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Exploring the Perceptions of the Volunteers of *Accueillons*, an Informal-hosting Network of Foster Families for Unaccompanied and Separated Children in France.

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Abstract

Title: Exploring the Perceptions of the Volunteers of *Accueillons*, an Informal-hosting Network of Foster Families for Unaccompanied and Separated Children in France.

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Key words: Volunteerism, Unaccompanied and separated children, Volunteer foster families, Experience, France.

The research is an exploratory study investigating the perceptions of the volunteers of *Accueillons*, a non-profit organization active in France consisting in a network of volunteer foster families for a particular group of unaccompanied and separated children. *Accueillons* was created in response to the lack of protection provided by the State to unaccompanied minors whose minority is not recognized in the first evaluation and who are appealing the refusal to the judge. In fact, during the appealing procedure which takes several months, boys and girls claiming to be minors are not entitled to receive any form of support from the State and therefore must rely on civil society organizations for shelter, food, material necessities, health services and legal assistance. The research was qualitative in nature and the data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the 7 participants of the study through video or audio call and then analysed using thematic analysis. The research aimed to investigate the social profile of the formal volunteers of *Accueillons*, as well as their motivations to engage in this specific volunteering activity and their overall experience. Moreover, the study investigated their perceptions on their role as volunteer foster families towards these minors and the role played by civil society organizations in ensuring their protection in the French context.

The respondents of the research presented a similar social profile in terms of age, educational background and occupational status and category, and these findings seem to be in line with previous studies which observed that there was higher participation in formal volunteering activities among individuals with high education levels and employed in highly qualified jobs. The respondents' engagement with *Accueillons* was mainly motivated by contextual and

practical motivations. The need to actively engage was driven by feelings of outrage and discontent towards the management and reception conditions of migrants and asylum-seekers following the European Migrant Crisis of 2015. While their decision to engage in a volunteering activity targeting specifically minors was motivated by the perceived vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated children and the lack of protection ensured to them by the French State. Regardless the level of commitment required as volunteer foster families, the respondents described the experience in positive terms, as meaningful and enriching under different aspects, and conceived their role towards the minors hosted to be similar to that of parental figures. Civil society organizations were unanimously considered to play a fundamental role in ensuring the protection of unaccompanied and separated children in France and in the EU and as acting either in collaboration with or in substitution of the State, highlighting the need to reform and improve the reception system.

Acronyms

art.	Article
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
MSF	Medécins sans frontières (Doctors without borders)
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNV	United Nations Volunteers programme

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	2
ACRONYMS.....	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	5
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
LIST OF FIGURES.....	7
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	8
Chapter 1 : INTRODUCTION	9
1.1 Background.....	9
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	10
1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study.....	12
1.4 Research Questions.....	12
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	12
Chapter 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	15
2.1 Conceptualization of Volunteerism.....	15
2.1.1 Formal Volunteering Sector.....	17
2.2 Understanding Volunteer Participation.....	19
2.2.1 Sociodemographic Determinants of Volunteer Participation: the Resource Approach.....	20
2.2.2 Personal Determinants of Volunteer Participation.....	24
2.3 Children in Migration.....	25
2.3.1 The Notion of Childhood and Children.....	25
2.3.2 Migrant Children.....	26
2.3.3 Unaccompanied and Separated Children.....	27
2.4 Foster Care for Unaccompanied and Separated Children.....	29
Chapter 3: CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE RESEARCH.....	32
3.1 Trends of Volunteering.....	32

3.1.1	International Level.....	32
3.1.2	Regional Level: the European Union.....	33
3.1.3	National Level: France.....	36
3.2	Unaccompanied and Separated Children.....	38
3.2.1	International Migration Movements.....	38
3.2.2	International Migrant Children.....	42
3.2.3	Unaccompanied and Separated Children at the International Level.....	43
3.2.4	Unaccompanied and Separated Children in the European Union.....	46
3.2.5	Unaccompanied and Separated Children in France.....	49
3.3	Formal Volunteering with Migrants, Applicants of International Protection and Refugees in the European Union	53
Chapter 4:	METHODOLOGY.....	58
4.1	Methodological choices.....	58
4.2	Methods of Data Collection.....	59
4.3	Selection of the Sample.....	62
4.4	Method of Data Analysis.....	64
4.5	Ethical Considerations.....	64
4.6	Reflections and Limitations of the Study.....	66
Chapter 5:	FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....	68
5.1	Determinants of the Engagement of the Volunteers of <i>Accueillons</i>.....	68
5.1.1	Sociodemographic Determinants.....	68
5.1.2	Motivations.....	71
5.2	The Volunteering Experience with <i>Accueillons</i>.....	75
5.2.1	What Volunteers Get in Return from their Engagement.....	75
5.2.2	The Roles of the Volunteers.....	78
5.3	Reflections.....	81
5.3.1	Values Guiding the Volunteering Engagement.....	81
5.3.2	Role of Civil Society Organizations in the Protection of Unaccompanied and Separated Children.....	83
Chapter 6:	CONCLUSIONS.....	86
REFERENCES.....		91

APPENDICES.....	102
Appendix 1: Interview guide.....	102
Appendix 2: Consent form.....	104

List of Table

Table 1: Sociodemographic details of the participants.....	63
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List of Figures

Figure 1: Asylum applications (non-EU) in the EU-28 Member States, 2008–2018.....	41
Figure 2: Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors in the EU (2008-2018).....	48

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation consists in an exploratory study of the perceptions of the volunteers of *Accueillons*, a non-profit organizations active in France and composed of volunteer foster families which host unaccompanied and separated migrant children in need of protection. In the introductory section, I will briefly describe the background of the study and state the problem area. Then, I will present the research objectives and the research questions, followed by a discussion on the significance of the study.

1.1 Background

In the last decade, the European Union faced a significant increase in the numbers of migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees arriving to its borders, mainly due to the growing instability and numerous conflicts taking place in some African and Middle Eastern countries, which led thousands of people fleeing their countries with the hope for a better future (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2019, p.67). The various migratory routes used to arrive to Europe involve irregular border crossings oftentimes managed by smugglers and traffickers and consist in unsafe and life-threatening journeys (like the crossing of the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea). The spike in the number of people arriving to the continent during the so called European Migrant Crisis¹ represented a serious challenge for the EU and its member states, putting a strain on their reception capacity (European Parliament, 2017). Moreover, it brought to light the several flaws of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and the general inconsistency of the EU immigration policies, emphasizing the need of a reform (ibid).

The management of the increased influx of migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees represented a challenge for the majority of the EU countries, which oftentimes struggled to ensure the standards of reception and the respect of their rights. Moreover, migrants and asylum-seekers have been and still are victims of countless human rights violations, which have been reported by the media and denounced by several inter-

¹ The European Migrant Crisis started between 2014 and 2015 and was declared as finished in March 2019 by the European Commission. It is generally referred as a “crisis” due to the significant increase in the number of asylum-seekers arriving to the EU.

governmental organizations like the *International Organisation for Migration (IOM)*, the *United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)* and the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)* and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as *Human Rights Watch* and *Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)* .

Civil society organizations such as NGOs and non-profit associations have played and play a crucial role in providing assistance to migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees in the European context at different levels (Irrera, 2016, p.23). Besides denouncing the reception conditions and advocating for the respect of their rights, they also take on different functions in collaboration with the States in the management of asylum-seekers, and sometimes make up for States' deficiencies. For instance, they conduct rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea and provide migrants and asylum-seekers with essential services and assistance. Civil society organizations have an essential role in helping those living in poor conditions, in the hundreds of temporary shelters and encampments found in the major European cities or in the various makeshift camps across Europe, like the Calais Jungle in Northern France, Moria in Greece and Vucjak in Bosnia.

Civil society organizations such as NGOs and non-profit organizations mainly function through the work of volunteers, individuals who freely donate their time to help others and who represent an important resource for societies all over the world. Volunteering participation and its trends have been observed to vary significantly across the world depending on the context.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Alongside the increased numbers of applicants of international protection arriving to the EU in the last decade, there has been a significant increase of children migrating alone. Unaccompanied and separated children are considered the most vulnerable group of children in migration (Dalrymple, 2006, p.133), since they undertake the migration process alone and do not benefit from the protection and support of any adult caregiver. Therefore, they are at greater risk of suffering from violence, abuse and exploitation during and after the migration journey and are likely to have lasting physical and psychological effects afterwards. Consequently, considering the vulnerability of unaccompanied minors, countries should do everything they can to ensure their protection and care during and after the migration process,

from the provision of primary necessities such as food, shelter and health services to child-friendly procedures in the asylum application process, to legal assistance and access to education.

Unfortunately, in the context of the European Migrant Crisis, in several countries there have been, and still are, several instances where unaccompanied minors are not guaranteed the protection and rights they are entitled to by different international, regional and national legal instruments. In fact, all the 27 EU Member States have ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* and therefore have committed to guarantee the respect of the rights listed in the *Convention* to all children present in their territory, including migrant children.

The increase in the number of unaccompanied and separated children applying for international protection in recent years in France brought to light the several shortcomings and flaws in the French reception system of unaccompanied minors, which were repeatedly condemned by several international and local NGOs (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Besides the complex administrative procedures these minors have to navigate in order to access protection and services, there have been instances where France clearly did not implement and respect the rights stated by the *UNCRC* (ibid). Countless cases of summary evaluation procedures and refusals without grounds have been documented in several departments, alongside the lack of protection guaranteed to unaccompanied and separated children who in the first evaluation procedure are not recognized as minors². In fact, once their minority is refused they are not entitled to receive any support from the French State, even if they decide to appeal the refusal decision. These minors are therefore left on their own without any means or shelter and many of them end up living in the streets, being exposed to great dangers. In the city of Paris, *MSF* estimated that between 150 and 200 unaccompanied minors have been living in the streets in the past years (Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), 2019).

In response to this dramatic situation, several NGOs and non-profits mobilized to support unaccompanied minors in the streets, and in 2017 *MSF* and *Utopia 56* created *Accueillons*, an informal-hosting network of volunteer foster families for unaccompanied and separated children who find themselves in the appeal procedure. This initiative, besides providing support and care to the minors in a family environment also aims to free some places in the

² In the present thesis, children are referred in keeping with the definition present in the article 1 of the *UNCRC*, where a child is «very human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier» (United Nations, 1989).

MSF shelters, so that those unaccompanied minors living in the streets can get a proper accommodation and care, and potentially integrate *Accueillons* in the future.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study's main objective is to explore the perceptions of the volunteers who engage as volunteer foster families for the protection of unaccompanied and separated children with *Accueillons*. The study aims to investigate the social profile of the volunteers and their motivations to engage in this specific initiative, explore their perceptions as volunteer foster families and also take into account their views and perceptions on the protection ensured to unaccompanied and separated children in France.

1.4 Research Questions

The general research question is:

What are the perceptions of the volunteers of *Accueillons* who engage for the protection of unaccompanied and separated children?

The subquestions are:

- What is the social profile of the volunteers of *Accueillons*?
- What are the motivations for their engagement?
- What are the values guiding the volunteers in their engagement with *Accueillons*?
- From the perspective of the volunteers, what is their role in the protection of unaccompanied and separated children?
- From the perspective of the volunteers, what is the role of the civil society organizations in the protection of unaccompanied and separated children regarding the French State?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The relevance of this study is mainly related to the importance of the phenomena involved in this research project and the context.

First of all, the increased importance and fundamental role played by civil society organizations and volunteers in the French and European context justifies the present research. By exploring the personal characteristics and motivations of volunteers it is possible to better understand volunteer participation and its trends, in addition to investigating the influence played by different sociodemographic factors. The present study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on volunteerism, and in particular to the growing literature on the formal volunteering sector targeting migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees in the French context.

Secondly, the present research explores one of the several responses of the French civil society to the inability of the EU and its Member States to manage the European Migrant Crisis and to ensure migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees the respect of their rights as human being in search for a better future. In fact, *Accueillons* is one of the numerous civil society organizations created in France to fill the gap of the State and provide support to unaccompanied and separated children and ensure the protection they are entitled to as I briefly describe in the section 3.3 of the present thesis. Literature on the situation of unaccompanied minors in the EU is still limited and further research on the best practices and models of intervention to adopt with them is necessary, especially for what it concerns the care arrangement solutions. The investigation of the perceptions of the volunteers of *Accueillons* as volunteer foster families may add to the knowledge on foster care as a care arrangement solution for unaccompanied and separated children in the European context, which is of particular importance for the social work field.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 impacted the overall process of this dissertation project. The fieldwork research had just started when the first lockdown measures were imposed in France and other European countries, forcing me to change my travel plans. The pandemic impacted mainly the data collection phase which was delayed and it partially limited the access to a wider number of participants. Moreover, only two of the seven in-depth interviews were conducted in person, while the remaining five had to be done through video or audio calls.

Structure of the dissertation

The present thesis is divided into six chapters, with the Chapter one serving as the introduction of the research project, presenting the background of the study, the problem

statement and the purpose of the dissertation. Chapter two provides the theoretical framework and the conceptualizations of the main concepts involved in the study, namely volunteerism, volunteer participation, children in migration and foster care. Chapter three gives an overview of the trends of volunteerism at the international, regional and national level, with a focus on the formal volunteering sector targeting migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees, and it also illustrates the situation of unaccompanied and separated children and their legislative framework globally, in the EU and in France. Chapter four explains in detail the methodological choices concerning the research strategy, design, data collection and analysis, as well as the ethical considerations made and the limitations of the present study. Chapter five consists in the presentation and analysis of the findings regarding the social profile of the respondents, their motivations to engage as volunteers with *Accueillons*, their experiences and their perspectives on their role and that of the civil society in the protection of unaccompanied minors in France. Finally. Chapter six constitutes the conclusion of the present dissertation, summarizing the main findings and suggesting further research ideas.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The aim of this chapter is to provide the theoretical framework and the conceptualization of the main concepts involved in the present research. In the section 2.1 I will present and discuss the main definitions of volunteerism found in literature, focusing in detail on the formal volunteer sector since the population of the present study consists in a particular group of formal volunteers. Then, in the section 2.2 I will present the features found to act as determinants of formal volunteer participation, in terms of sociodemographic characteristics of volunteers and personal motivations. Considering that the volunteers of *Accueillons* host unaccompanied and separated children, I will briefly discuss the notions of children and childhood in the section 2.3, to then conceptualize children involved in migration processes and specifically children on the move unaccompanied or separated from any adult caregiver (sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3). And lastly, since *Accueillons*' mission is to provide unaccompanied minors with a foster family which ensures them protection and care, I will present foster care as a care solution used to accommodate this particular group of children in the section 2.4.

2.1 Conceptualization of Volunteerism

The term volunteer comes from the Latin *voluntarius*, which is based on the noun *voluntas* (will) and on the verb *velle* (want), therefore the elements of “choice” and “will” appear to be central in the definition of volunteerism (Haski-Leventhal, 2009, p.272), which is considered a form of social action (Snyder & Omoto, 2008, p.2). Volunteerism has been studied both in micro and macro level studies by scholars from different disciplines, from psychology, to sociology, political sciences and economics. Micro level studies focus on the individual level and explore the small-scale interactions between individuals and small groups of people in their social setting, such as family, neighbours and close relationships. Macro level studies instead explore large-scale societal dynamics and processes which involve large sections of the populations such as a city, a community, a region or a country.

Volunteerism is studied in psychology as a prosocial and altruistic action serving some psychological needs and reflecting some personality traits, while sociologists mainly investigate the social profile of volunteers and their motivations (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010, pp. 9-11). In economic studies, scholars try to find micro-economic explanations for the

supposed irrational behaviour of volunteers, who engage in activities where costs may be higher than benefits (ibid, p.8). Moreover, they explore the functioning of the volunteer market and the supply and demand for volunteers in the organizational context (ibid, p.9). Political scientist instead conceive and study volunteerism as a fundamental element of social participation, which benefits individuals and communities, and has also a role in safeguarding democracy since it encourages active social participation (ibid, p.14).

Therefore, multiple definitions of volunteerism exists, due also to the fact that this complex social phenomenon includes a large variety of helping activities, organizations and sectors (Hustinx, Cnaan, & Handy, 2010, p.3). Volunteering activities are generally distinguished according to the setting into formal and informal. The engagement of individuals in activities within organizations or institutions is considered as formal volunteering, while “any assistance given directly to non-household individuals” namely relatives or close friends (Lee & Brudney, 2012, p. 160) constitutes the informal volunteering sector. However, while there is an extensive literature on the formal volunteering sector, little is known about informal volunteering, creating a gap in the knowledge of volunteering overall (ibid). As a consequence, the present research is mainly based on literature and studies on formal volunteering conducted in the context of Northern America and Europe.

Scholars seem to agree that volunteerism is based on the free and voluntary engagement of individuals and that they consciously act to help others (Wilson, 2000³; Snyder & Omoto, 2008; Cnaan, Handy & Wadsworth, 1996). However, different definitions of volunteers exist according to variables considered, such as the type and length of the engagement, the benefits of volunteering to the different actors involved and the setting where volunteering activities takes place. In fact, according to the amount of hours per week, month or year individuals engage in helping activities, volunteers may be distinguished between regular and occasional ones, while in some studies only individuals engaging regularly over time are considered volunteers (Snyder & Omoto, 2008, p.2). Another dimension debated among scholars refers to whether volunteers should benefit from their work or not. Snyder and Omoto (2008) sustain that volunteers should not expect any personal compensations, nor in terms of material benefits or the acquisition of skills. However, even if volunteerism is generally defined by the absence of monetary compensation, volunteers receive some benefits in return for their

³ This reference consists in a literature review of volunteerism done by the sociologist John Wilson, who extensively studied topics such as social movements, religion, leisure and volunteerism and who is cited in most of the literature I used in the present research.

engagement, such as learning and developing new skills, making new experiences, socializing and overall benefits for their mental health (Wilson, 2000, p.222).

Volunteering is considered by the social psychologists Snyder and Omoto (2008, p.2) a prosocial action with two possible outcomes. Volunteers can engage in social movements, conceived as organized groups of people, “directed at changing the status quo and creating systemic change and long-term solutions to social problems” (ibid, p.2). While other forms of volunteering provide “direct, immediate, and specific assistance to individuals and communities” (ibid,p.2), with the focus being on the micro level and short-term solutions for the problems of the recipients. However, regardless the outcomes being long or short-term, volunteering activities generally aim to benefit “another person, group or organization” (Wilson, 2000, p.215). In fact, the actions of volunteers are based on good intentions and aim at improving other people’s lives or solving societal problems, therefore people who offer their services for free and cause harm to others are not considered volunteers (Snyder & Omoto, 2008, p.4). However, there is not a homogenous consensus on the activities which constitute volunteering. For instance, some conceptualizations include political activism and trade unionism among volunteering activities, but in literature these are mainly considered as distinct forms of social actions from volunteering (Wilson, 2000; Snyder & Omoto, 2008). In addition, prosocial actions such as philanthropy and charitable giving are generally not included in the volunteering activities (Snyder & Omoto, 2008, p.5), since volunteerism in its general conceptualization goes beyond the donation of money and goods, and it implies an active engagement of individuals (ibid, p.5).

For the purpose of this study, I will conceive volunteers as individuals involved in an “activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or organization” as defined by Wilson (2000, p.215). Considering that the population of this study consists in a particular group of formal volunteers, I will briefly describe the formal volunteering sector and its role within the society in the next section.

2.1.1 Formal Volunteering Sector

The volunteers of *Accueillons*, who constitute the population of the present study, constitute a particular group of formal volunteers, since they engage within an organization. However, by voluntarily hosting an unaccompanied minor in their homes they act as volunteer foster families, therefore the engagement involves the private and familial sphere of volunteers and

does not happen in a formal setting. Still they can be considered formal volunteers, since they act within the framework of an organization and their duties as volunteer foster families are detailed in the agreement.

Formal volunteering activities are mainly performed in the context of the so-called civil society, which includes different actors with “a wide range of purposes, structures, degrees of organizations, membership and geographical coverage” (World Economic Forum, 2013, p.8). The World Bank defines civil society as:

“the wide array of non-governmental and not for profit organisations that have a presence in public life, express the interests and values of their members and others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations” (World Bank, 2020).

Civil society actors have played an important role in society, by creating positive social change and promoting social justice (Cooper., 2018, p.2). In fact, they may have various roles, from service providers of basic needs such as education or health services, to advocates and watchdogs of the governments’ actions (ibid). Then, they can also encourage the creation of active participation and citizenship and influence global governance processes by influencing policy-makers and businesses (ibid). Individuals generally engage voluntarily and without being remunerated in “community groups, Non-Governmental Organizations, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations” (World Bank, 2020), all actors of the civil society. One of the most prominent actors are the NGOs, which according to Anna Vakil are “self-governing, private, not for-profit organizations that are geared to improving the quality of life of disadvantaged people” (Vakil, 1997, p.2060) and which function mainly through the work of volunteers (Cooper, 2018, p.7).

In recent decades, countries have increasingly encouraged the engagement of civil society organizations in the delivery of public services and goods, which is mainly carried out by NGOs and other non-profit organizations such as charities or community-based ones (Brandsen, Trommel & Verschuere, 2015, p.677). As a consequence, there was an increasing collaboration between states and non-profit organizations, which mainly consisted in the states giving subsidies and commissioning services to the organizations, leading to interdependence and to the risk for civil societies organization to lose their independence

(ibid). Alongside the increasing importance of civil society organizations, volunteers as well have started to play an essential role, especially in those organizations working in the social sector and supporting people in need.

Regardless the elusive definition of volunteerism, due to the complexity and multifaceted nature of this social phenomenon, the importance of the volunteering sector in the society has been increasing, highlighting the need to further explore volunteerism and volunteer participation, both in terms of formal and informal volunteering. The formal volunteering sector has been drawing the attention of many scholars in the last decades, due to the important role played by civil society organizations in providing public goods, services and support to people in need. Scholars studying the formal volunteering sector investigated in particular the social profile of volunteers and tried to identify any factors influencing volunteer participation, as I will discuss in the next section.

2.2 Understanding Volunteer Participation

Volunteer participation is influenced by several factors and is usually motivated by a variety of reasons. Individuals' motivations to engage in formal volunteering activities are a well researched theme both in sociology and psychology (Smith, 1984; Clary & Snyder, 1999; Wilson and Musick, 1997; Matsuba, Hart & Atkins, 2007; Handy & Hustinx, 2009; Omoto, Snyder & Hackett, 2010). This complex topic requires “multidimensional and multilayered” explanations (Handy & Hustinx, 2009, p.553) at the micro, meso and macro level.

At the micro level, scholars focus on the personal characteristics of volunteers which affect volunteer participation. While sociologists focus on the impact played by the resources of individuals in terms of human, social and cultural resources (Wilson and Musick, 1997; Matsuba, Hart & Atkins, 2007), psychologists investigate the influence of individuals' personality traits, values and motives on the participation in volunteering, which is considered as a prosocial behaviour expressing individuals' values and serving some psychological needs (Handy & Hustinx, 2009, p.554). The participation and disposition to formally volunteer is influenced as well by macro and meso level dimensions, such as the social, organizational and institutional context, together with the geographical location (urban or rural) (Wilson, 2000; Handy & Hustinx, 2009). The role played by schools, religious congregations and community

organizations is at the same time influenced and dependent on some on country-level aspects such as the level of economic development and the type of welfare state regime (ibid).

Considering the exploratory nature of the present study I will focus on the personal level, investigating the main sociodemographic determinants of formal volunteering following the resource approach and exploring the functionalist model used in social psychology to explain volunteers' motivations and the values guiding their volunteer engagement. These models and approaches have been developed in studies conducted in the context of Northern America and Europe in the 20th century and focused mainly on formal volunteers. Therefore, they may not be applicable to other contexts and may appear too deterministic in the way they explain volunteer participation. However, the contemporary trends of volunteering that I present in the following chapter appear to confirm part of these models and theories, indicating that they are still relevant in the study of formal volunteerism and in the specific context of the present research. However, considering the complexity of volunteer participation, more in-depth research and multi-level analysis is necessary to gain a better understanding on the influence played by micro, meso and macro level dimensions on volunteer participation overall.

2.2.1 Sociodemographic Determinants of Volunteer Participation: the Resource Approach

In sociological terms, the ability to work is considered to be influenced by the resources of the individuals, and since volunteering activities are considered as unpaid work, also volunteer participation is determined by the individuals' resources (Wilson, 2000; Thoits & Hevitt, 2001). The sociological resource approach departs from the assumption that the predispositions and motivations to volunteer are socially determined (Handy & Hustinx, 2009, p. 554), and dependent on the individuals' human, social and cultural resources (Wilson and Musick, 1997; Matsuba, Hart & Atkins, 2007). In the following sections I will present how human and social capital have been observed to act as determinants of participation in formal volunteering.

Human Capital

The knowledge, skills and capabilities of individuals constitute their human capital (Coleman, 1988, p.100), which is acquired through formal and informal education, work experiences and other activities such as leisure ones. Human capital includes "all forms of [...] capital that yield income and other useful outputs" as defined by Becker (as cited in Lee & Brudney,

2012, p. 163). Therefore, human capital is considered to influence individuals' achievements in terms of profession and income, having a role in determining the socioeconomic status (ibid), but at the same time being dependent on the socioeconomic status of the family. In fact, the socioeconomic status of parents has been observed to positively influence the socioeconomic outcomes of children (Beller, 2009; Blau & Duncan, 1967), and this phenomenon is known as intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic status (De Leeuw & Kalmijn, 2019). Moreover, individuals may have access to different opportunities to develop their human capital in terms of education, leisure activities and types of job according to the socioeconomic status of their family. For instance, the financial means of the family may impact the opportunity of children to have access to good education or to any education at all. This influence played by the socioeconomic status of the family is greater in some contexts than in others, since the costs of education vary significantly from country to country. Then, other opportunities in terms of training and job may be dependent as well on the educational background and on the social context of the family, resulting to be all interconnected and strictly dependent on the socioeconomic status, according to the social reproduction theories.

In the study of the social profile of volunteers, the Human capital theory explores in particular the link between educational background, employment situation and income of volunteers, and volunteer participation. Several researches on formal volunteers observed that the educational level is among the main predictors of volunteering (Sundeen & Raskoff, 1994; McPherson & Rotolo, 1996; Wilson, 2000; Matsuba, Hart & Atkins, 2007), in fact participation rates in formal volunteering among highly educated people are higher than among those with low educational levels (Smith (1994) in Wilson & Musick, 1997, p.256). However, the influence of education seems to vary between different types of volunteering activities (ibid), since each requires different skills and types of engagement. Education has been observed to have both a direct and indirect effect on volunteering participation. Its indirect effect consists in the influence played by the educational background in finding an occupation and on the level of the occupation itself (ibid, p.256). The direct effect of education instead concerns the important role played by academic institutions in spreading and heightening the awareness of social problems, promoting civic responsibility and encouraging volunteering through the transmission of values such as solidarity and social justice (Verba et al. (1995) in Wilson & Musick, 1997, p.256) which may encourage individuals to formally volunteer. However, the relation between educational levels and

formal volunteering engagement does not imply that low educated people do not have a sense of civic responsibility or that they are not sensible to societal issues, it simply tries to explain why higher educated people are found to volunteer more than low educated one in the formal sector. However, due to the lack of studies on informal volunteering further conclusions on the influence of education on volunteer participation in both the formal and informal sector cannot be made. Moreover, it is important to remember that volunteer participation usually results from an interplay of different elements which are context-dependent, and education is only one of them.

The other element observed to influence formal volunteer participation is the individuals' situation in the labour market, so whether they are employed, unemployed, retired, job seekers or belong to other non-working groups such as students, the categories of occupation and consequently the income. According to Wilson (2000) work is a "form of social integration and a means of building civic skills, both of which increase the chances of volunteering" (ibid, p.220). For instance, past studies show that employed people tend to formally volunteer more than unemployed one (Wilson & Musick, 1997; Wilson, 2000), and this is confirmed also by recent statistical data and studies presented in the following chapter. Wilensky (as cited by Wilson & Musick, 1997, p.252) found that alienating and repetitive jobs tend to discourage autonomy and enterprise in workers, who consequently participate less in social activities such as formal volunteering (ibid). On the other hand, as the occupational category increases also the participation rates in society increase (ibid, p.253), mainly because professional and managerial level people will likely be more socially active and engage in volunteering activities (ibid). This phenomenon can be conceived within the Spillover theories, according to which people's experiences in one field of life tends to influence also others. Therefore, individuals with stimulating and dynamic jobs which require the use of their initiative, thought and judgement, are more likely to engage in social activities in their free time (ibid, p.253). While occupations which do not require or encourage the use of thought and initiative, will lead workers to become passive in their leisure time (ibid). However, this approach results problematic since it depicts lower skilled and non-qualified workers as less motivated and engaged in formal volunteering, which may not be true in other contexts and for different types of volunteering activities.

Social Capital

Another dimension strictly linked to human capital that has been observed as influencing individuals' participation in volunteering is social capital, defined by Putnam as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995, p.67). Individuals' social capital is constituted by the social resources found in the relationships and networks they establish and maintain with others (Lin, 2000). People with high social capital have extensive social networks in terms of personal ties with family members, friends, neighbours, classmates, colleagues, etc., and are socially active, meaning that they engage with civil society organizations and take part in social initiatives, while people with low social capital have smaller social networks and tend to not be socially active (Wilson, 2000, p.223). The dimensions of human and social capital are oftentimes interconnected, since people with high human capital will likely create extensive social networks thanks to educational, formative and work experiences and will therefore benefit from the social resources constituted by their social capital (Wilson, 2000; Coleman, 1988). Social capital influences individuals' participation in volunteering in several ways as observed by Brady, Schlozman and Verba (as cited in Wilson, 2000, p.224). Social ties and networks generate trust in individuals, who therefore are more inclined to be socially active and engage in altruistic behaviours such as volunteering. Moreover, people with extensive social networks are more likely to volunteer because they probably know someone who already volunteers and the chances to be asked to join are higher (Wilson, 2000; Lee & Brudney, 2012). Furthermore, social capital informs volunteers' calculation of the costs and benefits, in fact while volunteering activities produce public goods for the benefit of the whole society, the costs are undertaken only by the volunteers in terms of time and energy spent in the realization of the volunteering activities. Consequently, individuals who are socially active, embedded in the community and with several networks will perceive and appreciate the benefits of their volunteering work for the overall society, while those with fewer social networks and less integrated in the community may not realize the benefit and only see the costs of their engagement (Lee & Brudney, 2012, p. 162). However, the development of social capital is dependent on a number of factors, not only connected to the educational background and the situation in the labour market of individuals but also to their personality characteristics and partially on the level of social integration. In the following section I will briefly describe some other elements which have been found to inform the individuals' participation in volunteering activities, focusing in particular on the motivations.

2.2.2 Personal Determinants of Volunteer Participation

Besides sociodemographic factors, volunteer participation is influenced and determined by other elements, such as their personal motivations, their values and their personality. In fact, psychologists and social psychologists have investigated these dimensions to understand whether they play a role in influencing individuals' participation in volunteering activities or not. The influence on volunteer participation played by individuals' values and beliefs is debated among scholars, in fact some authors sustain that they do not act as significant determinants of volunteering, even if similar values are shared by volunteers (Wilson, 2000; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Psychological studies instead observed that people with a "prosocial personality" are more likely to engage in voluntary activities (Penner & Finkelstein 1998 as cited in Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). However, considered that the purpose of this study is to explore the personal motivations of the volunteers of *Accueillons*, I will follow the functionalist approach used by social psychologists, that I will discuss hereafter.

Motivational model: Functionalist Approach

Snyder, Omoto and Lindsay (as cited in Geiser, Okun & Grano, 2014, p.4) sustain that volunteerism benefits at the same time the society, the recipients of the volunteer service and the volunteers themselves. According to the functionalist approach used by social psychologists, individuals may decide to engage in volunteering activities for different reasons. In fact, scholars found that the motivations of volunteers include a complex interplay of both altruistic and egoistic motives (Frisch & Gerard, 1981; Wilson, 2000; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Individuals' engagement may be driven by the desire to care for the welfare of others, and at the same time by the wish to feel better about oneself (Geiser, Okun & Grano, 2014, p.4). Therefore, volunteering may serve different functions at the personal level, from meeting some needs and motivations to reaching specific goals (ibid, p.5). Social psychologists Clay and Snyder (1999) identified six main personal and social functions of volunteering at the individual level. First of all it is a way to express values and beliefs such as altruism, solidarity, care for others, etc. (Clay & Snyder, 1999, p.157), even if values do not act as determinants of volunteer engagement. Second, volunteering provides an opportunity to learn and better understand some societal issues and dynamics (ibid). Third, it provides individuals with the opportunity to enhance oneself, growing psychologically and emotionally (ibid). Fourth, volunteering activities oftentimes are undertaken in order to acquire experiences and skills which might be useful in a future career, and fifth, they

represent an occasion to strengthen and improve social skills and relationships (ibid). And finally, people engage in volunteering as a way to cope with personal problems or negative feelings such as guilt or depression (ibid).

In conclusion, individuals' participation in formal volunteering results from a complex interplay of different factors and elements. Research on participation of formal volunteers found that individuals' human, social and cultural resources tend to influence their engagement in formal volunteering activities. Some sociodemographic characteristics such as education and the situation in the labour market are considered to act as determinants of this type of volunteer participation. In addition, volunteering engagement is motivated by both altruistic and egoistic reasons. In fact, the recipients of the volunteering activity are not the only ones benefitting from it, also the volunteers themselves and the society benefit from their volunteering service. Since the population of this study engages in a volunteering activity with unaccompanied and separated children, in the next section I will conceptualize the notions of children and children in migration.

2.3 Children in Migration

The volunteers of *Accueillons*, who constitute the population of the present study, engage as volunteer foster families for unaccompanied and separated children. Therefore in this section I will briefly discuss the main conceptualizations of children and childhood, focusing on children involved in migration, and specifically on unaccompanied and separated children.

2.3.1 The Notions of Childhood and Children

In the present study, I will refer to children in accordance with the definition present in *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, the main international legal instrument setting the rights of children. According to the article 1 of the *CRC*, a child is considered “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (United Nations, 1989).

The notions of children and childhood are social constructs which evolved overtime and vary according to the geographical context, the historical background, the culture, the belief system (Trask, 2010, p.106), and are reflected in the existing policies and legislations. In fact, while childhood in biological terms is a developmental stage starting with birth, the moment of

transition from childhood to adulthood is usually culturally prescribed, therefore significant variations are found between different cultures (ibid). In the European context, childhood is generally considered a crucial stage for the development of children, who are conceived as vulnerable, in need of protection and care (ibid, p.107). Childhood is idealized as a care-free and happy period in life, where children should “inhabit an innocent world of play and fantasy” (ibid) and be protected from the harsh reality.

In the last decades, the general discourse on children has been dominated by a human rights approach aiming at promoting and guaranteeing children’s rights, with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* of 1989 as the main international legal instrument. However, the *UNCRC* is criticized because considered to mainly reflect the Western⁴ conceptualization of children (Trask, 2010, p.106; Liebel, 2012, p.21). Therefore, the implementation of the rights and standards of the *Convention* in non-Western countries may encounter some obstacles due to the different traditions and conceptualizations of childhood, and the varied levels of resources and capacities of ensuring the respect of those rights. That is why many countries when ratifying expressed some reservations to some articles of the *Convention*.

The discourse on children’s rights led to a further shift in the notion of children, who started to be considered as independent and competent actors, not anymore as the property of their parents (Dalrymple, 2006, p.131) or just as a member of a family unit (Reynolds, 2006 as cited in Trask, 2010). And since childhood is conceived as a fundamental stage for the development of individuals, protection and care need to be ensured to all children, who are recognized to have specific rights and freedoms as those listed in the *UNCRC* and other regional and national legal instruments. Therefore, States parties by signing the *Convention* committed to ensure all children within their borders the rights and freedoms of the *UNCRC*, including non-national children and migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee children.

2.3.2 Migrant Children

In recent decades, the growing number of children among international migrants brought to light the needs of protection of children involved in migration processes and the effects that migration has on children (McLeigh, 2013, p.1056). The experiences of children in migration

⁴ There is not a universal definition of Western world, however it generally refers to various regions and states which share or have shared historical or cultural traits generally of European origin. The Western world generally includes the European continent, both the American continents and Oceania.

vary significantly depending on the motivations, the migratory journey, their legal status and whether they undertake the migration process with family members, alone or if they are left behind while the parents/caregivers migrate.

The legal status impacts significantly the overall migration experience, in fact both adult and children migrating through safe and regular migration channels will likely have a different experience from those who undertake irregular migration journeys, which are oftentimes unsafe and dangerous. Among irregular migrants, children are generally perceived as the most vulnerable (ibid, p.1066) because they are at higher risk of suffering from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation during the migration journey and to have lasting physical and psychological effects afterwards (ibid, p.1058). Therefore, the general approach towards migrant children aims at protecting them and ensuring their rights during and after the migration process (ibid). In fact, according to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* countries should consider migrant children first of all as children and ensure their protection as such, and only in a second moment to consider their immigration status. Therefore, migrant children should be able to enjoy all the rights entitled to them by the international, regional and national legal instruments and the procedures regarding them should be guided by the four principles present in the *CRC*: non discrimination (art.2), best interest of the child (art.3), survival and development (art.6), and participation and inclusion (art.12). It is particularly important for migrant children to feel protected and cared, and to be able to access all the services needed to grow and prosper, in order to integrate into the new culture and society. And it is particularly important to ensure the protection of those children who migrate without any adult caregiver or end up being separated from them, as I will discuss in the next section.

2.3.3 Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Unaccompanied and separated children are considered the most vulnerable among children in migration (Dalrymple, 2006, p.133), because they find themselves alone in the migration process and therefore are exposed to greater risks of being victims of abuse, violence and exploitation (ibid). Unfortunately, oftentimes countries prioritize concerns and policies on migration control rather than child protection when dealing with unaccompanied minors (Dalrymple, 2006; O'Donnel & Kanics, 2016).

As reported by authors Salmerón-Manzano and Manzano-Agugliaro (2018), the topic of unaccompanied minors gained significant attention in scientific research, with an increase in the number of studies and publications on this particular group of migrant children. The main

contributions in research came from countries receiving high numbers of unaccompanied minors such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Italy, Australia and Spain among others (ibid, p.6). However, some studies also focus on the countries of origin of this specific group of migrants, in particular on Central and Southern American countries such as Mexico and Guatemala, sub-Saharan African ones like Eritrea, Uganda and Kenya, and Asian countries like Thailand and Malaysia. Even if 42% of scientific work on unaccompanied minors belongs to the field of social sciences which includes the field of law and legislation (ibid, p.7), the approach to this topic is multidisciplinary, in fact several studies have been conducted in the field of medicine (27%), psychology (14%) and arts and humanities (7%) (ibid).

The interests in scientific research varies according to the field, however some issues appear to be dominant in research on unaccompanied minors, such as the immigration status, the age determination procedures, the child welfare and mental health problems (ibid). A fundamental challenge for destination countries when dealing with unaccompanied and separated children is to find the best solution for them on the long term (O'Donnel & Kanics, 2016). The best interest of the child should guide the determination of the best solution, which can consist in the return to their origin country, the reunification with family members or with the integration in the destination country. In this last case, countries need to ensure a suitable living solution in a safe environment, enabling the development of the minors and their integration in the society (Van Holen, Trogh, Carlier, Gypen & Vanderfaellie, 2019, p.1). Different care arrangements exist for unaccompanied minors, from kinship care with extended family members, different types of residential care or group homes, foster care and semi-independent or independent accommodations (Van Holen et al., 2019; O'Higgins, Ott & Shea, 2018).

In the context of the European Union, the general conceptualization and discourse on children underlines the importance of ensuring the protection and respect of all children's rights listed in the *UNCRC* and other national legal instruments. Children involved in migration processes are as well entitled with the rights of the *Convention*, and all States parties should commit to ensure their safety and well-being, paying particular attention to unaccompanied and separated ones, due to their vulnerable situation. Considering that the volunteers of *Accueillons* act as temporary volunteer foster families for this group of migrant children, I will discuss in the following section foster care as a care arrangement for unaccompanied and separated children.

2.4 Foster Care for Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Foster care plays a crucial role in the child welfare system of many countries, since it constitutes a care solution for children who cannot live with their parents or primary caregivers for different reasons. In some cases the placement in foster care is imposed on the family to ensure the protection and wellbeing of the child, for instance a child can be placed in foster care in cases of neglect, when parents are not able to fulfil his/her needs, or in cases of suspected or confirmed psychological, physical or sexual abuse. Moreover, a child may end up in foster care if they commit minor crimes or have serious behavioural problems and the family is not able to properly manage the situation, and in this instance the placements may be voluntary. In other circumstances, foster care may represent the only care arrangement option, for instance when the child has been abandoned or his/hers parents are dead, incarcerated or mentally ill and not able to provide for him/her. Foster families have the role to ensure children a safe and stable environment either for a short or long period of time depending on the case (Julien-Chinn, Cotter, Piel, Geiger & Lietz, 2017, p.307). It is oftentimes preferred to residential and institutional care, since it ensures a stable family environment and individualized care, especially for younger children (O'Higgins, Ott & Shea, 2018; Van Holen et al., 2019).

Researchers agree that foster care should be the preferred care arrangement also for unaccompanied minors, especially for younger ones. This because it generally provides more stability and tranquillity if compared to other care arrangements, and it ensures personalized care, and allows the minors to establish new relationships (O'Higgins, Ott & Shea, 2018; Van Holen et al., 2019). In fact, the family environment and the sharing of everyday life may enable the developing of meaningful personal relations between the minor and the various foster family members. And these relations have been observed to greatly benefit the minors and to have an important impact on their mental health (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick & Stein, 2012). And this is particularly important, since unaccompanied minors oftentimes suffer from mental health problems as a result of their past experiences and thus have complex needs in terms of psycho-social support (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick & Stein, 2012; Huemer, Karnik, Voelkl-Kernstock, Granditsch, et al., 2009). Moreover, foster families play an important role in promoting the integration process of unaccompanied minors when there is a cultural difference between the minors' country and the hosting one. In fact, foster families may support and encourage the learning of the language of the receiving

country and introduce the unaccompanied minor to its customs and culture through experiencing everyday life together. However, foster care may not be the best care arrangement solution for every unaccompanied minor, that is why it is paramount to assess them individually and decide according to their needs and desires which type of care arrangement is the best solution.

However, research on the effects of foster care on unaccompanied minors is still limited, and mainly focuses on the general experiences of both foster parents and minors (Luster, Saltarelli, Rana, Qin, Bates & Brudick, 2009; Crea, Lopez, Hasson, Evans, Palleschi & Underwood, 2018), which are found to be influenced by the specific needs of each minors, the characteristics of the family, the cultural differences and the contextual factors (Van Holen et al., 2019, p.7). Considered the recent migration trends and increase of the number of children migrating alone in different parts of the world, further research on unaccompanied minors and the best practices to ensure their protection and well-being is necessary. The present research will give a contribution to the research on volunteer foster families as a type of volunteering engagement and on foster care as a care arrangement for unaccompanied and separated children.

In conclusion, volunteerism is a complex social phenomenon which encompasses a variety of activities and which is generally distinguished in formal and informal according to the setting. All volunteering activities aim at providing support to people in need and at improving their situation and indirectly benefit the whole society. The population of the present study consists of formal volunteers who engage through the non-profit organization *Accueillons*, but they are a particular group of formal volunteers since their engagement involves their familial and private sphere since it consists in hosting unaccompanied and separated children. *Accueillons* in fact was created to provide protection and support to unaccompanied minors, through their placement in volunteer foster families. Foster care is considered to be among the best care solutions for children and has been seen to benefit also unaccompanied and separated children who find themselves alone and in an unfamiliar place. In fact, the family environment promotes their overall well-being and plays an important role in encouraging and facilitating their integration process as well.

In the following chapter I will provide a contextualization of the main phenomena involved in this research, starting with an overview of volunteerism and its trends at the international,

regional and national level. Then, I will consider the migration phenomenon of unaccompanied and separated children, presenting the main trends and analyzing their legislative framework. Lastly, I will discuss formal volunteering organizations in the context of the European Union which provide support and target specifically migrants, applicants of asylum protection and refugees.

Chapter 3: Contextualization of the Research

The aim of this chapter is to contextualize the present research, through a general analysis of volunteering trends at the international, regional and national level (in section 3.1.), followed by a focus on civil society organizations providing support to migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees at the level of the EU and in France (section 3.2.). Finally, I will present an overview of the migratory phenomenon of unaccompanied and separated children and their legislative framework at the different levels (section 3.3.).

3.1 Trends of Volunteering

Volunteerism is a universal social action existing in all the societies across the world (United Nations Volunteers (UNV), 2018, p.9). The participation of individuals in volunteering activities is demonstrated to be influenced by several factors as discussed in the previous chapter. Since multiple conceptualizations of volunteering exist, the data and studies on volunteerism should be interpreted and compared with caution. In fact, depending on the conceptualization, the criteria used to define volunteering activities and volunteers vary, influencing the findings and data. In this section I will provide a brief overview of volunteering at the international level, regional and national level.

3.1.1 International Level

The United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) estimated that in 2018 formal and informal volunteer activities⁵ equalled that of 109 million full-time workers (UNV, 2018, p.11), meaning that volunteers constitute an important resource for societies and countries globally. At the global level, the vast majority of volunteers (around 70%) are engaged in informal volunteering (ibid, p.12), while only 30% of them formally engage with associations or organizations (ibid). The participation rates of individuals in formal volunteering activities varies significantly between the different regions of the world, and is directly linked to the

⁵ The UNV report defines formal volunteering as “activities performed through an organization” and informal volunteering as “actions performed by individuals outside formally registered organizations” (UNV, 2018, p.10). The measurements and estimates on volunteerism are done mainly through time-use surveys and national surveys on volunteerism both for formal and informal volunteer work. Since 2013 the International Labour Organization (ILO) has provided a framework to guide countries to the measurement of volunteer work so that it can be integrated into the official international work statistics.

number of associations and organizations present and requiring volunteers' work. In higher-income countries the formal volunteering sector tends to be more organized than in low-income ones (ibid), however the informal volunteer sector is the dominant one in the majority of the countries. For instance, in Asia and North America formal volunteering interests around 38% of volunteers (ibid, p.14), in Europe 26.7% and in Central and Southern America 32.5% (ibid). On the contrary, in Africa and the Arab States the sector of formal volunteering interests only 13.1% and 17.1% of volunteers respectively (ibid). Globally, women take on 57% of all volunteering activities and men 43% (ibid, p.14). However, when it comes to formal volunteering the two sexes are equally represented (51% women and 49% men) (ibid), while for informal volunteering activities women represent the majority with 59% (ibid). The engagement of individuals in volunteering activities varies significantly among regions and countries, but for the purposes of this study I will focus on volunteering participation within the European Union in the next section.

3.1.2 Regional Level: the European Union

The participation of citizens in both formal and informal volunteering varies significantly among the countries of the European Union. In fact, while some have an organized formal volunteering sector, others have still an emerging formal one (Educational, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2010a, p.7). According to the last available estimates of 2015, some 100 million citizens of the European Union were involved in both formal and informal volunteering activities (Eurostat, 2018b, p.118), representing 20% of the population over 16 years of age (ibid). The participation of citizens in volunteering activities follows an upward trend both at the general level of the EU and at the national one (Educational, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2010a, p.66). Several reasons are identified as contributing to this positive trend, including higher numbers of voluntary organizations, increasing awareness of social and environmental problems, several initiatives promoting volunteering and an increased need of volunteers to deliver public goods and services (ibid, p.8).

In line with the international trend, in 2015 in the EU more volunteers engaged in informal volunteering activities (20.7%), than in formal ones (18%)⁶ (Eurostat, 2018b, p.118). In fact,

⁶ In the report, formal volunteering is defined as “non-compulsory, volunteer work conducted to help other people, the environment, animals, the wider community, etc. through unpaid work for an organization, formal group or club” while “helping other people not living in the same household [...], helping animals [...] or other

the formal volunteering sector was larger than the informal one only in a few countries, namely Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, Germany, Cyprus and Malta, together with Norway and Switzerland (Eurostat, 2020b). Then, countries like Austria, Denmark, France, Belgium, Lithuania, Italy, Spain and Romania present almost equal share of engagement in the formal and informal volunteering sectors, while the informal one is clearly dominant in countries like the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia and others (ibid).

The more recent and comprehensive study on both formal and informal volunteering trends in the European Union is *Volunteering in the European Union* of 2010, which consists of national reports of EU Member States on volunteering, and a comparative analysis at the EU level based on the national data and information⁷. In 2010, the countries which registered the highest shares of adults engaged in both formal and informal volunteering activities in their own country were the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden and the United Kingdom with more than 40% of adults active in volunteering (Educational, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2010a, p.65), followed by Denmark, Finland, Germany and Luxemburg with between 30% and 39% (ibid). A medium level of participation was found in Estonia, France and Latvia, where between 20% and 29% of adults volunteer, while countries like Belgium, Czech Republic, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia and Spain had relatively low levels of participation which ranged between 10% and 19% of adults participating in volunteering activities (ibid). Lastly, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Lithuania had the lower percentage of volunteers among the adult population, with less than 10% (ibid). The formal volunteering sector with the highest participation rates was sports, for example in Denmark and France 31% and 24% of volunteers were engaged in sports organizations and associations respectively (ibid, p.79). The other main sectors included religious, cultural, recreational and educational activities, and those linked to the social and health sphere (ibid, p.78). However, volunteers in the EU also engaged in sectors such as charities, environment and animal protection, humanitarian and emergency services as well as community activities and development (ibid, p.80).

informal voluntary activity (for example, cleaning a beach or a forest)” are considered informal volunteering (Eurostat, 2018b, p.110).

⁷ This study was done by the ICF GHK consultancy agency, it was commissioned by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and managed by the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission. Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used to gather the information from each country, from different stakeholders (Ministries or other national agencies, voluntary organizations and other actors involved in the volunteering sector).

I will now present the main trends of formal volunteering in the 27 EU countries according to gender, age, educational background and situation in the labour market. The gender balance in formal volunteering registered in 2010 varied considerably across the countries of the EU (ibid, p.69), with the majority of the countries registering either a higher share of male volunteers (eleven countries, among which France) or an equal participation of men and women (nine countries) (ibid). While only six countries had more female volunteers than men and three did not provide reliable data on gender balance of volunteers (ibid). The majority of individuals who engaged in formal volunteering in the EU were aged between 30 and 50 years, however significant differences between countries remained (ibid, p.70). In fact, young people (15 to 30 years of age) were the most active in formal volunteering in many countries such as Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, Poland and Spain (ibid), while countries like Austria, France, Italy, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom presented relatively high levels of volunteering across all age groups (ibid). A new and common trend to many EU countries was the increasing participation of older and retired people in the previous years, especially in France, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Spain, Belgium, Romania and Slovenia (ibid).

Then, another element observed among the majority of EU countries was a correlation between the education levels and the tendency to volunteer, with higher participation in formal volunteering activities among highly educated people (ibid, p.73). Lastly, the situation in the labour market seemed to be as well correlated to the participation in volunteering, in fact in the majority of EU countries, the largest share of volunteers were employed, while that was not the case for countries like Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia and Spain where students represented the largest share of volunteers (ibid, p.76). Unemployed and other non-working people such as housewives and active jobseekers constituted instead the majority of the volunteer force in Belgium, Hungary and the Netherlands (ibid).

In conclusion, participation rates in volunteering and specifically in formal volunteering activities varies significantly across the EU. The country characteristics and individual factors such as age, gender, the educational background and the situation in the labour market are observed to influence and impact formal volunteer participation in the majority of countries. In the next section I will focus on the volunteering sector in France and present the main trends of volunteering participation at the national level.

3.1.3 National Level: France

The non profit sector has begun to develop in France in relatively recent times, due to the restrictions imposed after the French Revolution to associations of all kinds by the centralised state (Educational, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2010b, p.1). Voluntary organizations became legal again in 1901 and since then, the importance and number of the civil society organizations grew (ibid). Then, the governmental decentralization of power and the European Union's integration process encouraged the non-profit sector development. In fact, the reduction of power of the central government enabled local authorities to build partnerships with civil society organizations, which started to assume crucial functions in the society (ibid). Moreover, the EU promoted the creation of a social economy, where civil society organizations and associations play a role in the development and implementation of socio-economic policies, especially in the employment, health and social sphere (ibid).

The French word for volunteerism is *bénévolat*, and as defined by the *Conseil économique, social et environnemental*⁸ volunteers are individuals freely engaging in non-remunerated purposes for the benefit of others and outside of work and family related obligations (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2018, p.2). The term *bénévoles* is mainly used to refer to formal volunteers, while informal one are called *bénévoles de proximité* (ibid, p.4). The population of the present study can be considered *bénévoles*, since they are formal volunteers who freely engage with an organization (*Accueillons*) without being remunerated.

The last available statistical data from the INSEE⁹ [national institute of statistics and economic studies] dates back to 2013, when 11 million people in France were engaged in formal volunteering activities, representing 22% of the population (INSEE, 2016, p.3). Annual studies about the formal and informal volunteering sector in France are provided by organizations like *Recherches & Solidarités* and *France Bénévole* in collaboration with the French Ministry of National Education and Youth¹⁰. These annual studies are based on survey conducted on a representative sample of the population, therefore the data that I will present here on volunteering participation in France consists in estimates and should be considered accordingly. According to the last report, French citizens who engaged in both

⁸ Economic, Social and Environmental Council : a French national assembly composed by social representatives of labour unions, organization and associations with a consultative function during the legislative process.

⁹ INSEE: Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques.

¹⁰ Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Jeunesse.

formal and informal volunteering activities in 2019 were around 20 million, representing 37% of the total population (France Bénévolat & IFOP¹¹, 2019, p.3). Among the 37% of volunteers, the majority (28%) was engaged in formal volunteering activities through organizations and associations, while only around 10% were engaged in the informal sector (ibid). These findings are in contrast with the data presented in the previous subsection, where France was considered among the countries with an equal share of formal and informal volunteers. This discrepancy may be due to the use of two different conceptualizations of volunteering in the studies, to a different methodology and it can depend on the scale of the study as well.

In the last decade the share of volunteers remained quite stable in France, ranging from 37% in 2010, to 40% in 2013, 39% in 2016 and 37% in 2019 (ibid, p.3). Around 60% of volunteers engaged in only one organization or association, while the remaining 40% volunteered in several ones (ibid, p.8). An increasing amount of people engaged in occasional volunteering activities in specific periods of the year or for few hours or days per year, in fact this kind of engagement involved 20% of volunteers in 2010 and it grew to 29% in 2019 (ibid, p.7). Nonetheless, between 50% and 60% of volunteers donated some time every week or month during the whole year, while a more virtuous 17% engaged once a week for the whole year (ibid). The largest share of volunteers were engaged in the social and charitable sector with 30% of the total volunteers, followed by leisure and recreational activities at 23% and sports at 21% (ibid, p.9). Other important sectors of engagement were youth education, health and environment (ibid). The engagement undertaken by volunteer foster families can be considered as belonging to the social and charitable section of volunteering, but there is no data available on the extent of this specific type of volunteering.

Volunteering participation in France tends to be balanced for what it concerns gender and age, with 52% of volunteers being women in 2019 (ibid, p.6). In the same year, volunteering participation was quite balanced between the following age groups: 15 to 34, 35 to 49 and 50 to 64, which accounted each for around 20% of all volunteers. While people older than 65 years consisted the largest share of volunteers with 31% (ibid, p.5). In the last decade a growing number of young people has been registered in volunteering, and at the same time the number of people over 50 years slowly decreased, probably due to recent reforms of retirements policies (ibid, p.5). In fact, the minimum age to retire was increased from 60 to 62

¹¹ IFOP : Institut Français d'Opinion Publique [French institute of public opinion].

years and to get the full pension people need to have between 65 and 67 years. Additional elements taken into consideration when studying the profile of volunteers are their marital status and family composition. However, in the study used to describe the volunteering participation in France these dimensions were not explored.

Furthermore, in line with the international and regional trends, individuals with high educational levels and employed represented the majority of both formal and informal volunteers. In fact, 30% of volunteers in 2019 had a university degree, 21% had a high school diploma and 18% a vocational diploma (ibid, p.10). For what it concerns the situation in the labour market of volunteers in France, the last available data is the national study of 2010, which showed that France registered a higher percentage of unemployed people in volunteering if compared to other countries of the EU. In fact, 20% of volunteers were unemployed, 30% were active in the labour market, 26% were students and 23% were retired people (Educational, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2010b, p.5). In the 2010 national study, the largest share of volunteers were engaged in the sports sector (29%), followed by culture (16%), social and health sector (13%) and by leisure and social clubs (12%). Advocacy organizations and humanitarian action both engaged 10% of volunteers, while education and training and economic interest engaged 4% of them, with the remaining 1% active in other sectors of volunteering (ibid, p.5). The reports taken into consideration do not allow further consideration on the relations between civil society organizations and the State, and whether the organizations tend to be political or apolitical.

In order to better contextualize the present research, in the next section I will present and analyze the phenomenon of unaccompanied and separated children at the international, regional and national level, taking into consideration their legislative framework.

3.2 Unaccompanied and Separated Children

In this section I will present the migration phenomenon of unaccompanied and separated children by framing this particular group of migrants within international migration movements and by briefly analysing their legislative framework.

3.2.1 International Migration Movements

Migration, as “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State” (IOM, 2020) has characterized human history since the earliest times. In fact people have always travelled, explored and relocated across the planet for different reasons (King, Collyer, Fielding & Skeldon, 2010, p.13). While the vast majority of individuals move inside their country of origin (IOM, 2019, p.19), and are known as internal migrants, those deciding to move to another country become international migrants.

Nevertheless, in the last decades the proportion of international migrants has increased alongside the world population. During the 1970s and 1980s international migrants represented 2.3% of the world population, in 2000 2.8% and it reached 3.5% in 2019 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2019). Among the 272 million people who migrated worldwide in 2019 (IOM, 2019, p.19), 52% were male (ibid, p.22) and the majority were aged between 20 and 64 years (around 74%) (ibid, p.21). International migrants older than 65 years of age accounted for 12% of the total (ibid, p.21), while those younger than 20 years old represented 20% of the total (ibid).

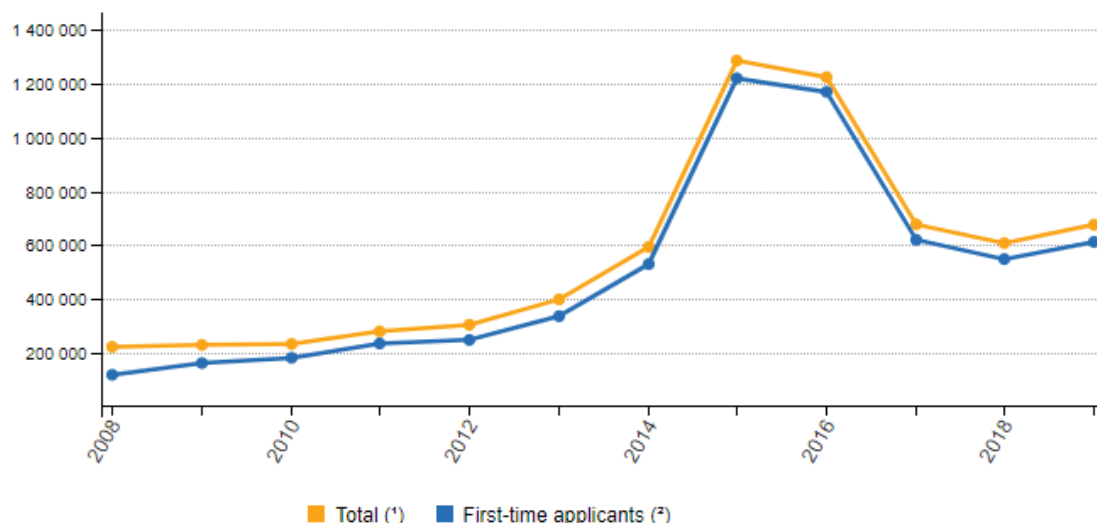
Migratory movements are usually distinguished between voluntary or forced, depending on whether people have the freedom to decide to migrate or not and the consequences related to that choice. In fact, the majority of international migrants move out of choice to another country, either for study purposes, to join their family members, to work or for health reasons. Job constitutes one of the main reasons for migration and in 2017 international migrants workers accounted for 64% of the total international migrant stock of that year (ibid, p.33). However, others are forced to flee from their country due to safety reasons, to escape conflicts, persecutions, human rights violations, natural disasters or adverse effects of climate change. In 2019, around 70.8 million people (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2020b) were considered to be forcibly displaced according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Among these, 41.3 million were Internally Displaced People (IDP) since they moved within their origin country, while 25.9 million refugees and 3.5 million asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2020b) left their origin country to look for international protection. All individuals applying for international protection in a foreign country are considered asylum seekers during the application procedure (UNHCR, 2006, p.441), however not all asylum-seekers are recognized with the refugee status as defined by

the *Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees* (UNHCR, 1951) and other national legal instruments.

Of all international migrants in the world in 2019, 40% were nationals of Asian countries like India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan (IOM, 2019 p.26). The regions which hosted the majority of international migrants in 2019 have been Asia and Europe, which respectively hosted around 30% of the total international migrant stock (ibid p.24), followed by North America with 22%, Africa with 10%, Central and Southern America with 4% and Oceania with 3% (ibid). Two-thirds of international migrants moved to high income countries in 2019 (ibid), with the United States of America remaining the main country of destination of international migrants since the 1970s (ibid, p.25). The other main countries of destination in 2019 were Germany, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and France (ibid).

Each region and continent presents specific migration patterns, both in terms of intraregional and interregional migration, however, for the purpose of this study I will focus on the European continent, which after centuries of being the origin of waves of emigration has recently become a region of immigration. However, more than half of the 82 million international migrants living in the European continent in 2018 was national of another European country (ibid, p.85), meaning that intraregional migration is a significant phenomenon in the European continent. The remaining international migrants instead were mainly nationals of Asian, African and Central and Southern American countries (ibid, p.86). However, the increased influx of asylum seekers and refugees arriving to the European continent was probably the most significant migration phenomenon of the last decade (ibid, p.90). While the Russian Federation and Ukraine produced the largest refugee population in Europe in 2018, the growing instability and numerous conflicts in some African and Middle Eastern countries in the last decades (ibid, p.67) contributed substantially to the increase in the number of people reaching Europe through different migratory routes.

Figure 1: Asylum applications (non-EU) in the EU-28 Member States, 2008–2018.



(¹) 2008–2014: Croatia not available.

(²) 2008: Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Slovakia and Finland not available. 2009: Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Croatia,

Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Slovakia and Finland not available. 2010: Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Romania and Finland not available.

2011: Croatia, Hungary, Austria and Finland not available. 2012: Croatia, Hungary and Austria not available. 2013: Austria not available.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr_asyappctza)

eurostat

Source: Eurostat, 2020.

As it can be observed in the graph of Figure 1, the number of asylum-seekers applying for international protection in the EU increased in the last decade. In fact, between 2008 and 2012 the number of first-time asylum applications doubled from 121.600 in 2008 to 250.400 in 2012 (Eurostat, 2020a) but the number started to increase dramatically in 2013 when 338.200 first-time applications were registered (ibid). In 2014 the asylum seekers applying for protection in the EU were 530.600, while in 2015 and 2016 more than one million people applied for asylum in the EU countries (ibid) representing the peak of the so called European Migrant Crisis. The number of first-time asylum application decreased to 620.300 in 2017 and to 549.000 in 2018, but increased again to 612.685 in 2019 (ibid). These growing influxes represent a challenge for the European Union and revealed the general inconsistency of the EU immigration policies and the shortcomings of its reception system.

3.2.2 International Migrant Children

In recent decades, alongside with the increase of international migration movements, also the numbers of children moving internationally rose. In fact, the international migrant children migrating worldwide were estimated to be around 28 million in 1990, 1995 and 2000 (IOM, 2019, p.236), but the number increased to 29.8 million in 2005 and reached 34.5 million in 2015 and 37.9 million in 2019 (ibid, p.232). However, if the absolute numbers increased, the share of migrant children among international migrants decreased since the 1990s, when they represented 18.6% of the total international migrant population stock (ibid, p.237), while in 2019 they constitute 14% of the total (ibid). The share of children among international migrants varies significantly between regions, in fact, the African continent had the highest percentage in 2019, with nearly 30% of international migrants under 20 years of age. Central and Southern America and Asia's shares were around 20%, while in Europe, Northern America and Oceania only around 10% of international migrants were children (ibid, p.239).

The topic of child migration has been understudied in the past and related data present several deficiencies due mainly to the lack of reliable sources and disaggregated data for certain groups of migrants (ibid, p.257). Some of these complexities are related to the concept of children itself, in fact, even if the universally accepted definition considers a child "any human being below the age of 18" (United Nations, 1989), some migration datasets are based on different age groups and usually distinguish between children under 15 years and youths (from 15 to 24 years) (IOM, 2020, p.258).

Nowadays, child migration has gained increasing attention worldwide as a result of the significant scale of the phenomenon (ibid, p.251) and states, international governmental organizations and civil society organizations are putting great effort in ensuring children on the move the protection they are entitled to (ibid). Children in migration are generally divided in three categories according to whom they are travelling with. They are considered to be accompanied when they migrate with parents or caregivers, unaccompanied when they are on the move alone, and separated if they have lost contact with their family in the migration process or if they are travelling with acquaintances (ibid, p.253). Even if the majority of children migrate as a part of a family unit (IOM, 2019, p.244), for the purpose of this study I am going to focus on a specific group of children in migration, unaccompanied and separated children.

To the present day there is not a universal definition of Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC), nor a specific international or regional law or treaty dedicated specifically to this group of migrants. However, different legal instruments of international humanitarian law and international refugee law contribute to the definition of their legislative framework and entitle them with rights (European Migration Network, 2018). In the following section I will present the trends of this migratory phenomenon and analyse the legal provisions of Unaccompanied and Separated Children at the global, regional and national level.

3.2.3 Unaccompanied and Separated Children at the International Level

At the international level, the most widely accepted definition of Unaccompanied and Separated Children is the one elaborated by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in *The General Comment n°6* of 2005. According to the Committee:

“Unaccompanied children (also called unaccompanied minors) are children [...] 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” (UNCRC, 2005, p.5).

“Separated children are children [...] who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members” (ibid, p.5).

The most important legally-binding international instrument setting the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children is the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*, elaborated in 1989 by the United Nations. States parties committed to respect and ensure the enjoyment of the rights of the *UNCRC* to “all children under their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind” (United Nations, 1989), and this includes “asylum seeking, refugee and migrant children - irrespective of their nationality, immigration status or statelessness” (UNCRC, 2005, p.6). In fact, the article 22 of the *UNCRC* recognizes to every child “seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee [...] whether unaccompanied or accompanied” (United Nations, 1989, p.6) the right to receive “appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance” (ibid, p.6). By fleeing their countries, unaccompanied minors are exercising the fundamental human right recognized by the article

14 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* “to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum” (UN General Assembly, 1948, p.4) as international refugees because of persecution “for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR, 1951, p.14).

Considering the growing numbers of children on the move alone, in 2005 the Committee on the Rights of the Child elaborated the *General Comment n°6*, where it clarifies the application of the rights of the *UNCRC* in regards to unaccompanied and separated children. This document was created to guide countries in the provision of an effective, comprehensive and integrated protection system for unaccompanied and separated children and to address the multiple gaps in their protection (UNCRC, 2005, p.4). It starts by underlying the legal obligations of receiving States, which must take all the necessary measures to ensure the protection of unaccompanied minors, first of all by respecting the principle of non-refoulement. In fact, as codified in the article 33 of the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugee* (UNHCR, 1951), “States shall not return a child to a country where there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of irreparable harm to the child” (UNCRC, 2005, p.9). Unaccompanied and separated children are considered to be especially vulnerable, since they are deprived of family care, support and protection during long and dangerous journeys (UNICEF, 2017, p.15). Therefore, UASC need to be protected from the risk of being victims of human trafficking and any kind of exploitation and abuse as stated in articles 34, 35 and 36 of the *Convention* (United Nations, 1989). The Committee states the importance of the best interest of the child (art.3), which should be the guiding principle of all the actions and decisions regarding unaccompanied minors (UNCRC, 2005, p.8).

Linked to this principle is their right to be appointed with a guardian and a legal representative, who have the duty to ensure their best interest and that their “legal, social, health, psychological, material and educational needs are appropriately covered” (ibid, p.11). Children migrating alone in fact, should be guaranteed basic rights listed in the *Convention*, such as the right to life, survival and development (art.6) and to adequate standards of living (art.27), the right to healthcare (art.23), education (art.28) and to adequate care arrangements (art.20) (United Nations, 1989). Then, States Parties have the obligation to make all efforts to reunite UASC with their families and therefore ensure the rights to family unity and reunification (art. 9 and 10) (ibid). Provisions guaranteeing the right to family life are included also in the *Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (art. 12) and in the *UN Covenant on Social, Cultural and Economic Right* (art.10), however these documents underline the

importance of the protection of children in general, not mentioning specifically UASC (European Migration Network, 2018, p.56). Finally, the Committee encourages the implementation of the article 12 of the *UNCRC* in the case of unaccompanied and separated children. In fact, they should be able to express their views and opinions and be “heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings” affecting them (United Nations, 1989, p.4) and taken into consideration “in accordance with the age and the maturity” (ibid, p.4). Therefore, all the 196 States parties of the *UNCRC* committed to ensure the respect of the rights listed in the *Convention* to all children in their territory, included those who find themselves unaccompanied and separated from their family members and caregivers. The *UNCRC* is the most widely ratified international human rights treaty, with the only country which has not yet ratified it being the United States of America. In the last decade, the exponential growth of irregular entries of migrants and asylum-seekers in the United States through the southern border with Mexico has led to a renewed exacerbation of policies towards irregular migrants (Cheatham, 2020). Unaccompanied minors entering illegally the U.S. nowadays face what many define to be an *inhumane* treatment, from being held in detention centres for long periods, to not having access to legal support in their asylum application, to suffering from abuses at the hands of border patrol and immigration officers (ibid). Moreover, there has been a steady increase in the denial rate of asylum to unaccompanied minors in the last years, and consequently of deportations (ibid).

Children may decide to leave their country on their own for a combination of various reasons, which encompass the search for better opportunities, in terms of both education and future employment, but may also include the necessity to escape child abuse, child marriage, conflict and/or child-specific persecution such as recruitment in gangs or in local military groups (IOM, 2020, p.254). Unaccompanied and separated children oftentimes undertake long journeys to reach their destination country, across life-threatening routes, while being exposed to psychological, physical and/or sexual violence and to the risk of being victims of human trafficking and exploitation (ibid, p.253). It is not possible to have accurate and reliable data on unaccompanied minors at the global level, mainly because of the lack of available and disaggregated data. The UNHCR estimated that 138.600 UASC applied for asylum in 2018 worldwide and 111.000 of them counted as refugees (UNHCR, 2020a), however, these figures are considered underestimates.

3.2.4 Unaccompanied and Separated Children in the European Union

For the purpose of this study I will here present the situation of unaccompanied and separated children and their legal status in the context of the European Union and not the whole European continent, which includes countries not Member States of the EU. At the level of the European Union, an unaccompanied minor is defined in the *Qualifications Directive* of the Council of the European Union as:

“a third-country national or stateless person below the age of 18 years [...] who arrives on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied by the adult responsible for him or her by law or by the practice of the Member State concerned” (Council of the European Union, 2011, p.14).

The Directive specifies that also minors who become unaccompanied and separated after they have entered the territory of the Member States are included (ibid, p.14). This definition reflects the one of the Committee on the Rights of the Child presented in the previous section but it introduces the condition that only third-country nationals or stateless people can be considered unaccompanied minors, thus it excludes children citizens of EU Member States.

In the context of the European Union, there are several legislative and non-legislative instruments, which contribute to the definition of a general framework for unaccompanied and separated children. The *European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights* lists the civil, social, political and economic rights of EU citizens and in the article 24 it states the importance of ensuring children protection, through making their best interest a priority and working towards family reunification (European Union, 2012). The EU has incorporated into its framework of policies and legislation aspects and principles from both the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (European Migration Network, 2018, p.6). Therefore, children in the EU are entitled with all the rights set by these conventions, including children entering the EU unaccompanied or separated (ibid).

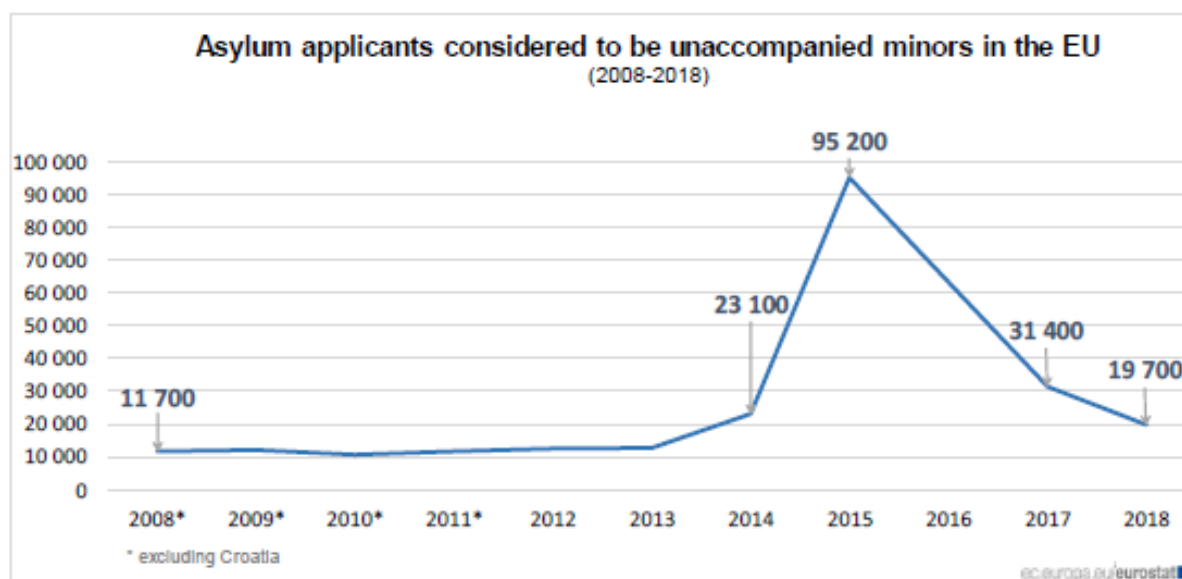
Within the framework of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), several Directives and Regulations address the phenomenon of unaccompanied and separated children, like the *Qualification Directive* (2011/95EU), the *Asylum Procedures Directive* (2013/32/EU), the *Reception Conditions Directive* (2013/33/EU) and the *Anti-Trafficking Directive* (2011/36/EU). The best interest of the child is considered a priority, together with the right of unaccompanied minors who are granted international protection to be reunited with their

families. In fact, Member States should try to trace family members, either inside or outside the EU, in order to enable family reunification, when advisable and possible (ibid, p.36). Moreover, children with relatives legally residing within the EU should be reunited as soon as possible with them, in order to preserve the family unity.

All unaccompanied and separated children, prior and after status determination, have the right to be represented by legal guardians (ibid, p.27), whose role is to assist the minors and ensure that their best interest is respected during the legal procedures. Standards concerning accommodation, care arrangements and the integration process of UASC are also set by these directives. Member States should provide accommodation facilities specifically for unaccompanied children, which should be separate from adults' facilities and should be child-friendly and able to meet all the basic needs of children (ibid, p.22). Among the basic rights that unaccompanied minors are entitled to, education plays an important role especially in their integration process. Since education, as stated by the article 28 of the CRC is a right of every child, Member States should grant automatic access to the general education system, specific training and any necessary preparatory language course to every UASC (ibid, p.33).

Due to the growing number of UASC coming to the EU and the evidence of lack of common standards and procedures, the European Commission released the "*Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors 2010-2014*" which addresses the main problems related to UASC in the context of unsafe migration (Parusel, 2017, p.9). The solutions suggested aim to achieve greater cooperation and coherence between Member States, with specific measures to prevent trafficking of children and to improve family reunification processes, together with policies regarding care and accommodation arrangements as well as education and integration (ibid).

Figure 2: Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors in the EU (2008-2018).



Source: Eurostat, 2020.

In the last decade, as shown in the graph above (Figure 2), a consistent and increasing number of unaccompanied minors has arrived to Europe, mainly from African and Middle Eastern countries (Menjívar & Perreira, 2017, p.1). In fact, official data shows that if in the period between 2008 and 2013, around 12.000 UASC arrived to the European Union every year, in 2014 the number doubled to 23.100, to reach around 95.000 in 2015 (ibid, p.1), which represents the peak of the European Migrant Crisis. The number of UASC decreased to less than half in 2016 and 2017, when the children migrating alone who applied for asylum were around 30.000. It continued to decrease in 2018 to 19.700 and to 13.8005 in 2019 (Eurostat, 2020c, p.1). The highest share of unaccompanied minors among asylum applicants registered in the European Union was in 2015 when they represented 23% of all minors asylum-seekers (Eurostat, 2016, p.1). In 2016, children on the move alone accounted for 16% of the total asylum-seekers under 18 years of age (Eurostat, 2017, p.1) and 15% in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018a, p.1), to reach the 10% in 2018 (Eurostat, 2019, p.1) and 7% in 2019 (Eurostat, 2020c, p.1). However, it is necessary to consider the fact that these figures are not completely accurate, since they only include the migrant children present in the European Union who applied for asylum and are therefore registered, while it is difficult to know the total and exact number of unaccompanied minors present within the EU.

According to the annual reports of Eurostat, unaccompanied children arriving to the EU are mainly boys aged between 16 and 17 years, while the annual percentage of girls on the move alone ranges between 9% to 14% (Eurostat, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2019, 2020c). The countries of origin of unaccompanied and separated children applying for asylum in the EU mainly include Middle Eastern ones such as Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq and Northern and Sub-Saharan African countries such as Gambia, Guinea, Eritrea and Somalia (ibid). From 2015 to 2019, Afghanistan was the country of origin of the largest share of unaccompanied minors in the EU, in fact they represented 51% of the total unaccompanied minors in the EU in 2015, 38% in 2016, 17% in 2017, 16% in 2018 and 30% in 2019 (Eurostat, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2019, 2020c, pp.2-3). Eritrea and Syria were as well the origin countries of a significant percentage of UASC through the years. Unaccompanied minors from Syria were the second largest group in 2015 and 2016, counting for 16% (Eurostat, 2016, p.3) and 19% (Eurostat, 2017, p.3). Eritrea was the country of origin of 10% of unaccompanied minors in 2017 and 2018 (Eurostat, 2018a, 2019), representing the second most numerous citizenship of unaccompanied minors in the EU.

According to Eurostat, the countries which registered the highest numbers of unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in the context of the European Migrant Crisis were Italy, Greece, Austria, Germany, Sweden, the UK, Bulgaria, Hungary, Belgium and the Netherlands. However, the countries which processed the highest share of applications for international protection of unaccompanied minors were Sweden in 2015 (Eurostat, 2016), Germany in 2016 and 2018 (Eurostat, 2017; Eurostat, 2019), Italy in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018a) and Greece in 2019 (Eurostat, 2020c).

3.2.5 Unaccompanied and Separated Children in France

In France, different expressions were used to refer to unaccompanied and separated children, from *Mineurs Non Accompagnés* [unaccompanied minors], to *Mineurs Isolés Étrangers* [alone foreign minors] to *Jeunes Majeurs Isolés* [young lone foreigners], (with the latter including young people until 20 years of age) (Frechon & Marquet, 2017, p.2). However, since March 2016 *Mineurs Non Accompagnés* [unaccompanied minors] is the official expression used to refer to this particular group of migrants. A peculiarity of the French context is that there is not an explicit definition of unaccompanied minors in the national law, therefore unaccompanied minors do not constitute a legal category (French National Contact

Point of the European Migration Network, 2018, p.6). However, definitions can be found in official reports and other documents, where an unaccompanied minor is defined as:

“a person under the age of 18 who is not in their country of origin and yet is not accompanied by a guardian or person exercising parental authority, in other words has no one to protect them and take important decisions about them” (Debré (2010) in Frechon & Marquet, 2017, p.2).

According to this conceptualisation, children from any country can be considered as unaccompanied minors if alone and in need of protection, including nationals of other EU member states, in contrast with the EU’s definition which specifies that only children from third countries outside the EU can be considered UASC (Frechon & Marquet, 2017, p.2).

France is a signatory to all the previously mentioned international and legal instruments setting human and children’s rights, and has in place as well an ombudsman for children to monitor the implementation of the *UNCRC*. Therefore, children reaching France on their own are entitled with the rights listed in the *UNCRC* and in the other international and European human rights legal instruments. The State and the local authorities of the Departments, through the Child welfare services (ASE¹²) are responsible for the social welfare and protection of all children, including unaccompanied and separated children (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018, p.9).

Once in France, unaccompanied minors have two options, either present themselves as asylum seekers at the OPFRA¹³ [French office for the protection of refugees and stateless people] or ask for protection to the Child welfare services which are responsible of ensuring the protection of all children in need and in vulnerable situations (ibid, p.6). Almost the totality of unaccompanied minors opt for the second option and apply for the recognition of their status at the Departmental Councils offices of the Child welfare services or at the centres set up specifically to evaluate unaccompanied minors, depending on the Department (ibid, p.21). In the Paris region there are four centres where the evaluation takes place, two in Paris

¹² ASE: Aide Sociale à l’Enfance.

¹³ OPFRA: Office Français de protection des Réfugiées et Apatrides.

known as DEMIE¹⁴ run by the French Red Cross on behalf of the Department and two in the suburban areas known as PEMIE¹⁵ and PEOMIE¹⁶.

The evaluation of their minority consists in different steps, first all children who claim to be under 18 years of age need to present themselves to these centres to formally start the evaluation procedure. A first short interview may be done in this instance, then they will get the appointment for the real interview, where qualified professional such as social workers, psychologists or educators will ask them general information about them such as their identity, family, country of origin, education and their migration journey, and also examine any official documents proving the age and identity of the children in case they have them. After the interview, they will be given another appointment for the following day(s), when they will get the final decision, either a recognition or a refusal of their minority status. The evaluation phase may last up to five days, during which unaccompanied minors are provided with accommodation in specific shelters for minors, meals and transportation tickets if needed.

Once recognized as unaccompanied minors, they integrate the Child welfare system and undergo a medical and psychological assessment in order to understand their needs and establish a “child’s plan” (*projet pour l’enfant*), in collaboration with them as established by the Article L223-1-1 of the *Code de l’action social et des familles* (French National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, 2018, p.32). The plan addresses all children’s needs, from the physical, to the psychological, emotional, intellectual and social ones (ibid), including education and other training courses. The ultimate aim of this plan is to accompany and support minors to develop a life plan and to achieve a good level of autonomy and integration in the French society (ibid). The accommodation options for unaccompanied minors vary from children’s homes run either by the Departments or by NGOs, specialised structures known as *Maison d’Enfance à Caractère Social* (MECS), foster families and semi-independent structures for older minors (ibid, p.22). The placement of unaccompanied minors in foster families by the Child welfare services is not common, in fact the vast majority is placed in collective accommodations, in order to encourage their autonomy (ibid, p.23). However, the Law of 14 March 2016 on child welfare created the framework for a host programme for unaccompanied minors with volunteer families (ibid, p.24). This programme

¹⁴ Dispositif d’Évaluation des Mineurs Isolés Étrangers.

¹⁵ Pôle d’Évaluation des Mineurs Isolés Étrangers.

¹⁶ Pôle d’Évaluation et d’Orientation des Mineurs Isolés Étrangers.

was conceived to ensure a family environment to younger minors, which may facilitate the integration process and also to encourage the engagement of citizens (ibid). These families are followed and monitored by the social workers of the Child welfare services, and receive a daily allowance for their engagement, meant to partially cover the expenses of the families (ibid).

If they are not recognized as minors after the first evaluation, they have the right to make an appeal to the President of the Departmental Council or to the *juge d'enfants* [children's judge] in order to be re-assessed, and in this instance the judge may ask for the controversial X-rays test, which is still used to help determine the age through the bone development, regardless its margin of error being of 18 months. During this procedure, which usually takes several months (from 1 to 14 months), the Departments are not responsible anymore for the care of unaccompanied minors, therefore they do not receive any kind of support and are left on their own. This is where NGOs and local associations play a crucial role in ensuring the protection of unaccompanied minors.

As all EU countries, France has been hit by a growing influx of unaccompanied and separated children in the past years, 7.600 unaccompanied minors were recognized between June 2013 and the end of 2014, while in 2015 they were 5.990 (Ministère de la Justice, 2016). In 2016 the number grew to 8.054 (Ministère de la Justice, 2017), in 2017 to 14.908 (Ministère de la Justice, 2018) and reached the peak in 2018 with 17.022 unaccompanied minors (Ministère de la Justice, 2019), while it decreased to 16.760 in 2019 (Ministère de la Justice, 2020). The proportion of girls among the UASC in France is lower than the EU's average, in fact the percentage of boys from 2015 to 2019 has been stable around 95%, while girls count only for 5% of the total (Ministère de la Justice, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). The vast majority of unaccompanied minors are from Western and Northern African French-speaking countries once former colonies. More than half of UASC from 2015 to 2019 were coming from Mali, Guinea and Ivory Coast, with an increase of the percentage of minors from Asian countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan since 2016 (ibid). Therefore, France as all other EU countries experienced an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors applying for international protection in the last years, which put a strain on the reception system and highlighted its shortcomings and the need to improve it.

In sum, unaccompanied and separated minors are a group of international migrant children considered to be particularly vulnerable due to the fact that they undertake the migration

journey alone or become separated from their adult caregivers in the process. The legislative framework of unaccompanied and separated children is defined by different legal instruments, from the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* of the United Nations at the international level, to other regional and national instruments. This migration phenomenon interests different regions of the world, and in recent years, the European Union has seen a dramatic increase of children arriving to its countries alone and looking for international protection. In the context of the EU, several Directives and Regulations within the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) set the rights of UASC incorporating the main principles of the *UNCRC* and also establish standard procedures for EU countries to implement when dealing with them. However, the situation of the reception and care of these migrant children varies from country to country, depending also on national legislation. In France, the context of the present study, the reception system of UASC presents some flaws since there are some instances where the State does not fully guarantee the rights of the *UNCRC*, even if it is a signatory, and therefore does not ensure the protection of unaccompanied and separated children.

In the next section I will present an overview of civil society organizations providing support to migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees in the European Union and in France, with a close look to those providing support to unaccompanied and separated children in Paris.

3.3 Formal Volunteering with Migrants, Applicants of International Protection and Refugees in the European Union

Volunteerism is a phenomenon characterized by significant variations in its trends around the world, both in terms of participation and type of volunteering. At the level of the European Union significant differences can be observed between countries, especially regarding the proportions of the informal and formal volunteering sectors. The formal volunteering sector in the EU has developed significantly in recent decades, with an increasing number of civil society organizations and associations providing public goods and services to people in need. In the last decade, migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees have been among the most vulnerable groups assisted by NGOs and non-profit organizations in the

European context, especially during the European Migrant Crisis. This because after extremely dangerous and long journeys to reach Europe, they find themselves in an unfamiliar and foreign country with different costumes, language and oftentimes complicated bureaucratic procedures to access services.

Several NGOs and associations have contributed and still work to support migrants and asylum-seekers, and some in particular target and assist children who migrate unaccompanied or separated from their family and caregivers. Civil society organizations support migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees in different ways, providing them with protection, shelter, food, health services and legal and bureaucratic assistance. In the context of the European Union, regional and local civil society organizations and in particular NGOs have played a crucial role in the assistance of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees at all levels (Irrera, 2016, p.23). Daniela Irrera sustains that NGOs in the EU do not only provide direct support to migrants in form of essential services and goods, but they also impact local, national and European policies, together with implementing various development and return programmes (ibid, p.23).

In the last decade a number of NGOs have been created in response to the increasing numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees arriving to the Southern European borders through the Mediterranean Sea. Many NGOs have been conducting rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea like *Acquarius*, *Open Arms*, *Mediterranea*, *The Sea Eye*, *SOS Méditerranée*, *Mare Ionio*, *Sea Watch 3*, *Josefa* and many others. Once in the EU countries, migrants and asylum seekers are supported both by the States, inter-governmental organizations and NGOs, both local and international ones. A crucial role is played by the national branches of international inter-governmental organizations such as the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)* and the *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, and by the national branches of NGOs like *Oxfam*, *Save the Children*, *Caritas*, *Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)* [*Doctors without Borders*], the *Red Cross*, *ActionAid*, *Médecins du Monde*, *Amnesty International* and others. However, many local NGOs and other non-profit organizations have been created in recent years in response to the increased number of migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees following the European Migrant Crisis.

For the purpose of the present study I will focus on the civil society organizations in France, and specifically in Paris, which support in particular unaccompanied and separated children.

In the city of Paris a number of NGOs and local non-profit organizations exist and provide different forms of support to people in need, mainly thanks to the work of volunteers. Organizations like *L'Armée du Salut*, *La Gamelle de Jaurès*, *Restos du Coeur* and *Solidarité Migrants Wilson* provide meals for people in need, both in soup kitchens and food distributions. Then, *Les midis du M.I.E.* provides specifically unaccompanied minors with breakfast and lunch on certain days of the week. NGOs like *MSF* and *Médecins du Monde* together with some hospitals of the city like *Hôpital Robert-Debré* and *Hôpital Armand-Trousseau* assure unaccompanied minors healthcare and psychological support. Then, the *Antenne des mineurs* and the *ADJIE*¹⁷ give minors legal and administrative assistance, while some associations organize free French classes like *Autremonde*, *La Femis* and *Médiathèque Françoise Sagan*. Unaccompanied minors can spend their days in some day centres, like *Camres* or the one run by *MSF* in Pantin, or in several libraries where they can have access to books, computers, internet and plugs to charge their phones. Moreover, a number of organizations provide them with clothes and hygiene products, such as *Vestiaire de l'Église Saint-Bernard* and *Utopia 56*.

Accueillons

The present research investigates the experiences of the volunteers of *Accueillons*, an organization created by *Utopia 56* and *MSF* in 2017 in response to the increasing number of unaccompanied minors reaching France. *Accueillons* consist in an informal hosting network of volunteer foster families all over France who decide to welcome and host an unaccompanied minor in their homes. This initiative targets unaccompanied minors who have not been recognized as minors in their first evaluation procedure and who are in the process of appealing the refusal of their minority, as discussed in the section 3.2.5 of the previous chapter. In fact, those finding themselves in this situation are not entitled to receive accommodation or any kind of support from the State and must rely on civil society organizations' support. However, the shelters of the organizations are not able to accommodate all the minors and many end up living in the streets for weeks or months. Since the beginning of the European Migrant Crisis in 2015, according to *MSF* between 150 and 200 unaccompanied minors have been living in the streets of Paris, being exposed to great risks and dangers. (Médecins sans frontières (MSF), 2019).

¹⁷ ADJIE : Accompagnement et Défense des Jeunes Isolés Étrangers [support and défense of lone foreign minors].

In March 2020, *Accueillons* counted 27 hosting families and 13 minors hosted, with new volunteers interested in joining as volunteer foster families as I learned during the fieldwork research. The minors who can potentially integrate *Accueillons* are selected among the 35 boys and girls living in the “*hotel passerelle*”, a shelter for unaccompanied and separated children run by *MSF* in the suburbs of Paris. The *MSF* professional educators and social workers of the shelter are in charge of identifying those boys and girls who could benefit from a placement in foster families, according to their profile and needs. Then, the staff of *MSF* and *Accueillons* present the option to the minors, who are free to choose if they want to integrate *Accueillons* or remain in the shelter. If they decide to join the hosting network, the minors are assigned to two or three families, which they usually meet or establish contact with prior to the start of the hosting experience. The placement is based on a signed agreement (*Convention d’hébergement citoyen*) between the organization, the volunteer foster family and the minor, where the terms of the engagement are defined, as well as the responsibilities and duties of both the volunteers and the minor.

The volunteer foster families assigned to each minor agree to provide for all the needs of the minors during the time of their engagement. From ensuring them an appropriate place to stay (preferably a single bedroom), to basic necessities such as food, clothes, transportation cards, materials for school or training courses and materials or subscriptions to leisure activities if possible. At the same time, the minors agree to behave well, be respectful of the rules and the lifestyle of the family and to help in the everyday chores. But most of all, the minors are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to focus on their future and their life plans, to learn the language and start the integration process in the French society through the help of the families.

The fact that the minors move from one family to the other every month or two may be seen as an element which does not allow them to fully benefit from a stable care arrangement. And while assigning a single foster family to each minor for the entire appealing process (which may last from one to 14 months) would be the best solution, the reality is that probably very few people would make such a commitment as a volunteer foster family. In fact, considered the level of commitment required by this kind of volunteering engagement, the organization needs to make arrangements which are doable and which are adaptable to the needs of the volunteer foster families. The main mission of *Accueillons* and of the volunteers is to ensure unaccompanied minors the best solutions and environment, taking into account their desires

and needs. For instance, the two or three families assigned to each minor are preferably chosen in the same neighbourhood or area, in order to lower the impact of moving and to ensure continuity in the integration process of the minors in the community. Moreover, there is constant collaboration between the different families, who all engage to ensure a safe, loving and caring environment.

Therefore, *Accueillons* is one of the several civil society organizations which provide support and help migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees in the context of France. It specifically targets unaccompanied and separated children in the process of appealing the refusal of their minority and who cannot benefit from the protection of the French State. In fact, through a network of volunteer foster families *Accueillons* ensures the minors protection and a safe place where to live and prosper.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological framework of the present study. It begins with an introduction of the research strategy and design (section 4.1) and continues with the description of the methods used to collect the data (section 4.2), select the sample of the participants (section 4.3) and conduct the analysis of the data collected (section (4.4). This chapter concludes with a discussion on ethical considerations in the section 4.5 and with some reflections on this study and its limitations in the section 4.6.

4.1 Methodological choices

The organization *Accueillons* and its volunteers constitute the object of the case study of the present research. This organization was created in response to the lack of protection ensured to unaccompanied minors who are in the process of appealing the refusal of their minority status in France, primarily in Paris. The present research both aims at gaining a better understanding of volunteerism and of the phenomenon of unaccompanied minors at the general level, and within a particular context (Paris and France), as well as investigating the subjective perspective and experience of the volunteers of *Accueillons* hosting unaccompanied minors. The research strategy of the present study is exclusively qualitative. The qualitative approach appears to be the best methodological choice since the objective of the research is to gain a better understanding of a specific social phenomenon through the eyes of the participants, exploring their personal experiences and perceptions, and therefore their perspective of the social context they find themselves in, which is one of the crucial preoccupations of qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p.399). The research design is the case study, in fact the research will be a detailed examination of the non-profit organization *Accueillons* and its volunteers. Case study research is based on the analysis of a specific and single case, which can be a person, a couple, a family, a community, a school, an organization or a single event, but which has to be an “object of interest in its own right” (ibid, p.69). The object of the study is investigated by the researcher taking into account the context, since it is usually context-dependent (ibid, p.67).

Some critiques are addressed to this research design, mainly regarding its validity and reliability, in fact the contribution of case study research to scientific development is

questioned since they focus on one specific and context-dependent case, from which generalizations cannot be made (Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, case study research is valid and important, since as Flyvbjerg sustains, in social sciences “there appears to exist only context-dependent knowledge” (ibid, p.3), because “predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs” (ibid, p.6).

The present research departs from a constructivist ontological position, considering “social phenomena and their meanings as continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2012, p.33). Social reality is then the result of social interaction between different actors and is consequently in constant evolution. Therefore, this study presents a specific version and perception of the social reality it investigates, and it should not be considered as the definitive one, since according to constructivism, knowledge is indeterminate (ibid), given the “continuous state of construction and reconstruction” (ibid, p.34) of social reality.

The epistemological approach is consequently interpretivism, considered that the purpose of the present research is to explore and understand human behaviour, while positivism focuses on trying to explain it (ibid, p.28). Interpretivism sees human action as complex and the only way to understand it is through the investigation of how social actors make sense of the world and of their experiences (ibid). In fact, the aim of the research is to gain an in-depth insight of the experiences of the volunteers of *Accueillons*, exploring their social profile, motivations and their perspectives of the protection system for unaccompanied minors in France.

4.2 Methods of Data Collection

The present research was developed using document review to contextualize the research and individual semi-structured interviews as the method to collect data.

Document Review

The first step in the research process included a careful review of a variety of documents, from online newspaper articles, to official national reports, to academic and scientific articles, to NGOs’ reports and websites, to different conventions and legal instruments. The review of French and international newspaper articles and reports from NGOs and associations working in Paris enabled the researcher to better understand the framework and the context of the

research, namely the situation and protection ensured to UASC in Paris. Then, a literature review was done to explore the key concepts for the present research: volunteerism, unaccompanied and separated children, and foster care. Alongside these conceptualizations, the main trends of volunteering were presented at the global, regional and national level, as well as the migratory phenomenon of unaccompanied and separated children.

Fieldwork Research

The fieldwork of the present research was done in the framework of a one month internship with *Utopia 56*, the organization which founded *Accueillons* in collaboration with *MSF*. During the weeks I spent in Paris I was able to take part in some initiatives of the organization which target unaccompanied minors (such as information sessions and distributions of basic necessities) and also to support one of the members of the staff of *Utopia 56*. The employee in charge of the management of *Accueillons* became the key informant for this research and I had the opportunity to have several informal interviews with her, where she presented and explained the functioning of the organization. I also participated to one of the regular meetings between the staff of *Utopia 56* and *MSF*, where they discuss the general situation of the minors being hosted in the families and the details of future placements.

MSF staff is in charge of identifying the unaccompanied minors who could integrate *Accueillons*, according to their needs and desires, while the staff of *Utopia 56* is mainly responsible for establishing the network of foster families and for organizing the logistics of the placement. The meetings took place at the *MSF* shelter which accommodates the unaccompanied minors who could integrate *Accueillons*. After the meetings, the staff of *Utopia 56* and *MSF* have lunch together with the boys and girls of the shelter, which is an important occasion for the minors to ask questions and clear any doubts they might have about *Accueillons*. Even if for a short period of time, the collaboration with the staff of *Utopia 56* gave me the opportunity to experience and better understand the context of the research, giving me meaningful insights and information that constituted useful research instruments.

Individual Semi-structured Interviews

The data collection was done through individual and semi-structured interviews with the seven respondents of the study, which constitute one of the primary methods of data collection used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p.471). Semi-structured interviews were conducted following an interview guide with a set of questions about specific topics that

needed to be covered during the session (ibid). However, semi-structured interviews are flexible, and allow changes in the order of the questions, and the researcher is free to add questions and explore any aspect or theme arising from the respondents answers which could be relevant for the research (ibid). Therefore, a dialogue was encouraged between the interviewer and the interviewed, and this enabled the researcher to investigate in detail people's experiences and perspectives on specific issues, events and forms of behaviours (ibid).

The seven semi-structured interviews have been scheduled via text message or email, and have been conducted between mid-March and the end of April. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown measures, only two interviews were done in person in the respondents' homes, while the remaining were done either via video-call (four) or audio-call (one). The interviews were conducted in French and lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. The interview guide used was divided into the following sections: personal information, volunteering experience, motivations and values, and reflections. Six out of seven interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed following the method of denaturalized transcription. This choice is justified by the interest of this study in the content and information shared by the participants, rather than in the way they talk and deliver the information (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). One interview instead was not recorded due to technical problems, so the researcher took notes during the audio-call.

The original goal was to conduct face to face interviews, however the outbreak of the global pandemic of COVID-19 forced me to shorten my stay in Paris and to return to Italy. Therefore, I had to do the remaining five interviews through video and audio calls via Skype and WhatsApp. Contrasting opinions exist on this kind of alternative to face to face interviews, which present both benefits and drawbacks (Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour, 2014; O'Connor & Madge, 2017). Among the positive aspects, I noticed the greater flexibility and, time and cost effectiveness (O'Connor & Madge, 2017, p. 9). In fact, the interview oftentimes occurs in more convenient conditions for both the interviewer and interviewed, since they can participate from wherever they want, without wasting time and spending money to reach a specific place. However, one of the main drawbacks of this method consists in technological problems which may occur before or during the interviews (Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour, 2014; O'Connor & Madge, 2017). The internet connection may not be good and cause interruptions in the calls or impact the quality of the sound. Some interviews were interrupted a few times due to this type of problem and the audio of a recording was

poor, so I had to contact the respondent at a later stage to confirm some data. Overall, I had a positive experience doing the interviews via Skype and WhatsApp and did not perceive any problems in establishing a good rapport with the respondents. Then, to ensure the informed consent of participants, I sent the consent forms via email sometime prior to the interviews, so that the respondents could read it and send it back once signed. Since two respondents could not print the forms or sign them electronically, I obtained their consent orally before starting the interviews.

4.3 Selection of the Sample

The population of the present study is the volunteers of *Accueillons*, which consisted in 27 family units at the time of the field work, in March 2020. The selection of the respondents followed the purposive sampling, a non-probability form of sampling used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). This technique aims at selecting the respondents taking into consideration their characteristics, which should be relevant and enable the researcher to answer the research questions (ibid). The participants of this study have been selected in a strategic way, following two main criteria: their experience as volunteers of *Accueillons* and their place of residence. In fact, the respondents in order to be able to contribute in a meaningful and resourceful way to the study, they had to have already hosted some minors with *Accueillons*. Then, due to logistical reasons, only volunteers living in Paris and the Île-de-France department were contacted.

The procedure of sample selection was done in collaboration with the key informant of this study, who had an important role in reaching the possible respondents. In fact, the volunteers of *Accueillons* meeting the criteria previously discussed have been selected and then contacted via email by the key informant, who knew them and where I had the opportunity to briefly introduce myself and my research project, and ask if they were willing to participate and do a semi-structured interview. All the volunteers the key informant reached out to agreed to participate to the research project, and were later contacted via text message or email directly by the researcher using the contact details provided by the key informant.

The final sample consisted in seven volunteers of *Accueillons*, six women and one man whose age ranged between 41 and 65 years. All the respondents had French nationality and two of them had one or both parents originating from other countries. Among the participants, four

were married and three were divorced, and all of them had between one to four children. The educational background of the respondents ranged from undergraduate to postgraduate studies, so all respondents had tertiary education. Their job positions were either at the managerial or professional level, with one being retired. As volunteers of *Accueillons*, four respondents had hosted one unaccompanied minor, while two had hosted two minors and one hosted four, depending mainly on the length of the engagement with the organization. The minors integrating the hosting network were originating mainly from West African countries such as Ivory Coast, Mali, Gambia and Guinea, and one was from Afghanistan.

In the following table you can find the sociodemographic details of the respondents summarized above.

Table 1: Sociodemographic details of the participants.

Participants ¹⁸	Participant 1 (f)	Participant 2 (f)	Participant 3 (f)	Participant 4 (f)	Participant 5 (f)	Participant 6 (m)	Participant 7 (f)
Age group	40-49	40-49	40-49	50-59	50-59	60-69	50-59
Nationality	French	French	French and other EU nationality	French	French	French	French
Migration background (up to parents)	No migrant background	Parents have a migrant background	Parents have a migrant background	No migrant background	No migrant background	No migrant background	No migrant background
Educational level (ISCED code¹⁹)	Bachelor (ISCED 6)	Master (ISCED 7)	Master (ISCED 7)	PhD (ISCED 8)	Master (ISCED 7)	Bachelor (ISCED 6)	Master (ISCED 7)
Occupational situation (ISCO category²⁰)	Manager (ISCO 1) Full-time	Manager (ISCO 1) Full-time	Manager (ISCO 1) Full-time	Manager (ISCO 1) Full-time	Professional (ISCO 2) Full-time	Retired (Professional) (ISCO 2)	Professional (ISCO 2) Full-time
Marital status and number of children	Married 2 children	Married 2 children	Divorced 1 child	Married 3 children	Divorced 2 children	Divorced 2 children	Married 4 children
UASC hosted and length of engagement with <i>Accueillons</i>	2 UASC Over 1 year	3 UASC Over 1 year	1 UASC Less than 1 year	1 UASC Less than 1 year	1 UASC Less than a year	1 UASC Less than 1 year	4 UASC 3 years
Previous volunteer experiences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹⁸ Gender: (f) female and (m) male.

¹⁹ ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) is the international classification for organizing education of the UNESCO. ISCED code for level of education: 0 early childhood, 1 primary, 2 lower secondary, 3 upper secondary, 4, post secondary, 5 short-cycle tertiary, 6 bachelor or equivalent, 7 master or equivalent, 8 doctoral or equivalent.

²⁰ ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations) is an International Labour Organization (ILO) classification of job categories into 10 groups according to the tasks and duties. Group 1: managers, group 2: professionals, group 3: technicians, group 4: clerical support workers, group 5: service and sales workers, group 6: skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, group 7: crafts and related trade workers, group 8: plant and machine operators, group 9: elementary occupations and group 10: armed forces occupations.

4.4 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected with the interviews was analysed using the thematic approach, a method used in qualitative research to identify, analyze and interpret “patterns of meaning” or themes (Clarke & Braun, 2016). This technique is particularly useful when exploring the participants’ personal perceptions, views and perspectives (ibid), since it enables an in-depth analysis. This analytic method was chosen also because of its simplicity and flexibility (Bryman, 2012). In fact, the transcriptions and notes were carefully read several times to obtain a sense of the whole, then Nvivo software was used to code the collected data and identify the emerging themes and subthemes. This process was eased by the division of the interviews in different sections: personal information, volunteering experiences, motivations and reflections.

The coding process for each section was made using a table divided into three columns, with the text extracted and coded in the left one, and then the sub-themes and main themes identified and reported in the other two columns. The emerging themes for each section were grouped together and discussed within the theoretical approaches presented in the second chapter of the present thesis. The final findings were divided into three sections in order to answer the research questions: the determinants of volunteer participation, the volunteering experience with *Accueillons* and the reflections.

The analysis of the collected data was done directly in French, and the translation into English was done only after the coding and the identification of the main themes. The quotes from the transcriptions considered to be meaningful were then translated into English and added to the chapter of the findings and analysis.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations need to be made during the conduction of social research, and careful attention needs to be paid to the different ethical issues which may arise in the different stages of the research process. The main ethical principles considered for this research study include the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, their informed consent and the harm to participants.

The first ethical consideration made was the need to ensure the participants’ anonymity and confidentiality (Bryman, 2012, p.136). In fact, considering that the total population of the

study was relatively small (*Accueillons* had 27 volunteer foster families at the time of the research), and that the method of data collection consisted in in-depth interviews, the possibility for the respondents to be identified once the research was published was considered to be moderately high. Therefore, in order to reduce the possibility of identification, the names of the participants were anonymized and relevant sociodemographic details such as age, field of education and sector of employment were presented in a way that guarantees their anonymity. For instance, I used age groups instead of their actual age and rather than focusing on the specific field of their education and employment, I considered their educational level using the ISCED classification and their occupation category according to the ISCO ones. Moreover, the confidentiality of the respondents is ensured by the fact that only the researcher has access and has worked with the information collected. The sensitive data, the notes and the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews have been and will be kept strictly confidential and used only in the framework of the present research project.

Another important ethical principle taken into account was informed consent, which stresses the importance of giving the participants all the information about the research, from the nature of the study, to the object and the possible implications after the publication (*ibid*, p.139), so that they are able to make an informed decision about their involvement in the research. In order to guarantee that all participants have gotten all the information they need to make an informed decision, they have been provided with a written consent form presenting the research project and all the implications of their participation. Then, during the interviews I had the opportunity to ask whether they had any questions or doubts they wanted to discuss.

Lastly, I considered also the principle of harm to participants, which includes both physical and psychological harm (*ibid*, 135). In fact, individuals may feel pressured and stressed before and while being interviewed and recorded. And since stress is considered to be a form of psychological harm (*ibid*), it was important to make the respondents feel at ease during the interview. However, after careful reflections and the evaluation of the profile of the respondents and of the topic of my research, which is not particularly sensitive, I concluded that the participants to the present research were not harmed during data collection and will not be harmed after the publication of the final thesis.

4.6 Reflections and Limitations of the Study

The choice of the topic of the present research was influenced by several factors. I have always paid attention to the events related to the European Migrant Crisis of 2015, following the main discourses and debates. In fact, the media coverage of the migration crisis was widespread in the whole EU, included my country, Italy. Thanks to this mediatisation and my personal interest I learnt about the several human rights violations experienced by migrants and asylum-seekers in various EU countries. Then, during the year I lived in Paris as an exchange student, I became aware of the problematic situation of many migrants and asylum-seekers and unaccompanied minors in the city.

During the MFamily Master's programme, the topic of unaccompanied minors was discussed in several lectures, related to migration and social work, and their vulnerability was oftentimes underlined. So I started to inform myself and read more about this specific group of migrants and decided that I would do my Master's dissertation on them. However, after some reflections and discussions with professors and classmates, I concluded that conducting a research with unaccompanied minors in the limited time frame of this Master's would pose some major ethical issues. In fact, considering their vulnerability, the risk to cause harm to them was high, especially because I do not have a social work background and would not be able to provide the support they might need. In June 2019, a friend introduced me to *Utopia 56* and I learned about their work and about *Accueillons*. So I contacted them and asked if I could do a short internship with them and if it was possible to conduct a research on the perceptions of the volunteers of *Accueillons*.

The limitations of the present research are mainly related to the limited time frame to conduct the study, which did not allow to have a larger number of participants. An additional challenge was represented by the outbreak of the COVID-19 and by the measures of social distancing imposed in France which affected the fieldwork research and data collection, and the overall organization of the dissertation project. In fact, the lockdown made it necessary to switch from face to face interviews to online ones when I had already started the data collection since I had to travel back to my home country. However, I found that it did not impact the participation of the respondents, in fact, when asked to do the interviews via audio or video calls, all the participants agreed positively but it certainly had an impact on the possibility to reach more participants.

In addition, being an explorative study of the experiences of a limited group of people, the present research presents the limitations typical of qualitative case study researches. In fact, considering the small number of participants and the general population of the study consisting in around 30 people, the findings of this research cannot be generalized since they are context specific and the research itself would be difficult to replicate.

The fact that I am Italian and not a native French speaker did not affect in a significant way the research process, in fact, since I am proficient in French, I was able to interact with the participants in their native language and to access French documents and sources of information. Moreover, my fieldwork experience was facilitated by the fact that I already knew the context of the research and by the support and meaningful insights received from the staff of *Utopia 56*.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the study emerged from the analysis of the gathered material and which have been divided into three main dimensions. The section 5.1 aims to explore the sociodemographic determinants of volunteering participation and the personal motivations of the participants of the study. The section 5.2 will explore the perceptions of the respondents as foster families for unaccompanied minor and how they perceive their role towards the minors hosted. Then, the last section 5.3 I will present the reflections of the respondents on the values guiding their engagement and their point of view on the role played by civil society organizations in the protection of unaccompanied and separated children in France.

5.1 Determinants of the Engagement of the Volunteers of *Accueillons*

In this section I will discuss the sociodemographic characteristics of the volunteers of *Accueillons* which have been found in literature to act as determinants of formal volunteer participation and to be common among formal volunteers. Secondly, I will focus on the respondents' personal motivations mentioned as informing their decision to engage with *Accueillons*.

5.1.1 Sociodemographic Determinants

Several studies explored the social profile of formal volunteers according to their sociodemographic characteristics, including gender, age, ethnic background, educational level, situation in the labour market, category of occupation and socioeconomic status. As discussed in the second chapter of the present thesis, the resources approach used by sociologists assumes that participation in formal volunteering activities depends on individuals' resources. In fact, the human and social capital of individuals have been observed to influence volunteering participation in different studies. For the purpose of the present study I will focus on their human and social capital, which are generally dependent on their educational background and situation in the labour market, and on their level of social participation.

France is among the countries of the European Union with a medium-high participation in volunteering, in fact in the last decade between 37% and 40% of the population engaged in either formal or informal volunteering activities (France Bénévolat & IFOP, 2019, p.3). Most people is estimated to volunteer within a formal setting through an organization or an association, and the social and charitable sector employs the largest share of volunteers in France (around 30% of the total) (France Bénévolat & IFOP, 2019, p.9). The volunteers of *Accueillons* belong to this group of *bénévoles* since they are engaged through a non-profit organization and provide protection and care to unaccompanied and separated children in a vulnerable situation as volunteer foster families.

The seven respondents of this study consist in six women and one man, whose age ranges between 41 and 64 years and who at the time of the fieldwork research (March 2020) were living in the Île-de-France region. The fact that the respondents of this study were adults aged between 41 and 64 could be explained by the nature of the volunteering engagement of *Accueillons*, which requires an everyday commitment probably compatible with a stable life stage that younger people may not have. Considerations cannot be made instead, in regards to the gender of the respondents and consequently it is not possible to draw conclusions on the engagement with *Accueillons* depending on gender. Firstly, because gender was not considered as a criterion in the process of the sample selection, and secondly because *Accueillons* is composed of volunteer foster families with various family composition, from one-person households, single parents with children, couples and couples with children. The respondents in some cases were only one of the members of the family units, therefore drawing conclusions from the gender of the respondents interviewed does not fully reflect the composition of the volunteers of *Accueillons*.

All the participants were born and raised in France and had French citizenship, and only two of them had a migrant background, in one case the parents migrated to France from another European country and in the other one of the parents migrated from an Asian country. Among the seven participants, four were married and three divorced, but they were all parents, having between one and four children each. However, only three respondents had young children living with them at home during their engagement with *Accueillons*, while the other four had older children who were not living with them anymore.

As shown in the Table 1 (page 62), the participants of the study present a similar profile in terms of educational background, situation in the labour market and occupation category. In

fact, all the respondents had a higher education qualification ranging between the ISCED codes 6 and 8: two had a Bachelor's degree (ISCED 6), four had a Master's degree (ISCED 7) and one participant had a PhD (ISCED 8). The fields of study were various, from economics, to engineering, business, medicine, design and history. The educational background of the respondents confirms the trends observed in national and international studies that found higher participation in formal volunteering among individuals with high educational background. While for what it concerns the situation in the labour market, six were employed (five full time and one part-time) while one was retired, confirming the national trends of 2010 when employed people represented the largest share of formal volunteers in France (30%) while retired people accounted for 23% (Educational, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2010b, p.7). The jobs of all seven respondents were either at the managerial or professional level and they were working in sectors such as banking, IT (information technology), medicine and education. The fact that the respondents' jobs were at the professional and managerial levels seems to confirm the theory stating that individuals in higher occupation categories are more likely to be socially active and engage in volunteering activities, especially in the formal volunteering sector (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p.253).

For what it concerns the dimension of the social capital of the respondents, I focused on their previous and simultaneous volunteering experiences, especially with children, adolescents and migrant populations. All the respondents had some previous volunteering experiences (either formal or informal), and several mentioned that they regularly support financially charity and non-profit organizations. Moreover, three participants had already engaged in volunteering activities targeting migrants and asylum-seekers before engaging with *Accueillons*, and the majority of the respondents (five out of seven) had past or simultaneous experiences in volunteering with children and adolescents. Their past and present engagements as volunteers belong mainly to the social and charitable volunteering sector, which as previously mentioned is the one engaging the largest share of volunteers in France (France Bénévolat & IFOP, 2019, p.9).

These findings seem to confirm the Human capital theory, which sustains that individuals with high levels of human capital tend to engage more in formal volunteering. Therefore, the link between the educational level and the situation in the labour market of individuals and formal volunteer participation seems to be confirmed. Moreover, the fact that all the respondents had previous and/or simultaneous volunteering experiences to their engagement with *Accueillons*, suggests that they probably have high levels of social capital as well. In

fact, people socially active and engaged in one or more civil society organization tend to have high levels of social capital, extensive social networks and be integrated in the community.

In conclusion, the social profile of the volunteers taking part to the present research seems to confirm the link between the individuals' resources in terms of human and social capital and the inclination to formally volunteer. However, while the resource approach is useful in identifying the link between some sociodemographic characteristics and volunteer participation, it does not explain the personal motivations of individuals that I will present in the next section.

5.1.2 Motivations

In this section I will present the motivations mentioned by the participants as informing their decision to volunteer and engage with *Accueillons*. Several reasons are related to the respondents' opinions on some contextual situations and circumstances, while others are more practical reasons.

Contextual motivations

The respondents described their engagement with *Accueillons* as being influenced by several motivations, mainly related to the general situation of the reception of migrants and asylum-seekers. In fact, the management of migration influxes in the EU and specifically in France in the last years was criticized by several respondents, who stressed the importance to improve the reception conditions and integration processes. The situation of migrants and asylum-seekers was conceived as urgent especially in the metropolitan area of Paris and some of its neighbourhoods, where hundreds of them are forced to live in makeshift camps. Some respondents referred to the media coverage of the situation of migrants and asylum-seekers as informing their decision to actively engage. Others instead mentioned the fact of being directly exposed to the poor living conditions of these people as influencing their choice, due to the proximity to the places where the majority of migrants and asylum-seekers live and spend their days. The respondents shared feelings of outrage and dissatisfaction towards the management of migrants and asylum-seekers, which made them feel the need to actively engage and reach out to *Accueillons*. Hereafter some quotes from the interviews:

*« I find completely revolting the fact that we do not receive migrants, not only that we do not receive them but that we also treat them badly, and that we lock them up in detention centres, that we let them die on the boats and that they are in the streets »*²¹

(Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

*« We are a little immersed in shocking images of the journeys of migrants. [...] We live in an area close to some shanty towns, of the places where migrants live, we are not far from (place where many migrants live) especially. So the idea of this proximity without doing anything started to lie heavy on our conscience »*²² (Respondent 1, female, age 40-49)

*« In the last months, even if it was not a new thing, there were instances especially of evacuations of camps which were truly so shocking that I said to myself that I needed to stop putting that in the back of my mind and that I needed to do something too, I needed to take part in the movement of people who tried to help those people and who try to shake the situation »*²³ (Respondent 5, female, age 50-59)

When asked if there were any particular reasons for their decision to engage in a volunteering activity created specifically to support and protect children, three main elements were mentioned. The first concerns the perception of children, and in particular unaccompanied children, as the most vulnerable among migrants and asylum-seekers, because they find themselves alone and in an unfamiliar place. Therefore, the urge to help them was motivated by their vulnerability and their protection needs, as confirmed by the following quotations:

*« They are the most vulnerable, they are alone and I believe it is them we need to help urgently »*²⁴ (Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

²¹ Original quote : « Je trouve totalement révoltant qu'on accueille pas les migrants, non seulement qu'on les accueille pas mais qu'on les traite aussi mal et que on les enferme dans les centres de détention, qu'on les laisse mourir sur les bateaux et qu'ils soient dans la rue ».

²² Original quote : « On baigne un peu dans des images un peu choquantes des parcours des migrants. Qu'on habite dans une zone proche de certaines bidonvilles, des endroits où le migrants se posent, on est pas loin de (lieu où beaucoup de migrants vivent) notamment. Donc l'idée de cette proximité sans rien faire commencé à peser un peu sur la conscience».

²³ Original quote : « Dans ce dernier mois là même si c'était pas nouveau il y avait vraiment de moments notamment d'évacuations de camps qui étaient vraiment tellement choquantes que je me suis dite il faut que j'arrête de mettre ça dans un coin de ma tête et il faut que je fasse quelque chose aussi moi, que je participe au mouvement des gens qui essayent d'aider ces gens là et qui essayent de bouger la situation ».

²⁴ Original quote: « Ils sont le plus vulnérables, qui sont seuls et ça me paraît que c'est eux qu'il faut aider en urgence».

*« We need to protect those who apparently are the most deprived, the most vulnerable »*²⁵

(Respondent 7, female, age 50-59)

In addition, some respondents judged quite harshly the lack of protection from the French State, which resulted in many unaccompanied minors living in the streets of Paris in the last years. The situation of homelessness of many unaccompanied minors was explicitly described as *«not admissible»* and *«unbearable»* by several respondents. Then, the third element some participants mentioned as partially influencing their decision to engage with children was the fact of being parents themselves. In fact, having children seemed to make the participants more sensitive to the situation of migrant children, and led to their engagement with *Accueillons*.

*« It is not possible that children sleep outside. [...] We have children, [...], so we are sensitized by the incredible courage of these young people who flee their country, we find that astounding »*²⁶ (Respondent 7, female, age 50-59)

*« I have children, [...], I envision a lot more easily. [...] An adolescent in the streets at 18 years of age it is not conceivable for me »*²⁷
(Respondent 2, female, age 40-49)

*« I have children myself and I work with children [...] but even without that for me it is inhumane to think that we can leave adolescents, children like that in the streets, without any means, without anyone to rely on, without support, without help.. that is inconceivable »*²⁸
(Respondent 5, female, age 50-59)

Finally, one respondent mentioned the desire to better understand the management of migration influxes by the French State, so the volunteering experience with *Accueillons* was conceived also as an opportunity to learn about the reception system of asylum-seekers and become more aware of its problems and shortcomings. The respondent underlined the importance of being conscious and aware of the issues related to the management of

²⁵ Original quote : « C'est de protéger ceux qui apparemment sont les plus démunis, les plus fragiles ».

²⁶ Original quote : « C'est pas possible que des enfants dorment dehors. [...] On a des enfants, leur âge c'est de 26 à 32 ans, donc on est sensibilisé par le courage incroyable des jeunes qui fuient leur pays, on trouve ça formidable quoi ».

²⁷ Original quote : « J'ai des enfants, [...] je me projette beaucoup plus facilement, [...] un adolescent ou une adolescente à la rue à 18 ans c'est pas concevable pour moi ».

²⁸ Original quote: « J'ai moi-même des enfants et je travaille [...] avec des enfants, mais même sans ça, pour moi c'est inhumain de penser que on peut laisser des adolescents, des enfants comme ça dans la rue sans moyens, sans personne de relais, sans soutien, sans aide.. voilà c'est de l'impensable ».

immigration in order to be able to make an informed political decision, considering that immigration is a major issue in the political debate in many EU countries.

« To discover while understanding what is happening, and the reception conditions of the country I live in, so to become aware of the mysteries and of the lack of structures, of the lack of coherence in what is happening. [...] In order to have an understanding and so to be able to have the free will and to position myself politically with the full knowledge of facts and not only undergo the information »²⁹ (Respondent 7, female, age 50-59)

Practical reasons

Some respondents also mentioned practicalities as influencing their decision and ability to become volunteers of *Accueillons*. More free time and the availability of a spare bedroom in the house were mentioned by some respondents as enabling them to engage in this particular volunteering initiative. The only retired respondent referred to have more free time since he did not work anymore and since he recently had put an end to his long-term engagement as a volunteer with another institution. This previous volunteering engagement was similar to *Accueillons*, since it consisted in hosting and supporting young people in need, therefore, for this particular respondent the engagement with *Accueillons* represented a continuity to the kind of volunteering activities he was engaging in before. Two respondents mentioned instead that they decided to become volunteers of *Accueillons* since they had a spare bedroom in the house, which was used before by the daughter in one case and by a flatmate in the other. The engagement with *Accueillons* may be considered quite demanding, since it is not an activity done a few hours once or twice a week, but it involves the everyday lives of the volunteers and their families. One factor which probably facilitates the engagement is the fact that the minors are hosted by two or three families in turns, so one family hosts him/her for one month or more at a time. Overall the respondents described the engagement with *Accueillons* as accessible and feasible, but they also acknowledged the time and energies spent dealing with bureaucratic and administrative procedures, and the support provided to the minors for issues related to school, training and language courses and leisure activities. However, regardless being a type of volunteering activity which requires commitment and dedication everyday, it can be considered as feasible because the majority of the respondents of the study conducted

²⁹ Original quote : « Découvrir aussi dans la compréhension de ce qui se passe et les conditions d'accueil du pays où je vis, donc prendre conscience des arcanes ou de l'absence des structures, du manque de cohérence de ce qui se passe. [...] Pour avoir une compréhension et puis pour pouvoir avoir un libre arbitre et après pour pouvoir me positionner en connaissance de cause politiquement et pas juste subir l'information ».

active lives. In fact, six of the seven respondents were employed and five worked full-time, and three of them had young children.

5.2 The Volunteering Experience with *Accueillons*

In this section I will present the overall perceptions of the experiences of the volunteers of *Accueillons*, focusing on how they lived and what they got in return from the hosting experience, and on how they perceived their role towards the minors hosted.

5.2.1 What Volunteers Get in Return from Their Engagement

When asked to describe their experience as volunteer foster families for unaccompanied and separated children, all the participants described it in positive terms, as enriching, interesting and satisfying. Some respondents mentioned that their engagement made them feel satisfied and that they were doing something concrete to help others. One respondent talked about their engagement to support the minors in these terms:

*« A conscience a little bit lighter, even if we know that it is only a drop of water[...] A feeling of satisfaction, because we can say that it is a drop of water but in reality it is real people who exist, real children who are under our eyes and we see that they pull through, so that brings satisfaction »*³⁰ (Respondent 1, female, age 40-49)

Moreover, the volunteering experience was seen as an opportunity to practice open-mindedness towards others and other cultures, customs and mindsets. The chance to learn and get to know other cultures was mentioned by most respondents among the positive aspects of the engagement. In fact, living and sharing everyday life with the minors enabled the families to learn and discover their cultures and customs. In addition, those volunteers who had young children highlighted the importance of this experience also in regards to their own children, who have as well the opportunity to learn, grow and enjoy the company of the unaccompanied minor being hosted. In particular, some volunteers mentioned the desire to make their children aware of their privileges and to transmit them certain values such as solidarity and the importance of helping others.

³⁰ Original quote : « Une conscience un tout petit peu plus allégée, même si on sait que c'est une goutte d'eau [...]. Un sentiment de satisfaction, parce que on peut dire que c'est une goutte d'eau mais en vrai c'est de vraies personnes qui existent, des vraies enfants qu'on a sous les yeux et on voit qui s'en sortent donc ça apporte une satisfaction ».

« Then indeed there are all the cultural differences which I consider to be very enriching to discover and share »³¹ (Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

« It is enriching for us as adults, because we learn to know people with different paths, it is enriching also for my children, to understand that there are... that not everybody has the same path and experiences. It is also an occasion for my children to discover different cultures, different origins and different stories. It is the openness, the openness to the world and to the others, and that is part of the educational values I want to transmit to my children »³²
(Respondent 2, female, age 40-49)

« So one of the motivations is that my son can discover other cultures, discover other stories too, because they are surrounded by people who are well and who do not have money problems and who have not known difficulties, and I think that it is important for him also to know that not everything is simple, that there are people who have more difficult paths »³³
(Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

The volunteering experience with *Accueillons* was perceived as an enriching experience also because of the personal relations established between the family members and the minors hosted. The sharing of positive moments and experiences, brought joy and happiness to both the family members and the minors. The volunteers and family members played an important role in encouraging and supporting the minors during rough and complicated situations, mainly linked to their past history or present difficulties. In these cases, negative feelings such as sadness, anxiety and frustration were as well shared among the foster families and the minors.

« And then in the everyday life, when they are at home it brings joy also, with the children a lot of sharing, emotions of sadness at times and suffering when they tell about their past, their

³¹ Original quote : « Après effectivement il y a toutes le différences culturelles qui sont je trouve une grande richesse à découvrir et à partager ».

³² Original quote : « C'est enrichissant pour nous en tant que adultes, parce que on apprend à faire connaissance avec d'autre gens avec des parcours différents, c'est enrichissant beaucoup aussi pour mes enfants, de comprendre qu'il y a voilà... que tout le monde n'a pas le même parcours. C'est aussi l'occasion pour mes enfants de découvrir des cultures différentes, des origines différentes et des histoires différentes. C'est l'ouverture, c'est une ouverture sur le monde et sur les autre, et ça fait parti du valeurs éducatives que je veux transmettre à mes enfants » .

³³ Original quote: « Alors un des motivations c'est que mon fils puisse découvrir autres cultures, découvrir autres histoires aussi, parce qu'il est entourés de gens qui vont bien et qui ont pas problèmes d'argent et qui ont pas connu des choses difficiles, et je pense que c'est important pour lui aussi de savoir que tout n'est pas simple, que il y a de gens qui ont de parcours beaucoup plus difficiles ».

*story, or stress when we see they are waiting to unlock the administrative situation, so they are anxious, so a lot of sharing of emotions, but among these emotions there is still quite a lot of joy »*³⁴ (Respondent 1, female, age 40-49)

*« It is really interesting, then *name of the minor* is super brave, she is super nice so frankly it is great »*³⁵ (Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

*« So much fun, so much happiness even if there are some moments where she is sad, she cries a lot and she is afraid. [...] I am really lucky to have met the minor I am hosting, to have met this young girl, because besides the fact that it is a responsibility and in terms expenses, as a commitment, for me humanly the meeting of others is essential in life.. so I consider that it is a chance for me [...]. In any case we don't talk enough about this, the richness that meetings like these can offer »*³⁶ (Respondent 5, female, age 50-59)

Finally, the very different and more frugal way of living of the minor hosted made one respondent question and reflect on her lifestyle, so the volunteering experience was also seen as an occasion to question herself and to improve as well, as confirmed by the following quote:

*« She puts in perspective what is important and what is superficial in our ultra consumerist society.. so it is small things but they have a way of thinking which is not ours »*³⁷
(Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

In conclusion, the hosting experience of an unaccompanied and separated children was described as positive and enriching under different aspects, besides being a concrete and

³⁴ Original quote : « Et puis au quotidien quand ils sont à la maison ça apporte de la joie aussi, avec les enfants beaucoup de partage, de l'émotion de fois dans la tristesse et la souffrance quand ils racontent leur passé, leur histoire, ou du stress quand on voit qu'ils sont en attente de déverrouiller la situation administrative, voilà qu'ils sont angoissé, donc voilà, beaucoup de partage d'émotions, mais parmi ces émotions il y a quand même pas mal de joie ».

³⁵ Original quote : « C'est intéressant, puis *nom de la mineur* est super courageuse, elle est hyper agréable, donc franchement c'est chouette ».

³⁶ Original quote : « Que de plaisir, que du bon humeur même si il y a des moments où elle est très triste, elle pleure beaucoup et a peur. J'ai énormément de change d'avoir rencontré la mineure que j'héberge, d'avoir rencontré cette jeune fille, parce que au-delà que ça soit une responsabilité et comme charges, comme engagement, moi humainement c'est le rencontre qui est fondamentale dans la vie.. voilà je considère que c'est une chance pour moi [...]. En tout cas on parle pas assez de ça, de la richesse que ça peuvent présenter des rencontres comme ça ».

³⁷ Original quote : « Elle remet en perspective ce qui est important et ce qui est superficiel dans notre société d'ultra consommation.. voilà c'est de petites choses mais ils ont une manière de penser qui n'est pas la même que notre ».

accessible way to support and help children in need. The personal relations established between the minors and the hosting families, and the sharing of positive and negative everyday life moments was perceived as a meaningful and enriching aspect of the engagement. Moreover, it was described as an opportunity to practice openness towards others and to explore other cultures and customs. The aspects of cultural differences between the minors and the hosting families contributed to enrich the experience, which was an occasion to learn and broaden the horizons both for the adults and children of the volunteer foster families, and an occasion to reflect on oneself lifestyle.

5.2.2 The Roles of the Volunteers

The participants, as volunteers of *Accueillons*, considered to take on multiple roles towards the minors hosted, which were similar to those of a parental figure. The main objective of the hosting network is to ensure the safety and protection of unaccompanied minors, through the provision of a stable and appropriate accommodation solution, even if for a determined period of time which can range from a few months up to a year. Besides ensuring a safe place to live to the minors, the volunteers were also responsible for providing for all of their material needs, including food, clothes and any other necessity.

*« We have a first role which is the one of a shelter, so a shelter does not mean that we are her/his parents, but it means that we represent nevertheless a form of safety and protection, so that means for me emotional security »*³⁸

(Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

*« It is a temporary shelter solution, material, emotional as well, because there are.. we are in a small setting, here they are part of the family for the time of their staying here. It is about bringing some stability when the paths have been difficult and chaotic, to make a clean sweep of the past and to project oneself into the future »*³⁹

(Respondent 2, female, age 40-49)

³⁸ Original quote : « On a un premier rôle qui c'est celui d'un foyer, donc un foyer ça veut pas dire qu'on est ses parents, mais ça vaut dire qu'on représente quand même une forme de sécurité et de protection, donc ça veut dire pour moi une sécurité affective ».

³⁹ Original quote : « C'est une mise à l'abri temporaire, matérielle, affective aussi, parce que il y a.. on est dans un petit cadre, ici ils font partie de la famille le temps de leur présence ici. C'est apporter un peu de stabilité quand les parcours ont été difficiles et chaotiques, pour faire table rase du passé et se projeter dans l'avenir ».

The volunteer foster families played a key role in supporting the unaccompanied minors they hosted in different ways, supporting them emotionally and promoting and encouraging their integration process. The majority of participants underlined the importance of ensuring the warmth of the family environment to the minors and of providing moral and emotional support to them, especially during rough or difficult times. Some respondents also mentioned the desire to show them solidarity and to establish a close relationship, in order to help them cope with their difficult past experiences.

*« Even if we cannot guarantee that the person will manage, we can show humanity, that they are not surrounded only by a system a bit cynic which sends them from administration to administration, that there are real people who perceive their real existence. [...] We have a role, I think, to bring that layer of warmth and humanity and closeness »*⁴⁰

(Respondent 1, female, age 40-49)

*« Clearly financial security, to ensure that she has enough to eat, that she is warm, so that is the paternal aspect, but actually I am not her mother, but nevertheless I need to insure her this emotional security, I believe that to be very important »*⁴¹

(Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

The role of the hosting network was also seen as an opportunity for the minors to start over and plan their future. In fact, the stability, safety and tranquillity of the family environment was perceived by the respondents as enabling the minors to let go of the past and project themselves into their future life. Then, the families had a major role in enhancing and promoting the integration process of the minors. In fact, the hosting experience gives them the opportunity to learn or improve their language skills and to learn about the French culture and society by living with a family which acts as a mediator. Therefore, the families have also an educational role in teaching and introducing the minors to things they might not know, and to support them while attending courses or going to school.

⁴⁰ Original quote : « Même si on peut pas garantir que la personne va s'en sortir, leur montrer un visage d'humanité, qui sont pas entouré que d'un système un peu cynique qui les balade d'administration en administration, qui il y a des vraie personnes qui perçoivent leur vraie existence ».

⁴¹ Original quote : « Évidemment de la sécurité financière, de s'assurer qu'elle aie assez à manger, qu'elle aie chaud, donc voilà, ça c'est le côté paternelle, mais c'est pas justement je suis pas sa maman mais j'ai quand même, il faut quand même que je lui assure cette sécurité affective, je trouve que c'est vraiment importante ».

« We are like a trampoline in a moment of their life to allow them to integrate, to be able to prepare for their new life »⁴² (Respondent 2, female, age 40-49)

« It is precisely the educational aspect, for instance to encourage them to study maths and French when they are at home or to explain them the small things of the culture, so to teach them... to help them in the integration and to advance, to give them small lessons, to find good books for them »⁴³ (Respondent 1, female, age 40-49)

Furthermore, some participants mentioned their role in promoting the social life of the minors and their integration within the families' network. This includes encouraging any leisure or sports activity, but also meetings with friends the minors may have. Moreover, some respondents talked about how they tried to make the minors feel as an integrant part of their families and lives, through introducing them to their friends and relatives and gathering together, as confirmed in the following quotes:

« A social and cultural role, so I have many friends and many of them come by my house often and they have welcomed her very well »⁴⁴
(Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

« If there are people coming over at my house, they meet them, it is an crucial part, we make them meet our children [...] Our children sometimes invite them out to do sports, to.. so they are integrated »⁴⁵ (Respondent 7, female, age 40-49)

In conclusion, the respondents described their role towards the minors hosted as being similar to the one of a parental figure. In fact, the volunteers and family members provide emotional and moral support, besides the material and financial one, but also play a major role in promoting the integration process of the minors.

⁴² Original quote : « Comme étant un tremplin à un moment de leur vie pour pouvoir intégrer, pour pouvoir se préparer à leur nouvelle vie ».

⁴³ Original quote : « C'est justement ce côté éducation, par exemple les inciter à travailler le maths et le français quand ils sont à la maison ou leur expliquer des petit choses de la culture, fin les apprendre.. les aider à s'intégrer et progresser, leur donner un petit peu de cours, leur trouver des bons livres ».

⁴⁴ Original quote : « Un rôle social et un rôle culturel, donc moi j'ai énormément d'amis et j'ai beaucoup d'amis qui viennent souvent à la maison et qui l'ont super bien accueillie ».

⁴⁵ Original quote : « Si il y a des gens qui viennent à la maison, ils les rencontrent, c'est parti intégrante, on leur a fait rencontrer nos enfants [...]. Nos enfants des fois les ont sollicités à l'extérieur pour un sport, pour..voilà donc ils sont intégrés ».

The overall experience of the respondents as volunteers of *Accueillons* was described in positive terms and as enriching on different levels. The sharing of everyday life and various moments with the minors was highly valued and described as a fundamental aspect of the engagement both for the volunteers and for the other family members. The respondents also acknowledged the commitment and responsibility required by this type of volunteering engagement, which however were overshadowed by the enriching relations and moments shared together with the minors. As volunteers of *Accueillons*, the participants considered to undertake different roles in regards to the unaccompanied minors hosted, resulting to be similar to a parental figure. The respondents were aware that it was a temporary care solution, however they conceived it as an opportunity for the minors to focus on their future and to start a new chapter of their lives.

5.3 Reflections

In this section I will present and discuss the reflections of the respondents concerning the values guiding their engagement with *Accueillons* and their opinions on the role played by the civil society organizations in the protection of unaccompanied and separated children in France.

5.3.1 Values Guiding the Volunteering Engagement

The influence played by individuals' values on the participation in volunteering activities has been explored by social psychologists over the years, but there seems to be not a significant correlation between them (Wilson, 2000, p.219). In fact, the engagement in volunteering activities may be inspired and reflect different values according to each individual, but they do not act as determinants of volunteer participation. As Clay and Snyder (1999, p.157) underlined, volunteering is a way for individuals to express their values, therefore I wanted to investigate whether their engagement as volunteers of *Accueillons* was guided by or reflected some values and whether these were shared among the respondents. The values mentioned by the majority as guiding their engagement were human and social ones such as solidarity, compassion, respect, equality, liberty, care for others and the value of sharing. In addition, one respondent whose parents migrated to France from another EU country, mentioned her migrant family background and the education received from the parents as having informed the values and approach towards the others in general. In fact, the respondent referred to the

parents as role models, who were always engaging in volunteering activities in the community.

Hereafter some quotations:

« Solidarity first of all, a form of compassion »⁴⁶

(Respondent 1, female, age 40-49)

« I think that those who received a lot, like us that we had so much luck. It is important to help also those who have not.. so I do not know, it is logic [...] we need to share, it is normal, natural. [...] When you are a child of immigrants yourself, the openness towards other cultures maybe is already facilitated »⁴⁷ (Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

« The care for others for me is a value, the respect for others, fraternity »⁴⁸

(Respondent 5, female, age 50-59)

« The cooperation and collaboration with others and trying to participate in the community »⁴⁹ (Respondent 6, male, age 60-69)

When asked if any religious values guided their engagement, five out of seven respondents stated that they were not guided by religious values and some of them described themselves as not religious people. This finding could be in a way anticipated considering the secularism characterizing the French State and society, and the fact that in the last decades the number of non religious people has been increasing. In fact, the estimates based on the survey conducted in 2019 on a representative sample of the French population for the *Observatoire de la laïcité*⁵⁰, shows that more than half of the population is either not religious or atheist (31%), agnostic (15%) or indifferent towards religion (10%), while religious people account to 37% and the remaining 7% did not answer the survey (Observatoire de la laïcité, 2020).

⁴⁶ Original quote: « Solidarité avant tout, une forme de compassion ».

⁴⁷ Original quote : « Je pense qu'il faut que ceux qui ont reçu beaucoup, comme on a eu beaucoup de change comme nous. C'est important d'aider aussi ceux qui en n'ont pas.. fin je sais pas, c'est logique [...] il faut qu'ils partagent, c'est normale, naturel. [...] Quand on est un enfant soi-même de immigrés on a une ouverture sur les autres cultures peut être qui est déjà facilité ».

⁴⁸ Original quote : « L'attention à l'autre pour moi c'est un valeur, le respect de l'autre, la fraternité » .

⁴⁹ Original quote : « Une coopération et collaboration avec les autres et essayer de participer à une communauté ».

⁵⁰ *Observatoire de la laïcité* is a national advisory commission composed of members of the parliament and experts which assists the government in the promotion and respect of the principle of secularisation. The online survey was done on a sample of 2000 people representative the French population for the criteria of sex, age, profession, region and urban agglomeration.

In conclusion, a variety of values were described as guiding the respondents in their volunteering engagement with *Accueillons*, which mainly referred to the sphere of solidarity and care for others. The importance of the community was as well mentioned as important, while religious beliefs and values do not appear to be reflected in their volunteering engagement.

5.3.2 Role of Civil Society Organizations in the Protection of Unaccompanied and Separated Children in France

The participants had different views on the role of civil society organizations in the protection of unaccompanied and separated children in France, even if they all recognized the importance of their work and role in the support of people in need in general, and of migrants and asylum-seekers in particular. For instance, some respondents sustained that NGOs and associations substitute the State by carrying out part of its duties in the reception of migrants and asylum-seekers, and in the case of *Accueillons* towards unaccompanied minors. In particular, one respondent did believe that the existence and work of civil society organizations allows the State as a whole (including the citizens) to offload its responsibilities.

*« I think that these associations are essential and that most of all they substitute the State... luckily that they are there, to support these young people who find themselves in the street but we are aware that anyway when you are not of age you have the right to be taken in charge by the French State »*⁵¹ (Respondent 2, female, age 40-49)

*« An essential role, and at the same time they have a role that allows, it is the snake which bites its tail like we say in France, which allows the State to offload of its responsibility and offload those missions to the associations and to the volunteers who ensure what the State should »*⁵² (Respondent 5, female, age 50-59)

⁵¹ Original quote : « Je pense que ces associations sont indispensables et que surtout elles se substituent au devoir de l'État.. heureusement qu'elles sont là, pour accompagner ces jeunes qui sont à la rue mais on rappelle quand même que quand on est pas majeurs on doit être pris en charge par l'État français ».

⁵² Original quote : « Un rôle indispensable, et au même temps ils ont un rôle qui permet, et au même temps ils ont un rôle qui permet, c'est le serpent qui se mord la queue comme on dit en France, qui permet à l'État de se défaire de sa responsabilité et de se décharger de ces missions sur les associations et les bénévoles qui assurent ce que l'État devrait » .

*« The State cannot do everything and in France the State does quite a lot [...] it does not do everything perfectly but I rather try to complete the role of the State and to facilitate the role of the State »*⁵³ (Respondent 6, male, age 60-64)

Differently, others highlighted the fact that civil society organizations cannot really substitute the State because they do not have the capacity and the political leverage to actually implement policies to change and improve things. From this perspective, civil society organizations are conceived also as having a crucial role in encouraging change and raising awareness about social issues among citizens in order for them to make an informed political decision. The relation between the State and civil society organizations was also conceived as a sort of collaboration, where the NGOs and associations complement and facilitate the State in the fulfilment of its duties. In addition, some respondents underlined the need for the State to improve the reception conditions of migrants and asylum-seekers, and in specific of unaccompanied and separated children. Some respondents mentioned the importance of the warmth of a family environment and the positive effects of the relationships with the family members, who provide emotional support to the children. This element of closeness and proximity is considered to play a crucial role in the overall welfare of unaccompanied minors, and some participants expressed their perplexities on the ability of the State and institutional care arrangements to provide that for minors. Hereafter some quotes:

*« They cannot substitute the State because they do not have the political leverage so that is up to citizens to vote and I think that it is difficult for those associations because sometimes they have the role to rebel [...] and at the same time protest, inform and participate »*⁵⁴
(Respondent 7, female, age 50-59)

« I think that foster families are something really positive for these children [...], that depends also on the children and their stories but foster families bring the emotional support that you cannot find in the shelters and all of that. [...] I think that psychological evaluations should be

⁵³ Original quote : « L'État il peut pas tout faire et que en France l'État il fait plutôt pas mal de choses [...] il fait pas tout parfaitement bien mais j'essaye plutôt de compléter le rôle de l'État et de faciliter le rôle de l'État ».

⁵⁴ Original quote : « Ils ne peuvent pas se substituer à l'État parce qu'ils n'ont pas le levier politique donc ça c'est au citoyens de voter et je pense que c'est difficile pour ces associations parce qu'elles ont à la fois un rôle de insurgez-nous [...] et au même temps ils doivent s'insurger, informer et participer ».

done by the State and decide according to the child and to what is best for him/her »⁵⁵

(Respondent 3, female, age 40-49)

« There are people who think that to act at our level is counterproductive because it takes the responsibility away from the State, I do not think that, I obviously think that the State must increase its capacity to take in charge and the means used to bring out these young people from these difficult situations, so of course I am in favour of that but nonetheless I think that the State cannot bring that... what I described earlier, that warmth, that family closeness, it is a bit too far anyway from the State's capacity »⁵⁶ (Respondent 1, female, age 40-49)

In conclusion, the opinions of the respondents were not unanimous when it comes to the role of civil society organizations in the protection of unaccompanied minors in France. While some participants considered the associations and NGOs as collaborating and supporting the State in carrying out its functions, others had a more critical opinion. The State was seen as offloading its responsibilities on civil society organizations and not actively working to improve the situation not only of unaccompanied minors, but of migrants and asylum-seekers in general.

⁵⁵ Original quote : « Moi je pense que l'accueil en famille ça reste quelque chose de très positif pour ces enfants [...], ça dépend aussi des enfants et de leurs histoires mais l'accueil en famille ça apporte un soutien émotionnelle qui se trouve pas dans les foyers ou tout ça. [...] Je pense qu'il faudrait faire des évaluations psychologiques faite par l'Etat et de décider en fonction de l'enfant ce qui le correspond le mieux ».

⁵⁶ Original quote : « Il y a de personnes qui pensent que agir à notre niveau c'est contreproductif parce que c'est déresponsabiliser l'État, moi je pense pas ça, je pense évidemment que l'État doit augmenter sa capacité de prise en charge et les moyens qui met pour sortir ces jeunes de ces situations difficiles, donc évidemment que je milite pour ça mais je pense quand même que l'État peut pas apporter cette ce, ce que je décrivais toute à l'heure, cette chaleur cette proximité presque familiale, il est un peu trop loin quand même des capacités de l'État ».

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The purpose of the present dissertation was to explore the perceptions of the volunteers of *Accueillons*, a non-profit organization composed of volunteer foster families which host unaccompanied and separated children in need of protection in France. The study aimed to contribute to the study of volunteerism, and in particular to the growing scholarship on the formal volunteering sector targeting migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees in the French context. The relevance of studying the French context is also due to the fact that in recent years a growing number of civil society organizations and volunteers have mobilized to provide support to the increasing number of asylum-seekers arriving to France in search for a better future, including unaccompanied and separated children.

The present research is an exploratory qualitative study, which investigates the social profile, the motivations, the experiences and perceptions of a sample of respondents among the volunteers of *Accueillons*. The qualitative approach served the purpose of getting a better understanding of their personal perceptions on their engagement as volunteer foster families for unaccompanied and separated children. The data collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis and the main findings emerged were related to the main theories and grouped in themes and subthemes, and then discussed.

Respondents' engagement as formal volunteers of *Accueillons* seemed to be the result of a interplay of different elements. The analysis of the respondents' social profile according to the resource approach showed that the participants presented similar social characteristics for what it concerns age, educational background, situation in the labour market and family composition. In fact, they were all adults with their age ranging between 41 and 64 years, with tertiary education and a stable working situation, where they occupied or had occupied a professional or managerial position. They all conducted an active life and had multiple experiences of volunteering both in the formal and informal volunteer sector, and some engaged in multiple volunteering activities simultaneously. Moreover, all the respondents were parents and had between one and four children and were either married (four) or divorced (three). The social profile of the respondents, being highly educated and occupying highly qualified job positions seemed to confirm the relation observed between human capital, which is mainly dependent on education and employment, and participation in formal

volunteering through civil society organizations. In addition, their previous volunteering experiences and general active lifestyle seemed to confirm the relation between human capital and social capital, which has been observed to inform as well individuals participation in formal volunteering. Further reflections can be made on the impact the volunteering experience with *Accueillons* plays on the social capital of the members of the volunteer foster families. In fact, the meeting with the unaccompanied minors and with the other volunteers of *Accueillons* may have a positive impact on their social capital, which may increase.

The motivations behind the engagement of the respondents with *Accueillons* included both altruistic and egoistic ones, which could all be traced back to contextual and practical elements. The management of the influxes of migrants and asylum-seekers in the context of the European Migrant Crisis in France was judged inadequate by the respondents, and it generated feelings of outrage and dissatisfaction, and the need to actively engage. Moreover, the direct experience and media coverage of the poor living conditions of migrants and asylum-seekers and of the abuses they suffered resulted to be decisive for their engagement in a volunteering activity providing support to these groups of people. Parenthood was described as having enhanced their sensitivity and empathy towards unaccompanied and separated children, who were perceived as the most vulnerable among migrants and asylum-seekers, and thus as an element which informed their decision to volunteer with minors. The respondents described their choice to engage specifically with *Accueillons* among all the organizations targeting migrant children as resulting from a natural process. Some respondents were introduced to *Accueillons* by other organizations, like *MSF* and *La Gamelle de Jaurès*, one participant had the opportunity to meet the volunteers and the staff of *Utopia 56* (the non-profit organization which founded *Accueillons*) during a demonstration of civil society organizations, while another one learned about it because a neighbour was already a volunteer of *Accueillons*. In addition, the respondents chose to engage with it because they shared the mission of *Accueillons* to ensure protection to UASC, and the engagement required was considered feasible.

The previous motivations were related to altruistic motives, so the desire to help others and to do something concrete to improve others' situation. However, volunteering serves also some egoistic motivations, as underlined by Clay and Snyder (1999, p.157). For instance, by supporting one or more unaccompanied minors through *Accueillons*, the respondents mentioned to feel better with themselves and to have a clearer conscience towards the overall management of unaccompanied and separated children in France. In addition, this experience

was seen as an opportunity to learn and better understand societal dynamics and issues, in this case the respondents gained insight into the functioning of the French reception system of unaccompanied and separated children and recognized its shortcomings. Then, being volunteer foster families for unaccompanied minors constituted an occasion to enhance and grow as individuals, since it encouraged openness towards others and other cultures, self-reflection and calling into question various aspects of nowadays society and lifestyle. Lastly, volunteering can also reflect the values of individuals, in fact the respondents mentioned values such as solidarity, compassion, respect and care for others, fraternity, equality and liberty as guiding their engagement with *Accueillons*.

Regardless the everyday commitment required by this kind of volunteering engagement and the responsibility it implies, the respondents described the experiences as volunteer foster families as positive and enriching. The respondents conceived their role as covering the typical functions of parents and caregivers towards the unaccompanied minors. In fact, besides providing for all the material needs, they also considered the emotional and moral support as an essential part of their engagement. Therefore, establishing positive relations based on trust and on sharing everyday life were considered very important, as well as making the minors feel cared and looked after. The respondents' family environment was conceived as promoting the integration process of the minors in the French society and culture, and as enabling the minors to focus and make plans for their future. However, considering the temporary nature of the hosting experience with *Accueillons*, which depends on the appealing procedure which may last from two to 14 months, and the two or three families assigned to each minor who move from one to the other every month or two, some perplexities may arise concerning the stability guaranteed to the minors. This solution is conceived to give volunteer foster families some flexibility, also taking into account the level of commitment that this volunteering engagement requires. Moreover, it is important to remember that the minors integrating *Accueillons* freely decide to do so, after some time living in a shelter for unaccompanied minors. While some minors may prefer to remain in the shelter, some minors may prefer foster families, because it may have some advantages in terms of privacy, calmness, independence and the opportunity to attend courses or do leisure activities such as sports. In addition, the placement in foster families enables the minors to establish meaningful relationships with the family members, which usually continue after the engagement and hosting period with *Accueillons*, resulting to be an important resource for the minors since they oftentimes do not have a support system in France.

Sharing everyday life with minors from other cultures and who oftentimes went through difficult situations was described as challenging at times, especially when dealing with administrative problems relating the appeal procedures or their enrolment in school or courses, or when the minors are sad or stressed because of past or present experiences. However, the hosting experience was mainly described as enriching and meaningful to both the respondents and the other family members, who had the opportunity to establish positive relationships with the minors. Moreover, the families and the minors by living together shared aspects of each others' cultures, being an occasion to learn about other cultures for the families and to initiate the integration process for the minors.

Citizens and civil society organizations have mobilized all over France and Europe to help migrants and asylum-seekers in recent decades, oftentimes filling in the gaps of the States and assuming what are generally considered to be the functions of the States. Besides advocating for the rights of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees and providing for essential services and goods, such as shelter, food, health services and legal assistance (Irrera, 2016, p.23), civil society organizations have played a crucial role in running rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea during the years of the European Migrant Crisis. Within the French context, *Accueillons* represents one of the responses from the civil society to the European Migrant Crisis and underlines the shortcomings and flaws of the reception system of asylum-seekers in France, and specifically of unaccompanied and separated children. The several violations of children's rights and irregularities in the evaluations procedures of unaccompanied children registered in the last years highlight the need for legislative and procedural reforms in France, as well as a more human rights-based approach to migration in the European context. Furthermore, the growing importance of the role played by civil society organizations in the provision of support to the more vulnerable groups of society, makes the research on formal volunteerism relevant and of present interest.

The present study contributes to the body of knowledge on volunteerism, and specifically on volunteering engagement through formal organizations targeting migrants, applicants of international protection and refugees in France following the European Migrant Crisis, and indirectly it adds to the still limited literature on this topic in the general context of the EU. The investigation of the social profiles and motivations of the respondents contributes to gain a better understanding of formal volunteering in France and the trends of volunteer participation according to the social profile of the respondents and their motivations, taking also into account previous theories of volunteering. However, considering the limited research

on formal volunteering with migrants and asylum-seekers, and the scale of the present research, conclusions cannot be made regarding the relations between the theories of volunteering and this type of volunteering engagement.

The exploring of the experiences of the volunteer foster families contributes to the knowledge on foster care as care arrangement used for unaccompanied and separated children, which is still under researched in the European context. Moreover, the study is relevant for the field of social work with families and children since it explores an alternative solution to the ones provided by the State to ensure the protection and well-being of unaccompanied and separated children in France and which is based exclusively on volunteers' engagement. Further research analyzing and evaluating the respect and implementation of the rights of unaccompanied and separated children in the European context are necessary, in order to identify shortcomings, irregularities and problematic aspects and procedures which need to be worked through.

Considering the qualitative and exploratory nature of the study, the rather small sample of participants (seven) and the research being context-specific, the findings of the present dissertation cannot be generalized and the research itself will be difficult to replicate. However, this research underlined some gaps in the knowledge of volunteerism, in particular relating informal volunteering and the volunteering sector (both formal and informal) targeting migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees in the European context. Further research involving a greater population and using both qualitative and quantitative approaches is needed to better understand both formal and informal volunteer participation. Future research should explore the influence played by micro, meso and macro level elements on formal and informal volunteer participation, and also conduct multi level analysis and comparisons to investigate the interplay between the different levels. Since volunteerism benefits the recipients, the volunteers themselves and the society as a whole, research on the factors promoting volunteer participation results to be advantageous for everyone.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

PERSONAL INFORMATION

- How old are you?
- What is your nationality?
- Do you or any member of your family have a migrant background?
- If yes, which is your/her/his origin? For how much time have you/ has she/he been in France?
- Could you describe your family situation?

EDUCATION AND PROFESSION

- What is your educational background?
- What is your profession?
- Do you work full time or part-time?
- Is your profession related or useful somehow in the volunteering experience?

VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCES

- Do you have any previous volunteering experiences?
- Have you ever volunteered with asylum seekers and migrant population before?
- Have you ever volunteered with children and/or adolescents before?
- How did you become interested in volunteering with Utopia 56?

MOTIVATIONS

- Why have you decided to become a volunteer of Accueillons?
- Are there any specific motivations for your engagement in the protection of minors specifically?
- Are there any values guiding your volunteering engagement?
- Do you get anything in return from your engagement as volunteer?

REFLECTIONS

- As a volunteer of Accueillons, how do you perceive your role in the protection of unaccompanied children?
- In your opinion, what role does the civil society have in the protection of unaccompanied minors in regards to the State in France?

Appendix 2: Consent form

Formulaire de consentement pour les participants dans un projet de recherche

Titre du projet : Une étude exploratoire des expériences des bénévoles de *Accueillons*, un réseau d'hébergement solidaire pour Mineurs Non-Accompagnés en France.

Chercheuse : Alice Cimenti, étudiante italienne du Master Erasmus Mundus in Social Work with Families and Children, Département de Sociologie, ISCTE-IUL, Lisbonne (Portugal).

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Objectifs du projet de recherche

Le présent projet de recherche a le but d'explorer les rôles et les motivations des bénévoles engagés avec le réseau d'hébergement solidaire « Accueillons » en France.

Description des procédures de recherche

Si vous décidez de participer à ce projet de recherche, vous serez interviewé et une dizaine de questions ouvertes vous seront posées. L'entrevue sera enregistrée et sera utilisée exclusivement par la chercheuse dans le cadre du projet de recherche.

Confidentialité et anonymité

Votre confidentialité en tant que participant au projet de recherche sera respectée et aucune information révélant votre identité ne sera diffusée ou publiée, cependant votre nom sera rendu anonyme. Les renseignements recueillis et les enregistrements audio seront utilisés exclusivement à fins de recherche et dans le but de répondre aux objectifs du projet, ils seront après conservés de manière confidentielle et sous clé par la chercheuse.

Droit de retrait sans préjudice de la participation

Il est entendu que votre participation à ce projet de recherche est tout à fait volontaire et que vous restez libre, à tout moment, de mettre fin à votre participation sans avoir à motiver votre décision sans aucun préjudice.

Résultats de la recherche et publication

Vous serez informé des résultats de la recherche et des publications qui en découleront. Une copie de la version finale de la thèse vous sera envoyé en Juillet 2020.

Consentement :

Participant :

_____	_____	_____
(Nom et prénom)	(Signature)	(Date)

Chercheuse :

_____	_____	_____
(Nom et prénom)	(Signature)	(Date)