



EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

**TO THE RECOMMENDATION CM/REC(2007)9 OF THE COMMITTEE OF
MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES**

ON LIFE PROJECTS FOR UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT MINORS

European Committee on Migration (CDMG)

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I. Introduction

1. On 12 July 2007, and on the proposal of the European Committee on Migration (CDMG), the Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors. The overall purpose of this recommendation is to promote respect for the human rights and dignity of unaccompanied children who find themselves alone and vulnerable, far from their family environment and separated from their parents or guardians. The recommendation seeks to achieve this objective in two ways. Firstly, the recommendation offers advice to governments of both member and non-member states of the Council of Europe on how they could improve their policy and practice in relation to the migration management of unaccompanied minors, particularly by strengthening the international co-operation between them. Secondly, and most importantly, the recommendation provides detailed advice on how relevant authorities can, through the development of life projects, contribute to improving the welfare of these children¹.

2. The approach of the recommendation is both political and practical. Its added value is to:

- firmly locate the best interest of the child at the centre of government policy solutions relating to unaccompanied migrant minors;
- encourage a holistic approach to the development of appropriate policy solutions that take full account of the entire migratory history of the unaccompanied minor, including the causes at the origin of his or her migration;
- recall the special guarantees afforded to unaccompanied minors seeking or enjoying asylum, in particular regarding non-refoulement and the identification of durable solutions;
- encourage countries (destination, transit, origin) to look together at the problems related to unaccompanied migrant minors;
- provide a framework for practical action free of political discourse;
- offer practical guidance on how to promote the welfare of unaccompanied migrant minors;
- support the role of skilled professionals in their work.

3. For the government experts who participated in the preparation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 the notion of life projects for unaccompanied migrant children is the key element of the recommendation. In their view, life projects offer a major innovative and positive alternative to migration management policies that rely exclusively on strengthening border control and on returning children to their countries of origin without any real provision for their welfare. They concern both policy and practice.

4. As a policy, life projects are conceived as a way of co-ordinating and orientating government action in respect of the rights of the unaccompanied children. They show how different government departments and services must work together, both at a national and local level but also with their counterparts in the child's country of origin. They also set the priorities for such action in terms of needs and how to work towards improving the child's welfare and life chances in the context of its vulnerable situation. In terms of practice, life projects are individual tools aimed at providing unaccompanied minors with the necessary assistance to help them overcome the difficulties with which they are faced and to create conditions for a better future. As individual tools, life projects must be, for their success, developed with the active involvement of the children themselves.

5. The guidance on life projects in Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9, in terms of both policy and practice, is drawn from experience in the member states of the Council of Europe and in other countries.² Some member states will, therefore, already have in place procedures that comply to some extent with the provisions of the recommendation, or which may be adapted with only minor

¹ The term of 'relevant authorities' should be interpreted as large as possible and covers all governmental institutions dealing with unaccompanied migrant minors, in particular those responsible for elaboration and implementation of national policies (ministries, national agencies, police's services, border protection services, judges, legal guardians, social services, local and regional authorities, but also diplomatic and consular representations, etc.). It includes also non governmental organisations in countries where some responsibilities are assumed by them.

² In particular, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Morocco.

amendments. However, because it is recognised that the term “life projects” is not yet widely used and that much of the guidance in the recommendation might be new to many other member states, this memorandum has been prepared in order to explain more fully the nature, content and ways of implementing life projects.³

II. Who is an unaccompanied migrant minor?

6. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 adopts a broad personal scope. The government experts who participated in the preparation of the recommendation considered that in view of the overall objective of promoting respect for the human rights and dignity of unaccompanied migrant children, the policy recommendations should not exclude specific groups. The recommendation, therefore, covers migrant children who arrive at the border unaccompanied by any family member or legal guardian as well as children who have become separated from their family whilst travelling. It includes children who have been left alone after they have been admitted into the country and also minors that are victims of trafficking.

7. Special attention is, however, accorded to minors seeking asylum or refugee minors. These children are covered by the recommendation and should benefit from life projects as much as other unaccompanied migrant children. Nonetheless, given their particular needs, they also enjoy special protection under international law, in particular regarding non-refoulement. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 therefore underlines that applications and proceedings relating to claims for asylum should not prevent, delay or modify the setting up of life projects for these children.

III. Best interest of the child

8. The procedure regarding unaccompanied migrant minors should always be a special one, taking into account the best interest of the child. The children's best interests must be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting them at all stages in the migration process. All the measures taken must safeguard the rights of unaccompanied migrant minors and foster their well-being.

9. As soon as the presence of an unaccompanied migrant minor is made known to the authorities, he or she should be informed immediately (in a language that he/she understands) about their rights and obligations and about the procedure to be followed to regularise his or her position.

10. It is important to create a protective environment. This includes access to protection, in particular legal representation, but also legal measures regarding entry and stay in the country, accommodation, and psychological and medical care. For unaccompanied migrant minors seeking asylum it should incorporate access to asylum procedure. Where there is a serious doubt regarding the age of the minor, age-assessments should be conducted in a professional and sensitive manner, avoiding psychological damage⁴. Similar principles should apply when there is a dispute over the country of origin of the minor.

³ There are proposals to prepare a training manual for practitioners containing more detailed advice and guidance on how to implement life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors.

⁴ “Such identification measures include age assessment and should not only take into account the physical appearance of the individual, but also his or her psychological maturity. Moreover, the assessment must be conducted in a scientific, safe, child and gender-sensitive and fair manner, avoiding any risk of violation of the physical integrity of the child; giving due respect to human dignity; and, in the event of remaining uncertainty, should accord the individual the benefit of the doubt such that if there is a possibility that the individual is a child, she or he should be treated as such”

IV. Life projects

11. It is important that the life projects are based on a comprehensive, integrated and interdisciplinary approach. It is only in this way that they can offer a lasting solution for both governments and the children themselves. They aim to develop or improve the child's personal capacity and faculties enabling him or her "*to acquire and strengthen the necessary skills to become independent, responsible and active in society*"⁵. The child's life project will cover different aspects of his or her life from housing, health, education to personal development, cultural development, social integration and future employment.

In the French department of Nord, for example, reception and orientation measures for isolated foreign minors offer decent and non discriminatory conditions for housing, education, social insertion. A fast and precise assessment of each child's situation is undertaken before identifying realistic and suitable goals for the child within a project that conforms with French legislation whilst not prejudicing parental authority. Action at the level of the department, the state or by associations and public bodies acting in accordance with the decision of a court must be co-ordinated within a pluri-disciplinary structure that takes full account of each body's responsibilities.

The specific objectives of the reception and orientation measures are to provide daily reception, lodging and education, provide an assessment of the situation and suggested orientation, make an appropriate decision and start implementation of the project. To achieve these objectives, the following specific means are necessary: the availability, at immediate notice, of places in public and voluntary establishments to take children; a technical, pluri-disciplinary and pluri-institutional structure to undertake the evaluation and orientation of the children; and an arsenal of long term options within the department (Nord) for taking care of the child.

12. Life projects imply an individual approach to each unaccompanied migrant minor. The social worker or other professional responsible for drawing up the life project for a particular child will look at his or her personal capacity and faculties and reflect these in a life project that is tailored to the child's situation and defines his or her future prospects. It has to be underlined that life projects should comply with the best interest of the child.

13. Finally, life projects are conceived as a mutual commitment by the unaccompanied migrant minor and the authorities. Its implementation must be monitored and a regular evaluation process foreseen.

V. The different stages of a life project

14. As it was underlined above, a life project should be based on a comprehensive, integrated and interdisciplinary approach, from beginning to end. Based on a holistic approach, every life project should take account of the child's specific situation.

15. A life project is based on mutual commitments from the national authorities and the child (and/or by his or her guardian). It includes "*individualised, open-ended objectives which the minor undertakes to pursue, the arrangements for monitoring their implementation and a regular assessment based on exchanges between the minor and the competent authorities*"⁶.

⁵ Paragraph 1 of the Appendix to the Recommendation.

⁶ Paragraph 16 1 of the Appendix to the Recommendation.

16. It is important to note that each life project depends on the child's personal profile and expectations. The search for a real and long term solution requires an individual approach, tailored to the needs the child.

17. There are three key stages to a life project, each of which requires particular attention: (i) commence the life project, (ii) making the written agreement and, (iii) implementation, monitoring and revision of the life project.

18. The appendix provides more detailed advice on how to prepare a life project and a structured framework for its implementation, monitoring and revision in the light of changing circumstances.

(i) *Commencing the life project*

19. It is very important from the outset to create a relationship of trust and confidence between the child and the different persons with whom he or she is put in contact. The relevant professionals should be properly trained in eliciting information from children who may be distressed and uncomfortable in a new and strange environment. The child should be allowed the time to reply to questions and recount his or her story and talk about what he or she considers important. The initial interviews should be conducted in a sensitive, non-threatening manner, in a language which the minor understands.

Assailing the child with questions may lead to a distorted story, far from the truth. This is an example.

O, a youth from Guinea, aged 16, has been travelling for the last year. He has left every centre he has been sent to. He is often on the street, in places where other youths meet, and is often involved with the police. In one of the welcome offices of a crises centre, his guardian spoke to him in front of the other workers/carers and said: "If you are holding back anything important you feel you would like to discuss with me and if this would help you solve some of your problems, do not hesitate to talk to me, at any time". After a discussion-free break, O explained that he wished to stay in the centre but his "duty" forbade him from doing so. His mother (who he said had died in his initial statement) was in fact pressuring him to provide for the family. He could not withdraw from this mission. Going to school, being fed and being given a place to live were in conflict with the reasons he migrated.

20. The interviewer will wish to be able to:

- analyse of the minor's past history, background and experiences,
- analyse of the minor's family situation, and of the possibility of safely initiating family tracing,
- make an analysis of the factors which contributed to the minor's migration,
- identify the needs of the minor, higher as well as basic, in the short, medium and long term⁷,
- explore the expectations of the minor, in the short, medium and long term.
- make an analysis of what may be needed to ensure that the minor is fully informed about his or her position in the host country, which may include rights, such as the right to seek asylum, responsibilities, services available and how to access them, the relationship between the minor and the appropriate authorities (immigration, welfare or social services, health, education and any other specific organisations).
- make sensitive but realistic appraisals of the possibility of return to the country of origin, or even to a third country if for example the minor has close family lawfully residing there.

21. Particular care should be taken to ensure that the minor understands that commencement of a life project does not imply the granting or otherwise of a residency permit. At this initial stage, the life project must be open-ended: it is unlikely that the minor will have received any decision regarding his or her immigration status. All options must remain open.

⁷ In case, a protection need arises from the assessment of the causes of displacement, the interviewer should also be able to refer the minor to the asylum system to ensure that his/her particular need will be effectively examined through an adequate procedure.

22. There must be clear explanations and whenever possible a reconciliation of any differences between the minor's expectations, the opportunities in the host country, country of origin or elsewhere, and immigration procedures. Clear, realistic and achievable objectives should be listed and prioritised, and broken down into manageable steps. Whilst taking account of the minor's wishes, it would be desirable if objectives, especially if medium or long-term, had a clear intrinsic value, regardless of where the minor eventually settled. For example: learning the language of the host country offers clear benefits, not only whilst the minor is in the host country (access to information, education, training, empowerment, participation and integration), but also in the event of eventual return, when it may offer the possibility of enhanced employment prospects or other benefits.

23. Similarly, the general long-term value of education, training or a healthy lifestyle should be stressed as intrinsic and not solely dependent on permanent residency in the host country.

(ii) Making the written agreement

24. Once clear and realistic step by step goals have been identified with the minor as an active participant according to his or her age and maturity, a clear method should be identified for setting out who will be responsible for facilitating each goal.

25. This is envisaged as a co-operative undertaking from all parties – the minor, the advisor, any family members if applicable, any carers, specialist services or organisations, and legal representatives.

26. The written agreement should be agreed and signed by the minor and all concerned parties. The life project thus becomes a moral commitment, with each party agreeing to take on certain roles. Crucially, the minor undertakes to participate and to work towards the agreed goals clearly and unambiguously.

(iii) Implementation, monitoring and revision of a life project

27. The authorities and professionals responsible for assisting the child should put in place procedures for monitoring the progress of the life project, and dealing with any possible difficulties. These procedures may vary depending on the national circumstances. However, it is recommended that each life project should be formally reviewed at least every six months, or more frequently in the event of important changes which materially affect the life project itself.

28. A life project could be developed and implemented either in the host country, in the country of origin or in the host country and the country of origin. It could happen that a life project may only be put in place in a third country. No solution should be excluded. The overriding principle is to ensure the best interest of the child. Minors who have started a life project should be granted a residence permit for the time required to be able to complete their education or vocational training. In certain circumstances this will imply allowing the child to remain in the host country after the age of 18.

In France, the law of 24 July 2006 on immigration and integration provides for the issue of a residence permit to a foreigner who has been placed in the care of the child welfare services before the age of 16 years and who can demonstrate being engaged in an integration process he/she wishes to pursue, subject to the nature of relations with the family which has remained in the country of origin and the opinion of the care facility on this foreigner's integration in French society.

Young people aged over 18 may receive a residence permit, considered on a case-by-case basis. This will be granted in circumstances where it appears that the prospects of return to their country of origin are very low and permission to stay appears expedient in the light of how well they are integrating in France. A number of criteria are laid down to assess the extent of their integration. These are: the length of stay, the real, serious and permanent nature of training or studies carried out in France, which may be continued after reaching adult age or result in employment, the

proven lack of maintained links with the family which has remained in the country of origin, a certificate from the care provider confirming, with reasons, the degree of integration.

Special attention is given to “young adults who, prior to being taken into care by social services, were victims of networks engaged in trafficking or sexual exploitation and who are no longer under the control of such networks”.

Indeed, there are several judgments of the French courts which, on the basis of Article 8 of the European Human Rights Convention, support the issue of a residence permit if the young person concerned has demonstrated a strong desire for integration into French society. The following dicta is taken from a decision of the Limoges Administrative Court on 12 September 2005:

"Since being placed in the care of the child welfare services at the age of 16, Mr Jawara has demonstrated a strong desire for integration and has worked very hard in his studies. He has made great progress, as his school results testify; he intends undertaking vocational training as a driver at the Alerbert vocational training centre from September 2005; in the circumstances, given the applicant's young age on his arrival in France in difficult conditions and his strong desire for training and integration, the prefect, in ordering his expulsion, disproportionately infringed his right to respect for his private life and failed to recognise the stipulations of article 8 of the European Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms".

29. Any decision concerning the return of a child requires information on the child and his or her family, on the progress being made in implementing the life project, on the supporting measures and future prospects. Implementing the return requires a prior localization of a parent, relative or an adult or government agency able to provide the necessary care. It would also benefit from putting in place arrangements in the country of origin to receive the child. Moreover, the relevant authorities might consider the conditions regarding a feasibility of either continuing or starting the life project in the child's country of origin. They could, in particular verify that there are:

- robust policies to protect the minor's human rights,
- adequate reception and accommodation facilities which offer protection for the minor's human rights and guarantee that s/he will not be in a more vulnerable or precarious situation than when s/he originally left the country,
- realistic possibilities of child's education, training or employment,
- adequate medical and psychiatric care, and
- transparent procedures for monitoring the proper implementation of the life project.

30. The important role and responsibility of national authorities in the host country in ensuring the proper implementation of life projects in the country of origin cannot be underestimated. They should consider providing authorities in the country of origin with the necessary assistance, particularly for unaccompanied minors returning from Europe. Their interest in a life project does not have to end with the return of the child. New co-operative arrangements could be put in place to monitor minors who return to their countries of origin (or third countries) or those who (having arrived in the host country as minors) subsequently return after having reached the age of majority.

VI. Family relations

31. It is important to bear in mind Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the right of a child to maintain personal relations and contact with his/her parents, unless this is contrary to the child's best interests⁸. Moreover, the role of the family in promoting the child's welfare and development cannot be stressed too highly. A trusting relationship with the family may facilitate

⁸ Moreover, the Convention places considerable emphasis on the role of the family in raising children. Article 5 makes clear the responsibility of the State in protecting and respecting their role.

implementation of the child's` life project and integration into society, either in the reception or origin country.

32. However, the government experts who participated in the preparation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 were of the view that, before involving the family of the unaccompanied migrant child, the authorities should first establish the role of the family in the reasons for the child's migration. Care should be taken where there may be concerns that the family might have been the motivating reason for the child's departure (sale of the child by the family to traffickers or family breakdown, for example). The recommendation, therefore, underlines that in some cases the family interests' may be in opposition with the best interest of the child⁹. National authorities should not attempt to trace a family if they have established that family reunion would not comply with the best interest of the child.

VII. Awareness-raising campaigns

33. National authorities should encourage and facilitate awareness-raising campaigns in the countries of origin to highlight the risks involved when children migrate alone, particularly when migrating from outside Europe, and to counteract unrealistic expectations.

An illustration of this is the Swiss project "Mass information campaign in Cameroon" set up by the Federal Office for Migration (ODM) and organised locally by the OIM offices in Dakar and Yaoundé. This campaign is aimed at reducing irregular migration flows of young people and is carried out in close collaboration with various ministries, governmental agencies, NGOs, youth associations, schools. This campaign runs from December 2006 to May 2007. The results of the campaign will then be assessed.

34. Clear information, in several languages, should be displayed at airports, ports and principal border crossings, encouraging and empowering minors who enter illegally, and/or accompanied by traffickers or smugglers, to make themselves known to the authorities immediately. By informing minors of their individual rights to protection it is hoped that this will sensitize them, their parents, authorities or other stakeholders in advance in their home countries about the real dangers of potential exploitation by traffickers or smugglers.

35. These measures should also prove beneficial to national authorities in terms of them leading to a higher detection rate of traffickers, a higher percentage of minors becoming known to the authorities, and a lower percentage becoming involved in activities which may be dangerous for the minors, and undesirable in a democratic society based on respect for the rule of law and human rights.

VIII. European networks to exchange information

36. Co-operation between countries of destination and of origin plays a crucial role, given the international dimension of the problem. National authorities should establish mechanisms that enable coherent co-operation across borders. Effective planning and co-ordination between all states involved must ensure an integrated approach to all aspects of work with unaccompanied migrant minors, from prevention activities, through care arrangements, to tracing and reunification. Close cooperation with NGOs and International Organizations (such as UNHCR, IOM and UNICEF in

⁹ In some cases family members may exercise pressure on the child to find a job abroad with the hope that he/she could have a better future. In other cases migration of the child is seen as a future source of income. Therefore, the minor feels obliged to earn money and send remittances home. As a result of different cultures and traditions regarding the role of a child in a society, it is not unusual that the family may initially not accept either a life project that will delay the earning of money in the labour market, or the child's return. From this perspective, return represents a great obstacle to the minor's life project.

accordance with their respective mandates or ICRC as the agency mandated for tracing) can greatly facilitate the needed exchange of information and concrete cooperation.

37. It is important that all action be co-ordinated with the relevant government authorities, unless this is not in the best interest of the children. Dialogue and co-ordination mechanisms need to start in the early phases of an emergency, and be maintained throughout the process. Specific lead roles must be established for key areas, such as child care and tracing, according to each organisation's mandate, expertise and capacity to deal with the given situation.

38. The recommendation underlines the role of co-operation with countries of origin¹⁰, including non member states of the Council of Europe. Member states should strive to reach a common understanding and coherent action in line with the principles of the recommendation, in particular as regards the interplay with immigration policies in the member states.

39. Alongside national co-operation schemes with the countries of origin, exchanges between local authorities directly involved in caring for the minors concerned may prove useful and complementary. They must be promoted and expanded. It is worth mentioning the Euro-Mediterranean Network for the Protection of Isolated Minors (REMI) which brings together actors from the countries of origin, host countries and transit countries of unaccompanied migrant minors, and whose aim is to improve knowledge of the phenomenon, develop training for professionals and implement agreed operational solutions.

40. Two proposals to strengthen international co-operation on life projects were made during the preparatory work. Firstly, it was proposed that a network should be established of government experts and other professionals in order to improve the collaboration between host countries and at least some countries of origin (or third countries where some minors' families may lawfully be residing), regarding information that may be obtained to help determine the feasibility or otherwise of a life project continuing outside the host country. Secondly, it was suggested that a group of experts may be created to provide governments with technical assistance in implementing life projects, in particular by elaboration of a programme for professionals dealing with unaccompanied minors and by drafting a training handbook.

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¹⁰ In this regard see the 2003 Franco-Romanian agreement introducing special arrangements to help unaccompanied foreign minors to return on a voluntary basis (Decree No 20903-220 of 7 March 2003 publishing the agreement, published in the Official Journal, 14 March 2003). It provides for a set of measures relating to care of the minors concerned, their return to Romania and the arrangements for receiving them.

Appendix : How is a life project drawn up?

A cycle – a long-term process

A life project is a long-term process that complies with a strict methodology based on a children's-rights approach. The cycle of the life project is not fixed in either time or space. The project is designed to evolve and be adapted to individual cases, in the light not only of the minor's background and expectations but also of the actual situation in the host and transit countries and the country of origin.

As far as chronology is concerned, the life project is broken down into stages. At each stage, it is essential that minors are involved in their life project. The life project is based on a written agreement between the minor and the people responsible for helping him or her, which sets out the commitments and obligations of each party.

Chronological stages

Stage 1: Approaching the minor and carrying out a systemic analysis of the situation (country of origin, host country)

1. Approaching the minor

Any approach to the minor should first aim at his/her identification as a minor followed by a prompt registration by means of an initial interview conducted in an age-appropriate and gender-sensitive manner, in a language the child understands, by professionally qualified persons to collect biodata and social history to ascertain the identity of the child, including, wherever possible, identity of both parents, other siblings, as well as the citizenship of the child¹¹.

Whenever possible, the minor should be assigned a specific person to help, inform and advise him or her. Depending on the usual procedure for the protection and provision of support to minors in the country concerned, this person could be a social worker, a tutelary or another authorised person.

This stage is of prime importance and crucial to the establishment of the life project. The minor must be considered as a "child in difficulty" and therefore as entitled to receive protection, to be informed, not to be discriminated against and to have access to basic social services (education, health, etc).

Confidentiality must be respected, except in an emergency (where there is a genuine risk of life danger). The minor must be informed, in a language he or she understands, of the relevant procedures (application for asylum, legal representation, etc) and the reception facilities in the country. The guardian must explain his or her role to the minor.

The guardian assigned to the minor must, for this purpose, be independent of the immigration services in order to avoid any conflicts of interest.

Intervention by the guardian and supervisory teams must be guided solely by the best interests of the minor, regardless of any political, social, religious, ethnic or other considerations.

This makes it possible to build up a relationship with the minor that is based on trust. The minor, being protected and properly informed, will co-operate fully in recounting his or her experience and background and will clearly express his or her expectations.

¹¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child - General Comment NO. 6 (2005) - Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, CRC/GC/2005/6, 39th Session, 3 June 2005, para 31(ii).

2. Systemic analysis of the situation

The idea is:

- to analyse, with the minor, the path his or her life has taken and his or her past history: the country of origin, the family, the minor's background and experience, etc;
- to analyse family ties;
- to identify the factors crucial in prompting the minor's migration (family-related, socio-economic and political factors, human trafficking, etc);
- clearly to identify the minor's expectations and needs: immediate needs (protection against abuse or persecution, housing, food, health care, clean clothes and personal hygiene, physical and psychological security) and medium-term needs (education, training, work, freedom, fair treatment, autonomy, etc).

This analysis will take time and patience; sustained support will make it possible to obtain a better grasp of certain traumatic experiences relived by the minor.

3. Informing the minor about the host country

The minor must be clearly informed about the situation in the host country:

- laws
- procedures
- reception facilities
- nature of the services available and means of access to them.

The minor must be informed about arrangements for residence in the host country:

- nature and statutory duration of residence (short-term, medium-term or permanent)
- asylum procedure and possibilities of appeal in the event of rejection
- methods for determining age
- procedures for return to the country of origin (voluntary or compulsory on reaching the age of majority)
- possibilities and arrangements for returning to a third country.

Stage 2: Drawing up the life project

Once the minor's trust has been won and he or she has been provided with information, support and guidance by a guardian, who has got to know the minor, the life project can be drawn up.

The life project, which is devised together with the minor, is based on reconciling the minor's expectations and skills with the opportunities that exist within the host country and in the country of origin or a third country.

The life project should be broken down into clear, realistic, achievable objectives. Each objective must be of intrinsic value and usefulness to the minor, regardless of the country in which he or she finds himself. Each objective is designed to enhance the minor's skills so that he or she can successfully complete his or her life project.

For example, learning the language of the host country, education and vocational training are key objectives, for they enable the minor:

- to have access to information
- to participate more effectively
- to become integrated more easily in the host country if he or she stays there
- to have additional assets if he or she returns to his or her own country.

Stage 3: Implementation of the life project - establishment of a written agreement

Implementation of the life project necessarily entails establishing a written agreement with the minor, which commits and reassures not only the minor but also officials and those helping the minor. This agreement puts the minor's participation in all the stages of his or her life project on a formal footing.

Involving all the parties concerned in the implementation of the life project

The guardian and certain other intervening parties will be constantly involved at each stage. The various partners involved in the minor's life project (social services, educators, foster families, tutelaries, etc) will need to co-ordinate their work perfectly.

The minor's family could/should be encouraged to participate (even from a distance) in the life project, provided, of course, that it is possible to get in touch with the family, that it is not a danger and that the consent of the minor is obtained if he or she has attained a certain degree of maturity.

Other bodies may be approached, depending on the particular case:

- the health services or services providing support for people with disabilities
- organisations providing support for nationals of the minor's country of origin
- religious or cultural organisations
- specialised organisations (e.g. the Red Cross, if it is responsible for helping a minor to contact his or her family)
- the police (trafficking, exploitation, crime).

It is advisable to inform the immigration services of minors' life projects (nature, stages, duration, etc).

Stage 4: Monitoring and consolidating the life project

All the achievements and objectives will be recorded by the supervisory team in the minor's presence, in a "life project" file, which will follow the minor all along his or her life path, whatever country he or she is in.

The authorities must be flexible. For example, if a minor or a young adult who has recently reached the age of majority and whose residence permit expires half-way through or nearing the end of his or her education or training, the authorities should allow the minor to stay in the host country until the end of the course.

The grant of a residence permit will then depend on the minor's commitment to the achievement of his or her life project. By means of an evaluation of the life project, account will therefore be taken of the minor's determination and ability not only to achieve his or her life project but also to become integrated in the host country.

This necessitates a relationship between the minor and the authorities that is based on mutual respect and trust. Such a relationship will make for improved protection and rigorous monitoring of minors. Fewer would disappear, become embroiled in trafficking networks or run away.

When the minor reaches the age of majority, the services concerned may change, depending on the host country. Some countries have a procedure for supervising young adults who were previously the responsibility of the social services. Those countries that do not have such a procedure have a duty to provide the support that unaccompanied minors and former minors need to finalise their life project.

As far as possible, European countries should co-operate in order:

- to set up advisory services for former unaccompanied migrant minors;
- to set up a system for exchanging information (so that countries that do not yet have such a procedure can benefit from the expertise and experience of the countries that already have one).

To ensure rigorous monitoring of the life project once the minor has reached the age of majority or returned to his or her country of origin or a third country, governments and NGOs in the host country and the countries of transit and origin should make co-operation arrangements (procedures for the protection of minors, implementation and monitoring of life projects, measures to combat trafficking in human beings, etc).