



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL INTERVENTION AIMED AT MIGRANT MINORS

COLOURFUL HORIZONS: a Save the Children Italy project for the prevention of deviance and for the social reintegration of foreign minors subject to criminal proceedings



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il Lazio Roma



PROVINCIA
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Save the Children
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Nicola Mai¹

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promoted by Save the Children Italia Onlus, with the support
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List of abbreviations

ANCI - Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani (National Association of Italian Municipalities)

ANPDC (Romania) - Associazione Nazionale per la Protezione dei Diritti dei Bambini (National Association for the Protection of Children's Rights)

CCM (Roma) - Centro di Contrasto alla Mendicizia (Center for the Prevention of Begging)

CDS (Roma) - Casa dei Diritti Sociali (Institute of Social Rights)

CGM - Centro Giustizia Minorile (Juvenile Justice Center)

CMS - Comitato per i Minori Stranieri (Committee for Foreign Minors)

CPA - Centro di Prima Accoglienza (First Reception Center)

DPC (Romania) - Departamentul pentru Protecția Copilului/Dipartimento per la Protezione del Bambino (Department for the Protection of the Child)

FONPC (Romania) - Federazione delle ONG Attive nel Campo della Protezione del Bambino (Federation of NGOs Active in the Field of the Protection of the Child)

FRCCF (Romania) - Fundația Română pentru Copii, Comunitate și Familie/Fondazione Rumena per i Bambini, la Comunità e la Famiglia (Romanian Foundation for Children, the Community and the Family)

IPM - Istituto Penale Minorile (Penal Institution for Minors)

MSNA - Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati (Unaccompanied Foreign Minors)

IOM - International Organization for Migration

Salvați Copiii - Save the Children Romania

SSI - Servizio Sociale Internazionale (International Social Service)

TAR - Tribunali Amministrativi Regionali (Regional Administrative Courts)

TM - Tribunali per i Minorenni (Juvenile Courts)

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

USSM - Ufficio Servizio Sociale per Minori (Social Services Department for Minors)

Preface

Introduction

This research is part of the Colourful Horizons project, promoted in Rome by Save the Children Italy. The purpose of the project is to reduce the number of foreign minors who are exploited or involved in illegal activities in Rome and to promote their integration in society, with special reference to unaccompanied foreign children facing criminal proceedings. Within the context of the project, the research analysed the relationship between the migratory routes of Romanian migrant children living in Rome, their involvement in illegal activities and their experience of the social intervention initiatives concerning them, in order to identify methods of intervention that may be more effective than those adopted today.

Romanian minors were identified as the target group of the research because they represent the largest group of foreign children in Italy. As far as their involvement in illegal activities is concerned, Romanian minors are the largest group of foreign minors housed in CPAs and in Penal Institutions for Minors (IPMs) on a national level. This particularly applies to the situation in Rome, which also features the highest number of arrivals at national level. The involvement of Romanian minors in illegal activities and the relative social dynamics they face, indicates a condition of great social and economic vulnerability and helps to foster feelings of insecurity, together with xenophobic and racist reactions that could lead to the enactment of measures that would go against the protection of their best interests.

Methodology

The research is of a qualitative kind, and was conducted by two teams: one in Rome, Italy, and one in Romania, in Bucharest and Craiova, respectively the capital and the area of origin of the majority of Romanian children living in Rome. Both teams were coordinated by Nicola Mai, through the conducting of interviews in the field and focus groups² and the organization of periodical meetings aimed at training the researchers and supervising the collecting of interviews. The final analysis was made by Nicola Mai, in conjunction with the team from Save the Children Italy coordinating the Colourful Horizons project in Rome (Elena Rozzi, Giancarlo Spagnoletto and Antonella Inverno). As part of the research, 64 open-ended interviews with minors/young adults and families and 30 open-ended interviews with institutional parties were conducted.

Legislative scenario

The inconsistency of the Italian legal system and the resulting lack of institutional coordination seriously hamper the activities of social workers. They are often unable to offer the children definite, credible and feasible alternatives to the children's resort to illegal activities.

Until 2006 the lack of an organized approach applied at national level led to the adoption, at local level, of different regulatory frameworks to discipline the residence and the subsequent possible integration of minors. This sometimes caused a proliferation of residence permits not foreseen by regulations and different procedures in the various Italian provincial police headquarters.

In January 2007 the entry of Romania into the European Union and the consequent application of regulations concerning EU citizens paradoxically made social intervention aimed at Romanian minors even more complex.

Survival strategies: the connection between migration and illegal activities

Some of the foreign minors who were interviewed and who had problems with the law in Italy had already resorted to theft and begging in order to survive in Romania. But for most of them the involvement in illegal activities takes place in the context of emigration, after clashing with very strong social exclusion factors, such as: impossibility to work and/or to study, marginalization by Italian minors of the same age, difficulty in finding dwellings, etc.

² The term *focus group* refers to discussion groups guided by a moderator, on specific themes concerning the research.

The life trajectory of migrant minors winds through the relative choice between numerous practices that are perceived as legal or illegal, moral or immoral, depending on the social context, the family background and the individual sensitivity of the minor. These comprise work in sectors with a high rate of irregularity (agriculture, construction), begging (Roma children), theft and sex work.

The dynamics of 'exploitation' encountered in the context of the research must be seen as intrinsically ambivalent and complex and must be related to the context of individual life experiences and the cultural and social realities the minors come from and to which they belong. In this perspective, working, stealing or begging for oneself and/or for others may be perceived by some as a morally acceptable means of survival for the individual and the family, by others as forms of self-fulfilment, while others still may see these as forms of abuse and prevarication.

In this perspective, Romanian (non-Roma) minors tend to be 'exploited' within the context of peer group dynamics, or in any case of life trajectories characterized by a search for individual autonomy. Roma Romanian minors tend to be involved in cases of 'exploitation' within the context of family networks. In both cases it is a matter of the same networks or relations within which the two groups emigrate. Cases of 'exploitation' of male prostitution appear to remain somewhat limited and occasional, while the 'exploitation' of children dedicated to theft and begging is, on the contrary, more common.

Social intervention in Rome

The main problem for the system of social intervention aimed at minors migrating to Rome is children's high rate of escape from the civil CPAs, which many of them consider a waste of time with respect to their need to make money for themselves and their families, regardless of whether these are in Italy or in Romania. Moreover, the centres are often experienced as infantilizing by the minors, whose migratory project is set in motion because of their search for greater independence. The presence of relatives in Italy is another reason that encourages many minors (especially Roma) to escape, since they often run away to join them. The presence of debts yields a very negative influence on the process of integration of the minors, as repaying the debts often becomes a priority over any social reintegration plans.

As to the secondary community homes and residential centres, the most positive experiences come from those which offer the migrant child a significant emotive relationship with a stable contact person and the certainty of being able to realize a process of regularization and integration through the definition of an ad hoc procedural protocol with the relevant institutions, gradually guiding the child towards economic and social independence over a longer period of time.

On the other hand, with regard to social intervention specifically aimed at the Roma population, the lack of trained Roma Romanian cultural mediators and the extemporaneous nature of the contact with the user group make it hard for minors to form a relationship that is sufficiently strong to complement that with the family of origin and the street network. Moreover, only in some Roma settlements is it possible to monitor the children's situation and involve the family in the integration process, especially in relation to access to education and the job market.

The greatest difficulty of social intervention aimed at the Roma population involves the identification of cases of 'exploitation' within the context of the complex nature of family relations that often 'misaccompany' the minor.

In Romania

The data gathered during the research allows us to conclude that despite the considerable progress made since the years immediately following the communist period, the Romanian social protection system is incapable of responding to the needs of the majority of migrant children on a medium to long term basis, while it appears better prepared to tackle the challenges associated with the initial reception of repatriated minors, especially children who have been involved in trafficking.

Despite the fact that there have been considerable improvements in the legislative system and

in the initiatives of social intervention aimed at the protection of children, the type of support the Romanian social services can offer families in difficulty remains extremely limited, due to a lack of sufficient financial resources.

These observations have important implications for the process of assisted repatriation. There is, in particular, a substantial lack of homogeneity in the level of expertise and resources dedicated to family investigations. Moreover, the brief duration and insufficient support offered by current assisted repatriation initiatives makes the repatriation of trafficking victims, who need a more complex process of reintegration than unaccompanied children do, unsustainable even on a medium-term basis.

We underline the need for more efficient communication between colleagues of the social services of the countries that are placed in contact with each other due to a child's migratory trajectory. At the same time, the civil servants working for the Romanian authorities and social services were critical of the type of educational and social integration opportunities that are offered to unaccompanied minors in Italy.

Main recommendations

In Italia

The best interests of the child could be guaranteed more efficiently through the introduction of a network of different social intervention initiatives, capable of meeting the individual needs and trajectories of each minor on the basis of his or her level of autonomy, and of criteria and procedures shared by the entire services system and by all of the institutions involved.

Regarding migrant children exposed to 'exploitation' issues, it would appear advisable to provide a way to be able to hold them 'officially' for a short period, during which time they could free themselves from incumbent financial pressure and form more significant relationships with project workers. Moreover, the cooperation between NGOs, social services and police forces should result in the definition of criteria to be used as an assessment tool and the adoption of standard procedures for cases of 'exploitation'.

As to minors who need a relatively high level of assistance in order to achieve greater independence, the most positive experiences are those of centres which offer the migrant minor:

- constant, consistent care and educational support, provided by permanent contact persons who are constantly present
- a residential service
- the certainty that he or she will be granted the right to residence, to work and to health through the definition of an ad hoc procedural protocol with the institutions concerned
- a personalized project aimed at social integration
- gradual guidance, extended in time, towards financial and social self-reliance.

Finally, as regards the migratory trajectories of children characterized by a higher level of autonomy, in addition to drop-in centres with low access threshold, it should be possible to create types of 'light judicial guardianship' where minors would be put in the care of relatives and/or persons in charge of social services, but physically placed in Roma camps and/or other residential facilities rather than the 'centre for minors', to allow young people to enjoy greater independence.

As far as the Roma population in particular is concerned, it is essential to immediately extend the minimum tools for monitoring and intervention currently existing in some authorized camps to spontaneous settlements too, in the hope that in the future there will be a willingness to adopt strategies aimed more at integration and that are less restrictive, or that offer access to appropriate housing, education and work.

Assisted repatriation

It is fundamental that the Italian and Romanian authorities (preferably within the context of guidelines established at EU level) clarify, as soon as possible, the competencies and procedures associated with family investigations and repatriation, in addition to the criteria on which

repatriation is decided, in full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international, European and Italian regulations on the rights of children.

To make a more rapid and personalized evaluation of what is in the best interests of the child, a much greater investment must be made in the personnel and structures dedicated to the management of repatriation and family investigations, both in Italy and in Romania, that at present have to deal with a very large, complex workload, with insufficient human and financial resources.

Apart from these structural difficulties, to offer repatriated minors better opportunities in terms of social reintegration, assisted repatriation projects should feature:

- substantial aid and intervention involving the family situation as a whole, and not just the financial and social autonomy of the child
- monitoring, to continue over a longer period in order to guide the child and his/her family towards greater independence in a sustainable way
- appropriate economic investment, able to guarantee real opportunities for the child and his/her family.

These conditions can only be met if Romania finds the financial resources required to invest in an appropriate system of social protection for all minors and their families, not just those involved in child migration.



INTRODUCTION: OBJECTIVES, CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

1

³ The publication *Foreign Minors in Prison*, by Alfredo Carlo Moro, Valerio Bellotti and Roberto Maurizio (Ed. Guerini e Associati, 2006) is particularly relevant for our research, which may be considered as an ethnographic in-depth study (focus on Romanian and Roma minors) and local (trans-local dimension Rome/Craiova); the research also analyses the context of origin and the individual experience of the child. For a good summarized version of this publication, www.fondazioneozanam.org/minori_stranieri_in_carcere.htm. Another text that is particularly useful, especially regarding the criticism towards the legislative structure aimed at foreign minors, is *Alvise Sbraccia, Chiara Scivoletto (edited by) Migrant minors: rights and deviation. Socio-judicial investigations on unaccompanied minors* Ed. L'Harmattan Turin, 2004. As to the involvement of foreign minors in male prostitution in Rome, our project is based on the results of the research conducted by Terre des Hommes/FRCCF/CDS in Rome, that had already identified, in December 2005, Craiova as one of the main areas of origin of the Rumanian minors present in Rome. Compared with the TDH research, this research focuses on activities that are illegal in the strict sense of the term (the exploitation - and not the exercising - of prostitution, theft, drug pushing etc.) and acknowledges the social, cultural and economic difference between the Roma Romanian and the non-Roma Romanian population. The unabridged text of the research is available online http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/tdh_2005_aumento_della_prostituzione_minorile_rumena_a_roma_051216.pdf.

⁴ Data from the Ministry of Justice, available online, http://www.giustizia.it/statistiche/statistiche_dgm/organigramma.htm.

⁵ Statistics service of the

1.1 Objectives of research

Save the Children Italy, within the framework of the Colourful Horizons project, commissioned Nicola Mai, migration processes anthropologist at the London Metropolitan University, to conduct the research.

Colourful Horizons is a project set up with the aim of reducing the number of foreign minors who are exploited or involved in illegal activities, and promoting their inclusion and integration in society, with particular attention to unaccompanied foreign children who face criminal proceedings. This goal is pursued by means of three main activities:

- offering children information, guidance and support;
- trying out innovative processes aimed at reinstating and reintegrating migrant children into society (regularization, education, professional training, introduction onto the job market, etc.);
- reinforcing the system of social intervention through an in-depth study of what is known about this situation, training of project workers, inter-institutional coordination, the creation of awareness among institutions and the development of an intervention model based on the innovative experience put in place.

The above aims and actions form the scope of the research, which is an in-depth study of the connection between the migratory route of the Romanian minor migrants who live in Rome, their involvement in illegal activities and their experience with the social intervention initiatives set up for their benefit. This is in order to identify methods of action that may be more effective than those adopted at present.

The research also aims at allowing project workers to obtain a better understanding of the situation, in order to enable them to take more effective action when dealing with the problem of the involvement of migrant children in illegal operations and to create a greater awareness of these issues among institutions and public opinion.

To maximize the utility of the research, in our work we sought to integrate existing investigations on the subject of the presence of unaccompanied children and their involvement in survival strategies (including illegal activities), trying to avoid unnecessary overlapping and repetition³. From this point of view, these are the most innovative aspects of our research:

- the comparative perspective between migratory experiences, involvement in illegal activities and social initiatives aimed at Romanian minors (Roma and non-Roma) present in Rome,
- a participatory action research methodological approach and the combination of ethnographic observation and gathering of open-ended interviews,
- double focus on the country of origin (Romania) and on that of immigration,
- attention dedicated to the individual identity project of the child and his/her development throughout the migratory process,
- acknowledgement of the trans-local relationship between Rome and Craiova, the main area of origin of Romanian children living in Rome,
- attention dedicated to the problem of children who are 'abandoned' in Romania as a result of the emigration of one or both parents, and the role played by these dynamics in the children's involvement in illegal activities,
- acknowledgement of the difficulties associated with identifying the dynamics of abuse and trafficking within the framework of the migratory trajectory of children and their relations with the family context.

After presenting the social intervention scenario of which this investigation forms a part, together with its main goals and distinctive features, the next section of this introductory section will analyse the social and (geo)political context involved.

1.2 Presentation of context of research

In the first quarter of 2007⁴, Romanian minors represented 23% of the children staying in CPAs in Italy (1824), and over 42% of foreign children (997). In 2006⁵ foreign children (72% male and 28% female) represented 58% of new arrivals in the Centres, 78% of which came from Eastern Europe, with a 7% increase in the Romanian population over the previous year. Not only are there more habitual offenders among foreign children than

among Italian children, but their involvement in crimes against property (81% compared with other types of crimes) is higher than that of Italian minors (62%). Moreover, foreign children staying in the CPAs are more frequently subject to the application of detention awaiting trial (44%) while measures that do not involve detention, such as house arrest, are more frequently provided for Italian minors (35%). As regards new arrivals in the Penal Institutions for Minors (IPM), in 2006 most detainees were foreign (54%) with the majority coming from Eastern European countries, particularly from Romania, former Yugoslavian countries and Albania. Finally, the percentage of minors in charge of the Social Services Department for Minors (USSM) is much higher for Italian minors (76%) than for foreign minors (54%), who are more frequently sentenced to detention awaiting trial rather than provided with other alternatives (such as house arrest and placement in communities), and who record a higher rate of escape from the centres (46%), when compared to Italian minors (23%).

These figures, that are characteristic of the Italian reality in general, are particularly evident in Rome, which also receives the highest number of arrivals at national level. In the first half of 2007, total arrivals at the CPAs in Rome represented 30% (557) of total (1824) arrivals at CPAs at a national level. Of the 557 children received by the CPA in Rome in the same period, 432 (77.5%) were foreign. Statistics for the Rome IPM are similar: in the first half of 2007 a total number of 103 minors entered the Institution, of which 86 were foreign, equivalent to 83% of the total figure⁶.

The data collected in Rome by the Colourful Horizons project, for which more than 700 foreign minors were contacted through the street outreach units or CPAs and/or the IPM, confirm these trends and indicate that Romanians (Roma and non-Roma) are the most representative group among the population of migrant children in Rome. Of the 554 minors contacted from the end of September 2005 until the end of June 2006 by the street outreach units, 333 came from Romania, 195 from Afghanistan, while the remaining 26 came from Albania (9), Moldavia (6), Nigeria (3) and Poland (1). Most of the children contacted were boys, but it is important to underline that about one third were girls.

Within the context of the social mediation activities of the Colourful Horizons project, from December 2005 to July 2006 the Save the Children team worked with 86 minors (talking to them at the CPAs and accompanying them to centres), of which 91 per cent were Romanian, 87 per cent male, most of them from 16 to 17 years old. The majority of young Romanians were Roma. As to the family situation, 76 of the 86 minors contacted within the context of the cultural mediation services declared themselves to be 'unaccompanied'; while only in the remaining 10 cases did they make reference to relatives in Rome. In this respect, it is important to stress that 52 of the minors who initially declared themselves to be 'unaccompanied' later actually proved to be accompanied by a relative, and that the actual number of unaccompanied minors must therefore be reduced to 24, almost all of them non-Roma Romanians⁷.

The involvement of migrant children in illegal activities and the associated social dynamics are significant from various points of view. In the first place, the exploitation of the involvement of foreign children in illegal activities (theft, drug pushing, etc.), their entry into the criminal network and the high rate of relapse suggest a condition of great social and economic vulnerability and represent serious problems in terms of the safeguarding of their rights in Italy. Also, the involvement of foreign children in illegal activities has very negative repercussions on the receiving society in which they live, not necessarily with reference to individuals who are victims of crimes but, more in general, due to a growing feeling of insecurity and xenophobic and racist reactions in the population as a whole.

At the same time, the question of unaccompanied foreign children and the substantial cost of their assistance for the local administrations of numerous European countries (including Italy, France, Germany and Spain) encouraged numerous political and institutional players to consider assisted repatriation of migrant children to Romania as an alternative - and less costly - solution than their integration in the country of arrival. Since most of these countries are signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, according to which all measures must be in the best interests of the child, many efforts were made and much pressure exerted at several institutional levels (local, national, international) in order to assure that the best interests of the child coincide with his/her repatriation rather than with the possibility of remaining in the country to which the child or its parents chose to emigrate. The campaigns of media stigmatisation that, in various European countries, addressed the issue of immigration in general and child criminality in particular, resulted in a further politicization of the issue of the involvement of foreign children in illegal activities and of the closely related phenomenon of unaccompanied foreign children.

Department of Justice for minors available online http://www.giustiziaminorile.it/statistica/Analisi/Flussi_2006.pdf.

⁶ Figures from the Ministry of Justice, available online, http://www.giustizia.it/statistiche/statistiche_dgm/organigramma.htm

⁷ Final report for Colourful Horizons Project, Rome: Save the Children Italy, pages 16-17. Available online http://www.savethechildren.it/2003/download/pubblicazioni/minorimigranti/orizzonti_a_colori2006.pdf.

The convergence and pressure of (geo)political and economic interests resulted in the negotiation of international treaties for the readmission of unaccompanied minors in Romania, with diverging results as far as the best interests of the child is concerned. The treaty between France and Romania is particularly significant for the purposes of our study since this treaty was indicated by several institutional and non-governmental parties in Italy and in Romania as a possible example for Italy to follow, at the time the research was undertaken. The revision of the memorandum of understanding between France and Romania in February 2007, which is still awaiting approval by the French parliament, introduces the possibility of bypassing the justice system for children and thus to defer the decision to repatriate to the public prosecutor's office. In Italy, and more specifically in Rome, a series of criminal offences perpetrated by Romanian citizens led to the adoption by the police and by a number of key institutions, including the city council, of a rhetoric of 'mass' repatriation and expulsion that cannot but alarm those who seek to defend the best interests of the child within the framework of administrative strategies associated with the phenomenon of child migration.

From this perspective, the entry of Romania into the European Union on 1 January 2007 represented both an opportunity and a further risk factor for Romanian foreign children. While, on the one hand, all the regulations concerning the repatriation of unaccompanied foreign minors from non-EU countries (with particular reference to the function of the CMS) no longer apply, on the other it is not yet clear what authority is responsible for undertaking the family investigations, consulting the minor and, if applicable, arranging for repatriation, nor which procedures should be adopted and what criteria should be taken into consideration. Clearly there is a risk that, in a situation characterized by a lack of clarity from an institutional and legislative standpoint, repatriations may be carried out (or not carried out, if the family of origin is 'suitable') in violation of the principle of the best interests of the child without the necessary assessment of the family situation and the integration process the child commenced in Italy.

The recent position taken by the Romanian government against the logic and rhetoric of 'mass' repatriation instigated by several Italian political and institutional parties clearly demonstrates that Romania is no longer playing a (geo)politically subordinated role in a European context. But the volatile nature of the social and political situation in Italy, combined with a lack of legal and institutional benchmarks and specific information, make the identification and implementation of measures that correspond to the best interests of the child increasingly difficult.

The research aims to make a positive contribution to the improvement of this situation.

1.3 Methodological approach, implementation and characteristics of research

Before starting to explain the methodological approach and the implementation of the research, it is important to clarify the way in which the concept of 'deviance' will be treated. In fact, in this report the term 'deviance', which is mentioned in the title of the social intervention project of which the research was integral part, was replaced with the expression 'involvement in illegal activities'. The reason for this change is that the concept of deviance is not universal, but an expression of a specific cultural and social system, with respect to which it is constructed socially and persecuted criminally. An example of the moral connotation and nature of the cultural construction of deviance is provided by 'borderline' activities such as begging and prostitution, that are perceived in very different ways by the various parties implicated and in different social contexts: the minors, the police, the family, the clients, the migrant child's society of origin, the project workers involved in the intervention project, the various political and religious sensitivities, the peer group⁸, etc. Since the main purpose of the research is to understand the reasons why so many migrant minors end up in trouble with the law, and to identify effective solutions that will make it possible to reduce the phenomenon and favour their personal development, we consider it more useful to refer to their involvement in illegal activities, rather than to abstract (and culturally/socially deep-rooted) canons of 'deviance' and 'normality'.

The research is of a qualitative type; in other words it is based on the recognition of the value of subjectivity in understanding social phenomena and on the critique of the positivist concept of objectivity. The work was undertaken by 2 teams, one in Rome and the other in Bucharest/Craiova, coordinated by Nicola Mai through the implementation of interviews in the field and focus groups⁹ and the organization of regular meetings aimed at training

⁸ The term 'peer group' refers to forms of spontaneous aggregation typical of adolescents and young people, that offer a fundamental opportunity for expression of an individual dimension of greater autonomy from the family and other situations of 'authority', through the experimentation of new rules and relations with persons of the same age.

⁹ The term *focus group* refers to discussion groups guided by a moderator, on specific themes that are inherent to the research.

personnel and monitoring the collecting of the interviews. The final analysis was made by Nicola Mai, in conjunction with the Colourful Horizons project team in Rome (Elena Rozzi, Giancarlo Spagnoletto and Antonella Inverno).

In line with its qualitative approach, the research methodology was characterized by a combination of a collection of open-ended interviews, the organization of focus groups and ethnographic observation, to allow an understanding, as far as this is possible, of the role of the different types of subjectivity (interviewer and interviewee) involved in the process of gathering information and data for the research. This methodology is inspired by the self-reflective developments of contemporary anthropology, which seeks to relativize the authority of the observer and the analyser (the author) by incorporating, wherever possible, the words of the person observed in the text describing the person. From this point of view ethnographic practice (which is the main methodology of anthropology) seeks to render the voice of the person observed, reducing the role of the author to that of an 'interpreter' of the texts of others, in this case, of the children interviewed. One of the most important implications of this approach is that the ethnographic material becomes an essential part of the 'text' which interprets it. For this reason, during the phase of transcription, translation and analysis of the interviews, an attempt was made to respect and maintain the way in which the foreign minors speak, as far as it is possible to do so; this will be seen in quotations given in sections 3 and 4.

To analyse the complexity of the migratory and social phenomena being examined, the research took place in Rome and in Romania from October 2005 to June 2006 and was conducted in different ways in the two countries. In **Rome** the **participatory action research** method adopted meant that observations and data were collected by persons directly involved in the situation being observed, in this case the project workers. The results of the research in Rome are based on the qualitative data collected by USSM and the project workers within the context of street outreach activities, the cultural mediation services provided within the context of the CPA, the IPM and the communities. The adoption of this methodology called for a particular capacity for self-reflection on the part of the interviewers, who had to take into account for the way in which their double role of interviewers and project workers influenced (positively or negatively) the interpersonal dynamics of the interviews.

The research methods adopted in Rome were open-ended interviews, focus groups and ethnographic observation. On the whole, 12 open-ended interviews were held in Rome with representatives of institutions that deal with the situation regarding the involvement of Romanian children in illegal activities:

- Public Prosecutor's office at the Juvenile Court,
- Juvenile Court,
- Centre for the Prevention of Begging by Minors,
- Virtus Centre,
- Sacra Famiglia CPA,
- ANCI,
- IOM,
- Diplomatic Representation of Romania,
- CMS,
- SSI,
- Ministry of the Interior,
- Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Interviews with the operators of the partner associations and organizations involved in the project took place through focus groups, in order to maximize the exchange of information and benefit from the relationship of professional collaboration between the parties involved. A maximum of 6 people took part in the groups, distributed as follows:

- Liaison staff and operators of CPA, IPM, USSM
- Community homes for minors
- Project workers belonging to street units
- Municipality of Rome Social Services (Department V)

In addition to interviews with institutional parties, 30 open-ended interviews were held with minors; this represented the most relevant and significant material for the conducting of the research.

In Romania the study, conducted by the coordinator Nicola Mai and by the local researcher Tiberiu Văduva, focused on social intervention initiatives aimed at migrant minors, with particular reference to assisted repatriation, and on the analysis of the causes of migration and the contexts of origin of Romanian children. The research was carried out in Bucharest, the capital, and in Craiova, the area from which the majority of Romanian children living in Rome come from.

The research methods adopted in Romania consisted of ethnographic observation and open-ended interviews (34 open-ended interviews with children, young adults and families, including 3 with street children in Bucharest and 31 with minors, young adults and families in Craiova, plus 18 open-ended interviews with institutional parties, of which 12 in Bucharest and 6 in Craiova).

The following is a detailed list of the institutional parties interviewed:

- Bucharest: 12
IOM,
UNICEF,
French Embassy (minors section),
Parada Association,
French - IOM Cooperation,
Salvați Copiii (Save the Children Romania) children's section,
Salvați Copiii trafficking area,
DPC section 2 Bucharest,
ANPDC,
FONPC,
Italian Embassy (area for the prevention of organized crime and the culture and cooperation department),
Person responsible, at the Ministry of Education, for teaching in Roma language and in favour of the Roma community,
- Craiova: 6
Person responsible for ethnic minorities at the Inspectorate of Education for the Craiova region,
Secondary School Teacher at Roșiori de Vede,
Salvați Copiii, Craiova,
Social Assistance, Craiova,
Tutelary Authority of Craiova,
DPC Craiova.

At the time the interviews were held, all the children and young adults interviewed in Craiova had migrated abroad, especially to Rome, in the past. Likewise, the parents and families interviewed in Craiova had had experience of emigration, or one or more of the members of their families were currently in Italy (mainly in Rome). In Rome, 10 minors were interviewed while they were living in detention centres, while others were interviewed and/or observed in relation to social intervention initiatives such as: street outreach units, low-threshold drop-in centres and accompanying/visits to CPAs and secondary reception centres. While the majority of the children and young adults interviewed in Craiova are of Roma origin, only one half of the children and young adults interviewed in Rome come from this ethnic group.

The interviews conducted with migrant children, young people and the families involved in migration obtained in Bucharest, Craiova and Rome were analysed along with the interviews with key informants described in sections 3 and 4 that deal with, respectively, the connection between the migratory trajectory and involvement in illegal activities, and the way in which the social intervention initiatives in Rome respond to this situation. Section 5, which analyses the Romanian socioeconomic context and how social intervention initiatives respond to the phenomenon of child migration in Romania, is only based on interviews with key informants, as it was not possible to interview children who had been directly involved in assisted repatriation projects.¹⁰

The methodological approach of the research is based on the attempt to establish a comparative connection between the life story as it is told, by obtaining open-ended interviews, and how it took place, through ethnographic observation. In other words, the open-ended interviews with the minors enabled us to obtain the 'official' stories, the versions of their life stories that they themselves prefer. These consist of the narration of social and cultural

¹⁰ Following the completion of this research, the Ulysses project to support minors and young adults intending to undertake voluntary repatriation was launched, funded by Rome Municipality and coordinated by Virtus Association - Ponte Mammolo. The project is being implemented by way of a help desk run directly by Rome Municipality. It would be worth interviewing those children who have taken part in the project.

experiences that one accepts to tell oneself and others, and are fundamentally morally acceptable versions of the complexity and ambivalence of the actual experience. This information was then analysed together with ethnographic observations on the relations with the operator during the interview, and on the behaviour of the interviewee within the context of the social intervention project.

The interviews are the outcome of an interpersonal relationship determined by the power position established between the two persons involved. The perception of what one may tell oneself and others depends on who the other persons are, and on the power they wield upon us. It is only by 'reinterpreting' these cultural and interpersonal factors that we managed to gain access to complex and significant information. This meant trying to reinterpret the context within the text and to consider the relational and logistical situations surrounding the interview as an essential part of the latter. And it is here that the ethnographic part of the research comes into play.

Technically speaking, **ethnography** is the main research method of the anthropological sciences and consists of living with the population or group being studied for a long period of time using a number of methods (in the form of observation or interviews) so as to obtain data that make it possible to understand the cultural and social system in question. Traditionally, the phenomena of most interest to ethnography are the rituals, customs, traditions, behaviours, values and beliefs of a given social group.

Within the scope of this research the ethnographic method was not implemented for a lengthy period of fieldwork, as normally applies to real anthropological research, but it was mainly used to gather information relating to the scope of the interview, and to monitor the context in which the interviews took place, in two different ways.

1. Firstly, notes were taken (mental or written) on the non-verbal and psychological aspects of the conversation, the power relationship existing between interviewee and interviewer, the place of the interview and the ways in which all these factors might have conditioned the perception of what the minor felt that he or she could say.
2. Secondly, notes were taken on the behaviour of the interviewee beyond the limited context of the interview, that is to say within the scope of the other social intervention operations of the project (accompanying minors to centres, conversations, etc.) and the macro-context of the interview, the external world, through the work of the street outreach unit.

In Rome, the project workers who deal with the young people in their respective professional contexts also acted as interviewers for the research. This made it possible for some of them (especially the operators who work both in the 'drop in' centres and with street outreach) to gain access to 'direct' information on the life of the interviewed minor, which was sometimes used to complement what he or she said in the interview. In four particularly interesting cases it was not possible - due to the 'street' life style and the existential context of the children - to conduct interviews in the strict sense of the term. On the contrary, interviews were replaced by a collection and assembly of ethnographic information (conversations and ongoing behaviour) gathered in different moments of contact between the minor and the researcher/project worker, for instance during street unit activity, while accompanying the minor to the centre for minors, or during a conversation in the drop-in centre. Information of an indirect kind obtained from friends or members of the peer group were also included in this reconstruction in order to obtain a complete picture of the child's situation. The result of this 'assembly' is an **ethnographic summary**, considered to be a testimony equivalent to the interview proper. In the majority of cases where, on the contrary, the interview was conducted, information essential to contextualise the analysis was included in a complementary **ethnographic note**; this information was used by the research coordinator and by the researchers in order to analyse the interview material as a whole.

After presenting some of the statistics and the social and (geo)political context of the research, the next section of the report will provide a more specific analysis on how the Italian legislative context and facilities and institutions respond to the situation as a whole.





ANAYSIS OF THE LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

2

Over only a small number of years, the migration of unaccompanied migrant minors to Italy has become an increasingly important issue both on a national and a European level. This is mostly because of the complex ethical problems in question and the need for appropriate and specific responsibilities which can only be taken in a global approach to the phenomenon.

The growing presence of unaccompanied foreign children meant that Italy, in an initial emergency stage, had to adopt a series of juridical and administrative measures aimed at facilitating their reception and integration. In an initial phase, from 1990 (Law 39/1990 or the Martelli law) to 1998 (Law 40/1998 or the Turco-Napolitano law), the extension to unaccompanied foreign children of the same provisions applied to Italian children who were abandoned or faced situations of difficulty or hardship solved the problem of the absence of specific regulations. With the increase of the phenomenon and in order to keep in line with international reflections on the migration of unaccompanied foreign children, the Italian legal system, through the Turco-Napolitano law, gradually implemented the principles underlying international conventions and adapted to the new requirements.

The introductions of measures such as: the placement of the child in a safe place, the issuing of a residence permit, the provision of protection, the search for his or her relatives, the monitoring - whenever possible - of the socioeconomic situation of origin, the allocation into custody, adoption (if applicable), the definition of a program aimed at the integration of the child in society, all of these measures represented and continue to represent a number of key passages, even if not always consequential, of a long procedural trajectory by means of which attempts were, and still are, being made to respond to this new situation.

Paradoxically, the entry of Romania into the European Union (EU) in January 2007 and the consequent application of regulations for EU citizens made social intervention concerning Romanian minors even more difficult, for the reasons described in section 4.4.

To address the phenomenon as a whole, it is important to also analyse the legislative context preceding the entry of Romania in the EU. This, not only to assure a better understanding of the institutional and regulatory framework on which the current discipline regarding EU citizens is based, but also (and perhaps more importantly) to understand the degree of distrust migrant minors (not only Romanians) feel for the public institutions involved.

2.1 Fragmentation and inconsistency of juridical and institutional framework

The phenomenon of child migration in Italy elicits complex ethical reflections and calls for the assumption of precise responsibilities on the part of the host country since the latter, as a signatory of international conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, must set itself the goal of pursuing the well-being of the child, assuring the child a healthy development and guaranteeing his or her fundamental rights. Unfortunately, on the contrary, the situation has until now been managed in a highly diversified way, a symptom of the degree of inadequacy with which local institutions have often managed this highly complex phenomenon: municipalities and the third sector organise initiatives at a local level to address the problems connected to child migration, but approaches may change, in some cases considerably, from one administration to another.

The most immediate consequence of the lack of an organized, nationwide approach was the adoption, at a local level, of different procedures to regularize the residence and subsequent integration of children, something that led to a proliferation of residence permits not contemplated by the law, such as residence permits 'for allocation into custody' or 'awaiting custody'. In fact, until 2001 many unaccompanied children who found themselves in Italy received this residence permit, which could be converted into another permit for work or for study purposes, or for 'awaiting employment', the moment they turned 18.

In April 2001 the Ministry of the Interior issued a decree concerning residence permits for unaccompanied foreign minors (art. 28, paragraph 1, Decree 394/99) establishing that the currently applicable prohibition of the expulsion of foreign minors under 18 years of age did not mean that minors were entitled to establish themselves in Italy, referring to the Resolution of the European Council of 1997 on the subject.

After that many young people who had accepted to participate in projects of integration were not able to convert their residence permit on reaching adulthood, and lost migration legal status. The police headquarters releasing their permit explained the rejection of the requests on

the basis that the minor was subject to guardianship, and not to custody under Law 184/83 (on adoptions).

Moreover, assisted repatriation measures decreed by CMS were applied to many children. The reasons for these measures appeared to be insufficient and generic and their application was until when the party concerned turned 18 (when assisted repatriation appeared to become an expulsion in the true sense).

This situation led to a substantial number of cases being brought before the Regional Administrative Courts (TAR). The approach of the magistracy immediately appeared favourable to the safeguarding of the position of regularity acquired by minors, even if this did not immediately lead to regularization measures on the part of provincial police headquarters.

In September 2002 Law 189/2002 (the so-called Bossi-Fini law) came into effect; it represented an amendment to the Consolidation Act on Immigration, and introduced significant changes in the treatment of unaccompanied foreign children. The law foresaw that the child should be issued a residence permit for minors, which may only be converted on reaching adulthood if the minor entered Italy before reaching the age of 15 and followed a social integration process within a recognised facility for at least two years. The law also established that the number of residence permits issued to unaccompanied minors would be deducted from the overall national quotas foreseen by the annual decree on immigration inflows.

These amendments to the law led to a situation whereby the majority of foreign children arriving in Italy were not able, on reaching adulthood, to convert the residence permit into a work or study permit or a permit awaiting employment and have, on the contrary, received measures ordering them to leave Italy. The reception facilities for migrants were forced to manage the transition to adulthood also in terms of administrative regularization, both through the presentation of appeals to the Regional Administrative Courts, and through action that may be defined as a 'local lobby'.

The numerous sentences of TAR (Regional Administrative Courts) finally resulted in a sentence by the Constitutional Court, no. 198 of 23 May 2003, ratifying a number of principles:

- the definitive equalization of minors subject to guardianship and minors allocated to custody pursuant to articles 2, 4 and 9 of Law 184/83 (administrative guardianship, judiciary guardianship, de facto guardianship respectively), with the possibility, for all categories, of obtaining the conversion of their residence permit on reaching adulthood;
- art. 25 of Law 189/2002 supplements, and does not replace, art. 32 of the Consolidation Act on immigration and is applicable to minors who, in any case, find themselves in the country, even if they are neither subject to guardianship, nor allocated to custody.

In other words this means that it is possible to obtain the conversion for all minors subject to guardianship, even if they have not been present in Italy for more than three years and lack certification documenting their process of social and civil integration.

However, the interpretation of the different provincial police headquarters in Italy is quite heterogeneous, and that a minor manages to convert his or her residence permit in one city without encountering any particular problems, and that another minor in the same situation does not, in another city, manage to regularize his position in any way on reaching adulthood. While, on the one hand, the variety of ways in which different local realities responded to the phenomenon of child migration reveals considerable creativity on the part of municipal administrations in working out strategic social intervention strategies, on the other, the lack of a uniform procedure led to internal migratory flows based on the opportunities offered by the different municipal territories¹¹. Moreover, the impression that a municipality guarantees a residence permit has repercussions on the entire national territory, as it confirms a cultural and social representation of Italy for migrant minors as a country in which 'one makes money and gets documents'.

The immediate consequence is that the restrictions placed on the conversion of residence permits for minors introduced by Law 189 of 2002 (Bossi-Fini) seem to increase - rather than reduce - the vulnerability of foreign children, and do not make it possible for all social intervention initiatives to offer migrant children a standardised procedure of regularization and integration. Although the sentence of the Constitutional Court was followed by another two

¹¹ For an analysis of the level of fragmentation of policies and intervention on a local level and its consequences in terms of the convergence of the minors towards the local realities that are most ready to respond to their needs, see Giovannetti, M. (2006) Unaccompanied foreign minors between social vulnerability and reception policies: results of the territorial investigation handled by ANCI, in Giovannetti, M. E Orlandi, C. Unaccompanied foreign minors. ANCI report 2005/2006, Rome: Edizioni ANCI servizi, p. 49-50.

decisions by the Council of State to the same effect, what happens is that the Regional Administrative Courts, who have a bigger workload, merely issue measures of precautionary suspension (i.e. suspending) of the decree issued by the police authorities and never reach a proper decision on the matter. The foreign minors who have just reached adulthood are thus catapulted into a limbo, and cannot be expelled, but neither are they given a residence permit¹².

2.2 Impact of Bossi-Fini law

The fact that the residence permit for minors is not not automatically convertible was an indirect and tortuous way to attempt to prevent the creation of a parallel migratory channel to the one represented by planned migration quotas. As far as the way in which the Bossi-Fini law influenced the migration of foreign children, very discordant analyses emerge from interviews with the key informants. On the one hand, a positive evaluation of the impact of the Bossi-Fini law emerged from allegations of a reduction in the total number of unaccompanied minors. However, it can also be assumed that the reduction in the number of minors who are officially present is offset by a considerable increase in illegal minors.

A very discordant interpretation, not shared by all who were interviewed, underlines that the measures foreseen by the Bossi-Fini law make it more difficult to guarantee a support to minors when they reach adulthood.

Non-governmental organizations stress that the average age of migrant minors has decreased and that this, along with the fact that the regularization on coming of age is not appealing to minors, create a dangerous and extended period of unlawfulness, in which situations of exploitation and vulnerability may emerge more easily.

These considerations are also repeated in the ANCI report on unaccompanied foreign minors 2005/2006¹³, where it is also underlined that the ‘increase of reports on younger children could be interpreted as a direct consequence of the amendments introduced by art. 25 of Law 189/2002 (Bossi Fini) to art. 32 of Consolidation Act 286/98’.

The issuing of the Enforcement Regulations no. 334/2004 for Law 189/2002 finally introduced a new type of residence permit ‘for the integration of minors’ for children who meet the prerequisites established by art. 32, paragraph 1b and 1c of the Consolidation Act, as amended by Law 189/2002, subject to the prior opinion of the CMS. However, the practical application of these regulations is extremely rare.

2.3 Legislative implications for minors involved in illegal activities

Minors who committed crimes face specific problems. Even if current legislation does not expressly prohibit the regularization of these minors, it is in effect extremely difficult for them to obtain any residence permit. Children involved in illegal activities face strong social exclusion (and this is especially true for Roma minors) and legislative incongruity on this subject is unfortunately not given due attention. Specifically, the question of crimes that represent an obstacle to the issuing of the residence permit (comprising theft aggravated by violence, a crime often committed by Roma young people) is used instrumentally, to refuse the provision of residence permits for social protection under art. 18, paragraph 6 of Consolidation Act 286/98¹⁴. However there are some good practices which have led to more and more residence permits for humanitarian reasons being provided. There is still a great deal of administrative discretion: some provincial police headquarters give such a residence permit to those who have received alternative measures to detention or who are on good behaviour, while other police only to those who had spent time in prison.

Moreover, there does not appear to be sufficient attention paid on the part of the institutions concerned to the connections between petty crimes, especially committed by children under fourteen, and situations characterised by dynamics of exploitation. From the various interviews with key informants, it is clear that there are no standard procedures or techniques used to identify victims of trafficking within the juvenile justice circuit.

Furthermore, foreign children who commit crimes end up with being discriminated against as far as their trial is concerned, especially as regards detention awaiting trial and access to measures representing an alternative to and substitute for imprisonment¹⁵.

¹² It is worth noting that on completion of this report, the Ministry of the Interior emanated a decree 17272/7 of 28 March 2008 entitled “Issues concerning residence permits for family reasons for children under 14 years of age, including the conversion and renewal of residence permits for family reasons on reaching adulthood”, with which the Ministry invited provincial police stations to provide residence permits for those just come of age whatever the length of their stay on national territory, or whether they had participated in an integration project or received a declaration from the CMS stating that “no repatriation procedures are to be instigated” where a foreign child had been formally placed under guardianship or in custody.

¹³ Giovannetti, M. E. Orlandi, C. Unaccompanied foreign minors. ANCI Report 2005/2006, Rome: Edizioni ANCI servizi, p. 25.

¹⁴ Art. 18 paragraph 6 of the Consolidation Act on Immigration establishes that a foreigner who committed a crime while a minor and who demonstrated real participation in a social and civil integration project, is to receive, at the moment he/she leaves the penal institution, a residence permit for humanitarian reasons (social protection).

¹⁵ C.A. Moro, V. Belotti, R. Maurizio, Foreign Minors in prison, 2005.

¹⁶ These norms were amended by the Legislative Decree 32/2008, which entered into force on 2 March 2008, introducing further reasons for deportations, particularly “reasons of public order” and for “imperative reasons of public security”. These allow for even further

Moreover, children who are repeat offenders seldom manage to obtain a residence permit, even in the case of participation in a social integration program. As a consequence, one of the most vulnerable categories of foreign children, such as children who are the victims of serious exploitation for illegal activities, are actually deprived of all protection.

This last consideration becomes even more alarming if interpreted in the light of what was stated by some Juvenile Courts concerning the verification of the state of abandonment and the declaration of availability for adoption, which only takes place with very small children and in extremely serious cases (exploitation/abuse). Consequently, Juvenile Courts often do not open cases for the evaluation and investigation of possible state of abandonment of children over 14 years of age.

2.4 Entry of Romania into the European Union

In January 2007 Romania and Bulgaria became members of the European Union, and consequently the Consolidation Act on Immigration 286/98, and the regulations applicable to non-EU citizens in general no longer apply.

On the other hand, as of 11 April 2007, Legislative Decree 30/2007 came into effect; this decree transposes Directive 2004/38/EC concerning the right of EU citizens and their relatives to freely circulate and reside in the territory of member states, abrogating the previous Presidential Decree 54/2002. The essence of Legislative Decree 30/2007 consists of recognising the right to reside for more than three months to EU citizens who have regular employment, are enrolled in study courses or who are present in Italy for other reasons, and who are able to demonstrate to the Italian state that they are self-sufficient and thus do not represent an excessive burden on the country's social security system.¹⁶

The decree by the Ministry of the Interior number 39 of 18 July 2007 clarified that EU citizen unaccompanied minors must be registered at Municipal councils upon receiving a guardianship or custody decision by the Juvenile Courts. These regulations have a strong impact on EU citizen children with regards to the application of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Accompanied children, particularly those of Roma origin, have been negatively affected by the climate of discrimination and exclusionist policies produced by these decrees: "Many people have decided to return to Romania or move to other less dangerous places. Roma children have been particularly affected by these forced movements, forced to leave school and other familiar places. Forced to flee with their parents by political initiatives which may give some electoral advantage in the short term, but in the long term create critical issues, reduce those new citizens' trust in institutions and undermine all attempts at integration, however small, which had already begun."¹⁷

Furthermore, for EU citizen children, the other rights associated with the right to reside, including that of benefiting from the national health service with the same treatment as Italian citizens, are not respected.¹⁸

It is clear that, once again, the legislative provisions on the subject of immigration (even in relation to EU citizens) radically contradict national and international legislation on the subject of minors. In fact, according to Regulation 2201/03/EC on the jurisdiction, recognition and execution of decisions pertaining to marriage and parental responsibility, in addition to those of international conventions on the subject (Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Hague Convention of 1961, etc.), in the presence of a EU citizen child in Italy, who is abandoned or even merely lacks a suitable family environment, the Italian state is obliged to provide (on a temporary or continuous basis) for his/her needs. It is also responsible for adopting temporary and precautionary measures (including placement in a safe place pursuant to art. 403 of the Civil Code and the introduction of guardianship), that only cease to apply when the authority of the EU country with jurisdiction adopts the measures considered appropriate (EC Regulation 2201/03, art. 20). If the minor habitually resides in the country and in some other cases¹⁹, the Italian state then has jurisdiction, on a general basis, for also adopting non-temporary measures (EC regulation 2201/03, Section II, Paragraph II).

Following this brief analysis of the legislative and institutional scenario encompassing the child migration situation in Italy, the next three sections will analyse the more ethnographic results of the research, starting with the connection between child migration and involvement in illegal activities, which will be the main theme of the next section.

administrative discretion, and may be applied to children without any guarantee that their best interests are taken into account and are safeguarded.

¹⁷ Extract of article from <http://sergiobontempelli.wordpress.com/2008/02/28/rom-rumeni-nemico-pubblico-un-articolo-di-nando-sigona>.

¹⁸ Following the conclusion of the writing of this report, the Ministry of Health, in the decree Prot. DG RUERI/II/3152-P/1.3.b/1 of 19 February 2008, regarding "Clarifications on health assistance for EU citizens residing in Italy", communicated that EU citizens had the right to urgent and non-deferred assistance, such as maternity-related referrals (including the voluntary interruption of a pregnancy) and children's healthcare.

¹⁹ The Regulations, on the basis of the criterion of vicinity (number 12 of the Preamble) in art. 8, paragraph 1, attributes jurisdiction to the country of arrival if the minor habitually resides there and provided the minor does not find himself in a condition of illicit transfer or non return (art. 8, paragraph 2). The concept of "habitual residence" is not defined by the Regulations, nor does it refer to any concept of residence pursuant to the national legislation, but must be determined by the judge on the basis of the factual elements present in each individual case. Articles 13 and 14 finally add two further criteria which motivate the jurisdiction, the first based on the presence of the child whenever it is not possible to establish his or her habitual residence, and the second of a residual type, in case no jurisdictional authority of a EU country would otherwise be found responsible on the basis of the main criteria.

In short...

The inconsistency of the Italian legislative scenario and the consequent lack of institutional coordination seriously limit the activity of social workers who are unable to offer these children definite, credible and feasible alternatives to illegal activities.

Until 2007, the lack of a structured approach at national level resulted in the adoption, at local level, of different legal measures to regulate the residence and the subsequent and possible integration of minors; this sometimes led to a proliferation of residence permits not contemplated by the law, to local procedures and to a heterogeneous interpretation by different Italian provincial police headquarters.

In January 2007 the entry of Romania into the European Union and the consequent application of regulations concerning EU citizens paradoxically made social intervention for the benefit of Romanian minors even more difficult.



MIGRATORY TRAJECTORY AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

3

Following the general considerations discussed in the previous chapters, the main purpose of this section is to present the results of the research, based on a joint analysis of the material collected in Italy (Rome) and in Romania (Bucharest/Craiova), with particular reference to child migration and the involvement of children in illegal activities.

3.1 Family and social context of origin of Romanian migrant minors

The results of the research in Romania and in Rome highlight the relative social and cultural vulnerability of the minors who emigrate and their context of origin. However, it should be stressed that it is not the children from the poorest classes who emigrate, but those who have access to the minimum social (contacts and information) and financial capital required for the devising, planning and implementation of the migratory project. These considerations are corroborated by the observations of the social workers at the DPC of Sector 2 in Bucharest (where the Gavroche centre, housing all children repatriated to Romania is located) and by interviews we conducted with children living in the streets, in this case also in Bucharest. Not only do the children appear not to have access to the economic and social opportunities that could facilitate emigration, but they view the prospect of emigrating to a foreign country without the support of a trusted person with fear, something that is demonstrated by the two following statements.

Why do the kids want to leave, in your opinion?

Well... the first thing is the economic situation... in spite of this, it's not the poorest who emigrate... there are many reasons why children leave... some have family problems... others do not... we cannot really say that the children from the most problematic families are the ones who leave most frequently... In any case, the majority have only one parent or come from very violent families, I mean from families where moral values and rules are not very deep-rooted. In some cases, especially with Roma, the children emigrate with their families, who then sell them or make them beg in the streets... just like they do here.

(DPC Sector 2 Bucharest)

And so you would only leave if you were to feel safe...

Yes, otherwise I would be afraid... I would leave with my boyfriend.

And... so with him you would leave. So you haven't thought about leaving before...

Well, but with who? Because, if you don't have anyone to meet you there...

But you could get a passport and leave...

And who gives us the money?

Well...

It's difficult, right? I would like to leave, too, I would also bring my sister with her husband along with me so we could do something, too. But if you don't have money, you can't do anything... you need money, everywhere...

(F, Roma, 20, Bucharest)²⁰

As far as the family context is concerned, even if we bear in mind the concept of relative vulnerability mentioned above, the majority of migrant children come from families with financial difficulties, because they are very large (especially Roma), or because their parents have lost their jobs, and from single-parent families (especially non-Roma). While the material we gathered presents numerous quotes confirming this, the following are particularly eloquent and representative.

What were the reasons that made you leave?

Me? It was my dad who decided. I needed money - that's why. Dad needed money... for my little brother who had the situation with his leg and we needed money. And for us, because we are 6 children: 3 brothers and 3 sisters and it's quite hard...

Who did you agree with, about leaving?

The whole family left, together. Me, dad, mum, my brothers and sisters - all of us. They couldn't leave half of the family at home, could they?

(F, Roma, 24 (16), Craiova).

Why did you leave for Italy?

Because I had no possibilities at home... there you can make money, here you cannot.

Who did you agree with, about leaving?

With mum, with dad...

And what did your friends say about you wanting to leave?

They said it was really good, and they said they would go too, but I see that they didn't go, after all.

And what do you think made you leave? Poverty, or what?

Poverty. We didn't have money.

²⁰ Every statement cited from interviews with minors/youngsters just come of age will be accompanied by an abbreviated categorization: M/F (male/female), R/Roma (Romanian/Roma), their age at the time of the interview, as well as the place where the interview took place and where the interviewee resides.

When did you leave, and with whom?

Two years and eight months ago, I left with my mother; we lived there for a year and two months...

How did you leave?

By car... the car we had at home. A gypsy from the neighbourhood took us.

And how much did you pay?

€ 200 each.

And who paid?

Mum and Dad. But my brother had sent them money.

Have you been to other countries, too?

To France, Italy and Spain.

What happened when you arrived in Italy?

We went to work, we went to look for a job and we found one - an uncle of my father was waiting for us, he was re-baptised, there. Because he had relations and could find us a job, something...

(M, Roma, 14, Craiova).

My name is S., I'm 19 years old, I come from Jași. At home there's my mother; my father; a brother who's 16 and a sister who's 15. My father does not work because he is ill, my mother used to work in a clothes factory and then she stopped. Now my father receives a state subsidy. My sister goes to school and my brother has finished now, and does nothing. I went to technical college to become a car electrician; I finished the 11 classes. Then I did a course to become a qualified mason, I only did 2 months but to get the diploma you need to do 5. I decided to leave because my cousin had been living in Italy for 2 years, now he is in Canada. He told me to come, because he knew there was nothing in Romania any more. When I arrived in Rome, he helped me out. My family agreed with my leaving. I had not imagined anything about Italy. I thought that I would get a visa for three months, I'll go to Italy, make money and then come back. I worked for a month as an unskilled labourer and then I worked as a construction worker for three months.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

Tell me about your family, what is it like? What do your parents do? Where are they now?

My father died in 2004, my mother is 43 years old and works as a cleaning lady in a school, we are eight children, my oldest sister is 25 and the youngest is five; I am the third child together with my twin sister. We live in a room with state-regulated rent, my mother has a lawsuit because she has not paid the rent for years and now she owes 3 thousand Euros, which is not a sum you can pay easily in Romania.

(M, R, 16, Rome)

In relation to this general scenario, the Romanian non-Roma family situation sometimes appears less organized than the Romanian Roma situation. In fact, cases of alcoholism, absence or abandonment on the part of one of the parents are frequent in the context of families of origin of non-Roma Romanian migrant children interviewed for the research²¹.

How was the situation at home? Your family? Did they beat you because you went about stealing? Did you have this kind of problem?

Let's say that in my family my mother and my father got along well, they never quarrelled, that is to say my father sometimes quarrelled about silly things, small matters, he got angry, but we hardly noticed him...

Did he have problems with alcohol?

My father did yes, he has been drinking for a time... and so... he drank.

Have you suffered because of this?

Yes I have, because at times I came home and they were fighting about something unimportant... and so I left (home) and went away.

(M, R, 18, Rome)

How old are you, and where were you born?

I'm sixteen years old and I was born in Brașov, a city in southern Romania, the second most important after Bucharest.

Have you been to school? Until what year? Why did you quit studying?

When I was five years old my mother lost me, and until I was ten I lived with a man who found me, I worked with him. He sold mozzarella cheese, I worked and lived with him, he paid me.

When I was ten my mother happened to come by the stall where I was working, and she recognised me. I didn't believe that was my family, they showed me the documents to convince me. In that period I never went to school. I began school when I was ten...

(M, R, 16, Rome)

There is a considerable difference between the relationship with the family context for Roma and non-Roma. While in the case of the Roma, the migratory project and the survival strategy (regardless of whether it is based on illegal economic activity or not) tend to be part of the social mobility project of the family system, for the non-Roma the decision to emigrate first

²¹ In the interests of clarity, in the rest of the text non-Roma Romanian minors will at times be indicated as 'Romanians', thus distinguishing them from Roma Romanian minors.

and foremost represents a mediation between the desire for independence and autonomy from the family, and the family mandate for economic help. It is very often the child himself who feels that it is his duty to help his parents, and he feels that he has the right to succeed in doing so. The following excerpt is extremely eloquent in this respect:

Try to imagine yourself here in Italy in a few years time: ... you have a job that enables you to earn well, you have the documents... in short, you're fixed. What are the first things you would do?

I would help my parents, I would give them a house in Romania and I would buy a house in Romania for myself, too.

When, in your opinion, can a person consider that he 'made it' (I explain what I mean by 'making it')

When he manages to do the things I told you about before: help his parents, buy a house and find a wife.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

It is very important to underline that the family mandate is almost never perceived as an imposition, but as a way for the parents and children to share the responsibility for survival, even when there are high levels of exploitation. The following excerpt clearly shows the active role played by the children, in negotiating the migratory project and the responsibility for survival with the parents.

Why did you leave Romania?

For the money, to work.

And did you want to come to Italy?

Sure, I wanted to come to Italy.

But did you already know Italy, I don't know, through stories told you by other people or by relatives?

Why Italy, precisely?

Yes, I knew what two kids from my town told me, they go to Italy for two or three months, and then they come back to Romania and then they return to Italy, and then they bring money when they return from Italy. Yes, I wanted to come to Italy and a friend and I agreed to leave together.

But do you have some relatives who already live in Italy?

No, nobody from my family has ever come to Italy, only I came.

Can you tell me how you organized the journey, and if your parents have helped you?

I had to work and there wasn't any good work around, and considering what the other kids from my town had done to help their families, that is, they had left for Italy to send money, my mother and I decided I should leave and try to find a job in Italy

But why you, and not your brothers and sisters?

Because I'm the oldest and the one who has to help the family, also to let the others study

Alright, and then how did it go?

There was another kid from my town who was preparing to leave. I knew him because we went to the same school. And so we agreed, and left together.

Did someone help you by giving you money to leave? And how did you travel?

Yes, my mother and her partner gave me about 200 Euros and, and that's a lot in Romania because it's like a month's salary. With the money I had saved, I bought the bus ticket.

(M, R, 17, Rome)

The mandate to help the family economically is often assumed voluntarily by the child, as a way to emancipate him or herself from the family context, yet morally justify the decision to leave in order to 'be free' and to make a voluntary contribution to the improvement of the economic conditions of the family.

And you, in this year that you were in Italy, have you managed to send money home?

Yes, sometimes, but not much, and now I haven't managed to send any for a long time and I'm sorry about that because it's important that I send it.

Do you miss your family?

Yes, a lot, but now I'm here and I have to work to help them. Then I call my mother every week and she cries and she doesn't ask me for money but I know they need it. And then I would like to send the money because that way they, too, can buy clothes and shoes and a car.

(M, R, 17, Rome)

Money is not a problem, but when someone wants to leave to feel free...

And so you left to feel free?

Above all I didn't want to have it on my conscience, that my dad gives me money for clothes, school, for having fun... The second time, I told two guys 'come on, let's go to Italy, let's see what we can do in this country'. I went, I told my dad 'look, I'm going to Italy', I told a pack of lies, that a friend is waiting for me with a job, I had a friend call me in Romania, and once I managed to convince him to let me go, I came here and I started to make my living as a rent boy.

What can you tell me about your family?

They're a good family, united, they educated me, I have a brother, the only thing is that I don't get along with my mother and with my brother...

How come?

I don't have the right character; they always get mad about just anything and I don't pay attention, you scratch my back and I scratch yours... With my mother, I couldn't discuss, for instance about going to school, but with my father I could. My other relatives, I could never get along with them, now I only call them to show respect, but I'm not interested in them, there is nothing I can do.

(N, R, 19, Rome)

'Light' or implicit critical comments on the family, as those included in the last statement, often conceal much more deeply-rooted family problems. The parents' ignorance of the day-to-day reality in which their children live often translates into an essential inability to guide them.

How much did you manage to send home?

More or less 500-600 Euros a week...

But did you send the money so that they would keep it?

Yes

It's a lot...

A family earns 500 a month there, they saved it for me.

And did they never ask themselves how you managed to make all that money by picking strawberries, potatoes and tomatoes in Italy?

I told them I'm working all the time, even Saturdays and Sundays, and they didn't ask me. In the end I told my dad, after a couple of months, that I hadn't been working since the two guys had returned to Romania, that I'm staying here, to live and to steal and make money that way.

'Ooohh, come back home, I don't want to know that you are stealing'. He got mad, and then he got over it... he couldn't come and get me, I have never told him where I'm living, I was in Florence, and I told him I am in Ancona. It's like looking for a needle in a haystack like Rome... it would take you a lifetime...

(M, R, 19, Rome)

What did your family think about what you were doing? Did they know you were stealing?

No, to tell you the truth, after a while they found out what I was doing. But in the meanwhile, they didn't know. When I tracked down my brother for the first time, first of all he told me 'Oh, but where are you? Dad is looking for you, he thinks you've gone missing'. I told him, 'Tell dad I'm fine, that I'm going to school'.

(M, R, 18, Rome)

In many cases the situation of the family worsened as a result of the closing down of industrial sectors that became obsolete in the post-communist period. The most macroscopic cases of this postindustrial scenario are undoubtedly realities such as Bacău, Călărași or Galați; the economy of these places was centred on heavy industry in the oil and steel sectors, but the same trends can be found in interviews with children coming from other locations, such as Brașov or Craiova.

Mum is in Romania, now she is not doing anything, because there is no work... when I spoke to her last time she told me that she will present an application... She used to work in a factory that made construction materials... but then it closed and they fired her... she told me that she will make an application, because they are reopening it now.. She worked there for 15 years.

(M, R, 17, Rome, from Craiova)

I'm from Galați, Romania. It's a big city, like Verona, big like that, not small, there's nothing, a metal factory, before more than 80% of the citizens were working, now half of them work.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

We decided to leave when they closed the factory where my parents were working in Brașov... we were forced to go, what were we going to eat if we didn't?

(M, Roma, 19, Rome)

For Roma minors, the decision to emigrate is made within the context of a family migration project, and a social situation involving very strong discrimination and marginalization. In spite of the fact that the Romanian government approved numerous measures in recent years in favour of the social integration of the Roma population, the insufficient financial resources available to social services and the perseverance of deeply-rooted and acute discriminatory attitudes on the part of the population and the institutions, including social services and non-governmental organizations, still make the improvement of the social conditions of Roma groups very difficult.

What were the reasons that made you go to Italy?

Well... I left because I could no longer stay at home because we had no more money and it was... we had nothing to live on, we did not have... I had to go to Italy to do something, to... At

home, in Romania, I couldn't get a job because I'm a gypsy and nobody pays attention to gypsies in Romania, especially if they haven't even finished school and I decided to leave for Italy.
(M, Roma, 17(14), Craiova)

The fact of leaving school is one of the most important symptoms that enable us to appreciate how serious the socioeconomic situation of the families is, since a good education is considered a priority by the children and their families; this applies to both the Roma and the non-Roma population. The following excerpt from the interview with the leader of the Roma community of Craiova, Vasile Velcu Nazdravan, and the two that follow, illustrate the contrast between the different priorities, needs and socioeconomic conditions migrant children have to deal with. Among the Roma, when financial means are limited, it is the education of the girls that is sacrificed.

School is the light in the eyes, school is the vision of the human being, school is the responsibility of Man, school gives you dignity. It is a necessity. Children, or those who have no education, cannot have an open horizon and a vision of tomorrow. You don't have to have a degree by all means, but if you have a basic education... it's very useful in order to make it in life.
If a family has a lot of work and the children could help, do you think it's OK if the children miss school in order to work with their parents?

No. Regardless of how many difficulties the parents have, they must fight and make sacrifices in the present time because, if the children go to school and want to study, they will have the satisfaction of seeing the day when these children will no longer carry the burden of their parent's lack of education, their collective inheritance, on their shoulders.

What kind of work should children begin with, when they are small?

Now that also depends on the family. The first job should be education. Legally, a child is not allowed to do any kind of work. If he or she gives a hand in the kitchen, helps the father in the garden to work the land an hour or two - but to make one's living through one's child, that's something that will condition the family in the future. Children must study, not work.

Did you go to school when you were at home?

No, I didn't go any more, for a long time, to school. I had too many brothers and sisters and I had to be with them... my mum went to look for something to be able to support us, and so did dad, and because I was the oldest, I stayed with them to feed them, clean, wash, take care of them. And one of my brothers had a bad leg. During the Ceausescu years they wanted to and they were about to cut his leg off. And I was with him in the hospital because I was the oldest. I took care of him... I finished 3-4 classes, me too. But then I didn't go any more.

Did your parents want you to go to school?

Obviously they wanted me to, but it wasn't possible. The others went - my brothers and sisters.
(F, Roma, 20(14), Craiova)

But did you go to school? How many years did you go for?

Sure I went to school, and I studied eight years and then I went to a technical high school to learn carpentry, but I only did the first year; then I left and went to work.

And what kind of work did you do?

I wasn't always working, I worked a bit when I found some job or other, but for only a few days. I worked a bit as a farm hand and for a while I helped as a construction worker, and then other things.

What do you mean other things, other jobs?

Yes, what I could find, once I helped a neighbour friend to carry furniture and some packages, and he gave me money.

And so you quit your studies because you had to help your family?

Yes because I have seven brothers and sisters and my mother needs money, and then it's hard there.

Why did you leave Romania?

For the money, to work.

(M, R, 17, Rome)

Lastly, the analysis of the interviews with children, their families and the institutional representatives reveals new realities, like the phenomenon of 'abandoned' children in Romania. These are children who are entrusted to grandparents or distant relatives by their parents, who emigrate abroad. The phenomenon is growing rapidly, and the Romanian government is attempting to legally discipline formalities concerning the placing of the child in foster care to other persons, both in the case both parents are abroad, and in the case of the minor leaving the national territory accompanied by only one of the parents, or by a third party.

According to official statistics, the phenomenon is of huge dimensions, considering that since April 2005 almost 200,000 children were left in Romania by parents who emigrated to other countries. It is a complex situation, which strongly affects the well-being of the minors, who usually experience the departure of the parents as abandonment; this strongly affects their educational prospects and may influence their decision to be involved in illegal activities.

The presence of these trends was ascertained in the research sample, both in Rome and in Craiova. In many cases, children whose parents were abroad lost their motivation and discipline in learning, something that emerges from this interview with a Romanian language and literature teacher at Roşiori de Vede.

Tell me, do you know of cases of pupils who leave school to go abroad?

Yes, there are many such cases. On the whole, in this city, school-leaving due to migration concerns about one third of the total number of pupils.

And where do they go?

They usually go to Italy and Spain. But most of them to Italy, as far as I was informed...

And how do they go? By themselves?

No. They have at least one of their parents there, who tell them to come.

According to you, isn't it possible that they leave by themselves?

No. I don't believe so... I don't see how...

Perhaps they are taken there and then left by themselves by one of the parents, or uncles, or a friend of the family...?

I don't think so... the most common situation is like this: one of the parents, or both, go to work abroad and then they also have their children come. Or the older brothers who are already there, call them or come home just to take a younger brother or sister back with them. In the former case, when the parents go abroad, one immediately notices it because the children immediately begin to lose interest in school, they don't come to school any more or they don't do their homework like they used to. And it is very normal for this to happen because if the parents are no longer there, to force them to go to school, they begin to do what they want: go to clubs and bars, spend the money the parents send home in clothes, to show everything off to the others... when there is no authority any more, this happens...

But are these children left here on their own?

Yes, that happens too. Or they are left in the care of their grandparents, uncles... as I said before, also by themselves at home, with the parents who send money...

I see. Can you tell me, on the other hand, about the economic situation of the city?

Most of the inhabitants work in the local industry. There's a beer factory, a metalworking factory that produces railway carriages and tracks and then there are two Greek textile industries. Most of the citizens work there. The salary is the legal minimum and the products are only for export. And so you can imagine...

And how is the school viewed, in general?

Education isn't viewed as a way to make it in life... that's how it is viewed, on the contrary, in Italy. The children lose interest in education while they wait for their parents to tell them to come to Italy or to turn 18 so they can leave by themselves...

And what should be done, in your opinion, about this situation?

In my opinion, we have to make the children see what might happen to them abroad, we have to make movies - perhaps even brutal movies - with children who beg in the streets, young people who steal and prostitute themselves, that way they'll see what the truth is like!

Why? What do they believe happens abroad?

They only know what they see: the parents who come back once in a while with a lot of money, with nice cars, pretty clothes, and then television contributes, too...

In your opinion, do the media have a lot of influence on their decision to go abroad?

Yes. In television they only see fun, pretty clothes, music... things like that - and freedom. They don't know that responsibility, not just freedom, comes with age. And they don't want to understand this. Because there's nobody there to teach them this, when their parents go away to work, and they are left by themselves, alone or with a grandmother who cannot even get out of bed...

These considerations are confirmed by the interviews with the minors themselves, who tell about how their fellow pupils with parents abroad behave differently from those who have parents at home, in fact:

*Are there many children who have parents abroad at your school?
There are... some...*

Can you tell me, so to speak... approximately how many?

Around 5 - 6 children...

Can you tell me where they went?

To Italy.

Do the children whose parents are in Italy behave differently from those who live here with their parents?

Yes, from a certain point of view yes, they are sadder; more... they are sullen all the time, they're more thoughtful all the time, more...

Are they sad about their parents?

Yes, about their parents.

Did anybody tell you if, and how much, he is sorry that his parents left?

Yes, they told me, but not everything... they told me that their parents went to Italy and that it's very hard for them, there's nobody who takes them to school when they need it - there's nobody there who can come to see him, who can help him, talk on behalf of him, and he feels the difference between him and the other children who have their parents at home with them.

(M, R, 17, Craiova)

Are there many children who have their parents abroad?

There are two. Their mothers are in Canada. They're the only ones.

Do they behave differently, the ones with their parents at home from those who on the contrary have them abroad?

They behave very badly: they beat us, they kick us...

Why? Does he act arrogantly because his parents are in Canada?

Yes, he doesn't even know how to write, but he beats us.

(F, Roma, 8, Craiova)

In most cases it is the grandparents who take care of the education of the grandchildren, while their children work abroad.

Do the children go to school?

Those who are old enough, go to school.

Did they go to school also when their parents were at home with them?

Yes, but they are not so many now... there are 4 and this one here, D., who go to school. The others are too young.

When did they do better at school? When they were with their parents or now with you?

The way they did before, that's how they do now. It depends on how well you take care of them. One is studying more, the other is lazier..

And now that their parents are abroad, how do they behave, can you explain to me a little?

There was that period at the beginning, when the parents left, when they were sadder; more sullen, they didn't even want to play... but they got used to it with time. Because habit is Man's second nature. With time, Man even gets used to the devil. The eldest of my grandchildren is this one, who's 14 years old, another is 10, another 9, the girls are 5 years old - I have 3 granddaughters who are 5 years old, another is 7, my children gave me 3 grandchildren: one is 3, another 2 and the smallest is 8 months. Then another who is 2 years and 2 months.

So you have a big family.

Yes, it's very big and, thank God, in good health!

That's a big gift. It is a big gift that God blessed you with many children and grandchildren...

I think we must thank God... There are also difficult moments in the family, there are problems, and hardship some times, but we are making it...

(F, Roma, 51, Craiova)

The departure of the parents have very important consequences not just for the process of social integration of the child in Romania, but also for the migratory trajectory of the children, who often join their parents in the emigration process, interrupting their education in Romania.

Have you ever gone to school?

Yes, for seven years.

And did you finish basic school?

No I didn't finish it, I left it.

Why did you leave school?

Because I left my country, I came here. My parents had already left for Italy and they left me alone.

What do you mean alone, who did you live with?

I lived with my aunt and I still went to school but then they told me to come and I left my country, school and I came here.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

Sometimes, even when education continues in Italy, it is not easy to renegotiate the parental role after a long absence and a process of individualization commenced in Romania, as the two

cases below seem to demonstrate, where both the children had problems with the law on arriving in Italy.

How did things go when you joined your parents in Italy?

In four years I had only seen my mother once, when they decided I should join them in Italy, in the first period I was bewildered, I saw them changed, aged, I was a bit bothered by their attention, they wanted to make up for the fact that they had been away, they showered me with affection but I found this unpleasant, because I had got used to living practically by myself. I felt embarrassed with Dad. I had been looking forward to coming to Italy and joining my parents, a lot, but after some time I didn't like it any more, there were too many new things, it was hard to start everything all over again. My life was very different from when I was living in Romania, I had lots of friends there, and I was freer. When I came to Italy I felt discriminated against, because they said that foreigners are all thieves, even now when I enter a shop, especially in central Rome, they look at me as if I'm going to steal something, that's why I often have my father accompany me because it doesn't happen when he is with me. People say bad things about foreigners, on the bus, for instance, they say we take the seats and never pay the ticket, once I showed my subscription to a woman who kept going on like this for ages...

Did you return to Romania again? How many times? How did it feel?

After three years I returned to Romania, I was very satisfied but I found that many things had changed. I missed Italy, I even went to an Italian restaurant once. When I'm in Italy I miss Romania, and when I'm in Romania I miss Italy. If I were at home, in Romania, I would have felt more at home, this situation (prison) would have been easier to stand. Now I am no longer either Romanian or Italian, now I feel like a child who fell and hurt himself and says 'I want to go home' but I no longer know where my home is, I don't know what I am anymore.

(M, R, 17, Rome)

How many years had you been going to school, before you came to Italy?

7 years...

Why did you stop?

I've never liked going to school much...

Why did you leave Romania?

I came to be with my mother... She's been living in Italy for over 10 years...

When did you come to Italy for the first time?

In 2003, three and a half years ago... My mother sent me money... then she was waiting for me here in Italy.

Did you also have friends in Italy or other relatives?

Yes, I had friends who were working as construction workers.

What did they say about their experiences abroad?

They told me that they are making money... that life is good...

So, once you arrived in Italy, what was it like?

I was living with my mother, she is regularly employed here, she also has documents...

So she never got you a residence permit, then?

No, not yet... I would like one now, when I get out of here (prison).

But did you go to school here?

No, I didn't really feel like it...

So you have been looking for some job?

Yes, sometimes I worked too, with those friends of mine who were construction workers...

So, what happened?

I didn't get along with my mother... We were always fighting... She wanted me to go to school and so I ran away from home and I went to live with friends of mine... But we didn't always find work and so I started to steal...

(M, R, 16, Rome)

The next paragraph is quite indicative; it is taken from an interview with a Roma mother who, after having emigrated to Italy, returned to Romania to take care of her child, who had not reacted well to their separation.

Do you have children?

I only have one son - I left him at home. Bring him with me? To live in those conditions and go begging? I let him study!

And with whom did you leave him?

With my parents.

And did you manage to send him money while you were there?

Very little... perhaps some bags of sweets, something... like that... money - nothing.

And for how long have you been away from your son?

9 months.

And how old was he?

He was more or less 6 years old.

And did you miss him?

Sure I missed him! And when I left him he was fat, fat, and when I came back I couldn't recognise him any more, he was skinny! You've seen how fat he is now! And the dark rings under his eyes...

at his age he was hollow-eyed, he was skinny, he suffered a lot, my father told me. All of them took him along with them everywhere, my father took him on trips in the car, he couldn't sleep, he stayed on his stomach for hours without falling asleep... He couldn't get used to the fact that I had left...

He suffered a lot...

Yes, he suffered a lot... seeing neither his mother nor his father... It's been something for him... in fact, he's emotional, he's very close to me, so... he is sensitive. Even now that he is older, if he does not see me for a day or some hours - he comes 10 times to my room: what are you doing? Where are you? What have you done? Where have you been? - it was very hard for him... he had got very sick and so I returned. I gave up everything and I returned.

(F, Roma, 31, Craiova)

3.2 The migratory project

The majority of Romanian (non-Roma) children leave their families for a number of reasons that are different but related: to get away from the family situation of economic poverty and contribute towards reducing it, to get away from situations of violence and abuse, and most of them to emulate companions from the peer group who returned from abroad projecting an image of success. Peer group pressure, along with the family mandate to contribute to the economic survival of the family, is perhaps the most determining factor in relation to the decision to leave and abandon the family nucleus. The following paragraph from the interview with social workers from Sector 2, Bucharest gives a picture of the diverse reasons for which the migratory project takes place.

The influence of friends is fundamental... many kids come home and tell tales and convince other young people to leave along with them... perhaps there's someone abroad who asks them to convince other kids and to bring them along, or perhaps they feel lonely and want to bring their companions along, or perhaps they convince others with their stories in order to make a good impression at home, and the others believe the story and want to experience the same thing, too... they exaggerate like all adolescents do... usually, those who return to Romania bring other kids with them to Italy... the media contributes, too... the colourful world of television describes life abroad... a world that is very different from this one... music videos, movies, broadcasts from abroad wield a strong influence on the kids, who want to see and experience those places, those stories, those experiences... we mustn't forget that we are talking about adolescents and that it is in their very nature to try things out and exaggerate... Then, there are regions of the country where migration is a very normal thing... they leave with their parents, with friends... and then it is by no means difficult to believe that going abroad is something normal... the result of all this is that the young people compete with their migratory experiences and living their 'fascinating' life stories... this is an important pull factor for migration, it plays a very important role in this process... this is why it happens that the young people leave together, because it is a group project...

The role of television in the emergence of children's migratory project is important because their consumption of Western media is a determining factor in the cultural construction of the West as an ideal destination, as a place where abundance and luxury is within reach²². The images of riches and freedom conveyed by the media are combined with the stories of success, adventure and migration told by the peer group, which remains the social context of reference for the definition of the children's migratory project.

Why I left... because I needed money... my friends came back from Italy where they had made money. I wanted to make money, too. All of them came here... to Italy, to Rome. And so I'll go to Italy too! (...) They told me... I heard about everything from my friends, and then in Romania you could see Rai 1 and Rai 2, but I didn't watch television all that much... I thought that it was a country where there was work, where one can work... because where I come from, there isn't any work. I heard the others who came back... there's work, they pay... I was hanging around with them, they told me one could earn money as waiters and bricklayers, even those who had studied a lot...

(M, R, 17, Rome)

Why did you come to Italy? Why haven't you gone to other countries?

Because it's easy to come here... and then I had friends who worked as bricklayers... they told me they make money... you'll always find something... Then all the friends from my neighbourhood came here. They said it's nice...

And what about television? Did you watch Italian television in Romania?

Yes, I liked Rai 1 very much. I always watched it, I like the language.

(M, R, 16, Craiova)

Internet and the possibility of chatting with one's peers are emerging as new factors that encourage the desire to migrate; this can be seen from the following two statements.

²² For an analysis of the role played by foreign television in the cultural construction of the West in the post-Communist context, see Mai, N. (2001) 'Italy is Beautiful': the role of Italian television in the Albanian migratory flow to Italy', in King, R. and Wood, N. (eds) *Media and Migration: Constructions of Mobility and Difference*, London: Routledge, pages 95-109.

But when you're not working, what do you do?

Either I stay in the camp or I hang around with my friends, sometimes we go to the Internet in Piazza della Repubblica and we play video games or speak with our friends in Romania, with web cameras.

And how do you arrange all this?

We send each other messages with mobile phones and agree on the time, we pull their legs, we show them how we are dressed with cool shoes and designer clothes, not in rags like them...
(M, Roma, 16, Rome)

In the end we went to B, who I'd heard a lot about on the Internet. Kids in Romania, friends, were talking about B...

Did you manage to keep in touch with your friends by chat or through email?

Yes, always, they said go to B., she's rich, she's pretty, I think I'll try. When I arrived, I made a lot of money the first week. I spent as much as I wanted, I sent very little home.
(M, R, 19, Rome)

From the interviews conducted in both Italy and Romania, there is a general feeling of disappointment as regards the expectations associated with the migratory experience.

Not even the money I paid for the journey then - which I paid 2-3 thousand German Marks for. Lots of money! I didn't even make the money back! It cost me almost 3 thousand marks! 3 thousand! When I left then, in 97.

And did you pay it all at once?

All at once! To live a better life. And when we went there... without water, dirty and hungry, when we arrived in Rome - I wanted to die! I had a debt to pay and I couldn't return... rats, dirt... My God, when I saw how those people lived, in those conditions! What kind of life is that? What kind of life is that?!

(F, Roma, 25(16), Craiova)

The cultural construction of the West as a world where material riches are within their reach is widespread among children and represents an important factor in their condition of cultural and social vulnerability, since the minor often invests substantial financial resources and a part of his/her life to gain access to this world.

What was missing, what made you leave?

The fact is that I saw a lot of people... adults, much more mature persons who told me that the West is nice and so I had got the idea into my head, to go and visit those places.

This at an age of 9-10 years?

No, a bit older, at 11.

Where did you meet them?

In the neighbourhood, and then above all I saw people who had clothes and money, people who came from abroad, they returned, you see... that's what made me leave. Because if I have to tell you the truth, they would make fun of me because of my clothes, and I didn't like it. I wanted to be like all the others... right? I wanted to have what everyone else has, me too. For instance, when I was small I wanted to have a bike, a mountain bike. Then in the end I bought myself a bike... but how? By stealing! I didn't have any other possibility, my father, my mother could not... they had no way of buying me a bike because it was expensive. (...)

When you came to Italy, did you find what you expected?

When I was small I had an idea of Italy, that Italy was very beautiful and it really is lovely, but the living conditions when I said... wow, there it'll be... for sure I won't starve to death. But that's not how it is, I mean if someone doesn't work and doesn't have money and in any other place, wherever he goes, he won't eat, he won't dress, you see? And so I had to steal...

(M, R, 18, Rome)

The majority of the children leave their country to ensure that they have an 'easy' and luxurious future, believing that this may be attained after a few years of work in the West. Within the context of this cultural construction of the West as a place where everything is possible, the most recurrent dreams are: a house, a car and a (pretty) wife.

How would you define a successful person?

Someone who has a job, a car and a house.

(M, R, 16, Rome)

And a successful person?...how do you imagine him?

With a pretty house, a car, your wife, good clothes!
(Replies as if he were saying obvious things)

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

This 'triad' is often also accompanied by a dream of permanent financial emancipation through the creation of a business, usually a shop, that many minors consider an easy way to 'make money'.

Did your father want you to finish school?

Yes.

What projects did you have for the future when you left?

To make lots of money...

How much?

Lots... so much that you cannot count it, that I would never have to think about money again. I wanted to stay five years, spending little and saving.

And then?

Then buy a home, a car, have a family, have a shop so I can live without working much.

(M, R, 19 Rome)

When I return I will have money and a house that my parents are building for me with what I'm sending them, I'll find a wife, have children and I'll make money with the shop I will open.

But what kind of shop do you want to open?

A shop with Italian clothes, you know how much money I'll make?

(M, Roma, 16, Rome)

How would you describe a successful person?

A person who drives big and expensive cars and doesn't worry about spending money.

How would you define a modern life style?

To have a pretty house with a green garden, a nice car, two or three shops that you can get money from, in short, to live like a king. (...)

What do you want to do in life... do you think you will continue to steal?

I certainly will not steal for ever, but I think that if I steal now it's easier when I stop, because I already have some money put aside, then I will see what I'll do, I've never really thought about it...

What will you be doing in ten years time?

I'll open a small shop, because I have always wanted to own my own business.

(F, Roma, 16, Rome)

But aren't you afraid of ending up in prison?

Sure I'm afraid, but for the moment it's always gone well with me, I have to be careful and then I'm a minor, what can they do to me?

You could end up in a prison for minors?

Yes, but anyway I'd get out of there, I already have a lawyer, my uncle hired him in case they arrest me. I must only be careful when I become an adult, but when I'm 18 I'll go to Romania and open a shop.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

I have never worked in Italy, I have always stolen, I'm only working now, here with Mister X, building a low wall in a garden, they give me a work grant, 450 Euros a month, it's not a lot is it?
But why did you steal?

Because I have always done it, both in Romania and in Italy, I came here to Italy to make money that way. Otherwise how could I help my family, in the centres they don't give you any money, and they expect me to help them out.

But do they know that you were stealing?

Sure, they know and they knew, just as long as I sent them the money.

But wouldn't you like to have a job like everyone else?

But how could I find one, even if I get the documents and work 8 hours a day for what, 800 Euros at most, and the rent of a place to live, what does it cost me? Anyway I want to make money to return to Romania and open a shop, one lives better there.

(M, Roma, 19, Rome)

Moreover, the migratory project that emerges from a comparison with the peer group and television consumption, inspired by a cultural construction of Western modernity as an 'accessible luxury', can often only be achieved by the minors by exposing themselves to lines of action and accepting opportunities that entail a high risk of exploitation. The following excerpt of an interview obtained in Rome with a Roma minor of 16 is indicative in this regard.

Do you think young Romanians have problems with choosing their own life style? Why?

Yes, they have problems because it's hard to think of a life style if you belong to a poor class in Romania. Everyone wants to live like the young people they see in television, relaxed and serene, and that's why many of the girls I know went to Hungary to do movies. But I know that they do porn movies, but they don't say so at home, they are ashamed. (...)

Do you think that the possibility of following a modern life style is an important factor in the decision of many Romanian young people, to emigrate?

For sure, a young person cannot think of having a modern lifestyle in Romania, he or she can only think of survival, this is why so many leave Romania...

What are the things you like most about Italy?

That all the young people live better than our young people, and that the parents help their children and that almost everyone can afford a mobile phone.

And the things you like the least?

That all of them have cash cards and are racist towards gypsies.

Is Romania modern? What comes to mind when you think about Romania?

Romania is not modern yet because there's no money, when I think about Romania what comes to my mind is when I'll return, dressed real well, and everyone will admire me because I made it in Italy and I'll feel fine, I also think of my friends and what they will say when they see me after almost four years.

It may be concluded that economic pressure, the devaluation of education in the post-communist context and pressure on the part of the peer group are the convergent factors that lead to the decision to leave on the part of almost all migrant minors. Many of them think that they cannot return home before they realized the dream/project of economic and psychological emancipation in the name of which they negotiated their separation from the family. This impossibility of returning 'without success' contributes to their growing vulnerability as regards their involvement in illegal activities. Sometimes the burden of the debt they incurred in order to leave (or during the migratory process) makes it impossible to return. More frequently, 'not having money to go back home' means not having the financial resources necessary to realize one's migratory project the way it had been imagined, rather than not being able to afford the return ticket.

What would you say to minors who want to come to Italy?

Wow, imagine getting out of Romania... the West, the West, they think it's great, that you get lots of work, that you get lots of money... I'd say that they mustn't believe it, that it's not true, because you sleep in the streets. They must not believe people who say that Italy is great. They mustn't believe it. All Romanians say that you live well in Italy. I told my family that I sleep in the street, Mum told me to come back, I don't want to for now, I don't have the money to come back.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

The first day I arrived we went to a restaurant with a cousin. I had come from Romania with 500 Euros, grandmother gave me 100, she took it from her pension, my aunt who had worked as a domestic helper with a family gave me 200, then my half-brother gave me 100 Euros and my mother gave me another 100. My grandmother gave it to me, brother gave it to me, my mother gave it to me and my aunt told me I had to pay her back later. So far, I haven't sent money home to help out. Before I left for Italy I had to send money to my cousin to pay for a house for three months. (...) my cousin told me nice things about Italy. After I had been three months in Italy we no longer had a house, I did not have any more money to pay. Then I slept in the park with my cousin and other kids for a week... it was the first time I slept in the street. I did not think I would live like this in Italy. I thought it was easier: If I knew that Italy was like this I wouldn't have come. I cannot return to Romania. I need a lot of money because I have to pay 210 Euros for the bus, 150 for consular document, then I need 200 to pay my aunt and then 200 Euros to get a new visa, since it has expired. I need about 1000 Euros. Now I'm staying in Italy because I don't have money...

(M, R, 17, Rome)

I was more afraid that they would send me to Romania, I didn't want to return...

Only because of that?

It was shameful for me, because I said I won't come back and then I would find myself like a puppy knocking on the door; I didn't like it, I didn't have all the money for the house...

How much?

20-30,000 Euros... to return to Romania.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

3.3 The migratory process

As to the organization of the trip and the role played by leading adult figures in the planning and implementation of the migratory project, the trends are very different and complex and vary according to the presence, or absence, of other members of the family nucleus abroad, especially parents, and according to the ethnic context of origin: Romanian or Roma.

Most of the Romanian children interviewed tended to leave either together with a group of friends or to join a relative (usually a brother or a parent, but also a member of the extended family), or to join the rest of the family nucleus that originally emigrated, as we saw in the section on 'abandoned' children in Romania.

I came to Italy for the first time in September/October 2004...last year... with three friends, we knew one another from the neighbourhood... we took the bus from Bacău that took us to Rome... We had some friends of ours... Then, also the friends with whom I came to Italy, they already knew the place, they had already rented a flat...

(M, R, 18, Rome)

Why did you leave Romania?

I had come to join my mother... She's been living in Italy for more than 10 years...

When did you come to Italy for the first time?

In 2003, three and a half years ago... I came with the bus, my mother sent me money... Then she was waiting for me in Italy.

(M, R, 16, Rome)

I've decided to leave because my cousin was there, he'd been living in Italy for two years, now he's in Canada. He told me to come because he knew there was nothing in Romania. When I arrived in Rome he helped me. My family agreed that I should leave. I had not imagined anything about Italy. I thought I'd get the visa for three months, go to Italy, make money and then return. I worked for a month as a labourer and then I worked as a bricklayer for three months.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

Unlike other Romanian children, Roma children tend to emigrate almost exclusively with their families or within the context of extended family networks. The ethnographic material and the interviews gathered within the context of the research show a deep involvement, on the part of the Roma family nucleus, in the migratory process.

The children usually:

- are entrusted by their parents to other adults, who are presented as an integral part of a family network (an uncle or aunt) and who often control, and at times exploit, the minor's work,
- join other members of the family (either of origin or 'street family') who are already abroad,
- migrate together with the family group.

In many cases, the children or their families had to borrow large amounts to be able to pay for transportation to Italy and the documentation necessary to cross the border with the EU. This is a factor that profoundly conditions the migratory trajectory and the potential integration of children, since the child is fully bound to the debtor and the urgency of repaying the debt becomes a priority with respect to any other possibility offered in Italy, including possible projects aimed at reintegration and regularization.

And the money, the tickets, are they expensive?

A guy lent me some money.

Do you have a debt because of this?

Yes, that's why I ran away from the community home last time. I couldn't stay there, I had to pay the money back...

How did you manage to get the documents to get out of Romania?

I got help from these friends of mine. Then since I had just turned 18 they did not ask me anything at the border...

(M, R, 18, Rome)

Indeed, in some cases the minor decided, along with the family, to emigrate precisely because of debts already incurred in Romania.

I worked with my father, as a painter and bricklayer, then in 2004 my father died from carbon monoxide, my family borrowed 3000 Euros from a Romanian gypsy to pay the funeral expenses. I decided to come to Italy a month and a half after my father had died, I wanted to pay off the debt. My mother signed the authorization for the journey, she helped me with the documents, I came with a bus, the journey cost 150 Euros. My father's employer gave me 300 Euros for the trip.

(M, R, 17, Rome)

Why did you come to Italy the first time?

In Romania my father and my mother had some debts and so they decided to send me to Italy because I was the oldest. In Romania we were living in a house with two rooms and we were five brothers and sisters, my father and my mother. One day my father told me that we had a lot of debts and that I had to go to Italy to make money to pay the debts and also to bring them here.

So it wasn't you who decided?

No, my father, also because I had to get married and I had to make money, so my father advised me.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

Generally speaking the family is very strongly involved in the child's decision to leave and in the implementation of his/her migratory project, because current Romanian legal regulations set out that a child crossing the border must be accompanied by, or legally entrusted to, an adult. The following scenario emerges from an interview with a representative of IOM in Bucharest.

A child cannot leave Romania alone, only if an adult is travelling with him/her. And so what happens? Are all these thousands of kids being teletransported? How do they do it? Are all these children crossing the border by themselves, illegally? Among other things, Romania probably doesn't have the most modern border system, but we mustn't forget that it inherited a communist system that was extremely alert...

And perhaps also highly corruptible...

Perhaps corruptible, but not permissive. You really could not... and anyway I find it hard to imagine that a group of minors would be able to corrupt a policeman, really... There must be an adult involved... even if only to corrupt someone or get the documents that will make it possible for them to travel. We have trained the border police very well. I saw them, and I can say that as matters stand today, corruption is very risky for them too... I mean... to let someone out without a passport... I wouldn't blame the permeability of the borders on corruption in general... I find it easier to believe that even if there's a group that crosses the border illegally, there are adults involved, who are showing the way, corrupting the right persons if this happens, or, something that's more credible, taking care that the documents and visas are legally approved.

How long have you been in Italy for?

I arrived with my uncle a year ago, and we came to the camp where he lived.

Where do you come from?

From Călărași.

Did your parents stay in Romania?

Yes, with my other brothers and sisters, we are 6 children, three boys and three girls, I'm the youngest.

Why did you come to Italy?

My family is poor, my parents don't work and my brothers and sisters are already married and have to think of their family, and so when my uncle returned to Romania then he took me with him to Rome.

How did you come to Italy?

With the bus, together with my uncle

(M, Roma, 16, Rome)

Despite the observations of the IOM representative, in many cases the interviews and life histories obtained during the research revealed the existence of cases of corruption.

I started to get together the money for the trip and my mother prepared an authorisation for me to go to my aunt in Germany, in Hamburg, but I was already thinking of going to Rome. I had friends there, who said that you can steal well here, that there's lots of tourists and they sent a lot of money home. And so when I managed to get together 500 Euros and I had the power of attorney, I left with a "microbus". We crossed Hungary, Austria and Italy. I gave all the money to the driver who paid 100 Euros to get out of Romania, 100 Euros to get out of Hungary and 100 for Austria. The driver kept the remaining 200 Euros.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

I come from Brașov, I left in 2004, I came to Rome when I was 17... with the "microbus", crossing Romania, Hungary, Austria... it took me three days... the driver went very slow, he was afraid of getting caught, it usually takes 24 hours. I paid 150 Euros plus 5 for insurance to the driver...

But how did you manage to pass, if you were a minor?

I was with my older brother...

And the other minors, how do they manage?

The parents give them a power of attorney and give it to the driver, who gives money to the customs and you pass without any problem, you put the money in the passport...

(M, Roma, 19, Rome)

As may be deduced from the two last quotations, Romanian migrant children usually cross through Hungary and Austria before arriving in Italy. Moreover, the material gathered in Italy and in Romania clearly shows that the legal measures adopted by the Romanian state to protect minors are easy to get around. In fact, according to Romanian regulations, a child may leave Romania provided his or her parents sign a legal document entrusting the child to an adult. These measures are ineffective for two reasons. Firstly, because the decision, and thus the responsibility for leaving, is in most cases taken by the family as a whole, and thus both by the child and by its parents. Secondly, because corruption practices exist among the authorities in charge of border control.

This is why the new provisions introduced by Romania to prevent the migration of unaccompanied children, while appearing effective on paper, may complicate the phenomenon of migration of unaccompanied or 'misaccompanied' children and make it more risky and costly, rather than eradicating it.

3.4 Survival strategies: the migration/illegal activities connection

From the analysis of the life stories of migrant children it emerges that some of the interviewees who were in trouble with the law in Italy had already resorted to theft and begging in Romania to survive, and that emigration consequently only represented a further step along this path.

Me, from the age of seven I started to go to primary school... I quit because I didn't feel like it any more... because from then on I started to hang out with people in the street and do stupid little things. I stole in the shops, little things that small kids do, and from there I begun this life. During the day, when I went to school, I returned home, took a piece of bread in my hand, went downstairs and went to play football. I met my friends, sometimes we went to do a job (steal)...
(M, R, 18, Rome)

I was born in Braşov to a very poor family, we are 4 brothers and sisters, I was already stealing in Romania when I was small, my parents knew, all of us brothers and sisters stole in the shops, or wallets, we were very poor. When I was 13 they arrested me because I had stolen in a shop and they took me to a rehabilitation centre where I stayed almost 5 months. Then I returned home and I continued to steal. In the end I had an arrest warrant for a year and two months. And so I decided to leave for Italy. I arrived in Rome, in Anagnina in October 2004, I was 17, a friend from my village was waiting for me, he had been here for a year. He took me to his home, there were six of us, all Romanian and the oldest was 20 years old, we all stole.
(M, R, 19, Rome)

For most minors, the opportunity to resort to illegal activities emerges in relation to the migratory process. The two following quotes demonstrate the role played by the peer group (for non-Roma) and by the family context (for Roma) in the involvement in illegal activities.

Now I'll ask you some questions about your work experience in Romania. Did you work there?
No... I was in Italy. I worked in Italy.
And so you haven't worked in Romania?
No.
Not at all?
No, I went to school.
Who was waiting for you in Italy?
Relatives of mine...
And did these relatives help you? And did they teach you what you had to do, where you had to go?
They guided me, they didn't help me with money - they showed me what to do, how to do it, where to go and afterwards I started to beg, steal, do something, earn money to pay for my trip and the debt that I had with the driver.
And during the first few days, where did you sleep?
I slept in someone else's tent. Afterwards I bought my own tent and I slept in it.
Did you have any problems with the police?
Yes... because I did not have documents...or because I was begging... they caught me stealing... and all the time like that - I was arrested, too, afterwards they let me go, I returned - but they did not let me beg any more.
But practically speaking, where did you beg?
At traffic lights.
And was it forbidden?
It was forbidden...
Also begging?
Yes, begging was not permitted... and in Italy it was dangerous if you stole or... the laws were more... they were less severe for us who were immigrants there and the laws are much less severe there than in Romania, and it wasn't so bad, that is to say they'd catch us, open a file on us, we'd stay with them for a couple of hours at most [...] and then they'd let us go...
(M, Roma, 17, Craiova)

How did you begin to steal?
Once, looking for work, I was walking around the Termini Station, I got to know some kids, and that's how I started... If there was no work?
Was it the first time for you, here in Italy, or did you do it in Romania too?
No, only in Italy...
Did you do it by yourself or with friends?
Once with these friends... Then by myself...
Has anyone ever forced you to do it?
No, no.
But did your parents know?
No, I told them I am working, as a bricklayer...
(M, R, 18, Rome)

And then in Rome, what did you do?

My friend had to meet other friends of his and he left. I met other Romanian kids who took me along to sleep together with them in an abandoned train carriage for a couple of days... Then I met some Romanians who took me to a place on street X, and they lived and worked there and they let me work and in exchange they let me sleep there and I took care of the horses, I fed them. I slept in a caravan and I was not comfortable, too little room for five persons. And then I went to work as a labourer and (*showing me his ruined hands*)... they paid me 25 or 30 (Euros), I worked all day and I was really tired and wanted to change. And then with my friends we went to steal cars...

(M, R, 17, Rome)

As can be seen by this last case, involvement in illegal activities is often a possibility that arises within the emigration context, and is chosen after clashing with very strong social exclusion dynamics (working conditions that border on exploitation, difficulty in finding a place to stay, etc.). Indeed, on arriving in Italy, migrant children have to confront a society based on exclusion rather than on the social integration of marginalized categories. The children thus face as much of a rapid spiralling descent of multiple failures, as they do integration factors; this sometimes make them seek situations that enable them to come together and to feel 'successful'. From this point of view Rome, with its thousands of tourists, seems like an inexhaustible source of easy earnings for young pickpockets.

The first day I came with them in the subway and they showed me how you steal. It's easier to steal in Romania because you understand what people say, you understand nothing of the language here. Then they explained that it's actually easier with tourists because when you steal their wallet and they shout for help nobody understands them, not even the police, and so it's easier to get away. With Italians, on the contrary, the police immediately understand and they arrest you. We went to steal in subway A between Piazza Vittorio and Piazza di Spagna stations from 8 to 10 in the morning and from 4 to 6 in the afternoon because in those hours people go to work and the subway was also packed with tourists. We also knew which foreigners it was best to steal from, Japanese and Germans are very careful and it's hard to steal money from them, French and Spanish, when you take their money and they ask for help, you (the Italians) understand them, Italians never have much money in their pockets, we would steal their mobile phones. The best are Americans and English, they have a lot of money. I always went with a Romanian girl, we dressed well and so we looked like we were Italians going to school, she would keep the money so if the police stopped us they could not check her, because she was a girl. Sometimes we managed to earn as much as 2-3000 Euros a week. We saved a part for housing and food, the rest we used to buy clothes and things we needed, and I would send some home. When I could, I sent as much as 1000 Euros a month. My parents bought themselves a house like that. They knew I was stealing, they told me to be careful, but they were happy to get the money.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

The following model was developed by Giancarlo Spagnoletto of Save the Children Italy on the basis of Mark Spivak's desocialization theory²³. It is an attempt to visualize and interpret the system of relative choice encountered by foreign migrant children and young people once they arrive in Italy. According to this model, the resort to illegal activities enables the young migrant to re-establish a higher margin of self-control and to assure him/her an opportunity for survival, after separating from the sociocultural context of the country of origin and encountering a series of obstacles in relation to satisfying his or her vital needs, such as housing, work, protection, family and friends. Unfortunately, these needs are often met within a context of illegality, where young people can put to use the only resources available to them: certain reckless tendencies and their own bodies. Thefts on commission, selling sex and working with criminal organizations or individuals sometimes become phases and trajectories that risk sealing the fate of children and young people. These activities are carried out together with a peer group, the '**street family**', which represents for many children the only source of support in a context of extreme marginalization and disorientation.

²³ Spivak, M. (1974) 'A conceptual framework for the structuring of the living of psychiatric patients in the community', in *Community Mental Health Journal*, Vol. 10, pages 345-350.

RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS ON THE DELIQUENCY CIRCUIT OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS ACCORDING TO MARK SPIVAK'S 'DESOCIALIZING SPIRAL' METHOD.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
(SOCIAL HARDSHIP AND FAMILY MANDATE)



CONTINUITY OF SENSE OF BELONGING TO A COMMUNITY AND TO A GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL LOCATION INTERRUPTED. THE MINORS SEE THEMSELVES AS A SOCIAL BODY THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE NEW CONTEXT, A HYBRID BODY IN WHICH THEY SEEK TO REDESIGN THEIR OWN SENSE OF BELONGING THOROUGH:



LIVING SPACE

- DWELLING
- WORK
- HYGIENE, PERSONAL CARE
- SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITY
- COMPANIONS AND/OR FAMILY



PERSONAL AND SOCIAL FAILURES IN THE ATTAINMENT OF THE GRATIFICATION OF ONE'S NEED'S



PROSTITUTION
(the body as practical demonstration of one's presence)

CRIMINALITY
(as an act of revendication in relation to frustrations derivind from failures)

EXPLOITATION
(as appropriation fo power within the group to which the person belongs)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY THE STREET FAMILY

To understand the reasons why illegal activities are often preferred to other forms of survival, it must be remembered that they may be perceived as relatively positive strategies for self-advancement, when compared to possible alternatives in the context of origin or of emigration. Most of the minors interviewed managed to ensure their economic, social and cultural survival by resorting to activities on a totally different level in terms of formal legality (observance of the law) and moral legitimacy (in relation to the 'social' experience of morality of the persons concerned). In the following excerpt, the minor combines types of work that are 'irregular' from a legal point of view (cleaning car windows at traffic lights, selling used goods at the market), but that are perceived as 'honest', with prostitution, that is legal as such, but that is experienced as shameful by the minor and morally disapproved of in the family context. While work, even if 'irregular', is perceived as 'legal' by all immigrants, only the Roma consider begging to be a morally acceptable form of work.

What did you do since you came to Italy?

I worked at traffic lights... I cleaned windows... then I began to go with my father to sell used things at San Giovanni...

And what kind of work did you do in Romania?

I couldn't find any work...

Who is the person who helped you most in Rome? If you are in trouble, who do you ask for help?

My parents... then there's the landlord of our flat, who helped us a lot.

How did you get to know him?

He came by every day at the traffic lights where I was cleaning car windows and we gradually became friends. He gave me some extra money and asked me where I came from, what I was doing in Italy. Then he helped us to find another place to stay. He told me that he had a flat that nobody lived in, and if we wanted to we could go there.

But do you pay him a rent?

Yes, but it's not much.

Have you ever been involved in illegal activities since you've come to Italy?

No, I was honest, I always worked... I don't steal.

Have you ever begged for money?

Only sometimes.

Have you ever had sex with someone for money?

[silence... nods]

How did you begin to do these things? Did someone suggest you should do it, teach you how to do it and so on?

No, I never did anything, that old man had something against me...

Did it happen for the first time here in Italy or did you do it in Romania too?

No, me? But, no... it's only happened a couple of times, but I had nothing to do with it...

Did you do it alone or with friends?

Alone...

What are the advantages and the disadvantages as compared to other jobs?

He just told me to do it with him, and then he paid me, it's money, right?

Has anyone ever forced you to do it?

No, no.

But did your parents know?

No.

When they found out, what did they say to you?

They got angry... they told me that we don't do that sort of thing...

And your wife?

She's expecting a baby. They haven't told her...

[He becomes silent and I decide to continue with other questions]

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

The following interviews clearly show how the life trajectories of migrant minors drift between relative choices amongst a range of activities that are perceived as legal and illegal, moral and immoral, advantageous or involving exploitation, dignified or reproachable depending on the social (and family) background and the individual sensitivity of the minor.

Where did you go and live when you arrived in Italy?

I came to Italy for the first time in 2004, I stayed four months and then I returned to Romania, then I returned for a second time in February 2005. In 2004 I didn't know anybody, I didn't speak Italian, I arrived at Anagnina, I took the subway to Termini and for two days I was looking for work, they also stole my suitcases. After two days a sergeant in the Carabinieri stopped me, with a Romanian man, and they helped me, they gave me clothes, they took me to Ostia to the home of the sergeant's mother, who is in a wheelchair. I was in Ostia for three or four days where I worked as a gardener, and they gave me money. Then I went to live on the Prenestina road, in an abandoned house where a lot of foreigners live. In 2005, on the other hand, I came with my cousin and went to live at her place.

What was your life in Italy like before you were arrested?

The first time I was in Italy I worked as a bricklayer for four months, sometimes by night I went

to steal in supermarkets with other Romanians. They opened the doors of the supermarket and then I went in and helped them to steal (*he is somewhat reluctant to tell me about this, and assures me that he has only done it twice*). Then I returned to Romania, I gave my mother some money for living expenses and I looked for work, after five months I went back to Italy, I still had a debt of 3000 Euros to pay. I returned to Italy and I began to work, I repaid the debt to the gypsy and then in May they arrested me because they accused me of having stolen a wallet, but I didn't do it.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

What was your life in Italy before you were arrested?

Come on, don't you know? Everyone knows what I was doing, I worked as a prostitute... but why do all of you say prostitution? I didn't work as a prostitute, that word is used for queers in Romania, and I'm not queer. Sometimes I also stole, also my brother stole.

How come you started doing these things? Did someone suggest you should do it?

A Romanian friend spoke to me, saying I could make money by doing it with queers, if I work I don't earn much, if I steal they arrest me, with sex I earn 80 Euros every time and nobody says a thing. I didn't go every night, sometimes I only went to look and to hang out with my friends, Italy is full of queers, in Romania never, there aren't any queers in Romania. Sometimes women paid me too. I'm ashamed of this, it's not something normal...

(At this point of the interview he becomes sad and so I decide it would be better to continue with other questions)

(M, R, 17, Rome)

The last excerpt clearly shows how the perception of the moral sustainability and illegality of prostitution, which is often associated with a loss of honour and status for the people involved, especially males, deserves more in-depth discussion. Child prostitution takes place in Rome in a micro-criminal or para-criminal context, where it represents one of the main livelihood strategies, which are ranked in terms of honour and respectability. As for girls, involvement in prostitution implies a loss of status and role in relation to the patriarchal cultural concept of female honour and respectability. As to the boys, the possibility of selling sex by 'fucking queers' (*futând bulangii*) represents the lowest level in terms of respectability and honour, since it endangers their own credibility as heterosexual men²⁴.

Theft and drug dealing are, on the contrary, considered as more honourable survival strategies, since these activities are corroborated by masculine models and lifestyles. From this point of view, both selling sex and being exploited are considered by some interviewees as a loss of autonomy, and thus of dignity and honour on the part of many children, as the following excerpt shows.

To support myself I have always stolen, I gave the money to a girl who came along with me to work, or I put it in my shoes, I had a double bottom where I hid it, and where I also put the razor blades, because if the police found them, they'd know I was a thief. They told me I could also make money by fucking the *bulangii* in Piazza della Repubblica but I don't like this thing, only the gypsies who work at the traffic lights or beg during the day, work as rent boys by night. Those who steal don't do these things! I keep all the money I make by stealing for myself, nobody has ever asked me to give him money or work for him. Giving money to pimps, that's something only whores do, and I'm not a whore. I heard that there are kids who, when they steal, have to give money to their boss, but they are smaller children, this doesn't happen with the older ones. Girls and small boys know that they come here to steal and to work as whores, also the families who take the money from what they earn here in Italy know it, they already know in Romania.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

Very often stealing, apart from being considered as an opportunity to have fun, becomes a symbolic act through which minors can assert themselves in the peer group, something the following two excerpts demonstrate.

What is the best thing you've done in Rome?

I don't know... But when I'm with friends, even now that I am staying in the centre for minors, I go to see my friends in Anagnina.

You've just told me that you stole cars, why? For money?

No, for fun. When I lived in Anagnina we went out in the evening to steal a car, to drive around and have fun. It was just to have some fun, a kid's game, a game... But I have never stolen cars... only twice.

(M, R, 17, Rome)

Have you ever picked people's pockets in the subway or stolen cars, scooters, clothes or other things?

Yes, I stole cars, but not for money, for fun. One night we stole three, just to drive around and have fun with our friends.

²⁴ For a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between the migration of young people, the cultural construction of masculinity and male prostitution, especially in relation to the Albanian cultural and social context, Mai, N. (2004) *Albanian Masculinities, Sex work and Migration: Homosexuality, AIDS and other Moral Threats*, in Worton, M. and Wilson-Tagoe, N. (eds) *National Healths: Gender, Sexuality and Health in a Cross-cultural context*, London: UCL Press.

And scooters?

I stole a lot of scooters, a hundred.

And what did you do with them, did you sell them?

No. I had fun, driving around. Well I sold some, but not for much. And then I stole lots of bicycles, I have even sent three to Romania, they were completely new.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

The question of Roma minors is another matter; in some cases their resort to illegal activities is accepted by the family group and by the larger social group. This applies both to theft and to male prostitution, as shown by the two extracts below. This acceptance is to be seen as a sign of the conditions of severe social marginalization which the Roma population finds themselves in both in Italy and in their country of origin, and not as a Roma cultural trait.

When did you hear someone talk about Italy for the first time?

I was a 13 years old, the others who returned said it was easy to make money, that life was better. I thought I could have a better life. They told me I could make money by begging or by working at traffic lights and they also said I could work as a rent boy.

Can you tell me what it was like, the first time you sold sex?

A guy came by in a car and he asked me if I'm passive or active, I told him active, and he took me to his home, he made me take a shower and he gave me shoes, underwear, trousers, everything, when I came out of the shower (reference to sexual acts) and he gave me 30 Euros and took me back to Piazza della Repubblica.

How did you feel after the first time?

Fine, how else should I feel!? I enjoyed it and I earned 30 Euro!

(...)

Does your wife know that you do this work?

Sure, she knows, she always says she is afraid of "scolamento" (the clap) or sida (AIDS).

And your family?

They know too, my mother says it's better than stealing, if not I end up in jail. I give some of the money to my mother and keep some for myself to get something to eat when I go to sell sex. My mother keeps it for me, so I can buy a house in Romania. Once in a while I keep a bit more for myself, to buy myself shoes and T-shirts.

(M, Roma, 16, Rome)

Have you ever thought of returning to Romania?

Yes but a thief like me is wasted in Romania, and then I like it here

(...)

Why did you choose to live in a Roma camp?

Because I feel protected, and then everyone respects me because I'm a good thief

(F, Roma, 14, Rome)

The fact that the project team became aware of the greater involvement of the family institution in the phenomenon of unaccompanied foreign minors, first and foremost as a result of the work done with the Roma Romanian children, called for a reflection (with implications both of a theoretical nature and in relation to social intervention) on what is known at present about the relationship between the involvement in illegal activities and the migratory trajectory of foreign children in Italy. From this point of view the experience of the CCM, to be analyzed in more detail in the last part of this section, is very important. In fact, the CCM considers the child's behaviour as an expression of a system of relationships that not only concern the isolated child, but also the needs, values and survival strategies of his/her extended family. It is within this system of relationships that the cases of 'exploitation' found during this research emerged.

3.5 And trafficking?

'Trafficking' is a subject that has given rise to an equal number of inquiries and debates. Numerous authors have tried to make a distinction between trafficking in the strict sense of the term, totally imposed by force, and migrations that are planned and realized in a more or less voluntary way²⁵. Other analysts, on the contrary, tend not to distinguish between these two approaches, claiming, especially with regard to prostitution, that migrants who sell sex are always victims of coercion and that they never do this voluntarily²⁶. This politicized interpretation of the voluntary nature of the act of selling sex becomes even more rigid when one is dealing with minors. Within the scope of studies on prostitution, when the authors refer to minors, they speak in an almost automatic way about the 'sexual exploitation of children', preferring this term to that of 'child prostitution' which would imply a voluntary activity. Despite the fact that more and more researchers acknowledge that the number of minors who practise prostitution in Europe is increasing²⁷, legislation and social welfare policies continue to

²⁵ For a synthesis of the literature referring to this position, see Agustín, L. (2004) 'Daring Border-Crossers: A Different Vision of Migrant Women'. In *Sex Work in a Changing Europe*, S. Day and H. Ward, eds. 85-94 London: Kegan Paul.

²⁶ Kelly, L. (2000) *Stopping Traffic: Exploring the Extent of, and Responses to Trafficking in Women for Sexual Exploitation in the UK*. London: Home Office Policing and Reducing Crime Unit Police Research Series; Hughes, D. (2002), *Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation: The Case of the Russian Federation*, IOM, available online at <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/russia.pdf>.

²⁷ Barrett, D., Barrett, E. and Mullenger, N. (2000) *Youth prostitution in the new Europe: the growth in sex work*, Lyme Regis: Russell House.

ignore the possibility of voluntary acts. To insist on the possibility of a voluntary act of child prostitution is important because it makes it possible, without challenging the condition of potential vulnerability in which children selling sex may find themselves, to understand the system of needs and desires as a whole, and not on the basis of canons of generalized and stereotyped victimization. Having a 'secular' approach to the issue of the voluntary nature of a child's decision to migrate, to take risks and use one's body in order to live is a very real necessity: experience in the field demonstrates that minors may also voluntarily decide to sell sex rather than accept working conditions that are perceived as being more disadvantageous.

How do you live? What kind of work do you do?

I live as best I can, I steal from shops then I sell what I steal at half price.

Do your friends do the same work too?

Yes, they do, all four. We also hang out in Piazza della Repubblica, that's where we met.

Do your parents know what kind of work you do?

No, they believe I'm working at a petrol station. That's what I told them because my parents wouldn't understand what I am doing, they're a bit old-fashioned...

Why do you say that your parents are old-fashioned?

Because they have always worked in the country and they haven't travelled to see the world, then if they knew that I have sex with men... my mother would die.

And are you satisfied with what you are doing in Italy?

Yes, in any case I don't work hard and I always have money in my pocket. I even managed to send my father 2000 Euros, so he could buy a tractor.

And so you want to return to Romania? Since you are sending money to your father and he is buying farming machinery, do you plan to work the land together with your father?

No, but he kept nagging that I wasn't helping him, so I sent money to make him happy. I'll never become a country farmer, since I saw the West I couldn't even live in the little village I come from.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

Do you know whether there are small kids who work as rent boys in Repubblica or in the cinema?

Yes there are, 13 or 14 years old... and they have customers and work too, we all come from the same town and we know one another. We know that this is a good job. What do I do in Romania, must I wait for someone who asks me to throw out a table or cabinet from his house for him for 50,000 Lei, what do I do with 50,000 Lei (1.5 Euro)?

(M, R, 19, Rome)

Many of the minors interviewed underline the fact that those who work as prostitutes do so voluntarily. From this point of view, while cases of exploitation of male prostitution seem to remain quite limited and 'occasional', the exploitation of minors dedicated to theft and begging is, on the contrary, more common.

Has it ever happened that older people asked you for money in Repubblica, to allow you to stay there?

Yes, there were three older Romanian guys who came in the evening with a chain and they made you go behind the kiosks to take your money.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

Do you know that many fellow Romanians come to Italy and prostitute themselves? What do you think about them?

I know, I would never do it, fuck someone for 30 Euros. I make a lot of money every day... and those who prostitute themselves do so because they want to.

Have you ever prostituted yourself?

No, no...

Do you know someone who does it?

Yes, a cousin of mine, her husband made her walk the streets because she doesn't make money at the traffic lights...

Do you know that many get exploited with prostitution?

I know, but I don't understand why they don't run away. Italy is so big... where would they find you?

(M, Roma, 13, Rome)

What do you think about all those minors who prostitute themselves?

I don't know what to say, I work as a prostitute too. We should divide them into two categories: those who are exploited whom I think lack the courage to run away, and those who do it for money and that's something I can understand. At least what they earn is all theirs.

But in the shops, what do you steal and to whom do you sell the goods?

I steal clothes, sunglasses and then a lot of food, since they don't do anything to me for food and I sell everything at X., where all the

Romanians are. Before I sold everything at X., but now I don't go there anymore because I don't have protection.

What protection?

In X., if you don't have a Romanian who protects you, there are people who take everything you have and perhaps they make you work for them, because you invaded the territory...

But does this happen in Piazza della Repubblica?

No, because all the rent boys are independent and want to stay that way. For instance, if one is attacked and robbed, all the others intervene because they know that it may be their turn tomorrow. That's why I like that place. I feel like I'm at home, safe.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

As studies on migratory trends in Romania reveal²⁸, the trafficking of human beings cannot be distinguished from labour migration, but must, on the contrary, be considered a collateral effect of the latter. The material gathered in the context of this research seems to confirm these observations, as the cases of exploitation encountered seem to represent 'variations on a theme' in relation to the migratory trajectory of the minors. These are characterized by the fact that they are assuming responsibilities for the survival of their families at an increasingly young age, and by a decrease of their level of autonomy from their adult reference points. These trends must be seen as the result of a convergence of several factors: the lowering of the threshold for access to the regularization process provided by Italian legislation (the Bossi-Fini law) and the extension of the migratory phenomenon to lower age groups and to different social groups (Roma) compared with a few years ago. It is within the context of these transformations and the diversification of the profiles of the migratory typologies that the cases of 'exploitation' found within the context of the research must be identified.

Until 2002 the typical case of the 'unaccompanied foreign child' was that of a kid in search of fortune, driven by the example of friends from his village or neighbourhood, who ended up by choosing to carry out illegal activities as a result of the social exclusion encountered in Italy. This profile is still partially true, as far as non-Roma Romanian children and young people are concerned. In their case, 'exploitation' is related to power relations at work within the peer group in a context characterized by a search for individual autonomy. In the following extract, the minor accepts to offer part of his earnings from thefts in exchange for strategic information on the basis of an agreement with his peers.

What kind of agreement did you have with the boy with whom you left Romania?

He's a friend, I went with him... he stole but very little... wallets... he taught me to steal but 'if I teach you then you pay me, right? Yes, I'll pay you back', then in the meanwhile I paid everything...

You didn't have any particular agreement in Romania?

No, we went to steal together, but he cheated me because I didn't know about life outside Romania. Then the experience that I got with him, that I stole and he made money, then I managed by myself. I went back to Romania, and I left for Italy with two other guys.

How much did you earn a day?

In the beginning 100 Euros a day, sometimes nothing, sometimes 50. After a month 400-500, especially with wallets. I gave him more than a half, I kept the rest. (...) For two months, he had already been there, he knew. Then I returned to Romania, I trusted these guys (other kids, with whom he later went to Italy), I used to eat together with them when I was small, we went to the discotheque together in the evening, we were together every day.

Have you convinced these guys?

No, they. I didn't want to return. (...) They said, let's go to Italy in a couple of weeks, and I said, wait, I'll come too...

Were they minors too?

No, they were adults, but once they got here they hid their documents and gone to the police and declared themselves to be minors. Here, another life, we arrived at two, three in the morning (...) in Padua. After a week we met two Romanian boys, they told us that they steal, that they break into shops, we went with them. Also these guys cheated us in the beginning: when one learns something it's normal that he asks something back, right?

One half?

One half, but if a guy accepts to take you with him and he says I take three quarters and you get a quarter, you say OK. This is what they asked, come on, let's learn, we learn something too, right? We go with them, they showed us, then we went along with them to break into a shop, a small shop, they wanted half of the stuff we took but they hadn't participated in the thing, they had been far from the place. We did all the work, they waited for us somewhere else. One gradually learns, and we said 'come on let's go, let's not talk to these guys any more'.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

The relationship between family mandate, migratory trajectory and illegal survival strategies is different for Roma children and young people, for whom the migratory process and the resort to illegal practices often take place within a family context characterized by double pressure, i.e. from the natural family and from the street family. During the period of the research, various forms of exploitation and abuse surfaced within the context of the Roma community, including

²⁸ Lazaroiu, S. (2003) Romania. More 'Out' than 'In' at the Crossroads between Europe and the Balkans; in Migration Trends in Selected EU Applicant Countries; volume IV; IOM; Vienna; page 33.

some particularly serious cases. The following quotes reflect the awareness, on the part of many of the children interviewed, of the existence of cases of exploitation and submission.

Do you know that many children are exploited in Italy?

Yes, I know. Even I worked almost six months for one, afterwards they arrested him and I was free... I went to steal with a guy, we met here in Termini Station, then I went to steal with him. When he wasn't making any money I took him along to work as a rent boy but then they arrested him and I, like an idiot, went to the place where he lived. He never wanted to take me there with him, because he said his uncle was there, and he did not want him to see us together. But I went to tell him that I'd help him with money, to get my friend out, and he sent me to steal to make money to pay the lawyer; but then I realised there was no lawyer. He told me that since my friend is in jail, I had to work for him, telling me that it was my fault that they arrested his man...

Haven't you ever thought of reporting him to the police?

If my friend hasn't had the courage, how could I do it?

(M, R, 17, Rome)

Do you know any kids being exploited?

Yes.

What do they do?

Usually, as far as I have seen, in these two and a half quite ugly years of my life, kids who were exploited, they were also beaten, threatened. Kids who came to tell me 'today I must do this otherwise the one at home destroys me'. And I always told him to run away, to leave. The only thing they thought of was to go to Romania. Some told me 'oh, I cannot wait to get home and never leave it again'. When they left (Romania) they said if you come with me, I'll buy you this and that, but once they arrived here all they got were beatings... poor kids...

(M, R, 18, Rome)

Have you ever heard people speak of criminal organizations that exploit minors?

Yes, there are Romanians who bring kids to make them steal in the subways, they are small kids who are brought from Romania, they go to speak with the families directly, they tell them that if they give them their child to take to Italy, they'll make a lot of money and they will send half of what the kids earn directly to the family. You know how it is, people starve in Romania and even 150 Euros a month are good, and so they give them the children.

But then, do they really send this money to the family?

In the beginning yes, they send something, but then when the kid is here they beat him and force him to steal and they don't send anything to the family any more. If the kid doesn't know how to steal, they send him to beg or to do other things. But now the situation is changing, there's a lot of cops in the subway and when they see these kids, they take them and throw them in jail. You know, I saw lots of them in IPM; now it's the older ones who are stealing in the subway, that way they cheat the cops.

Have you ever heard someone say they force them to do other things, as for instance to prostitute themselves?

Yes, in Piazza della Repubblica, but the ones who force them are not Romanian but Albanians, Romanians don't do these things, Romanians only make them steal.

But do the families know that the children are brought here to steal?

Sure, they know, and what's more, they sometimes say 'take this kid here, he's the brightest and learns more quickly'.

But then if the kid runs away, what happens to the family?

Well, they call the family right away and say that if the kid doesn't return, then there's trouble for the family. I heard them say that they'll send someone, and they say that if the son doesn't return to steal, they will take their house and you know... who do you ask for help in Romania? The cops, who are the worst criminals of them all?

But do the families rent their children to these organizations, or do they sell them?

They often sell them outright, consider that if a family has 7 children, one gets sold to feed the others. If they sell the kids it's worse, because the kids become their property, and they can do as they please.

But then these kids, do they only use them for stealing, or do they sell them for adoption to other families or worse still, for organs.

Yes, I heard that sometimes when they are small, they sell them to families in Europe, but as to organs, I only know of adults who do that in Romania, you know how it is, by selling a kidney, you can buy a house in Romania.

It's been said lately that it's the Roma Romanians who manage the trafficking of minors, do you know anything about that?

Yes, I heard that too, I heard about a Roma who had 50 kids working for him. Both Roma and Romanian kids, he went to Romania and brought all of them here to steal, beg...

But does this also happen in other European countries?

In Poland it's even worse, once I was staying in a hotel where there were other Romanians, and one was exploiting both boys and girls, and if they didn't bring him the money he said in the evening, then he beat them, but not ordinary beating, he beat them black and blue, once they pulled out a girl's nails with pliers.

But what do you think about all this?

The money you earn that way is damned money, and sooner or later you will pay. In Romania they say that stolen money slips through your fingers. Better earn money with one's hands than lying in bed and have someone bring it, still, it's a good life...

(M, Roma, 19, Rome)

There are many girls who prostitute themselves in Italy, what do you think about that?

I don't like them. A person who sells his or her body is not a reliable and strong person, they are certainly forced and they are afraid of stealing.

But what do you think about kids who steal for others?

They are idiots and there are many who accept to steal for others because they are afraid, or they feel indebted.

Do you know someone?

Yes, they are also beaten if they don't bring money, and they go to steal from seven in the morning until late at night to make the money their boss tells them to.

Are there exploited kids in this camp?

Yes, also by their parents, but I won't tell you who, I mind my own business.

Don't you feel exploited by your parents?

No, because they cannot take all their money with them to their graves.

(F, Roma, 16, Rome)

Generally speaking, it was very hard to read and interpret exploitation trends within the context of a system of family relations (including the extended family and the street family) characterized by so many indicators of social hardship such as poverty, violence, marginalization.

Once you arrived in Rome?

When we got to Rome, we went to the camp where my parents were staying, my father had left a few days before for Romania, because he wasn't feeling well, and my mother and a little brother of mine were staying there.

What did you do when you came here for the first time?

I joined my father's cousins, who were living in shacks and I stayed there for 3 years. In the morning I went with the others to work at the traffic lights, I even made 20 euros a day, but I had to give my father's cousins half of that, because I was living with them.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

As the extract from the last interview shows, the concept of exploitation must be read against the context of the cultural and social realities the children come from and belong to. In these milieux, stealing and begging may be perceived as morally acceptable behaviour for the survival of the individual and the family, or as forms of self-fulfilment or, in other cases, as a kind of abuse and prevarication.

To be able to work efficiently and to prevent social intervention from increasing, rather than decreasing, the social vulnerability of the user groups, the practitioners must be (put) in a position to recognize and interpret the cultural peculiarities of the standards of legitimacy and illegitimacy on the basis of which the child, and the system of relationships surrounding him, act. For instance, the way the intervention of the social services was perceived by some Roma families living in Rome bears witness to a peculiar way of considering the concept of 'protection of the child' and the relative principles and priorities. In the following extract, there is the situation of a mother who begs together with her child which is seen by the father as a way to avoid leaving the child 'unaccompanied' while both parents are 'working'. Likewise, the intervention of the Italian authorities is considered to be intrusive, partial and harmful, as it ends up separating parents from children, who thus remain 'unaccompanied'!

Look, in Rome... the situation is a mess... I was with my wife and my daughter... in the morning I left for work... and so did my wife.

What work were you doing?

I was working on a building site and my wife was begging. I was telling you...

Yes, pardon me.

That we couldn't leave the children in the camp, that if the police came they would take them to social services, because they may think they were abandoned... And so my wife took the girl with her... but not to make her beg as well, just to keep her with her. Well, the municipal police saw her; then what happened is that they took the girl... Because they said she was using her to get more money... But that's not true at all, it's just that we couldn't leave her at home, nor take her with us to work...

But did this also happen to other families?

Even worse, there were many families in the camp who were sent away, and the children remained there... they were accompanied before that... it's the Italian government that made them become unaccompanied, that's what's happened... they had a family before!

(M, Roma, 35, Craiova)

As the above extract shows, the initiatives and structures aimed at protecting foreign children are often perceived as mechanisms of control and coercion, rather than as an opportunity for change in the interest of the children themselves. This does not mean that the foreign minors do not need protection or help, but that 'interpreting' exploitation within a social context characterized by authoritarian relationships, marginalization and poverty calls for very carefully calibrated tools.

My little brother... *(a moment of silence, looking down)*, he's naughty, he always runs away, he doesn't want to stay either with my sister or in the centres, just imagine, he even reported our parents to the police.

Why?

I don't know why, he's 14 but I think he was taking some drugs when he did it. Because what he did is terrible, there aren't any parents better than ours in the whole world. They took him to a community home one day, and he said that his parents beat him and he reported them. He doesn't accept rules, afterwards he's run away from the community home too, when he understood that he had to accept rules there too.

What did they do to your parents?

Nothing as yet, I don't know, it's his social worker who takes care of it, now he is with my sister in the caravan.

But did you speak to him about why he did it?

Yes, I spoke to him but I cannot be too hard on him, if I am he runs away. Every time I speak to him, he runs away. I told my sister to make sure he doesn't smoke joints or use other drugs.

Doesn't it seem strange to you that he decided to report his parents because of a joint?

I think that if you have never smoked a joint, then the first time you do, you no longer think of your family, you don't think of anything, you just want to be free to do whatever you want. I see Italians at school who smoke joints and they are out of their minds, they are no longer there, with their heads, in the class.

(We drop the subject halfway through because it can be sensed that she does not want to talk about this matter.)

(M, Roma, 19, Rome)

X's little brother, after the umpteenth arrest for theft, today lives in a CPA in Rome, accompanied by the social mediation group of the Colourful Horizons project; a peer educator of ours is following him, to convince him to stay. He doesn't want to have any more to do with his family, who it seems tried to kidnap him from the centre.

It is within this context, characterized by very strong social and economic pressure on the relationships of solidarity within the family system, that it is necessary to identify cases of exploitation and trafficking. It is a very fluid scenario, in which relationships that seem to be based on solidarity, actually prove to be characterized by dynamics of exploitation, in relation to which the parents themselves are often to some extent responsible. The following extract, that we provide complete with ethnographic notes, reveals the ambiguity of the borders between exploitation, adolescent emancipation and parental protection that characterize the migratory trajectories and the life experiences of many interviewees. The text shows, in particular, how the methodological approach chosen for the implementation of the research, based on a combination of ethnographic observations on the current behaviour of the subject, and the recording of the open-ended interview (which must be considered a narrative reconstruction of past events) makes it possible to interpret the contradictions characterizing the life of migrant minors, beyond what they feel they can say.

When you left Romania, did you come straight to Italy?

No, first I stopped in X., where I spent three months, and from there I got to know other people, let's say older persons... and... then and... the departure from Romania, I came with my father to X, because he did... practically there are markets there and my father brought things from Romania there, for instance cigarettes, clothes... and it was then that I... he made me go further, I began to run away and to spend time with other people, you see?

Observation: He doesn't want to say expressly who these people are, but I know he is referring to exploiters, thieves, pickpockets.

So the first time you went abroad with your father, and then you wanted to go on your own?

Yes, but I couldn't because I was on Dad's passport... and so I run away... I met this organization... I agreed with them, before I ran away from dad, then once everything was fixed I got organized with them and I stole money to leave...

You agreed to go to Italy...

Yes, once we agreed that I was going to steal, I paid the guide and we left and...

And you had to pay these people?

Yes. The guide

Observation: He did not want to tell me everything, I asked him to tell me everything but he doesn't want to. But I know his story, and I know that he was stealing for these people he had met in X, and that it was an organization that specialized in theft. They were all older than him. The guide is a person who knew how to cross the border without needing documents, he was also Romanian. He stole for them, together with other kids.

How much?

1,500 marks (750 Euro)

And you met these people in X.?

Yes...

Were they Romanian?

Yes...

And so you decided to leave, just like that? And where did you go the first time?

First to X., then to Y. and then from there I crossed without documents, that is to say illegally, with the guide, and I came to I don't remember what town, it was small. I reached U by bus, I took the bus in U and I went to V, I took the train from V and I went to Rome, once I reached my destination here in Rome, not knowing the city and not knowing the people, I only knew those I had come here with.

(...)

Why did you choose Rome?

Because the people I travelled with, they were coming here, to Rome...

But how did these people manage to make a living?

They stole...

Were they older than you?

Much older than me...

Did they have kids with them, who they were exploiting?

Yes, some, they also had kids with them

Did they force you to steal for them, or not?

Well... I, when I came to Italy with them, in the beginning I'd come to stay in a villa with them, where we were all organized and my only choice was to go to steal to pay the rent, to eat. After a while, when I had begun to learn the language, I noticed something strange about these people, they wanted me to stay with them to pay them money, so then I left. I mean, to me, that's what made me go, that was the purpose, to learn the language, to be able to get around in the city of Rome, and so once I had learnt I left.

But if you were to do it all over again, what would you have done?

Well, if I were to do it all over again... I would have stayed with my father; I wouldn't have gone away (silence) because of what I went through (here there's an emotional change, his voice suddenly becomes more cheerful)... but in the end I'm not sorry because it's been an experience...

So now you say that, now that I did it I'm not sorry but if I could go back in time I wouldn't have done it all over again...

Sure (silence) but I mean that if I could go back in time, that is to say... I'm not sorry now... no, I'm not sorry because by now I had experiences that made me grow, that made me become mature...

(M, R, 18, Rome)

Observations: He keeps changing the subject, it seems like he is afraid of saying things that could still cause him trouble, as if this group were very powerful and dangerous. Considering that these things happened five years ago, the fact that he still does not talk openly about it today, not even with me, should give an idea.

After the analysis of the way in which the migratory trajectory of Romanian children intersects with involvement in illegal activities and with exploitation, the next section analyzes the response offered by the social intervention initiatives adopted in Rome.

In short...

Family and social context of origin

The results of the research in Romania and in Rome highlight that it is not the minors who come from the poorest classes who emigrate, but those who have access to a social capital (contacts, information) and an economic capital enabling them to imagine, plan and implement the migratory project.

While, for Roma children, the migratory project and the survival strategy (regardless of whether it is based on illegal economic activities or not) tends to be part of the social mobility project of the family system, in the case of non-Roma children the decision to emigrate is more often a mediation between the desire for independence/autonomy from the family and the family mandate for financial help.

The family mandate is almost never perceived as an imposition, but as a sharing of the responsibility for the survival of the family, even when there are high levels of exploitation.

The children's separation from parents who migrate has very important consequences for the process of education and social integration of the children left behind and for their involvement in illegal activities both in Romania and in Italy, if they emigrate to be reunited with their parents.

The migratory project

Peer group pressure is the most determinant factor in relation to the decision to leave, along with the mandate to contribute to the economic survival of the family.

The cultural construct of the West as a world where economic well-being is easy to obtain is highly diffused among the minors. This represents an important factor in relation to their condition of cultural and social vulnerability, since their own life, and substantial financial resources, are often invested in an unrealistic migratory project, that can only come true if they accept opportunities characterized by a high risk of exploitation or illegal activities.

The social vulnerability of migrant children is exacerbated by the fact that many of them think they cannot return home until they achieved their unrealistic project, on the basis of which they negotiated their separation from the family. For some minors it is the amount of debt incurred in order to leave, or during the migratory process, that makes it impossible for them to return.

The migratory process

The majority of Romanian (non-Roma) minors interviewed tend to leave their country together with a group of friends, to join a relative (usually a brother or a parent), but sometimes also a friend.

As for Roma minors, the family system is often directly involved in the migratory process, since the children are usually entrusted by their own parents to other adults, they join other family members, or they emigrate together with their family group.

In many cases the children and/or their families had to borrow large amounts of money in order to be able to pay for their trip to Italy or for the documentation necessary to cross the border with the EU, in other cases debts that had already been incurred in Romania made the child, together with his or her family, decide to emigrate.

Generally speaking, the involvement of the family in making the child decide to leave and in making his or her migratory project become a reality is very high. In fact, the measures currently provided by Romanian legislation require the child to be accompanied or legally entrusted to an adult in order to cross the border.

Survival strategies. The connection between migration and illegal activities

A large number of the foreign minors who were interviewed and who had trouble with the law in Italy had already resorted to stealing and begging in Romania. But in other cases involvement in illegal activities took place within the context of emigration, after the clash with very strong dynamics of social exclusion (impossibility to work and/or study, marginalization by Italians of the same age, difficulty in finding housing, etc).

The life trajectories of migrant children unfold through a relative choice between numerous activities that are perceived as legal and illegal, moral and immoral, depending on the social and family context and the individual sensitivity of the child. These comprise work in sectors where irregular employment is rife (agriculture, construction), begging (Roma), theft and sex work.

The cases of 'exploitation' encountered in the context of the research must be interpreted on the basis of the different migratory trajectories of Romanian Roma and Romanian non-Roma children. Romanian children tend to be 'exploited' within the context of the dynamics of peer

groups, or in any case of life trajectories characterized by a search for individual autonomy. Romanian Roma children are more frequently involved in cases of exploitation within the context of the same family networks with which they migrate.

Cases of exploitation of male prostitution appear to remain quite limited and occasional, while the exploitation of children dedicated to stealing and begging is relatively more common.

Dynamics of 'exploitation' must be seen as ambivalent and complex and are embedded in the cultural and social realities the children come from and belong to. From this point of view, working, stealing or begging for oneself and/or for others may be perceived as a morally acceptable means of survival for oneself and one's family by some minors, while other minors may consider them as forms of injustice and abuse of power.





SOCIAL INTERVENTION IN ROME

4

This second ethnographic section analyses the way in which the mechanisms of protection and social intervention aimed at Romanian migrant children in Rome meet their system of needs and priorities, also considering the changes that take place during the migratory process. The different initiatives and forms of intervention will be examined on the basis of the experiences of the children, which will be compared with those of the project workers and the institutional figures who represent their interests in different contexts. Since the research is based on the migratory experience of the minors, the analysis of the social intervention initiatives aimed at these minors will follow the steps according to which they are approached by projects of social interventions, beginning with prevention (street units) and proceeding with CPAs and secondary reception centres.

4.1 Initiatives for prevention of involvement of minors in illegal activities: street outreach

STREET OUTREACH UNIT

What it is:

Activity aimed at establishing contact and harm reduction, conducted directly in the street with the children to favour their entry into community homes.

The team:

Multidisciplinary (educators, peer educators, ethnopsychologists, lawyers).

Exit:

Generally when integration is accomplished.

In the interviews conducted in Rome, migrant children seldom mention the initiatives of outreach, prevention and harm reduction carried out by various street units operating in Rome. Their importance is nevertheless implicitly demonstrated by the ethnographic notes accompanying the interviews, rendering them more legible and useful for the purposes of the analysis.

We have already highlighted in the methodology section (chapter 1) the advantages and opportunities represented by the combination of the open-ended interviews and ethnographic observation, in which context street outreach activity

represents a privileged and constant point of contact. In particular, since not all foreign minors accepted being interviewed, and in order to take advantage of the street units' privileged point of observation of their behaviour, it should be borne in mind that this investigation is based on ethnographic summaries as well as interviews²⁹. In these summaries we sought to provide concise information on the migratory experience, gathered at various times by the project workers, both during work as part of the street units and at the CPAs. The most tangible proof of the usefulness and value of street units within the network of social intervention initiatives aimed at migrant children in Rome is the abundance of information that can be obtained through the quality of the interpersonal relationship that is formed in the field and thanks to the direct observation of children's behaviour. Both aspects are evident in this long extract taken from one of the four ethnographic summaries collected during the implementation of the research. In this summary, the project worker/researcher provides information referring to different moments and points of observation of the child's life. This was gathered during street outreach activity, while accompanying the child to the centre for minors and during an interview.

K. is 17 years and a half years old. He lived in Craiova, Romania, with his mother, father and little brother. The father worked as a welder, but retired a few years ago; the mother has never worked, and the little brother goes to school. K. declares that he went to school for nine and a half years, and more specifically, a technical college where you study to become a mechanic. He has never had problems with studying, his family could afford to send their children to school. K. takes care to underline that not everyone, however, is able to do so. For many other young people it is almost impossible to study, everything depends on the financial situation of the family: if many children don't go to school, it's not because they don't want to, but because they cannot. K. left Romania when he was 16, he was not afraid when he left. He often repeats that 'what is bound to happen, will happen'. (...) He had heard about Italy, also from some friends who told him that life was easy. He saw them dressed 'well', with designer clothes and shoes. He left because he wanted to work. He left with an adult Romanian friend who had already been to Italy. They came straight to Rome. The first night they slept in the street, and they continued to do so for the rest of the month. He knew he would have to sleep in the street, his friend had told him it would be like that in the beginning, but that was fine with him. (...) K. tells that he slept under a bridge. After a month K. returned to Romania, because the friend he had come with had to return, but after a week K. left once again, also this time by bus, with another boy who had in the meanwhile decided to go to Italy. The second time K. arrived in Italy he continued to live in the street, for almost three months. Then he managed

²⁹ For a more detailed explanation of the role of the ethnographic summaries within the context of the methodological approach of the research as a whole, see Section 1.

to find a flat, first in Rebibbia, with others. All the jobs K. managed to find were cash in hand... at first he worked as a mechanic.

In the beginning he didn't think of the possibility of getting his documents regularized, even if some other Romanians spoke to him of the possibility of getting a residence permit as a minor. K. asserts that he was the only one who had to decide about his life. In September 2004 K. was stopped by the police, and taken to a CPA where his passport was taken from him. K. says that he stayed in the centre for 5 days, because he hoped to get his passport back. K. states that it wasn't so bad in the centre, they explained to him that he could get his documents, but he didn't care, because he knew that if he were to stay in the centre then he wouldn't have been able to return to Romania. And he, on the contrary, wanted to return again, to visit his family, which he went back to see every three months. To go back again, when they had taken his passport, he went to the embassy and had his identity card sent, and had a new passport issued. He returned to Romania, and had to wait three months to leave again. On 19 December 2004 he returned to Italy. Even though he knew he would have a difficult life, he had no future in Romania. K. says that no-one has ever asked him to do things he didn't want to do, someone suggested he steal but he didn't want to run the risk of having trouble. He only stole twice in the market, things to eat, they even caught him on one of those occasions, but he returned what he had taken and so he decided not to try again any more. K. insists on saying that he has always decided on everything he did by himself, no-one has ever convinced him. When he didn't work illegally, he bought and resold mobile phones with the money he had saved. He says he managed to make some money.

K. decided to enter a centre 5 or 6 months ago, because he had understood that it was important to have documents. (...) When he decided to enter a centre, he asked us to help him, he was then placed in a CPA, where he stayed for four months. He took the decision by himself. We also speak of when we met in a street unit in Valle Giulia, the first time he hadn't thought it was a good idea to enter a centre, and then he only worked as a rent boy when he didn't have any money, he did so a few times.

(M, R, 17, Rome)

This long excerpt shows the type of knowledge of a minor's life trajectory that can be obtained through a relationship based on trust, something that can only be achieved through the acknowledgement, acceptance and sharing of the places where the day-to-day life of the foreign child unfolds. The fact that the members of the street outreach unit are a constant presence in the life of the migrant children makes the opportunities for change they offer more credible and accessible.

The use of Romanian cultural mediators and peer educators³⁰ as part of the activity promoted by the street outreach units deserves an in-depth analysis, since it represents both a limit and an opportunity in terms of making the children approach the services offered. On the one hand peer educators, being culturally, socially and existentially 'close to' the condition of the migrant child, speak the same language as the children and share, even if only implicitly, common life experiences, and may act as a natural fulcrum for the exchange of information and services. In fact, it is often through the interpersonal relationship between peer educator/cultural mediator and the child that the trust and confidence making social intervention possible emerges.

From this point of view the cultural mediator/peer educator must be seen as the privileged instrument enabling the social intervention team to gain credibility in the eyes of the foreign child, thus gaining access to the peer group and the street family to which he belongs. The following excerpt, from an ethnographic note accompanying an interview, shows the awareness of these dynamics on the part of a potential peer educator.

The meeting took place both for the purposes of conducting the interview, and for choosing a peer educator as part of the Colourful Horizons project. During the interview the boy was very much at ease even if he sometimes, after having given a sincere answer to some questions, asked who would receive the interviews and that his name should not be given, as he was afraid of being sent away from the centre. In the end he told me that if we let him work with us he will convince all the children in the street to join the centre, because he is a professional thief and knows how to speak to small thieves.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

The following excerpt, compiled by a project worker from Save the Children who works in the street unit and accompanies the minors to CPAs and secondary reception centres, is a further demonstration of the importance of a relationship based on confidence and trust, in every moment and at every level of social intervention. In this case the ethnographic summary, prepared by a Romanian peer educator, allows us to see how the interpersonal relationship between peer educator and foreign child is developed in terms of trust and confidentiality. Finally, it provides an analysis of how the CPAs meet the migrant child's system of needs, which is the subject of the next part of the section.

³⁰ Peer education is the process by means of which trained and motivated young people conduct informal or organized educational/outreach activities with their peers. These activities, conducted on a long-term basis, serve the purpose of developing the knowledge, attitudes and expertise of the young people, encouraging them to assume responsibility for their own well-being.

Name: X.
 Age: 14
 Place of birth: X
 Ethnic group: Roma father, Romanian mother
 Arrival in Italy: About two years' ago (2004)

Some information on the family of X. and on the meeting with X:

X's family consists of a Roma father, a Romanian mother, a brother (aged 19) and a sister (about 20). He arrived in Italy around 2004 with a part of his family. X is being forced by his parents to beg in the streets in Rome. The brother is at present living in a secondary reception centre, after having been arrested for theft, the sister lives with her husband in Rome, independently of her mother and father, who probably live in a camp.

(The project worker) meets X. for the first time in a CPA, around early March 2004; he was accused of pickpocketing. During the conversation X says that he had gone with some kids (Roma) to pickpocket, saying that the others were better than him at stealing, and that he hadn't taken the wallet but they had arrested him as an accomplice. Subsequently X was accompanied to CPA Y, from which he immediately escaped.

Information gathered about X's story.

Before I met him at the CPA, X had been forced to beg at traffic lights by his parents. One day he meets a man at the traffic lights who pays him some attention, he asks him what he is doing there, at the traffic lights, and explains that he is entitled to report his parents to the police. X decides to go along with this man and to report his parents for exploitation. By doing so, X demonstrated that he is courageous and very conscious of his situation. It is not known whether his parents were arrested, but they lost custody of their son, who was put in the care of the social services, namely the CPA, for some months. He was then transferred to a secondary residential centre, where he stayed for some months. X states that only Italian children were staying in this centre, he was the only Roma and everyone treated him with scorn and a racist approach. (...)

He therefore decided to escape and went to his sister; he is very fond of her and they are very close. At this point the parents who had returned to Romania during the period in which X was in a community home, return to Rome to his sister; and find him there. X recounts that when the parents arrived at his sister's place he had € 20 in his pocket, and that when his mother wanted to take the money from him, he replied that things are not like they used to be, that he is now living on his own and he wants to buy a mobile phone.

X. then decides to leave the place, and he meets a group of Roma kids in Piazza della Repubblica who were pickpocketing and decides to stay with them, working as a lookout. For a night he also slept in the camp with them. He tells me that all the kids in the camp were there with their parents, that when they arrived in the camp they delivered the booty to the adults and began to play, but he also saw that some of them were beaten by their parents and relatives because they hadn't made enough money.

There was also a kid who wasn't very good at stealing and who therefore usually didn't make much money. When X was there this kid was sent out again until 11/midnight to continue stealing. X spent the night in the camp, and the next day he returned to steal with some kids. At this point he was arrested and taken to the CPA. I met him there for the first time. Then we accompanied him to the CPA, from which he escaped shortly afterwards.

Today, on 24 March 2006, I returned to the CPA because I was told that the boy had been taken there by the police yet again, not because he had committed any crimes but because he wanted to begin a process of legal integration once again. His parents are still in Rome, they came back from Romania three weeks ago, but I don't know if they are still in touch with him. It was on this occasion that X gave me all this information. At the beginning, when I arrived at the CPA, the project worker asked him whether he knew me, but he was a bit vague, hesitant, coming and going, but then we sat down to talk and share some sweets. After a while it was X himself who sent other kids who approached us away, so they that they would not disturb us.

To maximize the positive impact of the use of peer educators for the activities promoted by the street outreach units, it is essential that this is part of a team work. In fact, sometimes the cultural proximity between the child and the peer educator may represent a limitation rather than an opportunity, especially if the peer educators come from relatively less disadvantaged social milieus, and thus from less 'extreme' migratory experiences and survival strategies than those of the children, or if the children had very negative experiences with persons from their own peer group, and thus tend to 'trust' Italian operators more. From this point of view it would be simplistic to think that peer educators automatically find themselves in a privileged position when working with children who share a part of their own experience, as well as the social and cultural context of origin. On the one hand, the social and cultural proximity between peer educator, child and shared experiences with survival, marginalization and illegality, could facilitate the creation of a relationship of trust and empathy. But it is also true

that this very proximity (not to mention the canons of “masculine” pride associated with the shared condition of ‘men in the making’) could prevent the minors from exposing their vulnerability and make them leave out information that could make their life history appear a failure. It is a well-known fact that people can tell outsiders things about themselves that they would never mention ‘in the family’, especially if it involves street families, based on an experience of survival and marginalization. As a consequence of these dynamics, in many cases the most strategic role of the peer educator is that of ‘establishing contact’ with the group of minors and to then work together with the rest of the team.

Beyond these comments on the best way to use peer educators for social intervention initiatives, the interpersonal bond created between the peer educator, cultural mediator or Italian project worker and the foreign child³¹ is the main resource that makes it possible for the minor to consider the opportunities for change offered by the social intervention network. The following extract is a further confirmation of this.

Did you give your real name?

No, I gave a false name because I didn't trust them. Then I gave an example to that girl (street unit operator) 'but if someone is 18 years minus 2-3 months, can you help him get the documents?' 'Sure', this girl was very willing to help, from the way she spoke... Then they told me (street unit operators) that they didn't belong to the police, that they had nothing to do with that...

How did you realize that they didn't belong to the police? Sometimes it's difficult... how did you manage to trust them?

There were also other Romanian kids there, who knew them, they always played football. I asked them 'but do they work for the police?' 'No, no, don't worry' they told me. Then I saw that the girl really cared, that she spoke seriously, that she could help me, and I told her, 'listen, I'm 17 years old, I'll be 18 soon, I don't know whether you can help me...' 'Come on, you can come to X tomorrow, and we can talk about it...' she said.

Did you go?

She bought the ticket for X. for me, she told me 'take this train...call me as soon as you get there'. She gave me some money to call her, she said: 'take the number...' I said 'I'm coming tomorrow'. In front of the station I met another boy from my town and I spoke to him. 'Give it a try, what can happen to you?' he said. I didn't know what to do, then I told myself 'come on, it's not as if you're going to die, I went through worse disasters, I'll try...'

What kind of residence permit did they give you, then?

The first was for assignment to the community home... first they took me there.

Why did you accept to stay in a community home now?

They've told me it was a chance, that it was possible to get the documents...

What was it like?

Three weeks, I did a medical checkup, then I don't know, then they told me we were going to the police station... three weeks went by, in this period the girl (street unit member) came to see me twice, encouraging me, giving me hope... In the end, on 25 May, I'll never forget it, we went down to eat, the coordinator told me 'the decree by the judge arrived, you can have the documents...' I couldn't believe it, in the end he reassured me that I could stay in Italy... I thanked him. On the 26th the lawyer called me, to tell me that I would stay (in the community home) another month and that as soon as the permit arrived, we would find a job and a place to stay... He took me to a residential home just on my birthday...³²

(M, R, 19, Rome)

³¹ See the first statement presented in this section.

³² This quotation reflects the linguistic competence of the interviewee, and the intention was to maintain it to some extent.

4.2 'Centres for minors': from CPAs to secondary reception centres

CPA

What is it?

An emergency structure that carries out provisional, temporary action.

How many children can it accommodate?

10 children per unit, but it may have several units.

How long the can children stay?

About three months, but there is no obligatory time limit.

Who sends them/keeps them there

The minors are received following indications by local government Social Services (Social Operational Unit).

Ratio - number of educators/children

1 to 10 the minimum by law.

Main activity

Taking cases on, meeting primary needs, planning of individual integration processes, cooperation with social services.

How many are there in Rome

3

Exit

The minors are generally transferred to secondary community homes.

To introduce and explain the matter, we shall now present, by way of example, the second part of the ethnographic summary with which we introduced this section, providing a detailed description of a positive path of social intervention aimed at a migrant minor under criminal proceedings, highlighting the favourable and the more problematic aspects.

It was very hard for him to put up with this period (the first four months in the CPA). The first week he was not allowed to leave the centre the whole day. He says that rules were imposed without any reason, that they were established at the discretion of the operators. He only left the centre to go to school during the week, on Saturdays and Sundays he could only go out from 3.30 to 6.30 p.m.

He was then moved to a secondary reception centre where he said he liked it better. He felt freer, he could be out until 7.30 p.m., on Saturdays and Sundays he could stay out all day until 7.30 p.m.. This centre isn't too bad according to K, even if there are rules. K says that, after all, rules are important, but it's also important how they are applied.

Now K. is working, he found a job as a heating system plumber with the help of the centre where he lives now, in the morning he gets up at 5.30 and goes to work, and in the afternoon he attends the second year of a technical college for mechanics. He says he wants to become good at his job.

He had started going to school before entering a centre. He first enrolled in the third year of secondary school, after December 2004, after his return from Romania. A Romanian friend, who had committed crimes as a minor and who now had to attend school, had told him about the possibility of completing secondary school. It was also possible to enrol without documents. He finished the third year of secondary school in June, and then he decided to enrol at school again. He went to ask for advice and information at the school where he had completed the third year of secondary school, and that's how he found the technical college he is attending now. He started in September 2005; he enrolled here, too, without documents. **At this point K. began to show some impatience about the time that it took to obtain the issue of the first residence permit. Since he entered a facility for minors, five months went by before he got the permit. K. says he doesn't know if he would have agreed to participate in a regularization process if he had known how long it would take to obtain get a document.** Now he is attending the first and the second year at the same time, he has to study another 3 years to complete the scholastic cycle. He likes to study, and he knew what he wanted when he left. That's why he decided to enrol in the third year of secondary school and then to continue his studies. When he finishes school he would like to work as a mechanic. He thinks that when he is 18, he would like to stay at X centre as long as possible, because he wouldn't pay much. He doesn't get along well with all the other children at the centre. "There are all races here". Those he gets along least well with are the Moldavians. There are girls in the centre, there are 4, but he's indifferent to their presence.

To convince a Romanian minor to go into a centre, there are things that should be changed - he says. The same rules should be applied for all kids, because that's not how it is now. He says some operators are racist towards Romanians in particular, and that they apply the rules according to who they like. They get most annoyed with the Romanians, perhaps because of what people say about them - but he asks why he should have to pay for what others do. If all the Romanians stick together, the operators divide them. He would just like all the rules to be the same for everyone. Then he says: - the food is awful here, and if you don't book for lunch you don't get anything to eat.

He saves the money that he earns. I point out that he is nevertheless always very well dressed, and he replies that he likes to dress well. He earns 700 Euros, but that doesn't seem to be enough for him, because he must get up at 5 in the morning... then he even has to go to school and comes back at 10 at night. I say that my wages, too, are more or less same as his, but he answers that unlike him I don't have to leave home at 6 in the morning to return at 10 at night. But he likes college. College is important to him, the diploma is important in order to do anything. Later he would like to return to Romania, when they finally give him the document, but then he intends to stay in Italy, in any case. When he worked illegally they paid him more, he never had problems, he found work thanks to other Romanians. He worked for a few days, always in mechanics workshops. He has always worked illegally for short periods, only a month, then he says he used to sell telephones, and that he managed to make a lot of money. The other times the police stopped him they never did anything to him, even if they realized he was a minor. In 2005 he even managed to buy a scooter for 300 Euros, that he also upgraded now - it does 120 km an hour - he says. At X centre they let him use it. **He speaks about the problems he had to get the residence permit, he was waiting for months on end for the authorization of the guardian - and then why does it take so long to get a permit?? I have a job now. I'm studying - he raises his voice, he's angry.** If he were to speak to other Romanian kids about Italy, he would like to say 'do as you please'. He doesn't know why Romanian children don't want to go to a centre for minors; the others who came to Italy did not come to go to a centre, they must make money. I mention a child who was with him the first time we met. He met her in 2004, he doesn't have any contact with her any more, he knows she is studying. It's easier for a girl to live in Italy, than it is for a boy, they can get married to an Italian - and he laughs - and it's also easier for a girl to get to know Italians, he states. People are afraid of Romanian boys, many Italians are racist, but not everyone is like that, 'I've met some good people'.

Since he entered the centre he has lost touch with all his Romanian friends, he has no longer been able to see them, they didn't let him out. He is sorry that things went like that. He'd like to do the work that we are doing, to help the other kids.

Before analysing the way in which first and secondary reception centres meet the system of needs of migrant children, it is important to underline that all structures which work with foreign children, regardless of whether they are first or secondary reception centres, tend to be described by the interviewees in general terms as 'centres for minors'. The main problem encountered, with regard to the operation of 'centres for minors' - and this particularly applies to civil CPAs - is the high rate of escape on the part of the children.

Just consider that last year about 600 children were received by the CPA, and that only a hundred followed a reintegration process...

(Referring CPA)

There are many reasons why the children run away from the centres. In the first place, many minors consider centres as a waste of time compared with their basic priority and reason for their migratory project, namely to make money.

Have you ever stayed at a centre for minors?

No, they took me to one once, but I didn't want to stay.

Why?

Because I didn't want to waste time...What could I do there?

(M, R, 16, Rome)

Have you ever stayed at a centre for minors?

No, they had taken me to one once. But I only stayed one day.

Why?

Because I'd like to make money...and then go back home...

But didn't you just tell me that you would like to have a residence permit here and work?

(He nods but doesn't answer) I don't want to study any more, I want to work...

Would you like to go to another country after this?

Yes, perhaps France or Spain, I don't know...

Have you ever thought of returning to Romania?

Yes, once I've made some money... I want to get myself a house in Romania...

Where do you imagine yourself in 10 years time? Doing what? With whom?

I don't know...

(M, R, 16, Rome)

Young migrants' necessity to 'make money' at all costs, not only refers to a dimension of economic survival, but must be seen as the result of a concurrence and overlapping of a number of fundamental needs, at times contradictory, as money is viewed as a means to:

- negotiate a process towards independence from the family of origin (more frequent in the case of Romanian non-Roma minors) and in any case towards financial independence (also by setting up a business, usually a shop);
- form a family of their own (usually through the purchase of a house);
- buy symbolic objects (mobile phone, 'designer' shoes, etc.) which serve the dual purpose of representing an opportunity for play and distraction, and allowing a comparison in terms of 'success' with the peer group;
- contribute to the survival of the family nucleus, which may be near the child in Rome, or in Romania.

The last reason is much more important to Roma minors, who often escape under the pressure of the family mandate, the peer group and the street family.

But have they ever caught you?

Yes, twice, once for a T-shirt and once for a pair of shoes, they called the police and they took me to prison for two days (he is referring to the penal CPA), then my uncle came and they let me go. The second time, on the contrary, they took me to a centre from which I escaped.

Was it a centre for minors?

Yes, there were other Romanian kids, but they didn't let us out and they told me I had to go to school, but I didn't go to school, not even in my own country... so I sure won't go in Italy, and then I must help my family and they don't let you work in the centres, and how do I manage to make money?

(M, Roma, 16, Rome)

The presence of relatives in Italy favours the escape of many children, who often run away to join them. In many cases, something which is also demonstrated by the long extract introducing this section, the most specifically relevant part of which is included below, the minor refuses a path representing an alternative to life in the street, so as not to lose the possibility of returning to his parents in Romania.

In September 2004 K. was stopped by the police and taken to a CPA for minors where his passport was withheld. K. said that he stayed in the centre for 5 days, because he hoped to get his passport back. K. said things weren't so bad in the centre, they explained to him that he could get the documents but he didn't care about that, because he knew that if he stayed in the centre he would no longer have been able to return to Romania. He, on the contrary, wanted to leave again, to go and visit his family, to which he returned every three months.

(M, R, 17, Rome, extract from the ethnographic summary)

Have they ever told you that since you were a minor, you could obtain your documents?

Yes, but I had to separate myself from my father and mother and I said no.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

Have you ever stayed at a centre for minors?

Yes, one day I was at the traffic lights and the police came... They didn't believe me when I told them I was with my parents in Italy. They took me to a centre... It didn't look bad as a place... But I didn't want to stay, and then mum and dad came to get me... You know, with the documents...

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

Children also run away because of the existence and tolerance of violent behaviour between individuals or groups of minors, and the circulation of drugs (presumably cannabis), which some younger migrants considered a danger from which to escape.

Why don't you go to a centre for minors, since you are only 17?

They took me to a centre twice. The first time they stole my shoes and the second the Albanians who were staying in the centre beat me up, and the project workers don't protect you.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

I have always been with Romanians, never with Italians, when they caught me stealing they took me to centres for minors but I have always escaped. Those places are full of drug addicts and there are Moroccans who take drugs, you find them in prison too.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

Once they took me by force to a centre in X, but I escaped. They took drugs in there, and they didn't let me out, as soon as I could, I escaped.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

Some interviewees were forced to escape so as to be able to pay the debts they incurred to come to Italy.

Have you ever stayed at a centre for minors?

Yes, when they caught me the first time they took me to a place like that, but I didn't stay... I couldn't, I told you I had to pay my debt... and then it wasn't a nice place... I would never have stayed...

(M, R, 18, Rome)

Some children associate Italian 'centres for minors' with the 'rehabilitation centres' for abandoned and/or disabled minors in Romania, and keep away from them to avoid being associated with a social condition, that of abandoned and disabled children, which is profoundly stigmatized in Romania.

Have you ever been to a centre for minors?

Yes, once in France and twice here

Why did you escape?

I don't like them, they look like reeducation centres, but I'm a boy with a real education...

If I find a centre for you that is not like a reeducation school, would you go there?

No, I don't like centres.

(M, Roma, 13, Rome)

The following extract shows how 'street' children consider the structures that work with disabled children in Romania.

Why did you come to Bucharest?

Because my parents made me steal, and I lived in a centre for minors, and that centre was called X. centre for handicapped and they said I was handicapped too, and I hadn't realised that I was handicapped, and they didn't leave me alone, and they beat me...

And is it better in Bucharest?

Yes

What did you do here?

The first time I lived two years in the street and then I came here - no! The first time I lived in a centre in X, and I went to beg, I went, I made money and returned to that centre in the evening, me and a friend of mine, X. After I had been living in that centre they moved me to another centre, and then to another, to X, and I run away from that one 5-6-7 times.

(M, Roma, 13, Bucharest)

More in general, many children find in the centres the same structural restrictions to their need to become adults and become independent. These are the same restrictions they wanted to get away from by emigrating, such as: the impossibility of finding work, emancipation from a system of coercive rules and escape from the authority of their parents. From this point of view, clearly the 'centres for minors' do not succeed, structurally, in meeting some of the priority needs of the children. By failing to sufficiently respect the children's aspirations to start work straight away, and by applying rules that are too strict in relation to their desire and need for autonomy, the centres are experienced as 'infantilizing' by most children, who try to get away from them.

In your opinion, why do many Romanian children escape from the centres?

I think it's because they are too strict, it would be better to let the kids have a bit more freedom, and then things should be explained better, the kids should be involved as far as the rules are concerned, they shouldn't merely be something imposed by the adults, often it's a life full of too many rules, that the kids don't understand. Then one must try to understand what the kids want, you may perhaps offer them everything but they're not interested, and so they must go their own way. One must understand what the situation is, if a kid wants to make money he's likely to run away, to have a project he must have a reason, if he's used to stealing and to having money he's likely to run away.

Another reason why the kids run away is when they feel too cramped, if I didn't have my baby girl I would have gone, the world is big and one takes one's chances, if the kids feel too cramped they go because they've done so already, they have already left home, they have already had the experience of running away to go to a better place and doing what they want. If one finds the same rules in a community home as one had at home, the same situation, then one will run away, until one grows up and understands that life isn't easy.

(F, R, 19, Rome)

But wouldn't you like to enter a centre and go to school and find a good job?

But what do I care about school, didn't I tell you, I'm making money and when I'm 18 I'll go back home and open a shop, and that will be my work.

In your opinion, what should a centre for minors be like?

It should give us food and a place to sleep, and let us go out all day to do what we want to.

(M, Roma, 16, Rome)

Had you ever been to a centre for minors before?

No, never.

And how did you like it in the centres for minors where you were?

Fine. It's just that I don't have money and I need a job. I don't even have money for cigarettes and my girlfriend buys them for me. And that's no good, because it's not possible that I have to ask her for money for cigarettes. I don't even have a mobile phone and I can never call my friends or my girlfriend. In May the training course finishes, and I must find a job right away, so that I don't waste any more time.

(M, R, 17, Rome)

But in your opinion, why don't the kids want to enter a centre for minors?

Because Romanians come here to make money and if they go to the centres they cannot do that, and they have to accept rules.

(M, Roma, 19, Rome)

As far as children who were involved in illegal activities are concerned, one of the reasons encouraging them to escape is that they are placed in the centre after having been detained by the police. Therefore, they see the centre as an opportunity to escape from a potential further restriction on their freedom, rather than as a place where they may be given opportunities to change. Continuous escape from the civil CPAs represents a waste of financial resources, a demotivating factor for the project workers who work there and, above all, a loss of opportunities that could be important for migrant children and young people. Instead of being the starting point for a new life project, the CPA sometimes becomes a kind of 'arrival point' for more difficult cases. This is a result of an informal selection process that takes place at the moment of transition to secondary residences, which is influenced by the lack of financial resources to invest in entertainment and in the structural maintenance of the institution, something that the following two excerpts demonstrate.

Listen, does the municipality give you a budget for every minor who is staying here?

Yes.

And is it the same for all facilities, or does it vary?

No, it varies.

And how much is it here at this CPA?

50 Euros a day.

Is that sufficient, in your opinion?

No, our centre is in danger of being closed. If you consider that a centre receives 56 and does not require a physician, psychologist, psychiatrist, to be operative 24 hours a day... all those things we need for the CPA... you can't manage it.

And how is this money invested?

Those 50 Euros have to cover the rent for the premises, the salaries of all the educators, and other personnel, everything from cleaning staff to the psychologist, the nurse, all the medical expenses for the kids, food... what else... from cutting the kids' hair; to shoes...

But if you had a more generous budget, how should the money be invested?

In entertainment activity...in my opinion we ought to have the money to send the kids to the movies, to MacDonald's once in a while... Among other things, we even give them their pocket money, 5 Euros a day. Consider that we have about 20 kids here, and there are some who stay just one night, and anyway we have to give them new clothes, shoes, and the kid takes a shower; changes and leaves... it really is not enough. (...) Then the CPA should be used better, and serve as a starting point for a project. Instead, in reality, it becomes a point of arrival for the kids, after a series of failures, failures with fostering, with placement in centres... failures of various kinds...

And so many of those who arrive here have already come and gone several times.

Yes, that is often the case. There are two cases that are particularly problematic at this time, who came here with a whole string of failures, and so you are working on failures... with a lack of prospects...

And so what could be done?

The CPA should be changed... this didn't happen before, because the kid was detained... in a centre. Today what happens is that either the kid escapes, or he is put in a condition that enables him to escape (from the secondary reception centre)...there's this expulsion of the kid, and so the municipality, instead of trying to solve the failure of fostering or trying to find the right facilities, applies to the CPA. (...) It's very often the kids themselves who ask to return to the CPA...

But to stay here?

Unfortunately to stay here, because they come from a series of continuous failures, and so they return to the place where they came first.

Perhaps also the place with less rules.

No, I don't know about less rules, but it's also the first place where you come, because maybe you failed in 200 centres... where do you take the minor? Unfortunately, no centres are willing to take on problematic cases, they want them pretty, blonde, tall and with green eyes... few are willing to work on difficult situations, this is to some extent understandable because if you have an educational project that works, it becomes a problem to take on a difficult case. And so they should be differentiated, (...) in relation to willingness to take on problematic cases. This problem didn't exist before, either because the kids who arrived were different, or because there were fewer unaccompanied foreign children, but there weren't so many with psychiatric problems. (...) There are very often serious problems associated with affectivity, complaints relating to behavioural relations, and then psychiatric complaints...

This is also a problem because... there is a need to have centres that work with difficult children, perhaps even paid better; why not, because the kids who used to come before certainly... Now a lot of those who arrive are kids who have a deep-rooted fracture... Like the boy who throws chairs when he gets angry... the centres don't want someone like that, if they can choose, on the same terms, between a difficult boy and a quiet one, because the demand is greater than the offer; they don't want a kid like that, if the financial return is the same.

So in your opinion this could be a possible solution in order to prevent them from returning to the CPA?
A solution, in any case, would be to have more centres willing to also work with difficult cases.

(Manager of CPA)

This is a marginal opportunity for Rome municipality, because the number of foreign children present in the territory is very high, certainly higher than 60 beds, and so the kids who gain access to this service are privileged kids as compared to those who continue to sleep in abandoned sheds. For the kids this is a starting point, either you realize that you are offered opportunities here, that you must take as much advantage of them as possible, otherwise we and Rome Municipality must consider that for every one here there are another 10 outside, and so we are evidently investing in the wrong person. Because, at a certain point, the kids take all the protection services offered by the Municipality for granted...we are basing our work on the precondition that you are in a social emergency, you are given a chance to get out, and at this point there's the kid. A bond is created with the kid, an empathic relationship that it's hard to ignore. But I must understand who is in and who is out, to understand whether the investment the Municipality is making on this service is the right one.

(Manager of Community X)

If, on the one hand, the informal selectivity of entry enables the secondary reception centres to obtain good results against a limited target, the situation is completely different in cases where this project of personalization and selection cannot take place. In these cases, many financial resources are invested in structures that cannot deal with a user group whose needs are more complex and diverse.

4.3 Secondary reception centres

SECONDARY RECEPTION COMMUNITIES

What it is?

Residential reception facility.

How many children does it accommodate?

A maximum of 8 minors

How long may the children stay?

Depends on the individual project (on the instruction of the Judicial Authority until the age of 18, which may be extended until the age of 21).

Who sends or detains the children there?

The minors are accepted on indications from the Social Services of the local institution.

Ratio of educators/children

1 for every 4

Main activity

Interviews, workshops, introduction in school and work activity.

How many there are in Rome

About 80.

Leaving

Generally when integration is achieved

Secondary reception communities deserve a separate and more in-depth analysis since the observations of the foreign minors that emerge from the material gathered indicate a greater variety of experience when compared to CPAs. In particular, unlike emergency reception centres in which the children essentially remain inactive, in some of these secondary housing structures the children are offered a more personalized and involving life project, something which is demonstrated by the following excerpts.

Have you ever been in other residential centres for minors? How do you like this one?

It's the first time I lived in a (secondary reception) centre, when I came here, I was very sad and wanted to run away the first week, then I decided it was better to stay because they would have come to look for me at my boyfriend's camp anyway, and they would have arrested me. A month ago I had another crisis, I'm not doing anything here and I'm angry because I'm not doing anything. I'd like to start working, that way I would perhaps decide to stay here also at the end of the precautionary measure. The possibility to work could help me to change, and to decide to stay...

(F, R, 16, Rome)

When I went to the children's prison in Rome I met a person, X, who was very kind to take me with him here, to his (secondary reception) centre, and since then my life has completely changed because it was a decision I took on my own... that I decided to change my life, to leave a life of crime.

Had you been in any other community homes before you came to this one?

Yes, yes.

What was it like?

When I went there, that is... here I was impressed right away, while there, on the contrary (in the other centres) people were always indoors, they didn't do any activities, they did nothing at all, they got up in the morning, had breakfast, then they watched television, doing nothing. I tried to stay once, I was there two days and then I couldn't stand it any more.

How were the people who worked there?

The people who worked there did their job, that is to say, they kept us company, they let us have breakfast, they gave us the opportunity to watch television, we watched television...

The opportunity to watch television!! (laughing)

Yes, yes, because sometimes they didn't let us watch television. Believe me! Some communities are like that. And they are small, I was in a community home... oh... we were eight persons.

What should be changed in these community homes, to make you decide to stay in one of them?

What do I know! Give an opportunity to the kids who go there right... that is, at least make them believe that they have a future. Because if they are taken there, and they are shut inside, all they ever think about is getting away. I mean, nobody gives them a chance to go to school, to work... it shouldn't just be a way to kill time... In fact this community home, I think

it's one of the best organized in Rome. Here they give you the opportunity to go to school, to work, to do activities... you see? And you feel satisfied, you really have a normal life, as if you had a father with you.

(M, R, 18, Rome)

The two quotes given below demonstrate the differences in terms of expertise, resources and opportunities that are offered by some secondary residential centres to unaccompanied foreign children. The possibility to provide minors with a gradual and prolonged support as they acquire new roles and skills is particularly important in this respect. The two following extracts show a negative and positive approach, respectively.

Later he was transferred to a secondary community centre where he stayed for some months. X recounts that in this centre, managed by Y, there were only Italian children, he was the only Roma and everyone treated him with scorn and a racist attitude. X says that Y was unable to do anything about this situation because the children did not even take any notice of her; in fact they called her a penguin and told her to go to hell. X says he suffered a lot during those months, because he had decided to report his parents to the police and to change his life, because he wanted to study. In fact, in the community home they also sent him to school. This is what X tells me *'I wanted to have books and exercise books like everyone else. I was ashamed to only have one exercise book and I was always hiding it in my sleeve (in order not to show that he only had one). The teachers continued to ask me, in class, to bring books and exercise books, they told me to ask the nuns but they didn't give them to me'*. In my opinion he was very upset by the fact that he couldn't be the same as the others, neither in the community home nor at school.

(M, Roma/R, 14, Rome, extract from ethnographic summary)

In addition to the inability of the individual operator to maintain discipline in the centre, the last extract shows that foreign children must have access to facilities capable of dealing with their difference (ethnic, social, economic and cultural) from the other children who live there, and that the facilities that fail to take these differences into account often end up with increasing the child's sense of inadequacy and insecurity.

This is a residential project. (...) The minors are under the guardianship of the Rome Municipality and are in the care of the service for the regularization of their position in terms of documents, assistance with work and the public health service, linguistic guidance and professional training.
From 17 until what age?

Normally until 18 and a half, 19 at the most. That obviously depends on the individual case. The weaker the kid is from an interior point of view, the more the time is prolonged. We have seldom gone beyond this margin. On average, after a year and a half they have already been earning money for several months, and so they've already saved something to find a private place to stay outside the service, with our support. Usually two or three young people get together and rent an apartment.

Do you act as a go-between also to find them a dwelling?

I'll explain better how, but basically we push towards independence, and so we are neither the trade union representatives of the kids, nor the parents of the kids, and so if they have problems with finding work or a private dwelling, we act as assistants to facilitate communication, that's all (...) We don't replace the kids in their search for a place to stay and a job, the kids must be the first to take action in that direction, with the assistance we provide them in terms of information, but if the kid pay attention to this, we don't stand in for them in terms of planning and implementation.

(Community X)

Beyond the technical and practical assistance the migrant minors receive within the context of structured projects, one of the most important factors for the success of their social reintegration project is the presence of a stable emotional relationship with a constant and authoritative project worker, who can help the minor to give up the immediate gratifications and compensations he may obtain by resorting to illegal activities, and facilitate the internalization of new rules and codes of conduct.

Now I'm here, X (director of the secondary reception centre) is helping me with the permit. I could run away from here but the only reason I stay is that if I leave, they arrest me, and I'd be ashamed if X, after everything he did for me, finds me in jail again. I speak to my friends once in a while, they continue to make money by stealing.

How much do you miss stealing?

A lot.

(M, R, 19, Rome)

Sometimes the relationship with a client met within the context of the involvement of the minor (or the peer group) in sex work or begging may be an important resource for social

intervention and an important factor to help the child to find the strength to escape family relations perceived as abusive or changes his life, as the two following cases show.

Before I met him at the CPA, X had been forced to beg at traffic lights by his parents. One day he meets a man at the traffic lights, who pays some attention to him; he asks him why he is standing at the traffic lights and explains that he would be entitled to report his parents to the police. X decides to go to the Carabinieri together with this man, and to report his parents for exploitation.

(M, R/Roma, 14, Rome, extract from ethnographic summary)

You see, at the age of 14 all my brother wants to do is have fun and make money, and then he doesn't care if he sleeps in the street or they take him to jail or he ends up in bad situations, all he wants is money.

But doesn't he use the money to help your sister or the family, too?

Not at all... I told you that he even reported them, he wastes all his money on drugs or stupid things, I'm worried about him, if he goes on like this he'll come to no good.

But did you try to convince him to enter a centre, like you did?

Sure, I tried, I spoke to him many times, I even beat him to make him stay in a centre... but nothing worked, he always runs away, for a period he also lived in the home of an older Italian man, he says he wanted to adopt him, in my opinion he's the one who convinced him to report his family, who knows what's got into his head.

(M, Roma, 19, Rome)

In both these cases, the 'older Italian man' is not openly referred to as a 'client', but the context and the way in which the person is described in the interview indicates that the meeting probably took place in relation to sex work, something that emerges more clearly in the following excerpt.

He decided to enter a centre 5 or 6 months ago, because he had understood that it was important to obtain documents. In Italy X knew an Italian man, a friend of the family. The child tells that he did not immediately contact the man, only later. At that time X had managed to rent a flat, in Rebibbia, his first flat. The man told the boy that he didn't agree with his decision to come to Italy, that he had been crazy to leave, but he had proved to be an important reference for the youngster, and he had also helped him economically once in a while. This man doesn't live in Rome, but in a city in the north, but every so often he comes to Rome to see X, and still does. He advised X to seriously consider the idea of going into a centre, but the child says he has never felt forced to decide in one way or another. And he tells me more, that the little girl with whom I met him once did just that, and that he had saved her; some Romas were controlling her. This is the worst thing, he's had to fight with those Romas but fortunately, then, nothing happened. She still does that now. She had come to do that thing, she knew it. Now she keeps doing it. *He speaks in a more agitated way. We are speaking about a man who had once accompanied them precisely to the centre where I work, to get some legal advice, he wanted to know how to regularize both X and his girlfriend.* He was a client of the little girl, X says he is a very good person, that it is hard to meet good people like him, that he was good to both of them. It was he who gave him the flat near the Olympic stadium. He took them for holidays around Italy, to Calabria, to Puglia, to the North. We talk about the girls again, I say that they have a pimp and that they are forced, he gets angry and says that they know what they have to do in Italy, they already do so in Romania. Then he admits that they are afraid, that afterwards, however, the thing becomes dangerous for them.

(M, R, 17, Rome, extract from the ethnographic summary)

Before the entry of Romania into the European Union in January 2007, the possibility of obtaining a residence permit by participating in an organized integration process was a key moment in migrant children's choice of an alternative to a life based on illegal activities. The entry of Romania into Europe and the automatic acquisition, on the part of Romanian minors, of the status of EU citizens as of January 2007 removes a large obstacle on their path towards social integration, as they no longer need a residence permit to live in Italy. However, as section 2, which analyses the legislative context reveals, the lack of clarity with respect to the rights of non-Italian EU children which followed this transition has, in some aspects, paradoxically led to a worsening of the situation.

For all these reasons, the considerations that emerge from the research, even if it refers to the period immediately preceding the entry of Romania into the European Union, are highly relevant since they did not change:

- the fact that some fundamental rights of minors depend on their bureaucratic 'regularization' (registration as a resident in municipal registries);
- the imbalances and the social phenomena that lead to child migration (and that make it impossible for the children to meet the minimum prerequisites for registration); and

- the lack of clarity and coherence of the legislative and institutional framework relating to the child migration situation, whether the latter come from EU member states or not.

In this perspective, within the network of communities and secondary reception centres, the most positive experiences are those that are characterized by a personalized and qualitative rather than quantitative approach and by an investment of time, emotional, financial and social resources for a selected number of persons. When these conditions are present, centres are able to offer minors:

- consistent and constant emotional and educational support, based on permanent contact figures who are always present,
- residential service,
- certainty of being able to obtain regularization (entry as a resident on municipal registries, residence permit before January 2007) through the definition of an ad hoc procedural protocol with the relevant institutions,
- a personalized social integration project,
- gradual guidance over a longer period of time towards economic and social independence.

When these conditions are met, the arrest of the migrant child as a result of involvement in illegal activities may paradoxically become a unique opportunity for social reintegration.

How long have you been here at X centre for?

For a year and a half!

And how do you like it? Are you doing fine here?

Yes, sure!

What do you think about what happened? The Carabinieri caught you, accused you of stealing, and then they brought you here?!

Yes, the mistake the carabinieri made was fortunate for me! Even if I was real scared when they pointed the gun against me like this! I thought I would die! But now I'm happy! Also because my friends who were staying with me in the house told me there's trouble there, they take drugs, they deal, also the Italians; and so they moved so as not to get into trouble.

If that story in Trastevere had never happened, what do you think you would have done? Where and how do you imagine yourself?

I would certainly still have been together with my friends and perhaps I would have found work as a bricklayer or continued at the traffic lights.

And now that you are here, how do you imagine your future? What would you like to do?

I'd like to work as a mechanic.

But are you already studying to do that?

No, not yet, but I spoke about it with X. (educator with X centre) and she told me that first I must learn Italian. So now I'm going to school.

(M, Roma, 17, Rome)

Obviously, the arrest of a minor only represents an opportunity when it is followed by the placement of the minor in a suitable facility, such as an appropriate secondary reception centre. The measures representing an alternative to detention and assistance with the integration process may only be granted if the child has parents or is in the care of a centre or of a responsible adult. This means - and this also emerges from the data of the Department of Justice for Minors presented in the introductory section - that unaccompanied foreign (or EU) children are at a great disadvantage as regards the possibility to benefit from alternative measures to detention.

As to alternative measures, how does the USSM (Social Service Department for Minors) proceed?

It must be possible for minors to be tracked down... it is sufficient that they are staying in a hostel, then they have access to all the services they want. The minimum prerequisite is an adult, any adult... and that the minor is motivated. As to the application of the penalties, there's not much difference. That is to say, if someone is a serious habitual offender, the sentence must be served. The problem is the granting of benefits in the case of good behaviour, as foreign minors are seldom entitled to these benefits.

(CGM Focus Group)

Before January 2007, often children delayed joining a social reintegration project until they were close to the age of 18, a phase when finding an alternative to involvement in illegal activities or occasional work becomes a priority for many of the interviewees. One of the fundamental reasons for this change was children's awareness that they would risk expulsion the moment they were 18, unless they managed to regularize their position through a project that made it possible for them to obtain a residence permit. In this perspective, the fact that Romanian children no longer need a residence permit in order to live in Italy might make the

social integration processes, as an alternative to involvement in illegal activities, considerably less attractive.

Was it the first time they took you to a community home?

Yes, the first time near X., by bus, the boss there was a priest, he spoke to me. How old am I? 14 and a half, that's my age, because that's how the police had registered me... Come on, we can help you with the residence permit, you'll go to school... you can do this until you're 16, then if you're over 16 you can no longer get the documents. If you want to stay here... I said no, no, I don't want to stay, what would I do, stay there to get the documents? I couldn't because I was over 16. I left that centre on the second day, then two weeks like that, and the police always caught me and took me to the same community home, there wasn't any other: That one spoke to me, he told me to stay: one could work there, inside the community home, you ate, worked, stayed closed in just like in jail, the only thing was that it had a garden, a little bit of garden, you couldn't leave, call, do anything, that's why I didn't stay...

(...)

Listen, but where did you live in the meantime, in stations, in cars?

I lived in a car; in a parking lot...

Weren't you interested in getting a residence permit?

I wasn't interested in that because I was fine with money as I was, then something happened that made me leave and I went to V and for a period I was afraid of stealing...

How come?

I was tired of being alone, I felt nostalgic, I didn't have any friends, not even an acquaintance who was always with me and I decided that I'll go down, shall I steal or not, I had to steal at least to live... I stole but I was afraid to...as I got closer to 18 years of age, I was even more afraid...

(...)

Why did you decide to stay in the home and not go back to the streets? Why were you able to do it?

I wasn't made to, but I told you I was fed up, if they catch me at 18, waiting for the documents, they'd withdraw my permit...

(M, R, 19, Rome)

However, it is very important to underline that the prospect of investing in a social integration project represents, both before 2007 and today, an attractive proposal only for children who plan to construct an organized life project in Italy. For all the others, all the ambivalences and complexities of their migratory and existential trajectory remain. Different types of social intervention must be offered to these children, something which will be explained in more detail in the final section of the report, indicating policy recommendations.

4.4 Social intervention specifically aimed at the Roma population

Even though all the social intervention initiatives aimed at migrant children recorded a very big increase in the presence of Roma Romanians, the work experience of the Rome Municipality CCM is particularly significant, since begging is one of the most common survival strategies of this group.

One of the most significant problems encountered in the social intervention aimed at the Roma Romanian population is the lack of appropriately trained Roma Romanian cultural mediators. Moreover, one must bear in mind the particularly extemporaneous nature of the contact with this group, which usually hinders the creation of an emotional relationship that is sufficiently strong to complement the network associated with the family or origin and the street family.

That of Roma mediators is a somewhat special issue, there are no trained mediators, often they are people in the camps who are more sensitive, who want to embark on a path of a different kind, in the beginning they are really taken on as helpers, then gradually, as they work, they tend to be trained. The boy you saw a moment ago has been working for years, he started with the educational programs, he did courses for cultural mediators. It's not always easy to find Roma cultural mediators as we understand them.

(CCM)

Another specific problem concerning work with the Roma community is related to the presence of numerous spontaneous and unauthorized settlements in Rome, inhabited by hundreds of families. The problem is obviously not that these camps are 'unauthorized', since the very institution of nomad 'camps' may be criticized as a measure of restriction and segregation that further marginalizes those who live there³³, but the fact that there are no mechanisms of social monitoring and intervention in these spontaneous settlements. While it is possible, in some settlements that are 'recognised' by Rome Municipality, to monitor the

³³ For a critical view of the social policies aimed at the Roma and Sinti population in Italy, see Sigona, N. and Monasta, L. (edited by) (2006) *Imperfect Citizens. Report on the racial discrimination of Roma and Sinties in Italy*, Edizioni Spartaco.

situation of the children after they were received by the service and to involve the family in the minor's integration process, this is impossible in entirely irregular situations, something that seriously limits the impact of projects of social intervention.

If the camp is equipped, that means the camp is stable and we have every guarantee that we may begin action with some possibility of success. Even if the minor returns to his family, we inform the project workers of the educational project, we tell them they must absolutely send their children to school because if they don't we will take them away from them, we put the project workers hot on their heels, and we also activate a network of resources. If they don't live in equipped camps, the situation is different, because it is necessary to establish a close relationship with the minor... The first time we generally always give the minor back to the parents, the parents come here, also to understand who's behind it, because if they don't, we don't understand it. The second time, depending on the situation...

(CCM)

The greatest difficulty with respect to social intervention aimed at the Roma population is represented by the identification of cases of exploitation, within the context of family-based relations that often 'misaccompany' the child. In this concern, cultural mediators and Italian project workers play a fundamental role, since they help to interpret relations that can be seen as exploitative in the light of a different cultural system. However, sometimes the difference between Roma children who are victims of trafficking and exploitation and those who are not is very clear, as shown by the following extract.

We make an assessment of the family as soon as we have a clear picture of the family scenario, and this is very easy to obtain with the aid of mediators. Even if we don't know the family nucleus, when the minor comes here he is received by a project worker who speaks his language, if he has told lies to the police... he will not tell them here, or he will tell them less, or if he tells them here too, then that's another element that allows us to understand there's something serious behind it... For instance, X is 13, he is a very serious case, this is already the third time he comes here, we tried to insert him in a second-level structure, because he practically comes from a community where children are treated violently, children who are here in Rome without anyone, with would-be uncles, would-be parents, but they spend the whole day in the streets stealing, they are Roma Romanians. Last time X was sent here, that was just three days ago, he had a bruise, he had lost weight... There's another group of children who run around and steal, but it's easy to see the difference between those children and these, that X is part of. Because the appearance of these children deteriorated completely, while the others have a family behind them.

(Centre X)

With Roma children too, the biggest challenge is to offer an affective relationship that is supplementary (or alternative in the more serious cases) with respect to the family and the peer group. This is seriously limited by the fact that children often do not spend sufficient time with the Italian project workers and with the mediators for this relationship to be formed.

What one does, or tries to do with these types of minors is to form a significant relationship, even if it is very difficult to do so, we try to make them play, we get involved, observe them closely, also in order to identify a hostel. You must also consider that we don't always have all that much time, because since this centre is known, if we come across situations of children exposed to risks and children we only want to place, get them away from Rome, we must do so immediately, it often happens that the child stays here three hours and then he is placed elsewhere.

And so it's not even a question of different suggestions that you can make...

Absolutely not.

And so, to conclude, the only possibility, is to rebuild a relationship that is strong enough to replace the street relationship.

That's right, this is what we try to do, it's the only possibility, but we don't always succeed. Last night, for instance, it's terribly frustrating, this is work that's very hard to carry out, we had managed to block a little girl of 10, she had been stealing since she was 8, you cannot imagine how intelligent she was, three months ago she was brought here again, and so we blocked her, we sent her out of Rome, quite a job... The people in the hostel were great, and had our support, but she kept saying that she felt lonely, that she would have run away and we tried to find another solution, we went to see her systematically at least once a month, taking the whole group of cousins on trips, while letting them be free. This worked for some time, yesterday she invited us because a group of children were singing and she was singing a song too. We went with the usual group of kids, she was very happy...and she ran away last night... The input is to go back to where you've come from...

(Centre X)

Following these analyses of the social intervention initiatives aimed at migrant minors in Rome, in the next and last 'ethnographic' section the analysis will focus on the social

intervention initiatives aimed at migrant children in Romania, with particular reference to interviews with privileged witnesses and to the issue of assisted repatriation.

In short...

Street outreach units

When street outreach unit operators are a constant presence in the existential territory of the migrant children, the alternatives offered by these operators are perceived as more credible and tangible.

CPAs

The main problem encountered is the high escape rate from the civil centres, as many minors see the centres as a waste of time with respect to their fundamental priority, making money. The presence of relatives in Italy is another motive that favours the escape of many children, who often run away to join them. The presence of debts wields a very negative effect on the minors' integration process, since paying back the debts becomes a priority compared with any social reintegration project.

Secondary reception centres

Within the context of the network of secondary communities and reception centres, the most positive experiences are those which offer the migrant minor:

- a consistent and constant emotional and educational support, based on permanent contact points who are always present,
- a residential service, the certainty of being able to commence a 'regularization' process (entry as a resident in the municipal registries, residence permit before January 2007) through the definition of an ad hoc procedural protocol with the relevant institutions,
- a structured and personalized project of social integration,
- gradual guidance, extended over time, towards economic and social independence.

Social intervention specifically aimed at the Roma population

The lack of competent Roma cultural mediators and the extemporaneous nature of the contact with the children do not allow the establishment of a relationship which can complement those with the family of origin and the street family.

Only in some Roma settlements is it possible to monitor the situation of the children and to involve the family in the process of integration. As a consequence, many Roma children cannot benefit from measures representing an alternative to detention and supporting the process of integration, since it is not possible to identify an adult to be responsible for the child.

The greatest difficulty with respect to social intervention aimed at the Roma population is the identification of cases of exploitation within the context of family relations of solidarity that often 'misaccompany' the child.



ROMANIA: FOCUS
ON SOCIAL
INTERVENTION AND ON
THE FEASIBILITY OF
ASSISTED REPATRIATION

5

This last section examines the social intervention initiatives that exist and are possible in Romania, with particular reference to the question of the feasibility of assisted repatriation.

5.1 Economic sustainability of social intervention in Romania

The most significant dimension to be able to understand the type of social protection service that Romania can offer its citizens, including minors, is the economic dimension. The insufficiency of financial resources available to the Romanian social services is the biggest obstacle to the improvement of the social protection system offered to Romanian minors, and is closely linked to the social and economic situation of the country. In fact, a study requested by the UNDP on poverty in Romania shows that the national social support system is insufficient both as compared to other European countries undergoing transition and to countries in the European Union. UNDP stresses that the necessary increase in the budget can be sustained only if the country achieves overall economic growth and the management of tax revenue becomes more efficient³⁴. Specifically, an increase in the salaries of personnel working in the social intervention sector, and in salaries in the public sector in general, including the police force, is indicated as a priority to guarantee the selection and employment of the most qualified personnel.

Even though there has been a radical improvement in the legislative system and the services in charge of the protection of children compared with the years immediately following the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the type of support the Romanian social services are able to offer families in difficulty is extremely limited, due to a lack of adequate financial resources. The two following extracts, from interviews with two of Salvați Copiii project workers (Save the Children Romania) bear witness to the shortage of financial resources available to the Romanian social service and its impact on the duration and the level of investment of initiatives aimed at supporting the child or the family.

OK... And as for national authorities, did they support you in this project?

Yes. We were obliged to involve them, also as regards investigations, and at the beginning of the project we asked their opinion and position in relation to possible repatriation. And in most cases they also wrote their conclusion, on the investigation. They also said that they would take care of the repatriated children for a period of time - between 6 months and a year - and that the repatriated children would in any case be handled by the regional social services.

What happens in those 6 months?

The project workers supervise them continuously, visiting them every two weeks, and, if things get better, every two months. Then, if considered advisable, the family is invited to social services, to receive assistance.

In your opinion, is the level of support and assistance offered by the state sufficient?

That depends on the individual case...

In your experience...

It's fairly OK if we consider the lack of resources... (...) The level of the budget is very low.

(Salvați Copiii Minors)

In the national sector - I don't want to be too negative - but they (the children who are the victims of trafficking) stay in the shelter for 30 days and no longer; after this period social services supervise the case from 3 up to a maximum of 6 months. This means that a social worker makes an investigation and writes a report every two months.

And what is this social investigation like? What does it consist of?

The social worker visits the family, talks with the family and with the minor... (...) There's no model as to how it should be done... it's just done. There are directives on how to conduct the investigation, such as for instance... the economic situation of the family, how the child is doing at school... and all these things, but in any case, it's very odd to only do this every two months, and to do this for six months - that is to say three times, and then say that everything is fine...

Yes... and what happens in these 6 months? What kind of assistance, or help does the family receive?

To receive money, the parents must go to the directorate for the protection of minors and ask for help. They must bring documents...

But do the parents know about this possibility? That they have this right?

Some do, some don't.

And in any case, how long does this help last?

That depends on each local social services branch. They may receive help for 3 months, 6 months, a year...

Only that long?

Yes.

Not for 3 years...

Oh no! No...

(Salvați Copiii, Trafficking)

³⁴ UNDP (2001) *Poverty in Romania: causes, anti-poverty policies, recommendations for action*. Available online, pag. 46-47.

The interviews obtained in the research allow us to confirm the situation described above, and to underline that the lack of adequate funds for the social protection system in Romania is translated into:

- lack of staff,
- difficulty in keeping qualified employees, who end up choosing other work opportunities in the private or non-government sector,
- impossibility of offering sufficient economic aid or financial, social and psychological support,
- impossibility of helping a sufficient number of families in need of financial, social and psychological support,
- impossibility of extending this support, when it is provided, for a sufficient period of time.

The following extract from an interview with a functionary from the IOM clearly shows that the worsening of the economic and social conditions of many Romanian families, along with the decentralization decided by the central government, the closing of orphanages (following the scandals that emerged in the initial years following the communist period) and, lastly, the lack of funds available to the social services, resulted in great pressure being put on the social services. Often the latter are not even able to 'see' situations of serious hardship and thus take action. The social workers very often find themselves working in very restrictive social contexts and with a very limited budget. In these circumstances, to acknowledge the hardship faced by a family means being socially exposed, as well as further overloading the social services with cases it is not possible to treat due to insufficient economic resources.

But are there tools to help the family in Romania?

We have the tools, but the mechanism behind the tools doesn't work. And this is also due to an inflation of requests. In 1990 I was a member of the DPC of Iași. There were 500 children in the orphanages. There was enormous pressure to close the orphanages, so we reinvented the wheel and we reinvented hostels for children. A considerable part of the orphanages were closed, something that was positive at the time, but perhaps not all of them should have been closed. And so what happens if a social worker in a village notices that a family is abusing its children? What can he or she do? Can you really take the children away from the family? It would, indeed, be in the best interests of the child not to stay with that family to be abused any longer. But you don't have the instruments to do this. You really have nowhere to place the child. There are emergency centres, but then what? Since the government cannot manage it any longer, it transferred the entire financial responsibility to the local authorities. They say that if the child comes from such and such a village, then the municipality of that village must pay for the assistance given to that child. But does this really help? Different municipalities have different budgets, and none of them are sufficient. So, in this case, will the social worker employed by the municipality report on the abuse and say they must take the child away from the family? So that the municipality that also pays his/her salary, must spend more, when it's already short of money? *The social worker will be seen as a troublemaker...*

Exactly! So social workers will prefer not to notice, and keep their jobs and salaries. I would be in favour of a centralized institution with a centralized budget because in that case I would be able to take action and lay down rules. Because you really cannot make rules if you then don't pay the people who are supposed to follow them...

(IOM Bucharest)

Since 1989 the closing of most of the collective facilities that took care of abandoned children has not been accompanied by an appropriate policy of support to the families. As a consequence, on the one hand the continuation of the economic difficulties in Romania still makes it very hard for many families, including extended families, to support their children. On the other, according to the common procedure of public intervention the tendency is now tends to see the family as the only solution for the placement of the child, with the risk of underestimating situations of abuse that continue to exist, here as everywhere else, in a family context.

At the moment it is very difficult to take a child away from his/her parents because of the law: it is necessary to obtain the consent of the parents, of the child itself, and if the parents are not the best choice, an attempt is made to try to find someone in the extended family of the child... grandparents, an uncle, an aunt... it's a very long process... you can only take a child and place him/her in a centre for minors if it is not possible to find a reliable relative... as you can see, it is anything but easy...

Is it also because of the mentality, if this is unlikely to change?

No, it's not due to the mentality, it's due to the law... many Romanian parents would be ready to leave the children in the centres, but it is by no means easy. It is necessary to comply with many articles of the law, and so the best interests of the child is forgotten...

(Salvați Copiii, Trafficking)

Cooperation between national social services and the national and international NGOs represented both an opportunity and a problem for the development of the system of social protection for minors in Romania, as it tends to take financial resources 'out of the system', resources that could have been invested to improve the structure of the social services as a whole, with a view to secondary sustainability. Also, while collaboration with the NGOs has, on the one hand, enhanced the national system of social intervention with new know-how and expertise, on the other, this greater investment, being out of proportion with respect to the overall economic situation of Romania, is not sustainable over a long period and tends to decrease once again when the cooperation agreement comes to an end. The following three excerpts from interviews with representatives from the social services and the non-government sector (Salvați Copiii and IOM) demonstrate this analysis and show that, once the collaboration project with an NGO comes to an end, there is a return to the previous 'equilibrium'.

In your opinion, should the money (public, intended for social protection) be given to the NGOs or used to consolidate the national system in general?

In our opinion, the way we are cooperating with the NGOs today is very positive because information and work methods that would otherwise be lacking due to the general economic level are introduced into the system... it is also true to say that the people working in the social sector are so badly paid that you can be sure of the cooperation and keenness of our employees, since working for the government in this sector is almost the same as doing volunteer work... people who want to make money don't stay here, it's a natural selection...
(Representative of DPC Sector 2 Bucharest)

We tried to teach the social workers as much as possible... to the extent in which they were under our supervision, so to speak...

Have you managed to do this?

We managed as long as we were the people in charge of the management of the project; afterwards, all the people we employed left, those who were there before stayed, they went back to doing things the way they were used to doing things before. Salvați Copiii opened all these centres, we gave them work models, that is to say work instruments, intervention plans, primary case assessment, secondary assessment, tertiary assessment, etc., etc., but the rest depends on them...

(Salvați Copiii, Trafficking)

It was decided to build centres for children who are victims of trafficking and for unaccompanied children, and everyone was satisfied. The ministry of labour and social solidarity who controls all this offered money and what do you think the authority for the protection of children did with the money? I find it hard to believe... they organized an auction and gave the money to a NGO. My concern regarding this is that they gave all the money to the NGO without spending anything to train their own people, their own employees. That is to say, I am the one in command, I have 41 organizations below me and I give all the money to a third party, so that it can work with my organization - I cannot understand this... why take the money out of the system? I'm not saying that what happened was bad or that what Salvați Copiii did with the money hasn't been OK, what I am saying is that the employees of the national social service did not understand what happened.

Did they only receive better instructions?

Yes, but from someone else, not from their leaders...

And when the NGO left, did they go back to doing things the way they used to?

Yes. (...) What I want to say is, there's nothing to discuss about this, and what's more, the experience, the money, the services that can be offered by the international organizations or by NGOs must not be considered a solution to the problems, but an extra, a plus, as an improvement to the base. But this base must be offered by the state, by the government, because otherwise we will continue to have this kind of debate for another 20 years without anything essential being changed. That's why I say that perhaps some of that money, the money they gave to the NGO - this is my theory - should have been used to invest in the people who are already in the system...

(IOM)

Furthermore, while it is true to say that there was a substantial legislative investment and, to a lesser extent, an economic investment on the mechanisms aimed at protecting minors in Romania, that are now more functional, efficient and competent than they were in the past, it is also true to say that this investment was not made to the same extent over the entire national territory³⁵ and that the structural resources required to permit coordination between all the institutions involved in the system of social protection in favour of migrant children are lacking.

I spoke with many DPCs (Departments for the Protection of the Child) and I think that some regions are doing a good job. It varies a lot from region to region, but most of them received

³⁵ For an official version of the progress made within the context of the social protection of the child, ANDCPA (2006) Children Welfare in Romania, available online www.infoeuropa.ro/docs/NAPCR%20brochure%20v.08%20final%20print.pdf.

appropriate training, and so I don't think that the problem involves knowledge or training... I think the level of awareness and knowledge of the phenomenon is adequate... especially with regard to the personnel in charge of the repatriation of trafficking victims... they are open and willing to work... But the problem is that some of the services really do not exist and it is difficult to create them... it would take an enormous amount of resources, which are not available... then there's also a problem of coordination. There are numerous institutions involved in the case of an unaccompanied child... that need to be coordinated... and if no-one tells the child what his or her rights are, if the police and the social services do not exchange information among themselves... What is created is a short-circuit, that prevents the child from receiving adequate help, even if the resources are there, in theory... And then the situation varies from one region to the next... Generally speaking, in any case, even if there were improvements... the national social services still have a lot of work to do...

(UNICEF)

The lack of coordination between the institutions that are theoretically in charge of assisting repatriated children and the different levels of expertise and organization of the regional services are particularly significant factors for the purposes of our research, since it is precisely at a local level that the services for the social protection of the child, including assisted repatriation, are provided. For instance in Craiova, or in other words where the majority of the Romanian migrant children present in Rome would be repatriated, we interviewed representatives from Social Assistance, the DPC and the local Tutelary Authority³⁶. An analysis of the material gathered reveals an extremely heterogeneous level of knowledge regarding the connection between migration and child protection in Craiova. Indeed, while the director of Social Assistance, which was created just a year before the interview, proved to be fairly familiar with the child migration situation, the director of the DPC and of the Tutelary Authority knew a little less on the subject. In this regard, the exchange visits between the Romanian and Italian municipalities involved in the migratory process of young people seem to play a very positive role.

I would like to say that two or three weeks ago our mayor was invited, together with a delegation, by the mayor of Bologna and they held discussions precisely on the situation of Romanian children from Craiova who are in Bologna, and they thought of finding solutions for repatriation. What happens now... is that since they are children, we consider that they are unable to decide for themselves.

But you know under Italian law...

This is very clear: But here in Romania, until the age of 18, until minors reach adulthood, they cannot decide about their lives. So those who went there had two possibilities of leaving Romania: on the passport of their parents, and thus with their agreement... and then they were abandoned there.. (...) Or they crossed the border illegally. They were certainly not sufficiently mature to decide to go to Italy because it is better, or to live in the centres where the conditions they are offered are very good...or good...or acceptable for living..

An offer that they refuse, by the way...

They refuse it because they - I am convinced they got involved in illegal activities, such as begging, stealing, robbery - why not?

Prostitution...

Prostitution, precisely... and I believe this would be the progressive order... Then, getting used to handling money, and then today the girls, already at 14 or 15 are mature, you pass them in the street and you get the impression that they are 20, 21, what I want to say is that in certain situations you are very astonished... how old are you? Sixteen. Sixteen?!? That is to say, you would never have thought you were sitting next to a minor: You get the impression that the person is older, more than 20, 21 or 22, and so these children finish their childhood very early. So it is only normal that they don't accept programs where they are institutionalized, because they don't like it. It's only normal that they want to be free, they also see themselves as experienced - and they are... Because they had experience that we perhaps don't even have at aged 50 or 55, and so it is normal that they don't want to be institutionalized and that they don't want to return to Romania because we... we must be realistic because, after all, our social services are not at the same level as those in Italy. We tried, we are trying, we try to raise money, we want to develop these services but... before you can develop them you must create them, and it's not easy...

(Director of Social Assistance, Craiova)

Generally speaking, do you have an idea about who emigrates most, which are the categories of people who go abroad?

To be sincere, I must tell you we have no evidence of this kind, but I think it is Roma families or families who cannot find anything here.

Do you know of cases where both parents go abroad to work and leave the children alone at home?

No, we don't. Until now, in fact, this wasn't even our job, but I understood that as of 2006 it is no longer possible to leave (Romania) without an approval... the laws became stricter in these cases...

(Director of DPC Craiova)

³⁶ It was not possible to interview the director of the Directorate for Social Protection and the Protection of the Child, Craiova, as the information requested by us 'was not secret but confidential in the best interests of the child'.

I understand... and as to migration, can you tell me how it happens? Do the parents go first, and have the children join them later, or do they all go together?

I don't know. Children go abroad registered on the passport of one of the parents.

Yes, I know that. But can you tell me who leaves most frequently? Roma, Romanians?

I don't know that...

But does it happen frequently that the parents go abroad leaving their children alone or with other people?

Yes, it happens and the phenomenon is on the increase.

Can you give me percentages?

No... I don't know... you must ask the DPC about this.

At the DPC they told me that they cannot give money to the families, that Social Assistance takes care of that.

Craiova Social Assistance was created last year...

(Director of Tutelary Authority)

5.2 The (geo) politicization of the child migration issue and its implications

In the period following the fall of the Communist regime, issues associated with the condition of children in general and the treatment of children by Romanian institutions in particular became of marked (geo)political importance, especially since the improvement of instruments aimed at protecting children was established as one of the essential conditions for the entry of Romania into the European Union, which took place in January 2007, i.e. after the conclusion of the observation phase of this research.

Although the urgency of demonstrating a willingness to cooperate in relation to the issue of migrant children and the improvement of social protection services for children in Romania ceased since the country joined the European Union, it still remains a vulnerable country in a (geo)political sense. The over 2.5 million Romanian citizens who live and work in the different European Union countries benefit from levels of regularization and rights that vary considerably, and the money they send home plays a fundamental role in guaranteeing economic growth at national level. This means that Romania must continue to be very prudent in managing thorny issues such as that of unaccompanied minors so as not to run the risk of compromising the position, which is often precarious in terms of rights and regularization, of a highly strategic part of its population. In view of the politicization of the issue of migration and unaccompanied minors and the lack of clear rules concerning the position of unaccompanied Romanian children in Italy since 1 January 2007, the risk is that the best interests of the children may be overshadowed by other considerations of a political and economic nature. Unfortunately, the rhetoric of 'mass' repatriation that prevailed in the days immediately following the murder of Giovanna Reggiani, that took place in Rome on 30 October 2007 in a camp mainly inhabited by Roma Romanians, means that it is particularly urgent to identify clear rules and procedures on the subject of migrant Romanian children.

During the period in which this research was conducted, the fact that the entry of Romania into the European Union depended on the social protection of minors, resulted in a politicization of the issue of the condition of minors in Romania and a very strong willingness, on the part of the Romanian government, to accept any proposal of bilateral cooperation with European Union member states, perceived as favourable to the cause of the entry of Romania into the EU. These dynamics strongly influence social intervention concerning the phenomenon of child migration, that in effect also becomes a question of public image in relation to the process of European integration.

This is a very important problem concerning Romania's image... we had the orphanage scandal in the past... all this was cleaned up well, so to speak... There remains the problem of children living abroad... but it is not possible to think of solving it with repatriation...

(FONPC)

Listening to the interviews gathered by the social services workers and the ANPDC in Romania³⁷, one notices the presence of a *leitmotiv* seeking to rehabilitate the system of the Romanian social protection system in the eyes of the international observer.

The new Romanian legislation offers a complete intervention plan... from preliminary investigations to secondary assistance for the children's families, psychological support, professional training programs, all in conjunction with a number of NGOs. The children may also stay in centres if their families do not represent the best choice. There are also projects that offer support for housing, education, or for finding work or food, for the families of children who are the victims of trafficking, for a period of six months. All this is done in cooperation with the

³⁷ It is not possible to provide the text of the interview with the functionaries of ANDPC since we were not allowed to record it.

NGOs. They find a dwelling for the parents, help them to find a job and ensure that the child returns to school.

(Representative of DPC Sector 2)

This extract from an interview with the Romanian consul in Rome explains particularly well the attitude of the national authorities on the question of Romanian migrant children, which appears to centre on repatriation as the preferred option.

Can you tell me the preconditions on which a family investigation is deemed more positive than negative?

The financial situation, the family situation, if there are, for instance, seven persons who live in two rooms, everything is recorded in the investigation summary and then there's the conclusion of the provincial directorate of the national authority for the protection of the child.

And, for example, if the situation is like the one you mentioned, of two rooms and seven people living in them, is this a criterion that should say we should not repatriate the minor, or...

No, no, he should always be repatriated! Again put in the care of the family, or placed in a facility run by the authorities.

So, repatriation in every case...if it is not possible for the minor to go to the family, then to the facilities...

Yes, family, extended family or a facility...

Is financial support available to the child and family in the event of repatriation?

Yes, yes, there are also financial supports...

From who? From the Romanian government or...

Yes, from the Romanian government through these structures...

And, in this situation, are prevention programs being developed at government level in Romania...

Certainly, there are programs, attempts and initiatives in this sense, but the economy does not make it possible to help these families economically as much as one would like to. When the economy makes it possible to also give these families, who lack the economic means, more help, things will change. But yesterday I saw a case in television, of a family which had a baby that had died as soon as it was born, the social workers went to see what the situation was like in relation to the other two children and the mother, who was alone and lived with her parents, and seeing the conditions in which the children lived they decided, the provincial directorate, to take the children and assign them to a centre run by the provincial authority. Obviously the family didn't agree, and the police also had to intervene, but now things like that are beginning to happen, 10-15 years ago they weren't even imaginable. If someone had children, then they had to take care of them as best they could... now, however, the authorities intervene... we are getting closer to Europe, all these procedures, also in the field of child protection we must be at European level and this package of laws that I spoke about a moment ago was prepared with the help of the EU. And so it's not... we realize that the problem of children has to do with the future of the country, and it is a serious problem that the authorities are paying attention to. All these structures were opened, then according to the new law there are not just government structures, there's also the possibility of putting these children in the care of families...

The conditions set for the entry of Romania into the European Union and the related pressures have important implications for the assisted repatriation of migrant children, from various points of view. Although no formal agreement exists, on a national level, between Italy and Romania on the subject of assisted repatriation, in 2006 the Romanian institutional front appeared to be compactly and coherently oriented on the acceptance in Romania of any child that the CMS should decide to repatriate, claiming that the country would be able to guarantee the paramount best interests of the child in Romania, through his or her reintegration in the family, with a member of the extended family or, as a last resort, in an institution.

The Ministry of Labour itself asked us to sign an agreement precisely on the repatriation of unaccompanied children because it then affects a whole series of issues... like the protection of the child... which is here seen as an intention, on the part of Italy, to perhaps proceed with international adoptions which are no longer allowed here in Romania at the moment...

Meaning that they would like to make a skeleton agreement with Italy to also regulate this?

They are very willing - they told us: we... even if it will cost us, we would, practically speaking, like to take care of our citizens - these children... when they are found in Italy and their identity is ascertained, we would like there to be an agreement, on the basis of which they would be repatriated to Romania and the Romanians would take care of them in the ways they would deem most appropriate, by placing them in institutions or seeking to find a solution with the original or extended family, or some other solution.

(Person responsible for Social and Cultural Affairs at the Italian Embassy in Bucharest)

At the same time, both the functionaries at the DPC and those at the Romanian social services strongly criticized the Italian state and the educational type of support that is given to most minors in Italy. The interviewees were surprised by the very low number of repatriations undertaken, considering their total willingness to assume the responsibility for the migrant

children. These observations, that were usually mentioned as an aside during the interview, are partially confirmed by the following extract.

The current situation regarding the system is that the provincial directorates of the DPC carry out a large number of social investigations and never receive the minors... because the minors, in other countries, are entitled to refuse repatriation even if all the necessary conditions are met... (UNICEF)

The Romanian government authorities underlined the difference between the potential, in terms of education and integration, offered the child in Romania where it would be easier for him or her to gain access to a general education in the public education system, and what happens in Italy, where the child at the most manages to get a technical training and to enter the lower levels of the job market, naturally provided he/she is able to benefit from an integration project.

In your opinion, is the collaboration between Italy and Romania and the handling of the situation sufficient, or could it be improved?

We must find solutions to reduce these waiting times, a more practical procedure for the repatriation of minor. At the moment, all one finds is solutions to regularize the minor's situation until he/she reaches adulthood. The judge, for instance, issues a decree against assisted repatriation, and so he or she remains in a facility. (...) However, by means of this type of agreement we must find a solution to manage the problem of minors and to truly act in the best interests of the child. But I doubt whether it is in the best interests of the minor if I keep thinking for another 6-7 months of his/her childhood... and then what? Will he or she be expelled, will...

But if the Italian law guarantees that all children with a residence permit may convert it on reaching adulthood, could there then, in your opinion, be an alternative solution to assisted repatriation?

Yes but here the Italian law would have to be changed... If one assures the protection of the child also afterwards, in a continued life trajectory for this child, then fine. If the child learns a trade in Italy and can work legally also after he or she reaches the age of 18 and the parents agree that the child should do this thing in Italy... why not. But it's no good interrupting this educational process, at this age when everyone is educated, when the child, until the age of 18/20, learns, goes to school, to university, gets ready for the future. If I make him work illegally, now that he's young, he's strong and all that, but what will he do later? Perhaps this one is talented, and when he gets older he could perhaps become a manager, let's not deprive him of this possibility by making him work, to earn some money now. And moreover, in my opinion, not only the child but also the parents should be consulted, by the judge...

(Romanian Consul in Rome)

The above observations by the Romanian consul in Rome are very important, especially if one considers the very high rate of Romanian migrant children who end up by dedicating themselves to, or 'specializing', in illegal activities abroad. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the right to parenthood of the Romanian families whose minor children find themselves in Italy, may refuse to return to Romania even if the family is considered suitable to take them back. The following extract shows how a 'normal' generational conflict between parents and children, even if very violent and with dramatic implications, may include an escape abroad and a return to the family.

In your opinion, given the situation, do you consider the repatriation of the minor as an opportunity for the minor? For instance, if the child cannot return to his or her family and is placed in one of the governmental facilities, what opportunities are he or she offered?

If this minor has the possibility to regularize his or her position and create a future in Italy, this is good. All international agreements on children's rights speak about the paramount interests of the child. If the best interests of the child is to remain legally in Italy then that's fine, but every country has the right to defend the rights of its own citizens, including children. This is what the Romanian state is doing. It's true that an Italian facility for minors and a Romanian one... there are differences, that's true... because one can see the economic base. A child is better off in an Italian facility than in a Romanian one. But if a child has a family at home, in my opinion it's in the best interests of the child to stay with his/her family until he/she reaches adulthood and decides what to do, even if the economic conditions are somewhat different. Otherwise he enters... you see, there are many who run away from the facilities and who enter these criminal networks... We had an exceptional case. A girl, with a very decent family, her mother was a public prosecutor... the situation exploded when the girl decided to dye her hair pink. The mother told her - you're not going to do this to me - you're not a whore! The girl, who was 17 years old, ran away from home, she was unfortunate and entered a trafficking network. When she returned home a little over a year later, the whole family was waiting for her at the airport, all of them remorseful, the girl because she had run away from home and things had gone the way they did, the mother because perhaps she had been too hard on the girl... It was their little family drama, that made sense from a certain point of view... and in the end everything returned to normal. Certainly, as I said in the beginning, this is a special case and cannot be assumed to be the rule. But these situations happen, too.

(IOM)

5.3 Conclusion: assisted repatriation and the best interests of the child

The considerations presented in the two previous sections concerning the economic and (geo)political context within which the child migration phenomenon developed, and the social protection services intended to deal with this situation, contain important implications for the feasibility of assisted repatriation.

In the first place, there are considerable differences in the levels of expertise and the resources dedicated to the conducting of the family investigations. At the time when the interviews were held, there still was no standardized model at national level for these investigations; the relative standards varied considerably from one area to another and depended on the level of training and expertise of the persons involved in the preparation of the report. Also in this case, the demotivating salaries and social and economic status of the people working for the social services are particularly significant factors.

The social investigation must be carried out properly..

Because the quality of these investigations varies at the moment, is that correct?..

That's true, but this is not because the social workers don't know how to do their job - if someone knows how to do it, it's the social workers, due to all the professional training sessions they received... it happens because the work is by no means appealing. It's not paid well, it does not represent an opportunity, it's not stimulating from a professional point of view... it's paid too little and it's not even concrete enough. There are no guidelines, one doesn't know what to do in order to be promoted... it's not very clear what happens in the system. There's no motivation... as a consequence, working in the social service is like a personal loss, in terms of economic status and prestige... it happens very often that people who work in these conditions hand in their resignation as soon as they receive the first offer of a better-paid job. That's only normal. The question is what can the system do.

(IOM)

Considering the relatively limited amount of time (28 days) established by the Italian CMS and the shortage of personnel and resources faced by the DPC and the Romanian social service, the investigations, conducted by the local divisions of the social services and the DPCs, were sometimes carried out by municipal functionaries rather than by qualified personnel.

Can you tell me about the project you did together with the Italian SSI (International Social Service)?

Yes, it began in 2001, between us - Salvați Copiii and SSI Italy; our target was to conduct 300 investigations and carry out 40 repatriations in two years. As a result of the first agreement, Salvați Copiii stipulated another agreement with the National Authority for the Protection of the Child, to use their networks in the country through the regional departments for the protection of children. Since we signed this agreement, we were able to ask every local department to conduct the preliminary investigations, as we are not authorized to do them. (...) It was very difficult for us to receive the investigations from certain regional departments in Romania. There are 42 regions in Romania, and our partners sometimes took a lot of time to carry out the investigations.

Your partner is also in this case the national administration, is that correct?

The departments for the protection of children of every region along with the 6 sectors for Bucharest. We had problems with the people in Baia Mare, Maramures, Vrancea... because they did not send us the investigations, some did not send us anything at all. We requested the investigation many times, but they did not have the time, the people, a car, the fuel to go to the specific location and conduct the investigations... usually, in our office we had 2 or 3 days to translate the investigations and to send them to SSI Italy.

I understand... listen... and... what's the quality of these investigations? Because I was told that they vary from region to region.

Yes... that's true... sometimes the people who work in the various social services know their job very well, but in winter, when the roads are closed, since they cannot reach certain isolated villages, they ask the clerks of that municipality to do the investigation... and so the quality is not very good... But we taught the representatives of the social services and the regional departments for the protection of children how to conduct the investigations according to the model sent by SSI Italy, which is a very detailed model.

(Salvați Copiii Minors)

The process of undertaking of family investigations is deeply influenced by a clear and unequivocal political mandate that pushes for the acceptance of any child for which repatriation is requested. This situation becomes evident from numerous episodes of 'schizophrenic' family investigations in which an extremely negative analysis of the family context is followed by a positive opinion on repatriation.

The most incredible story I experienced was that of a young girl who worked as a prostitute in Paris who was badly damaged psychologically... she wanted to return. So we conducted a social investigation, independently from the Romanian investigation. The social worker said: the father

was very violent and drank a lot; at the age of 5 she went to live with her grandmother because her father was very violent and drunk all the time. She lived with her grandmother until the age of 8. When the grandmother dies, she returns to her family, when she is 9 she is sexually abused by her father and her brother puts her to work as a prostitute. She is sold at the age of 11. She leaves X when she is 13, she arrives in France trafficked by her elder brother, and continues to work as a prostitute until she is 14... that's when she finally asks for help. When we conducted the investigation she was 15. The social worker includes all this information in the investigation and then at the end she puts this sentence - an incredible sentence - the parents love their girl and they want her with them, and therefore repatriation is recommended.

How do you interpret this behaviour?

I associate it with the fact that the Romanian government thinks it must close the matter; solve this problem of children abroad and, according to the national authorities, a Romanian child is a Romanian child, and must return to Romania.

(Person responsible for minors at the French Embassy in Bucharest)

Apart from the contradictory nature and the quality of the family investigations, the experience with assisted repatriation undertaken by Italy through cooperation between the SSI, the CMS, and Salvați Copiii had a very poor rate of success, due to:

- the creation of expectations; the minors were apparently promised direct economic aid in Romania,
- the poor motivation of the children with regard to repatriation; many of them abandoned the reintegration process, declaring that they wanted to return to Italy or they actually returned to Italy,
- the short period of the support, which never exceeded 6 months
- the limited budget allocated to the repatriation project for every single child.

The following extract from the interview with the manager of Salvați Copiii who was in charge of the assisted repatriation project on behalf of SSI-CMS illustrates how the logic of voluntary assisted repatriation clashes with the priorities and needs of migrant minors. In particular, the most compelling need of the children, namely to contribute to the family's financial situation in the immediate future, is not taken into consideration by the reintegration projects which, on the contrary, focus on education and social integration on a medium-term basis. The result is that many young people choose not to make use of the reintegration projects, and/or to return to Italy. The interview illustrates both the level of awareness and motivation in relation to the repatriation of a number of children or, in other words, the presence of much incomprehension on the part of the children concerning the nature (money rather than services) of the support offered in Romania, and reveals the actual amount available for the assisted repatriation project.

You told me last time that you had a budget of \$20,000 for 40 repatriations and 300 investigations and that the target hasn't been achieved... How many repatriations did you do in all?

17

Only 17?

We were not in a position to decide who to repatriate, and who not to. This decision was taken by the Italian authorities. They only let us know - this child will be repatriated, come tomorrow at the airport to receive him. And our job was to inform the parents or the national authority, or both.

And what else did you have to do, according to the project? Receive them and then?

Begin an individual project with each of the repatriated children. Usually, after the child had been repatriated, we let the child rest a couple of weeks, and then we asked him/her what they wanted to do. We can help with services, not by giving the child money directly. Some children refused our help. A girl from Brașov told us - I don't need your help, in two weeks I'll be 18, I'll get my passport and I'll leave for Italy!

So her repatriation was not done on a voluntary basis.

That's right...

Because if this is what she said, then the repatriation was not voluntary and instead it should be, shouldn't it?

A child from Iași lived in Italy for almost 4 years, he had even forgotten the Romanian language but he was repatriated anyway, and once he arrived here, he told us that he had been accompanied by the police all the time, until he got on the plane.

Are there similar cases, that you know of?

I don't remember now, some of them were deceived to make them return, meaning that they were told they would receive a certain amount of money in Romania if they return. This is what a child told me. They asked for money the moment they arrived. Perhaps they did not understand properly, perhaps in Italy they were told about the individual project, a project that included money, but it was not explained that the money would not be given to them direct, but in services placed at their disposal.

What do you think, is it a misunderstanding... or a deception?

I don't know... I don't want to make accusations based only on suspicions... It happened once that

SSI told me that this child would be repatriated, I went to the airport, I waited, and nothing happened. Then I was told that the repatriation had no longer taken place because the child had been warned by someone in the centre that they would have repatriated him the day after, and so he escaped.

Was he warned?!

Yes, yes, yes, the people working in the centres for unaccompanied minors said to him - run away from here, because tonight they will come and get you and send you to Romania.

(...)

So your impression was that some children were deceived, to make them return?

No, it's not exactly like that. I'll tell you about the case of two children who were caught stealing and put in a centre. I don't know what happened there, whether someone told them - you know, if you return to Romania someone will help you there, or give you money, because they arrived under the impression they would receive a certain amount of money. I told them - no, I cannot give you money, I'll buy you something you need, something that's useful for you. One of the children told me he wanted a cow. We asked SSI Italy for permission, and then I told him - fine, I'll buy you a cow. And he said he wanted one specific cow. His mother's cow...

I can answer this by saying - this way I can help my family with money, because after all, that's why I left Romania...

Yes...

I see. Now, this is what some children understood or rather, what they were made to understand... And, instead, what did the project offer them?

Well... I tried to offer him... I tried to be reasonable - but he only wanted money. I told him - you won't get a reward because you left and then you decided to return - if you want to do something, if you want to learn a trade, go and find a school you like, give me the information I need to contact this place and I'll speak with them and I'll pay for it. But you must help yourself. He didn't want anything...

How come?

I don't know... he only wanted money...

Perhaps he was too young to work?

No, he was nearly 18. I asked him - do you want to continue ordinary school? - No. What do you want to do then? I don't know what he had in mind - but I told him very clearly - you won't get any money.

Did you meet all the 17 children who were repatriated?

Yes.

And what was their psychological and social profile?

They wanted to make money. At any cost...

And how old were they, on average?

Between 16 and 18. Only one was younger; but I didn't meet him, a former colleague of mine did. It was a young boy of 13 from Iași. My colleague received him and put him on the plane for X and our colleagues in X had prepared an individual plan with him, his family received legal, social and psychological advice and the child was returned to school but, unfortunately, he did not attend school, on the contrary, he tried to leave.

(...)

And do you happen to know how many of them returned to Italy?

No... I know for certain that two or three returned to Italy.

Because if you put together the number of minors who returned to Italy with the number of minors who did not return voluntarily... another scenario appears, practically speaking... that is, I mean...!

Yes...

The success - not of the project - but of the very idea... seems very limited...

Yes, but I don't know... perhaps because the Italians kept them there too long... they are very slow - like us, come to that...

(Salvați Copiii Minors)

In this last extract, like in the the one that follows, the fundamental value of the execution times of repatriation is highlighted; it often appears to be in the best interests of the child the sooner it takes place within the context of his/her migratory project. Difficulties and characteristics similar to the experiences with managing the assisted repatriation of children in Romania on the part of Salvați Copiii were also encountered within the context of France's experience with assisted repatriation, managed by the OMI-Office des Migrations Internationales, a French international cooperation body. The conversation with the person in charge of the programme in Bucharest reveals that of 32 children who were repatriated, only a few remained in Romania, since no monitoring was organized by the local authorities. The experience showed an extremely high probability that the children will return to France. The comparison with France is important since - as mentioned in the introduction - the memorandum of understanding between France and Romania on foreign minors and assisted repatriation was considered a model to which to make reference in the case of Italy-Romania.

What were the main problems you encountered?

Well... cooperation with the National Authority for the Protection of Children was difficult... especially as regards the social investigations because they are very contradictory in many cases...

for example, the observations of the social service conducting the investigations, even if very negative... do not correspond with the final conclusion, which is always in favour of repatriation. Then... it was clear that many young people returned to France because they had got used to the material comfort offered by French reception facilities, they had their Nike shoes... clean, warm rooms... electricity... they couldn't put up with the life they left behind them in the poor, rural contexts from which they came in Romania. Then, the time required for the bureaucratic procedures, which sometimes lasted as long as 7 months, that is to say the time required by the French judge to understand the situation, request a social investigation in Romania... then the time needed to conduct the investigation... The problem is that the children's decision to return was of an impulsive nature, and usually changed during the time required for the bureaucratic formalities associated with the repatriation. Another reason was that the associations and social workers sometimes convinced the children to return by describing the opportunities of improvement they would be offered in Romania... These were the general problems, while the main problem was the Romanian authorities... whose support in favour of the social reintegration of the minor was completely insufficient... both in financial and in general terms...

(OMI)

In addition to the misunderstandings that surfaced, between the children and the social intervention initiatives in the host country concerning the nature (services rather than money) of the support offered to those who accept to be repatriated, another factor that contributes to the failure of the voluntary repatriation initiatives is their short duration. In fact, the brevity and insufficiency of the support offered to the minor lie at the basis of the unsustainability also of assisted repatriation for trafficking victims, who need an even more complex reintegration process than the process for unaccompanied children.

At the end of the 6-month period, we try to place the victim in a safe environment, and this requires a longer process. During these 6 months the child does therapy with the psychologist, we pay for technical training so that, at the end of the 6 months, the child has the possibility to make a new start, to know a bit more about what to do with his life... in the future... he learnt a trade, he is working, we help with housing... it also depends on how the child forms relationships. Sometimes they form close bonds with the psychologist or the social worker... so you don't need to keep track of them, because they come to you of their own accord, they let you know how they are doing...
I see... and do you consider 6 months to be sufficient?

No...

Then, even in the best solution, the Save The Children solution - let's say...

I cannot say that Save The Children is the best solution... perhaps 6 months are not enough, perhaps we make a mistake with this period because they may get attached to the system, and we speak to them about independence and how to work and to earn things by themselves... I don't know... it would be better to have a longer period of time for the social assistance... Some minors, when they come back to Romania, do nothing but sleep for 2 or 3 months... (...) This is why I also said that for me, as a psychologist, 6 months are not enough... I can assure you that in those 6 months, it's a constant up and down, back and forth both for me and for the trafficking victims. I can only work with her when she opens up and tells me about her problems... then I make a list of the problems and then we decide together, on a scale from 0 to 10, which one is the most serious, and we begin to work on this problem. When we were able to find a place to stay for a victim, also beyond the 6-month period spent in the IOM shelter, the victim continued to visit us... and we continued to help him/her... even if he/she was no longer part of the project, even if the period offered by IOM had come to an end, we continued to help her, and to work together and in the end we solved the problem. But it's taken a year... for one problem. I cannot say that it was overcome 100%. Perhaps 90%, perhaps 80%...

(Salvați Copiii Trafficking)

Apart from cases of 'trafficking victims' as the one mentioned in the above example, inquiries on the subject of migrants who return to their country of origin, both voluntarily and under coercion, showed that many of them tend to encounter problems of an economic and psychological nature during the process of reintegration, and end up with deciding that they have no other choice than to emigrate³⁸. The considerations of the president of the Federation of NGOs active in the field of the Protection of Children in Romania, confirm this analysis.

The problem with repatriation is that the very idea of the repatriation of these children is unrealistic... because even when the minors want to return... as soon as the support is reduced... after a few months, they want to leave the country again... taking their friends with them... almost all of them. Because what the Romanian state offers is not what they expect... Abroad, on the contrary, they make money, never mind how, but they earn a lot of money, they feel free... And so there is really no alternative here, if these are their priorities... Romania cannot offer them an alternative in terms of work, social assistance, education...

Even if the functionaries of ANPDC told us, two days ago, that all the necessary conditions exist, all the legislative provisions, the services and the structures required to guarantee the reintegration of the Romanian minor... And DPC Sector two personnel told us that all the right measures existed and that some NGOs did not know about them...

³⁸ Lăzăroiu Sebastian (2002), *Identification of sustainable approaches to voluntary return and reintegration of asylum seekers and persons with temporary protection status. Romania Case*, report for IOM Geneva/IOM Brussels, in Lazaroiu and Alexandru 2005, *Controlling Exits to gain Accession: Romanian migration policy in the making*, available online <http://www.cespi.it/migration2/PAPERS/mig-romania-2.pdf>.

But no, excuse me, this is not correct... it's not that we are not aware of the legislative measures... it's that they are not sufficient... one cannot think of nourishing a child with legislative measures... How can one think of being able to offer support to young people who have already commenced a process in the West, when it is still very difficult to achieve the social integration of those who are still in institutions here in Romania... at 18 they have to leave the centre... and there are big problems with finding work, a place to live, costs are very high... There are young Romanians who have a college diploma and a good family to rely on, who cannot find a job... or a dwelling... if you come from Italy... with very different experiences... how can one believe it is possible for a minor who comes back from Italy, after very different experiences of financial success... I, and my opinion reflects that of many colleagues who work in this sector, including the National Authority, simply think that repatriation is not a possibility, or a feasible solution. What can we offer them here... it all depends on what we mean by conditions sufficient to guarantee repatriation... If one considers that the sufficient conditions for return is a 6-month support period... well, then these conditions exist... But really, what happens after 6 months is that afterwards... there's nothing any more...

Sometimes, especially for 'trafficking victims', the stigmatization associated with involvement in prostitution becomes a factor motivating the child to return to the emigration context. Conversations with the employees of *Salvați Copiii* who work with the reintegration of these cases revealed that the social services involved in repatriation sometimes do not manage to guarantee the anonymity of the child, who is thus exposed to a situation of discrimination and marginalization.

One of the most recurrent problems concerns mentality... if a child is repatriated from a country in which he or she worked as a prostitute, the administrative employees don't know what to do with them...

Really? Is there such a stigma against trafficking victims?

Yes. And... the children see this every day, and not just with social workers, but also with teachers, sometimes even the parents put the blame on their children... whenever anyone gets to know that a child is a trafficking victim, they regard him/her with reproach, blaming him/her for what happened.

But I suppose that one usually adopts every measure to protect the child in this sense...

We do, yes, in the beginning we lied, saying that the child comes from an unfavourable social context. But in the government social service this is unfortunately not the case - on the contrary! I saw it with my own eyes, otherwise...

Yes? What happened?

The child arrives in the transit centre and all the employees surround the child. The coordinator of the centre begins to interrogate the child on what happened to him, with everyone present. And this is anything but professional. You don't do things like that! Everyone talks with one another about what happened, and in the end this story ends up with being discussed between the driver and the cleaning lady... I don't know if this happens everywhere, but I saw it myself in one of the government centres...

(Save the Children trafficking)

The analysis of social protection initiatives aimed at repatriated minors reveals much greater attention and investment in favour of trafficking victims as compared to migrant children in general. Although this approach may be justified by the particularly traumatic nature of the migratory experience of trafficking victims, there is a risk of underestimating the fact that there may also be experiences of maltreatment and serious hardship in the family context and the broader social context behind child migration. But since unaccompanied children, especially if male, tend not to recognize themselves in the role of 'absolute victim' (implicit in the definition of a 'trafficking victim'), the experience of abuse or ill-treatment that sometimes induced them to leave and to migrate are not taken into consideration by the competent social services, which only pay attention to more flagrant cases of abuse, especially if of a sexual nature.

Yes... there are centres, as provided by the law, for the protection of victims, there are about 9 centres... but the problem with these centres is that they are only for victims. And this is the question - what is a victim. Does one only talk about victims when it is a matter of sexual abuse or prostitution, or is there a more complex concept of what a victim is? And in this case, is victim the right word? And it's true to say that if a minor is not considered a victim here in Romania, then there's nothing for him. If it is impossible for a child to return to his family because the family doesn't protect him, there's no solution. In most of the cases I saw, before the children leave Romania, there's a situation of maltreatment in the family, and in the majority of cases this type of maltreatment is not taken into consideration. It is physical and psychological maltreatment. This is why I am now working on juvenile justice and the protection of children in Romania, because I believe that this is really the first problem. Then, one may also broaden the concept of abuse at a social level and speak of institutional maltreatment... I mean the lack of education, the right to work, these things too can be considered forms of maltreatment, they concern all the minors who leave the country... but there's no answer to this problem...

(Person in charge of minors, French Embassy in Bucharest)

Lastly, interviews with the local assistants and with the Italian SSI functionaries highlighted the need for greater communication between colleagues in the social services of the countries connected to each other by the migratory trajectory of the child. The Romanian social workers do not have access to the information and observations of the Italian social services, and have to repeat the entire analytical process when the child arrives in Romania. Not only does the child therefore have to be subjected to interviews the moment he or she returns, but the local social services are consequently not allowed access to information which could be fundamental for the purpose of identifying the child's needs. Instead, on the Italian side, the lack of a relationship with the social workers in the child's country of origin deprives the social workers of a source of information that could be very useful when working with the child.

Perhaps what is missing is a more extensive relationship between the services... how many times did we say that a review of the social services should be made with the social operators of the countries of origin of the children, to discuss with them, assess and properly explain what the children do when they return... that is to say go round to our operators in the foreign section of the services here. For example, we had a couple of meetings about this in Rome, because it's true that there's a separation here, because the social services and the workers in the communities have the children and they tend - rightly - to believe what the children tell them and they get involved, and so they are the first to find it hard to understand what will happen in the countries of origin, and what the value of an instrument like this is. There's a lack of contact here, in my opinion this is something we should set right.

(Head of International Social Service)

A problem that concerns us a lot is that no foreign social services send us their information, their investigations, that means we have to carry out new investigations, sometimes this is a waste of time, of information, and involves a lot, really a lot, of stress for the children, who sometimes have to remember their traumatic experiences once again, or have to acknowledge yet again that they did things they are ashamed of, something that would otherwise surface during the therapeutic process in a calm and serene way, not under the pressure of a hurried investigation... but this situation is really not in the interests of the child, and neither does it favour the process of recovery... if we were able to know what experience the child had abroad, it would be easier for us to deal with the trauma, the recovery... without forcing children to talk about what happened to them the moment they return... indeed sometimes, remembering one trauma may represent another trauma, and this could delay recovery... moreover, if this exchange of information doesn't take place, many aspects of the experience are lost, because the impressions of a child change rapidly, and we do not have access to the intensity of the sensations experienced abroad, perhaps only to the residual feelings that the child experienced there.

(Representative of DPC Sector 2 Bucharest)

In the next and last section, we will consider the analyses and observations presented in this section and in previous sections, and attempt to suggest directions or solutions to improve the impact of social intervention aimed at the minors forming the scope of this research in Italy and in Romania.

In short...

Although the legislative system and social services aimed at the protection of children improved considerably, the type of support the Romanian social services are able to offer families facing hardship is extremely limited, due to a lack of sufficient financial resources. These observations have important implications for the assisted repatriation process, which is the main area in which the Romanian social protection system is currently involved in the phenomenon of migrant children.

There are considerable differences in the level of expertise and resources dedicated to the conducting of *family investigations*.

The brief duration and the inadequacy of the support offered by current initiatives make even assisted repatriation for trafficking victims, who need an even more complex reintegration process than that for unaccompanied children, unfeasible even on a short term basis.

The need for greater communication between colleagues in the social services of the countries connected to each other by the migratory process of the child was highlighted.

At the same time, functionaries of both the authorities and of social services in Romania were critical of the type of opportunity for education and social integration that is offered to foreign children in Italy.



CONCLUSION AND PRATICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

6

6.1 Conclusive remarks on child migration

The main purpose of this conclusive section is to offer solutions and suggestions in order to improve the efficiency of the system of social protection and intervention in relation to the phenomenon of Romanian children (Roma and non-Roma) in Italy, and specifically in Rome, by making reference to the results of the research. One of the more significant indications that emerge from the analysis of the material collected is the need to consider the phenomenon of child migration as a repercussion and integral part of the migratory phenomena in general and of the processes of economic, social and cultural transformation that determine and accompany these phenomena. Indeed, migratory processes are the manifestation of demographic, economic and geopolitical (im)balances, of profound processes of social transformation (such as the individualization and fragmentation of collective and personal identities), as well as of important political and historical processes, like wars, social conflicts, the consequences of colonialism/neocolonialism, globalization and the process of expansion and organization of the European Union.

Instead, as to the more specific issue of the migration of children and young people, the imagination and realization of the migratory project must be seen as two central moments in the development of a rite of transition to the adult phase, in a historical moment in which the meaning of the experience of being a 'child' and an 'adult' is undergoing a dramatic change both in the context of origin and in that of destination. This is a fundamental point. While, in traditional and stabilized societies, the rite of passage to the adult phase takes place in relation to precise points of departure and arrival from an emotional, cognitive and economic standpoint, the reality that migrant children have to face is complex and contradictory. On the one hand, the traditional figures of authority and the ethical, social and economic system of reference are going through a stage of profound transformation, and the children who decide to leave their country must be seen as 'social innovators' who resort to international mobility to gain access to an 'upward' social mobility³⁹. On the other, as we saw in the previous sections, the context of arrival provides a schizophrenic and incoherent response to the survival strategies that sustain the transition, apart from the fact that they are rarely capable of meeting the migrant children's need for emotional, educational and economic support.

In addition to these sociocultural aspects, one must also consider the peculiarities of the adolescent and juvenile condition that characterizes the migratory project and trajectory of migrant children and young people. In fact, the tension between individualization, separation from the parents and the search for new emotional points of reference and the need for attachment to and guidance from parents that characterize the adolescent trajectory is exasperated by the 'migratory' character of the migrant children's identity, suspended between profoundly contradictory models, such as the system of 'traditional' values and models associated with the parents and the world of seduction and freedom evoked by Western consumer-oriented imagery.

In relation to this structural scenario, another complex aspect of the social group examined by the research consists of the fact that many of the children interviewed had the experience of parents who failed in their role, who were unable (often by being overly or insufficiently authoritarian, or absent) to help the young person to:

- gradually become separated from the parents;
- cope with the renunciation of the immediate satisfaction of his/her desires;
- plan his/her life on the medium or long term.

In particular, the acceptance to give up the immediate gratification of one's wishes, which represents a key transition in the process of internalization of social norms on the part of a child, takes place in a context where traditional forms are refused (even if an implicit or ambivalent way) while those to which the child aspires are only known through his or her utopian and narcissistic plans. The interaction between all these factors allows us to identify a potential vulnerability for many of the migrant children and young people, whose resort to risky life strategies (prostitution, begging) or illegal strategies (theft, drug pushing) and the active pursuit of 'easy money' must be seen as a consequence of the continuation of the imperative to have 'everything, and right away' typical of infantile narcissism. In fact, if we add, to this existential and psychological scenario, the post-communist cultural construction of the West as a place where 'luxury is within reach', and the customary reference to 'making money' as a solution to all one's needs (financial, social, psychological) it becomes easier to understand why the resort to illegal activities, both in the country of origin and in the migratory context, represents a feasible opportunity for the children. To 'make money' through involvement in illegal activities is sometimes the only way to obtain the recognition

³⁹ Lăzăroiu, S. and Alexandru, M. (2003) *Who is the next victim? Vulnerability of young Romanian women to trafficking in human beings*, Bucharest: IOM, page 22.

of a social status of 'success' in the country of origin, for which 'luxurious' standards (new car, house, etc.) would be hard to achieve in Italy over a short period by working as a waiter, bricklayer or bartender.

Moreover, once they are in Italy, the migrant children have to mediate between the need to grow up rapidly in relation to the standards defining an 'adult' in their country of origin (to become independent; help the parents) and the experience of infantilization associated with being the subject of protection by social intervention initiatives. Once again, 'making money' becomes the only known way, to the migrant foreign children, to mediate with respect to these contradictory experiences, since their earnings enable them to:

- recover their own childhood precociously denied them in their country of origin, by acquiring playthings (and playing!) with a high symbolic value within the context of the peer group (Playstations, mobile phones, etc...);
- respond to the need to consider themselves as 'individualized and fulfilled adults' in their country of origin, by sending money to build a house or open their own business.

In conclusion, it is important to stress that foreign children form part of a structural migratory phenomenon, and are bound, just like the majority of adults who follow the same path and who sometimes accompany them, to become part of Italian society. Since it is not possible to go against the existential choice on which their decision to come to Italy is based, and considering that in most cases assisted repatriation is not in the best interests of the child without a prior improvement in the socioeconomic context of origin, it is necessary to concentrate energies and resources to encourage their integration, rather than fighting imaginary battles against the social, cultural, historical and economic forces that made them migrate. This means to accept that the majority of these young people and minors are in Italy to stay, by creating the necessary conditions to assure that the arrival of these 'social innovators' may represent a stimulus and an opportunity for a change for the better, for the migrant children themselves and for the society that hosts them.

From this point of view, to consider repatriation as a priority response to the migratory project of the migrant children means to imagine that it is possible to disregard a desire for social emancipation which, regardless of how foolish and misinformed it may be, induced them to make a radical life choice in favour of Italy. It also means supposing that it is possible to refuse to accept reality, and not acknowledge that the life of a large number of migrant children is not economically and socially sustainable in their context of origin, due to the economic inequalities and injustices that mark the social order.

The social intervention initiatives aimed at foreign minors living in Italy will be effective to the same extent in which they succeed in responding to the system of their needs as illegal activities do. In the following section we shall attempt to indicate concrete measures in this direction.

6.2 Recommendations

The general considerations given in the above sections and those that emerge from the results of the research (presented in the previous sections) are reflected in the difficulties encountered by institutions and project workers when dealing with a complex issue such as that of the involvement of part of the Romanian (Roma and non-Roma) foreign minors living in Rome in illegal activities. Practical suggestions and recommendations will be presented by following the more significant phases of the migratory process of the migrant children and the social intervention initiatives that regard these minors.

6.2.1 Arrival of the minor

The period immediately following the arrival of the minor in Italy is especially important for the social action intended for the minor. The timely implementation of the intervention would appear to be decisive, as it is during the initial weeks that the first contacts with the peer group, and with the social context in which illegal activities take place.

Timeliness is also a critical factor in relation to social intervention in the medium term, and to the evaluation of the advisability of assisted repatriation, which is more likely to be successful and to be in the best interests of the minor the less the minor is integrated in the social context of immigration.

To improve the present situation, a maximum period of 2 weeks is proposed for the completion of family investigations and the decision on repatriation or inclusion in an integration project in Italy. For this to be possible, the spheres of jurisdiction concerning the request for and conducting of the family investigations and the repatriation of Romanian minors must be clarified as soon as possible, adequate resources for the investigations and return projects must be invested, and networks and procedures must be created for structured and shared intervention between the Italian and the Romanian authorities, in order to manage the process in the most rapid and appropriate way, to effectively protect the best interests of the child.

As to the identification of the unaccompanied minor, age assessment and the choice of social intervention procedure to be adopted during the first phase of the migratory trajectory of the minors, it is necessary to review the procedures currently adopted. Specifically, we suggest that:

- until it is ascertained that the migrant is of age, and even after this whenever doubts remain regarding minority, the regulations on the protection of minors shall be applied, and all measures that may jeopardise their rights are suspended,
- assessments should be conducted by professionals who possess specific expertise on the subject, adopting methods of proven scientific reliability that respect the health and the dignity of the child.

During the initial phase, the monitoring activity conducted by the street outreach unit could play an important role in providing the network with information that could make it possible to identify the most vulnerable children, those who are exploited and 'newcomers', who could be indicated, or sent, to the competent authorities and facilities without delay. In this context, the network of services and institutions involved should identify and organize criteria, procedures and training sessions, involving all parties.

6.2.2 Street outreach units and the use of peer educators

The main role of the street outreach unit, apart from its potential use in the monitoring and reporting of children to the authorities during the first few weeks after their arrival, consists of diffusing important information among the target population considered, as well as establishing a relationship between the social intervention network and the places where the children work and socialize.

From this point of view a suggestion that emerged during the focus group in the Roman street units appears to be particularly interesting. It would consist of involving the children in one-month training periods at the emergency and secondary reception units. During this period they would work for a given compensation as peer educators, in order to combine the indispensable need for an income on the short term with the opportunity to become more familiar with the operations and instruments offered by the services that exist. Should it prove very difficult, from a logistic point of view, to offer a training period to all the young people who want it, an alternative solution might be to make some children participate in training courses as preparation for the activity of peer education, offering a grant, so that they can in any case earn money and gain information that they may then disseminate within their peer group. Similar experiences with training implemented by Save the Children in Rome proved to be highly effective.

Leaving aside concrete solutions favouring the transfer of knowledge between the street outreach unit and its user group, the material gathered within the scope of the research demonstrates the position, at the same time peripheral and central, occupied by the street outreach units in the life of the migrant children. Indeed, this type of intervention represents a constant and important point of reference in relation to a whole variety of social pressures, priorities, life trajectories and needs that determine and form the very life of the migrant child. Proposals like that described above, that bring the world of services closer to the group it aims to help, are fundamental for the improvement of the entire social intervention network for the benefit of migrant children.

To maximise the efficacy of street outreach units, it is important to make an appropriate investment in the training and number of operators involved, in order to guarantee a skilled, informed and constant presence alongside the minors. The use of *peer educators* is a particularly useful tool for street outreach initiatives, since the cultural and 'existential' proximity of the educator and child may facilitate the creation of relationships based on affection and trust, that

may make the child decide to sacrifice his or her 'freedom' in favour of a more organized trajectory. At the same time, the empathic potential of this relationship may be compromised by prejudices, reservations and negative experiences associated with the child's culture, in which case the use of Italian personnel, especially if appropriately trained vis-à-vis the specific sociocultural context of the children, may be preferable.

In this regard, an important limitation is represented by the fact that the profession of 'cultural mediator' is often considered as being reserved for foreign citizens, something that leads to a lack of Italian personnel with an appropriate knowledge of the specific social and cultural context of origin of the children. To solve this shortcoming, specific training initiatives, also through visits to the contexts of origin on the part of the operators and on-site training (including the learning of languages that are strategic for social intervention by the operators, such as Romanian) could be extremely useful.

The street outreach service represents an (implicit) moment of acceptance and recognition, important in symbolic and psychological terms (and not necessarily of approval!) of the marginal places and survival strategies of the migrant children, and should always be accompanied by the offering of services characterized by a low access threshold (in other words, services that meet fundamental needs like personal hygiene, food, health, emotional and psychological support, etc.). These would serve a dual purpose:

- 'reduction of the harm' caused to the children by their lifestyles and the survival strategies in which they are involved,
- provide the children with a shelter (physical and emotional) that is unconditional (with respect to their participation in illegal activities and prostitution), and that represents a point of departure, from which it may be possible to build relationships based on trust and offer opportunities on which to build programs aimed at social integration and regularization.

6.2.3 Centres for minors: 'case by case' differentiation of social intervention based on the minor's level of (and need for) independence

An analysis of the material gathered within the context of the research revealed that the best interests of the child would be more effectively guaranteed if he or she could have access to a differentiated network of social intervention, able to meet, in a differentiated and personalized way or, in other words on a 'case by case' basis, the needs and individual trajectories of the single minors, who have different levels of independence, trajectories and needs. At the centre of this network, it is necessary to identify standard procedures and criteria shared by the system of all the services and institutions involved, to identify the path that is best suited to the possibilities, experiences and potentiality of each child. The basic factors for the purpose of deciding who could obtain the greatest benefit from initiatives characterized by a higher level of autonomy as compared with those featuring a higher level of support and protection, in addition to age, are the level of pressure to 'make money' and exploitation by the family or other adults (or minors), and an evaluation of the physical and psychological state of the child. The following are some suggestions in this direction, which will be presented starting from the minimum level (trafficking/exploitation) to the highest level of autonomy of the migratory and individual trajectory of the children.

With regard to migrant minors who are victims of situations of exploitation, it would appear advisable to provide a way to be able to hold them 'officially' for a limited period of time, during which they could be free from the family mandate, have sufficient time to rest, form a less extemporaneous emotional relationship with the project workers and potentially benefit from a 'truce' period that would allow them to reach a different decision from that of returning to the street.

On the one hand, the decision to detain the minor under coercion places project workers in a contradictory position; in other words, they 'liberate' the minors from exploitation by actually limiting their freedom and separating them from the family environment and the peer group. On the other hand, the compulsory nature of this period could free children from the pressures and repercussions associated with leaving the work or the family context controlling them. Many of them are in fact forced to escape from the 'centre for minors' because they have to repay the debt incurred when they left their country of origin or because they have to meet the financial and social expectations of their real, extended or street family. Moreover, during this period it would be possible to start to evaluate the inclinations and desires of the minors, so as to guide them towards a project suited to their vocation.

During the implementation of the research, the collaboration between the police forces and some social intervention services involved in the Colourful Horizons project led to the identification of situations of exploitation and trafficking, that led to the arrest of the adults responsible and the support of the exploited minors by the services network. In spite of the indisputably positive results of this collaboration, the ethnographic material and the interviews collected during the implementation of the inquiry show that this collaboration was quite extemporaneous and due to the personal initiative of the functionaries involved. To maximize the efficiency of this collaboration, it could be useful to:

- develop a methodology and criteria that are shared by the social intervention service network, by the judiciary authorities and by the police forces, in accordance with the laws in force, in order to identify situations of abuse and exploitation within the context of a social milieu characterized by marginalization, poverty and by the fact that the child is made responsible for the economic survival of the family nucleus,
- identify procedures and formalize protocols of collaboration between the police forces, the judiciary authorities and the network of social intervention services, based on team work and on the upgrading of the expertise (legally speaking and in terms of 'know-how') of all the parties involved,
- organize training sessions with all the parties involved, on the intersection between intercultural and social dynamics and the duties of the police forces and those of the social intervention services.

With regard to minors who intend to become stably integrated in Italian society and who need a relatively high level of support for the purpose of achieving greater autonomy, the most positive experiences are those that offer the migrant minor:

- a consistent and constant emotional and educational support, based on the permanent presence of contact persons,
- a residential service
- the certainty that they will be acknowledged the right to reside, to work and to enjoy good health through the definition of an ad hoc procedural protocol with the relevant institutions,
- a personalized social integration project,
- gradual guidance, extended in time, towards financial economic and social autonomy.

The presence of recreational activity and a structured program both for educational and work-related activities and for recreational operations is very important, to let the children have a full life and prevent them from wasting their time. Rather than depriving the children of responsibility in relation to the use of their free time, by preparing a fixed program for them, it would be interesting and desirable to encourage them to follow the rules of conduct at the centre and the planning of activities by making them participate in the meetings held by the project workers where decisions are made and rules, tasks and responsibilities, management procedures and activities to do together are discussed. The children would thus receive the recognition, by the project workers in the centre, of their need to assume responsibility for their lives and thus perceive the social initiatives as opportunities for their development, rather than as an assistance service that have nothing to do with them.

The results of the research in Rome have, in particular, highlighted the existence of a tension between the CPAs, that often find themselves obliged to deal with children who have very complex and varying needs, and the secondary reception centres, which at times tend to select young people whose condition (existential and psychological) is best suited to be able to carry out an integration process with success. This means that the CPAs sometimes become points of arrival rather than of points of departure for the most disadvantaged minors, something that leads to a waste of financial resources and to the demotivation of the project workers. A future approach could consist of creating a larger number of small facilities, capable of providing an efficient, consistent and long-term support, at a level of both emergency and secondary reception centres.

On a general level it is necessary to invest more in training (especially in the psychological and intercultural area) and on the quantity of employees working with children, since the key element of social intervention is the interpersonal relationship between operator and child, that enables him or her to give up the immediate satisfaction of his or her desires (by resorting to illegal activities) and not meet the expectations of the family and the peer group, in favour of a long-term individual life project. From this perspective, it could be particularly useful to resort

to peer educators and cultural mediators, both Italian and foreign, as educators in the centres for minors.

Moreover, given the central role of the need to 'make money' in the existential and economic condition of migrant children, it is essential to offer integration processes that allow them to begin to earn money within a short period of time, based on the simultaneous presence of training and paid work.

Lastly, as regards the migratory trajectories of children characterized by a much higher level of (and need for) autonomy, the challenge consists of encouraging integration processes representing an alternative to that of placement in community homes - contemplating the institution of forms of care with members of the family and/or members of the social intervention services, but with the placing of the child in Roma camps and/or residential solutions other than 'centres for minors', in order to assure the children greater independence. The discussions that developed within the Colourful Horizons project resulted in the idea of introducing forms of 'light guardianship' so that the minor can be reached in his/her environment by the services network, and not the other way round.

Another possibility in this respect is to make the person responsible for a low-threshold centre the guardian. The common denominator of these proposals for a light guardianship is a high level of responsabilization of the minor and the guardian, in such a way that their relationship becomes the working tool and the main resource of the project. Modes of operation of this kind imply a much higher investment in terms of willingness to establish a personal relationship and assume responsibility on the part of the project workers, who should identify, together with the minor, the project that is best suited to the situation and to the minor's aspirations, supporting him or her in their realization.

Experiences such as drop-in centres with a low-access threshold (especially if combined with street outreach units) where children and young people who have just reached the age of 18 may benefit from important, strategic services for their hygiene and other primary needs, appear to be determinant and more useful for the more independent category of the group studied (especially minors of a relatively advanced age, from 16 to 18, and those who have just become of age).

On a general level, the most effective way to intervene in relation to migrant children's need to assume adult responsibilities and gain greater independence is to assume the responsibility for the minor together with the system of relations 'accompanying' him or her in the emigration context, regardless of whether he or she is actually accompanied by the family, or whether there is a biological family (present or distant) and/or a street family. From this point of view it is essential to identify intervention projects that are aimed at the minor's family context, especially if the family is in Rome together with the minor, offering the parents concrete assistance over the education of the children and access to the job market.

On the contrary, if the family is in Romania, it is important to help the child to renegotiate the responsibilities he or she was burdened with by the parents, who should be given a possibility to symbolically 'approve' the child's investment in his or her future, accepting a long-term process of social integration to the detriment of survival strategies that guarantee immediate earnings. From this point of view, it would be important to collaborate with local organizations and services, that could facilitate the exchange of information, and their 'metabolization' on the part of the family context.

In both cases it would be necessary to promote campaigns aimed at informing and creating awareness, in order to make the parents assume responsibility for the risks and opportunities offered by child migration.

An approach that enhances the role of interpersonal relationships in social intervention would require substantial qualitative and quantitative investments in personnel, that are not permitted by the economic resources available at the moment. The resort to 'flexible' contracts and the high turnover of personnel this entails certainly do not facilitate the development of stable contact points and emotionally significant relationships on which to start work with the minors. In fact, perhaps the most important limitation preventing the creation of emotionally significant interpersonal relationships, that represent the most strategic instruments in the social intervention process with foreign children, is the shortage of personnel dedicated to the cultivation of this relationship, since the operators have to deal with a very complex and substantial migratory flow.

As far as, more specifically, the Roma population is concerned, in Rome like elsewhere, the monitoring, prevention and social intervention in relation to the needs of the migrant Roma population are important priorities for social intervention on the phenomenon of migrant children in general. It is fundamental to extend also to spontaneous settlements those minimum monitoring and intervention devices that currently exist in some authorized camps, in the hope that, in the future, there will be a willingness to promote politics that are more integration-based and less restrictive, or that offer access to appropriate solutions for housing, education and work.

6.2.4 Regularization, entitlement to health service and social integration of migrant children

With the entry of Romania into the European Union, the problems associated with the refusal of residence permits to minors on reaching adulthood (and the consequent risk of expulsion of the young adult regardless of his or her level of integration) were eliminated; this problem represented one of the main obstacles to the promotion of the process of integration of children, i.e. the central issue of this research. However, as the section 'Analysis of the legislative context' illustrates, not all the problems were solved and there even was a worsening of the situation in some respects.

In fact, at present security concerns have led to the introduction of quite restrictive norms with no guarantees for children being provided.

It is therefore fundamental that regulations or at least administrative provisions that clarify the following points are issued as soon as possible:

- laws regarding the expulsion of EU citizens cannot and must not be applied to unaccompanied minors, as provided by the Consolidation Act on Immigration for unaccompanied migrant minors who are not EU citizens, and by applying the more favourable clause in the said Act;
- where children are used for begging purposes, the finding of exploitation, or on the contrary, simple involvement by the child in maintaining the family nucleus, must be evaluated on a case by case basis. In the latter case, support for insertion in lodgings and work opportunities should be extended to the whole family nucleus, as well as providing for education inclusion of the child. Generally speaking, where EU citizens fail to meet the prerequisites envisaged provided by Law Decree 30/2007 for entry as residents in the municipal registries, but find themselves in one of the situations where a residence permit must be granted under Consolidation Act 286/98 or the implementative Presidential Decree 394/99 regulations, they must be issued a residence permit under the above provisions, by way of application of the more favourable clause established by art. 1, paragraph 2 of Consolidation Act 286/98.

6.2.5 Assisted repatriation and social intervention in Romania

Since Romania became part of the European Union, all regulations associated with the repatriation of unaccompanied foreign children from non-EU countries (and in particular, the jurisdiction of the CMS) no longer apply. However, Law Decree 30/2007 regarding EU citizens' right to circulation and residence failed to provide clear regulations on this matter.

It is therefore not clear at present which authority is responsible for conducting the family investigations, consulting the child and, if applicable, providing for repatriation, which procedures should be adopted and which criteria should be taken into consideration.

It is therefore clear that there is a dual risk: on the one hand, that repatriations may be carried out in violation of the principle of the best interests of the minor; on the other that family investigations may not be conducted and that minors for whom repatriation would be in their best interests are never repatriated because no authority assumes the relative responsibility.

It is fundamental that the Italian and Romanian authorities (ideally within the framework of guidelines established at EU level) clarify, as soon as possible, the spheres of jurisdiction and procedures relating to family investigations and repatriation as well as the criteria for deciding on repatriation, in full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international, European and national regulations on the subject of children's rights.

In addition to the need for more rapid intervention regarding the decision to repatriate, the analysis of the material collected during the research also highlighted the need to establish a more organic relationship between the parties most closely involved in the repatriation mechanism, i.e. the operators of the Italian and Romanian social services who are brought into contact through the minor's migration, by means of:

- the definition of a shared methodology and criteria associated with the conducting of family investigations,
- the exchange of information on cases of minors, in order to transfer as much information as possible and minimize damage (implicit in going back to traumatic or embarrassing events) to the minor.
- the organization of training initiatives, visits and exchanges of views between the functionaries of the social services in the countries involved.

On the other hand, as regards the criteria on which to decide whether or not the repatriation of the minor is in his/her best interests, in addition to the child's willingness and the assessment of the family situation, the duration of the child's stay in Italy and his/her age are two important aspects. While it could be considered that, generally speaking, repatriation is in the best interests of younger minors, even if they come from poor backgrounds (naturally provided the family situation is appropriate) since the right to family unity should tend to prevail, in the case of older minors the opportunities to study, train and work offered in Italy should tend to be a priority compared with the importance of living with the parents. Having said this, also in relation to the possibility of repatriation, every situation should be assessed on a 'case by case' basis and the best interests of the minor identified according to his/her specific situation.

To be able to make a rapid and 'personalized' valuation of what is in the best interests of the child, a much greater investment is needed in the personnel and facilities dealing with repatriation and family investigations, both in Italy and in Romania; at the moment they have to deal with a very heavy and complex workload, with insufficient human and economic resources.

The data gathered by the research demonstrates that the Romanian social protection system is incapable of guaranteeing the transition from emergency to secondary reception centres, or in other words to implement procedures that facilitate a true integration of the repatriated child. This is due to the difficult economic situation the country still faces today, where there is a lack of sufficient resources that can invert the structural logic leading to the precocious assumption of adult responsibilities by minors, underlying their migration, i.e. putting the parents of migrant minors in a position to support their children from an economic, social and psychological standpoint.

Apart from these structural difficulties, to be able to offer better opportunities for the social reintegration of the repatriated minors, the assisted repatriation projects should feature:

- substantial support and action in relation to the family context as a whole, and not only in relation to the economic and social autonomy of the minor,
- monitoring over a longer period, in order to guide the minor and his/her family towards greater autonomy in a sustainable way,
- economic investment sufficient to guarantee real opportunities for the minor and his/her family.

These conditions can only be satisfied if Romania finds the resources necessary to invest in a system of social protection that is appropriate for all the minors and their families, not only those involved in child migration. In particular, more resources should be used to:

- increase the salaries of functionaries and reassess the appeal of a professional career in the social services,
- increase the level and the duration of financial support for poorer families,
- offer the parents of migrant children opportunities in terms of training and support (social, psychological).

As things stand at present, it would appear to be essential to organize awareness raising campaigns in Romania aimed at promoting informed and responsible migration. These campaigns should take place at several levels: through the media, the schools and in the local places where young people gather informally, the main context where minors construct their migratory project.

Rather than frightening young people by means of aggressive ways of providing them with information⁴⁰ (matching the authoritarian social order the minors want to leave behind them), the main purpose of the prevention campaigns should be to inform the minors of the risks they run by migrating abroad, providing useful addresses and contacts in case of need.

A prevention campaign based on the principle of harm reduction and insisting on the feasibility of the migratory project, rather than on the utopia of containing the migratory phenomenon by means of fear, would have a greater possibility of being accepted by the minors, and would increase, in a constructive way, information and data on the real situation, according to which they can decide to leave the country or stay.

In conclusion, the principle of the best interests of the minor should be considered as the general goal that should keep the network of services and institutions involved in the child migration situation united, and ensure that they work. The role of fundamental human rights - of which the best interests of the minor is the explicit expression - in relation to juridical interpretation is, in fact, that of providing principles for comparison and evaluation on the validity of the rules of a legal system. Looked at in this perspective, human rights represent juridical infrastructures that may assume an interpretative value, indicating the correct intention of the legislator and highlighting the expectations of justice, that the interpreter of the law is called on to accept and respect⁴¹.

The problem must therefore be approached in a different way, by considering assisted repatriation as merely one of the social intervention options envisaged by the services network, and rejecting the current polarization between the “taboo” of a return to their country on the part of minors and many non-governmental organizations, and an approach in favour of expulsion on the grounds of political interests. More specifically, minors must be assured guidance along the return procedure, for which they give their full and incisive agreement, focusing attention not only on the minor but also on the family context. Indeed, by concentrating on the minor alone it would not be possible to reverse the social and economic trends that led the minor to take on adult roles and responsibilities at an early age, including the decision to emigrate.

⁴⁰ The necessity of resorting to ‘traumatizing’ information campaigns was mentioned in various interviews with social workers in Romania.

⁴¹ V. Frosini, *Theory and techniques of human rights*, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Naples 1995, page 74.

Save the Children is the world's largest independent organisation promoting and upholding children's rights. First established in 1919, it works in over 120 countries in a network of 28 national organisations with one international coordinating office, the International Save the Children Alliance. This international organisation promotes 500 projects aimed at improving the lives of children through education, health care and protection against exploitation and abuse, as well as emergency aid in cases of natural disasters, war and conflict. Furthermore, it puts pressure

on local, national and international governments and institutions to put the rights of the child, as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, at the centre of their policies. Save the Children Italy was established at the end of 1998, first as a non-profit organisation, but today as a non-governmental organisation recognised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy. Save the Children Italy promotes activities and projects for children in so-called developing countries, as well as children who live on the national territory.



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