

# Appendix A

## Article

Participation in Decision-making among  
Unaccompanied Children and the Essence of  
Adult Support.

# **Participation in Decision-making among Unaccompanied Children and the Essence of Adult Support.**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the present scoping review was to explore the literature available on the challenges of participation of UAC in decision-making and the essence of adult support in fostering effective participation.

This review explored five databases and identified 17 primary studies related to the participation of unaccompanied children in decision-making and the essence of adult support. These challenges are framed as relationships with adults and the environment; inadequate information; language problems and interpreter problems. With regards to the essence of adult support, this paper has categorized this support based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The needs on the bottom of the pyramid are considered as the basis in the fulfilment of the right to participation and are interrelated. Thus, the essence of adult support is categorized as follows: adult support in basic needs; adult support in psychological needs and adult support in self-fulfilment needs (participation).

The review highlighted possible directions for future researches.

**Keywords:** unaccompanied children, participation, decision-making, participation rights and rights

## **Introduction**

Over the last decade, unaccompanied children (UAC) have received increasing attention in both academic research and the public discourse. These children have all left their countries of origin mainly because of armed conflicts and oppression, or abuses of human rights and deplorable living conditions. (Herz and Lander,2017, as cited in Halvorsen, 2005).

Unaccompanied children (UAC) are defined by the United Nation`s convention, as individuals who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so ( United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child,2005,p.5).

Many researchers (for example, Davidson, G.R. et al., 2010; Ehntholt, K. A. et al., 2018 and Felsman, J., et al, 1990) have investigated the myriad challenges UAC face when settling in the countries of refuge. Their focus has largely been on their vulnerability leading to mental health issues. While little has been done on the conditions that reinforces their strengths and resilience to enable them cope with their past, present and future lives to flourish in their new settlements.

Unaccompanied children have an increased risk of being exposed to trauma, poverty, and lack of education and that it may be of great importance that their rights are protected, and this can only be accomplished if their voices are heard. (UNCHR,2005 and 2007). With so many unaccompanied children that should be integrated into society, it is of great importance to listen to their voices, according to Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger (2017).

The purpose of this scoping review is to examine the literature available on the challenges unaccompanied children face in exercising their rights to participation in decision-making and the essence of adult support in enhancing these rights.

It is worthwhile to note that, the adult is considered in a broader perspective in this paper. The adult in this case, represents all grown-ups the children interact with either officials or non-officials that represent the system and the environment UAC find themselves.

## **Participation**

Before delving into the main reasons of the importance of participation among UAC`s in decision-making and adult essence, it will be necessary to first outline the theories associated

with participation.

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, states parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, and the views of the child should be given due weights in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (CRC, Article12).

Insights from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations, 1989), Non- Governmental Organizations (NGO`s) and the native law of Norway indicated that the best interest of the child (also unaccompanied children) should be a guiding principle in all decision- making processes that affects their lives.

In assessing the best interest of the child, he/she should be recognized as an autonomous individual (Hedlund and Salmonsson, 2018, p.492, as cited in Freeman, 2000).

Recognizing the child as an autonomous individual makes the self-determination theory relevant to this study. Self-determination is found on the top of Maslow`s hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow`s hierarchy of needs, the lower needs down on the pyramid needs to be satisfied before an individual can attend to needs higher up. Although Maslow further clarified that, it is not a must that all lower needs must be satisfied before an individual can climb up the pyramid, he also argued that those needs that are met will lead the individual to focus on other needs. From bottom to up, he classified the needs as follows: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization (McLeod, 2018).

Self-determination is found within the esteem and self-actualization needs. These are the needs associated with dignity, achievement, mastery, independence, the desire for reputation or respect from others, realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences. Maslow indicated that, the need for respect or reputation is most important for children and adolescents and precedes real self-esteem or dignity (McLeod, 2018).

The self-determination theory has been used by many researchers in the field of health and social science. To name a few, Alvaro, S. et al, 2020; Ingrid, L. et al, 2012 and Josephine, S. et al, 2020 have all used this theory in relation to autonomy support and exercise relation for adolescents; basic psychological need satisfaction in leisure activities and adolescents` life satisfaction and in acute child and adolescent mental health inpatient care, respectively.

The self-determination theory sees the human being as an active, self-determined organism that has the need for autonomy, the need for competency and the need of affiliation to other human beings (Deci and Ryan, 2012). This theory focuses both on the individual as it also focuses on the affiliations of other human beings (adult essence). It has a focus on the influences of the social environment on attitudes, values, motivations, and behaviors both developmentally and in current situations of individuals (Deci and Ryan, 2012, p.2). As this paper also examines the essence of adult support, this theory becomes vital. Self-determination considers special factors within the social environment as autonomy supportive. Autonomy supportive according to Deci and Ryan (2012), is when the authority (in this case adults) accepts and acknowledges the internal frame of reference of the children, respect them, encourages exploration and choice, supports their decisions and refrain from pressuring and controlling them even in subtle manners. (p.2).

Autonomy supportive promotes autonomous self -regulation both by helping people maintain intrinsic motivation and facilitating internalization of extrinsic motivation. Self -determination encourages the possibility of a positive learning environment capable of equipping children with the necessary ability to make sound judgement in things affecting their lives.

There is a growing global trend towards acknowledging children and young people`s right to participate in matters that affects them (United Nation`s Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

The child protection law of Norway § 6-3 states that, *“a child who has reached the age of seven or younger that is in the position to make his/her opinion, shall be informed and given the opportunity to express himself/ herself before a decision is taken in issues that affect him/her”* (Lindboe, 2012, p.96).

Involving children in decision-making is complex as pointed out by Coyne and Harder (2011) because of issues such as, adult`s instincts to protect children from distressing information; the burden of decision-making and the adult`s concern about the children`s competency to participate. Despite the above concerns, there are documented greater benefits in involving children in decision-making according to Kirby et al, (2003).

In general, there is evidence that children`s participation can lead to improved service development, increase in children`s and young people`s citizenship and social inclusion, and

their wider personal development (Kirby et al, 2003, p.7).

To be specific, participation provides an inclusive practice that draws in those often excluded like unaccompanied children by increasing their knowledge, understanding, confidence and self-belief in specific areas to effect a change in their lives (Kirby et al, 2003).

Participation enhances citizenship and political education, including knowledge of children`s rights, structures and services to develop more positive community relationships and creates a sense of belonging through the increase of skills, employment opportunities and heightens their aspirations and plans (Kirby et al, 2003).

(Førde, 2017, as cited in Antonovsky, 1979; Prilleltensky, 2012; Tones and Green, 2004) supported the fact that, children who are not encouraged to participate in decision-making and when the conditions of effective participation are absent, will be characterized with an inability to make future predictions, lack self-control and will lack the feeling of association and belonging that are key factors in strengthening their strengths and resilience.

(Førde , 2017, as cited in Seligman et al, 1995; Garbarino, 2008; Ungar, 2012) also agreed that when children`s fundamental needs of care, fairness, safety and belonging to their immediate environment are not met, they navigate other possibilities that are neither good for them nor the environment they live in.

It is worthwhile to note here that, this scoping review uses the term participation, not only to mean “taking part” or “being present” but also having influence over decisions and actions. The review is concerned about UAC`s participation in all decisions taken that influences their lives.

### **The present study**

In consonance with the above, the present scoping review will attempt to identify the literature available on the challenges in the exercise of the rights of participation of unaccompanied children in decision-making : What are the challenges identified and the essence of adult support in enabling UAC participate effectively in decision-making? More importantly, will this scoping review also examine adult support in meeting the needs of unaccompanied children. Having an insight on this, will help researchers, adults/practitioners (the child welfare) and policy makers draw their attention in taking more concrete measures to improve the level of participation of this vulnerable group of children for their present and

future well-being and for the benefit of society.

By studying and understanding the range of studies exploring the challenges of the participation of UAC in decision-making, this scoping review shall be able to identify the gaps in the field of research on child welfare, social welfare and the public/social services as a whole. Will there be the presence of gaps in the field? What areas should receive more research focus? This review shall attempt to answer these questions.

## **Method**

Tricco et al (2018) stated that “*scoping reviews follow a systematic approach to map evidence on a topic and identify main concepts, theories, sources and knowledge gaps*”. (p.1). This scoping review will follow a systematic approach using the guidelines found in the framework of Arksey and O`Malley (2005) to map out the challenges on the participation of UAC in decision-making. The framework has been proved to be effective in mapping out the extent, nature and range of selected bodies of research. In addition to the identifying of knowledge gaps found in the literature, this scoping review shall also provide a summary of its findings. It shall use the five main stages outlined by Arksey and O`Malley (2005) as follows (1) identify the research question, (2) identify relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarizing and reporting the results.

### **Stage 1: Identifying the research question**

The current scoping review aims to identify the literature available on the challenges faced in the exercise of the rights of participation of unaccompanied children in decision-making. In line with the recommendations of Arksey and O`Malley (2005), this review began with a broad review area to establish what is available before narrowing the search. Previous research had focused on the deficiencies and vulnerability of UAC leading to mental health issues. Less attention was given to their resilience and strengths. The absence or inadequate research on their resilience and strengths that needs to be tapped effectively to enable a positive change in their situation through participation in decision-making, brought about this study: Participation in decision-making among unaccompanied children and the essence of adult support. Thus, the research questions as follows:

1. What are the challenges found in the literature UAC face in the right to participate in decision-making?

2. What do the findings say about adult support in meeting the needs of unaccompanied children?

### **Stage 2: Identify relevant studies**

A database search was conducted between the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 by using Web of Science, Embase, Eric and PhycInfo. Idunn was used as a back up to generate research articles basically from Norway and the Scandinavia. These databases were chosen because they provide a wide range of research articles on social sciences and humanities that includes child welfare, sociology, health policy and management.

There was uncertainty about the researches available on this very scoping review topic. It was therefore decided not to have any specific time limit on the publication frame. Two separate Boolean operators “OR” and “AND” were used with the search terms to retrieve relevant studies as shown below

#### **Search Terms**

“unaccompanied children” OR “unaccompanied minors”

AND Participation OR “decision-making” OR “participation rights” OR rights

### **Stage 3: Study selection**

A total of 403 articles were primarily acquired. They comprise articles from all over the world and in other languages even though the search was basically done in English and specifically in Norwegian when Idunn was used.

After excluding duplicates, there were (n=301) articles remaining. These articles were stored on a word program with their titles and abstracts. They were screened by reading through the articles, taking notes of titles, keywords and abstracts. A lot of the articles (n=236) had UAC in relation to health issues, age determination, services at reception centres etc. These articles were excluded as they did not fulfil the inclusion criteria.

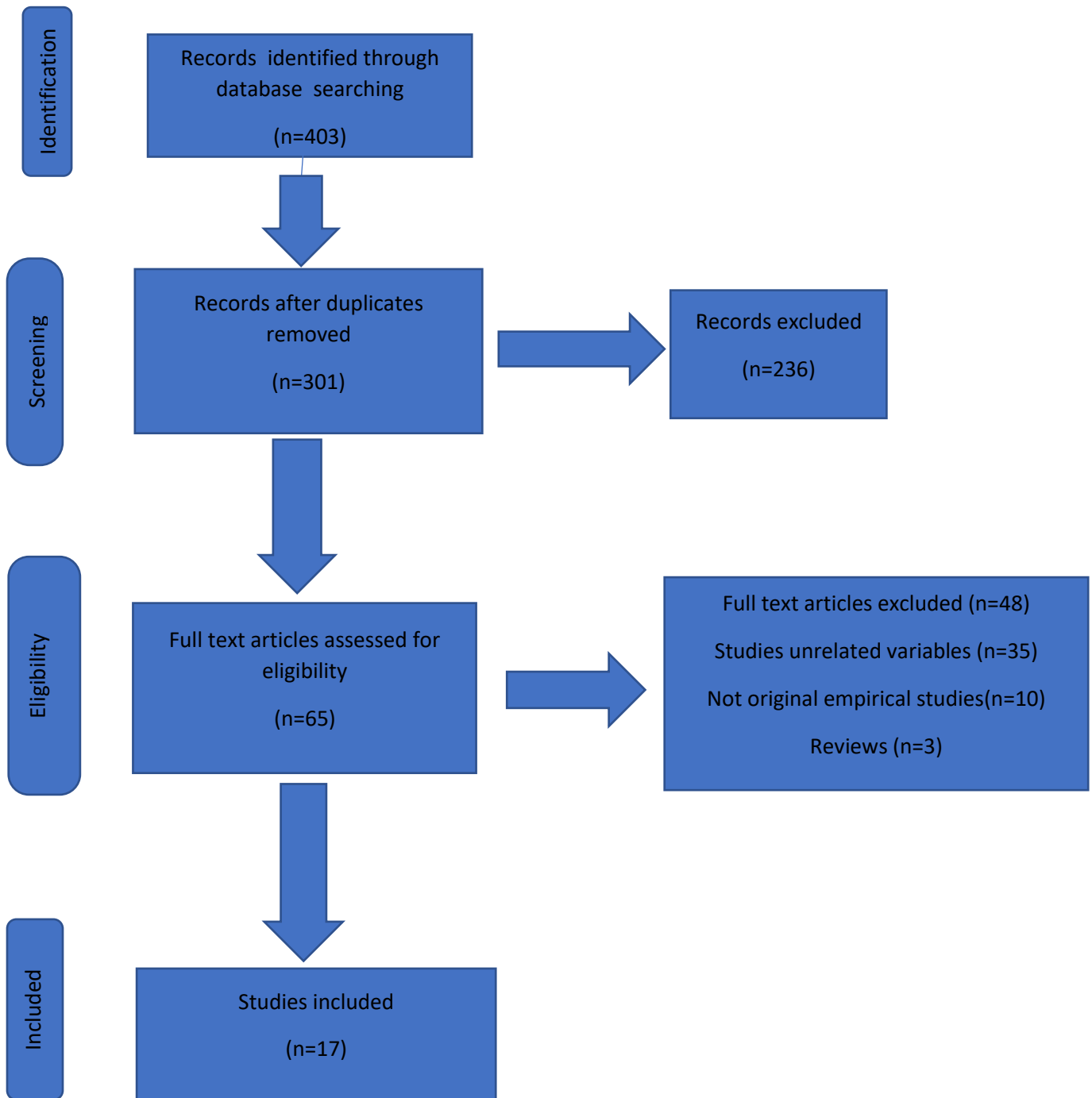
(n=68) articles were selected by not only reading titles and abstracts but by also opening and downloading the articles in order to get a proper glimpse of all what the article is about.

(n=47) were further excluded as they were either not related, not original empirical studies and were reviews.

Finally, (n=17) articles were included for this scoping review as shown on figure 1 on the next page.



Figure 1



#### **Stage 4: Chart the data**

A spreadsheet was developed on Microsoft Word and the extractions from the 17 articles were noted systematically on a table (Table 1 in the Appendix). The information from the articles was coded in relation to the focus of this review. The included articles were therefore coded by study, sample population, sample size, research design, country, participatory indicator and key findings.

#### **Stage 5: Collate, Summarize, and Report Results.**

The last stage of the scoping review according to Arksey and O`Malley (2005) is the collating, summarizing and the reporting of results. Relevant findings were carefully organized carefully in themes, taking into consideration their relation into the research question and the focus of this review.

#### **Ongoing consultation**

With an intention to aid the credibility and the strength of this review, the review has included experts in the area of research as suggested by Arksey and O`Malley (2005). This paper has therefore included one professor (PHD candidate) from the University of Bergen, Oyeniyi Samuel Olaniyan and one researcher Marte Knag Fylkesnes.

Two child welfare practitioners (not named for ethical reasons), with many years of working experience with UAC were also consulted. The professor, the PHD candidate who is the supervisor of this project was consulted in the preliminary stage in the identification of the search terms, the databases and general advice in the field of scoping reviews. The researcher Marte Knag Fylkesnes, who has an experience of working in the child welfare and being a researcher who has done extensive researches on immigrants and vulnerable groups was consulted at some point in the middle of this paper. The two child welfare practitioners were consulted to give views of their experience in bringing out the voices, views and opinions of UAC in decision- making that affects their lives and what has been their own roles (the practitioners) in enhancing participation.

#### **Results**

The studies` country of origin, design, methods, and key findings are presented in Table 1 (attached in the appendix). In the 17 included studies in this review, the majority were from Norway (n=4) (Engebrigtsen, 2003; Førde, 2005; Paulsen et al, 2015; Skårdalmo and Harnischfeger, 2017). Seconded by Sweden (n=3) (Herz and Lalander, 2017; Sönderqvist, 2014; Sönderqvist et al, 2014). Majority of the studies were conducted in single countries

except one from Spain and France (Gimeno-Monterde et al, 2019) and two from Finland and Sweden (Kaukko, 2017 and Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2017). (n=13) of the studies were qualitative and (n=4) were mixed studies.

The challenges to participation on decision-making by UAC and the essence of adult support has been framed into three main categories, as follows: nature of relationships with adults/environment/adult support; information/adult support and language and interpreter/adult support.

With regards to the essence of adult support on the needs of UAC, has this paper categorized its findings based on Maslow`s hierarchy of needs. (McLeod, 2018). Thus, this paper has categorized adult support as follows: Adult support on basic needs; adult support on psychological needs and adult support on self-fulfilment needs (participation). These are presented below:

### **Nature of relationships with adults/environment/adult support.**

All the 17 studies in this review made mentioned of the nature of relationships between UAC and adults and the environment. This theme presents the most important finding in the challenges to participation in decision-making.

This is the interactable relationships UAC experience with the immediate adults around them in the reception centres, the peer group homes, foster homes and all service workers including teachers, social workers, child welfare workers and health workers etc. It also comprises the social network of friends, the immediate community and the country as a whole- it`s culture and policies.

Crea et al, 2017; De Graeve, 2014; Engebrigtsen, 2003; Førde, 2005; Gimeno-Monterde et al, 2019; Herz and Lalander, 2017; Hopkins and Hill, 2010;

Kalverboer et al, 2015; Kaukko, 2017; Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2017; Kohli, 2005; Kohli, 2006; Paulsen et al, 2015; Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger, 2017; Sönderqvist et al, 2016 .

Eight of the studies found a negative relationship between children and adults in different forms that hampers the participation of UAC to decision making.

They found out that children feel insecure to talk (open-up) to their new adults in their early phase in the new country as they suspect adults of being spies for the state authorities on the one hand and on the other hand the adults suspects the children of bearing secrets and are scared to be unveiled. Some studies have detected disrespect and maltreatment for UAC in reception centres (Førde, 2005). Adults were found to be sceptic about the ages the children presented (Gimeno-Monterde et al, 2019). The children want the adults to see them as they

are (children) and understand things from their own perspective. Paulsen et al, 2015, questioned the competency of the adults who closely work with these children. While others indicated the need for adult`s attention and the need for affiliations to the children.

(Crea et al, 2017; De Graeve, 2014; Engebriksen, 2003; Gimeno Monterde et al, 2019; Hopkins and Hill, 2010; Kalverboer et al, 2015; Kaukko, 2017; Paulsen et al, 2015 and Van Os et al, 2018) have all found the limitations the environment can pose in enhancing participation and the development of UAC. They have reported cases of labelling and categorization that leads to the segregation and discrimination of UAC. They reported insufficiencies in child rearing environments and how the interpretation of rights depends on the local culture.

They reported a need for a safer network of friends and community; the need to be connected to the new home and community; the need for a positive community response.

The child needs to find solutions in collaboration with others. It can therefore be said here that the lack of positive parental figures to monitor, teach, show love and empathy and provide support to strengthen autonomy for these vulnerable children, is likely to lead them to associate with deviant peers, and the prediction of high levels of antisocial behaviour.

These studies suggested better relationships with UAC where there is more room for emotional involvement by the adults/ practitioners. Studies suggest the fair representation of UAC with reliable adults who serve in the best interest of the child in legal matters.

Positive community responses can provide them with a feeling of being respected in society and being good citizens and acquire a sense of belonging. This will thus empower them and increase their self-determination to succeed in their new environment.

### **Information/ adult support**

Nine of the studies pointed out lapses in the information required by UAC to fully equip them to participate in decision -making, to negotiate for their rights. (Crea et al, 2017; Førde, 2005; Herz and Lalander, 2017; Hopkins and Hill, 2010; Kalverboer et al, 2015; Kaukko, 2017; Paulsen et al, 2015; Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger, 2017; Sönderqvist, 2014 and Van Os et al, 2018) found out a great lack of information about everything surrounding UAC. These studies found that these children lack the age appropriate information with regards to their entitlements, services available, the asylum process, family tracing and the situation in their country of origin etc. Most children have named the need for information about what is happening around them. Knowledge of their rights was discovered absent in many studies.

Crea et al, 2017 found out that, a lack of information will result to these children being unable to understand well, the legal systems, their rights and the services available in their new environment.

A lack of information renders the children handicap in negotiating for their rights, including their right to participate and hence a low sense of belonging into their new community. Hopkins and Hill (2010) stated statements from children as follows “*there is not enough information about services. I like to do sport, but I don’t have any information about it*” (p.405).

Kalverboer et al (2015), found out, there is more often lack of information where the child must be returned to the country of origin.

The essence of adult support in the information needs of UAC is great. The adults have the duty to equip these children with their information needs. All necessary information is important as a newcomer to a new environment. It does not matter either the children request for information or not. The goal is to feed them with as much information as the adults can. These studies have suggested the proper representation of these children in legal matters with adults who have an experience in working with legal matters that concerns largely children, to make their voices heard.

Hopkins and Hill, (2010), identified the need for adults to be honest, clear, realistic and precise in receiving and transmitting information to be of critical importance to these young people.

### **Language and interpreter/ adult support**

Six of the articles found out problems associated with language and interpreters.

Crea et al, 2017; Herz and Lander, 2017; Hopkins and Hill, 2010; Kalverboer et al, 2015; Paulsen et al, 2015 and Sönderqvist, 2014, all pointed out language and interpreter related problems as a hindrance to the participation of UAC in decision-making. Language is the key tool in negotiating for one`s rights. Its absence or limitation renders UAC a lesser room for autonomy and the tools required to realize self-determination.

Communication with the use of interpreters and their availability has been identified as challenging in the child welfare unit and in other public sectors in the interaction with UAC. Paulsen et al (2015), found out that the challenges posed around the situation of interpreters influences the mutual trust between the child welfare unit and asylum seekers (also UAC). This hinders the relation building and makes it difficult to assess situations that will affect any

decision-making.

Loneliness was found to be created and reinforced through communication difficulties, manifested as lack of control and the absence of recognition in the eyes of other people. It creates a feeling of not being included and, thus, of limited agency. It was found out that, the inadequacies in language renders these children passive in the exercise of their rights to fully participate.

Linguistic support is therefore a primary issue in the lives of UAC, suggested the studies. Language is identified as a key prerequisite to the personal and social development of these children. Going to school is therefore paramount as it is a means of normalising the lives of these children by building up their confidence and thinking of their future. Policy makers and authorities need to allow these children to go to school as soon as they arrive. Confidence increases the possibility of stepping up for one`s right to be the masters of their life`s situation by collaborating with others to find solutions to their problems.

### **Adult support on the needs of unaccompanied children**

#### **Basic needs**

De Graeve, 2014; Engebriksen, 2003; Hopkins and Hill, 2010; Sönderqvist et al, 2016 and Van Os et al, 2018 indicated a need for the fulfilment of basic needs. These studies pointed out that there are insufficiencies in the child- rearing environment especially the reception centres. Having recently arrived in an unfamiliar place with customs and behaviours that are often very different to what UAC are accustomed to, they have a number of immediate needs in coping with their immediate situation. They need to be provided with food, clothing as to the climate and shelter. Hopkins and Hill (2010) found out that, these children need a safe, secured and constant accommodation. Having these needs being catered for by adults, will these children start to have a focus on the next level of the pyramid.

#### **Psychological needs**

Adult support on psychological needs includes the need for love and belonging, safety and esteem for UAC. Crea et al, 2017; Engebriksen, 2003; Førde, 2005; Gimeno Monterde et al, 2019; Herz and Lalander, 2017; Hopkins and Hill, 2010; Kalverboer et al, 2015; Kaukko, 2017; Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2017; Kohli, 2005; Kohli, 2006; Paulsen et al, 2015; Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger, 2017; Sönderqvist, 2014 and Sönderqvist et al, 2016 have all found high

mental health issues among UAC.

Some children have been reported to be all alone by themselves with no guardian to help them with their emotions. There are reports of limited social networks, discrimination and difficulties to be integrated in the new environment. Some children reported being treated as products of workplace (objects) and hence an influence on their self-esteem.

It was found by Sönderqvist et al, 2016 that, workers who work directly with these children find it difficult to have a balance between what is professional and what is private in their relationships with the children. These distinctions impact the young people negatively as uncertainties are created in relation to relationship building. Sönderqvist et al ( 2016) , found out that, some workers in some care centres were strictly prohibited from giving private gifts to children.

These studies suggested the essence of adult support as having an open dialog with UAC as a way of acknowledging the child`s needs to be understood and loved and being an ambassador for the child by helping the child integrate into the community and experience a sense of belonging.

### **Self- fulfilment need (participation)**

Participation in decision- making is a self- fulfilment need.

Engebrigtsen, 2003; Førde, 2005; Kalverboer, 2015; Kaukko, 2017; Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2017 and Sönderqvist et al, 2016 found out that, children`s voices were hardly heard on major decision-making, for example decisions on asylum cases, family reunification and placement.

Decisions on asylum cases and family reunification have always been difficult decisions to make due to political and judicial reasons on one hand and the assessment of the guiding principle of the best interest of the child on the other hand.

Children who live in care centres have shown concerns on their little influence on the decision-making about house rules and food choices. They complain about the vague reasons behind certain rules, rules that create more loneliness for them and conflicts that damages their relationships with adults.

Kalverboer et al (2015), discovered a high level of well- being and self –actualization among UAC who live with foster families that encourages these children to participate in decisions

regarding the structuring and the culture of the household they live in. There are also evidences of participation in the designing of action-plans in care homes. These action-plans are plans geared towards developmental areas of the children with regards physical, social, educational and psychological needs fulfilments.

### **Child welfare worker`s narratives**

The two child welfare practitioners that were consulted in the writing of this paper to share their experiences of working with UAC children in relation to participation in decision making, has stated that, it is a highly prioritized practice to include UAC in decision-making in their workplace. Even though it is not in all decision-making children are included, they consider the best interest of the child as a guiding principle and observe the dictates of Article 12 of the CRC. One of the workers made mentioned of the effects of the children`s background as influencing their participation in decision-making. She said the children are mostly from collectivistic societies that has lesser emphasis on the autonomy of the individual as compared to the new environment (the western world) the child is that has more focus on autonomy, individualistic. They both suggested more training and encouragement to participation in the form of acculturation that will very often according to their experience see these children develop skills that strengthen their autonomy in their interaction with others and the environment. They both confirm a high level of participation from the children they work with. The reason might be that, these children have residential permits and have lived a minimum of three years in the country.

### **Discussion**

In view of the aim of this study, this study has identified challenges that are associated basically with adults and the environment, even though the children themselves have their baggage of limitations. Their baggage of limitation can be averted into strengths if society make provisions for that. It is therefore of great essence to take into consideration the country`s welfare scheme and it`s politics as to how these children are catered for and how their needs be met.

Based on the theoretical point of departure of this scoping review with regards to the guiding principle of the child`s best interest in decision- making and Article 12 of the CRC, there has been controversial findings in this paper as to what types of decisions the child can influence. The article stressed out the influence of the child in all decisions without an exception. When it comes to decisions of asylum, family reunification and some placements, whose interest is



taken into consideration becomes a dilemma. Is it the interest of the state, the family back home or the child him/herself? Even though most states are experiencing pressure from their citizens to discourage the influx of UAC, that is resulting in negative responses to family reunification applications and residential permits for UAC, it is worthy to properly examine the guiding principle of the child's best interest. Children wished to be understood (from the findings of this study) from their own perspective. Not from the perspective of neither their families back home, nor the state.

The assessment of the best interest of the child and the observation of the dictates of Article 12 of the CRC seems to largely depend on the culture of the local community these children find themselves. How does society see children, becomes a point of consideration in assessing the influence the child can have in decision-making.

The Norwegian childhood model for example, sees children as naturally vulnerable and dependent that needs help to gain gradual independence and thus be able to express their true self. (Engebrigtsen, 2003.p.195 as cited from Liden, 2000). This model will therefore see children being limited in decision-making for protective reasons as they are considered vulnerable and dependent on adults. This notion has seen rules being implemented in care homes that have created misunderstandings, conflicts, poor relations and the emergence of mental health issues among UAC. Can these children be involved in the making of rules? Can these rules be negotiable and flexible? These are questions to note by adults/ child welfare workers etc. These children need adults who should serve as *autonomy supportive* as the self-determination theory dictates, by refraining from pressuring and controlling the children even in subtle manners.

It is important for adults/ child welfare workers etc to note that, the essence of adult support has enormous significance in enabling the effective participation of UAC in decision-making. The advice and the support of caring adults is especially important for UAC who had been unable to access protection and care from their family in difficult times that made them more vulnerable.

These children need reliable adults who can assist them in legal issues and ensure that their rights are protected. Some children see no need to have so much power in decision-making if there are reliable adults who fully know what is best for them according to findings. Some children believe that adults are the ones who can take care of children's best interests.

It is therefore important to always promote and refresh the competency and knowledge of

adults/ child welfare practitioners etc. who work closely with these children. For example, understanding the cultures of these children and how to meet them with respect, acknowledge their internal frame of reference, encourages the exploration of choices and supports their decisions.

The community/ the country where UAC find themselves has a great responsibility in the integration of these children. Findings has shown that UAC needs encouragement and support to take part in all educational/cultural and social activities that will help them build up a new network of both friends and new relationships that will enhance their mastery of the language, culture and increase their participation in all arenas of society to create a better self-image and the realization of their dreams.

This paper will conclude with the words of Førde (2017, p.146) “It takes a village to grow a child, and that a friendly and safe growing-up environment has a great meaning for a child`s development and the experience of mental health”.

### **Strengths and limitations of the present review**

The inclusion of only empirical studies in this review, will add more credibility to it. The inclusion of the narratives of the child welfare workers will also strengthen the outcome of this scoping review. As data collection from different sources is intended to promote the quality of the research. If the evidences from the different data sources are converged together with the findings from the review, one will be able to make a coherent justification of themes. Creswell (2014) called this the triangulation of different data. The data from the articles will either justify or in conflict with the meanings from the child welfare workers.

Being the first paper that focuses on the essence of adults in facilitating the participation of UAC in decision-making, this paper will serve as a reflection in the practices of adults/child welfare workers and the society in dealing with UAC. The inclusion of only empirical studies in this review, will add more credibility to it. The inclusion of the narratives of the child welfare workers will also strengthen the outcome of this scoping review.

Having been working with UAC for years, I found it worthy not to allow my experience to influence the findings of the research as it is a potential limitation to the study. I therefore, had practiced the Cartesian doubt from the inception to the end of the research. Gadamer (2013)

described the Cartesian doubt as *“accepting nothing as certain that can in any way be doubted and adopting the idea of method that follows from this rule.* (p.284). Everything should absolutely be doubted until proven right.

Some articles were unable to be retrieved from the data bases. They might perhaps have some important information that might be missing in this review. The smallness of the sample can also be considered another limitation. The researcher`s background as a refugee will also have the tendency of where the focus of this review was directed.

The absence of a standard developed guideline or checklist to report findings in scoping reviews can be a limitation to this study. Tricco et al (2016) argued that the use of reporting checklists increases transparency of methods and allows readers to judge validity and reliability and use research appropriately. (p.2). Due to uncertainty, I have gone back and forth in both coding and presenting the findings of this to make sure that I was doing the right thing.

### **Further Research Opportunities**

- The experience of well-being and the factors contributing to it in the host country from the children`s own perspective.
- The experiences of UAC in their pre-departure lives.
- Studying UAC separately for example, those awaiting results of their asylum cases, those who have been granted an unconditional /conditional permit to stay and those with refusal and awaiting deportation.
- A collective study on all the rights of UAC in relation to the CRC.

### **Conclusion**

Great efforts need to be made in a bid to minimize the challenges posed in the exercise of the rights to participation of UAC in decision-making by raising awareness of these challenges and the essence of adult support in realizing better participation. It could also be of great importance to note the challenges encountered in assessing the best interest of the child and the implementation of Article 12 of the CRC in practice with regards to the local culture. Research on the general challenges UAC face in the process of trying to be integrated in their new environment is not new, but this review is the first to summarize the challenges they face in accessing their right to participate in decision-making and the essence of adult support. Being encouraged to participate, promotes autonomy and hence self-determination.

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## Appendix

Table 1: Summary of cohort studies on the participation of UAC in decision-making and the essence of adult support.

Author and Year	Sample Population	Sample size	Research Design	Country	Participatory Indicator	Key Findings.
Crea et al. (2017)	Adults	79	Qualitative	USA	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-children need adults support to build independent living skills.</li> <li>-children need adults to love and understand them.</li> <li>-children need to be connected to the new home and community.</li> <li>-children have a greater need for adult support in getting adequate information and knowledge of the legal system.</li> <li>-children need healthy positive parental figures to give adult support.</li> </ul>

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- high levels of mental health problems.</li> <li>-language is a key challenge.</li> <li>-children need adult support to keep them safe from bad influences and dangerous gangs.</li> </ul>
De Graeve (2014)	Adults	13	Qualitative	Belgium	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-there are negative responses from the community about UAC in the country.</li> <li>-adult support can be challenging when professionalization and uniformity should be a common practice in relation to going into personal relationships with UAC.</li> </ul>

						-good care is a resource to form social capital for UAC.
Engebrigtsen, (2003)	Govt. officials and workers	25	Qualitative	Norway	None	-Findings show that: -children need adult support for care and protection. - decisions on family reunification are based on judicial and political grounds. Children are excluded from such decisions. -there is a weaker legal protection for UAC in relation to ethnic Norwegian children. -UAC are labelled and categorized and therefore discriminated in the exercise of their rights.
Førde (2005)	Children	5	Qualitative	Norway	Little	Findings show that:

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-children in the reception centres have poor relationships with the adult workers.</li> <li>-there are maltreatment cases of UAC in reception centres.</li> <li>-there is evidence of labelling and categorization.</li> <li>-there is the need for trustworthy adult support.</li> <li>-children are not taken seriously in decision-making.</li> <li>- there are cases of psychological problems.</li> <li>-there is a need for information.</li> </ul>
Gimeno-Monterde et al. (2019)	Children	382	Mixed	Spain and France	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adults are sceptic about UAC`s ages.</li> <li>-children`s integration into the host society is important.</li> <li>-children need adult support in</li> </ul>

						<p>mentoring and motivating for education and employment through befriending.</p> <p>-incorporating the family into protocols if present in the country is important.</p> <p>-children have the feeling of being a product.</p>
Herz and Lalander (2017)	Children	23	Qualitative	Sweden	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <p>-being called UAC led to feelings of loneliness.</p> <p>- Language is a major problem.</p> <p>-children report loneliness.</p> <p>-children are unhappy about some rules that brings more loneliness.</p> <p>-there are information needs.</p> <p>-children are in need of adult</p>

						support with emotions.
Hopkins and Hill (2010)	Children and adults	101	Qualitative	Scotland	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-children are not recognised as children due to the assumptions made by certain practitioners about their ages.</li> <li>-there is emphasis made by both adults and children about the importance of education. (Information).</li> <li>-the need to be recognized as children.</li> <li>-linguistic support was a primary factor.</li> <li>-there is an adult support need in the provision of a safe, secured and constant accommodation.</li> <li>-children need adult support on</li> </ul>

						<p>health and medical issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-children need adult support on legal representation.</li> <li>-children need adult support in acquiring information.</li> <li>-there is a need for effective interpreters.</li> <li>-there are psychological problems.</li> <li>-there is a need for adult support in cultural and religious needs.</li> </ul>
Kalverboer et. al. (2015)	Children	132	Mixed	Netherland	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-placement decisions made by adults.</li> <li>-cultural considerations are given in decision-making of placement.</li> <li>-children preferred going to the normal school</li> </ul>

						<p>with ethnic children rather than just the language school.</p> <p>-children need attention from adults.</p> <p>-foster home children participated in structuring the activities and culture of the household.</p> <p>-included in making action plans.</p> <p>-there is need for information.</p>
Kaukko (2017)	Children	12	Qualitative	Finland and Sweden	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <p>-age appropriate information is needed.</p> <p>-interpretation of rights depends on the local culture (Environment).</p> <p>-the need for a reliable adult is identified.</p>



						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-children raised the need to be heard.</li> <li>- children were not involved on major decision-making.</li> </ul>
Kaukko and Wernesjö (2017)	Children	23	Qualitative	Finland and Sweden	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-UAC are pathologized and conceived of being in a deplorable state.</li> <li>-children expressed the need for adult support to learn more about rights.</li> <li>-children prefer adults to take care of children`s best interests.</li> <li>-children had conflicts with staffs.</li> <li>-children reaching the majority age demanded more responsibility and participation.</li> <li>-children are critical to some rules.</li> </ul>

						-there is a power imbalance between children and adults.
Kohli (2005)	Adults	29	Qualitative	United Kingdom	None	Findings show that: -children wants to be recognised as children. -children had limited contacts with adults. - children lacked guardians. -there are evidences of psychosocial problems. -children suspected adults of being spies. -there were reports of trauma
Kohli (2006)	Adults	29	Mixed	United Kingdom	None	Findings show that: -children had a fear that limits them to open up. -children mistrust adults. -the children`s asylum status

						influences their participation.
Van Os et al. (2018)	Children and adults	27	Mixed	Netherland	None	Findings show that: -children hesitate to talk. - there is a lack of information. -there are insufficiencies in the child rearing environment. -there are reports of mental health issues.
Paulsen et al (2015)	Adults	36	Qualitative	Norway	None	Findings show that: -there are questions on the competency of workers. - there are indications of psychological problems (sleepless nights). -their asylum status affects their life situation. - there are reports of loneliness and missing home.

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-there are limited social networks.</li> <li>-there is poor cooperation between the child welfare and the reception centres.</li> <li>-reports of interpreter problems.</li> <li>- there are evidences of discrimination.</li> <li>-Categorization as “asylum-seekers” leading to less prioritizing of needs.</li> </ul>
Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger (2017)	Children	36	Qualitative	Norway	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-children want adults to see them from their own perspective.</li> <li>- most children are scared to talk in the beginning.</li> <li>-there is a greater need for information.</li> <li>- children are unhappy the way</li> </ul>

						<p>rules are communicated.</p> <p>-children want adults to help them.</p>
Söderqvist (2014)	Young adults	11	Qualitative	Sweden	Little	<p>Findings show that:</p> <p>-Young adults who were once UAC have a feeling of being different among young adults.</p> <p>-there are reports of loneliness and isolation after leaving care centres.</p> <p>- they expressed difficulties of being integrated because of language and knowledge of society.</p> <p>(Information needs)</p>
Söderqvist et al. (2016)	Adults	13	Qualitative	Sweden	None	<p>Findings show that:</p> <p>-there is evidence of conflicts with adults with regards to food decision.</p>

						<p>-adults take into consideration to some extent the self-determination of the children.</p> <p>-it is challenging for adults to differentiate between home and workplace.</p> <p>Professional or private.</p>
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