

**Guidelines
for
Interviewing
(Separated) Minors**

Directorate of Immigration Finland

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I. BACKGROUND READER¹:

I. COMMUNICATION ISSUES

1.1 Establishing personal contact

Aim for direct contact with the child; try to establish some common ground with him/her, and give something of your own person. You can interlace your personal comments with the child's answers to the questions concerning his/her present situation, or you may choose to introduce yourself separately. Asylum-seeking children may have had bad experiences with authorities. They have to be convinced that although the interviewer is not one of them, he/she is not a bad person.

- *I'd like you to teach me how to say in your language:*
- *'My name is... 'What is your name?'* Practise these phrases together
- *I have a child/grandchild/niece/nephew near your age, he/she likes to...*
- *I like bike riding/reading/etc., playing board games, watch sports, etc.; do you have any hobbies?*

1.2 Basic communication rules

- **It is important to create a friendly and pleasant atmosphere that generates trust.** Acceptance of the other's emotions creates trust. The child needs to know that all emotions are allowed at the interview, including crying. The interviewer needs to let the child know that that he/she can take it and still be in control of the situation. This creates security in the child, which in turn helps communication. A non-critical attitude helps to open up communication. Particularly with younger separated asylum-seeking minors, it is mostly an adult who has decided to send the child away. It does not help communication to show open disapproval of the adult's behaviour, or to criticize the child during the interview.
 - *show acceptance by giving some positive comment about the child*
 - *share something about yourself; your family/children/favourite colour/hobby etc.*
 - *show interest/find some common ground, for example by asking something about the child's language*
 - *ask if there was something the child was particularly afraid of concerning the interview*
 - *try to alleviate those fears as much as possible.*
- **Agree on clear working rules.** At the beginning of the interview, clarify how you are going to proceed. Say what you expect of the child, when the breaks are, how to ask for extra breaks, how to express that one does not feel up to talking about some topic at that moment, or that one is not able to go on with the interview. With younger children this can be done through a pre-agreed gesture, like raising a hand, or showing a red card or a card with an appropriate picture. There can be several of these cards in readiness.

¹ These guidelines were developed by the Directorate of Immigration Finland in co-operation with Dr. Mirjam Kalland from Save the Children Finland, as part of the multinational Children First project under the Odysseus 2000 programme. The first draft compiled by the authors has been embellished with materials from the following sources: the Norwegian immigration authorities' (UDI) guidelines for interviewing unaccompanied minors (Filref: IM 00-22V4.doc), the U.S. Department of Justice INS Guidelines for Children's Asylum Claims (File: 120/11.26; 1998), the UNHCR Guidelines for interviewing unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents and preparing social histories (1990) and Communicating with Children, Helping children in distress, by Save the Children, second edition, 2000. Interviewing Children, A guide to journalists and others, by Sarah McCrum & Lotte Hughes, London, Save the Children, 1998

- **Make sure that the child understands what you are saying.** It may not be enough to say, “*Do you understand what I said?*”, or “*Is that clear?*” because these are leading questions to which children are likely to answer “*Yes*” even if they have not understood. Ask them to repeat what you have said and then clear up any confusion. You could say: “*Let’s see if I’ve explained it properly. You tell me what I’ve just said (about X) and I’ll go over it again if it is not clear.*”

Even a child who is fairly young may cheerfully answer the questions posed to him/her. However, there may be a discrepancy between the person’s outer behaviour and the level of psychological development and emotions. One has to try and clarify whether the child really understands what he/she is saying and whether the child’s personality is in balance with the facts, or he/she is emotionally detached and just mechanically recounting what has happened or what he/she has been told to say.

- **Enquire about important matters repeatedly from different angles at different points;** spread the questions over different sections. It helps to double-check inconsistencies and enables you to form a more complete picture of the situation, when you do not get a direct answer. This kind of approach is generally used when working with children, as they may be too immature to give a comprehensive answer in one go at the first prompting, or to understand immediately what is expected of them. A gradual approach is also the best way when dealing with traumatic events.

However, if the child becomes aware of this strategy and becomes uncomfortable/nervous/scared because of it, try to make sure the child is not left with the impression that the first answer was “*wrong*” or “*not good enough*”, or a lie, because then the child will try and give a “*better*” answer just to please you. If you think the child is not telling the truth, you need to probe the reasons for it in a sensitive manner. It is important to keep the channels of communication open. If need be, explain the function of repeated questions by focusing the attention on you as an interviewer, by saying, for example:

- *I did not understand what you said about (incident X); can you tell me more/explain again: who/what/when/where/how...?*
- *I heard what you said about (incident X), but I need to understand better about: who/what/when/where/how...*

- **It is good to bear in mind that children may not know the specific details or circumstances that led to their departure from their home countries.** Children may also have limited knowledge of conditions in the home country, as well as their vulnerability in that country.
- **The gender of the interviewer and the interpreter:** Children who have been victims of sexual violence or abuse, prostitution, or FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) may feel more comfortable recounting their experiences to an interpreter and interviewer of the same gender. However, it is a generally recognized psychological fact, at least in the western countries, that persons being interviewed, regardless of their gender, find it easier to open up to a female interviewer. Boys in their teens or pre-puberty may wish to talk to a man, yet by the same token they may talk about difficulties to a male interviewer in belittling terms, desiring to show that they have behaved in a manly way, without experiencing fear. There may also be cultural expectations and restrictions in this regard. The interview can be interrupted if the gender of the interviewer or the interpreter becomes an obstacle. One can always enquire about the preferences for the gender of the interpreter and the interviewer beforehand from the interviewee.
- **Note taking:** With younger children, if at all possible, do not take notes during the interview, either on a computer or by hand. Have the taped interview transcribed later on. Writing may deter the child from talking, as it may be interpreted as disturbing the adult’s work. Some children may also be extremely suspicious about the note-taking and feel extremely anxious about it, even though they may not say so. If you take notes during the interview, it is good to ask the child if he/she understands why you are doing it and explain their function:

As we talk today, I will write down/type on the computer what we say because what you tell me is important. Do not get nervous about my taking notes. Later, if I forget what we said, I can look it up. When your story is written down, we do not have to keep on asking you about it again. These notes help me to think about what has happened to you so I can decide what will be best for you. These notes will not be sent to your home country.

To older children, who can read and write, you may add:

Afterwards somebody will read to you what has been written and you can correct anything you think is not true. This interview will also be taped, so there is a record to check that everything that we have said here has been written down correctly.

1.3 Verbal communication

- **Employ a more informal discussion method as much as possible.** Instead of a question-answer strategy from start to finish, encourage an open interview, i.e. first let the child tell the story in his/her own words, then fill in the gaps with questions. Avoid making the interview just a series of disconnected questions. Communication is eased by suitable comments and different kinds of questions, asking for details, and showing that you accept what the child says. Try to maintain an informal atmosphere, especially with younger children.
- **Explain it is all right for the child to say he/she does not want to answer a certain question.** This enables the child not to lie, which lessens anxiety and helps the working memory to function better, creating a positive communication environment.

- **How to formulate the questions:**

- Use open-ended questions to encourage narrative responses:

- *“You told me you were in your parents’ village that summer. Tell me about it.”*
- *“Describe the daily chores of your family members there. Tell me what happened that day when....”*

- Define questions dealing with details clearly:

“Tell me about it as best as you can:

- ***what** did he say first*
- ***who** came in from the door*
- ***how** did you find out that*
- ***where** is that room located*
- ***when** did your mother tell you...”*

- Ask one question at a time; do not embed many questions into one sentence.

- Ask a younger child to describe the concrete and observable, not the hypothetical or abstract.

- Ask the child to define a term/phrase to check his/her understanding of it.

- Use short sentences and simple words, *hurt, do/say bad things* instead of *persecution*.

- Avoid too many closed questions (that can only be answered with a single phrase/one word).

- Avoid too many questions that can only be answered YES or NO.

- Avoid front-loaded questions: (Do **not** ask: *“After you did X and then went to Y, what happened to Z...?”*)

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- Avoid WHY questions as much as possible, especially with younger children.
- Avoid leading questions that create suggestibility: (Do **not** ask: “*The policeman hit him, didn't he?*”)
- Avoid the projection/transfer of your own feelings
- Avoid expressions of doubt: (Do **not** say: “*Are you sure he did that?*”)
- Avoid questions that are too general, as they easily result in “*I don't know/I cannot remember*” answers. (Do **not** ask: “*Has anyone ever hurt you?*”)
- Use all the different senses to get a better picture of events and to help the child remember, for example:
 - “*What colour was the house...*” (display different options with crayons, coloured sheets etc.)
 - “*How did something smell, sound, look, feel...*”
- Use the “Fill in the story” method; start a story and ask the child to continue it, for example:
 - “*Once there was a child, who had to go away on a long journey...*”

1.4 Non-verbal communication

- **Observation** is a good way to obtain information, especially with small children. Allow time for it, observing free play, for example either before or after the interview. Observe whether the child has eye contact with a familiar person also present at the interview or eye contact is generally avoided. What does this tell you about the child or about his/her culture? Observe the overall emotional condition of the child: calm, active, passive, aggressive, fearful, withdrawn, anxious, unable to concentrate, restless, etc. Observations concerning sudden changes in the interviewee's behaviour, such as gestures, expressions, or the visible emotional state also give clues to what the child is experiencing and how the interviewer should proceed.
- **Try to establish and maintain eye contact with the child** during the interview. Do not concentrate your attention and/or eye contact too much on the interpreter. Be present for the child. However, do not be too overpowering. Give the child breathing space by not focusing on him/her non-stop.
- **Be a good listener.** Encouraging gestures, comments, and appropriate emotional responses indicate that you are actively listening, making it easier for the child to carry on talking. At appropriate moments, give an understanding nod, a sympathetic look, and, for example, comments like: “*Yes, go on, ahem, I see, Is that so? really? I'm sorry to hear that, that was sad/funny/good... etc.*”

1.5 Cultural issues

Cultural issues affect both verbal and non-verbal communication. The interviewer needs to be aware of cultural differences in these areas to help communication and to avoid misinterpretation. The interviewer's own reactions to certain responses may also serve as signs that there may be cross-cultural issues involved.

- **Eye contact:** In some cultures, children show respect to adults by looking them straight in the eye, while in other cultures children are expected to avert their eyes when talking to adults and prolonged direct eye contact is considered a sign of defiance. The interviewer may misinterpret downcast eyes as reluctance to communicate or as a sign of not telling the truth.

- **Listening and talking:** Children in some cultures are taught to listen to adults and not to speak in their presence, or only to speak when addressed. In these kinds of instances children need special encouragement to speak more freely in the interview.
- **A smile and laughter have different purposes in different cultures.** Apart from expressing friendliness, contentment, happiness and merriment, certain cultures also utilize smiles and laughter to express acute embarrassment, distress, and confusion.
- **Answering questions:** Some children may have been in school systems or other environments where providing answers to questions is expected and saying: *"I do not know"* is discouraged. The interviewer needs to make sure some answer is not given just for the sake of answering. It may be necessary to demonstrate that in some cases it is OK to say *"I do not know."*²
- **Interpreting the "I do not know" answer:** This answer is used in some cultures when the person him/herself has no absolute knowledge, but can have knowledge about the truth of the matter in question, which is gleaned from other people in the community. When asked: *"Who killed your parents?"*, the child may initially claim not to know, for example because he/she did not witness the incident, yet upon further prompting (e.g. *"What do other people in your community say about it?"*) may be able to provide the common knowledge community opinion that it was thought to be the army who carried out the killings. The interviewer needs to try and interpret the "quality" of an *"I do not know"* answer. Is it a genuine lack of knowledge, has the child been told not to give this particular information, or is there a community opinion the child could express?
- **Interpreting YES, NO, MAYBE answers:** In some languages, expressions such as MAYBE, POSSIBLY, or PROBABLY are interpreted as being very positive, almost as a YES, or a promise of a YES, whereas in some other languages these same expressions have a more negative connotation, a polite way of saying NO. The words YES and NO are not completely self-explanatory either. In some cultures it is very difficult to say NO, and therefore a positive answer is given first, if the other person expects/hopes/wants it. One has to interpret whether a positive answer means total commitment to what is being said, a personal opinion, or a provisional affirmative, etc.³ In some languages there is a whole scale of negative expression, whereby some of them are interpreted as clear NO answers, while others are interpreted as a fairly positive NO, with a hope of a possible YES in the end. The interpreter has an important role here in bringing out the right shade of meaning for both parties. It is useful to discuss the compatibility of various expressions connected with notions of affirmative, negative, and probability with the interpreter beforehand.
- **The order of presenting the facts:** Basically this is a question of direct vs. indirect communication style. In simplified terms, when talking about a certain incident, in some communication cultures the most important fact is mentioned first, after which all the other factors are woven around the main event. In other cultures all the background information and side plots are given first and the main event is left till the last. These are the two extremes, with many varying communication styles in between in different cultures. The interpreter's own communication culture may wrongly affect his/her judgement of the interviewee's communication style as being untrustworthy.

² The matter can be demonstrated by the interviewer saying: *'If you really do not know an answer to something, it is quite OK to say so. Let's practice it. I will start by asking you how many windows there are in this building (or some other suitable, concrete example, to which neither party is able to give the right answer). You can then answer to me: 'I do not know'. Let's practice: The interviewer: 'How many windows are there in this building?' The interviewer will hopefully answer: 'I do not know'. The child may need some coaxing at first and it may be necessary to repeat the exercise a few times with different examples.*

³ Regardless of culture and environment children generally have a strong desire to please adults. They may answer in the affirmative to a question posed by the adult, if they assume that it is expected of them. It is important to clarify to a child what is sought by each question, whether is the child's own experience/feeling/opinion/personal knowledge/general knowledge, rather than pleasing the adult or supporting the adult's view.

- **The effect of gender in the interview situation:** Boys and girls are socialized into different roles in different cultures. This may be reflected in how they behave in a communication situation. One can discuss beforehand with the interpreter what types of behaviour patterns are to be expected, what they possibly mean, and how the interviewer should behave to ensure successful communication.

1.6 The silent child

Never force a child to talk. If the child seems reluctant to talk freely or answer questions, you may try to hand over the initiative to the child by inviting him/her to ask some questions for a while. If the child is not willing to talk about a certain topic or episode, but seems to be able to discuss other matters, leave the difficult topic for a while and get back to it later. Tell the child that you understand the difficulty and that perhaps you can talk about it a bit later. At some point you can then ask:

How do you feel about talking about X now? Do you think you are ready to talk about it now? Would it be easier to draw something about it first? I'll let you draw and colour first and then you can tell me about the picture.

If the child refuses to talk altogether, the following might help:

- use gentle physical contact and attention to show your concern, for example by putting your hand on the child's shoulder, stroking the child's hair/hand/cheek, sitting close to the child, giving a hug, offering a handkerchief if the child is crying, etc. The interpreter can be consulted first as to what is culturally acceptable;
- use drawings, puppets, stories, masks, and role play to describe different feelings; ask the child to express his/hers in this manner. (NOTE: traumatized children often avoid using colours in their drawings; they often stick to black or brown or to the first colour of pen they happen to pick up, regardless of colour);
- Use child experts (child psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists) to analyze these activities if necessary to help assess the child's situation;
- use games to get the child into a more communicative mood.

1.7 Knowing the limits and interpreting the responses

The interviewer needs to understand when the child has had enough and needs a break, or to stop the interview. Restlessness, hyperactivity, lack of concentration, crying, pouting, excessive laughter, downcast eyes, acute distress, prolonged silences, and a long string of *"I don't know, I don't remember"* answers are signs to watch for.

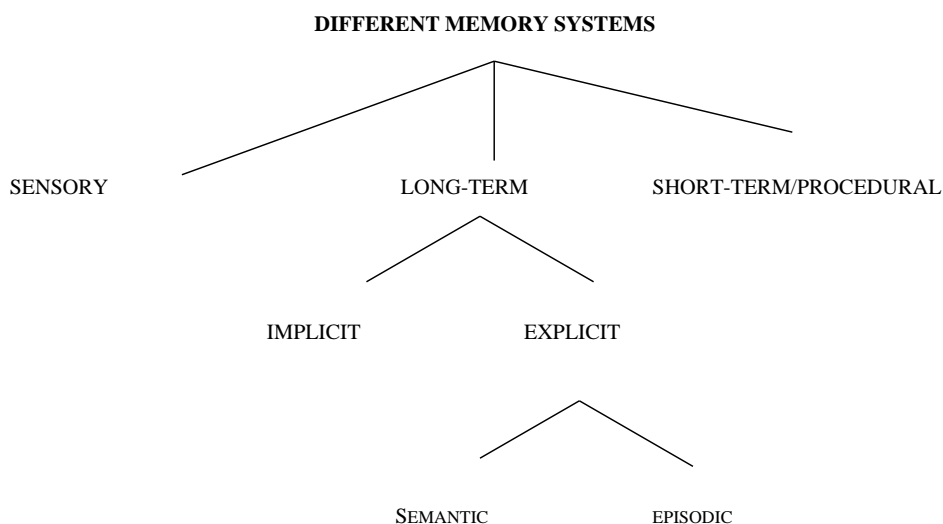
One needs to determine whether the child is just hungry or tired, confused by not understanding the questions, or exhibiting psychiatric symptoms, such as emotional stress due to a traumatic event being brought to the surface, or whether there is a cross-cultural issue at work, making the interviewer misinterpret the signals given by the child. Emotional responses of the above kind may also arise when the child has been told to give a fabricated story and is caught in between being loyal to the family and being truthful. In these cases it is important to try and understand the child's point of view and find out the real story in a child-supportive manner.

The interviewer needs to try and understand the reasons for the above-mentioned reactions, which bring the communication to a halt, and act accordingly; choose to stop the interview altogether, take a break and give

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the child something to eat or drink, rephrase the question at hand and check that the child understands, reassure the child if the symptoms are due to distress or anxiety, check (maybe with the interpreter) whether the child's behaviour is indeed culturally appropriate to him/her and consequently whether one's reaction to it is due to a cross-cultural misunderstanding.

2. ACTIVATING DIFFERENT MEMORY SYSTEMS



2.1 General treatise

Basically, memory consists of sensory registers (remembering smells, sounds etc) and long-term and short-term memory (working memory/procedural memory). **Sensory memory** refers to smells and sounds but also to tactile information (e.g. remembering the touch of a hand on the skin). Visual sensory memory is sometimes called image memory. Remembering sounds is among the earliest memory systems and is already developed before birth. Sensory memory sometimes needs **cued recall** (the smell or the sound) to be activated. If sensory memory is activated around a traumatic event, other memory systems can also be reactivated, but it can be highly stressful for the child. Emotions are often connected with sensory memory. Memory can be implicit, which means that the information is stored, but not accessible. Very early childhood memories lead to implicit memories, with very powerful learning processes involved. Different senses, such as smells, can activate the implicit memory system.

Explicit memory means that the information related to an event is verbally accessible. It is divided into two: *episodic memory* and *semantic memory*. **Episodic memory refers to the recall of a single, special event or occasion:** “*I remember the last time I saw my brother. He stood in front of the door and...*” Intense episodic memory is sometimes told in the present tense: “*I’m sitting there, in the garden, when I hear a sound...*” Episodic memory is often less distorted and even a child tends to resist misleading information.

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However, sometimes two episodes can be blurred together or an episode is cut off in the middle; the child remembers the most vital part of the episode, but not what happened then.

Semantic memory is also narrative, but does not refer to a single episode. Semantic memory can be rehearsed in advance (i.e. the child can tell a story he/she has been told to tell), and there might be a lack of episodic evidence. On the other hand, semantic memory often describes normal day-to-day living: *“When I was small we used to go to church on Sundays.”*

Short term memory is also called procedural, or working memory. This determines how the child functions during the interview. If the child is not feeling well or is tired or traumatized, working memory can be impaired in several ways. PTSD makes the child restless and unfocused on the interview. The child forgets the questions or does not understand them or is unable to formulate an answer. Depression also reduces tendencies to produce voluntary actions, such as free recall. Children often actively avoid attending to trauma-related cues to prevent the onslaught of emotion associated with the traumatic memory. Working memory can also be disrupted by the fact that the child has been coached to repeat scripts to the interviewer or to lie. The child might have been told keep secrets, or that the family will die if he/she tells the truth. The child may perceive the interviewer as evil or as a person the child is not allowed to speak to.

2.2 Implications for interviewing children

There is no doubt that misleading questions can result in distortions in children’s recollections. Furthermore, more psychologically disturbed children have poorer resistance to misleading information. Start with warming, not threatening questions. Show sympathy for the child. Tell him/her that you can understand how hard it is for him/her to answer these questions. The child might need “verbal scaffolds” (verbal help from the adult to name feelings, places and so on), but one must be aware that these scaffolds can be misleading.

Repeated, non-suggestive interviewing means using descriptive questions. What, when, how are neutral questions. AVOID asking “why?”, because to answer why-questions the child needs integrative capacity and causal understanding, which children are not usually capable of producing (nor are most adults) regarding traumatic events. “Why” might also be interpreted by the child as suggesting he/she has done something wrong. Instead of asking: *“Why did you come to this country?”* you might choose to ask: *“Tell me what happened the last time you saw your mother.”* **Avoid dichotomic questions, that allow the child to answer yes/no** – use them only if you cannot get any information voluntarily from the child.

Try to probe different memory systems: Sensory memory (smells, sounds, visual memories) (belongs to the implicit memory system) “what did it smell like, sound like, look like?” Emotional memory: “How did you feel?” Semantic memory: “Tell me about your family.” Always try to back up a semantic memory with

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episodic memory: ask for specific occasions, episodes, and instances. Observe that *situationally accessible memories* cannot be retrieved without trauma cues, and that at least in difficult cases several interviews serve the purpose better than one (the child starts to remember).

By activating different memory systems we can also observe how they function together. Do they support one another in regard to a certain incident, or do they bring up inconsistencies which need clarification? When there are serious discrepancies between different memory systems, the reason may be a severely traumatizing event or the fact that a memorized story fed to the child has come to light. One also has to bear in mind that human beings have a strong psychological need to produce complete stories and comprehensive accounts. The fact that a story seems to be a complete, comprehensive account does not automatically render it more credible. An incomplete account may be totally truthful, although not every fact is necessarily known because the person may not be able to remember everything for some reason at that moment (trauma, too young, etc), may not realize the importance of telling a certain fact unless specifically asked about it, and may consider some things too insignificant to mention, although they may have great importance for the other party.

3. DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL OF THE CHILD

3.1 *General treatise*

The younger the child is, the more difficult is it to get access to the child's memories. But from the age of two and a half to three children can accurately report personal experiences, especially if they have adult assistance. The limit for autobiographic memory is around this age. Developmentally, a small (three- to four-year-old) child is totally dependent on adult support. Between three and six years, the child is often helped by the possibility of having access to toys (acting out what happened) or drawings (drawing a picture of his/her family). **A small child cannot be interviewed without support from an adult with whom the child has a personal relationship.** This means that the child's memory can be distorted as a result of suggestibility. A child of this age is capable of pretend play and problem-solving. The child can think of only one thing at a time, and draws conclusions from associations; the biggest is the oldest. At the age of six, the (normally developed) child has a vocabulary of around 15,000 words. This is called the pre-operational developmental phase.

From the age of seven to eleven the child is capable of concrete, but not abstract, thinking. Keeping the rules is important, so give rules to the child! The child understands categories, and can sort things (bigger, smaller, best, worse, worst). The child is capable of understanding things like "Children's rights." The autobiographic memory is developing, and begins to become independent of adult support. However, if memories are not rehearsed, they tend to fade.

Abstract thinking and metacognition (thinking about thinking) begin around the age of 12. The child is capable of evaluating experiences and making individual statements. The rules are not so important any more, and the young person begins to make judgements about his/her own values. Still, the child needs support from adults to be capable of talking about difficult experiences.

However, age categories are only suggestive. Depending on experience and situation a child may be either more mature or less mature than his/her peers. There are also cultural differences in what kind of behaviour is expected of a child of a particular age. In this respect there is a possibility of misinterpretation of behaviour in the interview situation. One also has to bear in mind that a child's outward behaviour and level of understanding may be in contradiction with each other. Asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors may try to present a more mature role than befits their age because of the heavy responsibility of the role that is placed on their shoulders by their family; the child feels that he/she has to manage the task given by the parents and will try to present a brave face, even though he/she may not totally grasp the reasons for having been sent away from the home country and is experiencing insecurity.

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3.2 Attachment organization

Besides developmental age, the child's attachment organization has an impact on the child's capability to interact with adults. A secure attachment to primary caregivers affects memory in a positive way and moderates the effects of stress and trauma. The availability of attachment figures (primary caregivers) reduces the child's stress and creates the possibility of cooperation. Secure attachment organization has an impact on the child's coping strategies and resilience, buffers the effects of stress and trauma, regulates stress hormone release, and supports remembering.

However, all children seeking asylum are likely to be suffering from attachment disorders (Disruption of Attachment Disorder/Reactive Attachment Disorder). This implies a need for a supportive adult that the child can form a relationship with.

4. HOW TO MEET AND INTERVIEW TRAUMATIZED CHILDREN

Separated asylum-seeking children are often suffering from multiple traumas. They have often been living in poverty and unstable communities. They have been exposed to violence and to the loss of family members. They might have been forced to commit crimes and they have been separated from their primary caregivers or abandoned. All of the above factors may have left the children traumatized to a certain extent. With some children, one of the above factors may have caused a trauma, while other children have undergone several traumatizing events.

The developmental pathway of severely traumatized children differs from that of normal children. To meet and interview a traumatized child is therefore a challenging task, where the interviewer must take into account the developmental level (mental age) of the child, the history of the child, and cultural differences, (such as acceptable age and sex of the interviewer, for example). One also has to bear in mind the fact that the child might view the interviewer as an enemy or as a person the child is not allowed to talk to.

Trauma can be described as a physical or mental wound. **There are basically two types of trauma: trauma of type I involves a single traumatic event and trauma of type II consists of multiple, chronic experiences.** For an individual those two types do not rule out one another; a child can live under constant stress and also experience single or multiple traumatic events. Generally, traumatic experiences challenge our basic schemas of how the world is supposed to be. For a child a traumatic event often goes far beyond the child's capacity to understand.

Traumatic events that have been mentally resolved do not have an effect on the everyday life of a person any more. Unresolved traumas, however, manifest themselves continuously in various ways. In an interview situation that may block communication. A person with an unresolved trauma may experience uncontrolled flashbacks, re-living the traumatic event again, become totally paralyzed emotionally, or actively avoid the difficult subject during the interview. Unresolved trauma often also manifests itself in depression. In an interview situation this can show as a person's incapability to produce speech voluntarily or to give answers; dejected silence is the only response. The ability to produce positive expression is also impaired in a depressed person. This has an adverse effect on communication. It is hard for the interviewer to keep up a positive atmosphere by him/herself, especially with children, if the persons being interviewed remain totally expressionless, not smiling or expressing with other gestures and expressions what they are thinking or experiencing at that moment. It should be clarified whether a reluctance to talk about a certain subject is connected to some trauma to do with it or whether the motive for silence is the desire to conceal some factors, or some other reason.

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An emotionally disturbed child is very prone to suggestion. It may also be a painful experience not to remember. Every human being has a need for a sense of integrity, for an unbroken, complete personal history. Especially with difficult events, a person desires such an all-encompassing “model of explanation”. Therefore, it is important not to make the child over-interpret his/her story at those points where there are gaps, nor to be guilty of over-interpretation oneself.

Controversy exists over whether trauma enhances memory, burning a trace into the brain, or adversely affects the accuracy of recall. Generally speaking, both hypotheses are true; **trauma can both enhance and adversely affect memory**. The following things often happen during intense traumatic experiences:

4.1 Narrowing of attention

Memory in general operates differently under conditions of stress. The most common effect is the so-called “**weapon focus**“, which means an intense focus on the most central part of the experience (the gun, the knife, the hand that is hitting), while other information is considered less meaningful. When children are involved, the difficulty is to understand what the most central part of the experience was. However, for children the involvement of significant family members (mother, father, or siblings) is usually emotionally significant information that the child focuses on. The narrowing of attention improves the remembering of the core details, with little distortion or loss of important information, but peripheral details are never encoded or, if so, only weakly.

4.2 Dissociation

When the unthinkable occurs, the child might become totally overwhelmed and cannot process any information. This process is often referred to as dissociation. Dissociation means a lack of normal integration of perception, thoughts, and feelings. What remains is sensory memory, which is vulnerable to distortion (false memory creation). The child might, for example, remember the scream of his/her mother, but nothing else. Adult and older children with traumatic histories show large gaps in their autobiographical memories for both trauma and non-trauma, and are more vulnerable to suggestibility.

4.3 Repression

Repression refers to the fact that children can originally encode the traumatic episode into memory in a narrative form, but information is repressed and “forgotten”. When repression occurs, the memory of the event can be recovered later on.

4.4. PTSD

Asylum-seeking children are likely to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is known to affect memory in different ways. Individuals suffering from PTSD are characterized by re-experiencing traumatic experiences involving intrusive images, visual or sensory hallucinations, and vivid flashbacks. Children might have nightmares or hear voices. They suffer from hyperarousal and are extremely sensitive. Children may avoid stimuli associated with the traumatic event. They may be unwilling to and in fact unable to produce a description of what happened. This might coexist with uncontrollable flashbacks or nightmares. PTSD also leads to an irreversible decrease of hippocampal volume (the frontal part of the brain) and to the impairment of memory, especially short-term memory. Stress among children also leads to an abnormal release of cortisol, which leads to hyperactivity and learning problems. This condition, which is only found in children, is known as ADHD (Attention-Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder).

It is good to bear in mind that no experience is unbearable, if one is able to resolve it somehow. This does not only mean going over the difficult experience with the help of an expert (a psychologist or psychiatrist), but that one is able to talk about the difficulties in general or get them out of one's mind through different activities. In this regard the interview situation may bring relief, even though the nature of the situation is not therapeutic per se.

A difficult experience can be made more manageable if it is talked about in an indirect manner, through generalisations: *"I know that these kinds of things have happened to other people also, things like these are not unusual, I have been told about things like these..."* In this manner the interviewee is given the mental and emotional space to express traumatic experiences; the interviewer is saying that these things can be talked about and that he/she is capable of handling the information without breaking down emotionally. The interviewer need not be overly concerned about the possible adverse effect of the interview on a traumatized person. A good rule of thumb is a matter-of-fact but understanding attitude and common sense about whether or not to bring up traumatic events, depending on the case.

II. ASYLUM INTERVIEW

1. ARRANGEMENTS PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW

1. THINGS TO DO

- Contact the reception centre and/or the child's personal caregiver
- Contact the interpreter, arranging the time
- Contact the support persons to be present at the interview
- Arrange a pre-interview meeting with the above-mentioned persons to share already-existing information concerning the unaccompanied minor
- Ensure all the equipment needed is functioning
- Ensure all additional materials are there (maps, writing materials, colouring paper, crayons, books, board games, etc.)

Note: for the sake of continuity, it is ideal if the same person interviews all the siblings of one family, and that there is not too long a time gap between their respective interviews (if they have arrived together/at the same time).

2. SUPPORT PERSONS PRESENT AT THE INTERVIEW

A. Persons ensuring the rights of the child:

- legal representative (required by law)
- legal aid personnel (have the right to attend)
- child expert, such as psychologist, psychiatrist, or therapist (in difficult cases, if necessary)

B. Familiar person(s):

- child's personal caregiver from the reception centre (possibly)
- child's relative residing in the country of asylum (possibly)

- As a general rule, there should not be too many persons present at the interview, as this can be intimidating, especially to a younger child. Of course the respective roles of the persons, not just their number, may affect whether the child experiences their presence in a positive, neutral, or negative light.
- If it is deemed that the presence of a certain support person (possibly the personal caregiver) makes the child feel more secure/comfortable and helps in establishing contact with the child, it may be advisable to invite that person to attend at least the beginning part of the interview. With very small children, the presence of a familiar support person may be desirable throughout the interview. These persons are not to speak on behalf of the child. Their role is to give emotional/moral support only.
- Children over seven years of age can be asked whether they want a certain relative/other familiar person to accompany them at the interview. However, if the child has met the relative only after arriving in the country of asylum (or, due to having been very young, has no recollection of knowing/having met the relative in the home country) it is not advisable to have this person at the interview.⁴
- If the asylum officer determines during the course of the interview that the child is not comfortable because of the support person's presence or is afraid of the person (if the person appears to be an adult who could put the child in danger or only further his/her own interests through the child), the interview should be continued without that person.
- A separate interview can be arranged for the child's relative living in the country of asylum, if it is deemed necessary. This person may be the child's caregiver at the time (if the child has moved to private accommodation with relatives), or a person who is otherwise familiar to him/her and can shed some light on the background and/or present situation of the child.
- In problematic cases, such as severe trauma, child experts can be asked to conduct a separate, clinical assessment. The asylum officer can then either receive a written report on the child or there can be a joint meeting between the expert, the social worker and/or personal caregiver of the reception centre (or the caregiver with whom the child is living in private accommodation), and possibly other relevant actors, where the findings of the assessment are discussed. Alternatively, the child expert may accompany the asylum officer in a second interview, if the first interview has not been successful because of trauma or other complicating factors in which a child expert could render professional help. After the interview a joint meeting can be arranged with the child expert, the social worker/personal caregiver from the reception centre, the child's main caregiver in the family with whom the child is in private accommodation, and the asylum officer, to go through the findings of the assessment.
- It may be good to arrange for a familiar person to be with the child after the interview to give moral/emotional support.

⁴It is not a case of an unaccompanied separated child, if the child has arrived in the country of asylum accompanied by a relative/other adult with whom he/she has had regular interaction in the home country and with whom the contact is kept up in the country of asylum.

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3. PRACTICAL ISSUES

- Check that children are not hungry or thirsty, make sure they have been to the toilet before the interview, and give them the opportunity to use the bathroom during the interview.
- Children need enough breaks; the maximum period without a break should be a half-hour interview, even less with a small child. This does not necessarily involve interrupting the interview formally many times, but giving the child a brief recess at appropriate intervals, for example by offering a snack, focusing on a lighter matter, or by directing the attention away from the child for an instant.
- Children need more time than adults to formulate answers. Allow adequate time for the interview; tolerate pauses, even if they are long.
- Younger children cannot process a lot of new information very quickly. The terminology and the situation must be explained in parts, not all in one go.
- Check that the recording device and the computer are functioning properly

4. SEATING ARRANGEMENT

- Young children need to be given the freedom to move about and to play a bit in between the discussion. Likewise, the support person needs to be allowed to move about with the child as much as possible. There needs to be a comfortable place to draw and colour, if these methods are used as part of the information gathering. It is good to start informally, sitting together on a sofa for example. In the beginning one can observe what interpersonal distance and seating arrangement the child feels comfortable with and work with that. One can also make a mental note as to what the preferred interpersonal distance says about the person. Older children and teenagers usually settle naturally to the seat they are directed to.
- It is important to try to be physically on the same level as the interviewee for the sake of establishing and maintaining unhindered eye contact and to make the communication situation more balanced between the two parties.
- If a computer is being used, it is good to place it so that it is not directly between the interviewer and the person being interviewed.
- The diagram below places the support person(s) very close to the child, to create security and establish his/her role as a moral support to the child. In comparison, the interpreter is placed further away from the child and to one side of both the child and the interviewer to indicate his/her neutral role as a linkage between them. The interviewer needs to have easy eye contact with both the child and the interpreter.

INTERVIEWER

INTERPRETER

CHILD SUPPORT PERSON(S)

5. WARM-UP COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

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This section has a multiple purpose. First of all it serves as an ice breaker, relieving possible tension and anxiety experienced by the child, giving the child, the interviewer, and the interpreter a chance to get to know one another a little. Secondly, it allows the interviewer to check the child's level of language development, memory functions and ability to cooperate.

- Start the sentences with softening phrases like: *"I wonder..., I'm interested..., Would you like to tell ..."*
 - *How do you find living in Finland? Are you happy/content with your living arrangements?*
 - *What is your favourite thing to do? What do you find boring? What time do you have to go to bed?*
 - *What kind of food do they give you here? Do you like it? Favourite food? What food don't you like?*
 - *What did you do today before coming to this interview?*
- In addition to questions, use comments to encourage and compliment the child:
 - *You have a nice jacket/I like your jacket/hairstyle, etc.*
 - *Thank you for coming.*
 - *I understand this may be stressful for you.*
 - *We want what is best for you.*

6. PROCEDURAL MATTERS

6.1 Understanding the roles of the participants

Decision maker:

- Explain your own role as a decision maker. The interviewer has the power to make important decisions about the child's life. The child needs to know that this power is used in a just and fair manner, with his/her best interests in mind.

Interpreter:

- Explain the interpreter's role: confidentiality, impartiality, not to be a blood relative or a relative by marriage of either the applicant or the interviewer or their close kin, not to have acted on the applicant's behalf at any point. Explain in simplified terms, according to the developmental level of the child, what confidentiality and impartiality mean. One can also ask the interviewee what he/she thinks the role of the interpreter is.
- Before the start of the interview, talk with the interpreter for a while in order to get used to each other's style of speaking. Explain that it is important to interpret the exact words of the child as much as possible, including the exact verb tenses used. This can be crucial, for a change in verb tense in the middle of a story may denote a traumatic event for the child, and one does not want to miss the importance of what is being said.
- Ask directly whether the interviewee and the interpreter understand each other. Ask some questions to get the interpreter involved and to observe the interaction and communication between the child and the interpreter.
 - *Do you understand X well? Does he/she speak differently from your parents?*
 - *Do you know X from before?*
 - *Who else do you speak your own language with here in Finland?*

With younger children:

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- *I'm interested in children's songs/music in your country. Could you two sing a song to me together?*
- *My favourite children's song is this:* Sing a verse from a familiar children's song.

Other persons present:

- Acknowledge the presence of support person(s), i.e. legal representative, personal caregiver, and/or relative. Ask whether the interviewee understands their role and explain it if need be.
- *X (say the name) is with you here today. Have you met him/her before? (legal rep., relative...)*
- *I know X (say the name) is your personal caregiver here. What do you do together with him/her every day?*
- *Do you know why X is with us here?*
- *His/her job is to make you feel safer/make sure we do our job well*

6.2 The rights of the asylum-seeking separated minor

- Explain the child's rights in this situation to him/her.
- Tell the child it is all right to ask questions or to say he/she does not understand or does not know the answer. Tell the child you expect him/her to tell the truth.⁵

6.3 The decision-making process

- Check whether the child understands what applying for political asylum means. Give the reason WHY the interview is held and WHAT it entails. Clarify with suitable wording the different stages of the application process: interview; document based on the interview; positive/negative decisions; family reunification in Finland/country of origin/third country, or voluntary return.
- For persons over 15 years of age (the age of minimum legal responsibility in Finland) also refer to relevant parts of the information in the front page of the Unaccompanied Minor's Asylum Interview Questionnaire, adjusting the wording to the age and developmental level of the person, and to the relevant questions at the end gleaned from the adults' questionnaire.⁶
- With older children, explain that elements relating to identity or verifiable incidents of persecution may require corroborating evidence, where it is reasonable to expect it.

Example sentences:

⁵ Pekka Santtila, (PhD in Psychology), a researcher with the Espoo Police Academy, has researched how to obtain a statement from a child (who has been a victim of a crime or witnessed a crime) without traumatising him/her further and that the statement would be admissible in court. According to him the structured interview outlines developed in the USA are very useful. It is important that the child is allowed first to tell his/her own story and only after that questions for clarification are posed. It is important to prepare the interview carefully. First it is made sure that the child understands what is the truth and what constitutes a lie. This will improve the child's credibility in the eyes of the court. It is extremely important to make sure that the child can answer that he/she can not remember or does not know something. That way it is easier for him/her to resist leading questions. (Source: Totuus esiin, by Hannu Pesonen, Suomen Kuvalehti, 25-26/2001, pg. 25)

⁶ Please see Appendix 1. for the relevant parts of the Unaccompanied Minor's asylum interview questionnaire used in Finland.

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Do you know what we are going to do here today? We are going to talk about the things that have caused you to leave your family/country. As we talk, we both have jobs. My job is to understand what happened to you. I need your help in this. Your job is to help me to understand by telling me as much as you can remember. Even the little things can be important.

I understand that it may be scary/upsetting for you to tell me some things that have happened to you. Nobody here, not I, not the interpreter, nor X (the name of any support person present in the interview) will tell anyone in (name of the child's country of origin) about what you tell me here. Also, none of your friends or, if you want, your family members here in (country of asylum) will know anything about what you tell me.

As we talk together, I will be asking you some questions. Some of them will be easy for you to answer, but there may also be questions you do not understand. It is OK if you don't. Just tell me that you did not understand and I will try to help you. If you do not know the answer to a question, that is OK too. Just tell me that. No one can remember everything. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to my questions. We are only talking about what has happened to you/your family/in your country. It is important for you to tell me what you yourself know/feel/have experienced. It is not helpful to you to tell me things that other people have told you to say/things that you feel some other persons would like you to say. It is helpful for you to be honest with me. I promise to be honest with you too. Before we go on any further, do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

7. TOPICS FOR QUESTIONS

The topics follow fairly closely the UNHCR questionnaire for child refugees. The individual questions have been developed by the Directorate of Immigration in cooperation with Dr. Mirjam Kalland from Save the Children Finland. The questions reflect a holistic approach. In addition to general refugee issues, they also try to take into account child-specific human rights violations and child protection issues in general.

The purpose of the asylum interview for unaccompanied minors is not to collect any more information than what is necessary for the decision-making, taking into account the best interests of the child and respecting his/her privacy. The wide range of suggested questions is intended to help the interviewer to proceed with ease, depending on what the interview possibly brings up. They are meant to help the interviewer to react according to the needs of the situation. It is not the intention to conduct a psychological interview.

The formulation of the questions takes into account the fact that separated asylum-seeking minors need two-fold protection; they need to be protected first of all because they are children and secondly because of their special vulnerability resulting from their separation from their family within the refugee experience and/or in connection with their seeking political asylum. There needs to be a channel for referral for cases that raise grave child protection issues but fall beyond the refugee determination context.

As for child-specific human child violations, questions dealing with the recruitment of children into armies, forced labour, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation are included under various topics.

Violence is dealt with through the four basic factors to do with causing injury: who caused it? how was it caused (possible weapons)? what were the consequences (broken bones, bleeding, scaring, etc)? and was it a repeated action?

The purpose is not to go through the whole list with every case. The interviewer can choose those that befit the situation the best. These guidelines are a tool, and the interviewer can utilize them as such, or as a basis for formulating his/her own approaches. In some points, only question words or sentence starters are employed to stimulate the interviewer to try different approaches according to the situation and his/her personal communication style.

The suggested questions under each topic probe the different memory systems and try to accommodate children of varying ages. It is not intended that the whole list of questions is run through with every case. The interviewer can pick those most appropriate. They are by no means exhaustive lists. New questions can be formulated to suit the situation.

As already mentioned, talking about events in one's own words and maintaining a discussion are important means of communication while interviewing minors, especially with younger children. The suggested questions provide helpful tools WHEN one needs to ask questions. This does not mean that the interview is conducted ONLY by asking questions.

A. APPLICANT'S IDENTITY

The basic information dealing with the identity will already have been obtained by the social worker of the reception centre, as well as by the police, whose duty it is to enquire about the identity and the travel route. Therefore, prior to the interview it is advisable to have a joint meeting with the staff of the reception centre, the police, and the asylum officer conducting the interview, where the information already available is shared. This will reduce the need for the child to repeatedly answer the same questions to different persons in different phases of the asylum process. The asylum officer can then spend more time on other issues and go over the questions dealing with identity in a more cursory manner, checking things out and possibly finding some additional information in these areas.

Persons able to read and write can be asked to write their own names and the names of other people that come up in the interview.

• Name

Make sure you get down both the spelling and the pronouncing of the name. You can then make use of the first name to help maintain a more personal contact during the interview (if it is culturally acceptable to keep repeating the name).

- *You have told me that your name is X; do you have any other names?*
- *By what name did your mother/father use to call you?*
- *Did somebody else call you by some other name?*

You can also ask these questions in connection with the names of other family members/relatives.

• Date of birth/age, place of birth

Assess first the child's competence in counting numbers and understanding of how many times something happened. Say, for example: *"I am going to tap the table with my finger now. After I stop, tell me how many taps you counted, OK?"* Younger children may have imprecise recollection of time, dates, and distances. If the child is unable to tell the exact years according to the Roman calendar, try and probe further:

- *Have you seen calendars like this? (Show a calendar). Take a look at this calendar*
- *It says that now we are living in the year 2001, and today is the Xth day of Month Y.*
- *What year/month/day (exact date if possible) were you born?*
- *Do you know what year it was in your ethnic (Chinese, Arabic, etc.) calendar?*
- *Have you been told anything about that year?*
- *Draught? War? Some other important thing that happened that year?*

- *Have you been told about where you were born? Tell me about the place. Buildings/nature/animals?*
- *Do you know the name of the town/village you were born?*
- *Do you know other places that are near there? Is it near some big town? Which one? How far/near is it?*
- *How long does it take to travel there by car/train/bicycle/on foot?*
- *Did you ever go there? How did you travel there? How do most people travel there from your home area?*
- *Before coming here, did you live in the same place that you were born in?*
- *How old were you when you moved away from the place where you were born?*

- **Identifying features, marks, scars**

- *Do you have any birthmarks? (if no visible ones detected)*
- *Do you have any other marks or scars on your body? How did you get them? When did it happen?*
- *Who made the marks/scars? Can you tell me the reason why he/she did it?*
- *Did you want/not want it to happen? How did you feel about it? Did anyone help you? How?*

- **Nationality/ethnic background**

- *By what name do your people call yourselves? What do others call your people?*
- *Are there people in your country who look very different from you and your family/people group?*
- *Are there people in your country who behave very differently from your family?*
- *Are there people in your country who your family say are different from you?*

- **Religion**

- *Have your parents taught you about God/ancestors, prophets/spirits, etc...?*
- *What have they taught you about God, etc....?*
- *Did your family go to church/temple/mosque, etc? How often? Who went? Alone/together?*
- *What religious festivals did you celebrate? How did you celebrate? Tell me about the last celebration!*
- *Which family members attended religious services? Did you go together? Alone? Why did some not go?*
- *Think of a certain time you went to church/mosque, etc. Tell me about it! What did you do/see/hear/feel?*

- **Mother tongue/other languages spoken**

- *What languages do you/your mother/father speak?*
- *How and where did you learn them? At home/school/informally? From whom?*
- *What language did your mother/father speak to you?*
- *In your place, are there people who speak a different language than your family does?*
- *In what situations do you use language x/y/z etc.?*
- *Do some people in your home area speak a different language than your family?*
- *What happens if other people hear you speak your language?*
- *Have you/your family experienced difficulties because of speaking your language? Tell me about one incident.*

- **Schooling/education**

Younger children:

- *Can you show me how to write your name?*
- *Have you been to a kindergarten? For how long? How many years?*
- *How did you like it? Tell me about it!*

Questions about school:

- *How many years of schooling have you had? Do you have any certificates/exam/school reports?*
- *What subjects did you study? What were your favourite subjects? What subject did you not like?*
- *What did you learn last year in maths/other subjects?*
- *Did you like school? What was difficult about it?*
- *Tell me about your favourite teacher. What did you like about him/her?*
- *Tell me about a funny/sad/happy incident from your classroom that you remember well.*

- Last known address/place of residence/contacts with home country

- Describe your town/village, street/yard, house/ apartment.
- What other buildings were there near your home?
- What building in your home locality is known by everybody living there? What is it known for?
- Tell about the nature around your home/village/town; what trees, plants, and animals are there?
- Have you always lived in this place? Were you also born there?
- Have you lived in different places? When? Did the whole family move?
- Did you move to a different house/building/town/village/country...?
- Can you tell me what caused you/your family to move? What happened to make you move?
- Do you know where your parents/family are living now? Address/town/town/village/country?
- Does your family call/write letters to you? Send messages through someone? Who is it?
- Do you contact your family yourself? How?
- Have you been told not to contact your family? Who has told you? How do you feel about it?

B. FAMILY DATA

- Identity of mother, father, siblings, spouse, children, grandparents, or other relatives

Please see *Section A.* for examples of finding out about the names and ages of family members.

Apart from the immediate family members, it is also good to enquire about the identity and age of extended family members and whether they lived in the same household with the applicant.

Applicants that are over 15 years of age⁷ should be asked whether they are engaged or married, whether there have been plans for their engagement/marriage, and whether they have any children. These questions have ramifications for possible family reunification issues later on. They also raise some child-specific human rights violations, such as forced marriage of underage minors, forced child prostitution, etc.

- Are you engaged/married/in a common law marriage? Planning to get engaged/married?
- When did you get engaged/married/move in with your spouse?
- How old were you then? How old was your partner?
- Tell me about your fiancé/fiancée/spouse. Describe him/her as a person.
- How did you get to know him/her? Where did you meet him/her?
- What age do people usually marry in your country? Do you know at what age your parents married?
- Did you get engaged/married because you wanted to marry this person?
- Did your family approve of you getting engaged/married to this person?
- Were you asked/forced to get engaged/marry this person? Who asked you to do it?
- Are young people in your country/home area told whom they should marry/forced to marry?
- What happens to those who refuse? What happened to you?
- Does your (future) fiancé/fiancée/spouse treat you well? Has he/she hurt you in any way?

- Does your fiancé/fiancée/spouse know you are here now? What does he/she think/feel about it?

- Do you have children? How many? Where are your children now? Who is taking care of them?
- Do you know where the father/mother of your child/children is now? Are you in contact with him/her?
- Have you been forced to have sexual relations against your will? Who forced you to do that?
- Did this happen often? Did your family know about this? How did they feel about it?
- Was this done for money? Who got the money? What happened to the money?

⁷ With applicants coming from cultures where engagements and marriages may take place at a very young age, persons over 13 years of age can be asked about these matters.

- **Parents'/family's livelihood/possible (forced) child labour**

- *What did your father/mother do for a living?*
- *What did your mother/father do every day? What kind of chores?*
- *Describe a typical day in your family*
- *Did they stay at home or leave the house? Where did they go? Did they go to the fields/town/market?*
- *How did they go? (walk, bike, in a vehicle, what type?) Do you know what they did there?*
- *Where did you parents get the money to buy food?*
- *Did you grow your own food? What kind? Did you have any domestic animals?*
- *Where did you buy your food?*
- *Did you have to work at home/elsewhere, for example fields, market, factory, shop, etc?*
- *What kind of work did you do? Was it hard for you? Did you get paid? What happened to the money?*

- **If the parents are dead, date, place and cause of death**

- *How old were you when your mother/father died?*
- *Do you remember your parent 's/parents' death? What do you remember about it? How did your parent(s) die?*
- *Where were you at the time? Did you your mother/father die? If not, who told you about it?*
- *What happened to you? Was anybody with you? Were you scared? Who helped you/comforted you?*

- **Parents'/applicant's own political activity and security situation**

- *Did your parents attend some meetings with other people? What do you remember about those meetings? Did you parents tell you anything about those meetings? Did you ever go along? Tell me about a time when you went along.*
- *Were your parents afraid of anything? Can you tell about those things?*
- *Did your parents warn you about some dangers? Dangerous animals? Dangerous/bad people?*
- *What were your parents/you most afraid of when you lived at home?*

Ask about issues dealing with fear and warnings also in connection with the Separation issue.

C. OTHER IMPORTANT PERSONS

You can ask the child to draw a diagram of the most important persons in his/her life. You can help the child to get started by drawing your own diagram first. Persons can be represented by circles; the relative distance of the circles from the main actor (the applicant child) should say something about the emotional closeness of the relationship. You can invite the child to talk about the relationships.

The child may have nuclear family members or other close relatives living in Finland, Nordic countries, or elsewhere in Europe, and the child may have even lived with them. The child may also have lived with relatives in his/her own country or in some neighbouring country and formed a strong emotional attachment to them. Possible child protection issues may arise, such as forced child labour, child abuse, and child prostitution.

- *Which other people, who did not live in your home, were very important to you?*
- *Were they/was he/she your relative? Friend? Neighbour?*
- *Did this person/these persons live in your home?*
- *Did you ever live with this person/these persons? For how long? Did you stay with them occasionally?*
- *Were you adopted by them? Did they call you their son/daughter? What did they call you?*
- *Was it far away from your own home? In another village/town/country? Which place/country?*
- *Were you asked/forced to live with them? Who asked you to live with these people?*

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- *Did your parents ask you to do it? What reason did they give? What did they say to you? How did you feel?*
- *Did you yourself ask to live with them?*
- *How do you feel about this person/these persons?*
- *What did you do while there? What did they do? Were they working? What kind of work did they do?*
- *How did they treat you? How did it feel to live with them?*
- *Was it a happy/difficult time for you? Tell me about a happy/sad/difficult thing that happened to you there.*
- *Did they force you to do things you did not want to do? What kind of things?*
- *Describe one incident. When did it happen? How old were you? Did this kind of thing happen often?*
- *Where are these persons now? Are you in contact with them? How do you keep in touch with them?*

- *Did your other siblings/family members live away from home on occasions/permanently?*
- *Do other families have children sometimes living with other relatives rather than with their parents?*

D. CIRCUMSTANCES OF ARRIVAL / WHEN CHILD WAS FOUND/IDENTIFIED

Listen for the child's own, subjective recount of the experience. Silence is a powerful message in itself. If the child cannot/will not say anything about this matter, there is a strong reason for it.

The circumstances of the child's arrival in the country of asylum may provide clues to whether the child has a well-founded fear of persecution. If the child has arrived in the company of other asylum seekers who have been found to have a well-founded fear of persecution, this may, depending on the circumstances, help to establish that the child's fear is well-founded.

Child protection issues: the child may have a strong subjective sense of abandonment and/or may actually have been abandoned.

- *Where were you found? Who found you?*
- *Were you afraid of being found/talked to by the person who found you? What were you afraid of?*
- *Had someone told you to try not to be found out? By whom? What did they/she/he tell you about it?*

- *What happened when you were found?*
- *Did you know what to do/say? Had someone told you how to behave/what to say/do in this situation?*
- *How did you feel? Did you cry?*
- *Were you hungry/thirsty/tired/fearful at the time?*

- *Were you alone? Did anyone comfort/help you?*
- *Was someone with you just before you were found/when you were found? What happened to them?*

- *You have told me that you got here by plane/train/ship/lorry, etc... Have you travelled that way before?*
- *Did you like travelling like that? What was nice/exciting/not nice about it?*

- *Do your parents know that you are here now?*
- *Has someone told your parents you are here now? Who told them about it?*
- *How do your parents know you are here? Have they been in touch with you? Have you contacted them?*
- *What did your parents say when they contacted you/you contacted them? How did you feel?*

- *Would you like to get in touch with your parents? Do you have your parents' address?*
- *How do you feel about contacting your parents?*

E. SEPARATION FROM THE FAMILY

The **experience of separation** has different psychological ramifications, depending on whether it happened **by accident** (while fleeing from a conflict situation, for example) or was **intentional** (the parents, or someone else, decided to send the child away/to safety).

If the separation is unintentional, it is easier for the child to talk about this issue, to say what happened, and to express possible fears about the parents'/other relatives' fate. If the child's subjective experience of separation is that of being intentionally abandoned, he/she may find it more difficult to talk about the matter. These children may have strong feelings of anger, rejection, and inferiority, feeling they were sent away because they were somehow undeserving or bad. In other cases these children feel great pressure to accomplish the task their parents have put on them and feel extremely anxious. Children also worry about who will take care of them and how they are going to survive. Needless to say, they also miss their families a lot. Silence on the child's part at this point may indicate deep separation trauma.

If the child was sent abroad by the parents or other family members, the circumstances of that departure are relevant to the child's asylum application. If there is reason to believe that the parents wish their child to be outside the country of origin on the grounds of a well-founded fear of persecution, that may suggest that the child has such a fear as well.⁸ When this information is unavailable, or it appears that the will of the parents and that of the child are in conflict, the asylum officer will have to come to a decision on the basis of all the known circumstances.

Child protection issue: has the child really been abandoned/threatened with abandonment by his/her caregivers, or is this just a subjective view on the part of the child?

- **General impressions**

- *What do you remember about the last time you saw your mother/father/sister, etc...?*

In addition to, or in place of the parents, if necessary insert here any other person(s) who have been the child's caregivers/have lived in the same household and have a significant role in the child's life and/or in the separation incident.

- *What did they say to you/to someone else? How did they look? How do you think they felt?*
- *What happened to you? How did you feel? What did you say/do?*
- *When did this happen (month/season of the year or harvest cycle/special holiday/what school term, etc?)*
- *How long ago is it? How did you get separated from your family?*
- *Were you at home at the time? If not, where were you? Who was with you from your family?*

- **Unintentional separation**

Some possible reasons for unintentional separation from the family can be war, fleeing from fighting, natural disasters, kidnapping for specific purposes (various forms of forced labour, including child prostitution), etc.

- *Did you get separated from your mother/father/family by accident?*
- *Did you have time/a chance to say goodbye?*
- *Have you experienced war/fighting? Was there war/fighting when you were separated from your family?*
- *Were your parents/family going somewhere at that time? Do you know/Did your parents know where?*
- *Was your family running away from home at the time? From what? How long were you travelling?*

⁸ UNHCR Handbook, supra note 18, at para. 218.

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- *Do you know what happened to your home? Your farm animals? Who has told you this?*
- *What did your parents tell you about leaving your home? Did you hear them talk about it?*
- *Do you know what happened to the other family members?*
- *Was someone with you, or were you left totally alone? How did it feel?*

- *Were you home with your family just before being separated from them?*
- *Were you away from home at the time you got separated from you family?*
- *Where were you then? Were you alone? With someone? With who? Where was the rest of the family?*

- *Do you remember where it happened? Can you describe the place/scene? What time of the day was it?*
- *Were you cold, hot, hungry, thirsty, upset, sad, crying?*
- *Did you ask for help? Did someone try to help you? Who? What did that person do/say?*
- *Did other people around you speak a language you could understand?*

- *Do you know where your parents/the rest of your family members are now?*
- *Are you afraid of what might have happened to them? Do you think of your parents/miss them?*
- *Do you want to search for your parents?*
- *Would you like to go home, if it is possible?*

- *Have you heard from your parents since coming here? Have they contacted you/you contacted them?*
- *Can you tell what your parents say to you in their letters/over the phone/etc? How does it make you feel?*
- *How do you keep in touch with your family? Is someone helping you to keep in touch with your family?*

• Intentional separation

Clarify whether the person has left home without the parents' knowledge/consent (run away from home on his/her own initiative, or lured by someone) and whether the parents know where their child is at the moment. If they do not know, efforts to trace the family need to be made as soon as possible.

The parents may have sent the child abroad for various reasons: persecution experienced for various reasons by the family/the child; in an effort to improve the child's quality of life/educational opportunities/the family's economic situation. The child is expected to get a good education abroad and with that a good job, which will help towards supporting the family members who remain in the home country. In some cases sending the child away may involve varying degrees of forced labour, or child labour in general, the proceedings of which may go partly, or in total, to the parents, either as a lump sum paid to them or as a continual income. The child may also have been sent away as an 'anchor child', whereby the other family members are expected to join the separated minor in the country of asylum through family reunification process.

- *When did you last see your family? Did you have a chance to say goodbye?*
- *Did your family give you some items/photos from home to take with you?*

- *When did you leave home?*
- *Date (according to what calendar)/time or season of year/festival season/festive day?*
- *What time of day was it? Did it happen unexpectedly? Was the time of departure planned?*
- *Did other people see you leave? Was it in secret? Were you told to keep it a secret?*

- *Did you want to leave home yourself? Tell me what made you leave.*
- *Did you have some difficulties at home that made you want to leave? Can you tell me about them?*
- *Did your parents/siblings/spouse/anybody know you were leaving?*
- *Did someone say that you were not to tell your family/anybody that you were leaving? Who?*
- *Did you have some reason for not telling your family/anybody that you were going to leave home?*

- *Were you asked if you wanted to go/told that you would be sent away to another country?*

- *Who asked/wanted you to leave home? Did both of your parents agree on this matter?*
- *How did it feel when you were told that that you would be sent away to another country?*
- *Were you forced to leave? Did you want to leave alone? Did you protest? How? What happened then?*
- *What were you told about the plans/the reason for sending you away? Who told you? How did it feel?*
- *How long did you know about this? How many days/weeks/months/rainy/dry seasons/school terms?*
- *Can you say what was being waited for? How did it feel to wait for the leaving day?*
- *Did you wait for your departure at home? Somewhere else? Where? With whom?*

- *Did somebody/something make you scared/upset during your journey here? What was it?*
- *Did the people you met on the journey speak a language you could understand? Which one?*
- *How were you treated during your journey here? Were you treated well/badly?*
- *Did you travel alone? Who travelled with you? What documents did you have with you?*

- *What do you think your parents expect of you now? What do they want you to do?*
- *How do you feel about your parents' expectations for you?*
- *Would you like to go back home if it is possible?*
- *What do you think your parents would say/think/feel if you went back?*
- *Do you miss home a lot?*
- *Who do you miss the most? What do you miss about them? What do you think about them?*
- *Apart from people, what things do you miss from home? Tell me about them! Describe them to me.*

- *Do your parents/family know where you are now? Do you know where your family is at the moment?*
- *Have you received letter(s)/phone calls/other communication from your parents?*
- *Do relatives living here give you messages/greetings from your parents? What do they say?*
- *Can you yourself contact your family? How do you contact them? Directly? With whose help?*
- *Have you been told not to be in contact with your family? Who has told you not to contact them?*

F. LIFE EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO SEPARATION FROM THE FAMILY

• Daily living and health

- *How did you usually spend your days at home? Play/school/help at home/in the fields?*
- *How long were your working days? Did you work outside the family? Where? What kind of work?*
- *How old were you when you started to work? Were you paid? How much? Who got the money?*

- *What did you do first after getting up? What did you do next? What did you do during the day/evening?*
- *Describe one day from when you got up till you went to bed and got up again the next day.*

- *Where did you eat? What did you usually eat? Did you have enough to eat/were you often hungry?*
- *Where did you sleep? Did other people sleep in the same room?*
- *Were you able to sleep OK? What kept you awake? What made you wake up at night?*

- *Who did you play with? Who were your friends? What games did you play with your friends?*
- *Did your parents tell you not to talk to/be with/play with/be afraid of someone?*
- *What did they say to you about that person?*

- *Do you remember a time you were very sick? What kind of illness was it? What symptoms did you have?*
- *Who looked after you? What kind of medication did you get? How old were you then?*
- *Were you sick often? Was somebody else in your family often ill? Can you tell me about it?*

- Living surroundings

- Describe what your home/house looked like.

- What material: wood/stone, cement, etc, was it a house/apartment, etc?
- What colour were the walls/doors/curtains? (show colour charts for easier recognition)
- How many rooms? Where did you sleep/eat? How did you cook?
- Did you like your house? What was your favourite place there?
- Did you have a telephone/TV/washing machine/what kind of cooker?

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- Family relationships

- By what name did you call your mother/father?
- By what name did your father call your mother? Vice versa?
- What kind of things did you do together with him/her? Can you remember one particular incident?
- What kind of things did they tell you?
- Tell me about your mother/father (as a person); describe your mother/father in three words.
- With whom did you play/interact daily?
- How many siblings do you have? Did they all live at home?
- Was it your responsibility to look after (some of) the younger siblings? If not, whose responsibility?
- Did any of your siblings die/disappear/leave home for another reason? Can you tell me about it?

- Who lived in your house? How many persons altogether?
- Were there times when you/some other family member lived away from home?
- What did your mother/mother do most days? Work outside home/in the home? What kind of work?
- What was your mother/father like? Describe your mother/father in three words.
- What kind of things did you do with your mother/father/siblings?
- Think of a particular occasion you did something with your mother/father and describe it!
- What did you mother/father use to do with you/say to you that made you happy?
- Can you tell me one thing you once experienced with your mother/father that made you really happy?
- How old were you at the time of that incident? (This incident can be told, drawn or acted out.)
- What kind of things did your mother/father teach you/tell you?

- Was your mother/father happy/unhappy/fearful a lot of the time?
- Were they angry a lot? With whom?
- Were they angry with you? For what? What did they do? Were they often angry with you?
- Can you describe one particular incident when your mother/father was angry with you? What happened?
- How old were you at the time of that incident? (This incident can be told, drawn or acted out.)

- Did your mother and father usually treat you the same way they did your sisters/brothers?
- What kind of things did you usually do at home? What chores did you have?
- Did other siblings also help with the housework? What kind of chores did each of you have?
- Was it your responsibility to look after the younger siblings? One particular sibling?
- Who looked after you? Did you play with your siblings? Who were your playmates?

A child over seven years of age can be asked to describe someone's personal attributes.

- **Outside influences**

- The child's own experiences may support the parents' or other adult family members' account of persecution. These experiences may be either common to persons of all ages or child-specific.
- The child may have a stronger case of persecution than the adult members of the family, or be the only member of the family with a persecution experience. The persecution may have taken general or child-specific forms.⁹ The Geneva Convention notion of a "particular social group" can be applicable to children as members of a particular family who have been singled out for persecution for some reason.
- A distinction also needs to be made between private and public actors. When a child claims violence or harassment by public actors, it is clearly a refugee protection issue. When it is a question of private actors, i.e. neighbours, other significant individuals, or a matter of domestic violence, the weight of both general child protection issues and refugee protection issues needs to be considered carefully according to the particulars of each case.

- *Was there warring in your home country while you were living there?*
- *Did you see/have to flee from fighting? What did it feel/sound/look like? (drawings can be used)*
- *Were children fighting in the war? Were they/you asked to use weapons? Which ones?*
- *Were you fighting in the war? Helping with the fighting? Who asked/made you do it?*
- *What kind of things were children/ you/your siblings asked to do in the fighting?*
- *Did you carry messages/help with cooking/getting the food/look after the wounded?*
- *Who asked/ordered you to help in this manner? What did he/she say?*
- *Can a child say he/she does not want to do such things?*
- *What did your mother/father think about you doing such things? What did they say/you say to them?*
- *How did it feel to take part in the fighting/to help?*

- *Were some people outside your family not very nice to you/your family? Shopkeepers, the police, others?*
- *Were there some people you and your parents avoided/were afraid of? What was the reason?*
- *What did your parents tell you about these persons? What do you know about them? Who told you?*

- *In your country, do you need to pay for school books/school uniform/school food/school fees?*
- *Could your family afford to send you and your siblings to school?*
- *What language was used as the teaching language in your school?*

- *Did you have any difficulties at school because of your family/ethnic background/language background?*
- *Did (some of) the teachers/students treat you badly?*
- *How? What did they do/say to you? For what reason?*
- *How often did this happen? For how long did it last? Weeks/months/years?*
- *Was anyone else treated like this? How many persons? How often did it happen?*
- *Did anyone try to stop this behaviour? Who? How? Were the guilty ones punished?*
- *How did your parents react? What did they say to you? Did they talk to someone at school?*
- *How did it feel to be treated like this?*

G. EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE

Violence is an area where children need special protection. That is why various aspects of possible violence are brought up under different subsections in these guidelines. A second reason why this topic is spread throughout the document is that one cannot predict which areas will bring up experiences of violence in the

⁹ Children who seek asylum alongside with their parents should be heard to determine, whether they have a claim of their own, how strong is it compared to the parents' claim and has the alleged persecution been child specific or general in nature.

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interviewees' background and trigger a response in them. One also has to bear in mind when working with younger children that the order and context in which they present facts does not necessarily follow that of adults' logic.

The question of violence has also been made into a separate topic in order to present some guidelines on how to approach this very sensitive topic. Also, two specific issues to do with violence possibly encountered by children (domestic violence and sexual violence) are dealt with here. Some of the questions under these headings can also be utilized under other headings when appropriate if the issue of violence comes up.

Children are especially vulnerable to violence from adults, as their means to protect themselves against it are much more limited compared to the adult population. Children also become victims of violence more easily, as they generally trust adults to protect, rather than hurt them. Separated minors seeking asylum, who are victims of different forms of violence, including sexual violence, need to be protected by appropriate child protection measures in the country of asylum. This is especially so in cases of repeated and grave child-specific human rights violations.

Violence experienced by a child can take various forms (emotional/physical/sexual) and can be caused either by family members or persons outside the family. It can be an overt, public act or hidden from others except for the victim and the perpetrator.

Experiences of violence can be one of the reasons why a child has left his/her family and/or country, or been sent away from there. Children may also have been exposed to various forms of violence while separated from their family or during the journey from the home country to their respective destinations.

Victims of violence may be silent about it either consciously or unconsciously. The perpetrator(s) may have forbidden the victim to mention it through different kinds of threats, or the experience may be too traumatizing for the victim to be able to talk about it. There may also be cultural hindrances to the expression of these kinds of experiences.

Violence, sexual violence in particular, is an extremely sensitive topic. Therefore it needs to be approached with great care. On the basis of the country of origin information, some other relevant information, or on the asylum seeker's verbal and/or non-verbal cues, the interviewer can state his/her awareness that there may possibly be experiences of violence in the interviewee's past history.

A person needs to be given the opportunity to relate experiences of violence in a secure atmosphere. People are seldom able to talk about traumatic experiences like this at the first mention of them. The interviewer needs to introduce the topic first and afterwards give the interviewee several opportunities to bring the topic up during the interview. Depending on the situation, this can happen in different ways. The interviewer can pick the topic up if the conversation touches on things possibly connected with (sexual) violence. The interviewer can also give the interviewee the freedom to take up the topic up at a moment of his/her own choosing during the course of the interview.

One way of making it easier to handle the topic of violence at an interview is "normalizing" it, i.e. taking it up in a matter-of-fact manner along with the other topics being discussed. This gives the message that it is permissible to talk about this topic and that the interviewer can handle it mentally and emotionally.

Example sentences.

I know that these kinds of things (sexual violence/exploitation, domestic violence) happen. These things happen in every country. Many people have experienced this kind of violence. These kinds of things are not unusual. I have read/heard/know about cases/a case like this.

- The significance of the experiences of violence for the decision on political asylum needs to be clarified.

Example sentences:

- *I understand that it may be difficult to talk about things like this. If someone has violated you physically/sexually, it is important that you express it. It helps me to make the best possible decision for you. If I do not know all the important facts that have happened to you, it is difficult for me to know what will be best for you in this situation.*
 - *It is safe to talk about these things here. If you are not ready to talk about it right now, you/we can pick it up later on during the interview.*
 - *Would you like to write /draw something about this incident? You can do it now or later on during the interview.*
 - *If you are unable to talk about it today, you can contact me through your caregiver/social worker in the reception centre and we will arrange another meeting if you want.*
- The possibility of getting help and support in handling a traumatic experience needs to be made known.

Example sentences:

- *Sometimes people commit acts of (sexual) violence against other people. It happens for many different reasons.*
 - *Nobody should hurt another person like that. It is very sad that it happens. It is very sad if you have had to experience something like that. If this has happened to you, it may be difficult to think about it /be reminded about it.*
 - *However, there are people in this country whose job it is to help those who have had bad experiences like this. You can also get this help. You can ask your caregiver (whoever is responsible for the daily care of the person) to arrange it.*
- Domestic violence

A distinction needs to be made between mild forms of corporal punishment (as a result of disobedience or for some other reason) and domestic violence that is classed as severe, or acts of violence committed by members outside the family that are equally severe in nature. Cultural differences in child-rearing also need to be kept in mind. In some societies, corporal punishment is more acceptable than in others.

- *Did your parents/sisters/spouse punish/beat you for some reason?*
 - *How did he/she hurt you? Were you hit with a fist/slapped/kicked? On what parts of your body?*
 - *Did the person use something else except for his/her hands and feet to hurt you?*
 - *What implement was used? How was it used?*
 - *Did you get a visible injury/scar? What kind? Bleeding/broken limb/bruising/scarring?*
 - *How often did this take place? How old were you then?*
 - *Can you tell about one incident when X hurt you?*
 - *Were other siblings/family members treated like this? Treated like you? Beaten/punished?*
 - *Are children in other families often beaten/punished?*
 - *Do you know of anyone else (apart from yourself), who also has similar experiences of violence?*
-
- *Can you think what made X hurt/punish you? How do you feel about this person who hurt you?*
 - *How did this kind of treatment make you feel? Who knew that this was happening to you?*
 - *Did anyone try to protect you from the punishment/beating/kicking, etc? How? Did it help?*
 - *Have you been told not to talk about this matter? Who has forbidden you?*

- **Sexual violence/exploitation**

Several forms of violence by widely varying actors may come up in this connection. Sexual violence/exploitation may also be one form of domestic violence. The questions under the previous sub-heading may also be used here by changing the phrases dealing with other forms of violence to those of sexual violence/exploitation. Other questions under this sub-heading probe child prostitution and the experience of sexual violence during the journey from the home country to the respective country of destination.

- *If you have been forced to have sexual relations against your will/raped, you can tell me about it here/you can express it here, if you feel you are able to talk about it.*
- *You can also bring the matter up a bit later, if you so wish. I will give you an opportunity to talk about it later, if you want to.*
- *Have you been forced into sexual relations? By whom?*
- *When did it happen? How old were you then? Where did it take place?*
- *How often did this happen?*
- *Do you know anybody else to whom this has happened? Do things like these happen often?*
- *Were you exploited sexually for money?*
- *Who got the money? What happened to the money?*
- *Did your family know about this? What did they say/think/how did they feel about it?*
- *Did anybody try and help you/try to protect you/ try to stop this from happening?*
- *Have you been told not to tell about this? Who told you not to say anything?*
- *Can you tell me under what circumstances you travelled here?*
- *Were you hidden/concealed somewhere? How did it feel to be hidden/concealed?*
- *How long did your journey here last? How many days/weeks/months?*
- *If you did not come directly here, what happened during the waiting times?*
- *How were you treated during your journey here? Were you treated badly? How? By whom?*
- *If you were sexually assaulted during your journey here, you can talk about it here.*
- *Was it just a single incident? How many times were you assaulted during your travel?*
- *Have you told anybody about this before? Were you told not to say anything?*
- *What did the person say to you when forbidding you to talk about the incident?*

H. FUTURE PLANS

The issue of possible future scenarios can create anxiety in the child, as it involves many uncertainties. That is the reason why it is placed prior to the section dealing with the present situation, which is meant to be the cool-off phase of the interview. The hypothetical questions may only be appropriate with older children.

At this juncture one can also try to clarify what kind of information the interviewee has been given concerning what will happen to him/her/the family in the asylum process and who has given this information (the parents, the persons who accompanied the child to the country of destination, other persons in the reception centre, etc.). Possible misconceptions and wrong expectations can be gently corrected and a realistic picture of the process given instead.

Cultural issues also need to be considered when talking about future issues. In some cultures the mention of something means that what is said will actually happen. In these cultures people are wary of saying anything too definite about future scenarios; they prefer to say that something MAY happen or POSSIBLY take place. In some cultures people are not accustomed to talking about the future and may not be prepared to talk about it at all.

Directorate of Immigration Finland, 2001

- *Did you talk with your parents about what to expect here?*
- *What did they say? What did you say? How did you feel about what they told you?*
- *Have things happened differently from what they said/you expected? What things have been different?*
- *How do you feel about continuing to stay here?*
- *What do you think your parents want you to do now? What do they expect? How does it make you feel?*
- *Where would you most like to live? With whom would you like to stay?*
- *Do you want to go back to your parents? Do you think it is possible?*
- *What do you think will happen to you if you go back to your parents/your home (country)?*
- *Are you afraid of going back? What things/whom are you afraid of?*

8. WRAPPING UP THE ASYLUM INTERVIEW

Towards the end of the interview, the asylum officer should ask the child if he/she has any final questions. This should not be done right at the very end of the allotted time. It is common for children to say at the very end of a conversation something that is very important to them but is difficult to talk about. They really want you to know, but at the same time they want to suggest that it is not really important verbally (*It doesn't really matter*), in case you do not understand their concerns. This is why ending needs sufficient time. The child may have some very pressing concerns that need time to sort out, or the child's questions or comments (*When is my mother coming....? My father said that...*) may raise issues to do with the asylum claim that have not been mentioned before and which need to be probed further.

At this juncture the child also needs to be informed about the next steps in the application process, the written document of the interview, signature, decision, notification of the decision, appeals, etc. The asylum officer needs to be supportive yet realistic and not to raise any false hopes about what will happen. Cultural differences in communication patterns need to be remembered at this point too; one needs to check how the child interprets the answer, in order to avoid false expectations.

It is also important to give feedback about how the child performed in the interview, to say how you think things went, and to thank him/her for being cooperative. You can also ask about the child's own feelings concerning how the interview went from his/her point of view.

9. CLOSURE

At the end of the interview, it is important to bring the child back psychologically to the present situation. It is advisable not to finish with the child's situation in the home country, the separation incident, or possible future scenarios, as raising these issues often causes an acute sense of vulnerability in a separated minor. Finishing off with the present situation will help to restore the child's sense of security at the conclusion of the interview.

If any anxiety is detected in the child at the end of the interview, efforts should be made to lessen or eradicate it by drawing the interview to an end by concentrating on a lighter subject, something that is unrelated to the child's past situation. In addition to discussion, with very young children this can also be done through some activity like drawing, looking at some pictures, playing a simple game, etc.

It is important to observe the child's behaviour during this phase too, to see how well-adjusted he/she is in the present circumstances, and to gauge the results of the interview in that light.

- *What things are very different here compared to your home (country)?*
- *What do you like here the most?*
- *Who are the most important people to you now here in Finland? Whom do you like best?*
- *Do you have people here with whom you feel safe to talk to/share your feelings/tell your problems to? Who?*
- *Have you made any friends in the reception centre/neighbourhood/at school/through hobbies?*
- *What is school like for you here?*
- *What new things have you learned since coming here?*
- *Have you tried skiing/skating yet? How was it?*
- *What are you going to do today after we finish the interview?*

Respond to the child's answers with short comments, with appropriate expressions and gestures that indicate you understand what is happening to them:

As in the beginning, the interviewer can again draw the attention away from the child and concentrate on him/herself. For example, practise how to say something in the child's language, such as:

- *"Can you teach me how to say: 'It was nice to meet you/good afternoon/good night/etc...'*

The last subsection of the questionnaire, titled **Present situation**, is meant for recording facts concerning the child's living arrangements, for example whether the child is possibly moving to private accommodation, schooling, etc.

If it is detected that the child is fearful and anxious at the end of the interview, steps need to be taken to remove or lessen these reactions by concentrating on a lighter subject which has no connection with the child's past experiences. This can be done verbally, or through some activity. With very young children suitable activities are drawing, looking at picture books, reading to the child, simple games, music etc. Also with older children, a suitable activity, such as board games, music, or a sports activity can lessen possible tension experienced during the interview and take his/her mind off it. One can also have already arranged beforehand that after the interview the child has a chance to interact with some support person to lessen possible tension created by the interview, either by talking about it, through some of the above-mentioned activities, or in any other way deemed suitable.

APPENDIX 1.

DRAFT DOCUMENT



ASYLUM INTERVIEW
UNACCOMPANIED MINOR

Diary Number

Directorate of Immigration Customer number:

Asylum interview

At the start of the interview the applicant was informed of the following facts:¹⁰

- the interviewer represents the Directorate of Immigration
- the legal representative represents the child's interests in the interview
- the applicant has the right to an interpreter
- the document derived from this interview shall form the basis on which the application will be decided upon and thus complements any personally written application.
- it serves the applicant's own interests to share all the information pertaining to the application right at the onset of the asylum process.
- giving information that proves to be false weakens the application's credibility
- an application for asylum includes an application for a residence permit
- giving false identity information is a punishable act
- the residence permit may be cancelled if, in the application process, the person has deliberately given false information concerning identity or any other matters having a bearing on the decision
- based on the application, the applicant may be granted political asylum or a residence permit. If the application is rejected, the applicant may be deported and given a refusal of entry into Finland and other Nordic countries, as well as into countries which are party to the Schengen agreement.

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Questions for Sections A. to H.

Information from the adults' questionnaire:

To be used with older minors, depending on the case and available documentation

12.¹¹ Marital status

16. Spouse's name, date of birth, place of birth

¹⁰ This information is given to persons over 15 years of age, which is the minimum age for legal responsibility in Finland. Please refer also to the Guidelines for Interviewing (Unaccompanied) Minors, section B. Procedural matters.

¹¹ The numbers correspond with those in the adult's questionnaire.

17. Children: names, date of birth, place of birth
(including clarification of their present abode and which ones are applying for political asylum)

23. Military service
(child soldiers: military training, special training, type of service, place of service, etc.)

24. Passport particulars (serial number and date of expiry)

25. Passport information (how obtained/price/visas/stamps)

27. Travel route to Finland

28. Travel tickets

29 Travels in other countries

30. Asylum applications/decisions in other countries and Finland

32. Relatives in Finland/Nordic countries (residence status)
The Police and the Directorate of Immigration in Finland may request and receive information concerning my possible asylum applications or stay in other Nordic countries, or my stay in other Dublin or Schengen countries.

35. Personal political and/or other activity in the public domain (youth wing of political party, (political/religious) youth organizations, etc.

36. Grounds for political asylum

- persecution based on race*
- persecution based on religion*
- persecution based on nationality*
- persecution based on membership of a particular social group*
- persecution based on political opinion*
- other reason? What?*

37. Arrests and detentions

38. Court sentences and punishment (time, place, reason, name of prison, written documentation)

39. Arrest warrants (when, reason, written documentation)

40. Torture (time, reason, modes and consequences; doctor's report)

42. What would happen to the applicant if he/she were returned to the home country or to the country through which the applicant arrived in Finland?

43. Have there been any consequences for the relatives because the applicant has left the country?