

A photograph of two children, a boy and a girl, playing on a playground structure. The boy is on the left, wearing a dark t-shirt with a green graphic, and the girl is on the right, wearing a yellow t-shirt. They are both smiling and holding onto the ropes of the structure. The background shows a white building with windows. A blue semi-transparent overlay covers the bottom half of the image, containing the title text.

Child-friendly spaces and services for refugee and migrant children in Germany

A Case Study



Nearly half of all refugees and migrants arriving in Germany are children.

In spring 2016, the German Ministry of Family Affairs (BMFSFJ) and UNICEF started a joint initiative to improve the protection, care and support of children and adolescents living in refugee accommodation centres (hereafter: the Initiative). The Initiative is being implemented in close cooperation with Germany's major welfare organisations and many other important partners. Within the framework of the Initiative, the partners developed guidelines for the protection of refugees, which have been implemented in some 100 accommodation centres.

In addition, UNICEF provided practical guidance, training and mentoring, UNICEF also supported learning and play opportunities expertise and trainings to partners to set up child-friendly spaces and services, early learning and other needs-based activities in and outside the accommodations in cooperation with local partners.

Child-friendly spaces (CFS)

Child-friendly spaces are based on a child rights programming approach. Initially they were set up in emergency situations to provide a safe space for children to learn, play and enjoy a sense of normalcy. They can be an important part of children's daily routine. At the same time, they are crucial for child protection and participation as staff at the child-friendly space listens to the children and frequently becomes someone they give their trust to. Furthermore, the staff is able to identify distressed children and refer them to professionals such as psychologists. They also give room for psycho-social support and to strengthen children's resilience.

Over the years, the concept has proven to be very effective in a range of contexts and is now implemented in non-emergency situations as well. However, child-friendly spaces should not operate in isolation and complementarity with schools or kindergarten should be encouraged.

Child-friendly spaces are based on the following principles:

1. They are secure and safe environments for children
2. They provide a stimulating, participatory and supportive environment for children
3. They take a coordinated, inter-agency, and multi-sectoral approach (they are built on existing structures and capacities within a community)
4. They are used as a means of mobilizing and including the parents and the community (they use a fully participatory approach for the design and implementation)
5. They are highly inclusive, gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory

Developing and implementing a child-friendly space include:

1. Conducting an assessment
2. Organizing integrated supports and services
3. Providing ongoing training and follow-up support for staff and volunteers
4. Monitoring and evaluating all programs

To show how child-friendly spaces can be implemented in a variety of settings in Germany, UNICEF launched a study in three refugee accommodation centres to document promising practices in different circumstances and contexts. The following examples showcase key learnings from each centre. The goal is to provide inspiration and guidance to practitioners interested in the concept, and are planning to establish and operate child-friendly spaces. For further and more detailed information read the full study here: www.gewaltschutz-gu.de

AnkER-centre Regensburg*

In August 2018, 450 people lived in the centre, 150 of them were children. One of the main key factors for successful implementation of the child-friendly space was that the accommodation was newly built in 2017. Child-friendly spaces were part of the concept from beginning on and could therefore be included from the initial planning of the buildings, thus becoming an integral part of the whole set-up. The manager of the centre participated in the regional meetings during which Minimum Standards for the Protection of Refugees and Migrants in Refugee Accommodation Centres were introduced with a strong focus on child-friendly spaces. With the preparations of the CFS at the AnkER-centre, it should be underlined that the national guidelines for kindergarten were considered. The room for the CFS itself accounts for 100 square meters with an outdoor playground, toilets for children, underfloor heating, secure sockets and many other extras that make the place child-friendly and safe. Permanent professional staff were implementing the child-friendly spaces.

Temporary accommodation Frankfurt am Main

From 460 people living in the temporary accommodation in August 2018, 140 were children. The accommodation centre is run by the German Red Cross and, at the time, mainly hosted families, single parents as well as single men. People have been living in the facility for an average of two years. The facility is a former office building and setting up a child-friendly space was rather challenging under the circumstances. However, management and staff of the accommodation set up the child-friendly space in a 150 square meter room on the ground floor. One of the outstanding elements was the focus on the participation of the residents. Special attention was given to the exchange amongst staff and between staff and residents. To this end, both a women's council and a residents' council were established and regular consultative meetings were institutionalized. This way the participation of the residents was ensured and led to improved acceptance, ownership and management of the child-friendly space.

* In German this stands for: arrival, decision and return

Decentralized accommodation in city of Celle

In June 2018 there were 2.257 asylum seekers living in the city of Celle. Most of them were refugee or migrant families from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The case study was conducted in neighbourhoods with a high rate of refugee and migrant families living in their own flats (decentralized accommodation). Agreements and guidelines on child protection were already established by the municipality and relevant authorities, which made it easier to establish child-friendly spaces within the framework of the aforementioned Initiative. One of the crucial challenges was to reach children and families in a decentralized setting. Therefore, info-points and “Clubs” were set up and run by the municipality. These places acted as the contact points for children and families to seek support from qualified social workers and participate in regular activities. The programme is evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that the needs of the families and children are met. Additionally, the info-points are very well integrated within in the whole network of services in the city such as the job-centre, youth-clubs, welfare-organizations child and youth welfare etc. This means integration works faster and more effectively.

Conclusion

The examples highlighted in the three types of accommodation illustrate some good practices. Many more exist. They confirm how essential the infrastructure,

the participation of the children and their families, the integration into service providers’ networks and the mobilization of the whole community are to ensure effective, efficient and sustainable child-friendly spaces. The three case studies also show the importance of a holistic approach that takes into account the environment of children beyond their accommodation and includes for example their parents, clubs and schools. Child-friendly spaces give the opportunity to support and protect children and bring back some normalcy. As indicated above, it can be implemented in a variety of settings based on available resources and needs of the group. They provide a safe space where children and families can seek support and professional staff they can rely on and talk to even in a decentralized setting like the one in Celle. They have also shown that the participation of the residents and taking their opinion seriously is essential in order to provide an atmosphere of respect, trust and responsibility and to shape services in a useful way. Therefore, exchange and communication have to be given adequate attention, that common grounds can be reached. Depending on the context and circumstances, it is not always feasible to invest equally into all the features of child friendly spaces. However, practice shows that when designed and implemented considering the key principles and building on stakeholders’ strength, child-friendly spaces have a huge impact on children and their agency, resilience, protection and daily lives.

For further details read the full study here:
www.gewaltschutz-gu.de

