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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL JUSTICE and CONSUMERS

Directorate C: Fundamental rights and Union citizenship
Unit C.1: Fundamental rights and rights of the child

Brussels, 25 April 2016
JUST/C1/MK

SUMMARY RECORD

11th MEETING OF THE INFORMAL EXPERT GROUP ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Brussels, 7 March 2016

1. INTRODUCTION

The eleventh meeting of the informal expert group on the rights of the child took place on 7 March 2016. Delegates from 14 Member States attended the meeting (AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IS, MT, NL, PT, SK and UK) and the Commission was represented by the rights of the child team (Fundamental rights and rights of the child unit, DG JUST), DG Employment (DG EMPL) and DG Education and Culture (DG EAC). The meeting was chaired by the Commission.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING; INFORMATION FROM THE COMMISSION ON RIGHTS OF THE CHILD MATTERS, INCL. THE 10.2.2016 COMMUNICATION ON MIGRATION

The draft agenda was adopted with no changes. The minutes of the last meeting were adopted with no changes. The Chair welcomed new delegates.

The Chair explained that this and the next meeting of the informal expert group will be solely on **child protection of children in migration**. Today's meeting focuses on reception, guardianship and children going missing. Discussion should cover unaccompanied children as well as children travelling with families. The Commission updates its [compilation of data and reports on children in migration](#) every 10 days, and all delegates are invited to share the contents with their colleagues.

On funding, the Chair informed on the following calls under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme of DG JUST:

- The call on [corporal punishment](#) was closed on 03 March 2016 and 15 applications were received.
- The call on [116 000 hotlines for missing children](#) is being evaluated and 16 applications were received.
- New [call on capacity-building for child protection professionals and lawyers representing children](#) was published, deadline on 4 May 2016. The call for proposal covers re-integration

post detention of children, diversion from criminal justice, preparation for aging out of foster care and judicial care.

New information on [upcoming calls is also regularly disseminated through the messages on rights of the child to stakeholders](#), published on the Commission's website. Delegates are welcome to share these messages with their colleagues who can also be added to the stakeholder list (please write to JUST-CHILDRENS-RIGHTS@ec.europa.eu).

On 10 February 2016, the Commission adopted a [Communication on the state of play of the European agenda with references to children on pages 15 and 16](#). The Communication was accompanied by, amongst others, an [Annex 6](#) which covers ongoing actions contributing to the protection of children in migration, including in the area of guardianship, funding for education, and funding for child protection. The Commission announced to employ **a comprehensive approach to the protection of children in migration**. The development of a concrete list of actions will be coordinated by DG JUST, with the aim to be finalised in June-July 2016. The form of the document is still to be determined, but it aims to draw together different EU actions for children in migration.

The Chair recalled recent data on children in migration:

- In 2015, one million persons arrived by sea and one in three was a child.
- More and more children are arriving by sea. As at 3 March 2016, 36% among those arriving by sea to Greece were children.
- In January 2016, 3.500 unaccompanied children applied for asylum in the EU (ninety thousand unaccompanied children applied for asylum in the EU in 2015).
- According to a Europol estimate, 10.000 unaccompanied children have gone missing in Europe in the context of the refugee crisis.

3. THE USE OF THE EUROPEAN FUND FOR THE MOST DEPRIVED AND THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN MIGRATION – DG EMPL

The Commission (DG EMPL) presented how the Asylum, migration and integration fund ([AMIF](#)), European social fund ([ESF](#)) and European fund for the most deprived ([FEAD](#)) could be used for the protection of children in migration.

The European social fund (ESF), established in 1957, is a shared management fund available for 28 Member States (MS) with a budget of 86 billion EUR for the period 2014-2020. Twenty per cent of the each MS total budget should be dedicated to social inclusion.

The main goal of the ESF is to support employment and geographical mobility. Its objective is also to a) support those excluded from the labour market, b) to integrate them into the labour market and c) to ensure access to enabling services (housing, care for children and/or elderly). The ESF can support capacity building activities for authorities and stakeholders, non-discrimination activities and awareness raising campaigns against xenophobia.

The ESF can be used for long term integration of migrants and to some extent for their reception. Long term integration in the labour market can start as soon as the asylum seeker is granted refugee status (it is MS competence, but it should start at the latest nine months after the asylum application was filed). It is however possible to start certain activities before (such as vocational training). Education for children can be funded from the ESF upon their arrival (and application for a refugee status or international protection).

The European fund for the most deprived (FEAD) was set up in 2014 .It is a shared management fund as well, with a smaller budget of 4 billion EUR. It can be used to secure basic material assistance (meals, clothing, school supplies and sleeping bags) and some social inclusion activities to a number of groups defined by the MS. Sweden for example, funded only basic material assistance from FEAD, in Denmark FEAD was used to support language classes and socialisation activities.

These three funds (AMIF, ESF and FEAD) can support similar activities, but their application concerns different timeframes:

- FEAD and AMIF apply at moment of arrival;
- FEAD and ESF can be used after asylum seekers have applied for international protection;
- ESF is often used for long-term integration once asylum status has been granted.

The eligibility depends on a) the scope of the Operational Programme, b) the Member State's definition of the most deprived. The Commission has offered some flexibility in amendments of the operational programmes if needed in the context of the migration crisis, and it advocates the complementary use of all three funds. A [note](#) that clearly describe the scope of funds and [a document](#) that looks at synergies between ESF, FEAD and AMIF funds were produced. The Commission has set up monitoring committees to encourage discussion with and between MS and to see how programmes are being implemented. So far, only six MS indicated possible use of ESF, FEAD and AMIF in the context of migration:

- Germany for language courses and qualification measures matching the needs of the labor market,
- The Netherlands mentioned refugees as a target group for social inclusion activities,
- The Czech Republic indicated possible implementation of several measures targeting disadvantage groups and an assistance program for “foreign candidates for employment”,
- Italy and Bulgaria for support education programmes,
- Slovakia to reinforce the capacity of NGOs and to provide training for integration,
- Belgium and Slovenia – used FEAD for distribution of food.

However, AMIF remains the preferred fund to use for the immediate support directed to migrants, and ESF and FEAD are kept for other groups.

The European regional development fund ([ERDF](#)) is now available for reception measures and in emergency situations to support infrastructure.

The Chair thanked DG EMPL and emphasised that there were no restrictions in using funds to support children in migration. She stressed that it was important to combine EU funds to address as many needs as possible. She added that a new proposal from DG ECHO (budget 700 million euro) should be adopted in April 2016.

The floor was opened for comments or questions.

SK: The delegate asked for clarification on the restriction in using the funds to support children in reception and if it was possible to use them to support NGOs working on guardianship transfer and family reunification.

DG EMPL replied that FEAD can support reception of children in terms of basic materials (upon arrival) and ESF can support children once they have arrived and have applied for international protection.

The Chair added that the funds should not contribute to the institutionalisation of children.

4. THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN ON ARRIVAL AND IN RECEPTION AND THE PREVENTION OF THEIR GOING MISSING: EXCHANGE ON PROMISING PRACTICE AND CHALLENGES FACED BY MS - *TOUR DE TABLE*

The Chair gave an update on relocation and mentioned that a very low number of unaccompanied children has been relocated to Finland, with no pledges received from other Member States.¹

The Chair opened the floor to delegates and asked them to focus their interventions on:

- Identification of children;
- Missing children and measures taken to prevent them from going missing;
- Reception conditions including recourse to foster families instead of more institutionalised care.

As for the identification of children, the chair mentioned that in hotspots children were photographed. Regarding the age assessment the chair encouraged the use of existing tools and publications on age assessments, for example: [EASO - Age assessment. Practice in Europe](#). The chair added that in some countries (UK and EI) the medical age assessment was replaced by psychosocial assessments. The Chair pointed out that one of the issues reported frequently was the lack of guardians. She also informed delegates that DG HOME will hold a Contact Committee on 7-8 April 2016 which will focus on children in migration, with a particular focus on guardianship.

The chair mentioned the 2015 [EMN report](#) on unaccompanied children. Lengthy procedures for family reunification (e.g. often 6-11 months) are a driver for children going missing, when children could reach their family members in a week. Experiences to date in foster care show that better quality care helps to decrease the number of missing children. **The Chair** urged the delegates to look at the [NIDOS country reports, which](#) showed a good range of models of foster care that can provide better care to unaccompanied children. Coincidentally, foster care was also more cost-effective. Use of foster care is explicitly provided for in the reception conditions directive and could be used more extensively. Under rights of the child funding, the Commission is funding a project to build the capacity of social worker working with foster families for unaccompanied children, building on the previous NIDOS project.

5. TOUR DE TABLE

AT: The Austrian delegate explained that in 2007 there were 500 unaccompanied children in Austria, most of them in Vienna and lower Austria. In 2014 the number reached 2300 and by June 2015, 1300 unaccompanied children were registered. For the moment there are approximately 3000 unaccompanied children in Austria. At the end of 2015 the majority of them lived in Vienna and all were enrolled in schools. The education system is considered as ready to welcome children, but it

¹According to most recent information – 12 children were relocated to Finland *as at 15.04.2016

faces some difficulties. Children do not speak or they speak very little German, therefore they first have to learn the language and only later can be enrolled in general classes.

In March the Ombudsman's office organised an annual gathering to discuss missing children. The discussion focused on using digital media (mobile phones) to communicate with children which would also allow tracing them better.

BE: Belgium receives approximately 40 unaccompanied children per day. In 2015, 5000 unaccompanied children were registered in Belgium (1000 in December 2015 only). In January 2016 the number reached 375 and in February, 283 new children were registered. The delegate reported a worrying increase in the number of very young children arriving to Belgium: in 2014, 44 children aged 0-5 and 54 aged 6-10 were registered. A year later, in 2015, 55 children aged 0-5 and 135 aged 6-10 were registered in Belgium. Normally, a guardian would be appointed immediately to a child, but due to the lack of guardians, it is not possible any more. The national office received financial support to recruit new guardians, and efforts are underway to improve the situation. One out of three children does not have relevant documents to support claims to be a child. Results of the medical age assessment show that almost 70% of them are adults. Belgium applies triple medical examinations to assess the age of unaccompanied children. Children can be taken care of at the federal or at the community level. Flemish community regulations stipulate that if a child is younger than 12 years old, she or he should be placed in a foster care, older children can decide if they prefer to go to a foster family or institution. There are not enough foster families, especially for unaccompanied children. Unaccompanied children who are identified as victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation are placed in special protective centres.

CZ: Czech Republic is a transit country and this is partly the reason why children abscond. Twenty-three unaccompanied children stay in the facility for foreign children in Prague. Children are informed about the family unification procedure and encouraged to stay in a safe place rather than go missing. Efforts are made to speed up the processes of family reunification and to improve the possibilities of putting children in foster families – it is possible but not really used. The conditions in detention centres have improved since autumn, but children were still being placed there. In December 2015 legislation was changed to allow unaccompanied children access to the healthcare system.

DE: In 2015, 148.257 children applied for asylum. As of 29.02.2016, the Youth Welfare Service has taken care of 60.638 unaccompanied children. According to EUROPOL estimations there were 4700 unaccompanied children missing. The German government assessed the number as unrealistically high and resulting from multiple counting of children. A new law introduced in November 2015 improves the lodging and accommodation for youth and children as well as distribution of unaccompanied children across Germany. The protection of accompanied children in reception is based on a two-pillar concept, protecting from violence/abuse by (1) allowing municipalities to take up credits from the development bank to convert the facilities for women/children and (2) cooperation with UNICEF to implement standards, train staff and offer childhood education.

IS: Iceland deals with a lower number of children than most of the EU Member States. In 2015 there were seven unaccompanied children, in 2016 only three were registered. The rules for foster care are the same as for national children. For the moment, 45 families are interested in taking care of three unaccompanied children. Due to geographical constraints, children do not abscond.

ES: Information received from the relevant ministries is fragmented. Very few people arrived in Spain under the relocation scheme. Four hundred are still to arrive from Italy and Greece and Turkey. Citizens are keen and eager to receive migrants and the infrastructure is prepared. After the

registration, unaccompanied children are granted a residence permit and are integrated in the social system. The delegate mentioned a project implemented by the Council of Europe on the administrative detention of migrants. It aims to codify existing rules. The outcomes will be shared with the other Member States.

The Chair added that FRA is also looking at that issue and the results will be published in September.

FR: It is a challenge to get data from the relevant ministries and data is fragmented. According to the CRC report, at the end of 2014, there were 14.536 asylum applications filed by children, including 367 by unaccompanied children. Currently, approximately 326 unaccompanied children live in Calais – most of them waiting for reunification with family in the UK. France and the UK signed an agreement on the reunifications of families which should speed up the process. A legal centre operating in Calais has 200 open cases out of which one is about to be successfully closed. The situation of the camp itself has improved. A New camp at Grande-Synthe was set up and it will be run by NGOs.

HR: Croatia is a transit country. 30% of migrants are children (607 102). Eighty-eight unaccompanied children were registered in 2015 and only five in 2016. In 2015 and 2016, seven unaccompanied children and 17 children with families applied for asylum. Children usually prefer to continue their trip. Younger children often state that the older person in the group is the father, and older children claim to be adults. Victims of trafficking are difficult to identify, due to a) lack of documents, b) polygamous marriages, c) similar family names. In the last two years no child victims of trafficking were identified. As for the reception of children, three protocols were developed: a) protocol on separated children, b) rules of procedure on accommodation and subsidiary protection, c) identification and assistance to victims of trafficking. Exceptions to protocols:

- Compulsory medical examination performed after an unaccompanied child is placed in the institution (not before as it should be).
- All unaccompanied children stay in a special home for children with behavioral problems (even if the protocol says differently).

Children do not tend to go missing. Two escaped from the asylum detention centre, one from the special home. Social welfare institutions are open. Children learn English. They can use mobile phones and have access to internet. Foster families are not used. Good example of family reunification: a Syrian child was reunited with an uncle in Germany in one month. The child had a guardian who was in daily contact with the mother in Syria. There are 31 special guardians at the moment and social centres are now being appointed as special guardians. Some boys refuse to work with female guardians. Croatia has been suffering from a lack of interpreters. Guardians complained about lack of supervision and recognition and would welcome standards at the EU level. They suggested that the network of guardians should be established at EU level.

MT: The delegate explained that she was not a government representative, but a representative of the [President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of the Society](#). It was set up by the President of Malta, Ms Marie Louise Coleiro Preca in 2014. For the moment, five unaccompanied children stay in Malta. Between 2008 and 2013 there were 443 child asylum seekers. In 2013, 70 children went missing. The foundation set up a platform for NGOs run by the asylum seekers. At the moment there are seven NGOs registered, and another one is in the pipeline (set up by former child asylum seekers). During a meeting with child asylum seekers, the foundation enquired about education and employment prospects. Participants (13 boys, four girls decided not to come) complained about poor job prospects and limited education possibilities. They pointed out that the education allowance after the age of 16 decreases and it is not sufficient to cover schooling. Children would like to do some sport activities,

but for various reason they were not able to. Some of them wanted to be reunited with families, but it did not happen. All of them were assessed or assessed themselves as being at various stages of depression and worried about possible suicide.

NL: In 2013, 300 unaccompanied children were registered in the Netherlands; in 2014 the number reached 960 and in 2015 almost 4000. In 2013, 100 children were missing (20 ran away from the protective shelters), in 2014, 160, including 24 from protective shelters. Last year, 24 children went missing, 21 of them came from Vietnam – they arrived in different groups and left in different groups – a police investigation is ongoing. Most of the time, guardians know where the child is going. As of 1 January 2016 the Netherlands applies a new reception model. Unaccompanied children meet with three institutions: NIDOS (guardians), immigration service and with the police. NIDOS takes decision about where a child would go. Children under 16 years old are all taken into a foster family. Older children are placed in special small units. After being granted the refugee status, they either stay in the units or move to a foster family.

PT: Portugal does not currently receive many refugees, but has a long tradition of receiving people.

When submitting applications for asylum at the border, the asylum seekers must stay in Installation Centres located in airport international areas. There is a specific procedure for children. They are allowed to enter the national territory immediately after applying for asylum, they stay in specialised centres and are assisted by social workers. In the case of unaccompanied children, the Juvenile Courts are immediately contacted in order to appoint a legal representative. Until unaccompanied refugee children turn 18, they stay under the care of the Portuguese Council for Refugees (an NGO acting on behalf of the UNHCR). After that, Social Security takes over.

The Asylum Law was amended in 2014 in order to transpose three EU Directives. These amendments aim to reinforce the guarantees provided to asylum seekers, in particular unaccompanied children, as well as to strengthen the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or the non-governmental organisation acting on its behalf. The amended law also guarantees the free of charge translation of documents for asylum seekers with insufficient income and the right to make statements in the asylum seekers mother tongue, in conditions that assure due confidentiality. The asylum law foresees the possibility of granting a residency status for humanitarian reasons for a period up to three years. The new asylum law considers unaccompanied children as applicants with specific needs. Portugal has two reception centres for asylum seekers, run by the Portuguese Council for Refugees. A Reception Centre for Refugees was inaugurated in 2006, to accommodate asylum seekers and refugees and resettled refugees during their first months in Portugal. Besides providing housing, food and assistance, the Centre follows a unique approach to the integration of refugees by promoting their inclusion in the local communities, including through the organisation of joint activities. It can accommodate 60 persons.

The Reception Centre for Refugee Children, inaugurated in 2012, accommodates unaccompanied children applying for asylum in Portugal and provides proper housing, food, assistance and integration activities. The Centre is run by a specialised team of professionals. It can accommodate 17 children. In order to avoid overcrowding in the Refugee Reception Centres, in 2013 the Immigration and Border Service resorted to alternative housing solutions, such as hotel accommodation and renting of rooms in private households. Regular and irregular migrants have access to the National Health Service under the same conditions as Portuguese citizens. To ensure access to healthcare and education all unaccompanied children with irregular status are registered in the national registry, managed by the High Commission of Migrations. Portugal has integration plans for immigrants since 2007. Very recently the government launched an awareness raising campaign to present facts and dispel myths

about refugees. Lessons addressing discrimination and xenophobia were introduced in all classrooms. They are based on the UNHCR and IOM toolkit about migration and asylum in the EU, "[Not just numbers](#)".

HU: Hungary is a transit country and many unaccompanied children prefer to continue their journey instead of staying in Hungary. The majority of unaccompanied children are placed in care institutions, where they spend app. 2-3 weeks. In 2015, 4000 unaccompanied children were registered in Hungary. 99% of them were boys, 90% came from Afghanistan, 4% from Syria, 3% from Kosovo. Since the beginning of 2016 the number has been much lower– between 10 and 20 new unaccompanied children have been registered in Hungary. Age assessment remains a problematic issue. Many children are around 17-18 years old. Unaccompanied children are entitled to receive meals, housing, education, support etc. to facilitate their physical, mental and moral development. If they want to stay in HU after the age of 18, they get a work permit and receive follow up care until they reach 25.

SK: Slovakia is a transit country as well. Children usually stay in the facilities up to six days. In 2015 34 children filed asylum applications, most of them were boys at the age between 16 and 17. Similarly to Hungary, there are problems with age assessments. Social care organisations are forced to mix older children (17-18) with younger ones, which causes tensions in the facilities. Children are granted subsidiary protection and they very often do not wait until the asylum procedure is finalised, but go missing before.

FI: In 2015, 26.000 asylum applications were filed in Finland in total of which 2755 are unaccompanied children and 4124 accompanied children. Children represent 26% of asylum seekers (as of 10.02.2016) in Finland. There are currently 4100 children with families and 2800 unaccompanied children in Finland. Most of them came from Iraq (60%) and Afghanistan (20%). Children do not run away that often. Many of them suffer from mental health issues. Children are placed in small group homes (maximum seven children in one home). According to legislation, up to three units can be placed in one building (meaning maximum 21 children).

Most unaccompanied children receive a positive decision. Sixty per cent of the families who applied for asylum as of the beginning of the crisis have already migrated from Finland.

UK: The UK focuses its attention on countries of origin and is prepared to support upstream work. Unaccompanied children in the UK are taken care of by local authorities and they receive the same support as other children. Each child has a social worker assigned. The UK applies a careful approach towards unaccompanied children, similar to the UNHCR position, based on the principle that the child should stay as close as possible to the family for family reunification purposes. In 2015, 3043 unaccompanied children applied for asylum (9% of all applicants). Most of them came from Eritrea (694), Afghanistan (656) and Albania (456). In 2015, 2000 initial decisions were taken and 66% of unaccompanied children were granted refugee/humanitarian status.

LV (*sent via e-mail*): In 2015, 12 asylum applications were filed. Latvia faces a number of problems:

- lack of understanding of different roles between central and local government bodies,
- insufficient language skills
- insufficient training or lack of training for people interviewing unaccompanied children
- lack of knowledge about procedures (e.g. how to find a foster family and /or how to ensure the best interests of the child).

To tackle that, Ministry of Welfare supported the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Nordic Council of Ministers in launching a series of training sessions on the protection of children in

migration. Thirty-five professionals and officials from Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Norway and Sweden participated in a training session on 15-16.02.2016 in Riga. Two more courses will take place. The government has drafted new legislation which will enable the placement of unaccompanied children in residential institutions or foster families. There are positive examples of NGOs and volunteers working with families and children and organising excursions, public events together with the refugees, board game evenings, collective cooking or different thematic evenings.

EE (sent via e-mail): 58 unaccompanied children were registered in Estonia between 2010 and 2015. All of them received appropriate protection.

After registration of an unaccompanied child, a legal representative is appointed and a child is placed in residential care. Estonian National Social Insurance Board (ENSIB) is responsible for making sure that children are taken care of and have access to all relevant services, including schooling, psychological care, medical services, translation services. Unaccompanied children can also stay in the substitute home service or foster care. For the moment SOS Children's Village Estonia is the service provider and the partner for ENSIB. If a police officer has reasonable grounds to assess the declared age of an unaccompanied child to be above 18, the child is placed in a detention centre for immigrants for 48 hours. During this time the age assessment is done. Children are also placed in the detention centre if they arrive with parents. Parents can be also separated (e.g. father goes to the detention centre, mother with children to the accommodation centre for asylum seekers).

No education activities are provided in the detention centres. In 2015, Children's Ombudsman suggested that children should not be detained and since then the number of children in detention decreased significantly.

In 2016, new Child Protection Act entered into force that lays down the core principles of every child's best interests and sets responsibilities for government authorities and agencies as well as for local authorities to safeguard and protect the rights of the child.

The Chair asked delegates for questions and comments.

SK: The delegate asked which authorities were responsible for conducting the age assessment in Belgium.

BE: Replied that the service for guardianship asks for the age assessment which is then performed by contracted medical clinics (medical and psychological tests). In case of doubts, the decision is always in favour of the child. There is however no appeal procedure.

6. CHALLENGES AND EU SUPPORT FOR THE INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN IN MIGRATION INTO NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS – DG EAC

The Commission (DG EAC) presented EU actions to support integration of children in migration into national education systems. Education is the most powerful mean to provide people with skills, to ensure their personal fulfilment, and social cohesion and to enrich and strengthen human capital in Europe. Education has a transforming effect on the child's family and environment. Education and social cohesion are very powerful tools to integrate and support migrants.

In 2015 the Commission consulted Member States about the situation and challenges in the education systems in the context of migration. The main findings, as reported in November 2015 to the Council, are:

- The vast majority of migrants were young people of working age with low skills
- Children stayed out of education for a long time
- Receiving societies needed to adopt a new pedagogical approach in order to combat prejudices

Based on the consultation with MS, the Commission identified eight areas for improvement:

1. Ability to communicate in the language of the destination country. Language is considered as a key factor in successful integration. Lessons and transition classes to learn the language and improve key competences should allow to transit to normal classes. It was stressed that there is a need for recruitment of teachers with relevant language skills.

2. Knowledge assessment and recognition of prior learning, both formal and informal needs to take place more often.

3. Low level of basic skills. Migrants arrive with little or no previous education. Age gaps in the classes between national children and migrants have an impact on the integration and well-being of all.

4. Civic education. Diversity in classrooms is a reality. Measures to address the situation need to be based on shared European values and understanding for the refugees' situation.

5. Teacher training and cooperation with the staff. Teachers and social workers dealing with traumatised children need to receive relevant training and support, also in multicultural competences. According to [OECD Education at Glance 2015](#), 32% of teachers said they had to cope with multicultural and multilingual environments.

6. Assessment of skills for higher education. Migrants arrive with insufficient or no documents at all and therefore they have difficulties to prove their prior education and to access higher education.

7. Segregation and geographical concentration. Migrant children are often placed together in certain schools and that results in segregation in society.

8. Assignment of resources among relevant actors.

The Commission's priorities in the area of education of children in migration are:

- To integrate newly arrived refugee children in the education structures as soon as possible (this should cover the pathway from early education to adult learning). Focus would be on the language classes, assessment of skills and on teacher training.
- To prevent underachievement and underassessment of skills.

According to [PISA](#), young people with a migrant background are 70% more likely to leave school early in comparison to nationals, even if born in the country. This is linked to socio-economic disadvantages and differs among EU MS. The UK and Ireland have a high skilled foreign-born population, France and the Netherlands – low skilled, in Spain and Italy there are no differences. In Portugal the early school leaving rate is the same for nationals and foreigners.

The Commission emphasised that early childhood education and care is absolutely necessary and crucial to guarantee integration on an equal footing and to prevent social and cultural exclusion. The Commission has been working on a package on integration of migrants. The aim is to support access to education and prevent exclusion via language classes (Erasmus+), recognition of skills and education (peer activities), and intercultural activities. A peer learning event is planned to take place in Sweden (about welcome and transition classes and skills assessment) and in Germany (focus on unaccompanied children). MS are more than welcome to provide examples of good practices and peer activities can still be organised. The DG EAC representative encouraged the use existing programmes such as [Erasmus +](#) and mentioned some tools that can be used to support education staff :

- [Gateway](#) – platform school education
- [European Toolkit for Schools](#) – which promotes inclusive education and tackles early school leaving
- [Sirius policy network](#) will be extended to support teachers and educators.

As for the available funds, the Commission enumerated some of them:

- New call for proposal to foster inclusions and to prevent radicalisation will be launched in March.
- As of summer 2016, Erasmus + will start an on line tool for language assessment and classes – there will be around 100.000 licenses given over the course of three years.
- European voluntary service call with a budget of EUR1m for projects for integration of refugees.
- In 2016 social inclusion is a priority in the allocation of funds and particular attention is paid to projects addressing migrants and unaccompanied children.

The expert group on intercultural and integration of migrants formed within the European equality framework will publish a Handbook in 2017.

The DG EAC representative drew attention to two major challenges: a) how to integrate children who are not yet granted refugee status, b) the type of education and/or training children receive in reception centres.

The Chair thanked DG EAC for the presentation and opened the floor for comments or questions.

DG EAC, in response to a question from **MT** on active participation and intercultural dialogue, replied that the expert group on intercultural dialogue will be created this year and will gather delegates from relevant ministries and experts in the intercultural dialogue. It will meet four times and produce a handbook in 2017.

FR: Unaccompanied children integrated in the French mainstream protection system are doing really well in schools, sometimes better than local populations. Is there any data about the situation in other MS?

DG EAC replied that it was difficult to retrieve such data. There was no evidence that a migration background is related to low performance in school.

PT: 24 schools in Portugal received an intercultural school award. Portugal runs the [Choices Programme](#).

DG EAC replied that indeed Portugal was an example of successful integration policies.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Chair informed delegates that the next meeting will also focus on children in migration (*post meeting note: a June date will be communicated in due course*).

cc: Interservice group on rights of the child

Annexes:

1. IOM UNHCR Joint Technical Mission. Summary report. Unaccompanied Migrant and Refugee Children. Alternatives to Detention in Malta. 27.04-1.05.2014
2. Report from the Forum activity with unaccompanied children asylum seekers, Malta 25.04.2015
3. Information for Asylum Seekers – Finland
4. Information for unaccompanied children who are applying for international protection pursuant to Article 4 of Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 – Finland

DG EMPL:

5. Frequently asked questions on ESF and FEAD support to asylum seekers
6. ESF and FEAD support to asylum seekers and refugees – ppt