

Short Research Article

Unaccompanied Migrant Minors and Shared Transnational Protection: Limits and Hopes

Maria Platamone^{1*}

¹ Pegaso International, Malta

Received: August 16, 2020

Accepted: August 24, 2020

Online Published: August 27, 2020

doi:10.22158/jecs.v4n3p155

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v4n3p155>

1. Factors Determining the Process Implementation

When talking about the reception of young migrants, “complexity management” is a quite recurring topic.

This is due to the fact the migrant reception is always seen – and consequently investigated – as a “systemic network”, with a focus on the minor’s potential development and on the reception context, but without a real connection with the minor’s personal history.

“Talking about the reception of young migrants means talking about contaminations and conflicts for which shifting of attention is needed, as well as the ability to deal with situations involving events that are constantly evolving, as they take on meanings that are so different that are often incomprehensible, and almost not related to each other” (Sclavi, 2013).

The idea to implement a shared protection process – although not always feasible – is definitely a new approach to child protection.

In this regard, the classification of the factors determining the implementation of shared protection, provided by the Roman research group based on data from the former Committee of Foreign Minors and, masterfully summarised and commented on by Ciancio in 2016, is very important.

More specifically, four fundamental aspects have been identified:

1. The identification of the child’s family in his or her country of origin and the possibility of communicating with it;
2. The characteristics of the family in question, that is, the parent-child relationship;
3. The analysis of perspectives or the will to keep in touch to and protect the minor;
4. With reference to the previous point, if there is no desire to maintain relationships, investigating the child abandonment situation, in order to select the tools that apply to situations of abandonment of local minors.

After analysing the factors listed above, I used the available data obtained from the files on minors in the Rome area to investigate the topic.

The available data were extrapolated from some published interviews.

The analysis is based on four interviews, which certainly do not represent a particularly significant sample, but can definitely help explore the “shared protection” option.

More specifically, I investigated three aspects by reading their stories:

Family situation in the child’s country of origin.

Quality of the parent-child relationship in the minor’s country of origin before his or her departure.

Communication/Relationships in the child’s country of origin and in his or her host country.

Story No. 1 (R.C, 17 years old, from Bengal)

Family situation in the minor’s country of origin before his or her departure: unemployed parents, poverty, three younger brothers.

Quality of the relationship in the minor’s country of origin before his or her departure: bad relationship due to the financial conditions of his family, he reports that he suffered the consequences of the difficult situation at home.

Communication/Relationships in the child’s country of origin and in his or her host country: they sometimes talk on the phone, his parents feel guilty for letting him go.

Story No. 2 (H.S, 16 years old, from Egypt)

Family situation in the minor’s country of origin before his or her departure: he reports that his father has lost his job, and he has three sisters who need him to work and send money for their dowries.

Quality of the relationship in the minor’s country of origin before his or her departure: he reports that his is a close-knit family where everyone helps each other.

Communication/Relationships in the child’s country of origin and in his or her host country: frequent communication, they talk to each other every day.

Story No. 3 (J.K, 17 years old, from Afghanistan)

Family situation in the minor’s country of origin before his or her departure: his parents separated when he was a child, he stayed with his father, while he never saw his mother again. He lived in extreme poverty.

Quality of the relationship in the minor’s country of origin before his or her departure: his father is disabled, and since he can’t work he has forced him to work and earn money since he was a child. That’s why he did not go to school, although he wanted to. This caused them to fight, and it was the main reason he was beaten by his father.

Communication/Relationships in the child’s country of origin and in his or her host country: no relationship, he reports that he has left his country after secretly saving the money for the journey. He says he does not want to go back to his home country.

Story No. 4 (A.M, 15 years old, from Albania)

Family situation in the minor's country of origin before his or her departure: he lived with his mother and two younger sisters, his father was arrested after being accused of murder, and he left Albania because he was afraid of being killed in revenge.

Quality of the relationship in the minor's country of origin before his or her departure: he reports that his family was happy until his father was arrested, then everything got worse.

Communication/Relationships in the child's country of origin and in his or her host country: he manages to communicate with his family that he misses a lot and would like to take them to Italy.

Although this is not, as I mentioned before, a significant sample, based on what has been stated so far, three out of four minors claim to have a close relationship with their families of origin and to maintain, although for different reasons, links with their homelands.

In light of the above, in my opinion, we should start to consider the possibility of letting go the idea to separate "care and protection" of local minors and "care and protection" of unaccompanied migrant minors, as, to date, this seems to be the greatest difficulty that social policies have to deal with.

"...a collective that requires the same type of protection provided to marginalised and vulnerable children, which is made impossible by the fact that we are unable to predict how strong the impact of the skills of local authorities in Italian municipalities may be" (Save the Children, 2003).

2. The Road to Simplified Child Protection, the Life Project

According to Recommendation CM/Rec. 2007 of the Committee of Ministers to the member states on "Life projects" for unaccompanied migrant minors, and the analysis of some reception contexts, the good practice of "Individualised Projects" shall be an increasingly central aspect of reception policies.

In the same Recommendation, "Life Projects" are individual tools provided based on a joint undertaking between unaccompanied migrant minors and the competent authorities for a limited duration.

The individual projects define the minor's future prospects, promote the best interests of the child and provide a long-term response to his or her needs, as well as support to the parties "protecting" the child. Life projects can be a valid solution to the challenges arising out of the migration of unaccompanied minors and its management. They shall, therefore, be the link between the reception policies adopted by EU member states, in order to tackle the many difficulties arising out of migration and the path of each individual migrant, who can't rely on his or her parents.

According to the Recommendations, life projects shall be based on a multidisciplinary approach, in order to better define the situation of each individual minor. More specifically, they shall take account of: the minor's personal profile, migration itinerary, and nature of his or her family relations. Moreover, each project shall consider the minor's individualised and flexible objectives, the most suitable type of supervision and assessment, at defined time intervals, for the exchange of information between the

minor and the competent authorities.

Projects shall take into account the opportunities offered by the host country and the minor's country of origin.

With regard to the specific objectives above, life projects might be implemented either in the host country or in the country of origin, or both of them, according to the features of each single step.

It is, therefore, a programme developed and discussed by the minor and the competent authorities in the host country, since these shall create the ideal conditions for its success, also to avoid creating a gap between the minor's expectations and the opportunities available.

This, unfortunately, is quite common, as life projects require to make a great effort in terms of organisation, but, above all, they require multidisciplinary synergistic work. It often happens that the minor's wishes and expectations are fully recognised, that the competent authorities can meet these expectations in a specific context and at that given moment. However, if the local players involved do not communicate, it is not so unlikely that individual objectives will get lost when managing protocols, difficult relationships and the impatience of the minor, who will inevitably feel "betrayed" as his expectations are not met.

By way of example, if a minor is included in some educational/training programmes in the host community, but there is no communication with the school – the educational reference point – this could not just cause the failure of the intervention in question, but could also make the minor feel uncomfortable and damage his or her future.

"...often the gap between the minor's expectations and the opportunities offered by the network of services at his or her disposal is so huge that making those wishes come true and turning opportunities into reality becomes crucial" (Drammech, 2010).

3. A "School To Change" for Migrant Minors, Including and above all Unaccompanied Migrant Minors

A research conducted by the ISMU Foundation, an independent scientific body that studies migratory phenomena in Lombardy, Italy and Europe, in order to carry out objective analyses and propose effective solutions, shows a picture of the Italian school system characterised by multiple paradoxes and contradictions, especially secondary education.

Secondary school teachers define school through the evocative image of Pandora's box, that is, a place where discomfort, suffering and discomfort of foreign (and non) students and their families – when they are in the picture – are expressed.

The school system, however – and despite these issues – is still capable of promoting the ability to find positive elements, skills, hopes in all students, focusing on their individual intelligence and talents and helping all of them find their own path (not only within the school system). Foreign students say that the Italian school system is able to manage and promote educational practices and strategies that guarantee the same educational opportunities for new generations of foreign students as those offered

to local students. Foreign students are recognised by the school system as valuable resources, as they bring linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity into the system, which is essential for promoting the development of a “culture among cultures”, shared through communication and interethnic relationships; an exchange that only educational contexts can promote and experience.

Although this general approach to education has been hindered by financial crises and, sometimes – especially when social cohesion has lost ground to leave room for fears - has been questioned, the intercultural approach is a road that is difficult but paved with good intentions.

The objective difficulties that education is experiencing (refugee emergency, reduction of social protections, new walls and closed borders) are often due to a lack of synergy between the interventions, to the fact that schools are not always supported and not all their needs are met, while still being an extremely important reference. That’s why the education system must be revamped, as the main strategy for the development of spaces for debate (not only about education) and exchange of experiences shared by the new migrant and native generations. This could be not only an antidote to intolerance and extremism, but also the foundation for the construction of “authentic life projects”.

A challenge that involves school and training policies, which, although in the background of this relationship, are the main target, after analysing emergencies and goals of foreign students. This is to promote the right to education, especially for the most disadvantaged (unaccompanied migrant minors, asylum seekers, etc.), through access to different school levels; access to mixed, non-segregated and high quality schools; promotion of educational success through equal treatment and support from qualified teachers.

Considering the students’ (cultural and linguistic) resources as additional skills, to support individual talents, trying to develop the conditions for their full participation in the education system. Transforming educational programmes, curricula and staff training in order to promote interculturalism and reduce prejudices and stereotypes by investing in the management of school relationships, in the mediation of conflicts and in the improvement of the different forms of cooperation with local services. We should, therefore, also refer to the recommendations addressed to governments in the conclusions of the UNESCO Report, which ask to meet the education and training needs of migrants, just as they do with locals, while avoiding the discretion exercised – sometimes – by individual school workers when it comes to protecting this right.

In fact, in many cases, migrant minors – especially unaccompanied migrant minors – are considered as temporary or transitory presences, they are often addressed to training courses that reduce their present and future opportunities, programmes that do not allow them, for example, to obtain recognised qualifications. On the other hand, monitoring and identifying their educational needs and offering suitable educational solutions, through accelerated education programmes, with the support of qualified teachers who will assess the education level of a migrant student enrolled at our schools, covering any education and training costs, providing adult learners with technical-professional education and training, as well as with informal educational programmes developed locally, would be a major step forward and

would turn migrant reception into real “protection” of minors and the communities they are joining as well. As part of life projects, unaccompanied migrant minors shall be supported so that they can actively participate and give their contribution to the change of multicultural educational contexts. This is done by training them and providing them with instruments that will relieve the stress that school may inadvertently cause, and also by promoting equality and focusing on the potential of each single student, which can be exploited to individualise and improve “Life projects”.