



Study on alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children in Croatia

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Alternative care arrangements for UASC in Croatia

Key insights from UNHCR-commissioned research

Study to be published in November 2024, based on field research nationwide. Some context:

- In 2024 (January – July), asylum seeker arrivals have decreased by 57% compared to 2023.
- UASC arrivals, however, are up 45% compared to 2023, with **asylum-seeking UASC up 70%**.
- 99% of UASC in 2024 have registered as asylum seekers (970 / 983).
- UASC are **almost exclusively placed in institutions**: 0.3% of UASC in the care system placed in non-institutional alternative care (1 UASC fostered), compared to 74% of Croatian children. This data is from 2022 (the most recent available).

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Key challenges

- **In general:** fast onwards movement, language barriers, limited places, complex specific needs.
- **Institutional placements**
 - UASC are routinely accommodated in inappropriate settings: reception centres for adults, homes for children with behavioural disorders and/or in contact with the law.
- **Family-based placements**
 - Insufficient numbers of foster families; absence of a matching mechanism; language barriers and perceived cultural differences; insufficient support for foster families.
- **Community-based placements**
 - Placements are rare; targeted support required (interpretation, cultural mediation).

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Recommendations to build capacity and promote non-institutional care

- **End UASC placements in institutions inadequately equipped to meet their specific needs**
 - Family-based or community-based alternatives must keep pace, or interim solutions should be developed. BUT any dedicated UASC centre should only serve emergency placement purposes.
- **Strengthening the foster care system**
 - Trainings, supervision, support (mobile teams, networks), interpretation, mobilisation of new families (targeted information campaigns, enabling foster parents with less permanent stay).
- **Strengthening community-based care**
 - Prioritise the development and promote uptake of supported independent group living for older UASC; ensure targeted support (mentorship, integration assistance)
- **Durable solutions:** Ongoing best interests assessments, family reunification efforts.