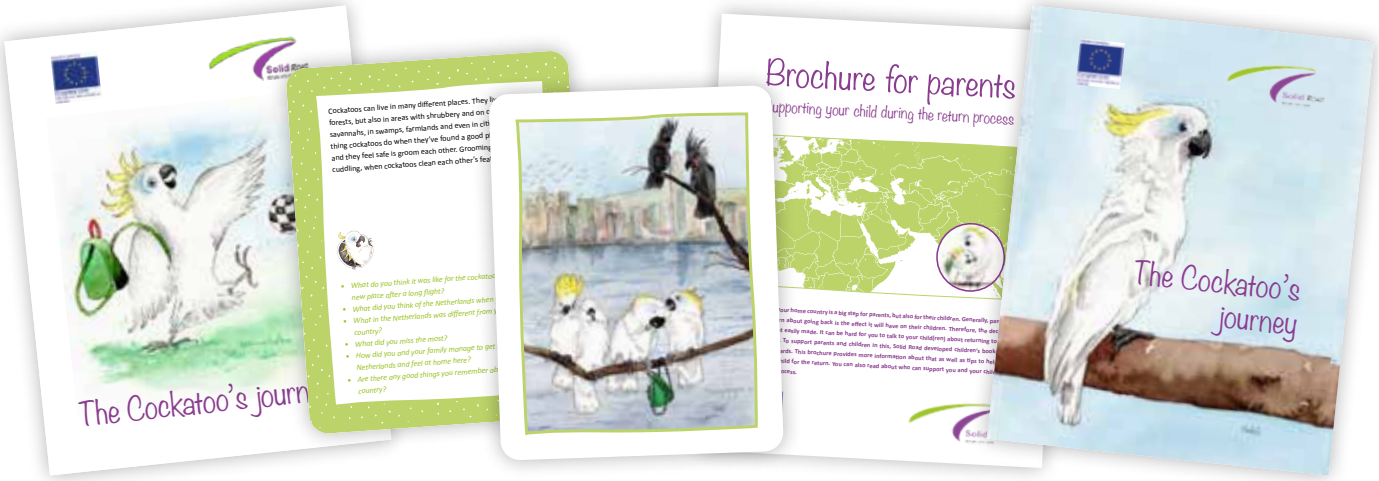
Child-centred and Resilient Return

Manual for the Toolkit ‘The Cockatoo’s journey’

For professionals involved in the return process
of asylum-seeking families with minor children



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Migratie in beweging
Europese Unie
het fonds voor asiel, migratie en integratie

Solid ROAD
RETURN WITH HOPE

COLOPHON

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction

An important part of the Dutch and European migration policy is achieving a sustainable return that is as independent as possible for asylum seeker families for whom all consideration of their applications has been exhausted. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 'in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.' To this, it adds that when a decision has a major impact on children, extra attention must be paid to protecting the child and to compiling thorough procedures to consider the child's interests.[1]
However, in practice, we see that child asylum seekers in families are systematically overlooked in the return process.[2] Children are generally seen as the parents' responsibility, and support in the process of returning families often focuses on income-generating activities. Seeing the vulnerability of most children in asylum seeker families, and the impact of the return, more specific attention should be paid to providing guidance to these children in the return process, to protecting their rights and interests, and to monitoring their welfare after returning to their country of origin.

To contribute to this, Solid Road, with subsidies from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V), developed 'The Cockatoo's journey' Toolkit and an accompanying manual.
The Toolkit was developed within Solid Road's The Green Way project, as a follow-up to the previously developed Toolkit for providing guidance to Armenian children in the process of returning to their home country. In using this toolkit, it was confirmed that the specific attention in providing guidance to (Armenian) child asylum seekers prior to and after returning to their home country was essential in preventing damage to their development after returning home as much as possible. We also saw that the focus on the interests of the child prior to and after their return, combined with an integral approach, facilitated the families' sustainable return to their home country. For the further development of the Toolkit and in writing this manual, we drew on the experiences that Solid Road gained in providing guidance to (Armenian) families in the return process. In addition, we conducted a detailed literature review, looked at good practices at a European level, held an expert meeting with chain partners, and spoke with asylum seeker families of various nationalities. We tried not to reinvent the wheel, but instead made as much use as possible of previously developed frameworks, interventions and methods. These are all listed in the bibliography and acknowledgements.

The goal of the Toolkit and this manual is to offer both practical tools and theoretical support concerning:

- Protecting the interests of returning child asylum seekers in families.
- Psychosocial guidance of returning child asylum seekers in families.
- Providing child-friendly information about the asylum procedure and the return process.
- Providing guidance to parent(s) in discussing the return process with and offering support during the return process to their children.
- Increasing children's and parents' (sources of) resilience prior to and during the return process.
- A focus on the child's voice during the return process.

The following section will go into more detail on the importance of guidance for children and parent(s) in the return process. In sections 1.2 and 1.3, we will cover the contents of the Toolkit and using the Manual.

1.1 The importance of guidance for children and their parent(s) in the return process

Returning to their country of origin is a major event for the children involved. Most child asylum seekers have been in the Netherlands for a long time by the time the decision is made to (have to) go back, and they feel connected to Dutch society through e.g. school and friends. Parents generally aim to stay in the Netherlands, and the children have worked hard to integrate in the Netherlands. In many cases, the children do not feel a strong connection to their country of origin. Their idea of their country of origin is often paired with negative associations due to the asylum procedure, and what they have been told by their parents. Moreover, children in asylum seeker families are often extra vulnerable due to long-term exposure to multiple risk factors, during both the migration and the asylum procedure.[3] In many cases, the long period of uncertainty and waiting led to a decline in resilience, in both parents and children. When families have to return to their country of origin, that makes the return process and the reintegration process a lot harder.[4]
With their generally increased vulnerability, support for these children is extra important during the return process. Furthermore, a properly prepared return is important in minimising (new) risk factors such as: uncertainty about their future, (further) educational delay and social isolation.

Research into the impact of returning to their country of origin on the psychosocial welfare of Albanian children shows that 'the preparation of families for returning and how involved children are in the return process has a significant effect on the children's psychosocial welfare'.[5] This is also mentioned by the international development organisation Save The Children. They state that there should be a stronger focus on the child's rights during the return and reintegration process, and that children should have a say in the return process.[6]
Giving child asylum seekers a voice helps them better understand their situation and needs, and helps to coordinate the help they receive. Furthermore, child participation contributes to building resilience, since children feel like they have a say in the matter and feel heard. Participation also helps the children better understand the decisions surrounding their return process and, when their interests and opinion is indeed considered, to more easily accept the return.

Child asylum seekers returning from Europe to Afghanistan indicated that their most important needs in the return process were: information about the return (and the situation in the country to which they returned), access to education and psychosocial guidance during and after the return process.[7]

In addition to the focus on the vulnerability of child asylum seekers, many studies also mention the resilience of these children. When a child is healthy and resilient, it makes the return to and adjustment in their country of origin a lot easier.

1. UNHCR (2013)
2. UNICEF (2019)
3. Kalverboer, M.E. & Zijlstra, A.E. (2008)
4. Vitus, K. (2011)
5. Vathi, Z. & Duci, V. (2016)
6. Save the Children International (2018)
7. Guillaume, M., Majidi, N., Samuel Hall (2018)

An important source of resilience in children is support from a parent. Support from parents and the quality of the upbringing (environment) are important protective factors that contribute to preventing and reducing psychosocial problems in child asylum seekers, both prior to and after the return.[8] Child asylum seekers who have been through traumatic experiences are at a higher risk of (long-term) psychosocial problems and developmental disorders. That risk can be significantly reduced when there is parental support, a positive and safe upbringing environment and a secure bond. Vice versa, the risk increases under the lack of support from parents, e.g. due to their own traumatisation.[9]

However, the parents' resilience is often decreased by (pre-)migration factors and by the asylum period in the Netherlands. Providing support and safety to their children in the return process is generally a challenge for parents of child asylum seekers. Furthermore, for many parents, talking about going back and guiding their children in the return process is very difficult. Parental support is an essential part of guiding children in the process of returning home. The Toolkit and accompanying manual focus on the (psychosocial) guidance of both the parents and children during the return process.

1.2 Contents of the Toolkit

'The Cockatoo's journey' Toolkit was developed to consider the interests of guided child asylum seekers in the return process, and to inform children (and their parents) in a child-friendly manner and offer them guidance in returning to their country of origin. Many different factors affect the psychosocial health of returning child asylum seekers. To increase the effectivity of preventive interventions meant to prevent developmental damage in child asylum seekers, it is important to consider the complexity of the context in which (returning) child asylum seekers have to develop.[10] Therefore, the Toolkit takes into account the influence of pre-migration, migration and remigration factors. It also focuses on individual child factors as well as environmental factors, such as family, friends, school and culture.

The Toolkit includes the following components:

1. A children's book for young children (± age 6 – 9) with an accompanying road map.
2. Conversation cards and a children's book for older children/teenagers (± age 10 – 12).
3. Brochure for parents

We will explain the different components briefly below.

Children's books and conversation cards
The children's books and the conversation cards are intended to provide child-friendly information about the return process. The focus is on identifying and increasing (sources of) resilience in order to deal with the risk factors.

Based on that, we opted to use the children's books and conversation cards to focus on:
- Providing information about the asylum procedure and the return process.
- Providing information about basic needs like safety, housing, school, and access to healthcare.
- The opportunity to exert influence; focus on the child's voice.
- Children's own coping mechanisms, or what has given them the strength they need and what do they feel helps them to make the process of returning less overwhelming.
- Strengthening the parent-child relationship and the family cohesion.
- Strengthening the child's social and cultural identity.
- Both their connection with the country of origin and their connection with the Netherlands.

The story and the metaphor of the Cockatoo is used to talk to children about the return process, and to prepare them for the return. The Cockatoo is used as a metaphor in order to more easily discuss the return, and it also serves as a figure of support. The title of this manual, 'Returning with Resilience', refers to both the Toolkit's focus on increasing resilience in returning children and to the metaphor of the Cockatoo which recurs as a central theme in the children's books and conversation cards.

For young children, a story was developed (to be read aloud), along with questions and assignments. The booklet comes with a 'road map'. On that road, children can use the included stickers to mark which assignments in the booklet they have completed. That makes it more fun for them to use the book, and it makes the return process easier to understand. This road map can also be used by parents and professionals to talk to children about going back in an accommodating manner.

An information booklet and conversation cards were also developed for older children/teenagers. These cards can be used to start conversations about going back with children in an accommodating manner, and to determine their interests and potential risk factors involved in the return process.

Both the children's books and the conversation cards comprise four parts: 'This is me and my family', 'The escape and your time in the Netherlands', 'Leaving the Netherlands', 'Back in your home country'. Chapter 4.3 goes into further detail on the content and how to use the children's books and the conversation cards.

Brochure for parents
The brochure for parents provides accessible information about the psychosocial aspects involved in the return process for children, and offers tips for preparing children for the return journey. It also explains how parents can use the children's books and conversation cards, and who they can go to for assistance in using them.

8. Daud e.a. (2008), Fazel, M. & Betancourt, T.S. (2018), Zevulun, D. (2017)
9. Fegert, J.M. e.a. (2018), Van Ee, E. (2013)
10. Fazel. M. & Betancourt, T.S. (2018)

1.3 Using the manual

The manual for professionals provides information and background knowledge about considering the interests of the child during the return process, guiding children (and their parents) in the return process, and about using the Toolkit.

This manual includes three (colour-coded) components:
1. Conditions for a sustainable return of child asylum seekers.
2. Psychosocial guidance of child asylum seekers and their parents in the return process.
3. Monitoring and guidance in the reintegration process after returning.

Moreover, an extra chapter was added that discusses what a multidisciplinary approach to guiding child asylum seekers in the return process would look like in a Dutch context.

Working with returning families is always custom work, where it is essential for parents to remain in control. Therefore, this manual goes into detail on the support of and collaboration with parents surrounding the topic of preparing children for the return. However, experience shows that in general, parents do not have a lot of room or time during the return process to prepare their children for and support them in the process of returning. To sufficiently safeguard the interests of returning children, supervision and support from involved professionals is therefore required.

The manual is geared towards a wide range of professionals involved in guiding returning families, such as: return counsellors, case managers, supervisors, teachers, aid workers, lawyers and policy makers. A multidisciplinary approach, which can use everyone's expertise with a clear definition of each person's role, is important to ensure that interventions reinforce instead of undermine each other, and to get a good idea of the child's needs.
Not every part of the manual will be equally relevant to each professional. To make the use of this manual easier, it is divided into different colour-coded sections.

There is also a roadmap on page 12, listing the different sections and steps to achieve a sustainable, child-friendly return. For each step, there is a list of the actions that can be taken, and which sections of the manual and Toolkit accompany each action.

Guiding parents and children in the return process is not always easy. There are various challenges you may encounter, such as:
- The return being emotionally charged, for both the parents and the children.
- A short period of time in which to guide them.
- Parents having a differing view on how to guide children in the return process.
- Distrust.
- Language barrier.
- Cultural differences.
- Trauma experienced by the children and/or parents.
- Insufficient coordination between the different parties involved.

This manual offers tools for dealing with these challenges. As previously mentioned, children are not just vulnerable. They are also very resilient. Experience shows that children often have good ideas about what they need to deal with the return. That can also give parents hope. The Toolkit does not make (talking about) the return harder; instead, it helps children and their parents find a way through the difficult circumstances together.

Road map

Step 1 • Safeguarding the child's interests prior to their return

A. Determining (child-specific) risk factors and protective measures to be taken

Actions: Safety Assessment, Best Interest of the Child Assessment, Overview of Risk Factors/Protective Factors

Manual: Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Appendices 1 - 5

B. Creating a child-friendly return plan

Acties: Include (child-specific) risk factors and protective measures to be taken in the return plan

Manual: Chapter 2.3 and Chapter 3, Appendices 2 - 5

Toolkit: Children's books and conversation cards

Step 2 • Psychosocial guidance of parents and children in the return process

A. Guiding children in the process of returning home

Actions: Psychosocial guidance, Child-friendly information, Guidance in saying goodbye, School transfer, Increasing resilience

Manual: Chapter 4, Appendices 6 - 7

Toolkit: **Children's books and Conversation cards**

B. Guiding parents in the process of returning home

Actions: Psychosocial support, Practical tools for discussing and guiding children during the return process, Increasing knowledge of the psychosocial aspects of children returning home, Increasing resilience, Strengthening the parent-child relationship

Manual: Chapter 5, Chapter 6, Appendix 8

Toolkit: Brochure for parents

Step 3 • Monitoring and guidance in the reintegration process after returning

Actions: Monitoring, Guidance in the reintegration process, Building capacity

Manual: Chapter 7, Appendix 9

2. Conditions for a sustainable return of child asylum seekers in families

2.1 Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, in most cases returning home is a major event for children, with an impact on many aspects of their lives. It is therefore essential to take the interests of the child into account during the return process.

Various guidelines and tools were developed to protect the interests of migrating children. These include the following focus points for achieving a safe and sustainable return of child asylum seekers:[11]

- Defining standards/conditions to ensure a safe return and to protect the rights and interests of returning children during the return process.
- Conducting a Best Interests Assessment and an assessment of the safety situation in the country to which they are returning to determine how to protect the interests of the child upon their return.
- A concrete individual return plan with a focus on child-specific risk factors as well as protective factors.
- Monitoring and guidance in the reintegration process after returning.

This manual specifically focuses on providing guidance to child asylum seekers in families. Therefore, the next section will formulate concrete conditions for a sustainable return of child asylum seekers in families, based on the guidelines set by organisations including the UNHCR, EASO and ECRE (European Council on Refugees and Exiles). Section 2.3 will then focus on taking the child's interests into account when creating a return plan. As indicated above, it is important for the return plan to focus on child-specific risk factors and protective factors. This is covered in Chapter 3. A thorough consideration of what is in the child's interests requires a multidisciplinary approach. Chapter 8 goes into further detail on this topic. Chapter 7 goes into further detail on guidance and monitoring after the return.

2.2 Guidelines for determining conditions for children in families to return home

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the UNHCR (the UN High Commissioner for Refugees) have stated that, in order to determine what is in the interests of the child, the following aspects should be taken into account[12]:

1. The child's safety.
2. The child's development and identity.
3. The child's voice/opinion.
4. Protecting the child's social (family) ties.
5. The child's vulnerability.

11. European Asylum Support Office (EASO) (2019), Global Compact on Refugees, UN Doc. A/73/12 (2018), UNHCR (2018), Unicef (2019)
12. UNHCR (2018), CRC (2013)

Various tools were created that can be used to determine whether the child's rights and interests are considered prior to, during and after the return. Five of these tools are explained in the box below.

FIVE TOOLS

The EASO Practical Guide on the best interest of the child in asylum procedures[13]
The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) recently published the 'Practical Guide on the best interest of the child in asylum procedures'. This guide states that every part of the asylum procedure should consider the child's interests. To determine what is in the child's interests, look at:

- The child's family situation.
- The situation in their country of origin.
- The child's specific vulnerabilities.
- Safety risks.
- Specific needs for protection.
- Extent of their integration in the asylum country.
- Physical and mental health.
- Education and socio-economic circumstances.

ECRE checklist for 'good practices' in decision-making concerning returning children[14]
The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) worked with Save the Children (EU Office) to create a checklist for 'good practices' in decision-making surrounding the return of children to third-world countries.

UNICEF Child Notices[15]
UNICEF Netherlands developed Child Notices to inform immigration authorities, asylum lawyers etc. about the situation of children in their countries of origin.
The information in the Child Notices can be used in decisions about the asylum procedure for children, or to determine how to facilitate the safe return of children to their countries of origin.
Recurring topics are:

- Legal information concerning children
- General principles, such as non-discrimination, the interest of the child and the right to life and development
- Civil rights and liberties, such as freedom of religion and freedom of expression
- Youth care and assistance to families in alternative forms of aid
- Protective measures for refugees, child soldiers, unaccompanied minors and protection from child labour, child trafficking and female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Basic human rights, such as water, food, health and education
- Conditions for returning to the country of origin

University of Groningen's Best Interest of the Child Questionnaire (BIC-Q)
The Study Centre for Children Migration and Law at the University of Groningen developed the Best Interest of the Child Questionnaire (BIC-Q). A report is written based on an assessment of the quality of the current and possible alternative upbringing environment (after the child's return). This report issues a recommendation for which decision would best serve the interest of the child.[16]

Save the Children's Child Sensitive Durable Solutions Framework[17]
Save the Children developed indicators to gauge the child's physical, legal, material and psychosocial safety and security, in accordance with the standards for the protection of children and their rights. The framework can be used to determine risk factors and conditions for a sustainable return, and can also be used to monitor children's reintegration process and well-being after returning to their home country.

Based on the described tools, a practical translation will now be carried out to determine how to consider the interests of returning children in families throughout the return process. This will be based on the four basic areas of Save the Children's Indicators Framework. This will be summarised in general conditions, which are included in this manual as Appendix 1. These conditions are not meant to replace existing procedures or existing tools, but should be used as an extra resource to protect the interests of returning children in families, both prior to and during the return procedure.

Ensuring the child's physical safety

Focus points:

- Assessment of the safety situation in the country to which the child is returning, with a focus on child-specific risk factors.
- Focus on specific individual needs for protection.
- Child protection mechanisms.

Assessment of the safety situation in the country to which the child is returning, with a focus on child-specific risk factors

To guarantee that there is no (immediate) physical danger for children after their return (in the form of violence, persecution, risk of abuse, recruitment, human trafficking or exploitation), it is important to gauge potential risk factors and possible protective factors prior to the return. UNICEF recommends running a general risk and safety analysis prior to the return process. For this, UNICEF's Child Notices (Country of Origin Information reports) can be used[18], which describe the situation of children in their countries of origin, or the Country of Origin Information reports on the UNHCR or EASO websites.

Focus on specific individual needs for protection

In addition to a general assessment of the safety situation after returning, it is important to take into account specific individual needs for protection, such as: child-specific grounds for persecution after their return and/or girls' extra vulnerability (regarding forced marriages, gender-specific exploitation and dropping out of school) in the return plan. For this, you can use Appendix 2, which goes into further detail on potential risk factors.

Child protection mechanisms

In the area of child protection, it is important that all children who are the subject of a return procedure fall under the application of national rules concerning child protection, that appropriate child protection procedures are followed, that there are cooperative protocols between the various

13. European Asylum Support Office (EASO) (2019)
14. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)
15. https://www.unicef.nl/ons-werk/nederland/child-notices
16. Zijlstra, A.E., 2012
17. Majidi, N. & Barratt, S. (2018)
18. https://www.unicef.nl/ons-werk/nederland/child-notices

organisations and parties involved in children's situations and that there are formal procedures available in the countries to which they return to monitor the consequences of the return for the child.[19]
If there were child protection measures in the asylum country, prior to the return it should be clear which child protection measures and family support systems there are in the country of origin, to determine whether both the physical and the emotional safety of the child can be ensured after the return.

Ensuring the psycho-social safety

Focus points:

- Psychosocial support for children and parent(s) before and after returning to their country of origin.
- Focus on specific vulnerabilities of the child (and the family).
- Protecting the child's social (family) ties.
- Increasing resilience.
- The (continuity in the) child's development and identity is ensured.
- Support during the reintegration process and building a social network in the country to which the child is returning.

Psychosocial support for children and parent(s)

After returning, children should be not only physically but emotionally safe, which means being able to live in a safe and protective environment, where they can safely become attached after returning.
If parents are unable to provide this environment, e.g. because of their own stress or trauma, it is essential for extra support to be provided after the return. Coordination and transfer from the aid services in the asylum country to a partner organisation in the country to which they are returning is essential.
As described in Chapter 1, it is essential to consider the important role parents play as a protective or risk factor in the development of child asylum seekers. Parents are the most important source of continuity and safety for returning children in families. Therefore, psychosocial guidance for returning children should be paired with guidance for parents and a focus on their mental health. Furthermore, focusing on a family approach as opposed to e.g. an individual approach also better aligns with child asylum seekers' cultural background, which is often more collectivistic than individualistic. Chapter 6 goes into further detail on this topic.

Focus on specific vulnerabilities of the child (and the family)

As previously mentioned, child asylum seekers are vulnerable and run a higher risk of psychosocial problems. For long periods of time, child asylum seekers grow up under generally difficult, changing circumstances. Their needs are complex, broad and interconnected. The need for psychosocial support cannot be seen separately from needs concerning safety, education, etc. Prior to their return, it is therefore important to take stock of the specific vulnerabilities of the child (and family), like trauma, educational and/or developmental problems, the risk of discrimination and exclusion, etc. For this, you can also use the information in Chapter 3 and Appendix 2.

Protecting the child's social (family) ties

Maintaining the unity of the family is an important condition for protecting children's emotional safety and security. During the migration, child asylum seekers look for ways to feel at home again, and to further shape their identity. Returning children generally feel a strong connection to the asylum country as a result of their search for safety and identity. School and friends play a major role in this. To ensure continuity in the development of their identity, it is important that the child can (continue to) feel a connection with both the asylum country and their country of origin. Maintenance of their own language, cultural habits and relationships in their country of origin are important for child asylum seekers' sense of belonging to their own country. Furthermore, that serves a unifying role within the family. Both aspects contribute to shaping a healthy (social) identity and increase the chances of a successful reintegration after their return.

Increasing resilience

Going back and adjusting in the country of origin is easier when a family is resilient. Therefore, a focus on increasing children's and parents' (sources of) resilience prior to and during the return process should be part of the process. The next chapters and Appendix 3 go into further detail on identifying and increasing (sources of) resilience in returning parents and children.

The (continuity in the) child's development and identity is ensured

An unexpected, sudden departure can have a strong impact on children, and damage their sense of safety and continuity, and their ability to get attached to their peers and to adults.
The European Council on Refugees and Exiles recommends:

- That, during a certain period, families with children are given the opportunity to return voluntarily so as to disrupt the child's situation as little as possible.[20]
- That the voluntary departure period offer enough time for children to:
  - complete their final exams or achieve other academic milestones, such as the end of a semester or school year.
  - be able to receive medical treatment or other healthcare if that is necessary on the short term or impossible after returning.
  - be able to collect all the required documents, such as their birth certificate, school records and medical records.
  - be able to say goodbye to their friends in the asylum country.[21]

For example, the project The Green Way worked with the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) supervisor to give a family whose oldest son was in the last year of primary school the opportunity to complete the last months of the school year before returning. At the end-of-year party for all the students in his year, they shone a spotlight on the boy and that gave him the option to say an appropriate and less overwhelming goodbye.

19. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)
20. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)
21. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)

Support during the reintegration process and building a social network in the country to which the child is returning

Belonging to a group is essential in the development of a child's (social) identity. In addition to family, friends and the ability to be part of society play an increasingly large role in children's lives when establishing their identity. Strengthening relationships in the country of origin and help building a (new) social network, by means of e.g. access to sports clubs, is also an important part of the support needed in the return process.[22] Chapter 7 goes into further detail on this topic.

Ensuring material security

Focus points:
- Socio-economic circumstances.
- Education.

Socio-economic circumstances

To ensure that the child's primary needs are met after returning, it is essential to create a concrete, individual reintegration plan with the family, which includes options for housing, education and work, access to suitable (mental) healthcare, education, and support (for the children) in the reintegration process.[23]
Part of this is the availability of programmes for support in voluntary return and reintegration, specifically tailored to the needs of children and families.[24] Custom work and a focus on social embedding are important here. Support in the country to which the child is returning should contribute to sustainable solutions, and contribute to acceptance from and integration in the community. Therefore, individual interventions for returning families should ideally be paired with a focus on building capacity in the country to which they are returning regarding education, (mental) healthcare and child protection. Chapter 7 goes into further detail on this topic.
An essential aspect for safeguarding children's development is access to appropriate education after returning. Factors that can limit or promote a connection to education (such as deficient language skills or acculturation) should therefore be identified and included in the return plan, prior to the return. Language problems in children can cause insecurities, educational delay and problems in building friendships. Extra language lessons before and after the return can be an important part of preventing that.

Ensuring legal security

Focus points:
- The interests of the child are the centre of both the decision-making procedures and the return procedures.
- Legal aid.
- Focus on the child's voice/opinion.
- Child's legal identity.

The activities and expertise of Solid Road mainly focus on offering guidance in the return and reintegration process, and not on legal assistance. Therefore, we only briefly touch on those aspects in the general conditions. For information on conditions concerning safeguarding legal security, please refer to the ECRE's checklist, the EASO Practical Guide on the best interests of the child in asylum procedures and the University of Groningen's Best Interest of the Child Questionnaire (BIC-Q).

Focus on the child's voice/opinion

One of the basic principles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to be heard, and that their opinions must be taken seriously (in keeping with their age). In 2017, the European Committee also published a set of measures that should be given priority to ensure the protection of migrating children. It states that children must receive information about the asylum procedures (including the return process), and the help that is available to them, in a child-friendly manner.[25]

Child's legal identity

An essential condition for ensuring the continuity and identity of the child is safeguarding children's legal identities. Legal registration of children, including with a birth certificate, is a condition for protecting children after their return and providing them access to education.

Additional comments:
It is important to realise that the parents carry primary responsibility and care for their child. A starting principle in the application of the aforementioned conditions is that this takes place in cooperation with the parents. A difficult aspect of this is that in many cases, parents do not (want to) include their children in the return process, or not enough. This is partly due to other cultural beliefs about what is in the interest of the child, but it is also often because parents do not want to hurt their children and find it difficult to find a way to talk to their children. Often, parents also experience so much stress during the return process that they do not have a lot of mental space to listen to and support their children. Creating awareness in parents about the importance of informing and involving the children in the return process should thus be paired with support for the parents in this area. Chapter 5 goes into further detail on this topic.

22. Merry, L. e.a. (2017)
23. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)
24. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)
25. Europese Commissie (2017)

2.3 The return plan

As mentioned in the previous section, a concrete, individual reintegration plan including options for housing, education and work, access to suitable (mental) healthcare, education, and support (for the children) in the reintegration process, is a condition for a family's sustainable return. The return plan can be used in preparation for the return to make a schedule that organises the required support and matters as much as possible before the return. Moreover, the return plan can be used to monitor the reintegration process.

Return plans should not be standardised but personal, practical and child-specific. The children's situation cannot be seen separately from the parents' situation and the whole family's socioeconomic status. Therefore, the return plan should focus on both the basic needs of the whole family and on child-specific factors like: being able to take part in education, receiving extra language lessons, psychosocial support during the reintegration process, and the ability to build friendships.[26]

The previous section already stated that it is important to identify potential risk factors and protective factors for involved children, prior to the return. Based on those, you can determine what extra support the child and possibly the parents need. The next chapter will cover this in further detail. Of course, a return plan is made together with the family. Have conversations with the family to take stock of all the family members' wishes, ideas and doubts about the future and about the return. With the parents, you can look at how to involve the child in the process, depending on the child's age and developmental level.

Usually, the return plan does not specifically include how to use the return budget to help the children reintegrate. The child budget is generally added to the family budget and used for housing, or to start a business. You could speak to the parents about how to allocate part of the budget to be used specifically for the children.

What is in the child's interests must be determined together with a partner organisation in the country to which they are returning. Therefore, coordination and communication between the asylum country and the country to which they are returning is essential in ensuring the child's interests and rights during the return and reintegration process.[27] Of course, it is important for the parents to grant permission for the transfer of information to the partner organisation in the country to which they are returning.

Other focus points for making a return plan:

- Sustainability. The plan focuses on preparing for the return in the asylum country as well as on reintegration in the country to which they are returning. It covers the child's immediate needs as well as the child's long-term development. The execution of the plan after returning is monitored. In its 'facing return' method, Pharos describes that in cases of both independent and forced returns, (thinking about) going back can bring up traumatic experiences. Even after returning, children and/or parents can suffer from flashbacks. In that event, they recommend consulting with the parents to explore whether it would be possible and desirable to move to a different city/town and/or area in the country of origin.

- Holistic. There is a focus on factors at the level of the child, the family and the community.
- Custom work. The plan is individual and flexible, meaning that it can be adjusted after the return.
- Geared towards increasing resilience. A focus on constant factors and on bringing the knowledge and skills acquired in the asylum country boosts resilience.
- Based on a 'Best Interest of the Child Assessment'.
- Sufficient time to properly prepare and create a good return plan before the return.
- Based on up to date, reliable information from/in the country to which they are returning.

Sufficient time to prepare for the return

Most families do not want to talk or think about going back while they are still in the middle of the procedure. Furthermore, there is often only a short time to prepare for voluntary return. In many cases, the combination of both of these factors has an undermining effect on a sustainable return.[28] UNICEF indicates that the preparations required for a child-friendly return, such as correctly completing school and transferring schools and providing the required psychosocial and/or medical support, often prove insufficient due to the preparation time being too short.[29]
Enough time to prepare, with considerations of both the required practical and psychosocial support upon return, is therefore important. It is also always important to keep looking at opportunities to talk about the return during the whole asylum procedure.

Up to date, reliable information

Good information contributes to a relationship of trust between the return counsellor and the returning family. Therefore, it is important that the information (provision) about the country of origin is up to date, reliable and available to guidance counsellors and to those returning.[30]
Direct contact with a partner organisation in the country to which they are returning through e.g. Skype can help with this, allowing the family to ask questions (about safety, work, housing, education, healthcare, etc.).
The content and duration of the possible return assistance in the country of origin must be clear to prevent unrealistic expectations.

26. Zevulun, D. (2017)
27. Nemeht-Almasi, J. & Delaney, S. (2014)
28. Chu, B., Stec, K., Dünnwald, S. & Loran, T. (2008)
29. UNICEF (2019)
30. Pharos (2017)

3. Risk factors and Protective factors

3.1 Introduction

This chapter and accompanying appendices will look at potential risk factors and protective factors that affect the development of child asylum seekers (after their return), so that they can be considered in the return process.

Child asylum seekers are a vulnerable group, and have an increased risk of developing psychosocial problems.[31] Despite that, many child asylum seekers are able to handle the many challenges they are faced with, and exhibit a lot of resilience.
Resilience comes from the Latin word *resilientia*, which means 'the act of rebounding'. Resilience is the ability to deal with and rebound from difficult or threatening situations, to come out of them stronger and/or the ability to adjust to those situations. For example, Albanian children who have returned say that the difficulties they experienced after returning strengthened their character, and that they now have a stronger bond with their family.[32]
Resilience is not just a personal ability; it is a relational and interactive process. Relationships and factors outside of the child can have a protective effect (increasing resilience) or present a risk factor (undermining resilience). Supportive parents can be an important source of resilience for returning children, while parents with psychological problems who are insufficiently able to be there for their child constitute a risk factor and can undermine a child's resilience.

In the guidance of child asylum seekers, it is important to keep an eye on risk factors that can lead to development problems during/after the return, but it is equally as important to focus on children's (sources of) resilience. In other words: do not be too quick to assume that a child asylum seeker is traumatised, or that a child who appears to be very resilient does not need support. The challenge is to increase a child's resilience as much as possible without losing sight of their vulnerabilities and also minimising those as much as possible on the long term.

When identifying risk factors and sources of resilience or protective factors, it is important to also consider the child's voice. Children can view their own situation very differently and experience it differently than adults do. It is therefore essential to listen to the children themselves, to get an accurate idea of how they see their situation, and the strategies they come up with to protect themselves.

3.2 Risk factors

Research by Kalverboer and Zijlstra (2006) shows that the extent to which children are damaged by a (forced) return is determined by the following factors:

- The child's condition ((psychosocial) health, resilience, educational development)
- The parents' condition
- The duration of their stay (long-term insecurity about/fear of going back, putting down roots in the Netherlands)
- The child's age

- Their connection to the country of origin (memories, social network)
- Cultural changes
- Conditions in the asylum country
- Conditions in the country of origin[33]

These topics are covered in further detail in Appendix 2.

There are multiple risk factors in the lives of child asylum seekers that can undermine their resilience and put them at a higher risk of being damaged by going back. The duration of their stay at an Asylum Seekers Centre and their parents' mental health are the most common important risk factors. Research on the well-being of returning child asylum seekers in Kosovo and Albania shows that, particularly when there was a culmination of risk factors in these children's lives (such as a combination of not having much of a connection with the country of origin, parents' poor (mental) health and no social network), they had trouble reintegrating and suffered from long-term social-emotional problems.

3.3 Sources of resilience

As stated before, going back to and adjusting to the country of origin is easier when a child is healthy and resilient. To determine which interventions can contribute to increasing the resilience of returning child asylum seekers, it is important to look at which protective factors there are, on both an individual level and an environment level, meaning the child itself, the family, school and society/culture. In this respect, it is important to keep in mind that increasing resilience is important, but could also be limited, particularly when children are exposed to risk factors for longer periods of time.[34] Increasing resilience should therefore be paired with minimising risk factors, and with providing additional psychosocial interventions (after their return) if needed.

To increase the resilience of child asylum seekers, it is important for there first and foremost to be a focus on primary needs such as care and security. That means: a safe and stable living environment and access to school and (mental) healthcare. Refugee children added that they wanted to be seen as children, and not as refugees.[35]

Protective factors most commonly mentioned by refugee children are: supportive (family) relationships, education, spirituality, a sense of control and agency, and hope for the future.[36] Research on factors that boost shared resilience among refugee children furthermore indicated: the feeling of belonging, and a connection to their own culture. Here, a strong link was found between education, a sense of belonging and a positive adjustment to the culture.[37]

Mainly a sense of control and agency is what many refugee children mentioned as a helping to deal with stressful events.

31. Abdi, S.M. (2018)
32. Vathi, Z. & Duci, V. (2016)
33. Kalverboer, M.E. & Zijlstra, A.E. (2006)
34. Tol, W. A., Song, S. & Jordans, M.J.D. (2013)
35. Pieloch, K.A. e.a. (2016)
36. Sleijpen e.a. (2016), Betancourt & Khan (2008)
37. Pieloch, K.A. e.a. (2016)

Several studies confirm that a sense of agency has a clearly positive influence on child asylum seekers' mental health.[38] This is an important aspect in the guidance of child asylum seekers, as feelings of powerlessness, mainly in the asylum procedure, play a large role. This sense of powerlessness can be felt in several respects. The extent to which children are involved in the decision to go back may differ, but in most cases they do not have a say in the matter and the choice is made for them, which intensifies the sense of powerlessness.

In sum: The extent to which the resilience of child asylum seekers is strengthened is determined by: children's individual traits, the quality of their social environment (in which family and school play an important role), a connection with their own culture, and the space for the children's own agency, meaning the ability to exert influence and access to sources of resilience.[39] Appendix 3 provides further theoretical arguments and information about the various sources of resilience.

Additional comments:
Resilience is a dynamic process that is influenced by factors in the child itself, by (available support in) their environment, by culture and by events in time (such as a long procedure at the Asylum Seekers Centre or the decision not to grant the family a residence permit). For this chapter, we drew upon various studies for sources of resilience in child asylum seekers and child refugees. Despite different cultural backgrounds, many basic needs and sources of resilience are the same. There were differences in the areas of religion and cultural traditions. There were also personal differences that came out more in conjunction with changes in time. For example, some children felt challenged in a positive way to perform well at school despite difficult circumstances, while other children were discouraged as the period of stress continued. Another cultural difference that impacts resilience in children is the children's and the parents' educational background.

It is good to realise that risk factors are not automatically the opposite of resilience. For example: due to differences in integration in the Netherlands, child asylum seekers often take over their parents' responsibilities. That is a risk factor if it becomes too heavy a burden on the children, and it gets in the way of their (school) development. At the same time, child asylum seekers also indicated that being able to help their parents contributed to their own self-worth, and that they liked being able to do something to help.[40]

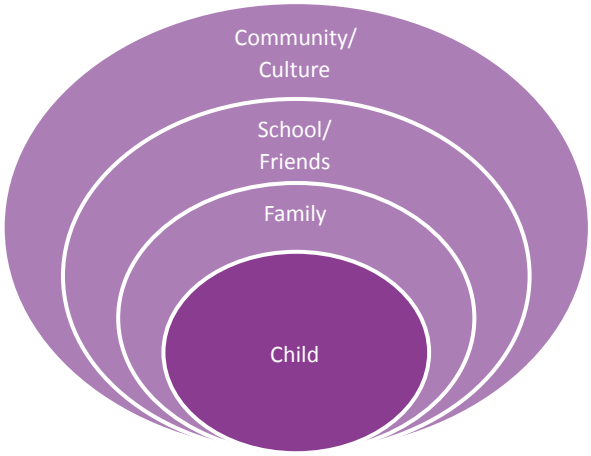
Another example is (temporarily) growing up between two cultures with differing values and ideas. That can lead to stress and problems in the (identity) development of child asylum seekers, and to tensions in the relationship with their parent(s)/family. At the same time, growing up between two cultures can also contribute to children's resilience, provided they experience enough support in this, as children develop new coping strategies and acquire knowledge by having to navigate between two cultures.

So, children can be both vulnerable and resilient. For example, children can do well at school while also suffering from post-traumatic stress symptoms, which can manifest as fears, or wetting the bed. Children can also appear to be resilient in the current situation, but show more vulnerabilities and signs of earlier trauma over time. Moreover, a child exhibiting resilient behaviour does not automatically mean that they are happy and feel good. Underneath that, they can still have feelings

of depression, difficulties in entering relationships, etc. Here, too, cultural differences can play a role like 'staying silent' about experienced trauma or about their own struggles out of respect for others/ family members and/or not wanting to hurt them. Therefore, it is important to keep an eye on the context, culture and individual situation of each child.

3.4 Taking stock of risk factors and protective factors for returning child asylum seekers

The previous sections discussed four areas from which we can look at both resilience-boosting factors and risk factors; the child itself, the family, school & friends and the wider social community/culture. These four areas as based on the developmental psychologist Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model. The four areas are connected and can reinforce one another. Education, for example, can offer hope and increase social support for parents. However, a difference in integration between parents and children and a difference in the connection with their own culture can weaken the parent-child relationship and thus form a risk factor for the child's development, both before and after the return.



In addition to the focus on the wider context in which child asylum seekers develop, it is also important to look at the effect migration has on the resilience and vulnerability of children. The continuity of the development of returning child asylum seekers is interrupted multiple times as a result of the migration and return. These children face the challenge of developing in a new environment, processing experiences from before and during the migration, and dealing with multiple losses and changes. That makes the children extra vulnerable to developmental damage and psychosocial problems.

A form is included in Appendix 5 on which you can enter both risk factors and protective factors prior to the return. Based on that, you can determine which protective measures have to be taken and which protective factors can be further expanded on and reinforced. This can be included in the return plan.

- Speak to both the parents and the child. To do so, you can use the children's books and conversation cards from the Toolkit. This is discussed further in the next chapter.
- Work together in a multidisciplinary approach. Chapter 8 goes into further detail on this.
- Know the potential risk factors and protective factors. A summarising overview was made of potential risk factors and protective factors based on Appendices 2 and 3. This is included as Appendix 4.

38. Sleijpen, M. e.a. (2017), Peiloch, K.A. e.a. (2016), Boyden, J. & Mann, G. (2005)
39. Skovdal, M. and Daniel, M. (2012)
40. Groeninck, M. e.a. (2019)

Additional comments:
Putting together an overview of risk factors and protective factors can help determine what extra support the child needs and possibly the parents need, and which sources of resilience can be used and strengthened. It is important not to use the overview as a simple way to make up the balance, but to maintain a focus on the context and the impact of time. Long-term guidance and a multidisciplinary approach, both before and after the return, with an eye for both risk factors and sources of resilience, is therefore essential.

In conclusion: As mentioned, the duration of a child's stay at an Asylum Seekers Centre and their parents' mental health are the most common important risk factors. The return cannot be seen separately from the preceding period. Ideally, there should therefore be a focus on increasing the resilience of children and their families throughout the whole asylum procedure.

4. Guiding child asylum seekers in the process of returning home

4.1 Introduction

The voice and interests of the child tend to easily get snowed under in the complex process surrounding the return. Most child asylum seekers experience a lot of stress surrounding the topic of the return and, out of a fear that it may affect their procedure, often do not dare to (honestly) express themselves. As described in Chapter 1, returning home is a major event for the children involved. To avoid the risk of developmental damage after the return as much as possible, it is therefore essential for children to receive guidance in the return process.

The content of the guidance for children in the process of returning home focuses on:

- Providing child-friendly information about the return process.
- Providing psychosocial guidance during and after the return process.
- Guidance in saying goodbye in the Netherlands.
- A proper transfer from the school in the Netherlands to a school in the country of origin.
- Support during the reintegration process in the country to which the child is returning.

The next two sections will provide more information about offering child-friendly information about the return process, and about the importance of psychosocial guidance during and after the return process. Then, sections 4.4 and 4.5 will discuss how the children's books and conversation cards can be used to inform returning child asylum seekers and prepare them for their return. Sections 4.6 and 4.7 will cover saying goodbye in the Netherlands, and the transfer to a new school in the country to which they are returning. Focus points for guidance in the reintegration process after returning are discussed in Chapter 7.

4.2 Child-friendly information about the return process

Several studies underline the importance of child-friendly information about returning to make the return easier to understand and less stressful for children. In their report on child-sensitive returns, UNICEF states that children must be informed not only on paper, but through a combination with face-to-face counselling.[41]

Child-friendly information means:

1. That children receive clear insight into what will happen in terms of procedures and events.
2. That the information aligns with the child('s situation), meaning that it is tailored to their age, (emotional) development, language, culture, gender and potentially their vulnerabilities.[42]
3. That you communicate with them in a child-friendly manner.
4. That the information is geared towards increasing the children's resilience by offering the ability to exert influence, and by identifying protective people, resources and behaviours.

41. Unicef (2019)
42. Council of Europe (2018)

Even though the return is generally a tense subject, it is still essential for children to be informed about going back. Children often have a (negatively) warped idea of the country to which they are returning, and they can get angry at the Netherlands and the Dutch 'authorities'. Children can also feel like they failed when they are not granted a residence permit. Loyalty to their parents plays a major role in this. Therefore, it is important for information to be provided in a sensitive manner, which takes into account how loyal children are to their parents.

Clear information

Children should receive information about:

- A potential negative decision concerning their asylum request.
- The return procedure.
- The situation in the country they are returning to.
- The guidance they receive in the return process.

It is important for children to be able to ask all the questions they need to. Questions that children may have include: why are we going back, when are we going back, how will we get there, where are we going to stay when we arrive, what is the school like in the country to which we are returning, etc. The children's books and conversation cards deal with these questions in a playful manner. They also explain the different parties that play a role before, during and after the return, such as: the supervisor, case manager, lawyer and return migration organisations.

The children's books and conversation cards focus on increasing the children's resilience. Chapter 3 went into detail on (sources of) resilience in returning child asylum seekers. Based on that, we chose to focus on the following in the children's books and conversation cards:

- Providing information about the return process and about the procedure(s).
- Providing information about basic needs like safety, housing, school, and access to healthcare.
- Strengthening the parent-child relationship and the family cohesion.
- The opportunity to exert influence.
- Children's coping mechanisms, or what has given them the strength they need and what they feel helps them to make the process of returning less overwhelming.
- Strengthening the child's social and cultural identity. Religion also plays a role in this.
- Both their connection with their country of origin and their connection with the Netherlands.
- Leisure.

Sections 4.4 and 4.5 will cover this in further detail. These will also discuss how you can use the children's books and conversation cards to connect to the child('s situation), and offer tools for child-friendly communication.

4.3 Psychosocial guidance during the return process

When children hear that they are going back to their country of origin and have to say goodbye to the Netherlands, it sets in motion a process which is similar to a grieving process. Children can usually make changes quickly and adjust easily. One moment, they can be sad and angry about going back, and the other they can go back to day-to-day things like school and play time. In this manner, children control how much (emotion) they can handle. Furthermore, children (asylum seekers) also just want to get back to being 'normal' kids again. This can make it seem like they have not experienced any damage or trauma. Children are very resilient, so that can indeed be the case. But at the same time, children are also vulnerable. Children can also put a pin in their sadness because they do not feel safe enough to express themselves, or because they want do not want to be a burden on their parents. That is common in child asylum seekers. Combined with the generally short time to prepare for the return, this increases the risk of returning child asylum seekers not having enough space for a 'healthy' grieving process. They may still have a reaction later on, in the form of abnormal behaviour. Furthermore, the child could have suffered a loss and/or trauma in the past which they have not completely processed, and/or they could be triggered by having to go back.

The better they have processed the return, the higher the chance of successful reintegration. And vice versa: the better the reintegration, the higher the chance that the child will process the return in a healthy manner.[43] Psychosocial support during the return process, parents' awareness and collaboration with a partner organisation in the country of origin that can help the child in the grieving process after the return are therefore important.
There are several different factors that can affect the grieving process and the child's processing of the return.

Factors that can lead to stagnation in the grieving process are[44]:

- A culmination of risk factors (see Chapter 3).
- 'Incomplete' grieving because the child was unable to say a proper goodbye.
- The child has to process the return during a stressful period, while reintegration in their country of origin is already difficult enough.

Protective factors are:

- Being promptly informed of the return.
- Honest and clear information about the return process.
- Children must be told that the fact that they are going back is not their fault.
- A sense of agency in what happens, both before and after going back. Children must be involved in the return process as much as possible.
- Attention from and presence of a supportive parent and/or other adult. It is important for children to realise that someone is paying attention to them and that there is space and time to talk about the return process. Consult with parents about the options in this regard during this busy and stressful period, and discuss how extra support can be provided by e.g. a teacher, return counsellor or aid worker.

43. Adriani, P. & Smit, M. (1998)
44. Adriani, P. & Smit, M. (1998)

- The ability to express emotions about going back. The next section goes into further detail on this topic.
- Informing the school so that they can support the child as well.
- Saying a proper goodbye.
- Ensuring ways in which the child can maintain ties with (friends in) the Netherlands.
- Support in the re-integration process.
- Connection to the country to which the child is returning, feeling welcome upon their return.
- School can play an important role in providing structure, safety, hope for the future and distraction. This is discussed further in section 4.6.

A grieving process takes time, and reintegrating takes time. A child cannot process the return until they have trust, a certain amount of stability, security and a perspective on the future. In addition to proper guidance prior to the return, monitoring and guidance in the first year after the return is thus essential.

4.4 The children's books and conversation cards

To inform children about and support them in the process of returning home, Solid Road developed children's books and conversation cards. For younger children, we opted to inform them and involve them in the return process by means of a story to be read aloud and creative assignments. For older children, the focus is more on the conversation and on feeling they are able to exert influence. For this, conversation cards were developed, on the basis of which children can write down issues that are important to them (concerning the return plan) in the children's book.
Both children's books also provide information about the return procedure and the involved organisations in a child-friendly manner.

The children's books and conversation cards comprise four 'parts': The different parts are colour coded:

A: This is me and my family (purple)
B: The escape and my time in the Netherlands (green
C: Leaving the Netherlands (blue)
D: Back in the home country (orange)

The story and the metaphor of the cockatoo is used to talk to children about the return process, and to prepare them for the return. We opted to use the cockatoo as the main character because the animal offers many points of connection for having conversations with children about their own situation, and because cockatoos have many characteristics that align with the resilience of children, such as: their social and playful nature, their resourcefulness and ability to adjust, the crest on their head which shows their emotions, taking care of each other in the group, loyalty, the ability to make friendships, etc.
Children can identify with the cockatoo's story and talk about the return without getting too literal. The cockatoo also serves as a figure of support.

The book for younger children comes with a 'road map'. On that road, children can use the included stickers to mark which parts of the booklet they have completed. That makes the return process easier for them to understand. This road map can also be used by parents/professionals to talk (and keep talking) to children about going back and about the return process in an accommodating manner. Both the children's book for younger children and the conversation cards contain different types of questions. The questions are formulated to increase resilience and offer children the opportunity to indirectly talk about their own feelings and needs (through the metaphor of the Cockatoo). A conscious decision was made to include lots of questions, so that you (or the children) can choose the questions that best suit their situation.

4.5 Starting points for using the children's books and the conversation cards

This section will look at the most important focus points in the (psychosocial) guidance of children in the return process. It will also translate how to practically include this when using the children's books and conversation cards.

Important starting points in the (psychosocial) guidance of children in the process of returning home are:

- Safety, Connection and Hope.
- Working with parents. A family approach.
- Focus on the child's own agency.
- Focus on the grieving process of returning child asylum seekers.
- Taking into account the conditions for child-friendly communication.
- Custom work, connecting with the individual child and family.
- Prevent new stress or re-traumatisation.
- Taking the child's voice into account when creating the return plan.

4.5.1 Safety, Connection and Hope

To increase resilience in both children and parents during the return process, this manual is based on three focus points: Safety, Connection and Hope. Below is a description of how to concretely structure these principles in the return guidance process for children.

Safety

Presence of a familiar person or object

The presence of a familiar person or object, such as a stuffed animal, can help the child feel safer. Also ask the child who they would like to have with them during the conversation. To talk to children about the return process, and to prepare them for the return, the children's books and conversation cards use the story of the travelling Cockatoo, as a metaphor for the children's own story. The Cockatoo serves as a figure of support during the return process.

Honesty and clarity

Clarity about what will happen offers children structure and security. It is therefore important to make the return process as concrete and predictable as possible. With this, children regain a sense of control which they have often lacked in past years.[45] The children's books and conversation cards can be used as a tool here.
Also be clear about the goal and content of your guidance and your role. Make clear what you can and cannot do for them. It is important for children to know which information will remain confidential and which information you will share. Do not make promises you cannot keep!

Offer the child space to express their emotions and ask questions

Every child will react differently when they hear about going back, and will process the news in their own unique way. Some children will express their emotions more easily than others. Reactions can include: anger, crying, denial, fear, running away or acting like nothing's wrong. Sometimes, children have a physical reaction, and have trouble sleeping. Children can get mad at their parents, with damaged trust. Children who have done their absolute best in school, in the hope of 'earning' a residence permit, often feel rejected. They can also blame themselves, or develop a sense of powerlessness. As mentioned above, it is important to make room for all kinds of questions and concerns children have and to acknowledge their feelings of sadness and injustice.

As difficult as the topic is, children need to regularly hear and be able to talk about going back. The memories children have of their country of origin are often hazy or warped. Particularly young children observe their parents' reactions to situations and then copy those reactions. Therefore, it is good to tell parents that the way they handle the return, and how they talk about going back and their country of origin has a major effect on the children. Chapter 5 goes into further detail on this topic. Try to talk about the return in a neutral/factual manner yourself.
Children often find it easiest to talk about things as they play, or during a shared activity. The children's books and conversation cards are therefore a good tool for talking to children about the return.

Connection

As described in Chapter 3, a child's resilience is not just determined by the properties and behaviour of the child itself; their environment and relationship with others also play a large role.
In guiding children in the process of returning home, there should thus be a focus on:

- Working together with parents and including the parents in guiding the children.
- Other important people in the child's life, like friends, teachers, possibly aid worker(s) or volunteer(s), etc.
- Family values and habits.

Focus points here are:

- Take the child's family's cultural values as a starting point, and not your own cultural values.
- Find out who in the family is important to the child, who they trust the most, but also who has the most authority in making decisions that concern the child. That can also be a father or grandparent in the country of origin. There may be a difference between what the culture officially dictates and how things actually happen. It is important to keep an eye on both.
- In many asylum seeker families, the roles of family members are more hierarchical than in the west. A shift may have taken place in the hierarchy during the asylum period. It is important to focus on that and to focus on strengthening the family cohesion when providing guidance to the children.
- Make sure to respect the position of the child in the family and that you include the parent(s) enough in the guidance you provide. In many cases, the child speaks Dutch better than their parents do. Because of that, it is easy to focus more on the child than the parent or to talk to the parents through the child. Do be sure to make parents feel validated in their role as a parent and not undermined. Chapter 5 goes into further detail on this topic.

Hope

A project with refugee children in Canada showed that hope is a big source of strength. In creative assignments, the children were asked to think about what gave them hope, and what hope meant to them. Hope proved to be a universal concept. Children indicated that hope helped them deal with difficult circumstances, come up with solutions and stay positive.[46]
The answers showed that hope is strengthened or formed by:

- Hopeful events (such as 'surviving and escaping when they fled', or 'a UN food truck at the refugee camp').
- Hopeful relationships ('playing with new friends', or 'when people helped us', or 'parents').
- Activities that provide perspective, such as school and sports.
- Hope that stemmed from a cultural or religious belief.
- Being able to help others.[47]

The hopeful factors listed above are also included in the children's books and conversation cards. A focus on hope does not mean that the difficult aspects should be ignored. It is still important to keep an eye on risk factors, but at the same time to look at what gives children hope and how to reinforce that.
The parents in the project indicated that it was difficult for the children to maintain hope when their parents were not hopeful about the future.[48] We often see that this is a challenge for parents. On the one hand, they want to appear hopeful to their children, but on the other, they have trouble remaining hopeful themselves. At the same time, children's answers about what gives them hope and how they experience hope in turn gave their parents hope.[49] Here, too, it is thus important to focus on both the children and the parents.

45. Plysier, S. (2003)
46. Yohani, S.C. (2008)
47. Yohani, S.C. (2008)
48. Yohani, S.C. (2008)
49. Yohani, S.C. (2008)

4.5.2 Working with the parents, a family approach

Family relationships play an important protective role for children in the return process, but they can also constitute a risk factor. In the development of the children's books and conversation cards, we covered factors that can increase the child's individual resilience as well as the whole family's protective 'strategies'. With that, the children's books and conversation cards can be used in conversations with/between parents and children as a tool for strengthening family cohesion, and identifying and strengthening the family's sources of resilience. When a family has multiple children, you can alternate between an individual and a collective approach. Children will like doing some assignments together, but others they might prefer to do alone. Here, too, it is important to look at what the child wants. When children do assignments together, it is good to underline that there is no right or wrong answer, and that every child is different.

Practical matters for working with parents when using the children's tools:

Explanation

Parents must be informed of the importance of preparing children for the return and involving them in the return process. Also see Chapter 5. It should be clear to parents that the children's books and conversation cards are tools which can be used to inform children about the return in a child-friendly manner, and that it can help the parents to talk to the children about going back. Parents should have a good idea of what is in the children's books and conversation cards. For this, they can use the brochure for parents.

Connecting

To connect to parents, it is important for the parents to feel that there is a focus on the questions and concerns they have about going back and that using the children's tools is part of that. Parents should not get the feeling that even more is asked of them and that they fall short if they do not take the time to go over the books in detail with their children.

So, talk to the parents and discuss which of them could possibly offer support in that area and offer alternative options, such as:

- Working with the children's books and conversation cards during shared conversation(s) (about the return) with parents and child(ren).
- The option in which the guidance provided to the children is partly taken on by the case manager, a teacher, aid worker, return migration organisation employee etc. Here, it is important for there to be clear agreements regarding feedback to the parents. In any case, we recommend having two group 'conversations' with the parents and children. The content of these conversations could include the following:

  Conversation 1: The children's books and conversation cards are introduced. Together with the child(ren) and parents, start 'working' with the children's books and conversation cards. Discuss with the parents and child(ren) when/how the 'guidance counsellor' can move forward with the child using the booklet/cards and how they will provide feedback to the parents.

Conversation 2: Group conversation in which the completed booklets are 'presented' (by the children) to and discussed with the parents. Based on what the children indicated, discuss concrete action points which are required to (further) include the interests of the child in the return process.

Hope-oriented

The children's books and conversation cards were developed to contribute to strengthening the parent-child relationship and align with the family's sources of resilience. The best way to communicate that to parents is by allowing them to experience it. Many parents will not be motivated to use the children's tools right away. At Solid Road, experience shows that these tools work best when the booklets and cards are introduced as part of a group conversation with parents and children in which they are used right away. This allows parents to see how the use of the booklets and conversation cards can provide their children with support, and how it can help them as a family deal with the fact that they are going back.

Loyalty to parents

Children will always stay loyal to their parents. Having parents acknowledge the return is important for children to be able to acknowledge the return themselves and go through a 'grieving' process. As parents are also going through a grieving process, this can be difficult. As children do not want to speak ill of their parents, they will not always really share how they feel about going back. Loyalty to parents should always be respected. Express that you want to help both the child and the child's parents. It can also help to express explicit understanding for the child and parents by saying e.g.: *'It is very difficult for you and your parents not being able to stay in the Netherlands. That isn't your or your parents' fault. I get that it makes you angry and sad.' or: 'It is very difficult for you not being able to stay in the Netherlands, and I get that it makes you angry and sad. I think it was a very difficult decision for your parent(s) because they don't want to hurt you, and they want you to be happy. I want to help both of you in the process of returning home. I could imagine you have a lot of questions. You can ask me all of them.'*

Underline their parents' positive aspects. Part of the grieving process that parents go through is often about the dream they had for their child(ren). See how you can connect to that. The next chapter goes into further detail on offering guidance to parents, and on creating awareness of the impact their behaviour can have on how the children process the return.

4.5.3 Focus on the child's voice and agency

As shown in Chapter 3, being heard and feeling like you have a say is important for children's resilience, and child asylum seekers often lack that in their lives. It is important for children to be informed on time about going back, and for them to feel that their interests and opinion is being taken seriously in the return process. In children's experience, what they find important and what they are doing is different than with adults. To connect with the child, it is therefore essential to listen to them. That requires the adult to have an open approach.

Child asylum seekers have already put in a lot of effort: processing losses, the process of fleeing, adapting to a new culture, handling tensions and insecurity as a family after fleeing, etc. Acknowledging these achievements and connecting to the child's strengths, and the solutions they came up with and present themselves, increases their resilience.

To be sure that children are informed on time about and are heard in the return process, including the children in the return should be a standard component of the guidance provided to families in the return process. At the same time, it is also important to keep an eye on the vulnerabilities of returning child asylum seekers, and children should also be protected in this regard by:

- Discussing how the children can be involved in the return process with the parents beforehand, and determining which conversations they should and should not attend.
- Clearly outlining the content of the conversations and focusing on the child's interests during the group conversations. The children's books and conversation cards from the Toolkit are a good resource to use for that.
- Including children in the return plans on time, but not making them feel that they are partially responsible for the decision to go back. That puts too much pressure on the children, and in the event of a difficult reintegration in the country of origin, that can lead to the children experiencing feelings of guilt.[50] For teenagers, it can be beneficial to include them in the decision-making process, without putting the whole decision on them.[51]

This is a list of concrete examples of how to include the child's voice and agency when using the children's books and conversation cards.

- Give children the power to choose, and say that aloud. Possible choices are: Which chapter or topic the child wants to start with. Which assignments they do/do not want to do, and with whom. When they want to stop, etc.

With the conversation cards, you can choose to:

- Let the child choose a card that speaks to them, and then ask them one or more questions from the back of the card.
- Let the child choose both the card and which question they want to answer.
- Explicitly tell children that it is their own book, and underline that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Try to manage them as little as possible and intervene as little as possible. Go along with the child. A practical example: When asked to colour in his home country, an Iraqi boy also started colouring in other countries on the map. Then, he said he had been to Paris. There are different ways to respond to this. For example: By talking about his stay in Paris; what did he like there, what did they do, ask him which other countries/cities he knows, etc. Then, you can make the connection to the original question, e.g. by asking what the difference is between Paris and the city he is going to live in, and whether some things are the same. Or with a more indirect question, like what does he think it would be like for someone from France to go live in Iraq? What would be different, and what would be the same.
- Connect to the child's priorities.
  For example, an Armenian girl mentioned that she loved to swim. So, she wanted very much to see a picture of a swimming pool in Armenia. Seeing that picture restored a bit of her faith in Armenia, and made room for further questions about school and housing.

4.5.4 Focus on the grieving process of returning child asylum seekers

Returning children have to deal with losing their friends, their school, security, the surroundings they have got used to, dreams they had for the future, etc. This grieving process is different for everyone. However, there are four general stages in this process.[52]

1. *Acknowledgement*. In this case, this means realising and accepting the fact of the return and the accompanying losses (of friends, school, dreams for the future, etc.). In this stage, you often see three possible reactions: fighting (anger at the Netherlands and/or at parents, not wanting to accept the return), fleeing (seeking distractions, not wanting to talk or think about going back) or freezing (shutting up, becoming closed off, putting up walls, being unable to express themselves).
2. *Experiencing* sadness and other emotions, in this case concerning the return.
3. *Adjusting* to the new situation. Or: thinking about going back and about a life in the country of origin, preparing for the changes, thinking about saying goodbye to the Netherlands, etc.
4. *Connection*. Being able to find a way to process the loss, and this case the return.

Each child goes through these stages in their own unique way. There is no fixed order. Stages can be experienced simultaneously or multiple times within the grieving process. For example, children can adjust to the return while still being in the process of accepting the return. Or children can display emotions and behaviour befitting of connection and acceptance of the return in one conversation, while being angry in the next conversation, not wanting to talk about it or seeing you as the bad guy. This is a healthy form of grief. Being aware of the child's (stage in the) grieving process can help you connect to them. Here, it is important to acknowledge what the child is going through and to mention that. It does not have to be very elaborate. A simple confirmation towards the child can be enough. For example: *'I understand that going back and saying goodbye is painful….', 'I understand that you don't want to go back (if that is the case)' 'You are allowed to be angry/sad/…. (name the emotion), that makes sense'.*

Both children and parents will feel supported when you show understanding for their grieving process. It can also be reassuring for both to hear that their (changing) emotions and behaviour are a normal reaction to have within the grieving process. Respect a child's unwillingness to talk. The section on child-friendly communication goes into further detail on this topic.

The children's books and conversation cards focus on increasing resources and sources of strength, and the books and cards have a playful angle. The danger here is that children can get the sense that you are trying to make going back sound 'fun', and that you don't realise how much impact the return has on them. Therefore, acknowledging and mentioning sadness and feelings of injustice in children (and parents) is essential.

50. Ghent Refugee Taskforce, K. van Gelder (2014)
51. Ghent Refugee Taskforce, K. van Gelder (2014)
52. Worden, William J. Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner. (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company), 1991

4.5.5 Take into account the conditions for child-friendly communication[53]

The manner of communication determines how information comes across to children and what they will want to share. The table below provides an overview of conditions for child-friendly communication.

Conditions for child-friendly communication

- A child-friendly environment
- Alternate between talk and play
- Put the child at ease
- Pay attention to your non-verbal communication
- Always keep tailoring your response to the child
- Listen
- Be creative
- Encourage them to ask questions
- Respect a child's unwillingness to talk
- Do not make the conversation too long
- Make sure to properly conclude the conversation

A child-friendly environment

First of all, it is important to ensure a child-friendly environment, or safe, calm and pleasant space where you can talk to children. Also consider the layout in the space: facing each other diagonally as opposed to directly facing each other, do not get too close to the child, align your eye height, etc.

Alternate between talk and play

Children find it easier to talk about difficult things when that is combined with playing, relaxation and humour. For young children, the focus should be on playing; for older children, the focus can be more on talking. On top of playing, movement is also important. Generally, this helps children release tension.

Put the child at ease

Talking about going back is difficult for children. Therefore, it is important to put the child at ease by telling them what the goal of the conversation is, namely: listening to the child and guiding the child, along with its parents, in the return process. This is included in a child-friendly manner in the children's books as well.

53. This section draws on the book Luister je wel naar míj? (Are You Listening to Me?) by Martine F. Delfos (2005)

Do not be too quick to assume that the child understands you. Take the time to allow the child to understand the purpose of the conversation and/or guidance.
Going back is a serious topic. Do not try to diminish that; there is a large chance that the child will then exhibit resistance because they do not feel heard. At the same time, it can also help the child to keep the conversation light and make jokes in between. Child asylum seekers have had to say many goodbyes. In many cases, that has impacted the extent to which they dare to get attached and trust other people. Moreover, their trust in adults may have diminished due to (traumatic) experiences before or during the migration. First of all, it is important to understand children in this regard, and to see that for the child, protecting themselves was and is essential. Additionally, it is important to let children feel (and state) that they call the shots, and to strengthen and include relationships that are familiar to the child (initially their parents) in the return process.

Other ways to put a child at ease:
- Take the time to get to know them. Introduce yourself. Remember the child's name.
- Really listen!
- Express their situation without filling it in for them.
- Connect to their interests.
- Talk about (recent) positive experiences.
- Talk about school.
- Ask a child to do something or tell you about what they are good at.
- Ask a child to help with something (it can be a very small thing, like getting a glass of water).
- Compliment them.
- Repeatedly ask them to tell you what they think and feel and assure them that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Show the child that what they say has an effect on you, e.g. by saying: *'Now I know that you are concerned about not being able to write in that language, I can talk to your parents to see if we can get you extra language classes.'*

Pay attention to your non-verbal communication

Children experience authenticity and this reliability by seeing that you are saying the same thing verbally and non-verbally. So, pay attention to your non-verbal communication, such as your posture, the tone of your voice, eye contact or no eye contact, the expression on your face, etc. It is important for these to correspond to what you are saying, and for you to put children at ease and be inviting, not only verbally but also non-verbally. That can be with an open posture, a quiet and friendly voice, eye contact, etc. Also look at the child to see how they are feeling. In many non-Western cultures, it is impolite to disagree or to state that you did not hear what someone said. In those cases, non-verbal communication can be more reliable than verbal communication.
There are various reasons for making or not making eye contact. Cultural differences can play a role here. In some cultures, it is a sign of respect to not look someone in the eyes. Avoiding eye contact can also mean that the child is scared, uncomfortable, or unwilling to talk. Another reason for temporarily breaking eye contact is because sometimes, children can concentrate better when they aren't looking you in the eyes and/or often find it easier to talk about difficult topics when they aren't making eye contact. So, try to gauge why a child is not making eye contact and tailor your eye contact accordingly.

Always keep tailoring your response to the child

Stop a conversation immediately if you see the child is getting tense or upset. Section 4.5.7 goes into further detail on this topic.
As a guidance counsellor, what the child tells you can be very upsetting. It is important for the child to feel seen and heard, but too much emotion can also scare them off. An attitude that is a bit more neutral will generally make it easier for the child to tell their story.

Listen

Take enough time to listen to the child and to let them say what they want to say. Do not take over the conversation. Respect the child's subjective version of the truth, or their own personal truth.
Try to refrain from interrupting a child while they are telling their story, and encourage them to continue.
Be patient. Children often need more time to express themselves. Particularly when there is limited time, it is a pitfall to instruct them or ask suggestive questions.

Be creative

Children can tend to skip from one subject to another. It is important to be flexible and go with the flow of the child. For the child, using the children's books should not feel like an assignment; it should be as interesting and as fun as possible. Be flexible and creative and make room for 'relaxation' in between. Here is an example: A five-year-old Iraqi boy asks you to draw a train in his booklet. You can go along with this by drawing the train together, asking what the train should look like, and then making a segue into the next question/assignment. For example, you could ask: *'Are there trains in Iraq, too?'* or *'Would the Cockatoo have seen a train sometime?' 'Shall we keep reading about the Cockatoo's journey?'*, etc.

Experiencing success is important. The children's books are not 'homework' that the child has to get a good grade on. If a child gives a wrong answer, e.g. by pointing to the wrong country on the map, you do not immediately have to tell them they are wrong. You could, for example, say: shall we see where Nigeria is on the phone/computer? Then, you can look it up together and then colour in the right country.

Encourage them to ask questions

It can be scary for children to take the space to ask questions. That often applies to child asylum seekers even more as they are generally more used to listening to adults as a child. Therefore, it is good to underline several times that they are allowed to ask questions and that there are no right or wrong questions. Here, it is important to consciously create that space by e.g. saying: *'now it's your turn to ask questions'.*

Respect a child's unwillingness to talk

Respect a child's choice to not share a lot with you. Let them know that they are free to do so. There can be various reasons for a child wanting to or not wanting to express themselves. Cultural factors can play a role in this, as well as loyalty to their parents, or developmental problems resulting from trauma, but it could also be a coping mechanism for dealing with the return. If you notice that a child has trouble expressing themselves or doesn't want to talk, it is firstly important not to force it. In this case, it can help the child to initially focus on 'informing' the child (offering clarity about the return, the process, the child's voice in this, etc.) and not asking the child about their emotions and opinion too frequently. What can also help is asking about things indirectly. Asking indirect questions generally makes it less threatening and makes it easier to talk about difficult topics. That is why the children's books and conversation cards make use of the Cockatoo 'character'. Children can identify with the Cockatoo's story and talk about the return without getting too literal.
Another way to get the conversation going is by asking closed questions.

Do not make the conversation too long

Keep in mind that children can feel overwhelmed when they receive too much information at once. Make sure to tailor the amount of information to the child('s age) and to the situation. The period leading up to, during and after the return is generally a stressful time for children. This can also impact their concentration and ability to soak up information. It can be helpful and comforting to repeat the information several times. It can also be better to have multiple shorter conversations than a few long ones.

Make sure to properly conclude the conversation

The length of the conversation depends on the child's age (see Appendix 6) and tension in the conversation. Pay close attention to the child's non-verbal signals to gauge when to conclude the conversation. The child can also put an end to the conversation because it is too emotional. Mention this and connect to it, by saying something like: *'It looks like you think we've talked long enough. That's fine, then we will pick this up again another time. You've done your best today.'*

Make sure the child can regroup and unwind after the conversation. Some children prefer being alone for a bit, while others want contact because of their need for safety and comfort. What often has a positive effect is walking with the child while taking about light-hearted subjects (like school, hobbies, food).

In conclusion: Sometimes, children can give answers that are funny, but do not laugh at their answers. The answer may be serious to the child, and that can make them feel like they are being laughed at, and make them more cautious in how they answer questions.

4.5.6 Custom work, align with the child('s situation)

The children's books and conversation cards are tools to prepare children for the return, and should therefore be used as a tool, meaning that: the books and cards are not the main focus; preparing the children for the return is the main focus. Every situation is different. Therefore, it is important to always tailor the use of the books and cards to the individual child and family.

To illustrate, here is an example: The children's book for younger children tells the story of the cockatoo with a mother and father who are present. That is not always the case in the lives of child asylum seekers. They may have a parent who died, or their parents may have (temporarily) separated. The questions in the booklet purposely do not focus a lot on a set of both parents. Reading the story with a mother and a father may however bring up emotions in the child. In this case, it is important to be open and honest about the loss (on the child's level), and to allow space for the child's emotions. You can acknowledge children in this by saying something like: *'I see that you really miss your father, and I can understand why that makes you sad. It's tough not being able to see your father again.' Or: 'I see that you are angry about what they did to your mother/father. I get that you are angry. People shouldn't do those things to each other.'*

Differences per child and per family can include: the reason for fleeing or migrating, the situation in the country to which they are returning, the (psychological) health of the child and the parent(s), the family structure, and children's personal properties like age, (emotional) development, language, culture and gender. Below, we have provided some guidance tools for connecting to the child's personal properties.

Age

The content and the amount of information, and the method of communication should be tailored to the child's age. Appendix 6 provides an overview of the properties of conversation for different age categories: Age 6 – 8, Age 8 – 10 and Age 10 – 12.

Emotional development

As described above, children go through a grieving process as a result of the return. Because of that, children can display various emotions and behaviour. Furthermore, children may have developmental problems as a result of previous traumatic experiences and/or prolonged stress during the asylum period. Therefore, it is important to take into account that they may show aberrant behaviour, and that a child's (emotional) development does not necessarily align with their age. Appendix 7 provides an overview of children's possible symptoms and responses to the return process. This overview is not meant to diagnose children, but to make you aware of those symptoms and it is meant as a tool with which to recognise and place signals, and get them extra psychosocial help (before and/or after the return) if necessary. Here, it is very important to be aware of the possibilities and limitations of your role, and to work with other professionals in the guidance process as discussed in Chapter 7.

Language

When offering guidance, use the language that the child feels most comfortable speaking. That could be Dutch, the language spoken in their country of origin or a local language.
Ask the child if they want to have someone there who is familiar to them that speaks both languages, e.g. a family member or employee/volunteer from the Asylum Seekers Centre. Do make solid agreements with this person regarding the child's privacy.
Children can be suspicious of interpreters from their own culture because of past experiences.
Practical tips for building trust when communicating through interpreters[54]:

- Explain what the interpreter is there to do. Make sure the child understands that the interpreter does not have an opinion or judgement about what the child is saying and that they will not tell anyone anything about what the child says.
- Ask the child beforehand if they prefer a male or a female interpreter, and what else they might find important.

An important point of attention for using an interpreter is to keep talking to the child, and not to address the interpreter. So, talk to the child the way you normally would. Keep in mind that when you speak to children in English, it is not their first language. In that case, children will probably need more time to understand everything and to express themselves.

The child's gender

Take into account the differences between boys and girls when it comes to their experience, (cultural) roles, vulnerabilities and development. Give children the choice to speak to a man or a woman.

Adjusting to the culture, cultural sensitivity

Be aware of your own cultural perspective and that of the child, which means you can interpret each other's information differently.
Focus points here are:

- Differing expectations and roles of children in relation to gender and age.
- Many child asylum seekers will not be as used to adults asking about their opinion, and see adults more as an authority they must obey, and to which they must provide the answers that are desired of them.
- Other cultural factors that can influence the guidance process are: a focus on harmony and relationships, use of indirect communication, the family(s honour), traditions, conformity, and a focus on achievements. Chapter 6 goes into further detail on the effect of potential cultural differences.
- Consider the role that religion can play in the child/family's lives.
- Have an eye for cultural differences within the same culture (different ethnicities, local customs, etc.).

Here, it is important not to stigmatise groups, and instead to keep looking at the child as an individual. Knowledge of cultural differences is important, but it is even more important to have an open attitude. Because you will never be able to know or understand all the cultural differences.

54. Council of Europe (2018)

Listen to the child without prejudice or judgement. Regularly check to see if the child has any questions and if they understand the information, e.g. ask them to repeat back to you what you told them in their own words.

4.5.7 Prevent new stress or re-traumatisation

Many child asylum seekers (particularly children who have fled from war zones) have experienced traumatic events before and during the migration, but the period they spent in the Netherlands is also stressful for many children. However, it is not always easy to tell whether child asylum seekers are traumatised. In some cases, it seems like children can handle what they have been through quite well, while that is mainly due to the fact that they are simply surviving, and they lack the safety to process the trauma.
The child may start to share things once they feel safe. In a conversation with a Belgian researcher, a ten-year-old Iraqi boy expressed it as *'I have 2 hearts: my old heart and my new heart. I can go back to my old heart because I trust you.'*[55]. This quote demonstrates the importance of having a safe adult present in the lives of child asylum seekers, but it also shows their vulnerability.
The purpose of the children's tools is for children to feel supported, stronger and safer to be able to deal with the stress and uncertainty surrounding the return. Therefore, the questions mainly focus on sources of resilience and (existing) coping mechanisms. Because child asylum seekers have often been through a lot, you may find that, when using the children's books and conversation cards, it brings up memories of trauma and children start to open up about them. This can come from the child itself, e.g. because they feel safe, or because they hope that talking about it will relieve some of their tension. But it can also be triggered by the adult, e.g. because they want to help the child and send the conversation in the direction of trauma-related topics, or ask follow-up questions about trauma-related topics. This is often well intended, but it can have a retraumatising effect instead of a strengthening effect on the child. Opening or getting into a possible trauma without the expertise to do so or time for follow-up care can further damage the child!

Due to the vulnerability of child asylum seekers, guiding these children in a sensitive manner and having enough knowledge to prevent retraumatisation is essential. Here, it is important to recognise and acknowledge the limitations of what you can do to help them and to be clear to the child about your role, and about what you can and cannot do for them.
Here are some tips for how to react when a child starts to share traumatic experiences[56]:

- Take a break from working with the children's books when you notice it is producing stress in the child or bringing up the trauma. Be alert for the signals the child gives off. If so, do a relaxing activity together.
- Do not ignore what the child shares with you! Opening up and sharing their feelings makes the child vulnerable, and ignoring what they share can make them close off again. Acknowledge them and listen with empathy, but also help the child return to the here and now, for example by saying: *"That must have been very difficult for you… thank you for sharing that… it was very brave of you to share that… I cannot change the bad things that happened, but we can look at how you can start to feel better and stronger now… How about we do something fun for now… What did you say you liked about school?"*

- Maintain contact with the child. Support them by being there for them and by showing them that you hear them, without interpreting or asking follow-up questions.
- Remain aware of the limitations of your role and abilities, even if your instinct tells you to ask more questions and talk more.
- Never promise something you cannot deliver on because you want to help the child so much.
- End the conversation on a positive note.

In sum:

- Using the children's books and conversation cards is not a therapeutic intervention, but a tool for preparing children for the return process and increasing their resilience so that they can better handle stress factors during and after the return.
- Getting into a possible trauma without the expertise to do so or time for follow-up care can further damage the child!
- If traumatic experiences come up when using the books and conversation cards, working with a professional in the Netherlands and referring them to an expert in the country of origin is essential.

4.5.8 Taking the child's voice into account when creating the return plan

As mentioned multiple times before, it is important for children to feel like they are heard, and that their interests are also considered. Therefore, it is important for the children to see that the compilation of the return plan took into account what they indicated in their booklets. Furthermore, using the children's books and conversation cards will allow parents and professionals to gain a better view of children's risk factors and sources of resilience, which can then also be included in the return plan.

4.6 Saying goodbye

Child asylum seekers have had to move many times, and deal with the losses involved in those moves, within a short period of time. An unexpected, sudden departure can have a strong impact on children, and damage their sense of safety and continuity. This can also impact their ability to get attached to their peers and to adults.
Therefore, it is very important for children to be able to say goodbye, and for them to be promptly informed of the return. You will generally have to create this awareness in parents and explain to them why their children need to say goodbye. You can meet with the parents to discuss how they can allow their children to say a proper goodbye, and who can help them with that. The children's books can help with this. At the back of the booklet, for both younger and older children, there is the option for friends, teachers or other important adults to write down nice memories, their best wishes or their contact information.

55. Groeninck, M., Meurs, P., Geldof, D., Wiewauters, C., van Acker, K., de Boe, W. & Emmery, K. (2019)
56. Vostanis, P. and Tosun, C. (2018)

The brochure 'Well, goodbye then: saying goodbye to child asylum seekers in the classroom', published by Pharos, provides a set of tips for saying goodbye at school. You can download this brochure using the link below.[57]

Important aspects to focus on are:
- Children should have a say in how they want to say goodbye.
- The manner in which they say goodbye helps the child to look back on their time at school in a positive light.
- Children should feel like they had a meaningful presence at school.
- The goodbye should be mentioned/talked about several times.
- Fixed goodbye rituals can help children process the return.

In addition to saying goodbye, it is also important for children to be able to maintain ties to their friends in the Netherlands. When they are back in their home country, it can be difficult at first for children to seek contact again with their friends in the Netherlands. Children often sense when they are emotionally ready for that themselves.

4.7 School transfer

For many child asylum seekers, school becomes a place where they feel safe and where they can just be a kid. Even after the return, school can play a major role by providing care and attention, structure and routine, and by challenging and protecting the child.[58] Furthermore, school is a place where children can make friends and develop themselves, which can make an important contribution to increasing a child's resilience.[59] At the same time, school can also be a risk factor if children aren't safe there, if they are excluded and/or receive inadequate guidance. Poor results can undermine a child's resilience and lead to a downward spiral of a sense of inferiority.[60]

Therefore, a proper transfer from the school in the Netherlands to the school in the country to which they are returning is important.

In concrete terms, that means:
- Saying a proper goodbye at the school in the Netherlands. Focus points here are: What is the best time to leave, How can the child be guided in saying goodbye, What do the parents and child need in this situation?
- Consult with teachers in the Netherlands and with the parents about the child's (educational) development. Ensure a written transfer (translated to the language spoken in the country of origin) from the old school to the new school. Take stock of what kind of (extra) support the child needs.
- Consult with parents to make sure they have all the required documents that the child will need to be able to attend school in the country of origin, such as their birth certificate and diplomas. For a smooth transfer, it is best to have them translated to the language spoken in the country of origin.

- Before they leave, talk to the partner organisation in the country of origin with the parents and children to discuss the children's education.
- Guide the children in the transfer by providing clarity about the departure date, about how they will say goodbye and about the new school if that information is available. Here, again, it is important for children to have the space to express their emotions and ask questions.

57. Baan, J. (2005). https://www.lowan.nl/lesmateriaal/nou-dag-maar-weer/
58. Kassenberg, A., Bongaards, M., & Wolfgram, P. (2004).
59. Mohamed, S. (2017)
60. Plysier, S. (2003)

5. Guiding the parents

5.1 Introduction

As mentioned several times in this manual, support for parents is an important source of resilience for children. Parents' (mental) health, a supportive upbringing style and safe attachment are important protective factors for a child's healthy development, and extra important during stressful times. Vice versa, research also shows that a lack of support for a parent, combined with a larger dependency on the parent (which is the case when the family is forced to return), leads to a higher risk of psychosocial problems.[61]

For many asylum seeker parents, however, it is a major challenge to keep providing a 'good' upbringing under long-term difficult circumstances, and to support their children during the return process. Due to the often short period during which to prepare for the return, and the in most cases diminished resilience, we see that parents focus more on the practical matters they have to take care of and on 'surviving' as a family than on making room to emotionally support the children in the return process. We also often see that parents feel like 'it was all for nothing' and that they failed. This has an undermining effect, and contributes to parents finding it difficult to talk about the return with their children. What also plays a large role is many parents not discussing much with their children at all, be it because they are accustomed to do so in their own culture of upbringing or because they want to shield the children from difficult topics.[62]

Parents we interviewed to write this manual indicated that it helped them to see that they were not alone in supporting their child. An Iraqi mother said: 'It is important to pay attention to guiding the children. With the stress and chaos surrounding the return, parents often pay insufficient attention to their children. It is good for the child to also receive support from someone else, a guidance counsellor they can trust. Sometimes, children do not tell their parents how they really feel or what they think, while they might be willing to express that to someone else.'

In short: Parental support is an essential part of guiding children in the process of returning home. The purpose of the support is twofold. Initially, it focuses on providing parents with information and practical tools for guiding their children in the return process. It also focuses on increasing the quality of the upbringing environment. Here, the main goal is to increase parents' (sources of) resilience. The information and tools provided in this chapter can be applied to both individual conversations and to more intensive guidance for parents. The extent of the guidance you can offer a parent will depend on your position. And yet, a single conversation that specifically focuses on building parents' confidence, and offering tools with which to guide their children in the return process, can already be very helpful.

For extra support on top of the conversations, Solid Road wrote a brochure for parents about guiding their children in the return process. This brochure can be given to the parents as part of the conversation.

In conclusion: Most of the parents we spoke to in the process of developing the Toolkit indicated that with the stress brought on by the return during this time, they had less time and emotional space for their children. Therefore, the focus during this period is on supporting the parents in preparing their children for the return, and on protecting the relationship between the parent(s) and child. Ideally focus on increasing the quality of the upbringing environment before the return period, and then offer support after the family has returned to the country of origin.

5.1.1 Starting points in guiding asylum seeker parents

Important starting points in guiding the parents are:
- Understanding parents
- Focus on the parents' own agency
- Cultural sensitivity

Understanding parents

Showing understanding for parents is essential. Assume that parents want what is best for their children. Generally, parents' biggest concern about going back is the impact it will have on their children. An open attitude towards, knowledge and understanding for their situation, and connecting to their concerns helps parents feel heard, and validated in their role as a parent. That is likely to make them more open to guidance.
To develop the Toolkit, we spoke to various asylum seeker parents. Parents indicated the most important aspect of the guidance to be: showing understanding for their stressful situation, warmth and reassurance. That may sound cliché, but many asylum seeker parents feel misunderstood and stated that aid workers did not sufficiently understand what they had been through, and what life as an asylum seeker is like. That often makes them feel lonely and not supported enough.[63] The next chapter provides additional information about upbringing in asylum seeker families and the impact of migration on upbringing.

Focus on the parents' own agency

The parents themselves are always the ones to decide on when and how to tell their children about and prepare them for the return. In practice, we often see that parents find it very difficult to inform their children of the return, causing them to postpone it as long as possible. This can cause tension between the importance of not overstepping the parents' authority on the one hand and the importance of the children being properly informed and prepared on the other.
This can be anticipated by:
- Clearly communicating to the parents from the start of the guidance during the return process that guiding children is a fixed part of the return guidance, and explaining to them why it is important to prepare children for the return.

61. Eruyar, S. (2018)
62. Kootstra, T. (2017)
63. Callewier, E. (2018)

- Telling parents what kind of support is available to them in preparing the children and which parties can play a role in that. It is important to align with professionals that are already involved with the family and have built a connection of trust.
- Asking parents how they want to prepare their children, what they are having trouble with in that area and what kind of support they would wish to receive.
- Focusing on the care that parents themselves need in the return process.

Cultural sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity means taking into account what parents view as good parenting, and as good upbringing and development of the child from their (cultural) perspective. It is important to be aware of the Dutch standard of upbringing and not to assume that as the foundation in conversations with asylum seeker parents. In the Netherlands and other Western countries, the child's autonomy and open communication with parents is much more common than in many non-Western cultures, where the upbringing is based more on hierarchy and obedience/conformism.[64] No matter how much you as an aid worker support autonomy, it is important to realise that after the return, the family will have to keep living in a different, non-Western environment.

5.2 Practical tools for parents in guiding children in the process of returning home

Going back to the country of origin is overwhelming for a child, and parents want nothing more than to protect them from that and not cause them any pain. It is important for parents to understand that the best way to prevent the risk of damage is to prepare the child as much as possible. The tools provided in this section for parents to guide their children in the process of returning home focus on:

- Increasing knowledge of the psychosocial aspects of returning children
- Discussing the return with children

These aspects are also described in the brochure for parents, which was developed as part of the Toolkit.[65] In addition to tips for discussing the return with children, and information about the psychosocial aspects of going back, this brochure also offers parents information about how to use the children's books and conversation cards.

5.2.1 Increasing knowledge of the psychosocial aspects of returning children

It is important for parents to understand why the children have to be prepared for the return, and for them to understand why it is important to promptly discuss the return with the children and to involve them in the return process. As mentioned above, parents do not always have enough knowledge to determine what kind of (psychosocial) guidance their children need. In a conversation with the parents, you can ask about the children's reactions, and how the parents are handling that. If necessary, you can explain which kinds of emotional responses/behaviour children can exhibit, as discussed in Chapter 4. This will help parents better understand that this behaviour is part of the child's processing the news.

Confirming the importance of the parent's role is equally important. Parents need to know that their support and response to their children plays a large role. Parents often feel like they have failed their children in their duty as parents. Sensitive communication, and connecting to 'what is already there', is necessary to ensure that parents do not feel even more pressure. Consider how parents support their children in their own way, and connect to that.
To develop the Toolkit, we asked various asylum seeker parents how they support their children and how they are preparing them for the return. The following 'strategies' were most frequently mentioned:

- Focus on the positive. Making children excited by bringing up the positive aspects of the return, such as being able to see their family again, showing them nice pictures and/or promising to go on fun trips, gifts, etc. after the return.
- Distractions, relaxation, positive emotions, humour. Many parents mentioned that they tried to find solace in distractions and leisure by doing something fun as a family, buying new clothes for their children, etc.) as a way to handle the stress surrounding the return.
- Keep speaking your own language.
- Taking care of each other as a family.
- Proper transfer of schools.

Many parents said that it was better not to talk about difficult topics and memories, but instead to focus on the positive. Therefore, many parents chose not to talk about the return too much. It is important to recognise and acknowledge this as some parents' way of supporting their child in the return process. At the same time, parents need to know how important it is to be able to talk about the return. The brochure for parents explains how the children's books and conversation cards can be used to prepare children for the return in a positive way.

The period leading up to the return, but also the initial time after the return will be intense and emotional for the child. Therefore, parents being available and having a good daily routine are extra important during this time. Tell parents this, and discuss with them how they can structure this and what kind of assistance they need in this area.

5.2.2 Tools for parents discussing the return with their children

Chapter 4 went into detail on discussing the return with children. That information can be used to give parents information and tips on discussing the return with their children.
In sum: a number of aspects are important here, which are also included in the brochure for parents:

- Honesty and clarity
- Informing children on time so that they have time to say goodbye
- Giving children space to ask questions and express their emotions
- Increasing children's resilience
- Not making the child (partially) responsible

64. Kootstra, T. (2017)
65. To develop this brochure, we drew on the brochure developed by the Ghent Refugee Taskforce, with information and tips for parents about preparing their children for the return.

Children can sense a lot, and take over their parents' fear, tension or resistance about going back. When children remain in uncertainty, their fear increases, and moreover, children can get the sense that their parents are no longer reliable and that they are being lied to. Therefore, you should always stress the importance of parents being honest towards their children, even if it is difficult and they don't want to make their children sad. Not knowing increases the risk of emotional problems after the return (due to things including children not being able to say goodbye and because their faith in their parents has diminished) and can even constitute a traumatic experience.[66]

As mentioned in Chapter 4, children need to regularly hear and be able to talk about going back. For parents, it can be hard to talk about the return and about the country of origin. It is important to show understanding for that, but to also still encourage parents to keep talking to their children. The children's books and conversation cards can help with this, and provide the option to talk to children about going back in a playful manner.

Feeling a connection with the country to which they are returning has a positive influence in children's reintegration process after the return. It is good to talk to parents about this, and to make them aware of the fact that the way they handle the return themselves, and how they talk about going back and their country of origin, has a major effect on the children. Parents can help their children by talking about the return and about the country of origin in a neutral/factual manner.[67] They can tell them what daily life is like in the country of origin, what the major holidays and celebrations are, what kind of food they used to love, show them pictures or tell them about family, friends and acquaintances in the country of origin, showing them information online, etc.

It is important for parents to understand why there should be specific attention for the child's voice in the return process, and that clarity offers children security. Consult with parents about how children can be involved in making the return plan. For older children, the children's book and conversation cards can be used to include their needs and ideas in the return plan in an accommodating manner.

As parents indicated themselves, and as we have seen in multiple studies, a strength-based approach is more effective than a problem-based approach. You can explain to parents that children often come up with good solutions for their problems and that, like their parents, they have their own ways of handling stress and the return. Examples are: exercise, being alone for a while, talking to their parents or to a friend, etc. This can also be a good segue for speaking to parents about what kind of support they need themselves, and what kind of support they think their child needs.

5.3 Increasing the quality of the upbringing environment

Upbringing in the context of migration can ask so much of parents that they get exhausted and are unable to make good on their upbringing intentions.
The next two sections go into further detail on increasing the quality of the upbringing environment. They provide tips on how to focus on the following aspects during the return procedure:

- Increasing parents' (sources of) resilience
- Validating parents in their role as educators and strengthening the parent-child relationship

As mentioned above, this should be paired with support before and after the return process.

5.3.1 Increasing parents' (sources of) resilience

Both in research and in practice, there is increasing attention towards increasing resilience in parents, and the importance of focusing on strength instead of focusing on trauma.[68] The most important resilience-increasing factors are support from their family and surroundings, maintaining their own language, faith and culture and coping strategies they have developed.[69]

Focus points for increasing parents' resilience are:
- Work based on questions
- An integral approach, with a focus on the parent(s)' surroundings and network
- Connecting to parent(s)' coping strategies
- Connecting to the parent(s)' language and culture
- Focus on risk factors that undermine the parent(s)' resilience

Focus on strength instead of trauma

Support to asylum seeker families is more effective when the focus is on increasing (existing) resilience instead of on trauma and risk factors. It is good to consider the risk factors, but it is important not to be too quick to assume trauma or retraumatisation. That undermines their own strength and agency. Asylum seekers themselves indicate that the 'label' of asylum seeker limits them, and that they do not want to be seen as a victim but as someone who has something to offer. Focusing on trauma can also lead to a family's personal needs being seen too strongly in that light, causing other factors in the return to be overlooked, such as practical needs.
On the other hand, focusing on the existing (sources of) resilience in families contributes to increasing their own strength which in many cases has weakened, due in part to the asylum period. At the same time, of course trauma and risk factors should not be ignored.

A strength-oriented approach requires:
- A focus on the parents' courage and strength and the difficulties they overcame before, during and after the migration.
- Strengthening the parents' own agency.
- Focus on the present and the future.
- An open attitude towards parents, not assuming what parents mean or what they might need.
- Balance between support and activation.
- A focus on empowerment, by for example offering professional training/courses before the return or by extending a microcredit loan after the return.

66. Brochure: Children and the Voluntary Return. Tips for guidance counsellors helping families that are returning voluntarily. (2014.
67. Brochure: Children and the Voluntary Return. Tips for guidance counsellors helping families that are returning voluntarily. (2014.
68. Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012)
69. Siriwardhana, C., Ali, S. S., Roberts, B., & Stewart, R. (2014)

Work based on questions

Security is a fundamental issue for returning families. Therefore, what is initially needed is a focus on the family's (practical) needs, such as safety, housing, (financial) security, schooling and (mental) healthcare. These primary needs should be met first, before there is space for further (psychosocial) support. In the guidance offered during the return process, it is important to connect to parents' concrete questions in the here and now, so that they feel that they are being taken seriously and you can build trust.
Clarity and a solid transfer of information are very important throughout the entire return process, to offer parents more certainty in the support you offer them.
Here, the following is important:

- Make sure that the support is available and accessible during and after the return process.
- Communication in their own language.
- Putting the support you will offer them during the return process down in writing, in terms that are as concrete as possible.
- Taking the questions parents have as a starting point in the conversation, and repeatedly checking with the parents to see if they have any new or additional questions.

Integral approach

Most asylum seeker parents come from a collectivistic culture where relationships play a large role. After the migration, for the most part, families lose this family network, but the mother and/or family in their country of origin often continues to play an important supporting role.[70] Furthermore, families who have been in the Netherlands for a longer period of time have also often built up a new network. The social network of families (both in the country of origin and in the Netherlands) can play an important role in increasing resilience. The day-to-day stress of being a parent can be significantly reduced by a social network that provides support, both before and after the return.[71] Therefore, including and reinforcing the parents' network is an important part of the guidance provided to parents during the return process. This is also important because of the relationships of trust that parents have already built with these people. Parents have many losses to deal with. In combination with negative experiences and distrust of authorities, this means that it takes time to build a relationship of trust. Therefore, it is good to be honest about what you can and what you cannot do for them, and to work with people who have already built a relationship of trust with the families and/or who can remain involved with the families on a long term.

In short: an integral approach, meaning one that considers the parents' network, is important in increasing their resilience. This can be done by:

- Including people who are important to the parents in the guidance during the return process. You can ask the parents themselves who they would like to have with them during the conversation.
- Combining informal and formal support
- Focus on strengthening a social network in the country to which the family is returning. This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

Connecting to parent(s)' coping strategies

Parents have their own ways of dealing with the return. It is good to be able to recognise that. Parents who were hoping to receive a residence permit are generally disappointed, and exhibit a lot of resistance, particularly at the start of the return process. Standing up for themselves, and resisting what they see as 'injustice', is a way to maintain control in a situation that seems to take control away from them.[72] Here, it will help to have an eye for this and validate parents instead of seeing them as difficult or defiant.

Section 5.2.1 already mentioned the various ways in which parents try to support their children in the return process. Wanting to give their children a bright future, and taking care of each other as a family are important motivations for parents not to give up. In addition to family and social support, religion is the most important source of support and comfort for asylum seekers. Therefore, it is good to consider that in the guidance you offer.[73] Most asylum seekers come from countries where religion is an integral part of life. In our secular society, it isn't obvious to mention religion, but for most asylum seekers it is normal to talk about it.

Other ways in which families deal with hardship and maintain hope to keep going are:[74]

- Being proud of each other. This can also be about what parents/children were able to do/did in their country of origin.
- Family traditions, such as how birthdays and (religious) holidays were celebrated.
- Hope-inspiring stories from families in the area.
- 'Family dreams', such as proper education for the children.
- Success stories and learning experiences from the migration and asylum period.
- Cultural involvement. The extent to which parents and children feel accepted in the culture and be able to be part of the culture affects the extent to which families experience hope for the future.

Connection to the parent(s)' language and culture

It is important for parents to be able to express themselves in their own language. They can do so with guidance counsellors from the same culture, with the use of interpreters or by involving a friend or volunteer from the same culture in the guidance and the conversations. If possible, use the same interpreter to build trust. In doing so, consider parents' preferences in terms of gender and/or region/dialect. Beforehand, talk to the interpreter and indicate what the conversation will be about (of course, maintaining privacy) and how they can interpret.[75]
As mentioned above, children can also take joy in helping and translating. They can do so if you are talking about easy, light-weight topics. It is important to then talk at the child's mental level. Do not use children as interpreters during the return conversations, as that will be too tense and emotional for the child.

70. Callewier, E. (2018)
71. Callewier, E. (2018)
72. Groeninck, M. e.a. (2019)
73. Laban, C. J., Hurulean, E., Attia, A. (2010)
74. Groeninck, M. (2019)
75. Plysier, S. (2003)

Focus on risk factors

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the challenge is to increase the children's resilience and the parents' resilience as much as possible without losing sight of their vulnerabilities and taking stock of those vulnerabilities as much as possible and taking them into account in the conversations and in the return plan.
Specific vulnerabilities for returning asylum seeker parents that can have an undermining effect on resilience are:

- Psychological problems resulting from trauma and/or long-term stress.
- Lack of agency and confidence due to the long-lasting uncertainty and dependency during the asylum procedure.
- Tension between spouses and/or children resulting from the decision to go back.
- Uncertainty about the future: financial insecurity, concerns about safety, concerns about the children's future.
- Reintegration stress: no longer feeling at home in the country of origin due to the time spent in asylum and possible changes to their 'original' values. (Further) changes to family roles.
- Discrimination: e.g. because of being an ethnic minority, because of religion, because of returning to the country as a single mother, or because of orientation.
- Lack of a social network.
- Insufficient access to (mental) healthcare after returning.

Please note: When the parent-child relationship is severely disrupted, and there are serious psychosocial problems, it is essential to work with professional help in the Netherlands and to ensure a transfer to professional help in the country of origin.

5.3.2 Strengthening the parent-child relationship

For parents, the image they have of themselves as educators is often negatively biased due to their problems, and the growing sense of powerlessness and uncertainty where the children are concerned. Parents feel powerless because they cannot give their children the future they want to give them, and often feel like they fall short in the area of upbringing.[76]

The relationship between the parents and child can change during their time in the Netherlands due to differences in integration. We often see that children quickly learn the language and integrate in Dutch society while parents fall behind. This can cause tensions, particularly in fathers who have lost their position as the breadwinner and who is often surpassed by his wife and children when it comes to integrating and learning the language. This often leads to psychosocial issues.[77]

Another common phenomenon is parentification, which means that the children start taking care of the parents, no longer share their own problems to unburden their parents and then (partially) take on the role of the parent as they are able to more quickly integrate in Dutch society and are better at learning and speaking Dutch.

Tips for accommodating assistance:
- Increase parents' support. Here, it is important to boost confidence and improve the upbringing environment.[78]
- Focus on positive upbringing techniques.
- Protect and reinforce the parent(s)-child relationship.

These aspects are explained further below.

Increasing parents' support

Confirming the importance of their role and boosting their confidence are important first steps in helping parents. You can boost parents' confidence by paying them specific compliments. Ask parents about the daily lives they had before their time in the Netherlands. What did they do? What energised them? How did they raise their children? Who helped them with that? What are they able to do themselves and what do they need help with?[79] Talk to the parent about what their youth was like in their country of origin. What did they enjoy, what might they have missed out on and what would they want to be able to give their child?[80] In the conversation, you can help parents think about possible resources to help them raise their children when they are back in their country of origin. A good partner organisation in the country of origin can also play a role here.

Focus on positive upbringing techniques

Positive upbringing techniques and a good parent-child relationship can protect child development in stressful times.[81] Positive upbringing techniques include: positive reinforcement, active involvement in and supervision of children's activities, open expressions of warmth and love, and sensitive parenting, meaning meeting the needs of the child, offering structure and setting clear boundaries. Children who experience their upbringing as supportive generally exhibit more resilience and have a lower chance of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD.[82]

Chapter 6 goes into further detail on the effect of migration on parents' methods of upbringing. In some cases, the quality of the upbringing increases because the upbringing is no longer taken for granted like it was before the migration, and parents more consciously deal with raising and supporting their children. For other parents, the asylum period results in a (more) rigid upbringing with firmer discipline, or to setting fewer boundaries and spoiling children.

Protect and reinforce the parent(s)-child relationship

Family relationships can play an important protective role in children's development, but they can also constitute a risk factor. It is far from black and white. For example: on the one hand, the migration and return process can strengthen a child asylum seeker's bond with and dependency on their parents.

76. Hoet, H. & Kaeblen, L. (2016).
77. Kootstra, T. (2017).
78. Distelbrink, M., Pels, T. V. M., Tan, S., & Aarts, W. (2013).
79. Möhle, M., Tuk, B., Wassink, M., Kooijman, K. & Kleijweg, L. (2017).
80. Kootstra, T. (2017). p.58
81. Kotchick, Beth & Forehand, Rex. (2002), Tol, Song & Jordans, 2013
82. Eruyar, S. (2018), Thabet e.a. (2009)

On the other, the migration's resulting vulnerability in both the parents and the children can make this relationship a risk factor. Many child asylum seekers have ambivalent feelings about their parents.[83] On the one hand, they have a strong bond with their parents because they know that their parents fled to protect them and/or give them a better future. Children see how much their parents do for them and what they have given up for them. That makes them feel supported, loyal and responsible (which, again, can be a source of strength as well as a risk factor). On the other hand, we see that children can also clash with their parents: differences in acculturation, parents 'weakening', differences in how they handle stress, etc. Children's loyalty to their parents can then lead to feelings of guilt. Making the decision to go back can also cause tensions between parents or between the parent(s) and the child(ren).
For parents, feelings of powerlessness and failure mainly play a large role. Here, too, vulnerability and resilience tie into each other. Even parents who are convinced that they have no more strength left to be there for their children still expect certain things of their children.[84] If you can connect to that and the parents feel heard and helped, you will see that parents in the return process slowly start to regain their agency and take action.

As previously mentioned, the parent-child relationship should be protected and reinforced before the return stage. A great example is the implementation of multiple family groups by the foundation Centrum'45, a treatment and expertise centre for psychotrauma. These multiple family groups are based on Multi Family Therapy, developed in England, and are used as a preventive programme for asylum seekers and refugee families to support parents in their parenthood and to increase the family's resilience.[85]

During the return stage, you can focus on strengthening the relationship by:

- Focusing on what is already there, meaning confirming and reinforcing positive interactions between the parent and the child.
- Focusing on the father's role, validating his role and consciously involving him in the process of supporting the child.
  To illustrate, here is an example: an Armenian family did not receive a residence permit in the Netherlands, and therefore had to return to Armenia. The father had developed psychological problems during the asylum procedure. He felt like he fell short for his family and children and got stuck in a downward spiral. During the first return conversations with Solid Road, the man did not take much initiative. There was a lot of resistance to the return and he was distrustful of the offered help. Despite that, the father did come to every conversation and, along with his wife, attended the conversation scheduled with the aid worker to discuss concerns regarding their daughter. At the start of the conversation, the aid worker mentioned the father's strength and efforts to be there for this conversation about his daughter. They acknowledged the fact that this period is very stressful, and the father's resistance to the return. They stated that there are also fathers who leave the conversations about their children to their wives, and that the fact that he was there showed his dedication to his family. The father clearly felt validated in his role, and that his struggles were recognised. This created an openness for the rest of the conversation, in which the father showed more initiative.
- Keeping an eye on the whole family system in providing guidance to the children. Focusing on just the children can even undermine the parent-child relationship.

In conclusion

This chapter discussed both the vulnerabilities and the resilience of parents and the importance of a strength-oriented approach. At the same time, we see that the resilience of almost all parents assisted by Solid Road during the return process is (severely) impaired. Asylum seekers more often have psychological and physical health problems than people without a migration background.[86] Furthermore, sometimes coping strategies work for a short period, but prove to be dysfunctional on the long term. Combined with children's vulnerability and strong dependency on their parents during and after the return, this shows the importance of (long-term) support for parents.
Therefore, identifying resources and the guidance and monitoring of both children and parents after the return is essential for more returning families. Chapter 7 will cover this in further detail.

83. Groeninck, M. e.a. (2019)
84. Pharos (2016)
85. Pharos (2016)
86. Soydaş, S. and Mooren, T. (2015)

6. Upbringing in asylum seeker families

6.1 Introduction

Culture is a major influence in how parents raise their children. It affects how parents view their child's behaviour and development, how they see their job as a parent and which values they find important for their children. Knowledge of cultural factors that influence upbringing enables a better understanding of asylum seeker parents, and prevents quick assumptions based on Western values. The effect of upbringing on a child's development cannot be seen separately from the culture within which the upbringing takes place. When the upbringing aligns with the culture's social-cultural values, the effect on the child will be different than when the same upbringing takes place in a culture with other social-cultural values.
For example: an authoritarian upbringing does not necessarily have to have a negative effect on the child in Arab culture, while an authoritarian upbringing within Dutch culture has a higher chance of harmful effects on the child. In poorer and/or dangerous areas, a more authoritarian style of upbringing, with more intense control of and supervision of children and a stronger focus on obedience, can even protect the child more than a style of upbringing in which children are given more autonomy.[87]

To gain more understanding of the context within which asylum seeker parents have to raise children, section 6.2 provides more information on the effect of migration on upbringing. Section 6.3 goes into further detail on cultural differences that are relevant in order to understand and offer proper guidance to returning child asylum seekers, such as: differences in child development and upbringing, communication and dealing with trauma.

When identifying cultural differences, we generally distinguish between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The most individualistic countries are in North America, Australia and Northern and Western Europe. Most countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America are collectivistic countries.[88] Initially, cultural differences will be viewed from this dichotomy.
Cultural beliefs and values in asylum families are - as they have been part of a different (individualistic) culture for a (long) period of time - generally no longer the same as they were when their left their country. Therefore, you will also have to consider the influence of acculturation (the change process that comes about through prolonged, direct contact with another culture) in the upbringing and the parent-child relationship within asylum seeker families.

6.2 The effect of migration on upbringing

Upbringing in the context of migration asks a lot of parents. They have to process their own (traumatic) experiences and losses, while also supporting and raising their children. Furthermore, the migration has taken away the family network and the self-evidence of the upbringing, so there is often a lack of social support. Parents and children are more dependent on one another, which in many cases means that their roles (have to) change. This can cause tensions in the relationship(s) and a fear of the family falling apart, resulting in a reduced or entire lack of supporting value offered by

this relationship(s). There are also often concerns about family left behind (including children), as well as financial and social obligations.

For parents, the well-being and future of their children are an important reason to not give up. Despite the difficult situation, many parents can still provide sufficient care to their children, and develop enough coping strategies and resilience to go on. At the same time, we see that parents have to adapt for a long time, exhausting their coping strategies. In those cases, parents do not always manage to be emotionally available enough to their children, or offer them enough structure, support and boundaries. As a result, children can develop problems, which can become a new source of stress to parents, and that often leads to feelings of guilt and failure.
Moreover, child asylum seekers can exhibit behavioural problems as a result of trauma or stress, such as hyperactivity, aggression, concentration issues, etc. That can be very tough on parents, and with their own stress or lack of knowledge, parents are not always able to properly interpret or respond to this kind of behaviour.
Parents can also tend to want to protect their child too much, for fear of their being traumatised again, or because of feeling guilty about what they have been through. Many parents experience stress and guilt because they feel that they have fallen short as parents. This can cause them to be too lenient to their children, setting fewer boundaries and 'spoiling' their children. Parents with post-traumatic stress disorder are an extra risk group here. Research shows that they can be less sensitive, apply less structure, and be more irritable or suddenly react harshly or inconsistently to their child.[89]

The most commonly mentioned undermining factor in upbringing is the constant uncertainty about the future. A prolonged stay at an Asylum Seekers Centre intensifies existing vulnerabilities and tensions, but also undermines resilience and it is an important risk factor for the development of psychiatric problems such as anxiety disorders, depression and psychosomatic issues. Research conducted among Iraqi asylum seekers showed that the duration of the asylum procedure contributed to the development of psychiatric problems even more than the intense experiences they had in Iraq. Particularly the lack of work, (worries about) family, loneliness and the stress of the asylum procedure played a major role here.[90]
Not being able to decide how to structure your life, not being able to work, the dependency on organisations and procedures affects parents' well-being and confidence, and thus often also the upbringing of and the relationship with their children. The sense of powerlessness that parents have often results in a loss of strength and motivation, which extends to all areas of life, including children's upbringing, making them less and less able to handle the responsibility for their children.[91]

Parents also sense the lack of control in the relationship with their children. They worry about their safety and development. For many mothers, it is difficult to see that their children are often out of sight, and they worry about the influence of other children and other cultural habits. Parents generally find Western values to be too free, and they are concerned about the behavioural changes they see in their children. The fear of losing their control and authority over their children can lead to a more rigid upbringing and stricter discipline.

87. Kotchick, Beth & Forehand, Rex. (2002)
88. Nunez, C. e.a. (2017)
89. Ee. Van E. (2013)
90. Pharos (2017)
91. Callewier, E. (2018)

Another source of stress and insecurity for parents is living and raising children in a different culture. A recurring theme in asylum seekers is frequently feeling misunderstood, and lacking information about cultural habits and values (about upbringing) in the asylum country, (access to) education, healthcare, organisations, etc.[92] Parents can feel overwhelmed by the new language, customs, values, systems, etc. The migration changed their (socio-economic) status and position. Parents have to deal with this themselves while also supporting their children in dealing with their status as an asylum seeker. In this regard, parents say they suffer from prejudice. This can vary from discrimination to (well-intended) stereotyping.
Cultural differences, and negative experiences with organisations, often leads to (experienced) distrust and misunderstanding of and towards 'the system' (education, aid workers, healthcare, etc.).

To many asylum seekers, their connection to family/friends and their own culture in the country of origin is very important. Their own culture, language, values and religion are an important source of pride and strength. Maintaining and passing on culture, language, values and religion is generally considered very important in maintaining an own identity and a connection in the family/with relatives and in protecting children from negative influences in the asylum country.[93]
With all the losses and insecurities, many parents start to hold on more tightly to what is safe and familiar to them, from the past. People from the same country or relatives in the country of origin can be a major source of support. Particularly the mother in the country of origin continues to play an important supporting role.[94] Vice versa, she can also play a negative, controlling role by offering negative reactions to parents mixing in influences from the asylum country's culture in their children's upbringing.

Parents have difficulties, but also positive experiences that come out of the migration, such as: feeling safe, hope for a better future for the children through the education they receive, enrichment by learning a new language and customs, new relationships and access to healthcare and legal systems in the asylum country.

6.3 Cultural differences in the area of child development and upbringing, values, communication, and dealing with 'trauma'

Collectivistic vs. Individualistic cultures

Most asylum seeker families come from collectivistic cultures. In short, collectivistic cultures mainly revolve around family and the group, while individualistic cultures focus on the individual, and on personal development. This means that the guidance during the return process should focus not only on the individual interests of the children and the parents, but also take into account the influence of the extended family. Important goals of upbringing in collectivistic cultures are related to conformity, both socially and in a moral-religious sense. Values linked to this are: respect and obedience towards parents/elders, good manners, modesty, being devout, no dishonourable behaviour, etc. Additionally, prestige in society through a good education and job also play a large role in upbringing, particularly with sons. The overview in Appendix 8 lists the general differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures in the area of child development and upbringing, values, communication, and dealing with 'trauma'.

The overview in Appendix 8 can help to better connect with parents when providing guidance during the return process. There, it is important to keep in mind that the differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures are very generalised. In most cultures, autonomy and connection do not occur so much as opposites, but coexist in different forms, and can also reinforce one another. For example, parents from collectivistic cultures can see confidence (autonomy) in children as a valuable trait in establishing relationships (connection). Furthermore, factors like the level of education, own experiences with upbringing, and the extent of acculturation also create differences. To mothers with a higher level of education, achievements and conformity are generally less important, and they value autonomy more.[95]
Moreover, there are also differences between collectivistic cultures and ethnic groups. For example, the importance of education is deeply rooted in the cultures of the Middle East and Asia, and we see that in those countries, people still highly value (good) education, while in Africa, that widely differs per country. Comparative research shows that in over half of the countries in Africa, people value personal connections more than education.[96]

Knowledge of cultural differences can help, but it is most important to keep an eye for the unique situation and needs of each family. For this, it is essential not be too quick to make assumptions, mainly by listening to the parents (and children) themselves and talking to them about (cultural) factors that play a role in the development and upbringing of children.

Acculturation

Culture is not static; it is dynamic, and changes with time and with situations. The term acculturation is used to describe the process of change in cultural beliefs and people's behaviour towards another culture, which arises through close contact with another culture, such as in the case of migration. By living in an individualistic culture for a long time, asylum seeker parents can take over that culture's values and ideas.
For example, in the area of upbringing, parents can move from a more authoritarian style of upbringing towards a more democratic style of upbringing, where there is room for setting boundaries and control, but also for the autonomy of the child. An Afghan mother said she had to change up some aspects of Afghan culture because otherwise, her children would get frustrated and alienated from their parents.[97]

Here, we see that parents' deeper beliefs often remain based in the collectivistic culture. For parents, this can cause tension, e.g. because parents worry about there being too strong a focus on autonomy, which can result in children losing their family heritage. So, though parents in asylum can take up influences from the culture in the country to which they migrated, most parents staying at an Asylum Seekers Centre do place major importance on their own culture's upbringing.
Parents rely on what is safe and familiar, from the past, and feel extra responsible for passing on cultural values. This applies even more strongly to parents who are ethnic minorities.[98]

92. Merry, L. e.a. (2017)
93. Merry, L. e.a. (2017)
94. Callewier, E. (2018)
95. Pels, T. and de Gruijter, M. (2005)
96. Crabtree, S. (2014)
97. Ryan, L. & Vacchelli, E. (2013)
98. Callewier, E. (2018)

Different upbringing traditions in the country to which they are returning can deeply impact returning children. Research among child asylum seekers returning to Kosovo and Albania showed that after returning, parents sometimes revert to upbringing styles and standards that are common there. A father who occasionally hit his children after returning said: 'That wasn't allowed in the asylum country; it is here.' He also stated that he didn't hit his children in the asylum country because he was afraid of them 'being taken away from him'. Schools in countries to which these children return sometimes also use corporal punishment. Therefore, it is important to discuss customs of upbringing with the parents, and to ensure thorough monitoring after the return. Moreover, it is essential to meet with parents to consider how to make sure the transfer to a different culture with different customs harms the children as little as possible by preparing them (the Toolkit can be used for this) and by working with a partner organisation in the country to which they are returning when facilitating the transfer to a suitable school and providing guidance in the reintegration process.

Religion and upbringing

Religion can be an important source of support for (returning) asylum families. For many asylum families, religion is an important part of their identity and determines their values. As their goal of upbringing, many parents in asylum indicated that they wanted to keep their children 'on the right path', whereby religion plays an important role. Parents often worry about the effect Western values have on their children, particularly with daughters. This can also be a reason to want to go back to their own country.

In sum:

Understanding parents is the starting point for trust and for proper guidance. That means: considering the effect of migration on upbringing, a focus on cultural differences in terms of upbringing, and knowledge of how parents themselves experience the upbringing and guidance of their children in their current situation.

7. Monitoring and guidance in the country of origin

7.1 Introduction

Multiple studies confirm the importance of and lack of attention to the guidance and monitoring of families after their return.[99] In practice, we see that in the period leading up to the return, families experience so much stress that they are mostly trying to survive. They often do not start to actually process and consider the reintegration in practical terms until after they return. Moreover, families have to deal with changes and uncertainties in the country to which they are returning, which requires flexibility in the range of reintegration and proper guidance after the return.[100]

Because of the vulnerability of returning children, and because of risk factors after the return, guidance and monitoring after the return are actually essential in facilitating returning children's safety and development. As described in Appendix 2, after returning, in many cases children are not safe, have psychosocial problems, and have inadequate material and legal security and protection.

General risk factors after returning are

- The safety situation in the country they are returning to.
- Poorly functioning child protection system and legal system.
- No access to/alignment in education.
- Vulnerable to recruitment, child labour and forced marriage.
- Difficulty with the reintegration process, lack of or limited social network.
- Instability, uncertainty about the future.
- Psychological and/or medical issues.
- Inadequate upbringing environment.

Risk factors are often interconnected. The increased vulnerability to damage in children resulting from an inadequate upbringing environment (due to stress in and/or absence of parents) is intensified by an often small social network after the return and a poorly functioning child protection system. A child not having a legal identity can limit their rights, access to education, etc. Not having access to education can in turn lead to increasing psychosocial problems and increasing susceptibility to recruitment, child labour and/or forced marriage.

Therefore, guiding families with children during the return process should always be paired with:

- Child-specific reintegration support and monitoring after the return
- Working with a partner organisation in the country to which they are returning
- Alignment with/reinforcement of local (and national) programmes/parties that focus on protecting and psychosocial support for children.

99. UNICEF (2019), Save the Children International (2018)
100. Chu, B. e.a. (2008)

7.2 Guidance in the country of origin

The kind of (extra) guidance needed in the country of origin should be determined as much as possible before the return and included in the return plan.
Based on the previously listed risk factors, we will now discuss the next five focus points for the partner organisation to guide the children in the country of origin:

- Alignment in education.
- Building a social network.
- Psychosocial guidance during reintegration.
- Support for the parent(s).
- Monitoring reintegration progress and child-specific risk factors.

Alignment in education & Building a social network

As described in Chapter 2, extra language lessons are important for returning child asylum seekers to be able to participate in education, make contact with peers and to facilitate their overall reintegration after the return.[101] To build a social network and increase the resilience of returning children, attention should also be paid to their ability to participate in social activities. In addition, particularly in the initial period after the return, children who have returned need extra guidance and support, to learn to deal with the differences in education, manners, and possible discrimination.

Possible ways in which the partner organisation can offer this support:

- Having regularly scheduled family conversations as part of the monitoring process.
- Having regularly scheduled individual counselling sessions with the children as part of the monitoring process.
- Informing schools and assisting in the reception of returning children.
- Selecting schools that better accommodate children returning from Europe, because of the experience and/or capacity the schools have. To illustrate, here is an example: *In The Green Way project, the partner organisation contacted an Armenian-Argentinian primary school with experience in guiding children who temporarily lived outside Armenia. The classes at this school are a bit smaller than at other primary schools, and it offers the option to receive extra (language) lessons.*
- Align with existing programmes that focus on psychosocial support and on improving education for children in the city/town/area in question.

Psychosocial guidance during reintegration

Focus on social embedding after the return
A return can only be sustainable if families can reintegrate, which requires both a safe environment, options to generate income, and social acceptance and embedding in the country to which they have returned.[102]
Research conducted on the experiences of returned asylum seekers shows that social embedding can be difficult and takes time, and that extra (psychosocial) support is beneficial in this process.[103]

After the return, feelings of guilt and shame often played a role (due to having abandoned family and friends when the family fled), as well as getting used to a 'new identity'. Moreover, some returned families did not feel welcome anymore, and felt as though they were seen as outsiders, sometimes even as traitors. In some cases, they were resented for having brought over 'bad' Western habits, or they were seen as a threat or as a burden due to their lack of money, work, land, housing, etc. There was also not much understanding for or interest in the family's asylum period in Europe, and it was therefore not talked about.[104]
Factors that played a role in the process of social embedding are:

- The extent of contact with family and friends in the country of origin during the asylum period.
- The expectations about how the return will go.[105]
- The motivation, abilities and resilience of returning families.[106]

Expectations about how the return will go are mainly formed before going back. Contact with the partner organisation before the return can help to test family's expectations, fears and obstacles against reality. Furthermore, this adds to the family's trust in the partner organisation's abilities and support.
Here, it is essential for families to see that the partner organisation has a positive view of the current situation in the country/city to which they are returning, that they are realistic and that they do not ignore the family's concerns.

Returned families/children often encounter jealousy for having received support, money and guidance. It is important to take this into account and to look at how the return guidance can not just help the individual family, but also the local community in the area to which they are returning. The Danish Refugee Council indicates that a sustainable return (particularly to former war zones) requires support from the existing capacity in the country to which the family is returning. They recommend developing country-specific return programmes that combine individual return guidance with support to the local community. This also promotes the integration of returning families.[107] Section 7.3 goes into further detail on support towards and connecting with the existing capacity in the country of origin.

Focus on the psychosocial guidance of children (and supporting their parents) after the return
Within the current return guidance, we mainly focus on families' and children's physical safety. There is often no consideration for psychosocial support after the return and long-term difficulties in the area of reintegration.
The previous chapters discussed the increased vulnerability of returning children, the of the return, and potential factors that can lead to stagnation in processing the return.

101. Chu, B. e.a. (2008)
102. Chu, B. e.a. (2008)
103. Ghanem, T. (2003)
104. Ghanem, T. (2003), Pharos (2011, 2017)
105. Ghanem, T. (2003)
106. Chu, B. e.a. (2008)
107. Chu, B. e.a. (2008)

Factors mentioned were:
- A culmination of risk factors.
- 'Incomplete' grieving process because the child was unable to say a proper goodbye.
- The child has to process the return during a stressful period.
- 'Putting a pin in' processing the return due to danger or due to a child's loyalty to their parents.
- Unprocessed losses and or traumatic experiences from the past.

In practice, all these factors prove to exist to some extent, which means there is generally not enough room for 'healthy' grieving and processing and there is often an increased risk of developmental damage after the return. Therefore, psychosocial guidance for children after the return is essential. This guidance should focus on providing a safe environment for a long-term period, within which children can process their migration and losses and assign meaning to them.[108] To help with this, the children's books and conversation cards can also be used after the return.
However, if this guidance is offered by insufficiently trained or experienced people, it can do more harm than good. It is therefore important to:
- Take stock of the support/training required of the return migration organisation.
- Connect to, combine and reinforce the existing capacity.
This is discussed further in section 7.3.

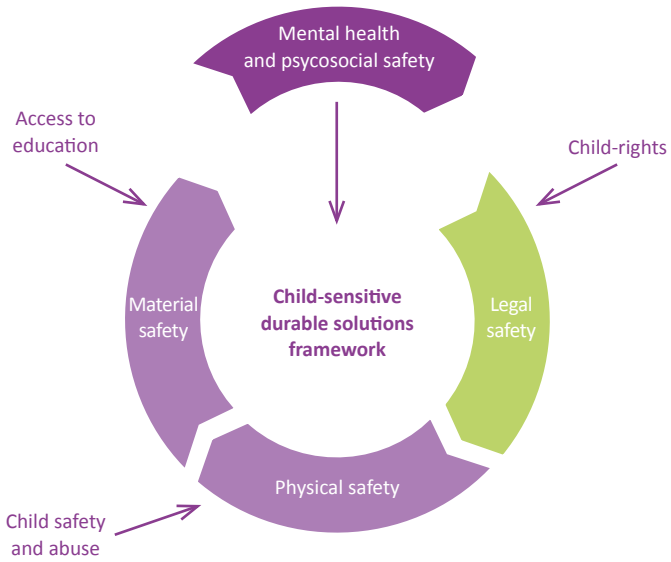
Previous chapters went into detail on the importance of (long-term) support for parents, both before and after the return. Support for parents after the return should mainly focus on:
- Increasing resources.
- Both practical and psychosocial support.
- Strengthening family cohesion.

Monitoring the reintegration progress and potential risk factors

An important component of monitoring is identifying measurable goals to determine whether children have successfully reintegrated after the return.
Various frameworks/tools were developed to measure reintegration progress. An example is the IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) Framework, which is used to measure the reintegration of Internal Displaced People. This framework looks at the following eight criteria:[109]
1. Long-term safety and security.
2. Adequate standard of living.
3. Access to work and means of subsistence.
4. Housing, access to land and property.
5. Access to personal documentation.
6. Voluntary family reunion.
7. Participation in public life.
8. Access to required legal support.

As this does not focus on indicators and psychosocial guidance after the return, Save the Children developed a framework based on the IASC framework (see image)[110]. This framework assumes the three core dimensions used by the UNCHR, to which Save the Children has added a fourth dimension: that of mental health and psychosocial safety.

Child-specific: additions to the IASC Indicator framework



A third framework that can be used is the 'Post Return Support and Monitoring Framework', developed as part of the AIDAH project, a joint project shared by 8 NGOs, to protect the interests of returning children during the return process.[111] With their permission, the monitoring tool they developed was included as Appendix 9 in this manual.

Chapter 2 discussed how to identify risk factors and take them into account in the return plan. The return plan can also serve as a base for monitoring conversations with parents and children, and for compiling progress reports.

Monitoring period

Experience and research show that guidance should start immediately after the return and that families should be monitored for at least a year.
The IASC framework states that a sustainable solution has been reached when families no longer need specific return-related support and protection, and they are no longer experiencing discrimination as a result of the return.

108. Vostanis, P. and Tosun, C. (2018)
109. Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (2010)
110. Majidi, N. & Barratt, S. (2018)
111. Nemeht-Almasi, J. & Delaney, S. (2014)

Save The Children defines a return as sustainable when families are economically self-sufficient, and when they have social and psychological stability, enabling them to handle any other difficulties resulting from the (re)migration. In the monitoring process, they recommend looking at the extent to which the risk factors of returned children are related to the return, or whether those factors are the same as for children who have always lived in that area. In that case, there can still be needs and vulnerabilities, but these should then be part of general programmes, so as not to create a division.

Monitoring in The Green Way

In The Green Way project, Armenian families were guided and monitored for one year after returning to Armenia. Prior to the return, a return plan was made and discussed with the partner organisation in the country of origin. This return plan considers primary needs like housing and income generating activities, schooling for the children, potential child-specific risk factors and sources of resilience, and protective measures to be taken (such as extra language classes, psychosocial support, finding a football club, etc.).
After the return, the family contacts the partner organisation to make an appointment for a further introduction and to discuss the (required) assistance. There is an evaluation every two months, during which the family and the partner organisation discuss the execution of the return plan and how the reintegration process is going, by means of a 'progress report'. After the evaluation, the partner organisation sends the report to Solid Road and they discuss any particulars that need to be discussed. Solid Road visits the returned families and the partner organisation once a year to monitor the progress.

7.3 Building capacity

At the start of this manual, we already briefly mentioned that in order to facilitate a sustainable return, individual interventions for returning families should be paired with a focus on building capacity in the country to which they are returning regarding education, (mental) healthcare and child protection. Support in the country to which the child is returning should contribute to sustainable solutions, and contribute to acceptance from and integration in the community.

Focus points here are:

- Including families returning from Europe (as much as possible) in existing support systems for returned children/families in and in national development programmes.

  To illustrate, here is an example: In Afghanistan, the 'Displacement and Return Executive Committee' (DiREC) was established to ensure that returned citizens were included in national development programmes and had access to basic provisions (such as land and housing) and income-generating activities.[112]

- A specific focus on connecting to national and local child-specific interventions/programmes in the areas of education, (mental) healthcare and child protection.

To illustrate, here is an example: Save The Children indicates that the current support for child asylum seekers returning from Europe to Afghanistan is fragmented. There are no guidelines or targeted support to connect the reintegration of returned children with other child-specific interventions.[113] *They recommend identifying and properly coordinating existing child-specific support to prevent overlap and to prevent gaps in the support system.*[114]

- Include specific guidelines for (the protection of) children/families that returned from Europe in policy frameworks for returned citizens and IDPs and in child protection legislation.
- Identify gaps in the access to legal support between local children and returned children.
- Improve national and local child protection systems.

To illustrate, here is an example: UNICEF established a child protection monitoring mechanism in Afghanistan. This officially documents serious children's rights violations in a monitoring system at a national level. Based on this, people can determine which programmes are needed and lobby the government and militias for changes. To illustrate, here is an example: schools in the Helmand province were constantly being attacked or used by soldiers. UNICEF documented this children's rights violation, which eventually resulted in a major success: the soldiers retreated from the schools.[115]

- Integrate an international, national and regional framework. Implement policy principles in practice. Develop concrete (local) guidelines, protocols and procedures in the area of child protection, access to education and (mental) healthcare for (migrant) children.

To illustrate: Examples of steps to be taken here (based on recommendations from the Middle East Research Institute on the migration policy in Iraq) are[116]*:*

- *Integrate the specific (protection) needs of returned children/families in the (national) migration policy.*
- *Translate policy in national legislation to make it legally binding.*
- *Set up a participatory framework for sustainable solutions. A 'round table' can be set up for this purpose, comprising experts in the field of migration and protection and the reintegration of (internally) returning families/children. Children's rights organisations and community institutions should be actively involved in this.*
- *Decentral implementation/execution of the policy, by appointing regional leaders, for example. Coordination and monitoring should be carried out by the ministry, with the leaders having a high level of autonomy.*

112. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) & The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations Afghanistan (2020)
113. Majidi, N. & Barratt, S. (2018)
114. Majidi, N. & Barratt, S. (2018)
115. https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/child-protection
116. Edgcumbe, S.L. (2019)

- Consideration of the local community (in the form of (collaboration with) emergency/ developmental aid, community projects, microcredit loans, etc.). Consultation and coordination with local authorities and stakeholders in the development, planning, execution and monitoring process is important here.

  To illustrate: The Danish Refugee Council recommends developing country-specific return programmes that combine individual return guidance with support to the local community. This also promotes the integration of returning families.[117] *Part of the reintegration budget for six families returning to the same town was used for a project to improve the town's water supply. This benefited both the returning families and the community.*[118]

- A multidisciplinary approach. This can include:
  - Cooperation between different sectors in policy-making; education, means of subsistence/ income-generating activities, (mental) health, children's rights system. Set up regional workgroups (including involved ministries, local government, national and international stakeholders).[119]
  - Linking formal and informal care.
  - Linking/setting up a structured network of (local) social organisations to:
    - Share knowledge in relevant areas such as education and (extra) classes for children, local healthcare facilities, psychosocial support in the return process, working on social inclusion and reintegration.[120]
    - Be able to develop a shared approach to improve the child protection system and available mental healthcare.
    - Build capacity. Promote professional development through shared training, intervision. Be able to make use of each other's expertise and resources.

- With the complexity and multitude of factors that affect the psychosocial development of (returned) child asylum seekers, it is important that interventions focus on both the child and the child's social context (in which parent(s)/family and school play the largest role), and that interventions are integrated.[121]

- Offer training and training materials for professionals (in collaboration with the partner organisation). Create awareness and offer training (within the national and local child protection system) on the rights and specific needs of child migrants. Work together with universities and other possible training centres.

In conclusion:

In conclusion: A systematic national approach is often difficult, due to factors including the small number of families returning from Europe (at the same time). In many cases, a bottom-up approach involving collaboration with local NGOs proves more effective.

117. Chu, B. e.a. (2008)
118. Chu, B. e.a. (2008)
119. Edgcumbe, S.L. (2019)
120. Edgcumbe, S.L. (2019)
121. Eruyar, S., Huemer, J., & Vostanis, P. (2018)

8. A multidisciplinary approach

A multidisciplinary approach is important to ensure that the needs of the child are properly identified, and to sufficiently take the child's interests into account in the return process. With the complexity and multitude of factors that affect the psychosocial development of returning child asylum seekers, it is important that:

- interventions focus on both the child and the child's social context (in which parent(s)/family and school play the largest role).
- interventions are integrated.[122]

Accepting the return is generally a difficult process for parent(s) and children. In practice, we have seen that regarding the return, they receive different, sometimes conflicting advice and information from both professionals and the network they have around them.[123]
Collaboration, coordination and transparency in the return process contributes to interventions reinforcing instead of undermining each other.

Components of a multidisciplinary approach are:

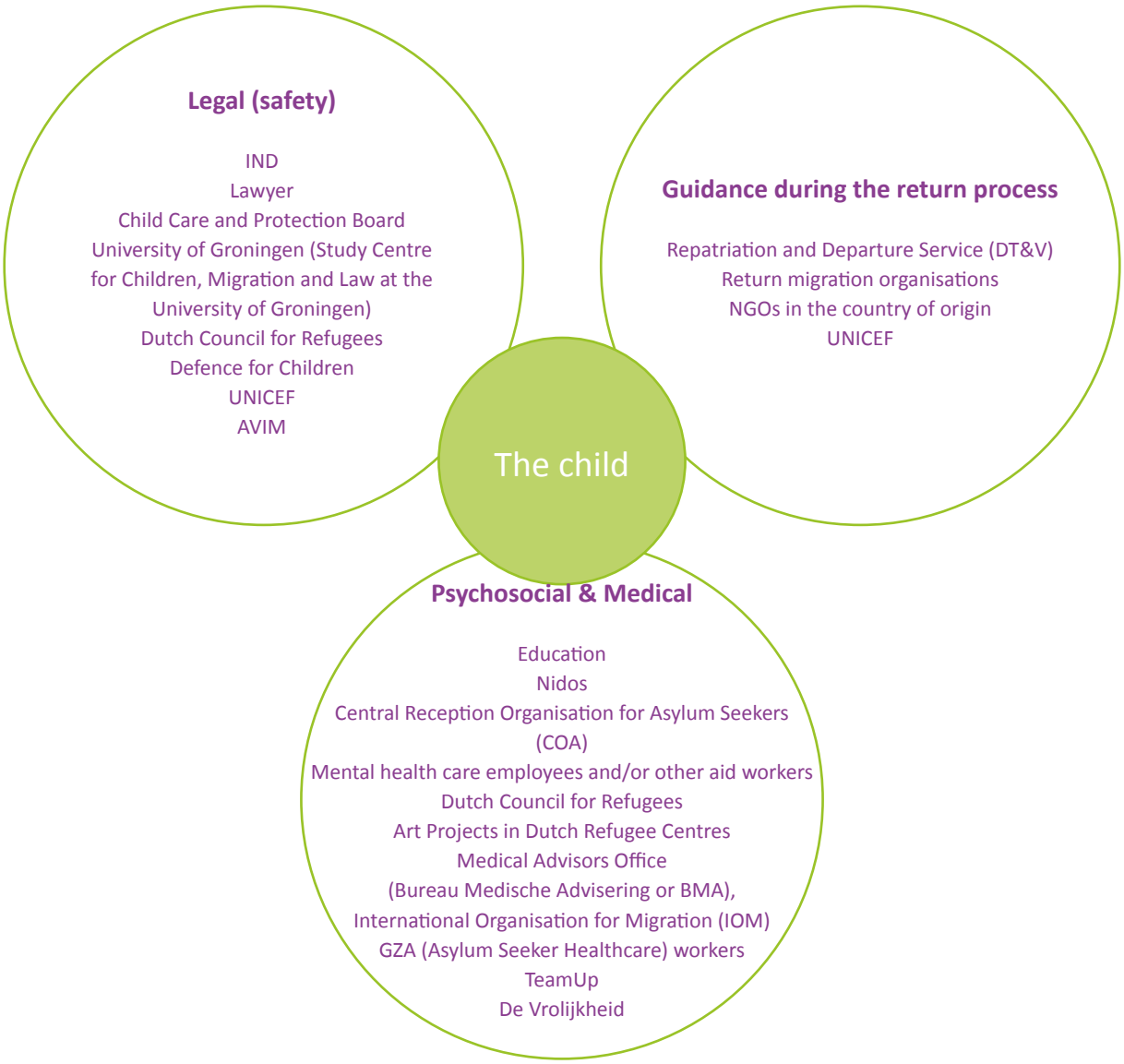
- Identifying involved parties or stakeholders surrounding the child.
- Developing a shared vision and (integration in existing) policy.
- Clarity about each party's role, possibilities and limitations. Linking formal and informal support.
- Developing a communication structure.

Identifying involved parties or stakeholders surrounding the child

Coordinating interventions and roles starts with identifying involved parties or stakeholders surrounding the child and family. The following overview outlines and categorises national formal assistance based on these three focus areas: Legal, Psychosocial & Medical, Guidance during the return process.
Further mapping could be done (during an expert meeting) per stakeholder:

- Their role in the children's guidance and protecting their interests in the return process.
- The procedures, resources and interventions they use and/or have developed for this purpose.
- Which other stakeholders they are in contact with and what consultation and communications are used.

122. Eruyar, S., Huemer, J., & Vostanis, P. (2018)
123. UNICEF (2019)



There is already a coalition and/or consultation structure between various stakeholders. These include:

The Local Repatriation Consultation (LTO)
The Local Repatriation Consultation (LTO) has employees from the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V), the Central Reception Organisation for Asylum Seekers (COA), the Aliens Police, Identification, and Human Trafficking Department (AVIM) and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). The goal of the Local Repatriation Consultation is to work together to facilitate an independent (or if necessary, forced) departure of asylum seeker (families) for whom all consideration of their applications has been exhausted and to monitor their departure process.[124]

The 'Interest of the Child' workgroup
This workgroup consists of representatives from the Child Care and Protection Board, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) and the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V). The workgroup meets when children or parents are going through a procedure with the Child Care and Protection

Board and the IND or the DT&V. The goal of this workgroup is to find a sustainable solution for a stable future for the child. This can pertain to their stay in the Netherlands, or to appropriate support for the parents in the process of returning to their country of origin.[125]

Workgroup: Children in Asylum Seekers Centres
The Children in Asylum Seekers Centres workgroup is a coalition between UNICEF the Netherlands, Defence for Children, the Dutch Council for Refugees, War Child, De Vrolijkheid and Save The Children Netherlands. This workgroup protects the rights and interests of children in asylum seekers centres to improve their situation at the ASC.

Developing a shared vision and (integration in existing) policy

Mapping can be used to determine how to include more cooperation, coordination and transparency in the return process. Here, you can look at 'key figures' in each area of expertise that can play a central role in developing a cooperation and communication structure.
The collaboration includes:

- Forming a shared vision for the children's guidance and protecting their interests in the return process, and (integration in the existing) policy.
- Developing a formalised 'Best Interest of the Child Assessment' to determine whether the interests of the child are sufficiently accounted for in the asylum and return procedure.
- Exchanging information and coordinating interventions during the return procedure of individual families, with the objective being a safe and sustainable return for the children involved.

The first two items are carried out more on a policy level, while the third item concerns working together in practice.

This manual[126] recommends:

- Forming a coalition of representatives from all three areas to carry out the first two items. This could be a coalition between UNICEF, the Child Care and Protection Board, the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V), Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), Central Reception Organisation for Asylum Seekers (COA), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Dutch Council for Refugees and Solid Road.
- Having a multidisciplinary team for returning families including: a supervisor, case manager, lawyer and representative of the involved return migration organisation(s). This could also be structured by a (regular) extension of the Local Repatriation Consultation (LTO) to include the lawyer involved and a representative of the involved return migration organisation(s).

Please note: Currently, lawyers are not always involved in the return process. UNICEF's report states and in practice, Solid Road has seen that working with lawyers is beneficial. A lawyer closely involved in the return guidance provided to an Armenian family in The Green Way project indicated that it is important to involve lawyers in the return procedure.

124. https://www.coa.nl/nl/asielopvang/vertrek-uit-de-opvang/rol-coa-bij-terugkeer
125. https://www.kinderbescherming.nl/themas/vluchtelingen-jonger-dan-18-jaar/samenwerking-rvdk-ind-en-dtv
126. Based on existing coalitions, a UNICEF report on accounting for the interests of child asylum seekers in return processes in the Netherlands, and Solid Road's practical experience

In her work, she has seen that as a lawyer, she often becomes a person the family can trust and as a result, if asylum is not an option, she can contribute to achieving a sustainable return.

The next paragraph will go into further detail on the division of roles within and potential work methods for this multidisciplinary team.

Clarity about each party's role, possibilities and limitations. Linking formal and informal support.

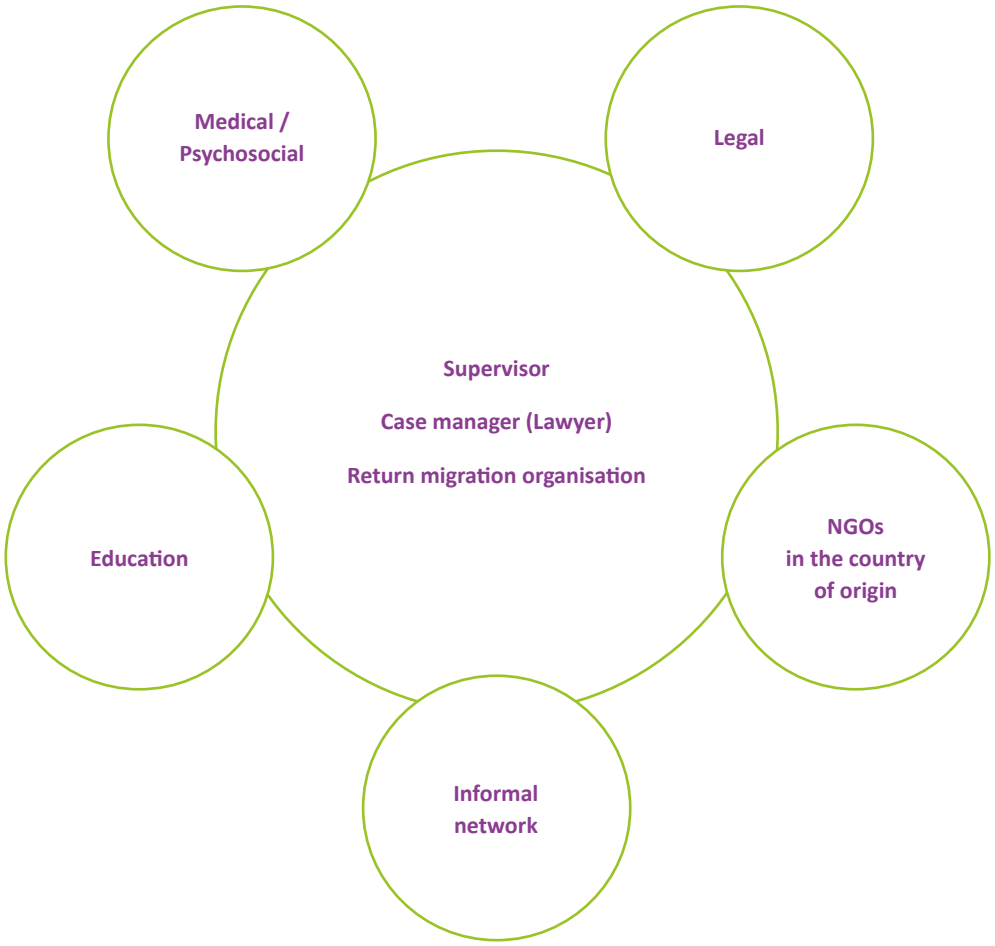
In the event of a negative decision, the IND turns the case over to the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V). In principle, the supervisor has the deciding say when the situation calls for supporting and/or encouraging an (independent) return. The counsellor at the involved return migration organisation plays a key role in carrying out the return, guiding the family and making a reintegration plan.
However, the return cannot be seen separately from the preceding asylum period. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the importance of working with professionals and people from the informal network who are already in contact with the family and/or have built a relationship of trust. Both the case manager and (generally also) the lawyer are in contact with the families during both the asylum period and the return period, often creating a less tense and more trusted relationship than the relationship with the supervisor and the return migration organisation. Because of that, the case manager and the lawyer can take on a connecting role between the family and the supervisor and the return migration organisation.

As mentioned above, the goal of working together is to facilitate a safe and sustainable return for the children involved and to consider their interests during the return procedure.
In practical terms, that means:

- Making a concrete return plan that accounts for the interests of the child and potential risk factors.
- Providing child-friendly information about and preparing children for the return.
- Saying a proper goodbye to children in the Netherlands.
- Guiding parents in providing support during the return process to and discussing the return with their children.
- A proper transfer (between schools and possibly healthcare) and guiding the children and their parents to and in the country of origin.

How to structure the collaboration within this multidisciplinary team in the practical guidance of children (and their parents) during the return process should be further outlined by the parties involved. Below, we have listed a number of suggestions, whereby we have assumed that the process is managed by the supervisor, with an important role for the case manager in terms of practical and psychosocial support.

Here, it is good to keep in mind that working with returning families is always custom work, and it is important for parents to remain in control.



1. Identifying the family's formal and informal network

The supervisor has a central role in guiding families in the return process. As the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) takes part in both the Local Repatriation Consultation (LTO) as well as the 'Interest of the Child' workgroup, there is already a collaboration between different parties in the various areas of expertise. As the 'director' of the return process, the supervisor initiates and maintains contact with the different parties involved. For this, it is important for the supervisor to have an accurate view of both the formal and the informal network surrounding the children and their family. The case manager can also play a role in informing the supervisor regarding this last aspect.

2. Conversation about the child's interests in the return process

This manual recommends including the interests of the child from the start of the guidance provided during the return process, and communicating that to the parents as a fixed component of the return process. In a shared 'conversation about the child' with the supervisor, case manager, parent(s) (and potentially the lawyer or other counsellor), the following can be discussed:

- Potential risk factors to consider when determining what is in the interest of the child and/or in making the return plan.

- The importance of preparing the children for the return and their being able to say goodbye.
- Which parties can play a role in:
  - Determining what is in the child's interests when there are clear risk factors.
  - Preparing the children for the return and assisting parents in this process.
  - The re-integration of children.

Additionally, information can be provided about possible extra support from e.g. return migration organisations. If a return migration organisation is already involved, it can also be included in the conversation. This depends on the parents' wishes.

Furthermore: It is important for return migration organisations to be visible/known to the parents throughout the entire asylum procedure. Asylum seekers must receive information about a possible rejection and the options for support in the return process at an early stage. Often, the first conversation with the return migration organisation does not take place until there is a chance of forced deportation, which does not benefit a sustainable return or the asylum seekers' trust in the return migration organisation.[127]

3. Coordination and division of tasks between the different parties involved

The conversation with the parents creates a better picture of the existing risk factors, of the parties involved and a potential division of roles. Here, the supervisor maintains an overview, the lawyer plays a protective role concerning the rights of the child, and the return migration organisation and case manager have a more executive role concerning the (guidance of children and parents during the) return process.

To illustrate, here is an example: Due to medical reasons, an Armenian family had contested their deportation and filed for a temporary injunction (article 64 of the Aliens Act). They were not allowed to await the verdict in the Netherlands. With the family's permission, the supervisor contacted the lawyer to discuss the situation. The lawyer indicated that the family had no real chance of obtaining a residence permit, but was concerned about the teenage daughter's mental health and wanted a guarantee of guidance and treatment for the daughter. The supervisor then referred the lawyer to Solid Road. A return plan was made in coordination with the parents, the girl's medical professional in the Netherlands, and the partner organisation in Armenia. After consulting with the lawyer, the family then decided to withdraw the objection and the temporary injunction. In order to properly organise the girl's care and departure, the supervisor agreed to extend the departure period.
During the departure period, in a conversation with the supervisor, the parents indicated that they had trouble sleeping due to noise made by another family in the unit they were living in. To give the family as much peace and quiet as possible during this already stressful period, the supervisor consulted with the case manager and arranged for the family to stay in a quieter unit during the final period leading up to their departure.

4. Using the children's books and conversation cards to prepare children for the return

As previously mentioned, working with returning families is always custom work, and it is important for parents to remain in control. It must be clear to parents why it is important to prepare their

children for the return. It is also necessary for the parents to feel that there is a focus on the questions and concerns they have about their children and about going back, and that using the children's tools is part of that. Chapter 5 goes into further detail on this topic.

The children's books and conversation cards can be introduced as part of the shared 'child conversation', or in a separate conversation with the supervisor, case manager, and/or a return migration organisation worker. With parents, you can discuss:

- How they can use the children's books and conversation cards to prepare children for the return.
- Which people could play a supporting role in that process. An important constant and familiar factor for children (and parents) is teachers, for example.

Alternative options could be offered as well, such as:

- Working with the children's books and conversation cards during shared conversation(s) (about the return) with parents and child(ren).
- The guidance of the children being partially taken over by the case manager, an employee at the return migration organisation, a teacher, aid worker, etc., with clear agreements on feedback to the parents.

In the latter case, it is important to have at least two group 'conversations' with the parents and children, as discussed in Chapter 4.3.1.

During an expert meeting (for employees at the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V), Central Reception Organisation for Asylum Seekers (COA) and Nidos) held as part of the process of developing the Toolkit, we saw that it is important to keep an eye on the line between guidance and psychosocial treatment. As a professional, you have to know your own limitations and be able to contact other parties for other fields of expertise. Here, too, a multi-disciplinary approach is important.

To illustrate, here is an example: The teenage girl in the case described above had been in treatment provided by a mental health psychologist in the Netherlands for some time. The return was very overwhelming to this girl. Receiving guidance from an unfamiliar individual would only have added to her stress in this case. In consultation with her parents, Solid Road contacted both her teacher and the mental health psychologist. Together, they agreed that the mental health psychologist would fill in the roadmap/children's book with the girl, and come see her where she lived with her parents at the Asylum Seekers Centre to prepare her for the return.
In another case, in which Nidos was involved due to the daughter being taken into care, Nidos outlined conditions for return after which Solid Road, Nidos, the family and the partner organisation in Armenia made a return plan together.

5. Taking the child's voice and interests into account in the return plan.

Using the children's books will provide insight into what is important to the children in question in preparing for the return and after the return. It is important for the (mainly older) children themselves to feel that their voice is heard and taken into account when making the return plan. This can be done e.g. by scheduling a second 'conversation about the child' where the child itself is also present.

127. Chu, B., Stec, K., Dünnwald, S. & Loran, T. (2008)

Here, it is important to explain to parents what the goal of the conversation is beforehand: to show the child that they are listening to them and that they are considering what is important to them in the return process.
It is important to ask children themselves what they see as the best way to make their voice heard. Another way could be for the child to make their own 'return plan' with their parent(s) in the booklet, and then to give the booklet to the supervisor or guidance counsellor from the return migration organisation and not be present during the conversation.

In conclusion: To write this chapter, we drew on current structures and divisions of roles. In addition, we might consider appointing a 'child specialist' in the mentioned areas of expertise (legal, psychosocial & medical, return guidance) or in the organisations involved in the migration process. They could then serve as a first point of contact, counsellor and advocate for the rights and interests of returning children, towards both families and other stakeholders.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Conditions for returning child asylum seekers in families

The child's physical safety is ensured

- □ An assessment was made of the safety situation in the country to which the child is returning, with a focus on child-specific risk factors.
  - □ The safety situation in the country and city to which they are returning, potential risk factors and possible protective factors were gauged prior to the return to guarantee that there is no (immediate) physical danger in the form of violence, persecution, risk of abuse, recruitment, human trafficking or exploitation.
- □ There is a focus on specific individual needs for protection, such as: child-specific grounds for persecution after the return and/or girls' extra vulnerability (regarding forced marriages, gender-specific exploitation and dropping out of school).

- □ Appropriate child protection procedures are followed before and after the return.[128]
  - □ All children involved in a return procedure fall under the national child protection regulations.
  - □ The question of whether the return is in the child's best interest is assessed. Here, we look at input from all relevant parties, including input from child welfare and child protection specialists.
  - □ There are collaboration protocols between the various institutes and parties involved in situations concerning children.
  - □ There are formal procedures in place in the countries to which the family is returning to monitor the effects of the return on the child.

- □ A concrete individual reintegration plan was made with the family including risk factors and any protective measures that need to be taken.
  - □ The child is involved in making a return plan in a child-friendly and age-appropriate manner. The child's opinion is heard and taken into account in this process.

- □ There is long-term (at least 1 year of) monitoring after the return, for which independent monitoring systems are in place.
  - □ There is a monitoring checklist including important aspects such as: registration (or acknowledgement of marital status), shelter, education, employment, healthcare, reintegration in the community and an evaluation of the child's health and safety.[129]

The child's psychosocial safety is ensured

- □ There is psychosocial support for the child during the return process.
  - □ Parents are assisted in guiding their children during, and if necessary, after the return.

- □ After returning, children must be able to live in a safe and protected environment, where they can safely become attached.
  - □ There is at least one safe available adult to which the child is attached/can become attached.
  - □ The family receives (psychosocial) support during the reintegration process.
  - □ If applicable, there is coordination and transfer between the aid services in the asylum country and a partner organisation/aid services in the country to which they are returning.

- □ Specific vulnerabilities of the child (and family), like trauma, educational and/or developmental problems, risk of discrimination and exclusion, etc. have been identified.
  - □ There is a focus on preventing possible discrimination/stigmatisation after the return because of ethnicity, gender or migration (e.g. because of 'Westernisation')
  - □ The child's social (family) ties are protected:
  - □ During and after the return, the family unit is protected as much as possible.
    - □ Children are not separated from their family, unless it is in their own best interest.
  - □ Children are able to say a proper goodbye in the country of origin.
  - □ After the return, there is support during the reintegration process and in the process of building a social network for the whole family.
  - □ Factors that can limit/promote the reintegration of children and children building friendships are identified and included in the return plan.

- □ The (continuity in the) child's development and identity is ensured.
  - □ For the duration of the voluntary departure period, families with children are given the time to properly prepare for the return so as to disrupt the child's situation as little as possible.
  - □ The voluntary departure period (or granting that period) offers enough time for children to[130]:
    - □ complete their final exams or achieve other academic milestones, such as the end of a semester or school year.
    - □ be able to receive medical treatment or other healthcare if that is necessary on the short term or impossible after returning.
    - □ be able to collect all the required documents, such as their birth certificate, school records and medical records.
  - □ Children are supported in the return process, with a focus on being able to (continue to) feel a connection to both the asylum country and the country of origin/country to which they are returning.

- □ There is a focus on increasing the child's and the parents' (sources of) resilience before and after the return.

128. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011), see original document for further recommendations on this topic.
129. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)
130. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)

The child's material security is ensured

- □ The child's primary needs are met after the return, meaning safe housing, water, food and sanitation facilities are guaranteed.
- □ After the return, the child and the parent(s) have access to (psychosocial) healthcare.
- □ The child has access to (suitable) education. Factors that can limit/promote a connection to education are identified and included in the return plan.
  - □ The school in the asylum country is promptly informed of the return so that there is enough time for the transfer to the school in the country to which the child is returning.
  - □ Reports etc. are translated if necessary.
  - □ Extra (language) classes are taken care of.

- □ There is a concrete, individual reintegration plan including options for housing, training and work, access to suitable (mental) healthcare, education, and support (for the children) in the reintegration process.
  - □ The child is involved in making a return plan in a child-friendly and age-appropriate manner. The child's opinion is heard and taken into account in this process.

- □ There are available programmes for support in voluntary return and reintegration, specifically tailored to the needs of children and families.[131] Custom work and a focus on social embedding are important here.
  - □ Families receive information about the availability of such programmes, about topics including:
  - □ The availability of financial aid;
  - □ The availability of support in the reintegration process, including reintegrating children in education;
  - □ The amount of financial aid the family needs to resettle in the community has been calculated.[132]
  - □ Support in the country to which the child is returning should contribute to sustainable solutions, and contribute to acceptance from and integration in the community. Therefore, individual interventions for returning families should ideally be paired with a focus on/ alignment with building capacity in the country to which they are returning regarding education, (mental) healthcare and child protection.

The child's legal security is ensured[133]

- □ In both the decision-making procedures and the return procedure, specific guarantees were implemented to ensure that the interests of the child come first and are sufficiently respected throughout the entire process.
  - □ A Best Interests Assessment is included in the outcome of the appeal procedure.
  - □ This assessment is conducted:
    - □ by a multidisciplinary team led and supervised by child protection professionals.
    - □ in collaboration with a partner organisation in the country to which they are returning. There is coordination and communication between the asylum country and the country to which they are returning to ensure the child's interests and rights during the return and reintegration process.
  - □ Any independent asylum motives of children involved are included in the procedure.

- □ The child's ID is obtained before the return.

- □ The child's opinion/voice is heard and taken into account in the return process.

- □ The child is informed about the return (procedure) in a child-friendly and age-appropriate manner
  - □ Children receive clear insight into what will happen in terms of procedures and events.
  - □ The information aligns with the child('s situation), meaning that it is tailored to their age, (emotional) development, language, culture, gender and potentially their vulnerabilities.
  - □ The information is geared towards increasing the children's resilience by offering the ability to exert influence, and by identifying protective people, resources and behaviours.
  - □ The information is provided in a sensitive manner, taking into account how loyal children are to their parents.
  - □ Children are frequently given the opportunity to ask questions and check the information they receive.[134]
  - □ There are methods to make sure the child properly understood the information given (e.g. by asking the child to explain the information in their own words).[135]
  - □ During the procedure, parents are assisted in providing their children with information.

131. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)
132. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)
133. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011), voor meer aanbevelingen op dit punt zie oorspronkelijk document
134. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)
135. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) (2011)

Appendix 2: Risk factors

This appendix will look at risk factors that can negatively affect the development of child asylum seekers (after their return), so that they can be considered in the return process.

The child's condition

Most child asylum seekers are exposed to multiple stressful and/or traumatic experiences for a prolonged period of time (before they fled, during the migration and in the asylum period). With this constant stress, children do not have a chance to recover from previous stressful events before and surrounding the migration, and this can even cause their psychosocial health to worsen. Furthermore, we often see that the resilience of both the child and the parents is undermined by trauma and/or the prolonged period of stress. As a result, child asylum seekers are at a higher risk of developing psychosocial problems or disorders. Particularly posttraumatic symptoms, fears, depression, somatic issues, trouble sleeping, concentration problems and withdrawing from social interaction are often reported in child asylum seekers.[136]

The parents' condition

For parents of child asylum seekers, it is generally a challenge to providing sufficient support and safety to children. We often see that the combination of the trauma parents have experienced prior to and during the migration, along with the uncertainty and powerlessness after migration, makes parents extra vulnerable.[137]

The duration of the stay

Feelings of powerlessness, mainly in the asylum procedure, play a large role in the lives of child asylum seekers. In many cases, we see that this undermines their development, resilience and the positive effect of protective factors. For example, a child could be motivated to do well at school during the asylum period based on their hope for a residence permit and a clear future. If that view of the future changes because they have to go back, they are often disappointed. The child can feel that their hard work didn't matter, and that their future is uncertain. This can affect their motivation at school, and lead to a poor start in their country of origin.
Research among young refugees in the Netherlands shows that when the asylum period lasted too long, the young people were no longer able to handle the difficulties, and it 'broke' them. With the feeling of no longer being able to influence their situation, the feeling of powerlessness and the constant disappointment, they no longer dared to hope, making them pessimistic and passive.[138]
This sense of powerlessness can be felt in several respects. The extent to which children are involved in the decision to migrate and to go back may differ, but in most cases they do not have a say in the matter and the choice is made for them, which intensifies their sense of powerlessness.

The child's age[139]

Age 0-5

Children in this age group mainly depend on their parents' care. They do not have enough of a connection to the asylum country and the cultural group to which they belong. These children also only have a limited sense of time, and they have but few conscious memories of what it meant to move. With the dependency on their parent(s)' care, children in this age group are extra vulnerable when the parent(s) have psychological problems or prolonged stress. They can particularly have problems with attachment.

Age 6-12

Children aged 6 - 12 spend more time with other people than just their parents or family. Peers, teachers, and other adults have a major influence on their development and upbringing. If support and upbringing at home falls short, this can (partially) be compensated by support and examples set by others. These people can thus play a large role in their lives, and losing these people as a result of the return can therefore have a major impact.

Children in this age category more quickly/increasingly bond with the asylum country. As mentioned above, returning children generally feel a strong connection to the asylum country as a result of their search for safety and identity. In many cases, their connection to the country of origin has weakened. Language also plays a major role in integration. From roundabout the age of 10, the development of a child's identity becomes more and more important, which is linked to linguistic development. Most child asylum seekers speak Dutch fluently after a few years, while the knowledge and use of their native language decreases.

The Netherlands has an individualistic culture. From a young age, children are encouraged to think about their talents, who they are and what they want to do in the future. At this age, child asylum seekers develop a vision for the future and an identity that aligns more and more with Dutch culture and social interaction (such as the standard of healthcare, education, freedom of speech, equality between boys and girls, etc.). As a result, children can experience a lack of a vision for the future and less of a connection with their own culture after the return.

The asylum status can have a major impact at this age. Children want to be themselves and to belong, and have trouble when they are in a different position than Dutch children. When children hear that they have been denied a residence permit, they often get into a state of incomprehension, and anger. They can feel like it's their fault and that they did something wrong, and they feel abandoned (by the Netherlands).

Age 12-18

'Children' in this age group are growing up, and forming their own identity. Contact in society and with peers is becoming increasingly important. As described above for the previous age group, there is a strong focus in the Netherlands on building talent and developing your own identity and dreams for the future. Teenagers/young people have become used to Western values (acting and expressing themselves freely) and have a vision for their future which is often based on the standard of education and welfare in the Netherlands. Particularly in girls, this can lead to a lack of a vision for the future, difficulty connecting to friends, and reintegration problems after return.

136. Zijlstra, A. E., Kalverboer, M. E., Post, W. J., ten Brummelaar, M. D. C. & Knorth, E. J. (2015)
137. Fazel, M. & Stein, A. (2002)
138. Sleijpen, M. e.a. (2017)
139 This paragraph draws on the aforementioned study by Kalverboer and Zijlstra (2006).

Due to differences in acculturation, we often see that teenage asylum seekers/younger asylum seekers do not connect with/lack support from their parent(s), which can lead to an ambivalent relationship. Many teenagers/young people take over responsibilities in the family, and partly take care of their parent(s) and/or siblings. After the return, they can continue to fulfil that role, though we also often see that after the return, fathers tend to reclaim responsibility for the family. On the other hand, they can also start to rebel against their parents and blame them for things, like the long asylum procedure or the return. We also see this ambivalence towards Dutch society and their country of origin. On the one hand, children are attached to Dutch society and feel alienated from their country of origin. But on the other, they can feel rejected by the Netherlands when they are denied a residence permit. This can manifest as shame, a negative self-image (wondering what they did wrong), disappointment and anger.
Both in the previous age group and in this group, most children are only fluent in their native language when speaking it. This generally leads to challenges in re-entering education after the return.

Connection to the country of origin

"If the child has positive memories of the country of origin, speaks the language, knows the culture, sees it as positive and is familiar with it, the risk of developmental damage is lower than when this is not the case."[140] Above, we already described that in many cases, a child's connection to the country of origin has weakened due to their integration in the Netherlands.
This is generally amplified by negative experiences surrounding the migration, and by parents, in the hope of increasing their chances of receiving a residence permit, encourage children to quickly integrate in the Netherlands and often paint a negative picture of the country of origin (to other people).

Cultural changes

Child asylum seekers have many losses to deal with: their family, school, house, friends. Having to leave behind familiar things and people without saying goodbye increases the lack of stability and predictability, and can make children more vulnerable. The manner of departure plays an important role here, too; was the child able to say goodbye, how were they informed prior to and during the journey, etc.
Another important risk factor is the amount of acculturation stress that children go through (and have gone through), both before and after the return. Acculturation stress is stress resulting from cultural changes. Factors that cause acculturation stress include a language barrier, communication problems, cultural differences, disappointment with the asylum country, alienation from their own country and discrimination. Children that belong to an ethnic minority are extra vulnerable in this regard.[141]

Conditions in the asylum country

Research shows that past trauma does not constitute a risk factor per se, but that after a while, recent stress factors, such as the asylum procedure, living conditions, bearing too heavy a load, performance at school, friendships etc., can play an equal or even more important role than past

traumatic experiences. Important risk factors here are: a lack of continuity (in care) and stability, a lack of suitable education and a lack of connections to friends.[142]

Conditions in the country of origin

To ensure children's safety and development after the return, it is essential to, prior to the return, identify potential (child-specific) risk factors after the return. Research conducted among families that returned to Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Syria shows that in many cases, the children who returned were not safe, had psychosocial problems, and had inadequate material and legal security and protection.
Risk factors that came up in this study were[143]:

In the area of material security:
- Difficulty finding housing, problems with reclaiming land and property.
- Difficulty generating income. Lack of a network. Parents' loss of work experience and confidence due to the asylum period. Families having fallen apart.
- No access to/alignment in education. Girls are more at risk here.

In the area of physical safety:
- Children are more susceptible to recruitment because families have less social protection and are not yet part of the community.
- Families are unfamiliar with the (safety) situation (e.g. danger of land mines), rules, social and cultural values and customs in the country to which they have returned, making returning children extra vulnerable.
- Children are at risk for child labour and forced marriage due to financial troubles after the return.

In the area of psychosocial development/emotional safety:
- Discrimination.
- Trouble with reintegration due to psychosocial problems.

In the area of legal protection:
- Poorly functioning legal system. No or poor access to (legal) aid due to a lack of 'good connections'.
- Poorly functioning child protection system.
- Children not being officially registered and thus having no legal identity.
- Sometimes, returned families are not welcomed by local authorities or security services because they are seen as enemy sympathisers.

Another report by Save the Children, on the impact of returning from Europe to Afghanistan on the children involved, confirmed that both the safety situation and the risk of dropping out of school were realistic risk factors after returning to Afghanistan. About 20% of returned children indicated that they were approached about joining militias or criminal gangs. Only 16 out of 53 returned children (about 30%) attended school. This partially corresponds to a general high percentage of school dropouts in Afghanistan, but this was reinforced by the majority of the interviewed children having an educational delay and language deficiency due to the migration. Another risk factor mentioned in the report is the lack of connection to the area to which the child has returned. This

140. Kalverboer and Zijlstra (2006)
141. Fazel & Stein (2002)
142. Daud, A., af Klinteberg, B. & Rydelius, P.A. (2008)
143. Majidi, N. & Barratt, S. (2018)

was reinforced by the fact that many families did not return to their original place of residence and social network, and/or because some children never lived in Afghanistan before. The majority of the returned children stated that they felt like an outsider. They did not know how to build a social network, and were less able to use means of communication such as mobile phones and social media than they were before the return. Children indicated that the return negatively affected their mental health - emotions mentioned were anger and sadness/depression in particular - and that they lacked (psychological) support.'[144]

Difficulties in reintegration and establishing connections (at school) were also mentioned in research conducted among children who had returned to Kosovo and Albania. This was due to both different social interaction at the new school, and memories of the educational opportunities in the asylum country. Children were also often bullied for having an accent. On top of the necessity of guidance in the reintegration process after the return, they stressed the importance of language assistance before and/or after the return. 'One of the strongest emotions children experienced after the return was the embarrassment of not being able to speak the language. As a result, children withdrew from social environments, and felt very lonely and like they did not belong anywhere.' On the other hand, these children also exhibited a lot of resilience. 'For some children, initial feelings of hopelessness turned into a pro-active attitude to learn the language and work hard at school. Progress in their school performance proved to be an important factor in the children's psychosocial well-being. In addition, support from parents, family, new friends and other people in the children's surroundings also played an important role for returned children in overcoming difficulties and developing a pro-active attitude.'

144. Guillaume, M., Majidi, N., Samuel Hall (2018)

Appendix 3: Protective factors

This appendix will discuss sources of resilience, or protective factors, which can positively affect the development of child asylum seekers (after their return), so that they can be considered in the return process.

Individual sources of resilience

Personal traits can play a protective role, and contribute to a child going through normal development despite difficulties or trauma.
Protective traits are: social skills, empathy, a pro-active attitude, confidence, creativity and resourcefulness, being able to express/regulate emotions, adaptability and (social) intelligence.[145]
As with all sources of resilience, here again personal traits need encouragement and support within a facilitating environment to outweigh the risk factors and vulnerabilities.[146]

Refugee children/young refugees mentioned the following coping strategies for dealing with stress during the asylum period[147]:

- Being good at something, like excelling at school or in sports.
- Looking for help/support.
- Finding distractions. Spending time with friends, and occupying themselves with sports and school, helps to not think about problems, reduce stress and increase confidence.
- Avoidance. A coping strategy can be to suppress negative emotions and not talk about past and/or current stress factors. By doing so, children are not overwhelmed by their thoughts and memories, so they can get on with their lives.
- Resistance, standing up for yourself.

This last one also ties in with experiencing a sense of agency, and experiencing 'social justice'[148].

Other important individual sources of resilience are hope and religion/spirituality. Hope can be fostered by making plans for the future and by focusing on new opportunities and a better future. School plays an important role in this.[149]

For many child asylum seekers and their families, faith plays a protective role as they find support in their faith, they feel a sense of connection and their faith gives them continuity and meaning. Young refugees mentioned that their faith helped them find meaning in difficult circumstances. Religious customs and rituals can also evoke positive memories and make them feel connected to other people.[150]

Family

Supporting and positive family ties are essential for resilience in child asylum seekers. The (mental) health of both parent(s) and children, a good parent-child relationship and/or positive style of upbringing and a close bond with at least one parent who is able to protect and support the child was mentioned the most.[151]

145. Daud, A., af Klinteberg, B. & Rydelius, P.A. (2008)
146. Daud, A., af Klinteberg, B. & Rydelius, P.A. (2008)
147. Sleijpen e.a. (2017)
148. Ungar, M. e.a. (2007)
149. Sleijpen e.a. (2017)
150. World Vision (2018)
151. Eruyar, S. (2018)

Other important protective factors in the family are: family cohesion and the family staying together, effective communication, the family's ability to adapt to new circumstances, hope for the future, family rituals and structure/boundaries.[152]
Taking care of parents/family members is also mentioned as a resilient activity, which can make children feel like they are able to do something to help.

School/Friends

Refugee children/young refugees themselves named education as the most important means of staying in control of their life and future[153]. Important protective factors at school are: the option to go to school, feeling safe at school, and education that aligns with the child's development. Here, a sufficient command of the language and access to learning materials is essential. Factors at the level of the school that can increase the child's resilience are: positive school experiences, feeling like they belong, being proud of achievements at school (maintaining the family's honour), friendships, and feeling like they can achieve their dreams/goals.[154]

Community/Culture

Support from the wider social environment and a connection to the community/culture can have a protective effect and reduce stress before and after the return. Factors on the level of the community that can increase the child's resilience are: social activities, a safe place to play, social support and a sense of community.
Taking part in social activities, like sports and religious groups, helps child asylum seekers build friendships, boost their self-esteem and provides structure.
Maintaining ties with their own culture and cultural habits like religious customs, family values and traditions also contributes to a sense of belonging, identity and pride in their own culture and family.[155]

Other resilience-enhancing factors on this level are:

- Having enough financial security to take part in the community.
- Being able to help others.
- Participating in society, integration.
- Competent aid workers, volunteers the child can go to.
- Access to information and healthcare.

152. Slobodin e.a. (2018)
153. Sleijpen e.a. (2016)
154. Pieloch, K.A. e.a. (2016)
155. Pieloch, K.A. e.a. (2016)

Appendix 4: Overview of risk factors and protective factors

Child		
(Pre-)migration risk factors	**Post-migration risk factors**	**Remigration risk factors**
Poor (mental) health	Poor (mental) health	Poor (mental) health
Exposure to violence and/or other traumatic experiences prior to the migration or during the migration	Long-term insecurity about/fear of going back. Uncertainty about the future	Abrupt departure, no opportunity to say goodbye
Worsened socio-economic circumstances before the migration	Duration of the stay in the migration country (Here, the context of and experienced support during the stay play an important role)	No strong connection to the country of origin
Stress and uncertainty during the migration	Stress of acculturation	Language deficiency
Abrupt departure, no opportunity to say goodbye	Lack of continuity/stability. Several moves during the asylum period	Uncertainty about the future
	High pressure (taking care of parents, having to do well at school)	Stress of acculturation
	Age (>12)	Discrimination
		Unfamiliarity with the (safety) situation in the country to which they are returning
		No legal identity
		Risk of recruitment
		Risk of child labour
		Risk of forced marriage
(Pre-)migration protective factors	**Post-migration protective factors**	**Remigration protective factors**
Personal traits like: social skills, empathy, a pro-active attitude, confidence, creativity, being able to express and regulate emotions, adaptability and (social) intelligence	See (pre-)migration factors, along with:	See (post-)migration factors, along with:
Faith, Religion	Sense of control/agency. Experiencing a focus on the child's voice and interests	Prepared departure, with the opportunity to say goodbye
Coping strategies	Child-friendly information about procedures and how things go in the asylum country	Child-friendly information about the return process
Hope	Experiences growing up in multiple cultures	Speaks the language well
Specific talents and interests, e.g. sports, hobbies		Connection to their own culture
Prepared departure, with the opportunity to say goodbye		Legal identity

Family		
(Pre-)migration risk factors	**Post-migration risk factors**	**Remigration risk factors**
Loss of family members, families falling apart	Parent(s) having (mental) health problems	See post-migration factors, along with:
Trauma in parents/family members	Emotionally stressful relationships within the family	Stress and absence of parents due to their difficulties in seeing to primary needs
	Inadequate upbringing environment (weakened parent-child relationship, lack of continuity/stability in care)	Family stress after the return due to expectations of and cultural differences with family left behind
	Loss of family cohesion	
	Loss of family dreams, hope for the future	
(Pre-)migration protective factors	**Post-migration protective factors**	**Remigration protective factors**
(Mentally) healthy parents	See (pre-)migration factors, along with:	See post-migration factors, along with:
Good parent-child relationship, positive style of upbringing, safe attachment, structure and boundaries	Family's adaptability to new circumstances	Stronger self-esteem and recovery of the role of parent(s) as a result of parent(s) once again being able to generate their own income
Family cohesion (strong family connection)	Family rituals, traditions	Being reunited with family in country of origin
Availability/Support from parent(s)	Hope for the future, family's shared dreams	Support for the family in country of origin
		Family's ability to find meaning in the migration and return together

School & Friends		
(Pre-)migration risk factors	**Post-migration risk factors**	**Remigration risk factors**
No access to (suitable) education	No access to (suitable) education	See post-migration factors, along with:
	Language barrier	Insufficient access to learning resources
	Lack of connection to friends	
	Learning problems, educational delay	
	Schools with insufficient capacity and knowledge to guide children and parents.	
	Parents not being involved at school	
(Pre-)migration protective factors	**Post-migration protective factors**	**Remigration protective factors**
Access to (suitable) education	See (pre-)migration factors, along with:	See post-migration factors, along with:
Friendships	Supportive teacher	Proper transfer from the school in the asylum country to a school in the country of origin
Positive learning and school experiences	Sufficient capacity (knowledge and range) to offer children and parents extra guidance	Ability to maintain ties with friends in the asylum country
	Extra language lessons	
	Belonging	
	Taking pride in achievements at school	
	Parents being involved at school	

Society/Culture		
(Pre-)migration risk factors	**Post-migration risk factors**	**Remigration risk factors**
Belonging to an ethnic minority	See (pre-)migration factors, along with:	See post-migration factors, along with:
Unstable and unsafe living environment	Acculturation stress: language barrier, communication problems, cultural differences, disappointment in the asylum country, discrimination	No/limited social network, families falling apart
Financial insecurity	Insufficient access to information and healthcare	Uncertainty about housing and reclaiming land and property
	Loss of connection to their own culture	Financial insecurity
	Not being able to take part in social activities (due to cultural differences or lack of finances)	Poorly functioning child protection system/legal system
		Poorly functioning (mental) healthcare
		Stigma surrounding trauma/mental healthcare
(Pre-)migration protective factors	**Post-migration protective factors**	**Remigration protective factors**
Social network, Social support	See (pre-)migration factors, along with:	See pre-migration factors and post-migration factors, along with:
Stable and safe living environment	Being able to maintain a connection to their own culture and cultural habits	Still present social network in the country of origin
Connection to the community and culture	Being able to participate in society in the asylum country	Support in the re-integration process
A safe place to play		Certainty about housing
Being able to help others		Legal support
Access to information and healthcare		
Being able to take part in social activities such as sports and religious activities		

Appendix 5: Form: risk factors and protective factors (based on Pharos 2017)

Risk factors	Protective factors
Child	
Family	
School / Friends	
Society / Culture	

Protective measures to be taken
□ None
□ Protective measures in the area of safety:
□ Required medical support:
□ Required psychosocial support:
□ Required support in education:s:
□ Other:

Appendix 6: Overview: conversations with children according to age (based on Delfos, M.F. 2005)

	Age 6-8	Age 8-10	Age 10-12
Metacommunication	• Explanation of the framework and the purpose of the conversation • Extensive metacommunication	• Explanation of the framework and the purpose of the conversation • Extensive metacommunication	• Explanation of the framework and the purpose of the conversation • Metacommunication is less important now. Expressing appreciation is very important for this age group
Form	• Talk + play • 15 – 20 minutes of verbal • Verbal forms of play • Using friends as examples • Do not sit still for too long	• Talk, sometimes play • 30 – 45 minutes of verbal	• Talk • 60 minutes of verbal • Possibly with a friend
Verbal aspect	• Brief and concrete, avoid hard words	• Concrete, explain hard words. • Use indirect communication, like what their friends would say about a certain topic	• Concrete and abstract, explain hard words
Non-verbal aspect	• Non-verbal communication remains important	• Mention non-verbal communication	• Mention non-verbal communication
Question techniques	• Avoid closed questions • Avoid suggestive questions • Ask about events in relation to space as opposed to time, so: 'where were you then?' and 'what did you do then?' instead of 'when was that?' • Repeat different versions of the same questions • Do not summarise	• Alternate between open questions and closed questions • Avoid suggestive questions • Prevent socially accepted answers • Questions about events can be asked in relation to space and time • Summarise for structure	• Open questions • Follow-up questions • Avoid suggestive questions • Prevent socially accepted answers • Questions about events can be asked in relation to space and time • Summarise for structure
Motivation	• Keep working on their motivation. At this age, rewards (material and immaterial) are an important validation • Conclude each topic. The arch of tension is also important.	• Check their motivation both before and during the conversation. Children aged 8 - 10 need to know what is expected of them and what the 'rules' are. Even at this age, they are still motivated by rewards (both material and immaterial). • Conclude each topic.	• Material rewards are appreciated, but the immaterial reward is particularly important in the form of appreciation and validation.

Appendix 7: Children's possible symptoms and responses to the return process

This table provides an overview of children's possible symptoms and responses to the return process.[156]

Possible symptoms and responses to the return process
- Sadness. This can be visible or hidden. - Anger. General anger, but also direct anger towards the person who decided on the return, or who was unable to prevent it. - Fear. Fear of the future, fear of being alone, other fears. Extra concern for others. Fear of something happening to family members or friends. - Impaired emotion and impulse regulation. Children can get very angry or panicked, and unable to regulate themselves. Children can also exhibit very impulsive behaviour. - Guilt. Children over the age of 6 can empathise with others, and often require an explanation for what has happened to them. However, they lack the ability to actually understand what happened. This can lead to fantasies and feelings of guilt. - Feelings of powerlessness. - Avoidance and denial. Repressing the memory. - Dreams and nightmares. - Health problems caused by tension and stress: headaches, stomach aches, nausea, trouble sleeping, reduced appetite. - Loneliness. Feeling like others do not understand how they feel - Concentration and memory issues. Being chaotic/forgetful. - Learning difficulties - Listlessness. Being absent. - Being extra vigilant and skittish. - Delayed development, Regressive behaviour, meaning that the child loses the skills they have learned such as talking or toilet training.

156. Some of this information was taken from the Toolkit: Psychological problems in refugee children and adolescents, published by Pharos (2017).

Appendix 8: Characteristics of collectivistic vs. individualistic cultures

Collectivistic culture (focus on a relational self)	Individualistic culture (focus on an independent self)
Values/Goals of upbringing:	
Important values are: • connection to family and other close relationships • responsibility for others • diligence, serious attitude towards life • fulfilling social and economic roles • cooperation • respect, obedience, self-control	Important values are: • autonomy • empowerment, self-esteem • developing personal skills • independence, personal decisions, intrinsic motivation • assertiveness, being able to express yourself
Children have emotional as well as economic value.	Children have mainly an emotional value.
Focus on the family/group, thinking more in terms of us and them. Focus on protecting the family's social cohesion.	Focus on the individual and personal development.
Family roles	
The extended family (grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.) play a large role in children's upbringing and development.	Family-focused culture. Children are brought up in their own direct family, by their parent(s).
In most cases, the mother handles the household and caring activities and provides emotional support for the children. The father's job is more controlling and morally directive (setting and enforcing rules, helping with homework, decisions about school, expenses and the children's freedom (of mobility). However, in daily practice, this division of roles is often less strict, and in the end mothers often also have a controlling, decisive role. [157]	Equal division of roles between the mother and father.
Relationships between men and women and between young and old are hierarchical.	Equal relationships between men and women and largely also between young and old.
Self-worth and description of your own person is related to social relationships and roles (a good son, brother, friend)	Self-worth and description of your own person is related to personal traits (smart, funny, etc.)
Development and upbringing of children	
Main goals of upbringing: • Social prestige: obtaining a good degree/job and thinking and working towards the future. • Conformity (both social and moral-religious). Social adjustment. Staying on the 'right' path. Other goals are being sociable to others, maintaining ties with family members, maintaining elements of your own culture and personal well-being.	Main goals of upbringing: • Personal autonomy: independence, sense of responsibility, personal well-being • Sociability: respect for others, proper manners, contributing to society
Relationships are at the centre.	The individual is at the centre.
Tradition and religion are a major influence on children and upbringing.	Views on child development and upbringing are largely shaped by science, and less by religion and tradition.

Children's developmental stages are generally determined by biological and social changes (sexual maturity, marriage, having children). Furthermore, the period of childhood does not receive as much specific attention.	Focus is on the child's (social) psychological development.
Parents are at the centre; they know what is best for the child.	The child is at the centre.
Functional upbringing.[158] Collectivistic families generally apply functional upbringing. This partly has to do with often more fixed gender roles, but social-economic factors also play a role here. A poorer social-economic situation shifts parents' focus to 'surviving' and being able to provide daily care.	Intentional upbringing. Upbringing in Western cultures is generally more intentional. This can be seen in families, but also at schools where teachers often work based on a 'child-oriented approach'.
Generally a more authoritarian style of upbringing. Focus is on mutual dependency and obedience. Upbringing is more directive and does not involve much explaining or negotiating. Upbringing is more controlling.	Lenient style of upbringing. Upbringing mainly focuses on building a child's autonomy and confidence. A lot is explained to children, and parents negotiate with children, with the goal of giving children some responsibility. Upbringing is more of a guiding process.
External conscience, children have to be told what is right.	Internal conscience.
Discipline: • Focused on respect for elders/authority figures, and learning desired behaviour. • Extended family members (such as a grandfather or uncle) often also play a role in disciplining children.	Discipline: Focused on children thinking about behaviour and learning boundaries themselves
Gender-specific upbringing, generally favouring sons over daughters.	Equal value of and approach to boys and girls.
The child must adapt to the circumstances.	Circumstances can be changed and adapted to accommodate the child.
School	
Strong focus on achieving in education and in society.	Focus on child-oriented approach and children's personal development.
The social, religious and moral development is the parents' responsibility, developing academic intelligence is the school's responsibility.	Education focuses on children's broader development (both cognitive and social-emotional and moral), working together and coordinating with parents in the process.
Communication[159]	
Communication in terms of we, us, ours.	Communication in terms of me, I, mine.
Indirect communication; part of the message is conveyed in non-verbal communication, and in the context of the message.[160]	Direct, literal communication.
More responsibility for the listener to properly interpret the message.	The responsibility for clear communication is carried by the speaker. It is better to repeat something a few times than to leave things unsaid.
More silences and pauses to interpret the message and understand the context.	Silences and pauses are often seen as a sign of agreement or a lack of interest.
Indirect communication so as not to hurt people unnecessarily. Harmony is important. Voicing criticism and confronting people is rude. Yes does not always mean yes. 'No' can be too confronting.	Honesty in communication is important. Culture of feedback.

Non-verbal communication is important.	Words (spoken or written) are important.
Communication is contextual, starts with the context and from there, goes to the core of the message. Main points are not discerned from details.	The information is structured, categorised and detailed.
Personal and professional networks meld into one another, enabling people to update each other on lots of information through their networks. The social network is the main source of information.	There is a divide between formal and informal communication. The (social) media is the main source of information.
'Trauma''[161]	
The term 'trauma' is not quickly used. Usually, what is discussed is the physical symptoms and not the psychological symptoms. This includes things like trouble sleeping, or a reduced appetite. There is often a stigma surrounding psychological symptoms.	Psychological approach
Determined by fate, divine intervention. Accepting the situation; everything happens for a 'reason'.	Persoonlijke regie. Psychotherapeutische behandeling. Weinig verdraagzaamheid van 'lijden', erg gericht op persoonlijk geluk.
Cultural beliefs, rituals and ceremonies are implemented to recover from trauma.	Personal agency. Psychotherapeutic treatment. Not much tolerance for 'suffering', very focused on personal happiness.
Difficulty talking about oneself as an individual, or about the personal effects of trauma. The effects of trauma are mainly experienced in relationships. If, as a result of trauma, social/cultural roles can no longer be fulfilled, it has a major impact and often leads to a negative self-image, feeling like a burden to the family/group, guilt and shame and isolation. As the group/family largely determines the individual's identity, trauma has a double impact in this case. Restoring the connection with the family/group and reducing feelings of guilt (e.g. through awareness/education) is therefore essential.	Individualistic approach.

157. Pels, T. and de Gruijter, M. (2005)
158. Functional upbringing is defined as the kind of upbringing that takes place implicitly in the daily interactions between parents and children. Intentional upbringing is about a conscious method of upbringing that explicitly focuses on influencing children's behaviour or promoting their development.
159. Nunez, C. e.a. (2017)
160. Nunez, C. e.a. (2017)
161. There is often confusion surrounding the term 'trauma' because it can refer to the event itself, or to the psychological impact of the event. Not every traumatic event produces traumatic symptoms. This section covers both traumatic events and the impact of stressful events in the form of trauma.

Bijlage 9. Monitoring checklist

Domain / goal	**Monitoring spot check** *(please review indicators and then, for each domain ticket whether progress to date is good, satisfactory, below average or unsatisfactory)* *Note: When reviewing, as several issues covered for each domain, take the lowest score achieved*		
	1st Monitor @ 6 months	**2nd Monitor @ 12 months**	**3rd Monitor @ 18 months**
Education / work	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory
Indicators for education/ work	**Good (4 points)** • school-age child enrolled in next school year, according to last finished school year and certification. • older children pursue the type of education, skill-building or work they want. • educational gaps addressed through extra classes/courses • no language difficulties **Satisfactory (3 points)** • school-age child enrolled in school (maybe not in the year was supposed to be- but assessment of his/her knowledge and skills were made) • older children are either in training or working – based on their life project and available opportunities • some language difficulties remain, but they are addressed through extra classes • educational gaps addressed **Below Average (2 points)** • school-age child not enrolled in school in the upcoming school year • older children stay at home without useful activity or any possibility of developing their skills and abilities • gaps in knowledge and language remain substantial **Unsatisfactory (1 point)** • school-age child not enrolled even after 12 months have passed since return • older children carry out work that is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of the child • gaps in knowledge and language were not addressed • suspicion of child labour or exploitation *Note: Depending on when the child returns, starting school may take up to 9 months, however the goal is to address the child's needs for learning and to prepare for the upcoming school year.*		

This checklist was developed by: Terre des hommes Foundation in Hungary, ECPAT (Austria), Hors la rue (France) and ARSIS (Greece), as well as Terre des hommes Albania and Kosovo Delegations, Medica Zenica (BiH), the Center for Youth Integration (Serbia), the Montenegrin Women's Lobby and Open Gate/La Strada FYROM, as part of the project "Monitoring the Situation of Children Returned from EU Countries" and is partially funded by the European Return Fund.

Domain / goal	**Monitoring spot check** *(please review indicators and then, for each domain ticket whether progress to date is good, satisfactory, below average or unsatisfactory)* *Note: When reviewing, as several issues covered for each domain, take the lowest score achieved*		
	1st Monitor @ 6 months	**2nd Monitor @ 12 months**	**3rd Monitor @ 18 months**
Social integration	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory
Indicators for social integration	**Good (4 points)** • child has friends and participates in lots interaction with peers • any initial signs of bullying or discrimination have stopped • child is involved in some recreational or free-time activities **Satisfactory (3 points)** • child is less sociable but has some good friends • child does not experience bullying or discrimination- only in isolated incidents **Below Average (2 points)** • child is shy and does not initiate contact with children • child only has one or two friends • child rarely goes out of the house for activities aside from school • child experiences some discrimination or bullying at school (despite intervention) **Unsatisfactory (1 point)** • child has not made any friends since arrival • child is reclusive and spends all his/her time at home • child does not have any extracurricular activities • child is continuously bullied at school - without intervention from school staff *Naturally, a child will need time for social integration, so the goal is to move from unsatisfactory, towards good over the monitoring period.*		

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Domain / goal	**Monitoring spot check** *(please review indicators and then, for each domain ticket whether progress to date is good, satisfactory, below average or unsatisfactory)* *Note: When reviewing, as several issues covered for each domain, take the lowest score achieved*		
	1st Monitor @ 6 months	**2nd Monitor @ 12 months**	**3rd Monitor @ 18 months**
Housing	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory
Indicators for housing	**Good (3 points)** • running water and electricity in the house • adequate room and privacy for family members • good insulation and heating • clean and hygienic • adequate furniture • housing is stable **Satisfactory (2 points)** • running water in the house • basic, functional furniture • clean • some form of heating available • space available for child to study • housing is unstable (child and family may have to move in the upcoming months) **Below Average (1 point)** • no running water in the house but tap exists within the perimeters of the house • no regular electricity supply • lack of space for child to study • lack of practical furniture • old, dysfunctional doors and windows • housing is very unstable (family will have to move soon) **Unsatisfactory (0 point)** • no running water in the house and no tap within perimeters of the house. Or unsafe water • no or no regular electricity supply • unhealthy sanitary conditions (including cleanliness) • not sufficient space/privacy • lack of basic furniture • lack of possibility for heating • leaking roof or uninsulated walls, lack of proper doors or windows (making heating ineffective, draft in the house, etc.) • family will likely be evicted from the accommodation in the upcoming weeks.		

This checklist was developed by: Terre des hommes Foundation in Hungary, ECPAT (Austria), Hors la rue (France) and ARSIS (Greece), as well as Terre des hommes Albania and Kosovo Delegations, Medica Zenica (BiH), the Center for Youth Integration (Serbia), the Montenegrin Women's Lobby and Open Gate/La Strada FYROM, as part of the project "Monitoring the Situation of Children Returned from EU Countries" and is partially funded by the European Return Fund.

Domain / goal	**Monitoring spot check** *(please review indicators and then, for each domain ticket whether progress to date is good, satisfactory, below average or unsatisfactory)* *Note: When reviewing, as several issues covered for each domain, take the lowest score achieved*		
	1st Monitor @ 6 months	**2nd Monitor @ 12 months**	**3rd Monitor @ 18 months**
Health and lifestyle	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory
Indicators for access to health and health condition of the child	**Good (3 points)** • medical services are available and accessible (appointments can be made within the week, available within 7kms from residence, affordable) • specialised services are available (within 30 kms) • quality of care and attention is good (skilled, attentive staff, medical supplies are adequate) • child is in good health **Satisfactory (2 points)** • basic services exist and are available (within 7kms from residence) • no specialised services are available (within 30kms) • there is support available for vulnerable populations to access healthcare • child is ill but is being treated **Unsatisfactory (1 point)** • medical services are hard to reach (more than 7kms from residence) • quality of care inadequate (lack of education of medical staff, lack of medical supplies or lack of attention, signs of discrimination of certain groups) • unaffordable and no health insurance available or accessible for vulnerable populations • child is frequently ill and/or his chronic condition cannot be treated • psychological counselling for children suffering from PTSD or trauma not available		

Legal situation	□ Good □ Some gaps exist □ Administrative invisibility	□ Good □ Some gaps exist □ Administrative invisibility	□ Good □ Some gaps exist □ Administrative invisibility
Indicators for legal situation	**Good (3 points)** • child has all official documents **Some gaps exist (1 point)** • ID, or school certificates are missing **Administrative invisibility (0 point)** • lack of citizenship or • lack of birth certificate or • lack or residence permit		

This checklist was developed by: Terre des hommes Foundation in Hungary, ECPAT (Austria), Hors la rue (France) and ARSIS (Greece), as well as Terre des hommes Albania and Kosovo Delegations, Medica Zenica (BiH), the Center for Youth Integration (Serbia), the Montenegrin Women's Lobby and Open Gate/La Strada FYROM, as part of the project "Monitoring the Situation of Children Returned from EU Countries" and is partially funded by the European Return Fund.

Domain / goal	**Monitoring spot check** *(please review indicators and then, for each domain ticket whether progress to date is good, satisfactory, below average or unsatisfactory)* *Note: When reviewing, as several issues covered for each domain, take the lowest score achieved*		
	1st Monitor @ 6 months	**2nd Monitor @ 12 months**	**3rd Monitor @ 18 months**
Family relations	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Some warning signs □ At risk	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Some warning signs □ At risk	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Some warning signs □ At risk
Indicators for family relations	**Good (3 points)** • nurturing relationship among family members/among children and guardians • child is treated as well as the other children • parents (guardians) pay adequate attention to the child • child is encouraged and supported to study and develop his/her skills and abilities **Satisfactory (2 points)** • despite the apparent love among family members/children and guardians, child needs additional attention of social worker • some conflicts or tension exists among children or the child and the guardians/parents but overall they manage these **Some warning signs (1 point)** • apparent tensions (and signs of substance abuse) in the family • child does not get positive guidance from guardians/parents • some of the child's psychological, emotional, physical needs are not met **At risk (0 point)** • signs of neglect or abuse by guardians/parents • child is treated differently (worse) than other children • serious psychological, emotional, physical needs remain unaddressed		

Safety	□ Safe □ Safe with some concerns □ Unsafe	□ Safe □ Safe with some concerns □ Unsafe	□ Safe □ Safe with some concerns □ Unsafe
Indicators for safety	**Safe (2 points)** • safe environment, no safety concerns for family or for the child **Safe with some concerns (1 point)** • wide-spread discrimination against minority groups the child belongs to • high crime rate in the community • signs of social tension against returned families/children exist **Unsafe (0 point)** • presence of armed conflict • presence of unrest • serious threats to the family or the child directly		

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	1st Monitor @ 6 months	**2nd Monitor @ 12 months**	**3rd Monitor @ 18 months**
Financial support	□ Good □ Satisfactory □ Below Average □ Unsatisfactory		
Indicators for financial support	**Good (3 points)** • the plan developed is realistic and appropriate and was carried out. • basic needs of the family and child are met • sustainability of socio-economic situation of the family/child **Satisfactory (2 points)** • the realistic and appropriate plan is under implementation • basic needs of the family and child are met • measures have been put in place to achieve sustainability of the socio-economic situation of the family/child (not yet achieved) **Below Average (1 point)** • the plan needed to be readjusted substantially because it was not realistic • some basic needs of the family and child are not met • gaps the financial support exist **Unsatisfactory (0 point)** • implementation of financial support was not done • basic needs of the family and child are not met		

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