

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Recognition in the lives of unaccompanied children and youth: A review of the key European literature

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## Abstract

This integrative literature review studies well-being of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children through the three modes of recognition—love, rights and solidarity—as conceptualized by Axel Honneth. The analysis shows that the children's basic needs, such as safety, shelter and nutrition, are mostly recognized; however, the systems responsible for the care of unaccompanied children seem to misidentify other essential needs, such as the need for stability, need for caring, family-like relationships and the need to be heard and seen as unique persons. We suggest that more research is needed to explore how recognition is displayed in the range of institutional, social and cultural structures in which unaccompanied children live. Furthermore, we call for research on how recognition is experienced by the children and youth themselves. It is also argued that practitioners and policy-makers in social work should be educated about the elements of recognition and that their practices and policies should prioritize the rights and needs of the child over questions of age or immigration status.

## KEYWORDS

asylum, love, recognition, rights, solidarity, unaccompanied minors

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Recognition theory (Fraser, 2000; Honneth, 1995b; Taylor, 1994) has been used in studies on child and family social work, exploring, for example, transitions after leaving institutional care (Paulsen & Thomas, 2018), care facilities (Warming, 2015) and collaboration with families in child protection (Turney, 2012). The theory provides a useful tool for exploring social justice and well-being concerning children and youth and helps with making the views of these young people more thoroughly visible. Recognition theory has been applied in refugee studies (e.g. Eide, 2007; Marlowe, 2010) but so far very little in research with unaccompanied children and youth (exception being Sirriyeh & Ní Raghallaigh, 2018).

The study reported in this article addresses this lacuna by documenting an integrative literature review of published, qualitative research articles that focus on the experiences of life of unaccompanied children in Europe (e.g., Hopkins & Hill, 2010; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Sirriyeh, 2013). The article creates a coherent understanding of how unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are recognized within their communities across different contexts of social care. In particular, the article elaborates on the dimensions of recognition—love, rights and solidarity—and ways in which these dimensions unfold in the everyday lives of unaccompanied children according to recent research.

We begin this article with a brief description of the primary structures and procedures affecting unaccompanied children and youth in

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Europe, followed by an outline of the theoretical and methodological approaches guiding this analysis. Then, the findings of the analysis are presented thematically.

## 2 | UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN EUROPE

The term *unaccompanied children and youth* refers to young people who seek or have sought asylum as minors without a parent or other primary caregiver. They may be waiting for their asylum decision, may have been granted residency permits or given refugee status. Various procedures and structures exist to ensure the quality of reception and care of unaccompanied children in their host countries, which also, in effect, shape their futures. Host countries in the European Union are required to follow the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (hereafter CRC) and the Best Interest of a Child policy (UNHCR, 2000; Council Directive 2013/33/EU) regarding the reception of unaccompanied children and youth. The Best Interest of a Child policy should be implemented in the reception of unaccompanied children and youth to recognize their personal needs and capabilities, giving the young person a possibility to be heard (e.g., Council Directive 2013/33/EU, Article 23). The goal of the European Commission (2016) is to ensure fair and just treatment of all asylum-seeking individuals. To fulfil this goal, the Commission has set minimum standards for the reception of asylum-seeking people. However, critics note these standards are not properly applied in all member states. In particular, reports have been made on the neglect to follow the CRC in asylum practices relating to unaccompanied children and youth (European Commission, 2016; UNICEF, 2018).

## 3 | RECOGNITION THEORY

This study draws on the recognition theory as conceptualized by Axel Honneth (1995a, 1995b, 2012), Nancy Fraser (1995, 2000) and Charles Taylor (1994). We acknowledge the limitation of using the theory of recognition as an unchallenged framework guiding this review. At the same time, we note that Honneth, Fraser and Taylor all present different views of the theory, all of which have been criticized. For example, Honneth's views on recognition are questioned for regarding children not as active participants of their lives but more so as 'adults in waiting' (Thomas, 2012, p. 258; Warming, 2015). Furthermore, they have been criticized for overlooking the fact that being mistreated does not always lead to awareness of injustice (Thompson, 2006, p. 166). However, the purpose of this study is not to present the theory as uncontested but instead to illustrate and structure the findings of previous studies from this perspective, which has not been extensively used so far in the literature.

To be recognized, one must be seen and heard as a unique person by the community and understood in a way that agrees with one's own constructive self-perception (Honneth, 1995a, 1995b; Taylor, 1994) within an environment where all people equally valued

and where their contributions are appreciated and accepted (Fraser, 2000). Misrecognition occurs when a person's needs, rights or abilities are misinterpreted by others or by societal structures and institutions, resulting in the person being denied full access to participate in the community (Huttunen, 2007).

Honneth (1995a, 1995b, 2012) and Taylor (1994) emphasized the interconnectedness of identity formation and recognition, whereas Fraser (2000) viewed recognition primarily as connected to redistribution of resources, highlighting the political aspect of recognition. Fraser argued that recognition and misrecognition are not limited to personal relationships but are very much rooted in the institutions and structures of societies (Fraser, 2000; Thompson, 2006). Fraser (2000), Thompson (2006) and Dunwoodie, Kaukko, Wilkinson, Reimer and Webb (2020), among many others, placed recognition in a combined structural and personal dimension. The theory of recognition as applied in this study agrees with this view.

Honneth (1995a, 1995b) differentiates between three modes of recognition: love, rights and solidarity. *Love* refers to recognizing everyone as a unique, singular person with unique needs and a capability to feel. This dimension of recognition is closely related to relationships in families. As a primary need, it typically begins as a parent's response to a baby. In an ideal situation, it continues throughout life through the unconditional love of those close to a person (usually parents), but the primary sources of love (parents or other family members) are often absent from the lives of unaccompanied children and youth. In addition, while loving relationships can lead to self-confidence, this confidence can be harmed by misrecognition (Honneth, 1995a; Sirriyeh & Ni Raghallaigh, 2018; Thomas, 2012; Warming, 2015). *Rights* refer to an individual's unique capabilities of self-determination and moral deliberation; everyone is a bearer of rights and duties. Rights-holders are recognized as capable of taking part in a civil society and societal decisions. Being recognized as having rights builds self-respect (Honneth, 1995a, 1995b). In the case of unaccompanied children and youth, this mode of recognition is connected primarily with legal rights (Sirriyeh & Ni Raghallaigh, 2018; Warming, 2015). Finally, *solidarity* is the recognition of a person's unique skills and achievements rather than the recognition of qualities outside of the individual's control, such as ethnicity or gender (Honneth, 1995b). Solidarity, in practice, in the lives of unaccompanied children and youth (as well as in the lives of all people) is often displayed through participation within a community. This, according to Honneth (1995a, 1995b, 2012), creates solidarity and builds self-esteem.

Honneth (1995a, 1995b) argued that these modes require reciprocal interaction; thus, they are incomplete without social interaction. Although interconnected, Honneth (1995a, 1995b) viewed them as hierarchical; for example, without self-confidence, one cannot have self-respect or self-esteem. However, Fraser (2000), among others (e.g., Huttunen, 2007; Kallio, 2017; Thomas, 2012; Warming, 2015), argued that all three modes can be present simultaneously at all ages and all stages of life. Thomas (2012), who explored the theory of recognition especially from the point of view of a child, claimed that Honneth's theory failed to acknowledge children as bearers of rights

or as autonomous beings with socially valuable capabilities. In agreement with Kallio (2017), Thomas (2012) and others, we propose that children are not only receivers of love and care, but also, they play an equal part in reciprocal cognitive relationships.

## 4 | METHODS

Beginning from the theoretical perspectives as outlined, the aim of this research is to synthesize findings of recent studies on unaccompanied children and youth in Europe and consider how, in light of these perspectives, the modes of recognition are displayed in the everyday lives of this population. The methodological choices followed the principles of the integrative literature review (Torraco, 2005) and the search, selection, extraction and analysis methods for scoping studies by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). The review was conducted using two major databases (EBSCO and Scopus) and using the following search phrases or words: (*Unaccompanied OR separated*) AND (*Asylum seek\* OR refugee*) AND (*minor\* OR child\* OR youth\* OR underage\**); the search was limited to studies conducted between 2008 and 2018 and included studies that were published online or in print within that time period. This search resulted in 511 documents.

Although people with refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds globally may share similar experiences, they are subject to procedures that vary, depending on the context and their refugee status (as asylum seekers or quota refugees). Therefore, as Europe constitutes an entity with similar systems, and with high numbers of unaccompanied children and youth in many of its states, only studies on European contexts were reviewed.

### 4.1 | Conducting the study

The 511 documents resulting from the database search were initially screened for relevance based on the article titles after which 233 articles remained. Of these 233 articles, all abstract, and when needed, parts of the articles were read to determine whether the articles should be included or excluded based on partly predetermined selection criteria (Table 1).

The most common reason for exclusion was mental health as the primary focus, which accounted for approximately 15% of the 233 articles and included studies specifically focused on trauma (e.g., Völkl-Kernstock et al., 2014), depression and depressive symptoms (e.g., Keles, Idsøe, Friberg, Sirin, & Oppedal, 2017) and behavioural problems (e.g., Bronstein, Montgomery, & Ott, 2013). Following this step, 37 articles filled the selection criteria. After the selection, the findings of the 37 studies were thematically analysed based on the three stages of recognition conceptualized by Honneth (e.g., 1995a, 1995b): love, rights and solidarity. Next, on the basis of the findings of the analysis, the authors discuss how unaccompanied children and youth living in Europe experience recognition—love, rights and solidarity—in their everyday lives.

**TABLE 1** Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<b>Criteria related to methodology</b>	
1. All different methodological approaches	N/A
2. Past 10 y	Prior to 2008
3. Language: English	Languages other than English
4. Peer-reviewed journal articles	Book chapters, books, dissertations, commentaries, reviews, reports, document analyses and articles concerning methodology
5. Empirical studies with primary data (e.g., quotations of participants) on the perspective of children and youth clearly present	Textual analyses of asylum claims, policy analyses, literature reviews, articles where the voice of children and youth are not clearly present and articles focusing on the perspective of practitioners
<b>Criteria related to research participants</b>	
6. Studies with participants who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and youth and have been granted a first residency permit in Europe	Studies with participants who are unaccompanied children and youth and who meet one or more of the following criteria: are internally displaced persons, are not seeking asylum, arrived as (quota) refugees, are waiting for an asylum claim, have been deported, are/were seeking asylum outside Europe and/or were seeking asylum during and after the world wars
<b>Criteria related to themes</b>	
7. Articles on themes related to everyday life of asylum-seeking children and youth, including the asylum process	Articles focusing solely on the following themes: medicine, psychology, mental health, health in general, age assessment, agriculture, economics and biochemistry
8. Articles focusing on life during and after applying for asylum	Articles focusing on the journey or preflight experience

## 5 | FINDINGS

Many of the studies reviewed presented unaccompanied children and youth as rather satisfied with the reception structures and procedures they encountered, especially when the focus was on the systems that secure children's basic needs, such as safety, shelter and food. However, many studies suggested the systems seemed to overlook other essential needs, such as full access to medical help while still waiting for the residency permit (Connolly, 2015; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Sinha & Uppal, 2009); stable, caring, family-like relationships (e.g., De Graeve & Bex, 2016; Eide, Lidén, Haugland, Fladstad, & Hauge, 2018; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Omland & Andenas, 2018; Wernesjö, 2015); social support and educational guidance (De Graeve & Bex, 2017; Oppedal,

Guribye, & Kroger, 2017; Pastoor, 2015); and being heard and seen as unique individuals (e.g., De Graeve & Bex, 2017; Deveci, 2012; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017). According to some studies, the structures and procedures also tended to homogenize unaccompanied children and youth, for example, according to their legal status or age, while failing to recognize the diversity among this group (De Graeve & Bex, 2016, 2017; Derluyn, 2018; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017). For example, the form of housing organized for each unaccompanied young person, in many European states, is largely determined according to age and asylum status (Derluyn, 2018). These diverse findings are further elaborated on thematically in the following sections, from the points of view of love, rights and solidarity.

## 5.1 | Love—Being part of a caring community

A reciprocal, trusting, emotional commitment in relationships is an aspect of the love stage of recognition (Honneth, 1995a, 1995b, 2012). The current review revealed that in the lives of unaccompanied children and youth, building trusting relationships can begin with recognizing the children's basic needs (e.g., Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; Gustafsson, Fioretos, & Norström, 2012; Ní Raghallaigh & Sirriyeh, 2015; Sirriyeh, 2013); however, merely acknowledging basic needs by offering food and shelter is not enough. Recognition with love can be enhanced by small everyday encounters, such as those described in several studies (De Graeve & Bex, 2017; Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017; Kohli, Connolly, & Warman, 2010; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Ní Raghallaigh & Sirriyeh, 2015; O'Toole Thommessen, Corcoran, & Todd, 2015; Sirriyeh & Ní Raghallaigh, 2018): For example, inviting the young person to participate in everyday routines and gatherings can create a feeling of recognition with emotional bonds and care. This appears to reflect a basic form of recognition that unaccompanied children and youth lack, simply because of their status: being recognized as members of a caring community. Moreover, many unaccompanied children and youth participating in the studies reviewed expressed feelings of utter loneliness and reported difficulties in creating trust. Several young people noted that even though they were surrounded by people, they missed their families and friends and wished to have someone in their lives they could lean on and trust (Bjernelid, Ismail, & Puthooppambal, 2018; Chase, 2013; Deveci, 2012; Eide et al., 2018; Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; Gustafsson et al., 2012; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Ní Raghallaigh, 2011, 2014; Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Omland & Andenas, 2018; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; O'Toole Thommessen, Corcoran, & Todd, 2017; Pastoor, 2015, 2017; Wernesjö, 2015). Many of the studies also illustrated how some of the participants had little or no contact with local residents outside their living units (Gustafsson et al., 2012; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2017; Pastoor, 2017; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Wernesjö, 2015), despite their desire to make connections and form friendships with people in

the local community (Bitzi & Landolt, 2017; Omland & Andenas, 2018; Pastoor, 2017; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Wernesjö, 2015). Some were not able to create trusting relationships, even after living in the host country for years (Ní Raghallaigh, 2014), which may add to their feelings of displacement (Wernesjö, 2015) and constrain feelings of self-confidence.

### 5.1.1 | Primary love

From the perspective of the love mode of recognition, it is vital that unaccompanied children and youth retain strong transnational ties. Many of the unaccompanied children and youth had a strong desire to hold on to cognitive relationships with their families, with the hope of meeting them again one day (Eide et al., 2018; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Omland & Andenas, 2018; Wernesjö, 2015) and being able to help the distant families financially (Omland & Andenas, 2018). Eide et al. (2018), Lundberg and Dahlquist (2012) and O'Toole Thommessen, Corcoran and Todd (2015) also described how many unaccompanied children and youth greatly feared for and worried about the well-being of their distant families. As the need to be recognized with love is essential for every person's well-being, some participants in the studies by Ní Raghallaigh (2011, 2014) and Eide et al. (2018) described turning to God as a source of recognition and love when family was far away.

### 5.1.2 | Institutional love

The care structures in unaccompanied children's and youths' lives influenced the possibilities for recognition that incorporated the aspect of love. For example, age and legal status, rather than personal needs, often defined their living arrangements (e.g., De Graeve & Bex, 2016, 2017). Additionally, these young people lived among official relationships. Legal guardians and staff at their living units became close, yet these relationships remained professional. Some of the children and youth in the studies described how their needs as children, in particular, the need for reciprocal care, love and support, were not recognized by the staff at the living units, the legal guardians, teachers or other officials in their lives (Bjernelid et al., 2018; De Graeve & Bex, 2016, 2017; Deveci, 2012; Eide et al., 2018; Herz, 2019; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Oppedal et al., 2017; Pastoor, 2015; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Wernesjö, 2015). De Graeve and Bex (2017), Eide et al. (2018), Herz and Lalander (2017), Ní Raghallaigh (2014) and Wernesjö (2015) all described the unaccompanied children and youth as possibly perceiving these officials plainly as people 'doing their job,' rather than as people who were emotionally involved or with whom a reciprocal trusting relationship could be created.

Indeed, some of the unaccompanied children and youth in the studies explained how they received less guidance and emotional availability than they would want from their legal guardians

(De Graeve & Bex, 2016, 2017; Hopkins & Hill, 2010; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Wernesjö, 2015). However, some studies (Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017) described good care relationships between the young unaccompanied individuals and their guardians. What made these guardian relationships good was that the guardians showed emotional involvement and interest in the children's and youths' well-being, sometimes even after the official relationships had ended (Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017). Many participants of the studies discussed their experiences with recognitive atmospheres in other official relationships with professionals, such as social workers, immigration office staff, teachers, doctors and police officers (Bjernelid et al., 2018; De Graeve & Bex, 2017; Eide et al., 2018; Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Pastoor, 2015; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017).

Creating a caring community in the temporary and rather extraordinary situations of unaccompanied children and youth may be challenging, but it is possible. Participants in several studies reported experiencing close, family-like ties in institutional care (Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; Gustafsson et al., 2012; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Pastoor, 2017; Wernesjö, 2015) and foster families (Herz, 2019; Kohli et al., 2010; Ní Raghallaigh, 2014; Sirriyeh, 2013; Sirriyeh & Ní Raghallaigh, 2018) and with friends and their families (Bjernelid et al., 2018; Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2017; Pastoor, 2017; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Sinha & Uppal, 2009; Wernesjö, 2015), people from non-governmental organizations and other family-like guides (De Graeve & Bex, 2016, 2017; Herz & Lalander, 2017). When comparing foster care with institutional care, foster care was found to be a form of housing, where recognitive relationships are more likely to be created (Herz, 2019; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Kohli et al., 2010; Ní Raghallaigh, 2014; Sirriyeh, 2013; Sirriyeh & Ní Raghallaigh, 2018). Further, Bjernelid, Ismail and Puthoopparambil, (2018), Kaukko and Wernesjö (2017), Kohli, Connolly and Warman, (2010) and Lundberg and Dahlquist (2012) emphasized that, from the perspective of recognition, it is vitally important that personal needs are considered in the organization of care and that opportunities exist for the young people involved to participate in everyday decisions concerning their lives.

## 5.2 | Rights—Constructing a shared experience of good and moral living

Loving, recognitive relationships cannot be established without appreciating the rights of other human beings or communities. What makes the recognition of rights of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and youth special is their position within the asylum system. These children and young people quite literally struggle for recognition of their right to exist and stay in their present (host) countries

(Chase, 2013; Connolly, 2014, 2015; Crawley, 2011; Hopkins & Hill, 2010; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Ní Raghallaigh, 2011; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017). Anxiety while waiting, the fear of deportation and the frustration of being questioned seem to be consistent. Many studies in this review (Allsopp & Chase, 2019; Chase, 2010, 2013; Connolly, 2015; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Hopkins & Hill, 2010; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Ní Raghallaigh, 2014; Omland & Andenas, 2018; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Sinha & Uppal, 2009) illustrated how waiting for their future to be determined caused feelings of frustration, fear and mistrust in the unaccompanied children and youth. Often, the structures of asylum processes are displayed as multiple, unexpected changes in the lives of unaccompanied children and youth. Relocations, school changes and changes among legal guardians and social workers are frequent (Bjernelid et al., 2018; Chase, 2010; De Graeve & Bex, 2017; Gustafsson et al., 2012; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Kalverboer et al., 2017). Additionally, some young people must go through various procedures of first being denied asylum and later given it or with age disputes resulting in being recognized as a child or being defined as an adult (Connolly, 2015; Crawley, 2011). All these changes constrain possibilities for experiencing stable, trusting relationships and being recognized (Chase, 2013; Connolly, 2015; Crawley, 2011; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Sinha & Uppal, 2009). This may result in the loss of motivation to study or plan for the future, as the future remains uncertain (Chase, 2010, 2013; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Omland & Andenas, 2018; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Sinha & Uppal, 2009).

### 5.2.1 | Right to be heard

Recognition of rights means not only recognizing the rights of people but also recognizing people as bearers of responsibilities and people with their own voice. Pastoor (2015) and Chase (2010) explained the experiences of some unaccompanied children and youth who, after many years of being deprived of freedom of speech in their native countries, were then given the possibility to be heard by their democratic host societies. Nevertheless, some studies reported situations where the unaccompanied children and youth were being reduced to children without responsibilities (De Graeve & Bex, 2017; Gustafsson et al., 2012; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017) or individuals without a political voice (Crawley, 2011). In the most extreme cases, unaccompanied children had their freedom of speech violated in detention by being placed, upon arrival, in prison cells with restricted possibilities for communication or without understanding the reason for being detained (Connolly, 2015).

Rules can play a major role in recognition of rights in the lives of any person. Studies by Allsopp and Chase (2019), Eriksson and Hedberg Rundgren (2019) and Kaukko and Wernesjö (2017) showed that although many unaccompanied children and youth acknowledged that rules are necessary, the implementation of the rules was often seen as inconsistent. Some unaccompanied young people expressed how the lack of opportunities to participate in decision-making

diminished their agency (Gustafsson et al., 2012; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012), whereas others felt it was the job of the adults to make decisions on behalf of the young people, adults who may not have understood their interests (Kaukko, 2016). In both cases, the lack of information about the reasons for the rules was problematic, leading to a feeling of misrecognition, as the young people's abilities to understand their own situations within the asylum system were questioned (Deveci, 2012; Hopkins & Hill, 2010; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017). The denial of participation in decision-making, the lack of justification and the inconsistencies in rules can create unhealthy power relationships and hold back formation of trusting relationships between officials and unaccompanied children and youth (Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; Gustafsson et al., 2012; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017). Inconsistencies in the rules especially caused not only the feeling of misrecognition but also the young people's mistrust towards institutions, as Eide et al. (2018) and Herz and Lalander (2017) described.

### 5.3 | Solidarity—Being a valued, active member of a community

The feeling of belonging as a valuable and active member in a community contributes to the solidarity form of recognition. A wish for recognition as an active member of a community was evident in many studies in this review (Bitzi & Landolt, 2017; Chase, 2013; Eide et al., 2018; Herz, 2019; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Hopkins & Hill, 2010; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Ní Raghallaigh, 2011; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2017; Pastoor, 2017; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Sirriyeh & Ní Raghallaigh, 2018; Wernesjö, 2015). Whereas for some participants of the studies this wish ultimately became a reality, many others experienced misrecognition through the stereotypical and/or racist views of local people, professionals, co-workers or bosses. Sometimes the systems labelled them as immigrants, refugees or unaccompanied asylum seekers (rather than young human beings), making them feel excluded (Bitzi & Landolt, 2017; Chase, 2010, 2013; De Graeve & Bex, 2017; Deveci, 2012; Herz, 2019; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Oppedal et al., 2017; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2017; Sedmak & Medarić, 2017; Wernesjö, 2015).

For unaccompanied children and youth to be recognized as valuable, active members of their communities, those communities must recognize the young individuals' knowledge and skills (Honneth, 1995b). Allsopp and Chase (2019), Bitzi and Landolt (2017), Gustafsson et al. (2012) and Lundberg and Dahlquist (2012) discussed how failing to recognize the skillsets of unaccompanied minors is common in schools and in communities at large. Being able to participate in activities where people can practise their skills and abilities is an integral part of recognition. In the lives of unaccompanied children and youth, solidarity was realized, for example, through being able to work, volunteering or having access to spare time activities, such as sports (Chase, 2013; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2017; Pastoor, 2017; Sinha & Uppal, 2009;

Wernesjö, 2015). Furthermore, shared experiences with peers create a feeling of recognition and inclusion in society, leading to self-realization and self-esteem (Honneth, 1995a).

Eriksson and Hedberg Rundgren (2019) showed how many unaccompanied children and youth found it easy to participate in the community of immigrants (or other unaccompanied children and youth), whereas schools or local communities sometimes created feelings of exclusion (e.g., Bitzi & Landolt, 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Ní Raghallaigh, 2011; Pastoor, 2017; Wernesjö, 2015). At schools, the feeling of exclusion was caused not only by having an asylum-seeking background but also by the fact that because of gaps in education, many unaccompanied children and youth are older than their peers (Bitzi & Landolt, 2017; Oppedal et al., 2017). Moreover, several articles (Bitzi & Landolt, 2017; Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012; Ní Raghallaigh, 2011; Pastoor, 2017; Wernesjö, 2015) illustrated the experiences of some unaccompanied children and youth whom local young people did not want to get acquainted with for various reasons, such as the local individuals' stereotyped views of the unaccompanied young people's backgrounds, the practice of different religious traditions or the unaccompanied children's and youths' lack of ability to speak the language fluently. Nevertheless, experiences of caregivers, professionals and other close people supporting unaccompanied children and youth in their quests to realize their dreams and overcome obstacles on the path to becoming appreciated members of a society were also widely apparent in the reviewed articles (Allsopp & Chase, 2019; Bjerneld et al., 2018; Eriksson & Hedberg Rundgren, 2019; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Sirriyeh & Ní Raghallaigh, 2018). Omland and Andenas (2018), Oppedal et al. (2017) and Pastoor (2015, 2017) showed, furthermore, that some of the children and youth clearly expressed a desire to recognize and to be recognized within the community by getting an education and working in the hosting country and by helping friends and family still living in their home countries.

## 6 | DISCUSSION

In this article, we have considered the findings of recent research on unaccompanied children and youth from the point of view of recognition. The findings show that all the dimensions of recognition, namely, love, rights and solidarity, can be found in the lives of unaccompanied children, but they all come with distinct challenges.

Firstly, recognition as *love* is prefigured by the situation of the children and youth, many of whom live in institutions. Professional and non-professional relationships may create an atmosphere of love and care and in a good situation assist children and youth in overcoming the hardships and loneliness that many of them face. This requires that each child is shown emotional involvement, thus creating understanding of their personal needs. Secondly, the review shows that recognizing the *rights* of the children and youth enhances the possibility of their feeling accepted. The understandable fear connected to having no legal rights to stay (in the situation of those who are still seeking asylum or waiting for renewal of their residency permit) is a form

of misrecognition. In addition, unaccompanied children and youth face several changes in their lives, because of the bureaucratic care systems. The lack of stability can result in inability to create loving, trusting relationships, as situations can change from day to day. Finally, unaccompanied children and youth often have few people in their lives with the knowledge needed to support them in fulfilling their potential as full members of a community, hence, giving them access to *solidarity*. In practice, this means that the young people are not able to share their knowledge and skills through their contributions within a community.

Revisiting prior research from the point of view of recognition contributes to our understanding of recognition; as Thomas (2012) argued, the three modes of recognition are not hierarchical, singular stages but instead are all linked together simultaneously. In the lives of unaccompanied children and youth, love is not only a primary stage of recognition but also a mode of recognition interdependent with rights and solidarity. One cannot be loved without reciprocal recognition as an individual or without communal rights as an active member of a community (regardless of whether it is a community of only two or more than two people). Recognition does not mean that all of a person's desires and needs are met. Recognition means that those needs are heard, seen, felt and shared. Recognition also requires dialogue with others and an attempt to consider how we position each other within the relationship. Furthermore, recognition resides not only between individuals but can also be found at the institutional level. To be recognized, institutionally or in personal relationships, helps to create an appreciative image of oneself as part of a community.

Understanding the lives of unaccompanied children and youth from the point of view of recognition reminds us that there are no common "good" practices that are supportive or suitable for all unaccompanied children and youth. The attempt to fit all unaccompanied children and young people with various backgrounds into same system is problematic. (See, for example, Bitzi & Landolt, 2017 who discuss this from the perspective of education.) To deconstruct the inflexible structures that hinder the possibility to create recognitive and socially just communities for all people, we need to focus on recognizing the individual needs, strengths and abilities of each young person and to allow these young people to participate in decisions defining their own futures. Consequently, practitioners and policy-makers in social work as well as other professionals in unaccompanied children's lives should be educated about the elements of recognition, so that their practices and policies will prioritize the rights and needs of the child over questions of age or immigration status and will enable recognition in its all forms.

Several of the reviewed studies focus on issues raised by the children and youth themselves, rather than on their assumed trauma or vulnerability as seen from the outside. This is a welcome approach in the typically trouble-centred research field related to unaccompanied children and youth. However, recent research still tends to cluster all unaccompanied children and youth in the same category with common needs, strengths and resiliencies. Furthermore, research is concentrated on very few geographical areas, with Great Britain, Norway

and Sweden being overrepresented and fewer voices coming from areas such as the Baltic States and Finland. Therefore, we suggest that there is a need for more research exploring how recognition is displayed in the lives of unaccompanied children and youth in the great range of different institutional, social and cultural structures of different host countries. Furthermore, more research is needed on how recognition is experienced by the children themselves. This would shift the scientific discourse around unaccompanied children and youth from fixed categories of vulnerability and trauma into seeing them as individuals worthy of recognition.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>We acknowledge the controversies with the term 'solidarity,' connected to, for example, in some Right Wing political rhetoric justifying exclusive welfare policies (e.g., Van Dyk & Grafe, 2019). In this article, solidarity refers to the third principle of recognition (Honneth, 1995b), emphasizing the shared experience of participation in a caring, inclusive community.

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