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5.1.4 The importance of using child-friendly communication

Trained and specialised staff, including interpreters, have a specialised role to understand children who arrive in a country and to ensure that they understand the procedures they are going through. Child-friendly, age-appropriate communication is crucial to gain trust and respond in a sensitive manner considering various factors like the child's potential traumatic experiences and culture shock. In 2020, new initiatives for information provision, often using digital means, were implemented in many EU+ countries to ensure a sensitive and adapted approach for applicants with special needs. Nonetheless, monitoring and accountability mechanisms are recommended to ensure that a child has followed and understood online content.

The Swedish Migration Agency developed an app, *"Migrationsverket Stories"*,[1292] which explains the asylum procedure in a simple and child-friendly way. The app is aimed at children aged 7 to 11 years and no literacy skills are required to use the app. The videos are available in several languages (Albanian, Arabic, English, Persian, Somali and Swedish).

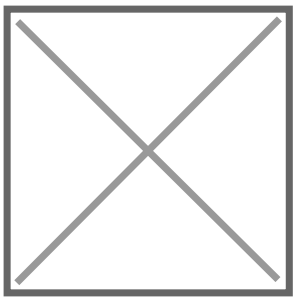
Nonetheless, Rädda Barnen/Save the Children noted some gaps in the provision of child-friendly information during asylum and return procedures. This was coupled with a lack of coordination between municipalities, leading to impediments on school enrolment and access to health care.[1293] The Strömsund municipality, the Swedish Migration Agency and the County Administrative Board of Jämtland carried out a project, "Best Interests of the Child", to improve communication with children by training professionals and legal guardians who provide information to children after placement and counselling to find an alternative goal for children whose application is rejected. They also developed a toolbox to organise and evaluate practices for organisations working with children.[1294]

The Danish Immigration Service introduced a new digital application to apply for family reunification when a child did not apply for asylum concurrently with a parent. The new digital form is filled in by the parent or legal guardian residing in Denmark and the child (or on behalf of the child) applying for family reunification. It is still possible to use the paper application as well.

The AIDA report for Poland observed that some guardians in Poland did not have any personal contact with the unaccompanied minor they are supposed to represent. Therefore, the children were not sufficiently informed about their status and legal situation. In general, a child-friendly communication and the availability of interpreters were missing to inform children about the procedure. The Polish Border Guard underlined that, while conducting procedures for

unaccompanied minors, the Border Guard follows appropriate steps (in accordance with the law), for example applying to the court with the request to appoint a guardian for the minor. The Border Guard must ensure that the representative (guardian) of the minor has personal contact through every step of the procedure.[1295]

The importance of child-friendly communication was highlighted in a case in 2020 in Romania. While the asylum application of an unaccompanied minor from Bangladesh had been rejected due to a lack of credibility from contradictory statements, the court reassessed the circumstances and granted refugees status, considering that that the inadvertencies in the applicant's statements may be due to his young age and linguistic difficulties in communicating, and overall the minor had made a genuine effort in substantiating his allegations.



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