LOCAL STRATEGY

for Equal access to services for unaccompanied children

City	Liège
Country	Belgium
Lead organisation	Caritas International
Date of adoption	
Version	1

Developed in the framework of the Power2UAMs Project by Caritas International and NADOE, based on the local working group meetings and the child participation platforms.

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1. Introduction

This Local Strategy was developed in the framework of the POWER2UAMs project ('Power to UAMs: Ensuring Equal Access, Participation, and Voice at the Local Level'), funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme.

It aims to strengthen equal access to local, mainstream public services for UAMs (Unaccompanied Minor) in Liège.

The local working group in Liège was launched in April 2026 and has convened four times; it consists of local service providers, guardians, representatives from reception centers in the federal reception network, civil society organizations, and experts. Members work for the following organisations: Caritas International, Cripel, CPAS Liège, Sam asbl, SAJ, Live in Color, Concertation Wallonne des acteurs en charge des MENA et ex-MENA, Fedasil (centre Rocourt) and Tabane. Ongoing strategic efforts are actively being pursued to establish a structural dialogue with representatives of the City of Liège.

The working group's objectives are to (1) promote coordination among local actors to develop a local strategy that addresses the needs of unaccompanied children and supports their equal access to services, and (2) provide a space for direct dialogue with unaccompanied children through the child participation platform. Given the large number of barriers that unaccompanied children face in accessing public services, the working group decided to select two priority themes: access to housing and access to municipalities, public social welfare centers, and other public administrative bodies. Following a thorough problem analysis, concrete recommendations and possible actions were formulated for each priority theme.

When developing the local strategy, it was important to acknowledge that many of the recommended and necessary changes to the existing system fall outside the authority and sphere of influence of the local working group members. Where measures require decisions or action by public authorities or other external stakeholders, the Local Working Group's role will primarily consist of raising awareness, facilitating dialogue and advocating for change, rather than directly ensuring their implementation.

For recommendations that directly concern the operations or practices of organisations represented in the local working group, it is equally important to recognise that individual members do not necessarily have the formal mandate to commit their respective organisations to specific actions or implementation responsibilities.

Several members of the local working group have already expressed their interest in continuing the collaboration beyond the official end of the Power2UAMs project in December 2026. While participation will remain voluntary, the aim is to maintain regular meetings to exchange information, discuss challenges related to UAMs' access to public services, and identify further opportunities for action. Given that

members contribute alongside their regular professional responsibilities, some of the proposed actions may only be initiated or implemented after the project ends. The local strategy should therefore also be seen as a framework for continued collaboration and longer-term improvements.

2. Local context and research findings

2.1 Overview of Unaccompanied Children in Liège

Precise city-level up-to-date figures specifically for unaccompanied children residing in Liège are limited, as registration and reception data are primarily collected at the federal level. A mapping of the reception infrastructure in Liège in 2025 identified 205 places within the official federal reception system[1], corresponding to second-phase collective reception and third-phase Local Reception Initiatives (LRIs/LOIs), while initial observation (first phase) is organized primarily in or near the Brussels region. However, recent policy changes have led to a reduction in the reception network, making it difficult to obtain up-to-date figures on the number of places available for UAMs in the Liège region. Nevertheless, a clear downward trend is visible at the national level.

Nationally, the number of UAMs arriving in Belgium has been decreasing since 2022. The peak of arrivals was experienced in the year 2022 with 6434 UAMs being registered for the first time by the Guardianship Service. In the subsequent years this number decreased to 4366 in 2023, 4068 in 2024, 3328 in 2025 and 1550 in the first eight months of 2026. The UAM population in Belgium is predominantly male and largely consists of adolescents between 12 and 18 years old, with main countries of origin including Afghanistan, Algeria, Eritrea, Ukraine, and Morocco[2].

Reception and support for UAMs in Liège follow the national three-phase model: first, an orientation and observation phase in an Orientation and Observation Centre (OOC); second, placement in collective reception facilities; and third, transition towards more independent forms of accommodation, including Local Reception Initiatives (LRI/LOI). Throughout these stages, UAMs can access a range of legal, social, educational, healthcare, psychosocial, and integration-related services provided through cooperation between federal, regional, and local authorities. In education, non-French-speaking newcomer youth aged 12 to 18

[1] Fedasil (n.d.) Reception centers. Retrieved July 2025, from https://fedasil.be/en/reception-centres

[2] Federale Overheidsdienst Justitie, (n.d.). Statistieken, DG Wetgeving, Fundamentele rechten en vrijheden. Retrieved November 3, 2026, from https://justitie.belgium.be/nl/statistieken/dg_wetgeving_fundamentele_rechten_en_vrijheden

attend DASPA (*Dispositif d'Accueil et de Scolarisation des élèves Primo-Arrivants*) classes for intensive French language acquisition and orientation.

Important actors supporting UAMs in Liège include Fedasil, the Federal Guardianship Service (*Service des Tutelles*), the City of Liège, the local Public Centre for Social Welfare (CPAS Liège), the Wallonia-Brussels Federation's Youth Welfare Administration (AGAJ / SAJ Liège), the regional integration center CRIPEL, as well as schools offering DASPA (such as Saint Laurent School). Key civil society and specialized non-profit organizations include Caritas International Belgium (providing *Youth in Transit* and *Youth in Shelter* projects), Tabane asbl (mental health and psychological support), Live in Color asbl, Interra, Savoir-Être, and Sam asbl.

In the Liège context, child and youth policy operates within the framework of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. At this level, the Forum des Jeunes represents young people aged 16 to 30 in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. It defines projects with young people during participatory days, issues official opinions on their behalf, represents them at national and international conferences, and carries out citizen initiative projects. The Observatoire de l'Enfance, de la Jeunesse et de l'Aide à la Jeunesse (OEJAJ) provides research and decision-support for local authorities, including guidance on free-time care and children's and youth councils.

None of these structures specifically targets unaccompanied children, nor are specific to the city of Liège only. Unaccompanied children often have limited support networks and less familiarity with the language, culture and political system in Belgium. They also face considerable personal and procedural pressures, such as asylum and guardianship procedures, housing and schooling uncertainty. As a result, they may be less inclined, or have less mental space, to take part in policy discussions, even where formal participation is open to all children.

In the POWER2UAMs project in Liège, the Network of Afghanistan Diaspora Organisations in Europe (NADOE) is responsible for leading the project's Child Participation Platforms (held in summer-fall 2026), and the organisation of the unaccompanied child photographic exhibition, directly consulting young people to ensure their lived experiences inform local action plans developed in the framework of the project. Both Caritas and NADOE also put UAMs in touch with youth forums and education-specific events to further amplify their voice and increase the impact of their opinions in a public setting.

2.2 Key barriers to equal access — summary of research findings

The POWER2UAMs local research in Liège, combining the desk research, stakeholder mapping, and qualitative interviews with 10 unaccompanied children (UAMs) and 10 key professional stakeholders (including social workers, reception managers, a general practitioner, a psychologist, a lawyer, a teacher, and legal guardians), reveals a city with a strong commitment to hospitality (having declared itself a "Ville Hospitalière" and participating in the EU URBACT WELDI network).

At the same time, the research identifies profound structural barriers and systemic gaps that limit UAMs from fully exercising their fundamental rights. Belgium's

support ecosystem operates under continuous institutional tension between immigration control and child protection. Access to essential public services, including housing, healthcare, education, and social welfare, often depends on a minor's administrative or residence status rather than the universal principle of child protection. Furthermore, responsibility is dispersed across federal (Guardianship Service, Fedasil), regional (Wallonia-Brussels Federation's Youth Welfare - AGAJ/SAJ), and municipal levels (City of Liège, CPAS Liège), resulting in a fragmented governance landscape where frontline service delivery varies significantly.

Drawing directly from the research report and the problem tree analyses conducted by the Liège Local Working Group, the key barriers to equal access are structured around the primary priorities selected by local stakeholders alongside systemic obstacles:

Housing remains a major challenge for UAMs in Liège due to a severe shortage of affordable, quality housing. UAMs face additional discrimination from landlords and administrative barriers, while dedicated housing-search support is largely absent. While social workers often step in out of necessity, they lack dedicated tools and time. Overcrowded or geographically isolated reception facilities further affect their well-being and access to services. Upon turning 18 or obtaining international protection, and transitioning out of Fedasil or youth care facilities, many face an increased risk of homelessness, couch-surfing or exploitation by unscrupulous landlords.

Navigating (access to) **public administration** in Liège presents a second major challenge for UAMs. Public service professionals (e.g., at municipal migration counters, CPAS offices, and banks) frequently lack specific training regarding UAMs legal statuses and rights. Practices, document requirements, and processing times vary widely across municipal departments and CPAS offices, leading to long delays that exceed legal limits. In the municipality of Liège, difficulties securing appointments and complex administrative procedures also lead to youth (and social workers) being forced to queue for hours early in the morning, often causing UAMs to miss full days of school. Furthermore, digitalized appointment systems, complex administrative correspondence, and dense paperwork create high entry thresholds for youth with limited French or digital literacy. Language barriers and a lack of professional interpretation services place additional pressure on UAMs, guardians and social workers.

The report findings also point to **several additional barriers.** UAMs report high levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while local mental health services are constrained by long waiting times, limited access to long-term care, and insufficient availability of interpretation services in languages such as Pashto, Dari, and Tigrinya.

Educational barriers also affect UAMs integration and future opportunities. Although DASPA classes provide important initial language support, their separation from mainstream education can limit interaction with Belgian peers.

Transitions into regular schooling remain challenging, with students often directed towards vocational education tracks based on their French proficiency rather than their academic abilities. Older UAMs face additional difficulties due to limited school capacity, rigid educational pathways, and financial pressures that may lead to early school dropout.

UAMs access to services can depend heavily on the system of knowledge, initiative and advocacy of their assigned legal guardian or social worker (the guardian being the official, legal representative of the child with the mandate to take official decisions in the best interest of the child and the social worker being the person often linked a specific organisation and offering the child more practical and sometimes emotional assistance), creating what stakeholders describe as a "luck of the guardian" effect.

The transition to adulthood and family reunification represent particularly vulnerable moments. Upon turning 18, UAMs lose their legal guardians and specialized support, often without adequate preparation or continuity of care. Similarly, family reunification can place significant responsibilities on young people, who frequently become responsible for translating, navigating administrative procedures, securing housing, and supporting their families financially, sometimes at the expense of their education.

Overall, the research highlights that Liège has a network of committed organizations and professionals supporting UAMs, but significant gaps remain in the accessibility, coordination, and continuity of services.

3. Legal and policy framework

The legal and policy framework underpinning the Liège Local Strategy for unaccompanied children operates across multiple levels of governance: international, European, federal Belgian, Walloon, and local. Together, these frameworks establish a comprehensive set of obligations and policy objectives concerning the protection, rights, reception, integration, and well-being of the child. At the same time, their practical implementation is shaped by an important institutional tension between migration management and child protection.

International level

Belgian legislation and policy on UAMs are grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which guarantees non-discrimination, protection, development, and access to essential services (such as education, healthcare, and adequate standard of living). Under these international child rights standards, every administrative, judicial, accommodation, and care decision concerning a

minor must treat the best interests of the child as a primary consideration[3]. Consequently, the protection and support provided to UAMs must be tailored to the child's individual developmental needs rather than dictated solely by immigration status.

European level

At the European level, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights[4] provides an important legal framework for the protection of human dignity, non-discrimination, and children's rights in asylum and transit contexts. These legislative obligations are complemented by policy frameworks, notably the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child[5] which aims to ensure the protection of rights of all children, and secure access to basic services for vulnerable children. A key initiative of the strategy is the European Child Guarantee[6]: an EU-wide initiative aimed at preventing and combating child poverty or social exclusion by guaranteeing effective access of children in need in the EU to a set of key services (e.g. early childhood education and care, inclusive education and schoolbased activities, healthcare, housing), of which children with a migrant background are mentioned as part of the target groups.

Federal (Belgian) level

At the national level, the Belgian framework combines specific child protection mechanisms with legislation governing asylum, migration, reception, and social welfare.

An important element is the federal guardianship system, administered by the Guardianship Service *(Service des Tutelles)* which currently falls under the Federal Public Service Justice. UAMs are entitled to a designated guardian who represents

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[3] De Graeve, K., Vervliet, M., & Derluyn, I. (2017). Between immigration control and child protection: Unaccompanied minors in Belgium. Social Work & Society, 15(1). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319542310

[4] European Union. (2012). Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Official Journal of the European Union, C 326, 391–407. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj:JOC_2012_326_R_0391_01

[5] European Commission. (2021). *The EU strategy on the rights of the child and the European child guarantee*. Retrieved from https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en

[6] Council of the European Union. (2021). Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 223, 14–23. http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2021/1004/oj

them legally, supports them throughout asylum and other administrative procedures, and helps safeguard their rights and access to appropriate services.

The Federal Reception Act and System (*Fedasil*) governs the reception of applicants for international protection, including the three-phase national reception structure for UAMs.

The CPAS framework (Social Welfare System) provides another important connection between federal legislation and local service delivery. When leaving the reception structure, and depending on their legal and administrative status, UAMs may be entitled to social assistance, financial support, medical assistance, or other forms of welfare provision through the local Public Centre for Social Welfare (CPAS).

Finally, asylum and family reunification procedures are primarily governed at the federal level, with responsibilities involving institutions such as the Immigration Office (OE) and the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA). These procedures determine an individual's migration and protection status and therefore have significant consequences for access to services and long-term integration opportunities.

Regional level (Walloon Region & Wallonia-Brussels Federation)

The Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the Walloon Region provide an additional layer of policies and services relevant to underaged newcomers. Youth care and child protection fall under the General Administration for Youth Welfare (Administration générale de l'Aide à la Jeunesse – AGAJ) and the local Youth Welfare Services (Service de l'Aide à la Jeunesse – SAJ Liège), which establish protection and accompaniment frameworks for minors in vulnerable situations. Within this framework, UAMs are recognized as a vulnerable group requiring specialized support, operationalized through initiatives such as Plan MENA, a structural agreement between Fedasil and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation providing specialized second-phase reception and care for vulnerable and younger children, often under the age of 15. However, several stakeholders in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation highlight the difficulties UAMs face in accessing youth welfare services, particularly due to the sector being overstretched. UAMs are not automatically considered to be children at risk, and the Youth Assistance Service (SAJ) plays a subsidiary role in relation to other competent institutions.

The *Délégué Général aux Droits de l'Enfant (DGDE)* independently monitors and promotes children's rights within areas such as education, youth care, and welfare. Its work provides an important rights-based reference point for local and regional policy implementation.

Housing, welfare, and education, three key areas affecting UAMs' access to public services, fall largely under the competences of Belgium's federated entities (Regions and Communities), rather than the federal government. In Liège, housing and regional social policies are governed by the Walloon Region, while education and youth care remain competences of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

Within education, DASPA (Dispositif d'Accueil et de Scolarisation des élèves Primo-Arrivants et Assimilés) provides newly arrived non-French-speaking young people, generally between the ages of 12 and 18, with intensive French-language education and orientation towards the secondary education system and wider society.

Other relevant Walloon instruments include the *allocations familiales (paid by funds such as Famiwal and overseen by AVIQ, "Agence pour une Vie de Qualité")*, which provide child-related financial support subject to applicable eligibility conditions (e.g., having started a residence procedure and having a guardian). Unlike the Flemish system, the Walloon system does not have a regional foster care framework, such as *Pleegzorg*.

Local Level (City of Liège)

The City of Liège translates these international, European, federal, and Walloon/French Community frameworks into local policies and services. In 2017, following a citizen-led campaign, the City of Liège became the first municipality in Wallonia to officially declare itself an open, hospitable, and welcoming city, a "Ville Hospitalière". As part of this commitment and its active participation in the EU-funded URBACT WELDI network (Building Welcoming Communities for Migrants), the city pledges to maintain an open attitude toward migrants, promote non-discrimination in access to quality and affordable housing (including specific housing for unaccompanied children and arriving families), and collaborate constructively with civil society actors defending the rights of young migrants.

While the Public Center for Social Welfare (CPAS) operates within a federal legal framework, it delivers its services at the local level. Each CPAS is integrated into its local municipal government and restricted to its municipal territory. Consequently, while these bodies provide statutory forms of social assistance (such as social welfare income, installation allowances, and urgent medical aid), their administrative procedures, frontline practices, and waiting times can vary across Belgian cities.

CRIPEL (Liège Regional Integration Center) serves as a regional integration center, primarily by organizing the integration program, facilitating social and professional integration, and providing intercultural support to program staff.

At the operational level, local accommodation and autonomy support are provided through federal reception centers and Local Reception Initiatives (LRIs/LOIs), supplemented by specialized second-phase facilities under Plan MENA in

coordination with the Wallonia-Brussels Federation's Youth Welfare service (SAJ Liège / AGAJ). There are three services accredited by the Walloon Region to support the transition to independence for unaccompanied minors and former unaccompanied minors in the Province of Liège, two of which are located in Liège (Live in Color and SAM asbl).

4. Strategic priorities and Objectives

The proposed measures provide a flexible and indicative roadmap for future action. They reflect opportunities for improvement and collaboration identified by participating stakeholders, rather than formal commitments by the organisations represented in the Local Working Group. Their implementation will depend on the respective mandates, responsibilities and capacities of the actors involved, as well as the availability of funding and other necessary resources. Consequently, concrete actions for the working group often involve advocacy efforts directed at the institutions and decision-makers with the authority to implement these changes. Another important area of action involves awareness-raising and sensitisation activities, such as organising workshops, developing infographics and other informative materials, or mapping and promoting existing tools and resources that can support awareness-raising efforts among relevant stakeholders.

The organisations identified under “Potential actors” are considered relevant stakeholders who could contribute to the proposed measures. Their inclusion does not imply any formal commitment or responsibility for implementation.

As noted above, the desk research and interviews with UAMs and relevant stakeholders identified a wide range of barriers to service provision. Given the limited timeframe and scope of the local working group, it was necessary to focus on a limited number of priority areas. These priorities were selected on the basis of two main criteria: their relevance to the actors represented in the working group and their significance within the local context. On this basis, two priority areas in which UAMs and former UAMs face structural barriers were identified: **access to housing and access to municipalities, public social welfare centers, and other public administrative bodies**. From the very first meeting, several cross-cutting challenges were already apparent: language barriers, a lack of information about rights, insufficient coordination between services, a lack of understanding of UAMs among professionals, and significant differences in practices between institutions and regions.

These two priorities are also closely linked. Difficulties in establishing a legal address or delays in residence verification can, for example, delay eligibility for benefits from the CPAS and temporarily deprive a young person of income. Conversely, a lack of resources or administrative support significantly undermines access to and retention of housing.

4.1. Priority 1: Access to housing

The working group notes a combination of factors that make access to housing particularly difficult for unaccompanied children and former unaccompanied children: a shortage of affordable housing, discrimination, excessive rents for housing that is sometimes of poor quality, difficulties in establishing a legal address, a lack of personal networks, and a lack of services specifically designed to assist with the search for housing. These obstacles can lead to repeated moves, overcrowding, an increased risk of homelessness, or push some UAMs to accept precarious or undeclared jobs in order to pay their rent.

The challenge is not only to create more housing, but also to ensure a smooth transition from temporary reception to the search for housing, establishing a permanent address, and gaining access to benefits. A setback during this transition can have a ripple effect on a young person's income, education, mental health, and independence.

The following **recommendations** were put forward by the local working group:

1. **Increase the availability of affordable and accessible housing for young people and families.** The City of Liège should continue and strengthen efforts to bring vacant properties back into use, particularly by converting them into social or affordable housing. It should also reinforce controls on housing quality, rental prices and landlords' compliance with regulations. This increase should benefit all vulnerable households, while taking into account the specific needs of UAMs and reunited families. Newly arrived families should also receive information and support to register on social housing waiting lists.

2. **Develop more housing solutions adapted to family reunification situations.** Particular attention should be given to larger families, for whom suitable housing is especially scarce. The working group recommends exploring more flexible access to emergency accommodation in certain family reunification cases, as well as administrative solutions allowing families to live across multiple housing units when no sufficiently large accommodation is available. Transitional housing solutions should also be provided before and after the family's arrival, while ensuring that the responsibility for finding suitable accommodation does not fall primarily on the UAM.

3. **Ensure continuity of social assistance and timely access to housing-related entitlements.** When police verification of an address is delayed, CPAS/OCMW should be able to consider opening a case or issuing a provisional decision based on sufficient supporting documentation, in accordance with the applicable legal framework. This approach should cover both changes of address and the initial granting of entitlements, ensuring a sufficiently rapid response to needs related to rental guarantees and the first month's rent, including for families arriving through family

reunification. Agreements in principle could be explored when certain administrative checks are still pending.

4. **Provide structural funding for housing-search support.** Many organisations currently act as intermediaries between young people, landlords, real estate agencies and public administrations, often without a specific mandate or dedicated funding. A housing support service, adequately resourced and staffed by specialised professionals, should assist young people with housing searches, property visits, rental applications, registration of residence and the first months of independent living. This support should also address needs before and after family reunification, including when the family does not yet have a stable address, and ensure a smooth handover and coordination between guardians, reception facilities, CPAS/OCMW and specialised organisations.

5. **Strengthen efforts to combat discrimination in the rental housing market.** Information and awareness-raising activities should target landlords and housing intermediaries, alongside mechanisms to better identify and address discriminatory or abusive practices. These actions could include realistic testimonials from landlords who have had positive experiences renting to refugees or young people, with the support of specialised organisations.

6. **Start preparing young people for independent living at an earlier stage.** Support provided in reception facilities should go beyond immediate accommodation and prepare young people for housing searches, budgeting, rental rights and obligations, address registration and the administrative consequences of moving. Fedasil and social workers have an important role to play well before young people leave the reception system. This preparation should cover paying bills, waste management and property maintenance, be reinforced over time, and continue after moving into independent accommodation. Practical guidance should also be provided to reunited families.

Based on these recommendations, the Local Working Group plans to develop a **policy brief** to support further advocacy efforts. This policy brief will be developed in the month of January and finalised in the month of February, based on the recommendations put forward by this working group. In addition, several **possible concrete actions** have been identified to improve UAMs' access to housing in Liège. Many of the proposed measures fall outside the direct mandate of working group members, including increasing the availability of affordable housing, adapting emergency housing arrangements for families following reunification, ensuring continuity of social benefits during changes of residence, and establishing structurally funded housing support services. For these measures, the working group's role would primarily consist of **advocacy and awareness-raising**, particularly through the development of a joint policy brief and dialogue with the City of Liège, CPAS and other competent actors such as RWDH and ACRA. Other actions could be pursued more directly by participating organisations, depending

on their respective mandates and resources. These include **raising awareness among landlords and housing intermediaries** about discrimination and the specific challenges faced by UAMs, strengthening collaboration between housing support actors, and **improving young people's preparation for independent living** through information and guidance on housing searches, budgeting, rental rights and administrative procedures. The working group could facilitate the exchange of good practices and explore opportunities for joint initiatives, while recognising that implementation remains dependent on the capacities and commitments of the organisations involved.

Practical follow-up opportunities:

- Draft and disseminate a **policy brief** on housing to the City of Liège, CPAS and relevant networks (particularly the Réseau wallon pour le droit à l'habitat and organisations working to combat homelessness). (Timeline: January–February 2027)
- **Exchange good practices** on housing searches, rental guarantees, registration for social housing and preparation for independent living through existing coordination platforms, potentially in collaboration with CRIPEL. (Timeline: first quarter of 2027)
- **Explore** opportunities, in collaboration with existing initiatives, to share landlords' testimonials and develop **realistic awareness-raising activities**. (Timeline: first quarter of 2027)

4.2. Priority 2: Access to municipalities, public social welfare centers, and other public administrative bodies

The difficulties encountered with CPAS offices, municipalities, and other public services stem less from a single obstacle than from an accumulation of barriers: limited knowledge of the UAM population, differing practices from one service to another, a lack of interpretation services, the digital divide, high staff turnover, significant delays, and insufficient recognition of the role of organizations that support these young people. These situations fuel misunderstandings and a loss of trust in institutions and can contribute to further precariousness.

The following **recommendations** were put forward by the local working group:

1. **Strengthen the knowledge and skills of frontline staff on the specific rights and circumstances of UAMs.** Existing training opportunities, particularly those offered by CRIPEL through the HYMA project, should be further promoted and made accessible to public administration staff, notably through partnerships with CPAS. These training sessions, covering areas such as intercultural competencies, administrative status and UAMs' rights, should be complemented by concise, practical guidance tools.

Existing resources should be identified and updated before new ones are developed.

2. **Ensure coordinated support for unaccompanied children by designating reference persons within CPAS and public administrations.** Generalist staff cannot be expected to understand all the specificities of UAMs' legal and administrative situations. Clearly identified reference persons would help to obtain reliable information more quickly and ensure greater consistency in the handling of cases. These designated contact persons should be able to advise their colleagues on complex situations, promote a better understanding of young people's vulnerabilities and sometimes challenging reactions, and strengthen coordination with guardians and support organisations.

3. **Strengthen formal cooperation agreements between CPAS and specialised organisations.** The working group recommends formalising collaboration with organisations that can inform young people about their rights, assist them with administrative procedures and act as intermediaries with public authorities. These agreements could notably allow complete case files to be prepared ahead of CPAS appointments, with sustainable funding for the organisations involved. Particular attention should be paid to coordination during family reunification, to ensure that young people are not left to manage administrative procedures on their own.

4. **Improve the accessibility of public administrations for young people.** Services should communicate in clear, accessible language, maintain opportunities for in-person assistance and offer appointment times compatible with school attendance. In particular, the City of Liège's Foreigners' Service should consider introducing an official booking system allowing UAMs to schedule appointments outside school hours (for example, on Wednesday afternoons), thereby avoiding long queues and school absences. Informal arrangements with individual staff members are not sufficient.

5. **Ensure that digital services are not the only means of accessing rights.** Accessible information and services must remain available in person, with assistance provided where necessary, to prevent the digital divide from becoming an additional barrier. Municipal digital tools can complement these channels but must not replace direct human support.

6. **Facilitate and systematically promote the use of interpretation services.** Public administrations should establish simple procedures and allocate sufficient budgets for both remote and in-person interpretation. Responsibility for arranging interpretation services should be clarified, particularly in complex or sensitive situations, and this information could be included in an information sheet. Young people should not be expected to interpret sensitive medical information or complex administrative instructions for their family members.

7. **Clarify collaboration with support workers and reduce unnecessary administrative procedures.** Rules concerning powers of attorney, GDPR requirements and the respective responsibilities of guardians and social workers should be clarified, in order to avoid inconsistent refusals and repeated visits. The working group reports that certain procedures initiated by social workers are sometimes rejected because they must formally be carried out by the guardian, creating delays and additional administrative burdens for both young people and professionals.

8. **Provide young people with clear, practical information about their rights, obligations and complaint procedures.** The working group recommends providing accessible, UAM-friendly guidance explaining which services are responsible, the relevant administrative procedures, available complaint and appeal mechanisms, and rights when moving to another municipality. Existing resources should first be identified and updated, then adapted to the Liège context and, where relevant, integrated into the City's communication channels.

Based on these recommendations, the Local Working Group plans to develop a **policy brief** to support further advocacy efforts. This policy brief will be developed in the month of January and finalised in the month of February, based on the recommendations put forward by this working group. In addition, several possible concrete actions have been identified to improve UAMs' access to administrative and public services in Liège. Actions that could be undertaken directly by working group members include **organising training sessions for frontline staff** on UAMs' specific rights and needs, and **developing practical information tools**, such as a concise information sheet for administrative staff and an accessible guide for UAMs explaining their rights, relevant services and complaint procedures. The latter could build on existing digital tools developed by the City of Liège. The working group could also **facilitate exchanges between CPAS, public administrations and specialised organisations** to strengthen collaboration, clarify the respective roles of guardians and social workers, and reduce unnecessary administrative procedures. However, several proposed measures fall outside the direct mandate of working group members, including the designation of specialised reference persons within public administrations, the establishment of formal cooperation agreements, improvements to appointment systems and non-digital access, and the allocation of sufficient resources for interpretation services. For these measures, the working group's role would primarily involve **awareness-raising, dialogue with relevant institutions, and advocacy,** potentially supported by a joint policy brief. The implementation of these measures would ultimately depend on the decisions, capacities and commitments of the competent authorities and organisations involved.

Practical follow-up opportunities:

- Draft and disseminate a **policy brief** summarising the working group's recommendations. (Timeline: January–February 2027)
- Submit a **targeted request to the City of Liège** to introduce appointments at the Foreigners' Service that are compatible with school hours, supported by an official booking system. (Timeline: 2027)
- **Organise an exchange between CPAS, municipal services, guardians and specialised organisations** on designated contact persons, required documentation, powers of attorney and case file preparation. (Timeline: 2027)
- **Identify and review existing information sheets, guides and training materials**, assess whether they are up to date, and consider adapting or disseminating them rather than systematically developing new resources. (Timeline: 2027)

5. Monitoring and follow-up

The Power2UAMs working group in Liège was established in April 2026 and convened four times over the course of the year. This Strategy should therefore be regarded not as a final product, but as a foundation for further development. The absence of dedicated long-term resources should also be taken into account when designing the monitoring framework. Monitoring should therefore remain proportionate and practical.

Interested stakeholders will continue to share relevant information on activities, developments, barriers, and, where available, emerging results. This information can serve as a basis for continued dialogue and help identify areas for further action and advocacy.

Recognising that members of the local working group do not necessarily have a formal mandate to represent their respective organisations, neither the Strategy nor its monitoring framework should create formal reporting obligations or assign implementation responsibilities to potential contributors. Where feasible, progress may be reviewed periodically on the basis of the indicative indicators set out below.

5.1 Indicators

Priority area	Indicator(s)
Priority 1: Access to Housing	1. Number of policy briefs developed, consolidating all recommendations made by the working group (Target: 1) 2. Number of targeted stakeholders or institutions reached through dissemination of the policy brief (Target: 5) 3. Number of exchanges organised within an existing coordination forum, potentially in collaboration with CRIPEL. (Target: 1) 4. Number of awareness-raising activities identified and proposed (Target: 1).
Priority 2: Access to municipalities, public social welfare centers, and other public administrative bodies	1. Number of policy briefs developed, consolidating all recommendations made by the working group (Target: 1). 2. Number of written requests submitted to the relevant department of the City of Liège (Target: 1). 3. Number of meetings requested with the relevant officials to discuss the feasibility of appointments compatible with school hours and an official booking system (Target: 1). 4. Number of coordination meetings organised, bringing together representatives from at least three of the four targeted stakeholder categories (Target: 1). 5. Number of existing tools or resources identified and reviewed, assessing their relevance, whether they are up to date, and their accessibility (Target: 5).

5.2 Updating the strategy

If the Local Working Group decides to continue its collaboration beyond the official end of the Power2UAMs project in December 2026, the strategy should remain a flexible and evolving document, regularly reviewed to reflect new developments, emerging needs and progress made. A review every six months could provide an opportunity to assess the implementation of proposed actions, identify challenges and adjust priorities where necessary. However, given the limited time and resources available to working group members, this process should remain light and practical, building on existing meetings rather than requiring a separate, time-

consuming evaluation exercise. Updates should focus on key developments, progress achieved and necessary adjustments, ensuring that the strategy remains relevant and actionable without creating an additional administrative burden.

6. Child participation

The development of the local strategy was also informed by exchanges with unaccompanied children at different stages of the project. During the summer, participatory activities were held with young people living in Liège to explore their experiences, priorities and the issues affecting their daily lives in the city. An overview of these discussions was presented to the Local Working Group during its third meeting. A photo exhibition offered a further opportunity to hear their perspectives. Guided by five prompts, the young people took and shared photographs illustrating what a typical day in their lives in Liège looks like, where they feel comfortable or uncomfortable, the challenges they face, what matters to them for their future, and what could improve their lives in the city.

Between the third and fourth meetings, a child-friendly version of the draft recommendations was prepared and discussed in a small focus group with three unaccompanied children. To make the recommendations more accessible and easier to discuss, they were presented around two central themes: (1) “A place to feel at home”, focusing on housing and the importance of having a safe and stable place to live, and (2) “Less confusion and more help”, focusing on access to administrative services, clear information and appropriate support. The children's reactions to the proposed recommendations were very positive and largely confirmed the priorities identified by the working group, although they suggested relatively few additional changes.

One participant nevertheless highlighted an important gap in support following family reunification. The young person explained that their guardian's involvement had ended when his family arrived in Belgium, even though his mother was unfamiliar with Belgian administrative procedures. As a result, the young person had to take responsibility for navigating municipal and social welfare services. This experience highlighted the need for a gradual transition of support following family reunification, rather than an abrupt end to guardianship-related assistance. The UAM suggested exploring whether guardians could help facilitate this transition when families arrive. These reflections were shared with the Local Working Group during its fourth meeting and taken into account when refining the recommendations.

Engaging unaccompanied young people in meaningful participation proved challenging and required considerable time, individual outreach and sustained efforts to build trust. Encouraging young people to comment directly on policy recommendations was not always straightforward. However, when sufficient time and space were provided for personal exchanges, their contributions proved

valuable and their responses to being consulted were positive. This experience reinforced the importance of flexible, accessible and relationship-based approaches to child participation, allowing young people to express their views in ways that suit their circumstances and preferences.

7. Sustainability and next steps

Regarding the long-term continuity of the local working group, several members have already expressed their interest in continuing this collaboration beyond the official end of the POWER2UAMs project in December 2026. However, this interest remains dependent on professionals' availability, financial resources and the willingness of the wider group to remain involved. Although participation is entirely voluntary, all members will be invited to indicate whether they would like to continue their involvement. Ideally, the working group would continue to meet every few months, with flexible arrangements, including the possibility of participating remotely. These meetings would provide opportunities to exchange information, monitor developments and challenges affecting UAMs and their access to public services, and identify new opportunities for collaboration and joint action.

It is also important to acknowledge that many of the actions identified in the local strategy may not be initiated or completed before the official end of the project. Their implementation may therefore take place at a later stage, depending on the availability, capacity and priorities of the organisations and individuals involved. During the fourth meeting, members highlighted the growing pressure on frontline professionals, who face funding shortages, increasing demands and persistent difficulties in achieving tangible results. These constraints can contribute to staff fatigue and burnout, further limiting their capacity to engage in new initiatives.

The local strategy should therefore acknowledge not only the need for better coordination and clearer responsibilities, but also the lack of human and financial resources and concrete solutions. In this context, the working group could prioritise one or two realistic joint actions, based on available resources and shared priorities, rather than attempting to implement all recommendations simultaneously.

The local strategy should therefore be viewed not only as an action plan for the remaining duration of the project, but also as a framework for continued collaboration and the implementation of longer-term improvements beyond December 2026.

8. Adoption by the local working group

The Local Strategy was developed through a participatory process involving the members of the Local Working Group. Between the third and fourth meetings, members had the opportunity to review the draft strategy and provide feedback. During the fourth meeting, the group discussed the proposed recommendations and actions, identifying necessary adjustments and additions. Following this meeting, members were invited to review the revised version and provide any final comments before approval. Given the voluntary and informal nature of the working group, no formal signing procedure was organised. Instead, the strategy was approved by working group members via email, reflecting their collective endorsement of its recommendations and proposed directions for future action, without implying binding commitments by their respective organisations.