professionals on the challenges faced by unaccompanied children was identified as a high priority, in order to provide the highest standards of care and protection to these children.

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7244677/3-02052016-AP-EN.pdf/>

² http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-libe_missing_children_21_april_2016_background_note.pdf

³ Article 24 2. (b) of Directive 2013/33/EU:
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=en>

FAB'S APPROACH

Building on the expertise of the ALFACA manual developed by Nidos, FAB sought to develop a training programme on the care of UMC, adapted to different national contexts, but with a shared core structure and key principles. Through doing so, implementing member states were able to create training programmes that effectively addressed the training gaps and needs specific to their context. FAB saw, thus, IOM work together with implementing partners bringing together different fields of expertise to increase the scope of the project.

The FAB's overall objective, to contribute towards improving and expanding the quality of family-based care for UMC, was achieved through a two-pronged approach, or two specific objectives:

(i) Enhancing key stakeholders' awareness and knowledge of the needs of UMC.

This includes stakeholders who work in national and local governments, as well as wider civil society and practitioners. Stakeholders played a dual role on the programme. They offered insight and expertise as professionals working in this environment, providing direction and vision for shaping project deliverables. Concurrently, professionals were engaged in the topic of UMC, and the needs and rights of UMC were advocated for by project staff.

(ii) Increasing the availability of training on the needs of UMC. FAB's flagship deliverable is a country specific two-day training programme, specific to the needs and care nuances of UMC in each country context. The training programme was adapted to five countries (UK, Poland, Luxembourg, Belgium and Austria) and rolled out to 173 professionals through a training of trainers' approach.

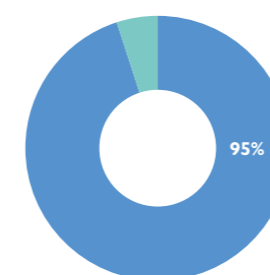
Key outputs

- **Mapping:** a robust mapping was conducted at project inception, aiming to understand the current gaps and needs in training on UMC, the perspectives of stakeholders and current 'state of play' for UMC in each country.
- **Training Programme:** the programme included:
 - the development of a foster carer training manual, adapted to five country contexts and composed of six modules covering the circumstances and needs of UMC;
 - an information leaflet on fostering UMC, translated in the implementing countries' main languages;
 - country of origin information leaflets, covering Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan and Viet Nam, also translated into the countries' main languages;
 - Training 173 professionals across four countries
- **Video:** a video was produced to better support understanding of UMC and their experiences. Filmed in Austria and produced by two UMC and one former UMC, the video shows family-based care in a real-world setting. Seeing the realities of family-based care can help myth busting and also promote the model to interested parties.
- **Webpage:** a webpage was created to host the materials developed under FAB, including the video, training programme and mapping reports (<https://eea.iom.int/fostering-across-borders>).

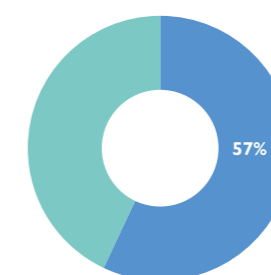
- **Information sessions, world cafes and webinars:** overall, FAB aimed to promote the foster care or the family-based care model throughout the programme cycle. This included organising outreach sessions to interested parties, such as new and potential foster carers.
 - World cafes, exchange meetings and foster care forums provided a space for peer to peer learning, whereby foster carers new and established could share perspectives and reflections on caring for UMC with each other.
 - Webinars focussed on subjects related to UMC and provided a space for professionals and other interested parties to learn more about their specific needs.
 - Information sessions provided a space for professionals, faith communities and the general public, including families interested in fostering UMC to learn more about the experiences of UMC, such as the journeys they may have taken, and hear more from the perspective of the child.

KEY STATS

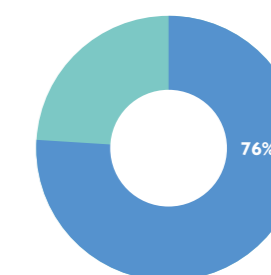
Outcomes



95% of professionals trained said their knowledge on UMC increased after the FAB training



57% said that they were confident to deliver a rollout training on UMC after attending the FAB programme



76% rated the training manual as excellent

Outputs

173

people trained through a training of trainer's approach

744

people visited the FAB webpage, with 194 accessing the materials uploaded to the site

*What will I do differently after the workshop?
Communicate boundaries clearly;
lots of appreciation; lots of love*

Foster carer working in Austria reflecting on communication with UMC

COUNTRY SPOTLIGHTS



Austria

Austria experienced contextual changes throughout project implementation. UMC numbers decreased significantly, from 8,277 in 2015, to 390 in 2018. As a result, many UMC housing units in Austria closed/ are due to close and many UMC are being transferred between housing units. Against this backdrop, IOM Austria instead sought to engage stakeholders working in the topic of UMC, aiming to connect them to share best practices and experiences on working with UMC. Workshops were held that engaged interested stakeholders as well as foster carers themselves in the topic, promoting the specific needs of UMC and the family-based care model as a preferred care model. Austria engaged stakeholders from across the country. These shared engagement opportunities allowed for cross fertilization and the sharing of best practices. The provision of mental health support was identified as a gap in Austria, with a need to support UMC with counselling and other forms of therapy.



Belgium

In 2015, Belgium saw more than 5,000 UMC arriving; this was a significant increase compared to an average of 1,500 children arriving in previous years. In 2016, the number still reached 3,000 arrivals, with a drop back to the usual average of approximately 1,500 UMC since 2017. Since the peak of arrivals in 2015, the profile of the minors has changed: children are younger, more vulnerable and more likely to arrive from countries such as Eritrea and Sudan. Since a couple of years, Belgium has become both a destination and a transit country to the UK.

In the Belgian context, FAB operated over two languages and two authorities; the French speaking and Dutch speaking administrations. A key benefit of the FAB programme was uniting the two administrations to discuss family-based care, allowing the sharing of best practices between stakeholders. Observational findings show that stakeholders often agree that family-based care to be the best care model for UMC. In the French administration, the FAB manual was the first of its kind; there had been no formal training manual previously for foster families or professionals working specifically with UMC. For the Dutch part, many had already benefited from the ALFACA manual that FAB took its inspiration from and were able instead to share their experience of the training and working with UMC. Nevertheless, a need for additional training on the UMC specificities has been identified. Training in the French speaking part of Belgium was delivered by both professionals and foster carers, offering a nuanced training delivery that allowed for peer to peer learning, which has been considered as a good practice by both the professionals and the experienced foster carers.



Greece

Numbers of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) remain quite high in Greece; according to the National Centre for Social Solidarity's (EKKA) estimations, there are currently 4,210 UASC in the Greek territory whereas the available hosting places are in total 1,944, out of which 1,169 are in shelters and Semi Independent Living (SIL) facilities and 775 are places in temporary accommodation such as Safe Zones and Emergency hotels. Different to other FAB target countries, there is no formal family-based care system in Greece for UMC.

Priority activities in Greece therefore focussed on awareness raising of UMC and their specific needs, as well as sharing the benefits of the family-based care system as one of the leading care models for children. The programme targeted institutions that host Greek children, helping introduce UMC and their specific needs to authorities who had not previously worked with migrant children. Stakeholder engagement came at three different levels, management, policy and operational staff. The training material has provided Greece with a tool for the future should the family-based care model be adapted in country, with a small-scale training of professionals planned to be delivered post-project.



Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, numbers of UMC remain considerable compared to the size of the country. In 2018, 36 UMC arrived, in comparison to 50 in 2017. Although numbers are decreasing, the vulnerabilities of the group are on the rise. The caseload is increasingly more female, and younger in age (12 years and above). Informal reflections from stakeholders suggest that Luxembourg is also becoming a destination country, with more children arrivals from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Albania and Iraq last year. 15 professionals working in the Luxembourgish Red Cross' Foster placement service with foster families (some of whom have fostered UMC – but mostly fostering Luxembourgish children) were trained in Luxembourg on the training of trainer's curriculum Caring for UMC.

Stakeholder engagement was identified as a key success in the Luxembourg setting; FAB offered an unusual opportunity for civil society, representatives of Luxembourgish authorities across different ministries and social workers to come together and discuss UMC and their needs. Prior to FAB, no specific Luxembourgish materials on UMC for Family Based Carers existed; the training programme has therefore filled this gap. In addition to training delivery, leaflets were distributed to faith-based communities, schools, hospital wards and existing foster families, to encourage families to consider the family-based care model for UMC.



Poland

Poland has high numbers of UMC from Ukraine, Russia and Viet Nam with little to no children arriving from the Middle East or Africa. There are under 200 UMC in Poland currently, a number that has stayed static for the previous seven – eight years. Current legislation addresses Polish children only, thus information on UMC and their specific needs is not always known in the Polish context, with no specific training available on UMC in Poland.

The FAB programme facilitated stakeholder meetings where professionals with experience in supporting UMC interacted with those who had not engaged with UMC. This cross-fertilisation enabled peer to peer learning, supporting stakeholders to learn at their own pace and in a relevant context. A tangible benefit from this exchange was the awareness amongst stakeholders that the needs of UMC are different and distinct from that of Polish children and in consequence the importance of preparing foster carers to look after UMC. As a result of the training, institutions responsible for training foster carers in Poland are exploring including FAB materials in their training programme.



United Kingdom

In the UK, excluding the 2015 peak of arrivals, numbers of UMC have recently been on the increase: 2018 saw a 20% increase (ca 400 children) from the previous year – from 2,399 in 2017 to 2,872 in 2018.⁴ The UK has a rich history of family- based care: the UK mapping report identified a number

of policies and training provisions specific to UMC, albeit with regional and local differences in implementation and availability. In 2016, the UK introduced the National Transfer Scheme, a procedure by which local authorities across the UK determine the transfer of care duties and responsibility (from the entry authority to the receiving authority) for an unaccompanied migrant children.⁵ The scheme created more demand for training, particularly across local authorities with less experience in providing care for this cohort of children. FAB responded to this need and piloted the training programme across 11 locations in the UK, including the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Collaboration across all UK countries allowed for the identification and sharing of good practice examples across administrations. Sign-ups to the training of trainers' programme filled quickly, and the so did sign-ups for training roll-outs to foster carers, which took place in three locations, including Scotland. This suggests sustained demand in training about caring for UMC. In addition, the UK successfully carried out two information sessions with professionals involved in the care of UMC, from a wide range of backgrounds (family-based care, health, social care, youth advocacy and so on); two foster carer forums with experienced foster carers; and two webinars, led by Coram BAAF.

⁴ See <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Children-in-the-Asylum-System-May-2019.pdf>

⁵ The scheme supports local authorities in England to ensure a more even distribution of unaccompanied children across the regions through transferring to another authority with greater resources. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/750913/NTS-Protocol-Final-October-2018.pdf

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Build in a mentoring component: an underlying assumption for many TOTs is that professionals will be ready to deliver the training material immediately after receiving the training themselves. FAB instead adopted a mentoring or a collaborative approach to rolling out the training programme, offering support to professionals if needed.

Engage existing foster carers: foster carers have a wealth of knowledge that they can share with professionals. Engaging them to train alongside the professionals and help deliver training sessions in the future provides the opportunity for a well-rounded perspective and real-life examples.

Recruitment is a standalone component: recruitment and training are often presented together. Coram BAAF, experts in foster care recruitment in the UK, estimate that a realistic timeframe for foster carer recruitment is 18-24 months. Recruitment components should be developed into standalone projects or given a realistic timeframe.

Consider developing an e-learning course, or organizing thematic (half-day training, in conjunction with the training programme: face to face training is widely considered the best approach to learning, however distance, time, and volume of information are all barriers to knowledge acquisition. E-learning allows participants to learn at their own pace and can help capture different learning styles, such as reflective thinkers. This learning model should not be considered a replacement for face to face training, but rather complimentary.

Consider promoting befriending services in addition to family-based care: befriending services in Belgium, Austria and Greece provide a way for UMC to connect to families and experience the family lifestyle for families who are not yet ready or in a position to foster. Promoting this model to faith communities, local communities and schools can help aid integration and help UMC feel a connection to their countries of origin.

Mental health continues to be a gap that is poorly supported: in most contexts, mental health for UMC continues to be a barrier. Language barriers and short-term placements add to these frustrations. Generally, more support is needed to help UMC access mental health support, settle into their placements and help integrate into their new societies.

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