

Monitoring Returned Minors

29 November 2013 - Progress report and preliminary project conclusions

This document gives insight in the project activities and progress of the Monitoring Return of Minors project. Furthermore, with the project being in the final phase, it presents preliminary conclusions. In the five attachments, a more detailed explanation is given for each of the 5 results promised in the logical framework.

Background

In the field of return migration (mostly of asylum seekers), there is limited attention for reintegration and after-care and hardly any attention for monitoring and evaluation. When it comes to the return of minors the responsibilities of Member States are even larger; the best interest of the child has to be taken into account in all decisions (UN Convention of the Rights of the Child). Currently it is practically impossible to make well-informed decisions regarding return in the best interest of the child: there is hardly any monitoring after return and hardly any contact between countries of origin and destination countries. Systematic, methodology-based monitoring of returned minors could enable better decision-making and assistance in individual cases, but could lead first and foremost to return policies that are better tuned toward the needs of children.

Project design

In order to be able to develop and test a monitoring mechanism able to approach minors with best interest criteria the project partners set out to design a first draft of the methodology. The goal was to monitor the well being of the minor and the chances on a positive future perspective (as opposed to for example the completion of reintegration measures as a goal for monitoring). Key was finding a logic and systematic methodology that could be used by any EU Member State, at any given time after return (or even starting beforehand), regardless whether a returnee had received (reintegration) support. The result is an instrument that could be used for independent monitoring by any stakeholder deciding to use the methodology.

The partnership decided to collaborate with the University of Groningen because of their expertise in monitoring and assessing the well being of minors while they are still in the asylum procedure. The instrument uses a combination of interviewing the parents or responsible adults, interviews with children, self-assessments of children and data collection on factual background.

The success of the approach lies in the link between the Child Rights Convention and the questionnaires and in the combination of the different questionnaires. The combination of the questionnaires makes it possible to make an analysis across different variables. The different questionnaires forming the total monitoring instrument are explained in more detail in attachment 1 and the possibilities of their use and correlation between the different data are explained in attachment 2.

Process and challenges

Contracts were made with Kosovo Health Foundation and APPK, two local partners in Kosovo. These partners were selected based on their experience with reintegration measures for and interviews with returnees from EU Member states.

The project trained four of their staff members in using the monitoring instrument: administering the different questionnaires and registering the output in an online tool that was developed for this project. The

online tool is used to register all the data, makes it possible to keep a check on the quality of the data and is the basis for the analysis. 150 interviews in Kosovo and Albania were conducted in 11 months time.

The major challenges consisted of:

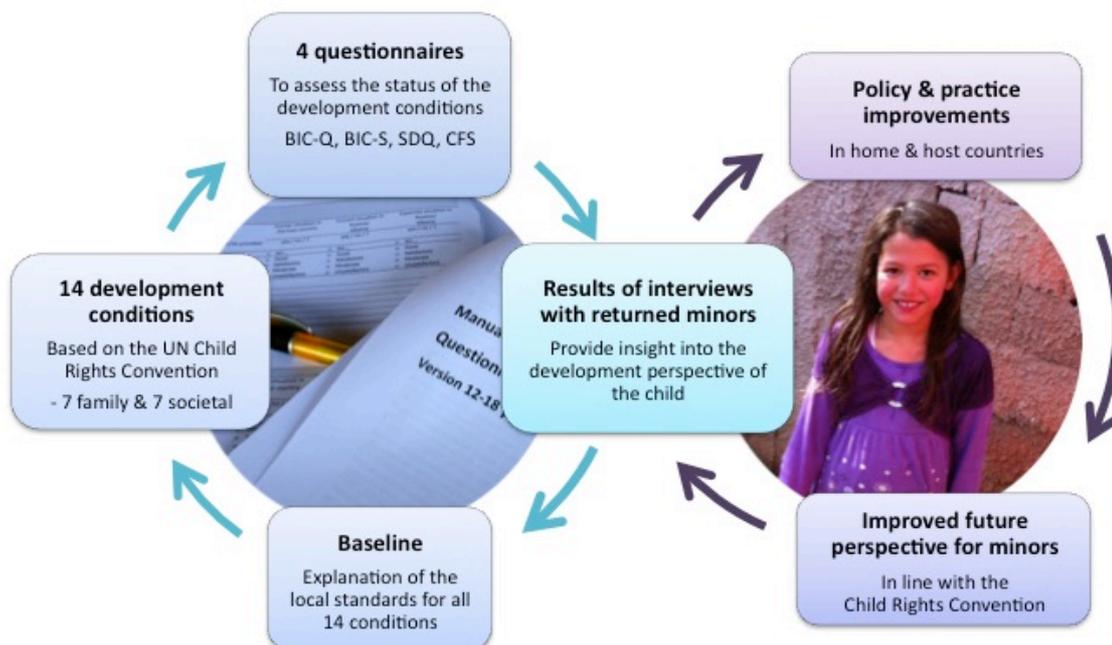
- Translating the Best interest of the Child Criteria to the local context. Lots of discussions within the project team, with the local partners, with experts and trial & error were needed to specify the local standards for the different conditions. The more the methodology will be used the better the quality of these descriptions will get. The challenge reflects the tension between a more universal approach (the basis of the CRC) and the local reality and culture (needed to be integrated to make the instrument valuable for monitoring return and well-being).
- Extra transnational and Skype meetings needed to discuss the initial interviews, to discuss the logic of the methodology and to discuss the interpretation of local standards.
- Developing the online tool and interviewing the minors went partially parallel with the effect that some of the administration in the online tool had to be done at a later stage.
- The interventions for the minors with the most problematic developmental conditions needed to follow the same methodological approach (strengthening moderate and/or unsatisfactory conditions in its connection to each other). It took quite some discussions and again trial & error for the interviewers to jointly with the minors and families decide on the right intervention with the most impact (within the limitations of the project). The final approach is presented in annex 3.

Objectives & Results

Not only will the below mentioned objectives and results be achieved, the project is mainly successful because of its logic and systematic approach. The coherence between the 14 conditions based on articles of the Childs Rights Convention, the related questionnaires, the results of the interviews leading to the description of local standards create a feedback loop that can actually lead to improved policy and practice and thus to improved future perspective to returned or returning minors. The instrument itself is self-improving too: the more it will be used, the more conclusions can be drawn and the better the validation.

Monitoring Learning Loop

To improve the future perspective of returned minors



Objectives (see original application)		Realisation
To contribute to a more sustainable and safer return of minors by:		
1	Designing monitoring mechanisms for returned minors	Integrated methodology, realised, in the process of reporting and writing
2	Offering a small scale pilot with support to correct the situation in case monitoring reveals shortcomings during the project	30 minors will be supported, the methodology is realised, the interventions are in process
3	Advising on the standards to be used for the establishment of mechanisms for assistance to minors, based on this small-scale pilot	In process
Deliverables (as in the logical framework)		Realisation
1	Long-term monitoring mechanisms for returned minors	See attachment 1 and 2
2	Sustainable mechanisms for assistance to minors and	See attachment 3
3	A small-scale pilot: A social work/guardianship-based support structure for minors is set up in Kosovo, in which the <i>best interest of the child determination</i> is tested (within the local context)	See attachment 3
4	Online tool: instrument for integrating support and monitoring on the medium/long term is developed	See attachment 4
5	Conference: more sustainable and safer return of minors through monitoring, Brussels	See attachment 5

Outcomes and conclusions

At this moment, with activities in its final phase, the general conclusions of the project can be drawn. On detailed findings, analysis, reporting and dissemination the work is ongoing.

The following conclusions will be part of the final presentation on 19 February in the European Parliament:

- The project shows that monitoring the well-being of children upon return to improve policies and assistance is possible in a methodological and structured way, against limited costs
- The instrument is applicable in any country of origin, but the baseline (the interpretation of development conditions in the local context) needs to be developed for each country of origin separately. More cases improve the instrument in general and the country-specific baseline
- The findings for Kosovo and Albania, related through the development conditions to the CRC, raise grave concerns. While a significant part of the monitored children are doing well, a large part is in desperate need for treatment and/or assistance. The results are communicated with the governments and their assistance programs. The findings make it possible to identify in which aspects of their development children are in danger
- Local standards, a regularly stated criterion by Member States when speaking about assessing the best interests of the child, are difficult to develop. The developed baseline is an operationalization of local standards. The project shows the need of a discourse on the interpretation of local standards (in assessing the best interests of children) as current practice in member States.

Next steps and ambitions

During the last months of the project the main aim will be to bring forward the results to partners with specific responsibilities (such as Member State migration-, asylum- and return authorities and the Kosovo government) or a specific interest in the issue and target group (such as UNHCR, UNICEF, ECRE and Save the Children). The final conference on the 19th of February is the highlight of dissemination activities (explained further in attachment 5).

Part of the dissemination will be:

- Showing the need for monitoring by using the findings and presenting the instrument as an easy-to-use and affordable instrument for policy improvement
- Convincing Member States and/or/in combination with countries of origin to continue monitoring in Kosovo and Albania, thereby increasing the validity and the caseload
- Convincing Member States and/or/in combination with countries of origin to look at more structural use of the instrument in their standing practices (through pilots or more permanent set-ups).

The first set-up in more countries of origin, with an established baseline and first conclusions, will make a large difference to member states as it reduces set-up time and costs significantly (continuation with all new cases in the Kosovo context must be possible for all EU returnees for an amount between € 50.000 and € 100.000).

Attachment 1: Monitoring model

Project deliverables 1, part 1: Long-term monitoring mechanisms for returned minors

Approach of the deliverable: The model for monitoring is described as detailed and thorough as possible, to make the instrument transferrable to other actors.

Short outline

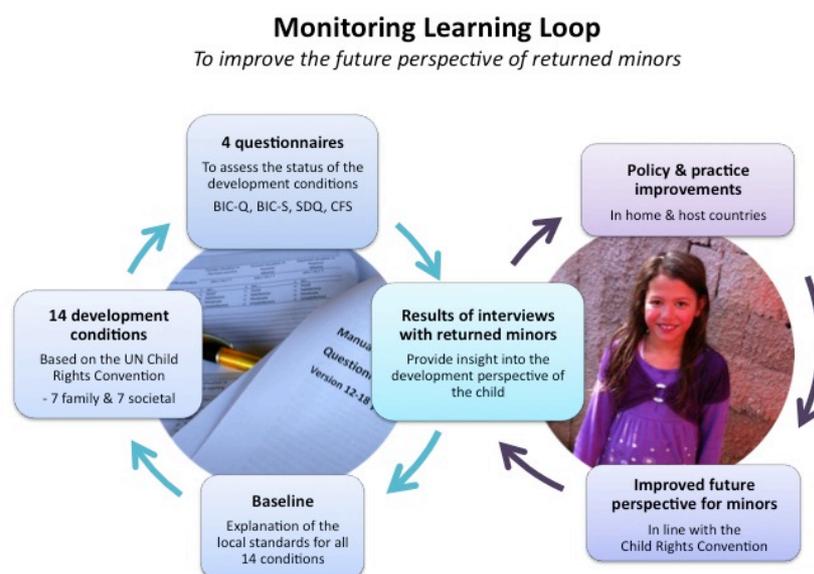
This report describes the developed instrument; it explains in detail how to use it and which steps to take. It estimates the time (and thereby financial) commitment that is needed and the results that can and cannot be expected. It makes recommendations for further use and development. Finally, it annexes all elements of the instrument.

The monitoring model is based upon 14 rearing conditions that are derived from the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), 7 related to the family environment and 7 related to the wider societal environment. For healthy emotional, physical and social development, a minor needs to have a minimum number of development conditions present.

The monitoring instrument, with which the actual monitoring is carried out, consists of four elements (questionnaires) that assess the status of the development conditions and the migration background of the minor:

1. Best Interest of the Child Questionnaire (BIC-Q)
2. Self assessment Questionnaire child (BIC-S)
3. Behavioural Questionnaire (SDQ)
4. Case Fact Sheet (CFS)

Scoring needs to be done by local interviewers, to ensure that development conditions are rated against the local context. By training the interviewers in the model and the manual, equal interpretation is ensured. By having the interviewers motivate the scores in detail, local standards for the development conditions are developed by aggregating interview scores.



The process and feasibility of using the instrument

Important conditions for a successful monitoring tool are that it is easy to apply, not too expensive, that it takes into account the local context as well as the CRC and that it generates data that are useful on the policy level. The following elements illustrate the feasibility of the instrument:

- Interviews take 2 – 3 hours, plus processing and travelling time
- Local interviewers can, with several days training and limited guidance, do the interviews
- Local interviewers and experts determine the scores on the conditions, ensuring local culture and context is integrated in the model
- More cases make it possible to draw conclusions on and between more variables. The aggregate scores on developmental conditions show where generally the problems of returning minors in their development can be found.

Results

The monitoring instrument is operational and tested in Kosovo and Albania with 150 cases.

Attachment 2: Findings of the monitoring

Project deliverables 1, part 2: Long-term monitoring mechanisms for returned minors

Approach of the deliverable: This report does two things, it presents the findings in Kosovo and Albania and it serves as the showcase of what the model can do. The main target group will be policy-makers, specialists and lobbyists that are interested in or need to be convinced of the need of monitoring (and using the model). A secondary target group is stakeholders specifically interested in the results with regard to Kosovo and Albania).

Short outline

The 150 interviews with returned minors in Kosovo and Albania present the following opportunities:

- Much can be learned on the target group in these two countries, their challenges and opportunities, the connection with their flight histories and possible interventions
- The large amount of data can be used to answer questions relevant for policy-makers. It shows what the model can be used for and of what it will be capable if the amount of interviewed minors will be enhanced and expanded to other countries

In this report the data will be presented and the opportunities for analysis will be presented.

The data consists of the scores on development conditions (BIC-Q, BIC-S) and behaviour (SDQ). Furthermore, a lot of factual data (CFS) is collected, such as country of origin, length of stay in the host country, forced or voluntary return, assistance with return, status in the host country etc.

The data enable to answer general questions, such as:

- What percentage of minors receives education upon return?
- How many have been returned by force and how many voluntarily?
- Are parents capable of providing a healthy development environment for the minor?

The correlations between conditions and variables enable to answer questions, such as:

- What is the relationship between the length of stay in the host country, ethnicity and the degree of participation in education?
- What is the impact of family conditions on societal participation and the development perspective?
- Is the family environment or the social environment more decisive for the well being of the child, regarding returned children?

Results

The data have been collected. At this moment the analysis is being made and reports are written. The data will show which combination of variables has the most powerful impact on the development and well being of the child.

Attachment 3: Interventions

Project deliverables 2 and 3: Sustainable mechanisms for assistance to minors and a small-scale pilot: A social work/guardianship-based support structure for minors is set up in Kosovo, in which the best interest of the child determination is tested (within the local context).

Approach of the deliverable: The monitoring results are used to assess the 30 minors that have most problems with their development. Based upon those results, using the methodology currently applied by guardians, it is determined with the child how to intervene with the aim of stimulating the development of the child at maximum

Short outline of the methodology and approach

Currently the shared vision on care or assistance is that it works best when help is based on strengthening the forces of care users and their (family) network (empowerment). By starting with the strengths and solutions of the involved individuals (solution focused), self-confidence is enlarged and therefore their strengths increase. Involving the (family) network calls on natural commitment and responsibility. Using this method to organise support enables the best chances for sustainable and successful solutions. This requires an attitude of professionals in which there is confidence in the strengths and solutions of the other. Another common starting point in counselling is that interventions must be SMART. SMART stands for, specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound.

A good analysis of the problem areas and strengths of the minor and his network helps to collaborate on shared solutions. The analysis can be made by mapping the minor's and his network's strengths and problem area's, using their perception. Within the MRM project the information available from the BIC model, the Q-BIC, BIC-S and SDQ can be used as a basis. To be mapped:

- the necessity and urgency of an intervention (BIC-Q; SDQ; BIC-S)
- the areas that contribute to the problem (Q-BIC, BIC-S)
- the strengths of the minor and his network (Q-BIC, BIC-S, SDQ).

The information can be supplemented by involving a wider network.

Together with the minor and his network possible interventions are examined. The basic principle is to work on the ideas of the network. The professional does not suggest solutions himself, but can monitor whether suggested ideas are SMART. He should also monitor whether it is realistic to expect that the suggested solutions will improve conditions or minimise effects of the negative conditions.

Analysis, identification of actions and prioritisation will lead to action. It is important to evaluate results and if needed adjust goals. Goals should also be adjusted when circumstances change or new information comes up.

Results

Currently approximately half of the interventions have been finished. The methodology to use the monitoring results to base the intervention upon so far seems applicable.

A point of concern is that in the worst cases often the family environment is one of the largest constraints. This can generally not be addressed within the scope of the project.

Attachment 4: Online tool

Project deliverables 4: Online tool: instrument for integrating support and monitoring on the medium/long term is developed

Approach of the deliverable: An online tool is made to implement the combination of local support and long-term monitoring. The tool is based upon an online tool from an earlier project (CCM, Return Fund 2007).

Short outline of the approach

The online tool is a mechanism for both administration and analysis. By inserting the data from interviews into the system locally in Kosovo and Albania, research and analysis can be done in the Netherlands and Germany and data are automatically stored.

Results

The online tool in its current form is very suitable for registration and administration. However, as the number of variables that data was collected on turned out to be larger than expected at the beginning, its use for analysis is limited to a portion of the data. To fully use the potential further development will be needed in the future.

Attachment 5: Conference

Project deliverables 5: Conference: more sustainable and safer return of minors through monitoring, Brussels

Approach of the deliverable: Goal of the conference is to disseminate the monitoring model to key stakeholders, such as EC, Member States, EP, NGOs from the fields of child protection, refugees, migration, asylum and return.

Short outline of the approach

To ensure the stage needed for a high level meeting, the conference will be held in the European Parliament in Brussels. The main NGOs and international organizations involved in the field have been contacted well beforehand to ensure their involvement (UNHCR, Save the Children, UNICEF, ECRE). The project has been brought to the attention of several Member States. During the project the Kosovar stakeholders have been involved in two round tables (NGOs as well as government).

Results

The conference is foreseen for the 19th of February 2013, 9.30 to 12.30, in the European Parliament in Brussels.