

Short Research Article

Unaccompanied Foreign Minors, the Difficult Path from Migration to Citizenship

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Abstract

In Italy, the number of unaccompanied foreign minors (UFMs) is constantly and continuously increasing, and includes unaccompanied and separated minors, as well as asylum seekers, coming from different countries and for different reasons. To better understand this phenomenon, the regulations that protect UFMs, the Italian immigration system, and the fundamental rights of children will be discussed. Possible risk factors such as deviance, exploitation and trafficking, and possible intervention strategies to protect unaccompanied foreign minors will also be discussed.

Keywords

minors, integration, inclusion, orientation, rights, education

1. Introduction

Unaccompanied foreign minors are a constant and significant presence in relation to the total number of migrants by sea arriving in Italy, with a rate greater than 13% in 2016 and 2017, up to 15% in 2018, all sharing the same deprivations, all experiencing a journey lasting months—if not years—taken without the support of an adult for a possible better future in Europe. 10787 unaccompanied foreign minors were recorded in Italy as of 31 December 2018 (Note 1), 95,7% of them were accommodated in reception centres, while 4,3% of the minors reported to the Directorate General were recorded as harboured by private individuals.

There are 7.294 UFMs accommodated in secondary level reception centres, accounting for 67,6% of minors in Italy. 28.1% of minors are accommodated in first reception centres. First reception centres include first reception public centres, financed with resources from the FAMI fund (A Migration Asylum and Integration Fund), temporary accommodation facilities activated by the Prefects pursuant to Article 19, paragraph 3-bis of Legislative Decree 142/2015 (the so-called “minor CAS”), first

reception facilities accredited/authorised by the Municipalities or the Regions and, finally, emergency and temporary facilities. Secondary level reception centres, on the other hand, include SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) network facilities, second-line reception facilities financed by the FAMI fund, and all the second-line reception facilities accredited/authorised at a regional or municipal level. As of 31 December 2018, a total of 3500 SPRAR units for unaccompanied minors were funded (Note 2), including 413 second-line reception units funded by the FAMI fund (Note 3). Due to the limited number of people that SPRAR facilities can accommodate, many minors remain in the first reception facilities for long periods, many months or even years. Being temporary reception facilities, these cannot guarantee the services aimed at the social inclusion and the independence of minors, such as school enrolment and attendance of vocational training courses, work placement, etc. Furthermore, operators are often not adequately trained. Many UFM, therefore, are accommodated for long periods in reception facilities where no one takes care of their path of inclusion or procedure aimed at obtaining documents, and where sometimes even basic needs are not adequately met. Some of the almost 4,700 minors were untraceable at the end of June 2018; these were boys and girls who decided to leave the facilities where they were accommodated, to look elsewhere for better opportunities: the so-called “untraceable” minors (Note 4).

Furthermore, the fact that SPRAR facilities are not able to accommodate all of them and the absence of a system designed to distribute UFM accepted outside this national system between regions mean that the responsibility for the reception of these minors is disproportionately assigned to the landing regions, which does not happen with adults. As of 30 June 2018, 43,3% of the UFM reported to the Directorate General of Immigration and present in Italy were in Sicily, while populous and relatively rich regions such as Piedmont and Veneto accommodated, together, about 5% of them. The municipalities and prefectures involved in the landings, therefore, must manage the reception of a very large number of unaccompanied minors.

Finally, many unaccompanied minors are detained in hotspots for extended periods, even months. In these centres, minors, some of whom are very young, live with adults, under severe overcrowded conditions, in many cases they are forced to sleep on the ground and use the same bathrooms as adults, with obvious risks of being sexually abused.

Furthermore, it is common for minors to be transferred from their landing areas, as part of transfers of adult asylum seekers, to first reception facilities for adults in the central-northern regions, where they remain for long periods and sometimes up to the age of majority. This practice, also reported by the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the reception system, is in clear contrast with the current legislation, which expressly prohibits the placement of UFM in adult reception centres and their detention.

In 2017, these serious violations of children's rights were brought to the attention of the European Court of Human Rights, which adopted several provisional measures to protect some unaccompanied minors assigned by the Italian authorities to adult reception centres.

2. Hypothesis

“High inclusion” reception models are, for unaccompanied foreign minors, the most “suitable” form of inclusion and safety, which helps them work on their new life, the new social model. “Low-inclusion models”, on the other hand are different, as, although the inclusion and integration steps are constantly mediated, the contacts between foreign minors and host communities are not frequent, and there is no mutual knowledge.

3. Objectives

- Identifying, in general, the strategies implemented for the inclusion of unaccompanied minors in Italy.
- Investigate the quality of social integration of unaccompanied foreign minors into different reception contexts.

Direction: foreign minors/families, work, identity and free choice, health and well-being.

Field: Sociology of territory, Sociology of migrations.

Investigation tools

Two main types of information gathering tools will be used. As regards the context analysis, descriptive tools will be used: data made available by research institutes, data and information obtained from published surveys.

Keywords: minors, integration, inclusion, orientation.

4. Discussion

The question of UFM's who, after arriving in Italy, move through illegal routes to other EU countries is a phenomenon known for many years. Already in July 2012, UNHCR had published the “Protecting children on the move” report, with the results of a monitoring work aimed at collecting evidence and identifying practices in the care and assistance of unaccompanied minors moving between Italy, Greece and France. Based on this document, many of them tend to avoid any form of protection offered at the national level, or leave the reception facilities shortly after their arrival, as they are afraid of not being able to reach their final destination and jeopardize their “migration project”. More recently, in June 2018, UNHCR has published the “Desperate Journeys” report (Note 5), from which it emerged that, despite an increase in the relocation procedures that allowed the legal transfer of many asylum seekers and refugees (including minors) to many EU countries (Note 6), the procedures were still too complex, especially those for family reunification (Note 7), the main reason behind the voluntary departure of minors from reception centres. UNHCR has identified different types of intervention in favour of children on the move, implemented by the local competent social services.

The data available as of 31/12/2018 confirmed that the region that receives the greatest number of UFM's is Sicily (4.097, equal to 38% of the total number), followed by Lombardy (875 minors, equal to 8,1%), Emilia Romagna (792 minors, equal to 7,3%), Friuli Venezia Giulia (785 minors, equal to 7,3%) and Lazio (761 minors, equal to 7,1%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of UFM's in Italy by Region as of 31.12.2018

Region	Data as of 31/12/2018 V.a.	%
Sicily	4.097	38
Lombardy	875	8,1
Emilia Romagna	792	7,3
Friuli Venezia Giulia	785	7,3
Lazio	761	7,1
Calabria	522	4,8
Tuscany	474	4,4
Puglia 424	424	3,9
Campania	357	3,3
Veneto	322	3,0
Piedmont	307	2,8
Liguria	233	2,2
Sardinia	181	1,7
Marche	155	1,4
Basilicata	146	1,4
Molise	97	0,9
Abruzzo	77	0,7
PA di Bolzano	71	0,7
Umbria	69	0,6
PA di Trento 32 0,3	32	0,3
Valle d'Aosta 10 0,1	10	0,1
Total	10.787	100

95,7% of the 10,787 minors who were in Italy as of 31 December 2018 were accommodated in reception centres, while 4,3% of the minors reported to the Directorate General of Immigration are harboured by private individuals/entities.

As shown in Table 2, 7.294 UFM's, accounting for 67,6% of the minors in Italy, are accommodated in second-line reception facilities. 28.1% of minors are accommodated in first reception facilities. First reception centres include first reception public centres, financed with resources from the FAMI fund (Migration Asylum and Integration Fund), temporary accommodation facilities activated by the Prefects pursuant to Article 19, paragraph 3-bis of Legislative Decree 142/2015 (the so-called “minor

CAS”), first reception facilities accredited/authorised by the Municipalities or the Regions and, finally, emergency and temporary facilities. Secondary level reception centres, on the other hand, include SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) network facilities, second-line reception facilities financed by the FAMI fund, and all the second-line reception facilities accredited/authorised at a regional or municipal level.

As of 31 December 2018, a total of 3500 SPRAR units for unaccompanied minors were funded (Note 8), including 413 second-line reception units funded by the FAMI fund (Note 9).

Table 2. Distribution of UFM in Italy by Type of Accommodation as of 31.12.2018

TYPE OF HOSPITALITY		N ° di MSNA	
		N ° MSNA PRESENTI	%
SECOND RECEPTION FACILITIES		7294	67,6
FIRST RECEPTION FACILITIES		3032	28.1
PRIVATE		461	4.3

The local bodies that join the SPRAR network ensure that the unaccompanied foreign minors they are responsible have access to a series of services designed to guarantee the rights provided for by the law, the regularization of their legal status, their gradual independence and their inclusion in the local society, based on their prerogatives and without prejudice to the responsibilities of the other local institutional actors involved for different reasons. When a child enters a reception facility, the first activity carried out by the operators consists precisely in the preparation of an individual educational project (PEI), on the basis of which the different activities offered by the centre, which will involve the child throughout his/her stay at the facility, are planned and organized, activities also aimed at his/her possible and desirable integration into the host community. One of the priority interventions included in the PEI is the learning of the Italian language; moreover, the participation of minors in a wide range of recreational, sporting, and cultural activities (cultural tours, exhibitions, training workshops, courses of various kinds, sporting activities, dance, volunteering, etc.) is promoted. A way to involve children in the activities practiced by their peers and with whom to share a growth path.

In addition to the aforementioned activities, among the different actions included in a PEI, the vocational training of minors on their path towards independence and inclusion in the host community has a privileged position. The project investment in training programs for these young recipients requires preliminary mapping of the job positions available in the area, which is included in almost all projects and involves the establishment of more or less formal relationships with as many institutional and non-institutional actors, which are the basis of the territorial network giving life to ideas, projects, and new life paths. The training sector in which minors are mainly involved is the restaurant/tourism

industry, followed by craftsmanship; apprenticeships and/or work grants in favour of UFM are also predominantly initiated in the restaurant/tourism and craftsmanship sectors, and there are several experiences that, following these programs, led to work placements for minors.

Almost all the projects also promote information actions aimed at raising awareness among the city communities on the issues of the right to asylum and the condition of applicants and holders of international protection.

5. Conclusions

The positive effects of the inclusion of UFM in the different projects at the end of their path are: an improvement in living conditions, not only from an economic point of view but also in terms of relationships, and an improvement of linguistic and technical-professional skills, sometimes also based on their (formal and informal) training background, which can be an immediate earning opportunity.

At the same time, some critical issues emerge, such as: the short duration of the apprenticeships, which is an obstacle to the complete and effective inclusion of a trainees in a company; the trainees' poor linguistic skills and a lack of adequate orientation for the trainees; the uneven territorial distribution of the programs completed and the concentration of a significant number of them in the regions of Southern Italy (in particular Sicily), characterised by lower employment rates.

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Notes

Note 1. Source: Interior Ministry

Note 2. Source: SPRAR central service database.

Note 3. Source: SPRAR central service database.

Note 4. “Untraceable” means unaccompanied foreign minors whose departure has been reported by the competent authorities to the Directorate General of Immigration. Departures are recorded in the SIM until the age of majority or until the children are tracked down. The total number of untraceable UFM mentioned above is the total number of departures recorded over the years relating to persons who have not yet reached the age of majority.

Note 5. UNHCR, *Desperate Journeys*, pp. 23-27.

Note 6. ECRE, *Relocation of Asylum Seekers in Europe, A view from receiving countries* http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/aida_brief_relocation.pdf According to the Ministry of Labour, in 2017, 102 UFM were relocated from Italy <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/italy/asylum-procedure/relocation>. According to the Interior Ministry, 275 UFM were relocated as of 23/10/2018.

Note 7. See UNHCR, *Left in Limbo*, August 2017.

Note 8. Source: SPRAR central service database.

Note 9. Source: SPRAR central service database.