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7. Education - Preparatory classes and vocational training

Introductory remarks

Accessing education as soon as possible represents the key element during the reception phase to help unaccompanied children resume their life in a new country. Preparatory classes and vocational training generate possibilities for social interactions and routines that children need for their development.

The main challenges concerning access to education include long waiting periods, segregated education, language barriers, lack of adjusted curriculum and trained staff, cultural differences, accessibility issues in terms of distance, lack of information provided on such opportunities, lack of support for traumatised children, and lack of opportunities for accessing vocational training for teenagers.

There may be exceptional situations where access and participation in the education system is temporarily not possible due to specific local or national causes. Volunteers and other stakeholders (teachers, NGOs, professional staff) within the accommodation facilities sometimes provide the only education available. In addition, there may be situations where the special needs of unaccompanied children do not allow their participation in normal schools (e.g. illiterate children) and specific arrangements have to be prepared for children with special educational needs.

Unaccompanied children are likely not to have attended school regularly before their arrival. They need time and qualified support to settle into a new environment. They may be older than the compulsory school age or because of their schooling gaps they tend to be placed in lower grades than their age group. Unaccompanied children could also be traumatised after experiences of forced exile. Preparatory classes are designed to facilitate access to and participation in the education system by familiarising children with the educational system, culture and language of their host countries. Preparatory classes should be adapted to the level of knowledge, previous education and the specific needs of children. Preparatory classes can be provided by the reception centres or by the wider network of involved actors, including NGOs.

There are difficulties with regard to education of unaccompanied children who are above the compulsory school age, particularly where they have not achieved yet the skill level required by secondary school. Such difficulties include a lack of sufficient language skills, forcing unaccompanied children to attend classes for younger age groups, and the absence of programmes providing access to vocational training.

Vocational training and apprenticeships can offer the appropriate environment for unaccompanied children to develop their skills to join the labour market. Vocational training allows familiarity with the language and culture of the host society, and empowers unaccompanied children to take responsibility for their lives. Vocational training should be adapted to the level of knowledge and specific needs of unaccompanied children and together with national children in order to facilitate the integration process. The main obstacles relate to the general requirements for access to vocational training (e.g. documents attesting education and/or professional qualification in the country of origin) and knowledge of the local language.

This chapter is composed of various subchapters covering the following aspects of schooling, education of unaccompanied children, and vocational training:

- access to the education system and other education arrangements;
- preparatory classes;
- access to vocational training

Each of these subchapters cover essential aspects of the topics, which complement each other.

Legal references – Education
• Article 14 RCD: Schooling and education of minors • Article 16 RCD: Vocational training