



# Life Projects for unaccompanied migrant minors

## A handbook for front-line professionals

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
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**Life Projects  
for unaccompanied migrant minors  
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front-line professionals**

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## **Preface**

This handbook provides practical training and advice for front-line professionals involved in the design, implementation and review of Life Projects, as defined in Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors.

The first part of the handbook provides essential background information, enabling front-line professionals to situate their work within the broader context. The introduction explains the origins of the concept and provides a brief description of Life Projects and their objectives. The broader conditions required for the successful implementation of Life Projects are then considered. The roles of stakeholders are then outlined, enabling key front-line professionals to position their work within a multi-disciplinary context.

The best interests and rights of minors remain at the forefront throughout the handbook and are situated within a discourse enhancing each child's potential to become an active and responsible contributor to society and a confident and independent world citizen.

The main part of the handbook moves from the abstract to the practical and shows how the two are inextricably linked. This part of the handbook speaks directly to the key professional, the designated worker who will be responsible for the successful implementation of Life Projects at the individual level. Broad stages of the Life Project process are illustrated with examples drawn from real cases to provide maximum relevance to front-line professionals.

Whilst an overall structure for the work is proposed, the key professional is urged to avoid undue rigidity. Human rights, participation, non-discrimination and the overriding concern for the best interests of the child are central to the concept of Life Projects. In keeping with this, a great deal of attention is paid to early stages of relationship-building, to listening to the child and meeting needs as essential preconditions for respecting the inherent human dignity of each child.

The role of the key professional in engaging other professionals in the process is described throughout. It is an aim of this handbook to empower

the key professional in this respect and to empower him or her to advocate for the minor whenever it appears that he or she is being, or is in danger of being, discriminated against, treated unfairly or portrayed as less important than indigenous children.

In the firm belief that thorough ground-work and preparation are essential for success, the preparation of the minor for the Life Project process is considered in detail. Nobody who has just arrived in an alien environment, least of all an unaccompanied child, could possibly make sensible choices and consider alternative life-plans in any meaningful way. The minor is introduced to the concept of goals and alternative means to achieve them. Abstract goals are broken down into achievable steps. Whilst allowing the minor to participate and express his or her views and aspirations, the key professional is advised to guide the minor towards goals of intrinsic and enduring value.

The Life Project is portrayed not as a form to be hurriedly completed, but as a rights-driven, yet realistic tool with the potential to provide durable solutions. An example of a modest early-stage plan, not yet a full Life Project, illustrates an intermediate stage which also provides the opportunity for formalising the concept of mutual commitment between the minor, the key professional and other professionals and authorities.

Formulating the “first edition” Life Project therefore emerges naturally from the steps above. The holistic nature of the project, encompassing a variety of facets of the minor’s situation, is shown. Goals are broken down into clear steps, which detail the support the minor may expect to receive, who will be providing that support, the minor’s own responsibilities, how the steps will be monitored and contingencies envisaged. A format for the written agreement is suggested. Uncertainty is addressed through the concept of multi-planning: seeking and considering future opportunities before paths are blocked, using preparation and forward thinking to allow some control and choice over the future.

The importance and objectives of routine reviews are then discussed and a broad format is suggested. Special mention is made of planned reviews preceding significant expected changes in the minor’s situation.

Monitoring and implementing a Life Project is then exemplified through another case, when difficulties arise through a change in the minor’s own perception, mental state and motivation. The key professional’s own

difficulties are acknowledged. A path is shown whereby such issues need not mean abandonment of a Life Project, but in which the Life Project process itself may help clarify the situation. Drawing on the expertise of other professionals, the key professional and the minor adapt the project to help resolve the situation without losing the original path.

A more far-reaching revision is exemplified in the following case, due to changes in the relationship between the country of origin and the host country. Through the Life Project process, a situation which could have resulted in chaos is managed to produce a smooth transition, enabling the young person's skills and potential to continue despite a change of direction.

A different kind of revision is illustrated in the last case, when the future of a young migrant in the host country becomes clearer. The importance of continuing the Life Project process, even when legally a child acquires lasting parity with permanent residents is demonstrated. Unaccompanied minors are children first and migrants second and their support should not depend on immigration status, whether positive or negative. In this case, the Life Project process itself and its emphasis on human dignity and worth allows a very damaged young person to turn from being a passive victim to becoming an active and independent citizen whose contribution to the host society is clear.

The conclusion refers back to the principles outlined initially and the risks that unaccompanied migrant minors face, to reiterate the role of Life Projects in finding durable solutions which respect human rights and the rights of children whilst not denying states the right to control their borders. The role of the key professional, at whom the handbook is aimed, is highlighted as central to this process: in finding solutions for and with the young people, they are helping to find solutions for society as a whole.



## **Section 1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Origins of the Life Project concept**

Noting that considerable numbers of unaccompanied migrant minors are present in member states of the Council of Europe and noting their vulnerability and isolation from family networks, an international conference was held<sup>1</sup> to consider possible responses to the phenomenon, whilst ensuring that the best interests<sup>2</sup> of the minors remained at the forefront of all decisions and interactions with them.

Recognising that border controls on their own are insufficient to meet the challenges arising from the migration of unaccompanied minors, a more individualised approach appeared necessary and the Life Project concept was proposed.

Following the conference, an advisory group<sup>3</sup> with representatives from various member states, advised by representatives from international NGOs was formed to develop the concept as a lasting solution to the issue. The recommendation on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 July 2007.

### **1.2. What are Life Projects?**

A Life Project is a plan, drawn up and negotiated between the minor and the authorities in the host country, represented by a designated professional, with contributions from a variety of other professionals. Life Projects are holistic, personalised, flexible tools.

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1. Regional conference “Migration of unaccompanied minors: acting in the best interests of the child”, Torremolinos, Malaga, Spain, 27-28 October 2005.

2. A universal definition of best interests is difficult to identify, although it always contains the general tenets of welfare and rights. UNHCR (2006, 2008) distinguishes between a best interest assessment as a continuous process involving all aspects of interaction with a child, and the Best Interests Determination, which is formally undertaken at specified points when decisions affect the child permanently or at least in the very long term. This handbook refers mainly to best interests in the first sense but recognises that all assessments, reports and plans may eventually inform long-term or even permanent decisions.

3. Ad hoc Advisory Group on Unaccompanied Migrant Minors (Life Projects) (MG-S-MNA).

A Life Project takes account of a variety of past and underlying issues, including the minor's personal profile, background – including family situation – the causes of migration and itinerary. It links these to the present, including the aspirations and perceptions of the minor, the legal situation and opportunities both in the host country and the country of origin, and seeks to clarify and enhance the minor's future prospects by ensuring that best interests are respected, rights are upheld and that the minor is supported to develop the skills necessary to become a full and active participant in society.

The term “unaccompanied minor” includes all unaccompanied and separated children under 18<sup>4</sup> who find themselves outside their countries of origin, regardless of their immigration status and whether or not they have claimed asylum. Special safeguards for children claiming asylum are respected, notably the principle of non-refoulement and also non-disclosure of personal details to authorities in countries of origin.

Minors are supported and encouraged to be active participants in their own Life Projects, in line with their levels of maturity. Participation is not only a right,<sup>5</sup> but also essential for the success of the Life Project concept.

Life Projects may be followed in the host country or – subject to the minor's best interests, safety and human rights being respected, including the principle of non-refoulement for those seeking asylum – in the country of origin, or in both countries. Exceptionally, where family members are living lawfully in a third country, family reunification to that country may be considered and a Life Project may continue there. Where member states have established safe procedures for moving minors subject to Dublin II regulations,<sup>6</sup> Life

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4. Two items were discussed by the ad hoc committee but were not central to the recommendation itself. One is the identification of unaccompanied children who are “accompanied” by adults claiming to be their parents or guardians. This is a huge issue in terms of protecting children who may be abused, sold, prostituted or otherwise trafficked and exploited. The second concerns the procedures for properly and fairly assessing age for young people who state they are under 18 but at first glance may appear older. States vary greatly in their age assessment procedures, some favouring medico-physical evidence, others socio-behavioural and others a combination of these. The recommendation's explanatory memorandum calls for age assessments to be conducted in a professional and sensitive manner, avoiding psychological damage, but does not go into details. Both these issues are therefore omitted solely because they are beyond the remit of this handbook, which concentrates on Life Projects as described in the recommendation. They are nevertheless crucial in respect of the right of the child to protection and must be fully addressed elsewhere.

5. Article 12, 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

6. See footnote 20 below.

Projects may follow them over national borders within Europe. Life Projects therefore include an element of multi-planning.

Life Projects include a mutual commitment between the minor and the relevant authorities, outlining clear step-by-step goals and defining responsibilities. Built within this is the arrangement for monitoring progress and reviewing or revising the project, both routinely at predetermined intervals and in response to significant changes in the minor's situation.

### **1.3. The objectives of the Life Project, conceptually and individually**

Life Projects always place the best interests of the minor at the forefront.

Life Projects aim to develop each child's capacities and potential, supporting the development of independence, responsibility and resilience, to enable each young person to become an active contributor to society, whether ultimately he or she remains in the host country or returns to the country of origin.

A Life Project aims to:

- establish the minor's individual history, including family background, the reasons for migration and its trajectory;
- identify specific risks, for example if it appears that the minor may have been trafficked;<sup>7</sup>
- ensure that the minor is not discriminated against and receives all the support and protection available to indigenous children and young people;
- seek out the minor's motivations, aspirations and expectations;
- reconcile these with opportunities available, whether in the host country or the country of origin;
- assist the minor in this self-awareness and reflectivity, always taking account of his or her best interests, safety and development;
- guide the minor towards goals of intrinsic and lasting value, socially and educationally;

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7. The term "trafficking" is used here to denote trafficking for exploitation or gain. This is distinguishable from the term "smuggling", although in some languages the two are used interchangeably. The 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and its Explanatory Report provide further information and guidance. The Recommendation calls for all member states to ratify the Convention.

- empower the minor to develop the skills required to make the Life Project achievable;
- identify what support the minor requires to this end and, crucially, who will be providing this support;
- break down medium and long-term goals into shorter-term achievable steps;
- provide a structure for monitoring steps, reviewing progress, revising or updating the Life Project.

#### **1.4. Conditions required for the successful implementation of Life Projects**

At all levels, a strict deontological adherence to basic ethical principles is required, in particular:

- respect for persons and for human dignity;
- respect for human rights;<sup>8</sup>
- respect for the rights of the child, including but not limited to the right to be safe, to be healthy, to education, to protection from exploitation or abuse, to maintain family links when these are not detrimental to the child, and the right to care and protection from the state, particularly if the child is deprived of the family environment;<sup>9</sup>
- maintaining the best interests of the child at the forefront.

An attitude on the part of professionals<sup>10</sup> which supports these principles in practice and includes:

- an anti-discriminatory approach;
- a willingness to advocate for these rights on behalf of the minor;
- a willingness to inform the minor of these rights, as well as balancing them with responsibilities.

A supportive legal framework, including:

- human rights legislation, both international and national;

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8. As enshrined for example in the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights.

9. 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

10. Supported for example in the International Federation of Social Workers' Statement of Principles (2004).

- anti-discrimination legislation, including reference to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or race, religion, disability, social status;
- a framework of protection as afforded by national or international legislation, for example protection from abuse, exploitation, trafficking, domestic or other violence.

A willingness on the part of professionals to support and use this legislation in practice by:

- advocating for the minor in accessing protective legislation;
- informing him or her of these legal safeguards.

The legal and ethical conditions strongly overlap with social conditions including the need for:

- full access to social, welfare, health, educational services, legal representation and other services available to indigenous children and young people;
- the assessment and allocation of services according to individual need, including specialist services if required, such as mental health support, support to victims of trauma, torture or other violence, including for example female genital mutilation, rape or forced marriage.

Economic conditions and cross-national co-operation including:

- a framework for allocation of national and international resources which includes the needs of unaccompanied migrant minors as well as the needs of indigenous children or young people;
- protocols for ensuring that welfare provision is properly and accountably resourced;
- a framework for cross-national co-operation enabling member states to learn from each other and enhance their collective understanding and expertise to the benefit of all.

A spirit of multi-professional co-operation:

- although a key professional<sup>11</sup> should be allocated to each minor, to play a pivotal role in drawing up the Life Project, other professionals are involved to a greater or lesser degree, to produce a holistic and multi-faceted tool.

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11. This term is suggested purely for ease of reference, as explained in the next section.

- other professionals should therefore display a willingness to contribute as appropriate and required.<sup>12</sup> The role of stakeholders is further explored below.

Training:

- key professionals should have background training in the support of young people, including training in child-friendly, non-threatening interview skills.
- key professionals and their managers should be trained and knowledgeable in national and relevant international legislation and protocols around the care and support of all children and young people who find themselves in need, in difficulty or abandoned. This is a prerequisite for ensuring that unaccompanied minors have access to all the protection and support available to indigenous children and young people.
- key professionals should have a basic understanding of immigration procedures in their own states, not to provide a substitute for professional legal advice, but to ensure that the minors comply with compulsory procedures and are referred to appropriate legal advisors.
- key professionals and others working closely with minors should seek to keep up to date on relevant legislation and guidance produced since the original recommendation, such as the 2009 UNHCR Guidelines on Child Asylum Claims.
- training in the delivery of Life Projects could be at different levels according to the directness of involvement. Occasional contributors may simply require a consensus on the ethical standpoint and on the centrality of the best interests of the child. Longer-term actors such as educational professionals – and health professionals where a minor has specific needs – would require a greater understanding of the holistic nature of the plans and the impact of their own contributions. Key professionals should have a clear understanding of the nature and objectives of Life Projects, their formulation, implementation and revision, such as may be found in this handbook, supplemented by

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12. Where legislation and structures already exist in member states, encouraging or demanding multi-professional co-operation in the care and monitoring of all children who are assisted by statutory authorities, this must apply equally to unaccompanied minors. The higher standard must always apply.

experience, reflection and interaction with other professionals engaged in a similar task.

Empowerment of key professionals:

- key professionals must feel empowered and confident enough to request and encourage the participation of other professionals and to advocate on behalf of the minors. An aim of this handbook is to build on that empowerment. Supervisory or managerial support is also vital.



## Section 2. The role of stakeholders

This handbook is designed for those stakeholders most directly involved with individual Life Projects. The order in which the stakeholders are considered reflects this. National governments are listed last but their role is crucial, particularly in underpinning the conditions required for the successful implementation of Life Projects and in disseminating information.

Minors themselves are central. Without their active engagement, Life Projects are simply a bureaucratic exercise with no tangible benefits.

The key professional should be a person who has regular contact with the minor, who is adequately trained and adheres to the core ethical principles outlined above. The professional title will differ according to each member state<sup>13</sup> and existing child welfare procedures.<sup>14</sup>

The role of the key professional includes the presentation of the Life Project concept to the minor, the co-ordination of input from other professionals, the formulation, implementation, monitoring and review of the Life Projects. The next section focuses on the role of the key professional.

For minors in foster care or residential homes, the carers will be crucial participants, by virtue of their daily contact with the child.

Teachers, trainers or educators may be the greatest other contributors to most of the Life Projects. Often educators spend a greater amount of time with the minors than any other professional.

Educational and training institutions and their funding bodies must ensure that they have adequate provision for classes in the host language and for the associated needs of this vulnerable group. Language-learning is one part of a broader picture. Educationally, language-learning should be

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13. The Separated Children in Europe Programme (UNHCR/Save the Children, 2000 onwards) suggests that a guardian or advisor should be appointed. In the UK, for example, this would be the child's social worker, as all children who are looked after by a local authority must by law have a qualified social worker allocated to them. In other member states, such as Belgium or the Netherlands, a guardian is more routinely appointed.

14. In member states where a legal guardian is routinely appointed but has infrequent contact with the minor, a professional who has more regular contact would work alongside the guardian.

supported by numeracy and other key skills.<sup>15</sup> Emotionally and socially, religious support within educational institutions should ensure that the needs of unaccompanied minors – around such issues as separation, trauma or culture-shock – are understood and addressed.

Educators and key professionals, working alongside the minor, ensure that educational decisions are appropriate to the minor's ability, aspirations, situation and Life Project. The real life example in the panel illustrates what happened on one occasion, prior to the Life Project initiative, when this vital communication did not take place.

16-year-old X, already fluent in the host country language, enthusiastically attended her college enrolment without her social worker. She chose a travel and tourism course. X was later granted temporary residency. X made good progress. Some months later, her social worker was approached for consent for X's participation in a short trip to another EU state, an intrinsic part of the course. Although funding for the trip and for a temporary travel document was agreed, it was established that a visa could not be granted. X could not gain full certification for the course. X eventually undertook a more appropriate course, but the initial lack of communication created disappointment and wasted valuable public funds.

In member states where the prescribed educational or training framework is usually rigid, it may be appropriate to adapt this to the specific needs of unaccompanied migrant minors.<sup>16</sup> Vocationally or academically, the individual potential of unaccompanied minors should be encouraged and nurtured: they should not be deprived of opportunities – including those in higher education – which are enjoyed by indigenous young people. Throughout Europe, many former unaccompanied minors have developed successful, sometimes high-profile careers, acting as role models to others and making outstanding contributions to their host societies.

The contribution of health professionals to the Life Project varies according to each minor's situation. Contributions may be limited to an initial health assessment, backed up by access to medical care as required, on

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15. As an example, in the UK all ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes for students aged under 19 must include classes in numeracy, computing and PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) or citizenship.

16. In Belgium, for example, some organisations are striving to offer alternative tailor-made vocational opportunities based on the buddy system: Entreprise de Formation par le Travail, Projet Pilote Recherche Action, Association Joseph Denamur and l'EFT NSS-Technique asbl, 2010.

an equal footing with permanent residents. Conversely, health professionals may play a central role, for example when a minor is suffering from a physical or mental health condition or disability or is receiving support following trauma, abuse or torture. Health professionals may also submit reports to lawyers or state authorities where the information is required to inform immigration decisions. In co-ordinating the input from health professionals, the key professional must respect the minor's dignity, integrity and privacy in accordance with national and international guidelines.

Legal representatives may be involved at various stages, typically representing the minor towards the state but potentially also in ensuring that the minor's rights and access to services are respected.

Community or faith groups may be involved to a greater or lesser degree. Minors should be informed of such groups and have the opportunity to engage with them, always on a voluntary basis. For some young people, these groups may become a significant part of their lives, supporting them to maintain links with their cultural heritage and perhaps informing the Life Project itself. Key professionals, however, should ensure that properly funded authorities do not abdicate their statutory responsibilities by simply referring minors to voluntary organisations.

The family in the country of origin may be involved to a greater or less degree. It is normally assumed that the family provides the most protective unit to support a child, in most situations. The right to maintain family relations applies,<sup>17</sup> except when it is contrary to the child's best interests.<sup>18</sup> Key professionals, working at times with incomplete information, may have to make difficult assessments of this fine balance, calling also on the expertise of others and taking the minors' own views into account.

International organisations such as the Red Cross or Red Crescent may be involved in family tracing or messaging. International Social Services may help in assessing the situation of families in countries of origin, their involvement in migration arrangements, their motivations and the extent to which they may provide a protective environment to the child. Where the possibility of a Life Project continuing in the country of origin is being considered, organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration may be consulted. International organisations may potentially play a crucial role in

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17. Article 8, 1989, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

18. Article 9.3, 1989, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

continuing to monitor the Life Project if the young person eventually returns to the country of origin or elsewhere and in ensuring that conditions are favourable for its success.

National governments – and sometimes autonomous or regional governments – are the vital link between the Council of Europe and front-line professionals. Governments disseminate information, encourage or guide local authorities and professionals.<sup>19</sup> Governments allocate the resources required to deliver services. National and local governments may, through statistical or other tools, monitor the progress which is being made in implementing the Life Project concept.

National governments in Europe may also play a role in facilitating continuity of Life Projects when a minor may be transferred between states, for example under the Dublin II regulations,<sup>20</sup> or simply where it appears that a young minor may have travelled from one European state to another.

Employers of key professionals play a role in facilitating, training, encouraging and monitoring the implementation.

Providers of specialist training and organisations involved in accreditation play a role in ensuring that front-line professionals are adequately prepared for the task. Indirectly, the trainers and supervisors of all officials who come into contact with minors may play a role. The attitude and interaction of police or border control officers, for example, may have a lasting influence on the minor's perception of other professionals later involved in the Life Project.

International bodies may encourage the use of Life Projects in their supportive guidance and may investigate, monitor and report on progress made in the implementation of Life Projects.

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19. Section V of the recommendation.

20. EC Regulation 343/2003 clarifies which member state of the European Union should be responsible for considering the asylum claim of a person who has, or intends to, travel between member states. The rules are complex and subject to challenge and time limits, but, when applied to minors, the general ruling appears to be that when a minor has simply travelled through state A en route to state B (for example in a lorry, or held by an agent), state B would consider the claim. Where, however, a minor has actually claimed asylum in state A and then travelled to state B, the minor may be returned to state A for continuing consideration of the claim, unless there are relatives in state B. At the time of writing, these guidelines are being further discussed through international conferences and debates.

At the European level, national and local governments may support the implementation of Life Projects by encouraging and facilitating communication between professionals in different member states, so that all may gain by greater insight and co-operation.



## **Section 3. Putting the Life Project concept into practice: guidelines for front-line professionals**

In this section, addressed directly to the key professional,<sup>21</sup> we shall consider how to translate the principles outlined above into practical front-line work with children and young people, particularly around Life Projects. We shall illustrate general structures with examples from real cases.

### **3.1. Background preparation for the task**

You are a busy child welfare professional. It now seems that initiating and implementing the Life Project process has been added to your habitual role. You may be concerned that an extra burden or responsibility is being placed on your shoulders. Will this Life Project idea make your job more difficult, more bureaucratic, or will it make it more interesting, more creative? Hopefully, this handbook may help you to use the Life Project as an innovative and exciting tool in your work with young people .

The first thing to remember is that you have probably already been doing many of the tasks outlined in this handbook.

The handbook does not recommend, much less prescribe, any particular theories or approaches. You may have in mind guidance or training provided by your organisation or state on the aims and desired outcomes of supporting all children and young people in difficulty.<sup>22</sup> You may, indeed, be expected to follow the best practice guidelines issued by your professional

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21. At all levels, a strict deontological adherence to basic ethical principles shall apply, in particular:

- respect for persons and for human dignity;
- respect for human rights;
- respect for the rights of the child, including but not limited to the right to be safe, to be healthy, to education, to protection from exploitation or abuse, to maintain family links when these are not detrimental to the child, and the right to care and protection from the state, particularly if the child is deprived of the family environment;
- maintaining the best interests of the child at the forefront

22. Purely as an example, the five-stranded “Every Child Matters” framework in the UK seeks to ensure that all children are healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution to society and work towards eventual economic independence.

body or organisation or comply with the regulatory framework of your member state. Assuming these are compatible with the recommendation and mindful that the same rights should apply to unaccompanied migrant minors as to indigenous children, they should provide you with a useful foundation on which to build a flexible approach based on the minors' integrity, individuality and human rights.

You may be familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs<sup>23</sup> illustrated here. This classic model has been revisited countless times and all that is required here is a general awareness of its basic premise that higher level needs cannot be properly fulfilled until the needs below are met. This is particularly evident in the early stages of relationship-building.



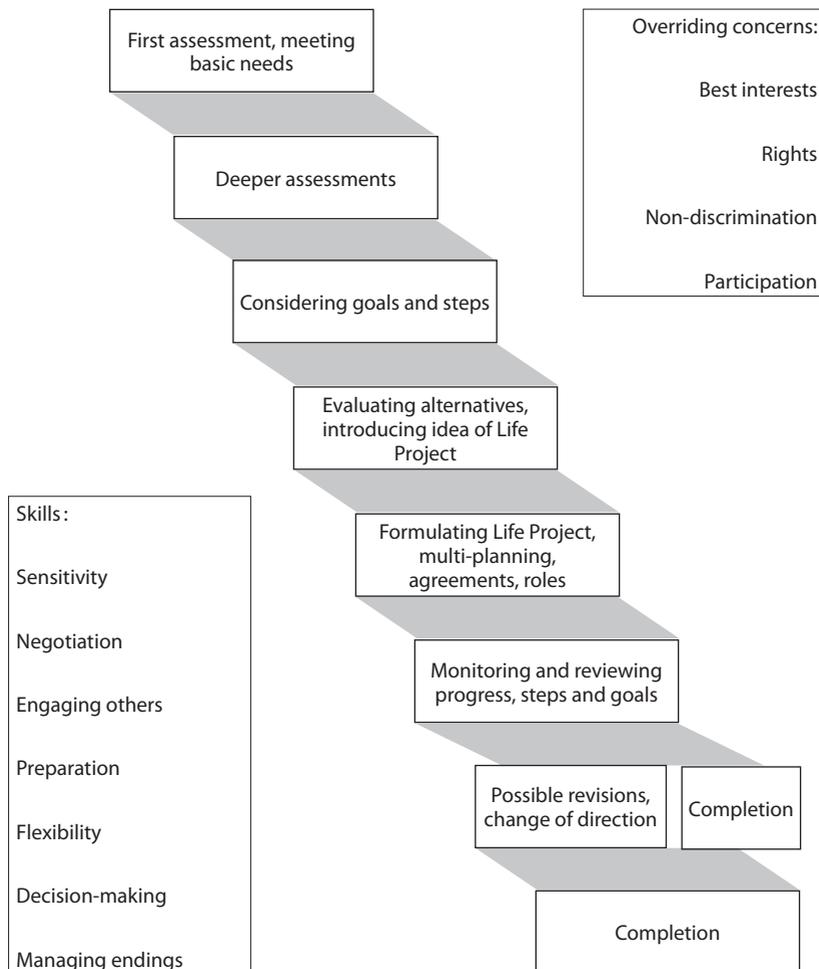
Secondly, remember that working with people can never be an exact science. You may need to balance relative advantages and disadvantages and on occasion, with the benefit of hindsight, you or others may wonder whether you made the “best” decision. Whilst maintaining accountability, as long as you can show that you analysed the evidence carefully and that your decisions were guided by the best interests of the minor and the overriding principles outlined earlier, you should not be criticised. Just as the Life Projects will be evaluated and reviewed, so you may find yourself

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23. Maslow (1954).

re-evaluating your own work: consider this a strength of your practice, not a weakness.

Have in mind an overall structure for your work, such as that suggested here, but do not feel forced to follow it too rigidly. This is not a true flowchart, but a guide. A structure is there to help you, not to restrict you. Never be intimidated by a structure: you are the professional.



### **3.2. Early stages of relationship building: Z's story**

If the advice given here seems obvious, please do not feel patronised: everyone has different skills and expertise and sometimes all of us may benefit by refocusing on basics. Let us now imagine that you are about to meet Z, a 16-year-old for whom you will be organising care.

- Remember the difficult situation that unaccompanied minors find themselves in, separated from their parents or usual carers. Be mindful of Z's needs, respect him as a human being, try to seek out his best interests and consider how they may be met.
- Engage with Z in a two-way dialogue,<sup>24</sup> not only talking to him and asking questions, but also actively listening to his unique story, told in his own words.
- Together, you and Z will embark on a voyage of discovery. You will be considering his motivations, hopes and aspirations, actively evaluating them and reconciling them with realistic opportunities and achievable goals. You will both have to keep open minds and you may need to identify various pathways and routes to take account of uncertainty.
- You will be referring Z for services and engaging other professionals in this process. You will need to build and co-ordinate multi-agency relationships to ensure that Z's Life Project is as holistic as possible. You may at times have to advocate for Z to ensure that his rights are respected and that opportunities are not unfairly or unlawfully denied him.
- Occasionally, you may have to explain to Z that his immediate wishes cannot be granted, and why. The relative success or failure of these difficult interactions will depend on the relationship of trust and mutual respect that you have built up with him. This will be heavily influenced by first impressions at your initial meeting.

#### *i. Your first meeting*

- Welcome Z and look genuinely pleased to meet him.

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24. The extent of dialogue will naturally also depend on Z's level of maturity. UNHCR (2006) suggest that children over 16 may usually be mature enough to make many decisions, those between 14 and 16 to make a major contribution, those between 9 and 14 may participate to varying degrees and that children under 9 should still have the opportunity to be heard. You will also take account of the effect of the minor's life experiences on his or her level of maturity.

- If you are using an interpreter, greet him or her professionally but remember throughout the interview to address yourself to Z. You are here to interview Z, not the interpreter.
- Make sure that Z's basic and immediate needs are met. Offer Z some water, perhaps some fruit or biscuits. Let him know where the toilet is.
- Ask Z if he is feeling well. If he says he is not, or if he appears ill, be prepared to seek medical advice and if necessary for the meeting to be shortened or even postponed. Even if Z says he is fine now, check whether he suffers from any ongoing medical conditions.<sup>25</sup>
- Explain who you are and what your role is. Explain the role of your organisation: this may be particularly important if Z has been in a temporary reception centre, police station or elsewhere. Explain that your role differs from that of immigration officials, but avoid implying that you are somehow “better” or kinder: you simply have different jobs.
- Introduce any other people present and explain their roles.
- Check that Z has understood everything so far.

#### *ii. Models of assessment and interview style*

Although you will be directing the meeting, remember that this is Z's life. He may already feel that things are out of control: avoid adding to his anxiety and allow him to share some control of the interview.

Three models of interaction<sup>26</sup> are often compared. Briefly, in the questioning model interviewers are seen as experts, drawing out information according to their perceptions. The procedural model is similar, but designed to establish whether interviewees fit predetermined criteria for assistance. The exchange model places interviewees at the centre of the process, recognises their understanding of their own situation and allows them to express this in their own words. The exchange model will allow you greater insight into Z's situation from his perspective and perhaps reveal issues you had not initially considered. Crucially, the exchange model respects Z as a unique human being and not merely an object in a bureaucratic process.

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25. On one occasion, a child explained his entire migration itinerary to a colleague before disclosing that he suffered from a serious medical condition. He was found to require immediate life-saving treatment.

26. Smale and Tuson (1993).

You may nevertheless need to ask some procedural questions – try to get through these as simply as possible. If you need to copy any documents that Z may have been issued with on arrival, ideally return them to Z – they may be all he has to somehow “prove” that he exists as a human being.

- Ask Z to tell you, in his own words and at his own pace, something about himself, his life in his country of origin and what led to his arrival in the host country. Do not expect a full picture at this stage, but simply an outline.
- Be prepared for this to take some time: remember that time invested now will pay huge dividends later. First impressions count and first meetings are seldom forgotten.
- Each young person’s response will be unique. Be prepared for almost anything.
- Some young people may launch straight into the account. If the story seems pre-prepared, evasive or skewed to fit the process, refrain from betraying immediate scepticism.
- Some young people may become distressed when remembering sad or traumatic events. You will need to judge how best to respond.<sup>27</sup> It may be best to let Z express his distress and reassure him that this is normal and understandable. Explain that you will not keep asking upsetting questions unnecessarily, but prepare Z for the possible need to repeat the story to others such as lawyers or immigration officials. Offer comfort but refrain from making promises about the future over which you have no control.
- Conversely, some young people may describe horrific events with little apparent emotion. This does not mean that the events did not happen: the manner of description may be the result of trauma, dissociation or desensitisation.
- Some young people may give incomplete, monosyllabic or confusing accounts. Remember that Z may be frightened, perhaps traumatised by events including the separation from parents or carers, by the journey itself, by possible abuse from agents, by threats or simply by finding himself in an alien environment. If necessary, encourage clarification

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27. UNHCR (2006, section 3.2.2) suggest that counsellors should be on hand to assist children who become distressed.

but remember this is an interview, not an interrogation. It takes time to build up trust.

- You may find that giving Z the lead has resulted in important gaps in information. In that case, sensitive probing could be used after Z has had the chance to tell his story.
- In particular, you may wish to know more of Z's family and the background prior to migration. Again, try to use open rather than closed questions. It is not necessary to have every detail now, but you may at least wish to know whether Z believes his family (or some members) to be alive or dead, or perhaps simply does not know.
- If possible, try to get an understanding of how Z sees his position within the family. It may be too early to consider in detail the potential role they may play later in Z's Life Project, but the present situation, for example whether Z is in touch or wishes to make contact may provide a basis for later enquiries. You may need to link the migration story to the family situation: if for example the family are in hiding, there will be risks associated with trying to trace them. Conversely, Z and his migration may be a potential economic resource for the family.
- If you or your team will be responsible for all Z's protection, care and accommodation, there will be great deal to cover on the first day. You may, for example, have to complete a preliminary risk assessment before placing Z into accommodation.
- It will be overwhelming, therefore, to mention longer-term plans at this stage, but some young people may already make requests. Some may appear focused, almost fixated on certain things, such as work, education, housing or residency. If that happens and Z seems alert and insistent, do not evade the question. Give an adequate answer and propose a timeframe for further explanations and discussions. If you decide to mention the Life Project process, even if you do not have time to explain it fully, show enthusiasm for the idea, particularly for the fact that Z will be an active participant in his own Life Project and that his best interests will be your overriding concern.

### *iii. Concluding the first meeting and meeting basic and immediate needs*

- Give Z a basic idea of his rights and obligations. You may already have a format for these, or you may choose to design one specific to your own organisation, but as a bare minimum they may be summarised

as the right to be treated with respect and the obligation to treat all others with respect, the right to enjoy the protection of the law and the obligation to comply with the law. The idea of a mutual commitment is therefore introduced. Z should sign a summary of this once it has been explained to him.

- Explain the principle of confidentiality and any legal or organisational limits that apply.
- Ensure that Z understands basic immigration procedures so that he has the opportunity to begin regularising his position. In particular, if it appears that Z is afraid of returning to his home country, or has fled his country, explain his right to apply for asylum. You are not a lawyer or immigration official: it is not up to you to try and pre-ascertain the likelihood of success in an asylum claim. You may need to explain in simple terms what asylum means,<sup>28</sup> and let Z know that his lawyer will be advising him.
- Explain to Z what will happen next and why. Assure him of his right to participate in decisions affecting him.
- Ensure that Z's immediate needs are met as soon as possible. For example, Z may be accompanied to his accommodation, provided with food, clothing and/or an allowance, according to your procedures and his needs, and given basic orientation.
- Record what you have done.

The summary below allows us to follow Z's story to the next stage:

Z's father has died but Z was too upset to give details today. Z expressed the fear that he would also be killed. Z's family moved to stay with an uncle in another town after the death. Z has an older sister, who is married, and three younger siblings.

Z had some schooling and can read and write in his own language. Z spoke through an interpreter.

Z says he is well and has no history of physical or mental health conditions

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28. Many people, even well-informed adults, still believe asylum only applies to political refugees, whereas the 1951 Geneva Convention recognises five broad categories on which the fear of persecution may be founded. A legal advisor should also be able to advise and consider related issues such as humanitarian protection.

Z travelled here by lorry and boat.

Z states that he is on his own, has nowhere to stay and no money.

Basic services: Z has been accommodated at ... and all information provided to the accommodation supervisor. Z will be given basic orientation, taken to purchase clothing and shown where to access the nearest place of worship.

#### *iv. Following the first meeting*

If your member state already has established procedures for the immediate support of unaccompanied migrant minors which comply with the recommendation, you will be following these. The scenario below is an example of basic standards:

- Arrange for medical checks, unless they have already taken place and are satisfactory. Initiate the process required for Z to register for routine medical support as applicable in your state.<sup>29</sup> If you are concerned that Z may be sick, has mental health difficulties, is suffering from trauma,<sup>30</sup> or has a disability health professionals will be more involved from the outset.
- Arrange for Z to access legal advice<sup>31</sup> or, if a lawyer has already been appointed, advise of your involvement.
- If Z is of compulsory school age, begin the process for enrolment in school on the assumption that the law will apply to him as much as to indigenous children. If Z has no knowledge of the host country's language, begin the process for enrolment in language classes.<sup>32</sup>
- If Z already has adequate knowledge of the host country's language, let him know that you will arrange a meeting to explore aptitudes, wishes and interests in the light of opportunities available, whether in academic or vocational education or training. This effectively introduces the idea of the Life Project, even if it is only implied, partial, or preliminary.

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29. Article 24, 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

30. Research by Bean (2006) found that over half of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the Netherlands were suffering from trauma.

31. Article 12, 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the right of the child to be heard in judicial or administrative proceedings.

32. As there is little element of choice in these arrangements, they would not be considered Life Project plans.

- Z will have the right to continue links with his existing culture or identity. Ensure that his orientation includes information on the nearest places of worship and where culturally appropriate food may be purchased, for example.

### **3.3. Preparing the minor for the Life Project concept – Z’s story continued**

Z’s immediate needs have been met and Z may feel safer in his new accommodation, but he may have underlying anxieties about how long that will continue. Meeting his solicitor should have helped him understand his right to participate in the immigration process. You will be building a deeper picture of Z through personal interaction and information from others.

You may have a mental checklist of items to be covered next. Although it will be essential to record your interactions, it may be preferable to delay lengthy form-filling until after the meeting, to avoid giving the impression that Z is simply a “case” and that your interest is solely ticking or completing boxes. We are all human beings, not files.

Your mental checklist could be based on international guidelines specifically written for unaccompanied migrant minors<sup>33</sup> or national frameworks of assessment relating to all children in difficulty, with additions or modifications to reflect the specific situation of migrant minors. Alternatively, you may wish to draw from a variety of existing models to produce your own organisation’s format. Whatever format you choose, you will be analysing the impact of background, including health, education and family; the migration story; risk and protective factors; the present situation including Z’s strengths and needs, development and maturity, hopes and aspirations. You will be considering external factors such as the situation in Z’s country of origin and in the host country and his legal and immigration status. Your central concerns will be Z’s best interests and how he may be supported to overcome difficulties, develop to his full potential and become a full and active world citizen.

A network of professionals is building up and a summary update a few weeks later may look like this:

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33. For example, those suggested in appendix to C4 in the Separated Children in Europe Programme, or those in the UNHCR BID documents.

Information from Mr C., hostel supervisor:

Z has settled fairly well into his accommodation. Z was shown how to cook chicken and rice by another resident. Z accepts food prepared by others but does not seem interested in cooking.

Z enjoys watching TV and playing football in the local park with other residents.

Z uses the public telephone. He often seems upset or angry when he returns, but when asked about this, he says there is no problem.

Information from educators:

Z began language classes but although he is polite and his behaviour is good, his attendance and timekeeping are not always satisfactory.

Z's viewpoint as stated to the key professional:

Z appreciates the help but does not like being treated "like a small child" and says he wishes to work.

Whether you have already mentioned the idea of a Life Project or whether this has merely been implied by your consultations, now is probably the best stage at which to introduce Z to the concept.

*i. Outlining the Life Project concept*

- Show real enthusiasm and refer to this as his Life Project.

The way the Life Project concept is explained will depend on the nature and extent of your interaction so far and also on Z's level of maturity. Do not underestimate Z's capacity to understand abstract concepts. Neither should you assume that Z will understand exactly what you mean: check with him at intervals, asking him to tell you what he thinks you are talking about. It may be useful to check to what extent Z understands preliminary concepts, such as "alternatives", perhaps using a few concrete examples, such as modes of transport.

- Assure Z that you, your colleagues and other professionals will be prioritising his best interests. Stress that because you take this task seriously, you are willing to invest the time and effort in working with him to identify these.
- If Z requires immediate confirmation on specifics, acknowledge that he is indeed the expert in his own situation, but he cannot be expected to be aware of all the alternatives available and that you both need time to explore all possibilities together.

- Explain that external factors should also be considered, because you are serious about his Life Project and you want it to work. It must therefore be realistic and achievable as well as imaginative and exciting.
- Stress that it would not be respectful to him to make hasty or ill-considered decisions.

The extent and ease with which young people engage will depend on many factors. Some express wishes very clearly and may refuse to consider the possibility of alternatives. You may wonder whether those are really their views or whether they may have been manipulated. If you are very fortunate, some may already demonstrate a willingness to discuss options. In Z's case, he does not appear very interested in the process. At the individual and cultural level, Z may not be used to expressing his own opinions. He may have internalised the idea that only adults make choices: his very migration may have been arranged by others, without any consultation with him.

All the time, patience and energy you spent since that first meeting now begin to pay dividends.

#### *ii. Initial ideas and stages, continuing to engage the minor*

Remember that the Life Project is not just a form. A form may be envisaged, but it is simply the means to record the process, how options have been evaluated in terms of best interests; how the mutual commitment was recorded; how progress will be monitored and how the Life Project will be reviewed, adapted or revised. The Life Project itself is the path that Z's life will take, with reference to those plans and agreements.

For ease of explanation, we may envisage a "first meeting about the Life Project", possibly at a table with paper for noting ideas, making visual aids and so on. Depending on the frequency of interaction between you and Z, you may already have discussed many points informally. That will have given you a firmer basis on which to begin a more formal process without Z feeling intimidated.

- Recap on the information you already have and ask Z for clarification where necessary. This will be a good opportunity to fill in some of the gaps or details which were too complex or difficult to consider earlier.
- Praise Z for his strengths, for example his politeness and good behaviour. Balance these by explaining that you will support him to overcome any difficulties in other spheres.

- Balance independent information on Z's country of origin with his own, remembering that major issues may be well-reported but the local situation may be just as important to Z.
- Ask Z again about his motivation and that of others in arranging his migration. The answer may be different from his initial account: Z will have had the opportunity to reflect, to clarify his thoughts, he may feel safer, he may be more realistic about the host country.
- Do not expect a full and comprehensive plan to emerge from this initial meeting. Even indigenous young people would have difficulties in being asked to identify goals, much less to consider life choices.

*iii. Identifying goals and how they may be achieved*

You must now assist Z in a process of reflection.

To maintain a sense of purpose, it may be useful to distinguish true goals from the means to achieve those goals. The concept may perhaps be introduced by a simple activity such as discussing how to cross a river (the goal) and the different ways this could be done: by bridge, boat, swimming ... (the means to achieve the goal).

You would then move on to consider Z's real life goals, listing or picturing them on paper, eventually perhaps producing a short list like this:

<b>What I hope to do</b>	<b>How could I do it?</b>	<b>Who could help me?</b>	<b>What shall I do if that doesn't work?</b>
Find out what happened to my family.	Try to contact trusted neighbours.	I want to try that myself.	Consider the Red Cross Tracing Service.
Stay safe.	Get permission to stay in this host country.	My lawyer has already sent my statement. I will explain my story at the immigration interview.	I am very afraid and I hope it works. If it does not, I may be able to appeal.
Train to be a radiographer like my father was.	Learn the language. Study hard at all subjects, especially maths and sciences.	My tutors at college.	Find out about other courses.

You know that there may be flaws to this “plan”. The Red Cross cannot offer a tracing service in every country. Z’s hope of staying safe depends on a successful asylum claim. Whilst Z can access language classes and general education, his plans for higher education may also be dependent on his immigration status. However, you have helped Z to clarify his thoughts and understand the link between actions now and outcomes later. You explain that it would be good, for now, to focus on actions which will have intrinsic value, even if Z’s ultimate goals may change – whether by his choice or because of external factors. You agree on the importance of learning the host country’s language. Z may feel more positive and more confident in knowing that you are listening to his viewpoint. You arrange to meet again to try and formulate a more comprehensive and holistic Life Project.

### 3.4. Formulating the first Life Project – Y’s story

#### *The background*

Whilst Z is reflecting, studying and establishing a new routine, you visit Y. Your state and Y’s have close links and there is a well-established pattern of migration, including that of unaccompanied minors, from Y’s state to yours. Y had the opportunity to discuss his case with a legal professional, but did not wish to claim asylum. Y seems suspicious of professionals. Y was evasive about his family and said he had no idea of their whereabouts and no means to contact them. As Y gained confidence he became clearer about his motivations and appeared focused on obtaining work.

Your initial attempts at formulating goals and considering means looked something like this:

What I hope to do	How could I do it?	Whose responsibility? Who could help me?	What shall I do if that does not work?
Work.	Stay in host country.	The immigration people will give me a work permit.	“Surely they will let me stay and work?”

You instantly saw that this was not a proper plan. Y does not have permission to work and illegal working is dangerous and exploitative. Y does not have permission or skills to work in the host country. No alternatives are

considered. Mindful of Y's distrust of professionals, you decided not to dismiss Y's ideas immediately, but you pointed out the limitations of the plan and the dangers of illegal working. You suggested meeting again to discuss the matter more clearly.

*Negotiating with the minor, engaging others in the process, advocating where necessary*

- Preparing for this meeting, you still consider that if you reject Y's ideas without proper consideration, or if you try to divert him onto other matters, he will simply feel that you do not understand his situation. He may refuse to take part in the Life Project, or – worse still – he may politely agree with everything you say whilst internally making his own plans.
- Y's immigration status and its implications must be considered, but should not be the only or determining factor in his Life Project: you wish to avoid seeing Y as one dimensional. Y is not just a migrant; he is also a child,<sup>34</sup> a complex human being.
- You plan to probe Y's motivations further and perhaps suggest the insertion of medium-term goals, which are not dismissive, or in conflict with his ultimate goal.

Y does not seem very motivated towards education, as confirmed by reports from the school. At this stage, you may need to connect the rather abstract principle of education as a right and your aim to support the development of Y's full potential, to more tangible benefits of education in terms of his ultimate goal.

- At the meeting, you may begin by checking whether Y's main goal remains unchanged. Gently question the assumption that staying in the host country is the only means of achieving the goal. Ask Y if he can think of any alternatives.

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34. Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (2006), *Child First, Migrant Second: Ensuring that every child matters*.

- Avoid giving the impression that you are trying to trick Y into giving an answer he did not intend. He may, for example, fear that you are pushing him to leave the host country. Explain that we should consider all alternatives, even those which may eventually be rejected. Y may not have experienced this type of thinking before, so he may not grasp it immediately. Give a few examples, similar perhaps to those you used with Z.
- Point out that learning the language of the host country and possibly having that recognised through a formal qualification, will enhance Y's future job prospects and earning potential and allow him to understand his employment rights. It will be essential if Y stays in the host country and an asset if Y eventually returns to his country of origin.
- If it is feasible, mention the possibility of Y accessing classes and if possible qualifications in the official language of his country of origin. That will be invaluable should Y return, but may also be very useful should Y remain in the host country.
- Point out that basic skills such as numeracy are essential anywhere in the world. Y will be more in control of his situation regarding wages, bills and other financial arrangements.
- Stress that his education will be his for life. You could illustrate this: for example, someone may give him a wonderful gold watch, but that watch could be stolen. What is in his head will remain there forever and nobody will be able to take it away from him.
- Explore Y's own interests and consider whether they may be developed further, giving him enjoyment in his achievements and possibly leading to greater career choices.

This produces the log below:

When Y was younger, he used to help his neighbour in his carpentry workshop at weekends. Y enjoyed that and was proud of what he had learnt, but he was unable to continue after his neighbour moved.

The option of Y learning carpentry was discussed, and Y felt that would more relevant to him than simply learning the language. The local college was called while Y was present. They advised that a carpentry course would begin in the autumn. Students must have a basic knowledge of the language and have a school report showing commitment to studies.

The course lasts nine months and there may be an issue in accepting a student who might be unable to stay in the host country for that time. It was pointed out that Y's situation may change and that he should be given the chance to know about the course.

A meeting was arranged at the college on ... to discuss this further.

In taking Y's ideas seriously, you are demonstrating that you respect him as an individual. In advocating for Y with the college, you are showing that you are not merely a member of the establishment, but you are willing to challenge potential discrimination on his behalf.

You and Y agree on some short-term goals for the next four weeks.

Domain	Step	Who will be responsible? Who could assist you?	How will we know it is achieved?	What shall we do if there is a difficulty?
Education	To achieve 100% attendance.	You will be responsible.	Report from the school.	Reconsider your commitment to the carpentry course.
Education	To be on time at least 19 days out of the next 20.	You will be responsible.	Report from the school.	Mr D. will knock at your door, but that will be an hour before you have to leave.

Ideally, this would be accompanied by a signed agreement:

I agree that I will undertake all the steps shown above. I understand that information from the school will be shown to the college when I attend the meeting there next month.	Signed: Y Date:
I agree to assist Y to access further opportunities in line with his commitment, abilities and lawful non-discriminatory procedures.	Signed: Key professional (KP ) Date:
I agree that if Y fails to get to school on time any day, I will knock at his door very loudly the next morning. I don't think Y will like that!	Signed: Mr D. Date:
I agree to email the K.P. with details of Y's attendance and punctuality.	Signed: Tutor.. Date:

This is not a Life Project, as it takes account of only one domain in Y's life, but it introduces Y to the idea of working towards goals, of having progress monitored and of a mutual agreement.

You are hoping eventually to develop a holistic plan which takes account of all aspects of Y's case, his best interests, his right to develop to his full potential, his existing abilities and aspirations and how he may be supported to become a responsible and independent contributor to society.

At your next meeting, therefore, you plan to broaden the focus to include other aspects of Y's development. Y mentions that he really enjoys football and would like to improve his game. There is a school team, but Y is reluctant to go, as he does not know anybody there. You identify this activity as beneficial for health and integration. You call the coach and arrange for Y to attend an initial session and be introduced to the other players. An update two weeks later may look something like this:

Meeting between Y, K.P. and the college admissions tutor:

Admissions criteria: students must have reached level 1 in the language and pass a basic numeracy test. Students must show their commitment to studies generally and an aptitude for the subject.

The recent attendance and punctuality report was acceptable.

A report was also provided on Y's general school progress, which has improved considerably.

Y's vocabulary now includes carpentry tools and types of wood.

The college course is part-time and can be taken alongside a course to develop Y's language and numeracy skills. Y will be invited to the admissions interview in two months.

Other reports: Y started attending the football sessions at school and says he really enjoys this.

Y has begun to realise that you are willing to invest time in his future. He still hopes for a work permit but is realising that there are alternatives to immediate working. He now seems more interested in his education and he is beginning to integrate into the host community.

You are also keen for Y to improve his self-care skills, vital for his long-term independence. You are concerned that Y's diet is not very varied. Mr D., the accommodation supervisor, agrees to show Y how to cook some different foods.

Y begins attending weekly activities at a nearby cultural centre. Y enjoys helping younger people from his country of origin who did not have the opportunity to attend school there, with reading and writing in their original language. Y may be a beginner in the host country's language, but his self-esteem and confidence will be enhanced by sharing the expertise he has with others. Y is also beginning to feel that he is making a contribution to society.

Soon after, Y is given temporary residency to allow official investigations to continue, although he is not permitted to work. The carpentry course appears more possible. Mindful of the need to multi-plan, you suggest also finding out about similar courses in his country of origin. Y is sure they are costly and will not lead to work, but you remind him that it is still useful to keep an open mind.

You will be praising Y for his present achievements and expressing confidence in his future successes. You are showing an interest in Y as a well-rounded human being, not just a potential worker. Perhaps Y is beginning to see education not simply as a means to an end, but also as something

to be excited about, something which can provide him with a sense of achievement and perhaps even status. Education, which began as an intermediate goal purely for a purpose, is now beginning to take shape as a true goal with its own intrinsic value. Y is also broadening his horizons and developing problem-solving and independence skills.

Just prior to your next meeting, you are notified that investigations show that Y had in fact been to your country before, in another area, before disappearing from his accommodation. It seems that Y had returned to his family, only to leave again.

Y comes to the next meeting looking preoccupied. Y reveals that his family have been in touch with him and that they are in debt to the agents who facilitated his migration. Harassed by the agents, the family are pressurising Y, their eldest son, to send funds immediately. You ask Y about his earlier migration and return. Y says he left because he was in closed accommodation, could not get work and nobody understood how disappointed his family were in his failure. Y decided to go home, but after a few months he felt obliged to try again. It seems that Y's family have little understanding of Y's situation as a child protected by the authorities in the host country. They now accuse him of laziness or even of earning money and keeping it to himself. Two of Y's cousins went abroad and are now sending remittances to their parents.

You understand the plight of the family, but you keep focusing on Y's best interests. This is not always simple: returning to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, you see how Y's need to belong to a group, his sense of duty to the family and his need to maintain his relationship with them may be met by his sending money now, by whatever means. Your perception of Y's best interests may not instantly accord with his: what you see as protection Y may see as control, as a barrier to his needs.

You will need to explain this to Y without suggesting that his family do not care for him, but perhaps by reminding him that they may not be aware of the opportunities he now has, which in the long term could benefit them too. You are mindful that when Y returned, he was eventually sent on a migration trajectory again. This may not necessarily be in his best interests. Ultimately, you may have to remind Y that you are accountable according to the laws of your state and that you are undertaking a task according to certain principles, which cannot be compromised. Y may disagree, but he

should respect the fact that you are unbending in your support of him as a human being who is entitled to certain rights.

If you and Y have built up a relationship of mutual respect and trust, you may advise him how best to explain matters to his family. Y agrees. You keep an open mind and resist the temptation to assume that Y's family will be unwilling to engage with the process. You also explain that through bilateral links, the authorities and NGOs in his country of origin are also attempting to contact his family and that they will report their findings to the authorities in the host country.

You and Y now feel better able to formulate a more comprehensive and perhaps more realistic Life Project. The full form<sup>35</sup> will contain a list of various domains and aspects of the situation. If some sections are not relevant, indicate that you have considered them, even if you state "not applicable" or give a very brief answer. For example, at present Y does not appear to need any medical support. The form must be regarded as a flexible tool: if it is in Word format, you will be able to abbreviate or expand sections to suit the situation.

To enable Y to maintain ownership of his own Life Project, you could include some leisure items, as suggested by him, as well as the more serious plans.

A possible summary of the main points of Y's Life Project is presented on the following page:

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35. After careful consideration, it was decided not to append a suggested template for a full Life Project form. In some states national standards pertaining to all children in care may be higher, more specific or more precise than those outlined in the recommendation. The higher standard should always apply and must be included in formats for those states, but would not be enforceable in other states. A detailed universal template would therefore be confusing and counter-productive.

Domain	Step	Responsibility/ support	Monitoring	Alternatives
Education: general	Achieve good attendance and punctuality.	Yourself.	Reports from the school.	Further discussion, reappraisal of your motivation.
Education: language, self-discipline	Learn one new vocabulary sheet per week. Listen to grammar tapes. Aim to pass first grammar test.	Mainly yourself. Your tutor will give you materials. You will study each evening, using the new study room at the hostel.	Reports from the school.  Report from Mr D.	Repeat stage 1 if you do not pass it – but you will pass!  If you do not use the study room, Mr D. will allocate it to someone else.
Education: numeracy, group work, social skills	Take an active part in the group project on costing the new sports hall at school.	You will be responsible, alongside other group members.	Your K. P. plans to attend the presentation of group work at your school.	You would need to repeat level 2 maths if you do not take part in the group work.
Education, social responsibility	Continue helping younger students at ... cultural centre.	Your suggestion. You will be responsible, with support from your teacher.	Informal feedback from the centre and from yourself.	Help the community centre with fund-raising.

Domain	Step	Responsibility/ support	Monitoring	Alternatives
Health, life style, teamwork, integration	Try to get a place on the school football team.	You will be responsible, with Mr E's support.	Feedback from yourself. Report from Mr E.	Continue with football or try another sport.
Independence-building, health, self-care.	Learn how to cook three new healthy recipes.	You have chosen some recipe cards.	Feedback from yourself and Mr D.	Stay in the hostel until you are able to move to shared flat.
Independence-building, social responsibility.	Take your turn in cleaning the shared areas of the hostel.	You will be responsible.	Feedback from Mr D.	As above.
Identity, social contribution	Show G, a new arrival, the bus routes.	Your suggestion. You will be responsible.	Feedback from you, G and Mr D.	If you are unable to complete this task, G will be given another helper.
Identity, belonging, family links	Let your family know about your Life Project. Explain that this is now your goal. Explain the advantages.	You will be responsible. Your K. P. has given you a phone card for this.	You will let your K. P. know what happened.	If you do not do this, decisions may be made by adults with less input from yourself.

Domain	Step	Responsibility/ support	Monitoring	Alternatives
External factors	To update you on investigations in your country of origin.	Your K. P.	You will be contacted if there is any news.	If your KP is not available, the team manager will contact you.
Multi-planning	Find out about carpentry courses in your country of origin.	Your K. P. will be responsible.	Feedback to yourself.	If courses not available, meet to consider alternatives.

### **3.5. Written agreements and mutual commitment: Y's story continued**

This should be backed up by a written commitment from Y, from yourself and others involved. As the plans have already been agreed by all concerned, to avoid placing too heavy a secretarial burden on other professionals you could simply have a box signed by Y, yourself, the tutor, Mr D. and Mr E., agreeing to all the tasks mentioned above.

If, however, you feel that the agreement should be spelt out more formally and clearly, you could produce a more complex format, perhaps with a section or box for the young person and one for each professional, itemising and clarifying each person's role.

A date will be set for the next review meeting, subject to change, particularly if the authorities in Y's country of origin make contact with his family and complete their assessments on the family's capacity to meet Y's needs.

You have achieved two very important things in this meeting: you have been honest with Y and you have not promised anything beyond your control. Y's future is still uncertain, but perhaps Y is beginning to see that your advice is not simply based on preconceptions. Y can see that you are trying to understand his position and that the advice you give him is not about building barriers but about ensuring that he does not miss opportunities which may enhance his longer-term prospects. Y may not agree with everything you say but he is beginning to notice your investment of time in him and your concern for his best interests.

Secondly, although Y must be accountable and understand that he has made a commitment, your tactic in this Life Project has been less about anticipating sanctions should Y "fail" and more about giving him the self-motivation and drive to succeed. Y is more likely to work towards success because he anticipates a feeling of satisfaction and achievement than purely because others want him to succeed. It is significant that in the "Every Child Matters" framework mentioned earlier, "enjoy and achieve" are classed as one domain and not two.

### **3.6. Routine and planned reviews**

Once all this hard work has taken place, the hard-pressed worker may wonder whether it is really necessary to plan for regular reviews. Would it not be

simpler to sit back and see what happens, knowing that ongoing monitoring will ensure that if problems arise, we shall soon hear about them?

Routine reviews are important for several reasons:

- The minor or others may have concerns but may lack the assertiveness to raise them. A planned meeting allows them to raise questions without appearing difficult or demanding.
- Several people may have small concerns which do not appear individually important but when considered together these may paint a significant picture.
- Reviews allow small problems to be dealt with before they turn into big problems.
- A central tenet of the Life Project concept is flexibility. It could become easy to drift along a path and forget alternatives, only to find the route blocked. Reviews remind all concerned to keep an open mind.
- Reviews reveal progress made and help the minor to gain self-esteem and confidence.
- Review reports may demonstrate to others the progress that the minor has made.
- Reviews help professionals to evaluate their own input in terms of outcomes.<sup>36</sup>
- Reviews themselves could be seen as a right<sup>37</sup> and are essential for public accountability.

A useful format for routine reviews would reflect the points above:

- Check progress on agreed steps and goals, consider how they may be enriched to make them more challenging and show progression.
- Allow all involved to have their say, particularly the minor.
- Reappraise the relevance of goals, consider alternatives, reformulate the Life Project if necessary, either at the review meeting or by arranging further meetings.

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36. In the UK, for example, reviews are chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), whose role is to monitor the standard of support provided, as well as making future recommendations. Crucially, the IRO is independent of the local authority or social worker who is supporting the looked-after child or young person.

37. Article 25, 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

When changes are expected, planned reviews become doubly important and may have to be more frequent. This may be due to external circumstances, for example if a child is approaching the age of majority, to prepare for the expiry of temporary residency, when an appeal is expected or if return to the family (particularly in non-asylum cases) is being considered. It will be very important, then, to consider difficult but essential questions, such as “How are you going to support yourself if/when your present support as a child ceases?” or “What support could you access if/when your immigration status changes?” Some of these questions will be very specific to the immigration process in different host countries, and it would be impossible to consider all alternatives here: the key professionals in the various host countries will be best-placed to prepare for these.

Sometimes expected changes may be personal to the minor, such as the forthcoming birth of a baby, planned surgery, reunification with a family member, or admittance to a university. Each situation will be unique, but as far as possible Life Projects seek to replace uncertainty or chaos with well-considered alternative plans.

### **3.7. Monitoring and implementation and dealing with difficulties: B’s story**

While Z and Y are continuing to work towards their Life Projects, you will be continuing to meet many other young people with unique stories. Let us now consider 17-year-old B, whom you have known for almost two years. B’s parents were professional people, who invested in B emotionally and educationally. On arrival, B already had some knowledge of the host country’s language, as it is the official language in her country of origin. All those were positive, protective factors. B claimed asylum unsuccessfully but was granted temporary residency until majority, in compliance with the non-refoulement principle. B is certain that if she is returned she will be killed, as her parents were, due to their opposition to the government. B could not consider alternative plans which included her country of origin, nor could you see any feasible way of considering these. Occasional searches found no resettlement programmes or bilateral agreements and statistically the majority of asylum claimants from B’s country of origin eventually result in positive decisions.

B received specialist trauma counselling when she first arrived but after that she made good progress in education, enjoyed sports and church

activities and was positive about integration in the host country. Last year, B moved to a shared house with other young women and displayed good independence and organisational skills.

Recently, however, B's 20-year-old friend was returned following an unsuccessful immigration appeal and since then B has become passive and depressed. Her tutor reports that she is concerned about B's progress and timekeeping. B's housemates tell you that she seems to spend hours in bed. You decide to introduce an extra review of B's Life Project.

B explains her loss of motivation by saying that it seems pointless to work towards intermediate qualification X, if she is later unable to access education or training leading to higher qualification Y, or if she will not be able to access the labour market in the host country. B also says she has difficulties sleeping at night, which makes her very tired during the day. B may even feel so depressed that she sees little point in engaging with any counselling, education or leisure activity – let alone her Life Project – whilst the future threat of forced return is never far from her mind. Returning to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, although B demonstrated a positive attitude previously and showed educational promise, she cannot focus on it because her need to feel safe is not properly satisfied. B had been building confidence, but this was not sufficient for her to overcome the difficulties caused through environmental (external) factors over which she has no control. B has not developed enough resilience, the internal capacity to deal with external difficulties.

You'd like to reassure B, but you both know that when she is an adult she will need to make her case to immigration authorities again and that neither she nor you can pre-empt what the eventual long-term decision will be. B knew that in a few months, her pre-18 review would have considered these issues in more detail, but up until recently she had not allowed that to prevent her "getting on with her life".

You note that the explanatory memorandum<sup>38</sup> to the recommendation calls for minors who are undertaking an educational or training course as part of their Life Project to be allowed to complete it in the host country when they reach majority. You also know that in some member states there is a possibility of the degree of integration and the willingness to integrate

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38. Paragraph 28.

being taken into account by the authorities when making decisions concerning ultimate residency. However, you cannot be sure that B will be able to benefit from this. You plan to provide a positive social report, but your role is not judicial. You decide to work at the interpersonal level, to rebuild B's confidence and to help develop her resilience. You keep in mind the possibility of B's individual progress and achievements lessening the impact of environmental factors, but you are not relying on that.

You will need to tread a fine line between emotional support, encouraging ongoing integration, yet trying to build the problem-solving skills, capacities, confidence, adaptability and resilience which B will require in the future wherever that may unfold, but particularly should she be faced with eventual return.

B's best interests seem best served by her maintaining a positive attitude, enabling her to function productively in the present without pinning all her hopes and aspirations on the future. You aim to help B focus on current opportunities, to work towards medium-term goals, mindful that they could open or close doors later, but without considering them solely as a means to achieving longer-term goals, whether in terms of education or residency.

Useful goals will have their own relevance and their own intrinsic value:

- Encourage B to access all possible support regarding her mental well-being: this helped her before and it may help her now.
- Remind B of the enduring value of education. You may mention how her family clearly placed a value on education, and that what she learnt as a young child remained with her even after she had to leave her country of origin.
- Remind B of the social enjoyment of education, for example in terms of friendships.
- Praise B for her educational progress and remind her that this will be essential whether B stays or whether she eventually returns to her country of origin, and could open doors even if she settles elsewhere.
- Transferable skills or qualifications – whether in vocational or academic subjects – may be recognised in many countries, and potentially the Life Project could assist in that transferability and continuity.
- Lifestyle achievements and goals in sport or leisure interests will have an enduring value in terms of B's health, self-esteem and her eventual ability to achieve independence.

You both agree that what is required now is not a drastic change of direction, but a rescheduling of goals and the addition or reinstatement of elements which may assist B. B agrees to try counselling once more, but feels embarrassed about asking for help again: she'd like you make the initial approach. B is older than when she was first referred, so she signs a consent form giving you permission to contact the clinic. B sees the benefit of meeting her tutor to discuss how she might re-engage with education.

The meeting with the tutor is arranged with little difficulty, but when you call the mental health support services they say that they are very busy and B's problems sound like an understandable reaction to separation, not a mental health issue. You point out B's underlying terror of return and her sleepless nights. You advocate for B's right to access their expertise through a proper assessment and they eventually agree to an initial appointment. Your next log could look something like this:

Meeting at mental well-being clinic between B and Dr E. K.P. present at B's request:

B explained that she has difficulty getting to sleep and when she does she is often woken by bad dreams. She then cannot get back to sleep until early morning. B cannot concentrate during the day. The things that B used to enjoy do not seem to matter to her any more.

Dr E. suggested concentrating on the sleep issue for the moment. An appointment was made for B to return next week for the first of four sessions on relaxation and sleep-inducing techniques.

Meeting at college between B, Mrs F. and K.P.:

The difficulties about sleep and the impact they are having on B's timekeeping and concentration were explained, along with the plans for resolving these with the help of Dr E.

Mrs F. was sympathetic to B, particularly in light of her previous commitment. A plan was made to reduce B's workload by allowing her to concentrate on her strongest subjects.

Wider discussion with B: B accepts the advice to start swimming again, as she used to enjoy that.

You and B together make some modifications to her Life Project, which may be summarised thus:

Domain	Step	Responsibility and support	Monitoring	Contingency/ alternatives
Health	Continue attending sessions. Use sleep techniques.	Dr E. will help you, but you will also be responsible.	Feedback from yourself and Dr E.	For short-term medication to be prescribed.
Education, re-establishing routine	To be on time at least three days out of four.	You will be responsible.	College reports.	Initially, medication as above. Ultimately, to switch to a part-time course.
Education, specific	To catch up on chemistry and maths. To eliminate physics.	You will be responsible, with extra support from tutors, for three hours a week.	College reports.	Reconsider goals, possibly eliminate another subject this year, or re-take the course next year.
Health and lifestyle	To start swimming again, at least three weeks out of four.	You will be responsible. Your K.P. has given you a swimming discount card.	Your own report.	To consider alternative sports or activities.

The review is agreed in the normal way and you arrange to meet again in a month to review progress.

### **3.8. Revising the Life Project: K's story**

B's Life Project review was designed to deal with difficulties. It did not fundamentally change the direction of the Life Project although it still took account of the possibility of later change. We shall now consider K, whose Life Project is about to change direction.

K is almost 18. He came to the host country two years ago and applied for asylum. K's story with regard to his reasons for claiming asylum and whether he had any living family members – and the vagueness of his explanations to the authorities – meant that you were not surprised when he was refused asylum. K was allowed to stay in the host country until majority, in compliance with the non-refoulement principle.

K already knew the host country's language and had benefited from a good education in his country of origin. K has always been extremely motivated towards education and is clearly a high achiever with very good potential and high ambitions.

K arrived before the Life Project process was implemented, but nevertheless there were attempts to consider longer-term options. K's Life Project officially began a year ago. In formulating the project, you tried to consider alternatives to K being granted asylum, but he was always confident that matters would be resolved. Unlike B, K did not appear to suffer from any trauma or indeed any anxiety about possible return. You sometimes wondered whether his focus on education and integration was his way of refusing to contemplate an eventual return, or perhaps the reason for his migration, or a mixture of both. K is well-liked by all who meet him. In many ways you have considered him as one your "easier" cases. Reviews were cheerful and positive and it was easier for you too to put aside thoughts of return and – like K – to focus on the present. There were no bilateral arrangements relating to the return of adults between your host country and K's country of origin and K's lawyer had been very optimistic about K being granted asylum on appeal after the age of 18.

Now, however, you and K have been told by his lawyer that his country of origin has been reclassified as safe by your host country, which is initiating a programme of return and no longer considering asylum claims relating

to that country. You call the International Organization for Migration (IOM), who confirm this and advise of potential assistance to facilitate return. K is dismayed at this suggestion: he is presently undergoing a course which he hoped would lead to university entrance and his tutors confirm that educationally he stood an excellent chance of being accepted on the course.

You arrange a meeting between yourself, K, his personal tutor and his lawyer. The log could look something like this:

The tutor confirmed that K is showing real promise in engineering. K is just over halfway through a two-year course leading to an internationally recognised pre-university qualification.

K.P. advised that K's behaviour has been excellent. K often helps new arrivals with their mathematics. K undertook voluntary work on an ecological project last summer.

The tutor and K.P. agreed that K had the potential to make a real contribution to society. Both are willing to make a statement to that effect.

The lawyer advised that there were no further asylum grounds for K to be allowed to stay. Independent reports confirm that there are no serious security issues in K's country of origin.

The lawyer suggested that – for the medium term – K could apply for permission to stay in the host country at least until the course is complete. The lawyer was optimistic about this, partly because the returns programme has only just begun and it will take time for all migrants from K's country of origin to be processed, and also because K is already progressing on the course, which is an intrinsic part of his Life Project. K accepted the lawyer's assistance in making that application.

It was agreed that a revised Life Project would be formulated to take account of these new realities.

The revisions to the Life Project are presented on the next page.

Domain/aim	Step	Responsibility	Monitoring	Contingencies
Financial support and housing	To continue to support you whilst you are engaging in this modified Life Project.	Your K. P. Your K. P's organisation.	A review meeting is planned for ...	If you do not commit to this modified Life Project, your post-18 support may be affected.
Education	Continue present progress on course.	Yourself, supported by your tutors.	Reports from tutors.	Your request to stay until course completion depends on continuing progress.
Legal	To write a report on K's academic progress and potential, to forward to K. P. and lawyer.	Your personal tutor.	A copy of the report will be forwarded to you.	If your tutor is unable to do it, another tutor has agreed to do it.
Legal	To write a report on your social interactions and contributions and forward to lawyer.	Your K. P.	A copy of the report will be given to you.	If your K.P. is unable to do this, a colleague has agreed to do it.

Domain/aim	Step	Responsibility	Monitoring	Contingencies
Legal	To collate information above, to meet once more with K to word the request for further stay, to formulate the request and forward to the authorities before you are 18.	Your lawyer.	A copy of your request will be given to you and to your K. P.	If you are not allowed to stay until your course finishes, you must comply with immigration directions.
Contingency planning, information-gathering	To meet with IOM to find out what support may be available to arrange safe return and whether and how your education could continue in your country of origin.	You, your K. P. and the IOM will meet.	You will all be present. You and your K. P. will discuss this after the meeting.	If the IOM are unable to help, your K. P. will make further enquiries.
Problem-solving, building adaptability, multi-planning	To consider the possibility of returning to your country of origin with an open mind.	Yourself, supported by your K. P.	You and your K. P. will discuss this at your next meeting.	If you do not do this, you may find yourself unprepared for eventual return.

This is signed and agreed by all concerned.

Dual planning is now taking shape.

What happens after this will depend on many factors, including the procedures in your own host country. In this example, in view of his continuing commitment to the Life Project, K is given permission to stay until the completion of the course.

A meeting report the following year could look like this:

Summary of activity since K turned 18:

K continued to progress in line with his life project and continued to receive support from ...

K was given permission to remain in the host country until completion of his course.

K gained a distinction in his course and now has X qualification in engineering with mathematics.

Investigations by K. P., with information from the IOM and from the consulate of K's country of origin (who were contacted without K's name being revealed): engineering courses exist at ... institutions, at a cost of between ... and ...

The IOM advised of a grant of up to ... being made to assist K to resettle in his country of origin.

There are also potential grants from charitable foundations.

The consulate confirm that returnees are welcomed back, particularly if they are qualified and willing to make a contribution to society.

K's mathematics qualification would entitle him to work as a teacher there, or to work part-time as a mathematics tutor to partially support himself.

Present situation in host country:

- K has no means of support.
- K has received official notification that he may be removed from the host country without further warning.
- K is now accepting that remaining in the host country is no longer tenable.
- K is anxious to ensure that when he returns, he will be able to continue his education. K would be willing to work part-time to meet his daily needs, if the cost of the education could be met. K hopes to become an engineer. K now understands that - partially thanks to some international development programmes - there is potential for eventual employment in that sphere in his country of origin.

K's Life Project could now look like this:

Domain/aim	Step	Responsibility	Monitoring	Contingencies
Safe transition	Assist K to obtain travel documentation. Prepare authorities for K's arrival; make first contact with ... university.	IOM.	IOM to liaise with K and K. P.	Potential difficulties to be notified to authorities in host country. Possible further discussions.
Continuing personal and educational development	Confirm funding for K's course.	IOM, K and K. P.	Regular communication.	Alternative course to be sought. Potential to apply to ... foundation for a charitable grant.
Resettlement	Locating accommodation within reach of university.	IOM supported by relevant NGOs in country of origin.	Regular communication.	Alternative accommodation to be sought.
Monitoring of transition	To follow K's progress for first year after resettlement	As above.	K to email K. P. with updates. Final report from ... NGO to KP.	K. P. has contact details for university and for relevant NGO.

Perhaps this was not initially K's preferred outcome, but the support and assistance you and others provided, the education which K received in the host country and the problem-solving and adaptation skills which K acquired through the Life Project process will help him in his future development and independence. Partly as a result of your work, K will be better able – and more willing – to make a positive contribution to society in his country of origin.

### **3.9. Revising the Life Project: M's story**

In her country of origin, 16-year-old M was forced by her family to marry a man of over 60, a business associate of her stepfather's. After the marriage, M was accused of having had a previous relationship and suffered horrific physical and mental abuse by both families and by her community. Eventually a distant aunt managed to arrange for M to flee, accompanied by an agent. The agent raped M en route and it appeared that he was planning to sell her for prostitution, but when M became visibly ill, he abandoned her. M eventually claimed asylum and was referred to your organisation for support. Shortly after, it was established that M was pregnant.

M's first Life Project was very complex. Health care was the immediate priority. M had had no formal schooling but was keen to learn the host country's language. M could not access the usual college courses as the baby was expected during the course, so you looked for alternatives and referred M for part-time classes at a local voluntary group. You advised M about human rights and the rights of women and children. As a victim of female genital mutilation, M was relieved to hear that this was illegal in Europe.

M was warned that in your host country it is rare for minors to be granted asylum, but instead they usually receive temporary residency until they approach majority and if they wish to stay for longer they must make fresh representations to the authorities. The first Life Project therefore contained clear short-term plans, but was fluid in recognising long-term uncertainty.

To M's great relief – and your surprise – M was one of a minority of minors recognised as refugees within months of their arrival. M gave birth to a daughter a few days before her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. The unforeseen element was not the birth, but the granting of residency.

M follows all the advice of health professionals and is becoming a sensible and able young mother. It could be tempting – when assisting many others

whose Life Projects still reflect long-term anxieties and uncertainties – to revise the Life Project for young people whose residency is assured, on the assumption that they will be accessing all services and opportunities just as permanent residents do. However, we must not forget that – even if they have fewer personal responsibilities than M does – they may still face discrimination, that they may be unaware of their rights and how to access opportunities, that they may still be suffering trauma or other effects of migration and, crucially, that they are still children without family support.

You and M meet to revise her Life Project. Some of the original items remain, such as those on health care and child-rearing.

The table on the next page simply summarises some of the changes:

Domain/goal	Step	Responsibility/ support	Monitoring	Contingencies, alternatives
Access to full-time education planned for the autumn	Application for child-care grants and investigating local nurseries.	Your K. P. will help you complete the forms. You will both visit local nurseries.	You will be doing this together.	If local nurseries are already fully booked, investigate nearby areas and travel costs.
Social contribution, volunteering, preservation of identity	To be trained as mentor to newly-arrived young women whose languages you speak.	You suggested this. Your K. P. will find out about training available through community groups and women's groups.	Feedback from K. P.	If not possible to become a formal mentor, continue to be available for informal welcoming.
Education, continuing social integration	Continue language practice at home. Take first test at open learning centre.	You will be responsible, using the tapes provided by your K. P.	Feedback from open learning centre.	Continue independent study and take test again in the summer.
Building social integration, education	Take part in small study group on geography, history and culture of host country. Submit portfolio for accreditation.	Your K. P. has organised this small group. You will be responsible for attending and for your portfolio, with support from group leader.	Your K. P. will check your portfolio.	You asked to take part in this. If the group cannot continue, you will continue reading books from the library to find out more about the host country.

The aims of this Life Project have shifted from support to building M's existing resourcefulness, adaptability and resilience. M's goal has developed from simply being allowed to stay in the host country to considering what she will do with her new life. M says she would like to become a nurse or midwife and is already asking what she must do to make that goal an eventual reality. A path is becoming visible, whereby M will maintain her identity yet build her social integration and develop the skills necessary to make a contribution to the host society. M has a vision on how to achieve eventual financial independence for herself and her child. This Life Project is one step in that direction. Subsequent editions will monitor her progress and help her clarify her route. Your work has not only benefited M, but also society as a whole.



## Conclusions

Migration can be a messy business, even for well-prepared adults or secure family groups. Unaccompanied minors, often traumatised and invariably separated from their families and their usual environments, will face countless extra risks and difficulties. Host countries face the challenge of upholding and demonstrating respect for human rights and the rights of children, whilst retaining the right to control their borders. At best, migration can produce a mismatch between aspirations and outcomes, at worst chaos and tragedy.

Yet these young people hold within them so much potential.

These young people are the future citizens of the world.

As recently as 26 March 2009, the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe<sup>39</sup> highlighted the potential of Life Projects for identifying durable solutions to these issues. You, the front-line professional, have a key role in this exciting initiative. In finding solutions for “your” children and young people, you will be helping to find solutions for society as a whole.

You have now read this handbook. You started with abstract aims and lofty principles before going on a journey with Z, Y, B, K and M.

What has this imaginary journey meant to you?

Perhaps you spent more time initially with Z and Y than you envisaged, but later you saw how that early investment enabled you and them to work together through difficulties and uncertainties. Their lives may well follow different trajectories but, with your support, they are acquiring skills and developing capacities which will help them grow into productive, responsible, active world citizens.

You helped B through difficult times, encouraging her to persist in her Life Project, supporting her resilience and in so doing ensuring that the gifts that she can give the world – perhaps your own country, who knows – will be available later and not lost through setbacks outside her control.

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39. De Boer-Buquicchio (2009).

When K's plans changed direction, the Life Project gave you a tool to advocate for K to access the continuing support he deserved. Instead of chaos, a smooth transition was arranged. What could have turned into a disaster became an opportunity: K's potential will be developed and his country of origin will not lose his vital contribution. Who knows, in years to come you may travel there and walk on a bridge he has designed.

M came to you in a state of chaos. She could have remained a victim, but the work you did, supported by the Life Project process, enabled her innate adaptability and resilience to resurface. Your early support encouraged M to appreciate her worth as a human being, to develop her capacities and reveal a path by which she will not simply take refuge in your country, but will become a full, independent and active citizen. Who knows, you may one day go to hospital and find her returning the compliment and helping you recover.

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