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4. Vulnerability and risk indicators for children

Children applying for international protection are in a particularly vulnerable situation. It is very important that the responsible officers can identify any indicators of additional vulnerabilities and special needs and are prepared to act upon them. These can be, among others, the child being a victim of THB or at risk of it, or having been subjected to other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual and gender-based violence, including FGM/C, forced and early marriage, physical and mental harm, and other forms of abuse or exploitation, child heads of households, stateless children, adolescent parents, children who have been part of armed groups, children suffering from serious illnesses, children with mental health issues, etc.
Factors that put children in a situation of heightened risk can include both risks in the wider protection environment and risks resulting from individual circumstances, taking into account the cumulative effects of being exposed to several risk factors […] (73)
When such a risk is identified, the role of the authority processing the application for international protection in referring the child to specialist institutions/organisations for relevant interventions and support is key, especially where not done by the representative/guardian. The asylum authority has the responsibility to identify a child at risk in collaboration with CP authorities but also to secure the involvement of a specialist actor. Separately, the asylum authorities should examine the risk indicators and the experiences of children as elements contributing to the substance of an asylum claim (e.g. childspecific persecution, see above in Assessment of the child's application).

NB: Children who go missing become more vulnerable. The risk of the child disappearing/going missing from their accommodation for any reason, including to attempt to cross into another EU+ State, should be assessed. The risk can be mitigated by properly informing the child of the asylum procedures and the expected timelines, providing the child with clear, understandable and ageappropriate information regularly. Such information can be provided specifically on the consequences and risks of attempted travel to another EU+ State irregularly, whether alone or with the support of criminal networks or smugglers. Prioritising the case is another way of mitigating this risk.

Example of practice

DK recommends that the asylum authorities be very careful when using the statements of a child in the parents' case when it will influence their case negatively, especially if they risk putting the child in a situation where the child may be subjected to reprisals on the side of the parents.
However, Danish authorities consider that the child's own statements may be used in the child's own case, depending on the age and maturity of the child, and on the circumstances in which the statements are given.

Overall, the national asylum authority should ensure that whenever dealing with such a case the child is not put in a situation that could cause them harm. Depending on the circumstances, confidential information is not to be provided to the parents without the child's consent. Whenever signs of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation are noted, the responsible officer shall ensure that the relevant authorities are informed accordingly and that the child receives assistance and care.

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(73) UNHCR, Conclusion on Children at Risk No 107, A/AC.96/10485, October 2007.

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