



## KURZINTERVIEW MIT TERRY SMITH (EGN)

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Terry Smith ist Projektkoordinator des [European Guardianship Network \(EGN\)](#), ein interdisziplinäres europäisches Netzwerk zur Vormundschaft von unbegleiteten Minderjährigen.

**Bundesforum:** What is the impact of Corona on guardianship for unaccompanied minors in European Countries? **Smith:** As we know having a strong and trusting relationship is the key to effective guardianship. This is best built by direct contact and the guardian and child spending time together – whether that’s talking about current and past difficulties, planning for the future or simply having some fun time together. The biggest problem was the lack of direct contact with children. Other problems were the children feeling unsure about what was happening, often due to a lack of accessible and translated information, an increased sense of loneliness and isolation and anxiety about their families. Guardians addressed this using social media and different tools to undertake virtual meetings via Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom etc. Children were very adaptable – they use this all the time and most guardians thought it worked – though it is not as good as actual face to face visits.

**Bundesforum:** Do guardians have the same problems in all of European countries during the Corona time? **Smith:** Broadly the issues were the same. Some of the larger institutions where unaccompanied children live had well established systems for infection control. They were thus more open to allowing some direct visits by guardians though strict social distancing, hygiene and the use of protective equipment were rigorously applied. A very small number of countries conducted initial asylum application interviews online. This made it difficult for guardians to support children through these procedures – it can be hard to offer emotional support in this way.

**Bundesforum:** How do you think guardians’ work will change after Corona? **Smith:** Some children seemed more relaxed and open during a virtual meeting than in a face to face meeting, though this was the exception rather than the rule. I think that the use of technology will become a part of guardians’ toolkits as we go forward. It’s not something to be used all the time but an option that could work in some situations and of course it may be really useful when something unexpected happens that prevents a planned meeting going forward. Most guardians are quick to try to re-establish family contact for the children they work with but I believe that the insight that the pandemic has shown us into the anxiety some children felt about their families in country of origin will serve as an important reminder of this and in consequence guardians will be very focused on family contact. The European Guardianship Network is unclear about how conducting online procedural interviews could develop and we will want to watch this closely.