

EGN Members

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Dear EGN Member,

As we begin a new year, I'd like to take the opportunity to write to you about our work in the European Guardianship Network (EGN) and to thank you for your continued engagement and shared expertise in the year that has passed.

We are very glad to be starting a new three-year programme (2026-2028), with EGN core activities funded by the EU CERV programme. It's a busy and challenging time for organisations and authorities responding to the situation of unaccompanied children in Europe and there is a lot we want to achieve together to strengthen guardianship.

Looking back at 2025, we had a busy and productive year, not least through our two Network meetings in Vienna and Copenhagen which provided great opportunity to share experience and learn from each other. I thank our Austrian and Danish colleagues and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) in Vienna for organising, hosting and looking after us.

We also organised study visits for several members to learn about national practices in other countries. The Irish members of EGN visited the Netherlands to explore issues around reception for unaccompanied children and one of the Network's Greek members visited Ireland to look at family based alternative care for unaccompanied children. Our online thematic meetings for all network members provided us with opportunities to explore several issues: The Different Models of Guardianship Service; Developing Inter-Cultural Mediation; Supporting the Revision of the FRA's 'Guardianship Handbook'; and Developing Positive Narratives regarding Unaccompanied Children. We initiated our first peer-to-peer meeting between guardians in different countries and explored the topic of transnational safeguards when children from Ukraine travel between EU countries or visit Ukraine.

We also had four active and regular working groups: EU asylum and migration policy, cross-border collaboration, guardianship assessment and monitoring tools, and engagement with unaccompanied children. Highlights of 2025 from our working groups included, but are not limited to:

- The implementation of the Asylum and Migration Pact carries the opportunity to strengthen guardianship systems for unaccompanied children, whilst this is also a complex and difficult task. The EGN Working Group on Asylum and Migration has met regularly to explore issues arising in implementation of the Pact at national level and regional level. We have managed to have a constructive dialogue with DG Home at the European Commission, with all EGN Members invited to attend and to contribute to the Expert Working Group on Protecting Children in Migration in early November last year.



We also contributed to the delivery of a workshop at the EU Forum on the Rights of the Child and continue to contribute to the Commission's Working Group on the EU Children's Strategy. EGN has also published a reflections paper relating to guardianship issues raised in the ongoing negotiations of the revision of the EU Return instrument. Importantly, EGN also contributed to the ongoing revision by the EUAA and FRA of important tools in the field, including EUAA's Practical Guides on Age Assessment and Best Interest of the Child and the FRA Handbook on Guardianship. Members also prepared short national plans of objectives and activities for strengthening guardianship in their countries.

- In the field of child participation, our meetings with unaccompanied children enabled us to hear from children and young people about the issues that affect them concerning guardianship and this helps to keep our work relevant for them. I thank our colleagues in Belgium, Finland and Greece for facilitating these meetings.
- Our cross-border collaboration group met to exchange on developments and cases that Members are seeing and prepared a session for our Copenhagen meeting to share a case study and explore issues within the network.
- Our guardianship assessment working group had a very fruitful roundtable in December in Utrecht to provide input on the revision of the EGN Self-Assessment Tool for Guardianship Systems for Unaccompanied Children.

Looking ahead, as we start our new three-year programme, we have a calendar of important activities which aim to support members in their national work, and which will contribute to ongoing regional policy and resource developments. Some highlights of our proposed work in 2026 include:

- We will continue to give attention to the implementation of the reforms contained within the Asylum and Migration Pact and work to counter any erosion of EU safeguards ensuring the best interests of unaccompanied children.
- We plan to develop and pilot an online EGN consultation board of (former) unaccompanied children to strengthen their engagement with EGN.
- We will introduce and begin to work with the updated EGN self-assessment tool for guardianship systems which should assist members in working towards specific improvements to their systems.
- We aim to improve our website including the development of an interactive map which outlines how you all deliver your services and develop an online forum for guardians to connect with each other.
- And of course, we will continue to meet together in person and online to share practice, learn from and support each other and we will maintain our working groups and study visits. Our first network meeting of 2026 will be in Cyprus.

I look forward to working with you again in 2026. I thank you for your engagement and commitment to the values we all share, that we hold close and that we will defend together so as to improve the lives of unaccompanied children in Europe and their futures, wherever they lie.

Best wishes,

Tanno Klijn
Chair European Guardianship Network