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# "COLOURFUL HORIZONS" PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

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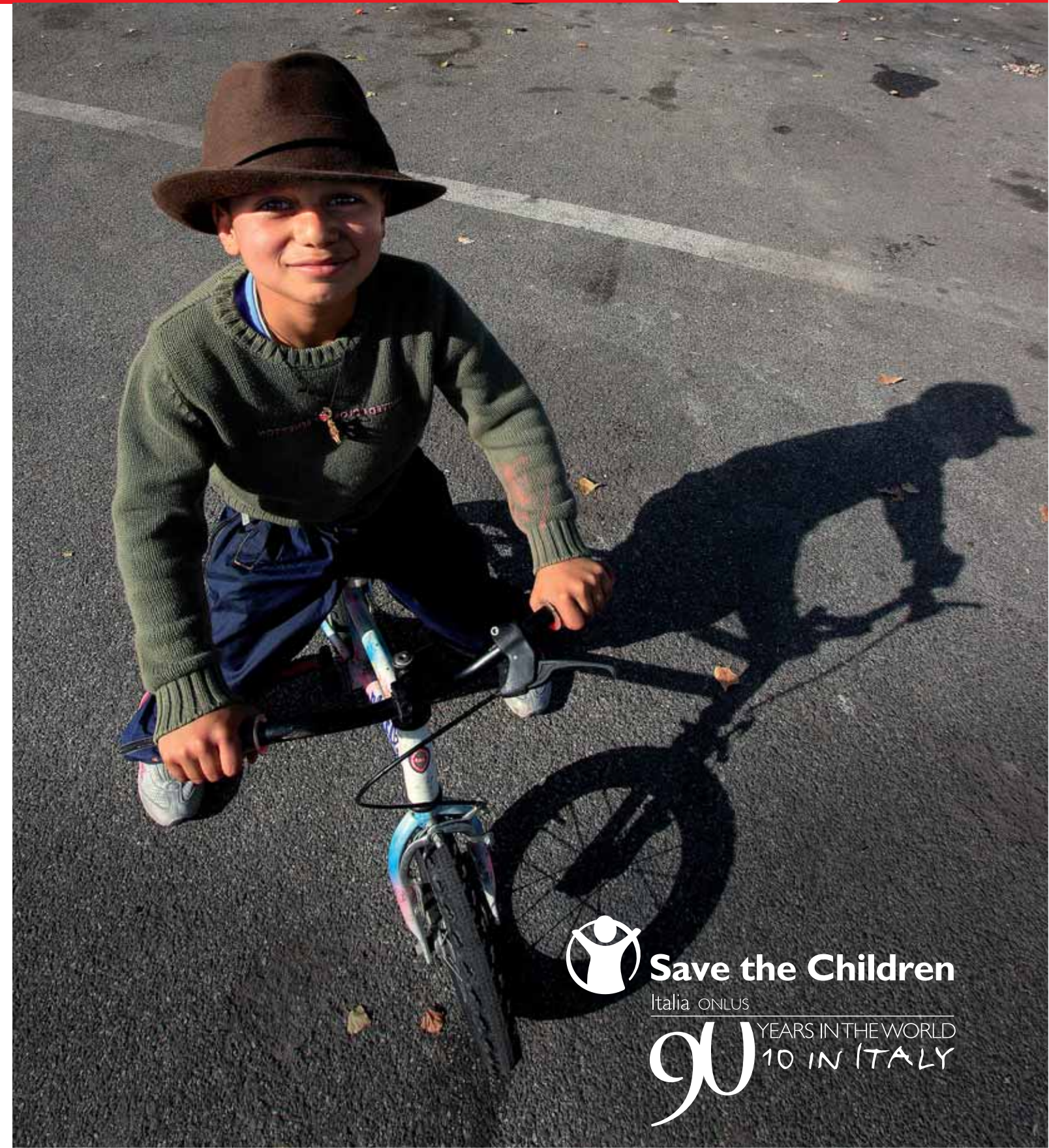
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Save the Children  
Italia ONLUS

90 YEARS IN THE WORLD  
10 IN ITALY



“COLOURFUL  
HORIZONS”  
PROJECT

FINAL  
REPORT

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Photos on pages 11 and 21  
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Published by:  
Save the Children Italia Onlus  
Via Voltumo 58 - 00185 Roma



<u>PREFACE</u>	5
<u>COLOURFUL HORIZONS: FIRST YEAR</u>	7
<u>SECOND YEAR</u>	11
<u>THIRD YEAR</u>	15
<u>CONCLUSIONS</u>	21
<u>APPENDIX</u>	24

A synthesis of the research  
“Opportunities and Challenges for Social  
Interventions aimed at Migrant Minors”

Thanks to:  
Lottomatica  
Alleanza Assicurazioni  
Toro Assicurazioni  
Fondazione Simonetta Seragnoli Onlus



PREFACE

The project “Orizzonti a Colori (Colourful Horizons) - Programme for the prevention of deviancy and for social integration of foreign minors involved in criminal proceedings”, led by Save the Children and in partnership with Centro Giustizia Minorile, Department of Social Policies and Health Promotion of Rome City Council, the associations CIES (Centre for Development Information and Education) and Casa dei Diritti Sociali, was realized in the city of Roma between September 2005 and September 2008 with the support and funding of Fondazione Vodafone Italia.

The project aimed at promoting the integration into Italian society of the minors in criminal proceedings, through activities such as street outreach, cultural mediation in Juvenile Justice institutes and residential care, experimental peer education and legal advice services. Furthermore, training of staff project workers, relevant research and awareness raising conferences outlining the project activities helped to enhance both the institutional and non-governmental sectors capacity to act on issues relating to foreign children in conflict with the law.

At the conclusion of the project, after three years of activity, we are prompted to consider the progress, achievements and knowledge acquired during this period. In particular, we are able to provide a certain interpretation of how the panorama relating to child migration to Rome has changed over the course of the years, and also regarding trends relating to deviancy and what kinds of children are involved in the criminal circuit.

The project was modified and adapted while it was being carried out in order to maximize its impact upon those for whom the activities were organised; it sought to work on and integrate those further needs which came to light during its operation and became a focal point, in the Rome area, for many foreign children who, over the years, have been able to make use of the services offered by the project.

The idea of creating a project like “Colourful Horizons” was inspired by observations by the Lazio Child Justice Centre which had identified the presence of a high percentage of unaccompanied Romanian minors inside juvenile reception centres. Responsibility for the co-ordination of the project “Colourful Horizons” was given to two coordinators, who had already previously developed a considerable field experience in relation to the target group concerned. The staff comprised of an ethnopsychologist, a legal consultant, two educators and two peer educators. This final report, as well as setting out all of the activities carried out during the course of the third year of the project, also summarises the reports of the first two years<sup>1</sup>, describing in addition a series of activities carried out “collaterally” which, though not forming part of the original structure of the project, resulted from it and were closely related, insofar as they were established on the basis of the provisions and carried out thanks to the project. The result is an overall panorama of what has been carried out in the three-year period.

<sup>1</sup> For the full reports, see [www.savethechildren.it](http://www.savethechildren.it), in the section “pubblicazioni”, year 2006 (year I of the project, in Italian) and 2008 (year II of the project, in Italian with an English translation).



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**D**uring the course of the first year (September 2005-August 2006), the activities described in the yearly programme were launched and carried out. Having structured the activities and established the necessary network of contacts, both at institutional level and among Rome’s social organisations, a detailed study was carried out of the operational context of the project. Various factors emerged from the study, which provided a better understanding of the criminal circuits in which foreign children are involved and therefore the most effective ways to intervene against this phenomenon, including preventative activities. In particular, workers in the child justice centres as well as those in private organisations felt that this phenomenon related essentially to unaccompanied foreign minors of Romanian nationality, which was the reason why the “Colourful Horizons” project was initially designed to respond to the needs of this target group. After a more detailed study of the situation, based on the knowledge which the project team gradually acquired from its own direct experience, it emerged that the majority of minors involved in illegal activities (and who were incorrectly recorded as “unaccompanied”) were in fact Roma children who often lived with their families. Indeed, unlike other Romanian children, Roma children tend to emigrate almost exclusively with their families or with extended family groups. This discovery has made it necessary to partially remodel the project during the course of its operation. The team devised innovative solutions and tried out different practices that responded more adequately to the needs of these minors, such as for example various forms of “light surveillance” of Roma minors, placing them in a residential situation (aimed at providing family, cultural and community continuity), rather than placement within a closed community.

So far as the actual implementation of project activities is concerned, a team of workers was set up to work in a **street unit**. The team consisted of two educators, two Romanian peer educators, an ethno-psychologist and a legal advisor. The group was coordinated with other similar units, already operating in the Rome area, in order to guarantee maximum efficiency and effectiveness in the activities carried out. During the course of the year, the Department of Social Policies and Health Promotion of Rome City Council, Department V, added an educator within the team for the purpose of ensuring the future sustainability of the project.

The team carried out thrice-weekly outings, into different areas and at different times, in the city of Rome, in order to meet the greatest possible number of children. In particular, the team’s operations were carried out in those areas of the city that were identified as having the highest juvenile crime rates: Piazza Repubblica, Termini railway station, bus routes that were most used by tourists (the victims most preferred by child pickpockets) and some of the stations on the underground railway.

The team workers also operated in areas where exploitation of children in prostitution was found, and consequently adopted different methods of action according to the context where they came into contact with the minors. For example, in order to deal with this particular phenomenon, harm reduction actions were adopted through the distribution of contraceptives and the spread of information about the opportunities for breaking out of the prostitution circuit. In order to create a contact with children exploited for criminal purposes, street games and leisure activities were carried out which gave the children, in their “place of work”, the possibility of amusement, making it possible for them to get away temporarily from their illegal activities. When the team entered into contact with young refugees, they were able to give them information about legal status and the possibilities of obtaining official permits. All unaccompanied minors were assured access to reception centres by being accompanied by team workers to local police stations.

Furthermore, a 24-hour telephone service was activated which was to remain operative for the entire duration of the project and where it was possible to make requests to be accompanied to medical services or short-term accommodation, legal assistance or psychological assistance.

During the course of the year, there were over 1,200 “contacts”<sup>2</sup> made with young foreigners (both children and young adults. It must be considered that during the first

street contact it is difficult to distinguish between minors and young adults, before to start a dialogue with the person. The minors resulted to be 554). Most of them were youngsters from Romania and Afghanistan. 40 minors were placed in reception centres; 10 of them, victims of exploitation from prostitution, were accompanied to the health services, in order to help them escape from the exploitative situation.

A group consisting of 2 educators and 3 peer educators carried out **social mediation** activities inside the Centro di Prima Accoglienza penale (Initial Penal Reception Centre), directed towards children (especially Roma) awaiting confirmation of a custody order. The youngsters were accompanied to civil reception centres that are authorised to provide accommodation for children awaiting trial, so as to assist their integration and reduce the risk of escape. The support activity for these children is followed up, within the reception centre, by counselling and the presence of peer educators, guaranteed by a shift system, who provide the children with a point of contact upon which they can rely on.

From the accounts given by the children, it emerged that most of the children involved in illegal activities were Roma children and (contrary to what was initially believed) accompanied by people who are or may purport to be their parents and/or relatives, and who in many cases were the victims of serious exploitation. Following this observation on the operational context of the project, it was thought appropriate to remodel certain aspects, in order to develop new action strategies that would be more appropriate and more centred upon the real needs of the children.

Reports given by the team to the police authorities, following information received from the children, contributed towards the successful outcome of two investigations on informal Roma settlements, in relation to crimes connected with pedophilia and the exploitation of children for illegal purposes.

Finally, an experiment was launched involving social mediation initiatives in informal Roma settlements, which began by contact being made with the families and continued with personal integration projects, without involving social services and institutions.

The project also provided for assistance and **ethno-psychological guidance**, aimed at children and workers in the street unit, in the Centro di Prima Accoglienza Penale and to support reception centre staff.

Interviews were carried out on the street (in this case, the ethno-psychologist joined the weekly street unit). Their purpose was to obtain a better understanding of the psychological state of those minors at risk of being exploited for the purposes of criminal activity and prostitution and aged from 12 years upwards, in order to carry out, or assess any opportunities for commencing a personal programme which could also include accommodation. Some of the interviews were then carried out with minors identified by the reception centres.

In addition a regular supervisory activity was conducted involving all operative staff in the Centro di Prima Accoglienza Penale in Rome, to promote a multidisciplinary approach to case management and taking into account certain ethno-psychological aspects.

The project also provided for the launch of a **legal advice** service in relation to immigration. The service was aimed at minors contacted during the project activities (as part of street education and social mediation activities), as well as educators in the Child Penal Institute, in order to ensure the successful outcome of education projects, and also for social services assistants in the Child Social Services Office at the Lazio Child Justice Centre. Legal assistance was provided for 32 minors during the first year of the project, 15 of which for legal procedures for regularisation or related to juvenile justice and 17 for recognition of refugee status.

The **cultural and linguistic mediation** service was set up by four Romanian mediators from NGO CIES, who worked in Juvenile Justice Centre facilities for offenders, with the aim of providing back-up services for workers during the reception and accommodation stages for minors.

Cultural and linguistic mediation has contributed on the one hand towards assisting communication between the institutional staff and foreign children; on the other hand

<sup>2</sup> For “contact” we mean each conversation held by the street unit with a child/young adult. Throughout the year, the same person may have been “contacted” several times.

it has made institutions more accessible to children, through counselling and information offered regarding the integration programmes available for minors. Furthermore, the mediation activity has provided a fundamental contribution in preventing and managing possible misunderstandings between the minors and the service workers.

The added value provided by the creation of this activity as part of the “Colourful Horizons” project involves providing a fixed shift system for cultural mediators within the residential care (and not simply on call, as previously happened). This system has made it possible on the one hand to reduce the hourly cost of the cultural mediation service; on the other hand it has made it possible for minors to identify a contact (the mediator) within the structure who is of the same nationality and on whom she or he is able to rely, not just on a casual and intermittent basis, but continually. The system has proved to be effective, above all in terms of reducing absconding by minors from civil structures.

The cultural mediators work beside the institutional operators, carrying out translation activity and improving understanding, on the part of the minors, in relation to the preventative measures imposed upon them, with de-codification actions not only in terms of language but also culture and behaviour.

At the same time as the mediation activities were being carried out, a **introductory training course in peer education and peer support** was commenced, aimed at young foreigners coming from the penal environment as well as from civil structures. The course, lasting for a total of 120 hours, involved 8 children resident in Rome and was an innovative experiment of its kind at national level. The activity made it possible to develop subsequent peer education actions, carried out by the same youngsters who attended the course.

The methodology adopted in carrying out the course (each lesson on a particular subject was supported by detailed workshop activities, the production of information or project material for activities aimed at youngsters of the same age-group, both in Italian as well as in the mother-tongue of the children concerned), made it possible for the children to share experiences, points of view and information with the adults. It was therefore possible for them to absorb the information received and stimulate their transversal communication skills (verbally and with the assistance of animation materials).

An important aspect of the first years’ work on the “Colourful Horizons” project was a series of training sessions for project workers, aimed at informing them about the situation of children at risk. Some of the sessions were:

- *Prevention against delinquency and social reintegration of foreign minors involved in criminal proceedings*, during which Save the Children presented their project and workers from the Juvenile Justice centre outlined the institutional context.
- Training on street intervention, for workers who were part of the joint street outreach unit.
- “*Little Roma Romanians*” comparative study session, with a significant contribution from Juvenile Justice centre workers.

Both these operators as well as NGO workers took part, with over 50 participants at each session.

During the course of the first year of the project, **research** was carried out into “*Opportunities and challenges for social intervention aimed at migrant minors*”. Further details about the contents and objectives of the research can be found in appendix of this publication<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> For the full research document, in Italian with an English translation, see [www.savethechildren.it](http://www.savethechildren.it), in the section “pubblicazioni”, year 2008.





**D**uring the second year of the project “Colourful Horizons” had the benefit of new experiences and activities. Following the skills acquired and the changes made in the operational context, the project also had to be remodelled, readapting to the new needs identified by the staff.

With regard to the progress of the project activities of the project, the **street unit**, which continued to operate in collaboration with Rome City Council, Department V, Social Policies and Health Promotion Department, interacted in particular with four categories of minors: young girls, mainly Romanian, involved in the prostitution circuit; Roma children living in the cities of Rome and Milan, who are exploited for the purposes of committing illegal acts; Afghan minors seeking political asylum; Romanian minors exploited in prostitution and illegal activities. The street unit was provided with a service vehicle in which it could carry out its rounds, enabling it also to reach areas on the outskirts of the city. The number of contacts with minors amounted to 1210 (727 with girls, 483 with boys).

In order to make its operations more effective and at the same time to acquire more information about the operational situation, a collaboration on some joint activities was launched together with some local associations working in the sectors of Roma support and support to victims of trafficking.

Thanks to agreements reached with these associations, the street unit was also able to obtain physical support (accommodation), where it could further develop the relationship that began in the street, arranging ethno-psychological appointments, providing legal advice, etc. **Social mediation** activities were also carried out at the Centro di Prima Accoglienza Penale in Rome. During the second year of the project, the number of contacts with minors amounted to 250, through interviews and workshop activities. The team also accompanied 52 minors to reception centres, of which 16 were penal and 36 civil. The project workers also tried to follow the minors once they had left the Centro di Prima Accoglienza Penale in Rome, visiting the informal settlements where they lived or, in certain more problematic cases, after having applied for their placement in Rome City Council’s Centre Against Child Beggars, where a peer educator was present three times a week.

**Ethnopsychological consultancy** activity also continued during the course of the second year of the “Colourful Horizons” project in the form of support interviews and psychological interviews - clinical or psychotherapeutical interviews and consultancy services to the teaching and management staff of a middle school in Rome in relation to two cases where teachers had identified strong elements of risk and psychological hardship.

The **legal advice** service within the project is arranged on three different levels: appointment following a report from the reception centres or from Rome City Council, Department V; appointment following a report from the Child Social Services Office; appointment following street contact (report from the Street Unit) or other forms of informal referral (introductory peer education courses, private reports). In particular, the legal advice service examined problems relating to conversion, renewal and issue of permits to stay obtained in various circumstances, matters relating to voluntary repatriation and employment activity during criminal proceedings.

In particular, during the course of second year of the project, the legal advice service helped 15 minors/young adults reported by the Child Social Services Office, carrying out assistance in procedures for regularisation of permits to stay, enrolment in registers of the consulates of the countries from which they originated, thus enabling them to obtain identity documents (passport, consular certificate of identity); 12 single or accompanied minors reported from the Street Unit, 8 minors, young adults and families were placed in contact with the service through other forms of formal referral.

The **cultural and linguistic mediation** activity also continued in the Juvenile Justice centres and in reception centres. Having established the importance, on the basis of the experience acquired over the first year of the project, of careful organisation and

constant coordination of the linguistic and cultural mediation activities, in the second year the activity was structured not only around contact with foreign children but also on: periodical meetings with project contacts; periodical meetings with contacts from the Juvenile Justice Centre; participation in cultural mediation sessions; participation in coordination committees; meetings with operators of monitoring centres for ongoing services; periodical meetings of mediators for assessing the progress of the service.

Various **art therapy workshops** were also set up at both the Centro di Prima Accoglienza Penale as well as the Juvenile Penal Institute. These activities represent, for the minors taking part, a moment of escape from the anxiety and stress of their situation (of detention or awaiting sentence). They also enable minors to reflect and reinterpret their situation not as the result of the misfortune of the moment (being caught in the act of committing a crime) but to see it as a mistake which has resulted from the planning of a migration project based on unreal expectations. In particular, a workshop was set up in the Juvenile Penal Institute whose end-product is a series of tables which illustrate graphically the migration route of those taking part.

Once again, in the second year of “Colourful Horizons”, as in the first year, the **introductory training course in peer education and peer support** was carried out, for a period of 120 hours, in which 10 youngsters between 16 and 20 took part; two of the youngsters in the group performed the role of peer tutors. The participants, identified by the municipal social services network and by USSM. The participants, as well as sharing their personal migration experiences and community life, had the opportunity of meeting public services representatives for minors (health, education, juvenile justice, social services) and the non-governmental organisations operating in the social sector (cultural mediation services, day centres for children, reception centres, legal services, street facilitators).

The youngsters were therefore able to make contact with adults, exchanging their points of view, obtaining information, in particular, about the integration of foreign minors in Italy, on exploitation and recruitment into deviant circuits, and also on the planning of peer education actions and services which can assist the education and support offered by adults.

Following the programme, coordinated by an ethno-psychologist and supported by a facilitator, the youngsters taking part contributed in the planning of a low threshold day centre for minors and also, by way of structured consultation, in the drafting of a protocol for the Identification and Support of child victims of trafficking and exploitation<sup>4</sup>.

A **peer education** project was commenced in April 2007, devised and carried out by I.D., a 17 year old Romanian girl living in a Roma settlement in Rome. I.D. had taken part in the 1<sup>st</sup> Introductory Course in peer education, carried out as part of the “Colourful Horizons” project. After additional training on the subjects of sex education and health, and starting a collaboration between the peer educator and the local Medical Centre, relating to the targeted counselling of girls (in particular Romanian Roma girls), I.D. carried out awareness activities aimed at girls living in her camp in relation to the services offered by the Medical Centre.

Following the resistance that she encountered while carrying out her work, in particular due to the reticence of girls in seeking support from public services, I.D. decided to prepare graphic material specifically aimed at Roma girls. In order to carry out this idea, a graphic design workshop was set up (in a different Roma camp) for a period of three months.

One of those taking part in the graphic design workshop, a 19 year old deaf Roma boy with a great artistic talent, who until that time had been involved only in begging, agreed to produce the graphic design material in collaboration with I.D. This material will be used as information material by the street unit and in the low threshold day centres. In addition, the international conference on “*The role of the peer educator in supporting young migrants and Roma*” was organised. It stimulated international

<sup>4</sup> The protocol, published as part of the project carried out by Save the Children Italy and its international partners entitled “*Development of a child-rights methodology to identify and support child victims of trafficking*”, funded by the European Commission, AGIS line, can be freely consulted on [www.savethechildren.it](http://www.savethechildren.it), section “pubblicazioni”, year 2007.



discussion and debate among experts and workers of various nationalities, especially Romanians, Albanians and Egyptians, on the question of peer education and support for young migrants and Roma. About 70 people (among them, institutional and social workers) took part in the conference.

During the course of second year of the “Colourful Horizons” project, a peer education and street unit experiment was also started in Tirana (Albania), carried out as part of the “Se Baskhu” project, funded by the OSCE/ODIHR and aimed at children who beg and work on the streets, or who are at risk of exploitation or being trafficked. The “Se Baskhu” project, which was created out of the experience started through “Colourful Horizons” made it possible for those working in the two projects in Italy and Albania to exchange experiences, encouraging the transmission of operational practices and the acquisition of new methodological skills by both groups.

One of the activities carried out at national level was the **pilot project** entitled “*Road to rights: Practices and models of intervention for the reception and social inclusion of street children exploited and/or involved in illegal activities*”<sup>5</sup>. This was carried out in Milan with experimental street units set up thanks to the collaboration of staff from “Colourful Horizons”. The project activities (funded by the Department of Equal Opportunities - Presidency of the Council of Ministers) contributed in providing information, as had already happened in Rome the previous year, for an investigation by Milan police, during which there were numerous arrests in Italy and Romania relating to the exploitation of Romanian Roma children. The pilot project also allowed for the analysis and verification of the possibility of repeating the actions in different areas.

A group of *peer researchers* devised and carried out a **peer research** project entitled “*Ragazzi ricercatori: A participatory research on the work of migrant children*”<sup>6</sup>. The initiative, carried out in collaboration with IRES (Institute of Economic and Social Research) and CGIL (Italian General Workers Federation) and supported by Rome City Council’s Minors Office, involved 6 youngsters chosen by way of a public selection procedure from among migrants from the countries most commonly found in Rome (an Ecuadorean, a Romanian Roma, an Afghan, a Moroccan, a Moldavian and an Indian). The youngsters, under the guidance of two peer tutors who had been trained in the “Colourful Horizons” project first year course, were accompanied, during the six months of the programme, by three adult project workers (a psychologist, an animator and a sociologist). This activity made it possible to obtain information about the significance that minors attributed to their work and to examine the following characteristics: the types of work in which the minors were employed, the reasons that led them to find work, the importance that they attach to training, how to reconcile study and work, what they consider to be the difference between exploitation and work, and what are the channels for integration into the job market. At the same time, the research also provided an opportunity for participation, training and empowerment for the group of young foreign workers who, with adequate training, carried out the investigation personally.

At international level, as part of the “*Girotondo*” project (funded by OCSE/ODIHR) it was possible to carry out a training exchange between Save the Children workers involved in the “Colourful Horizons” project in Rome and workers from Terre des Hommes, involved in a similar project in Craiova (Romania). The two cities were chosen because they are, respectively, a point of arrival and a point of departure for many Roma migrant children between Italy and Romania. The exchange provided a means for the workers involved to discuss methods, exchange information and compare their own operational approaches.

<sup>5</sup> The text of the final project report, in Italian with an English translation, can be found at [www.savethechildren.it](http://www.savethechildren.it), in the section “pubblicazioni”, year 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The research can be freely consulted on [www.savethechildren.it](http://www.savethechildren.it), section “pubblicazioni”, year 2007.



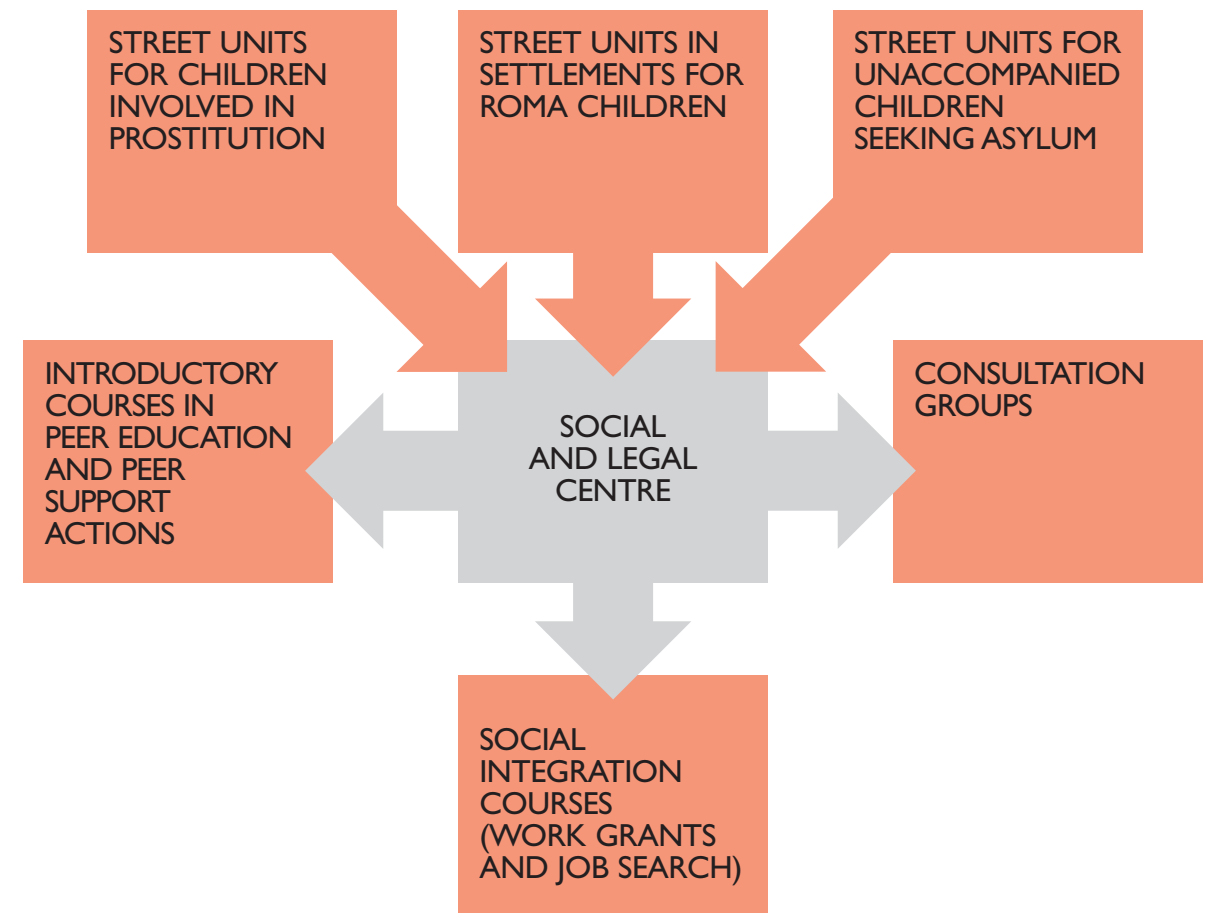
COLOURFUL HORIZONS: THIRD YEAR

The third year of the project (October 2007-October 2008) covered a period in which a growing feeling of insecurity among the Italian population developed, emphasised also by outbursts of violence involving foreign immigrants, which were highlighted by the press. This atmosphere has also had repercussions upon the ways in which foreigners in general, and Roma children in particular, live or have viewed their migratory project and above all upon the way in which they interact with the host society.

The most important development concerning the project, in its third year, was the opening of **day centre** facilities at the premises of Save the Children Italy, operating every day at pre-arranged hours, available for children to carry out various activities. The opportunity of using the centre enabled the team to develop the relationship established with the children on the street and the children themselves were able to rely upon a structured point of reference.

The **street unit**, in particular, has benefitted from the advantages of being able to arrange its project activities in a specific place. During the course of the third year of the “Colourful Horizons” project, the number of contacts with foreign minors amounted to 733, of which 411 with girls and 322 with boys. The largest nationalities represented by the contacts were Romanian (450, of which 52 with boys, 398 with girls), Afghan (270 with boys), Nigerian (6 with girls) and Bosnian (7 with girls). The contact established with the children on the street, has made it possible to develop closer links by sending them to the centre, where they have been able to take advantage of a peaceful and protected environment, and where it is possible to have private conversations with legal advisors, with the ethno-psychologist or with the mediators, depending on the individual needs. Thanks to the launch of the centre, the children contacted on the road have been able to think about the mechanisms which put them into situations of exploitation and on the health risks that come from life on the streets, as well as dangerous practices which are part of daily life. In particular, over the year 9 children were accompanied to medical appointments. The centre has proved to be of great importance also for Roma children, generally between the ages of 12 and 14, involved in pick-pocketing. After the initial contact with workers on the street unit, the children were given the address of the centre, and also information about the services that it could offer. From interviews with those children who decided to make contact, details have emerged about their living conditions. They are sometimes children who have been placed by their parents with criminal organisations in order to pay debts contracted in their countries of origin. The children who reach Italy are trained in pick-pocketing techniques, by children of their own age who are more expert, and the daily earnings gradually repay their parents’ debts. These children have been transformed into adults by their living conditions, insofar as they feel responsible, by family mandate, for the support and economic development of their family. As a result, they often refuse any kind of help. The responsibilities which they have been given make them too “adult” for schooling, while their actual age prevents them from receiving job training.

The daily social **mediation activities** at the Centro di Prima Accoglienza Penale continued also during the third year. There was a reduction in the number of minors contacted, presumably because of the fact that, following Romania’s entry into the EU, numerous families were able to support themselves legally. In addition, it is possible that, due to the climate of suspicion felt towards them, some have decided to return to their own country of origin. There has also been a notable development of social mediation activities during the course of the third year of the project, especially in settlements that have no services. The team workers have taken it upon themselves to interact not only with the children in the juvenile reception centres, but also with their families (where present). The role of “facilitators”, that team workers carry out with minors, their families and the reception centres, has brought about a better interaction between everyone involved in the process.



The project staff also noticed a consistent decrease in the number of minors whose migratory project was to come in Italy to commit illegal activities. The minors contacted in the Centro di Prima Accoglienza penale during the third year of “Colourful Horizons” were 80. The number of minors accompanied to the juvenile penal communities was 11 (3 girls and 8 boys) during the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, while to the civil communities was 8 (1 girl and 7 boys).

The **art therapy workshops** have been conducted on a twice-weekly basis at the Centro di Prima Accoglienza Penale. In addition, during the course of the third year, thanks also to the collaboration of the head of the Rome Library service, during the month of February it was possible to make arrangements for the use of 80 books within the Centro di Prima Accoglienza. The minors detained there also took part in decorating the rooms of the dormitory where they sleep at night, choosing also the colours; this activity occupied them during the two afternoons of each weekly workshop.

Inside the Juvenile Detention Centre, on the other hand, the workshop activities continued, also on a twice weekly basis.

These activities, linked with other activities organised by the project team (such as the organisation of football matches between the police warders and the children at the centres), saw the active involvement of the police warders and contributed towards improving relations between the prison authorities and the children held in the centres, and thus succeeding in overcoming divisions between “warder and thief”.

With regard to the **legal service**, assistance was provided for 22 minors/young adults referred by the Child Social Services Office. Support was given to these youngsters in applications for legal status, issue or renewal of permits to stay, for registration procedures at the consulates of countries of origin, for the purpose of issuing identity documents (passport, consular identity certificate) and for the presentation of appeals to the Tribunale Ordinario in Rome against expulsion orders. There was also a



strengthening in legal support and guidance provided for families of minors who were being assisted. This included, for example, the presentation of an appeal to the Tribunale per i Minori in order to obtain authorisation for the parent of a foreign minor to remain in Italy, or the presentation of applications for the renewal of a permit to stay, presented to the Immigration Office of the Questura in Rome. The nationalities most represented by the contact group were Albanian, Bosnian, Columbian, Moroccan and Serbian.

Together with the project staff, 35 foreign minors, single or accompanied, have been assisted by the legal service, contacted by the street unit or in other informal ways. These persons have offered support for a process of regularisation and to escape from exploitation circuits, with the joint assistance of the street unit team. In particular, 25 minors have been assisted in obtaining a placement in protected structures, with support at the same time from the police authorities. In some cases, the minors had no identity documents from their countries of origin and were the subject of expulsion orders. In relation to 11 unaccompanied minors applying for asylum, who were erroneously identified as adults, an appeal was made against the expulsion order. In some cases, a request was made for a medical examination in order to ascertain their age.

The **cultural and linguistic mediation** service was set up by four Romanian mediators working on shift with planned interventions and 10 mediators speaking other languages working on request. The mediators were from the CIES (Centre for Development Information and Education) and worked in Juvenile Justice Centre structures and communities (CPA, IPM and USSM).

The cultural mediators work together with the institutional operators, carrying out translation activity and improving understanding, not only in terms of language but also culture and behaviour.

A series of **integration and support programmes** for minors was carried out, involving children who had been contacted in various ways - from the Centro di Prima Accoglienza, Roma settlements, spontaneous settlements and peer education courses that had been carried out during previous years of the project.

In particular, during the last year of the project, as a natural progression and application of the preparatory course for peer education carried out in the previous years, there was a **“mobile” peer education and animation activity** (over a period of 5 months) entitled *“Itinerando”*. It was formed and supported by the “Colourful Horizons” team (ethno-psychologist, animator, audio-visual technician), a team of 6 youngsters between the ages of 14 and 18, from various backgrounds (Albania, Senegal, Romania, Italy, Bosnia) who were born in Rome or arrived there when they were only a few months old, with whom street entertainment was created (using a Roma legend, together with songs and hip hop dancing), to be used in order to involve and entertain children and youngsters from some of the most marginalized areas of the city (in particular some of the informal settlements and shantytowns) through the use of their own stories. The communities and the families living there opened their homes and their living spaces for the workshop rehearsals and for the performance itself. In this way it was possible to make contact and find out about the needs and conditions of many children and various families, in particular Roma families, and to commence a process of breaking down barriers and achieving a different and joint sharing of the city’s spaces.

One of the activities organised during the year was a **consultation programme** promoted by Save the Children Italia in conjunction with the Ombudsman for Children and Adolescents for Lazio in preparation for the conference entitled “Reception, protection and participation of foreign minors” (19 June 2008). Twelve youngsters of various nationalities, including Italians, who were living at home, in formal and informal Roma settlements in the Rome area or with families, took part in the consultation group. The participants, assisted by team staff from “Colourful Horizons” (an ethno-psychologist and a facilitator) and two peer tutors, analysed the

themes for the conference, developing various suggestions on the basis of their reflections (which were then submitted for the attention of the Ombudsman) and also creating four video-clips which were presented at the conference itself<sup>7</sup>.

Over the last year, with the support of the Municipal Monitoring Centre on working conditions in the City of Rome, and in partnership with IRES Cgil, **peer research** was also carried out on the question of **labour exploitation and the worst forms of labour exploitation through the activation of peer groups**, which involved 6 youngsters (foreign and Italian) acting as peer researchers. The peer research, which reached 42 marginalised minors who were involved, formally or otherwise, in work activities and resident in Rome, enabled the researchers to study and consider the involvement of minors in various forms of exploitation, the operational mechanisms and risk factors, the relationships with schooling, and the possible methods of prevention, especially for the most marginalised groups.

Between March and June 2008, in collaboration with the Agenzia di Ricerca Sociale Codici in Milan, an ethnographical research was carried out entitled *“Cash Cash - Adolescenti Rom tra inclusione sociale e strategie di affermazione (Rom adolescents: social integration and achievement strategies)”*. The research was carried out in Milan, Rome and Craiova (Romania).

The research made it possible to study the dynamics of local development in various districts where there is a prevalence of Roma inhabitants in the city of Craiova, looking at the role of migratory routes towards Italy, in order to reach a better understanding of the phenomenon and to improve the impact of interventions carried out, with particular regard to education and health. The area of Craiova was chosen as a base for the research due to the high migration level among its young residents towards Italy. Thanks to the contribution provided by the research, it was possible to propose ways of interpreting the migratory routes taken by the Roma community, basing these theories on the increased knowledge obtained not only in relation to the destinations but also the departure points for the migratory route.

The **training** activities in the third year of the project have included: a **course in ethno-psychiatry** for project staff, conducted by a doctor specialising in clinical psychiatry, ethno-psychiatry, trans-cultural medicine, medical anthropology and cultural psychiatry, and carried out in different modules (specifically, modules on understanding psychological processes in a trans-cultural context, on migration, on medical anthropology, on the history of medicine, on migration and social hardship, on structuring the interpretative model, on clinical cases and a specific module on Roma); a **course for cultural mediators in child justice** in collaboration with CIES, to provide further professional training in cultural-linguistic mediation. In addition to presenting the project, the course provided information on the services provided by the Juvenile Justice Centre, on the legislation concerning foreign and EU minors, on the models, instruments and intervention methods to be adopted in order to tackle phenomena of deviancy, on interpersonal communication, on linguistic and cultural mediation, and on the ethical rules of the linguistic and cultural mediation service.

Finally, as part of the training exchange between workers on the “Colourful Horizons” project and the Se Baskhu project, aimed at vulnerable children on the city of Tirana (Albania), a course was carried out on the theme of **street health** in collaboration with the INMP (National Institute for Health Migration and Poverty) and the Istituto S. Gallicano, Rome, which involved around 20 public sector and NGO workers.

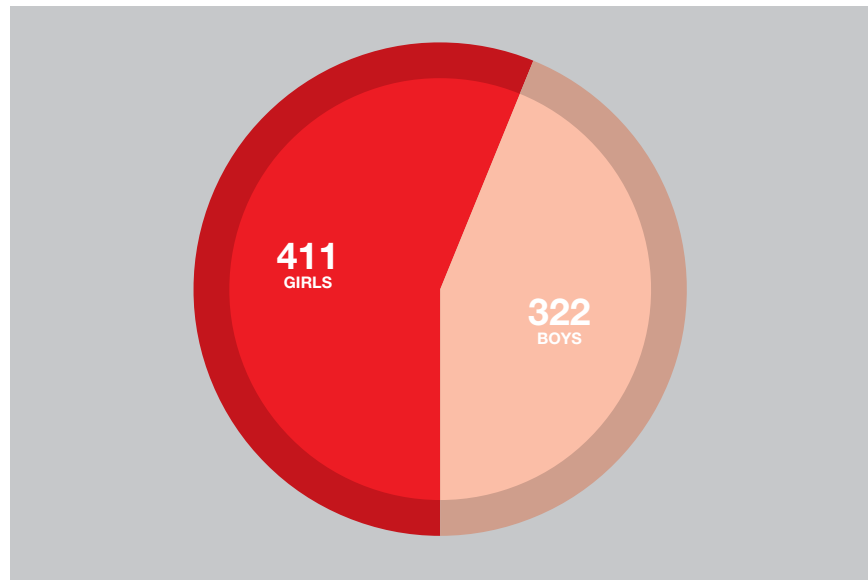
The introductory courses on peer education and peer support, the consultancy courses, peer research on the question of employment and exploitation of child labour, and mobile workshops involving peer entertainment have involved, and supported through study grants, around 50 minors and young adults (between 14 and 20 years of age) who were at risk of social marginalisation. These programmes have been organised in order to apply and experiment prevention, support, ethno-psychological and psycho-social activities, at individual and community level, in relation to the target for this project. The youngsters themselves, who have been

<sup>7</sup> The publication related to the consultation activity, showing its objectives and methodology, entitled “Paurismo e altre storie” (only in Italian), can be found at [www.savethechildren.it](http://www.savethechildren.it), in the section “pubblicazioni”, year 2008.

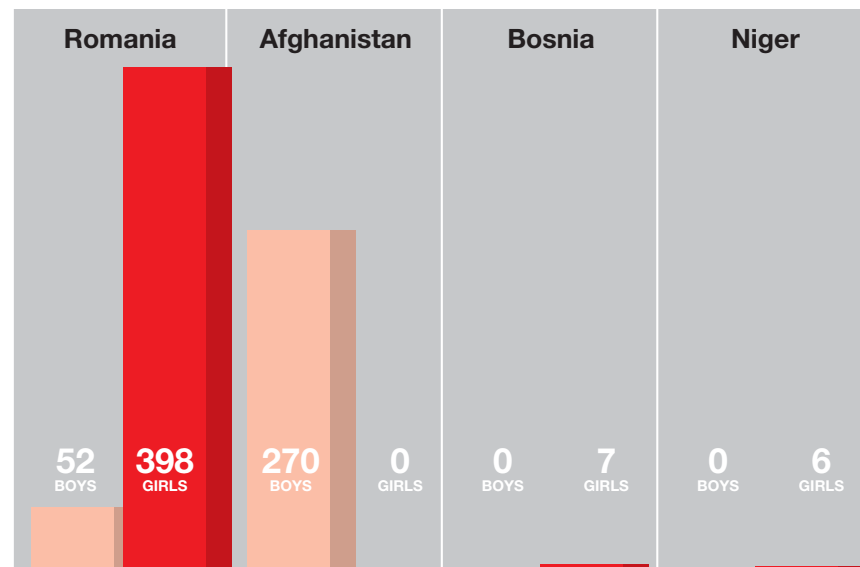
**COLOURFUL HORIZONS: THIRD YEAR**

involved and received training during these activities, have been able to express and share their own views with the adults and institutional workers who have assisted them, and thus to acquire, observe and spread respect and the practice of fundamental rights among youngsters of their own age, and with whom they share their lives (families, districts, Roma settlements, informal settlements, schools), using new methods for social integration and for preventing the risk of exploitation (in employment, in the commission of illegal activities, in prostitution), for understanding and trusting the public services available, and also through alternative opportunities provided by education and entertainment.

**CONTACTS WITH BOYS AND GIRLS OVER THE THIRD YEAR**



**MOST REPRESENTED NATIONALITIES IN THE CONTACTS OVER THE THIRD YEAR**



**CONCLUSIONS**



CONCLUSIONS

From the experience of these three years, it is possible to make various remarks of a methodological nature, based on both theoretical as well as practical experience acquired from the field work carried out.

- Peer education: the gradual professionalization of peer educators has had a negative impact on their activity insofar as they gradually began to feel that they were more social workers than peer educators. Since peer education represents a success factor in the life of the minors contacted, it is necessary for the peer educators to be perceived by the target group as, on the one hand, belonging to the peer group and, on the other hand, as agents of change. When the peer worker acquires skills, obtains an employment contract and receives a fixed income, she/he passes over the ideal border line between client and worker, arriving in a point of limbo in which in reality she/he can no longer be a client, but does not yet have the professional tools to be a social worker. We therefore suggest that peer education should be distinguished on two levels: on the one hand, a level which we might describe as “soft” peer education and support, which is that offered through introductory courses and the various peer activities, and on the other hand, a level of actual education among peers which should provide a programme of schooling and vocational training for the peer educator, who should therefore be able to move from being the client figure to that of social worker.
- Cultural-linguistic mediation: it is important that a cultural-linguistic mediator builds on their basic skills with specific training on the context in which they are called to intervene. In the Colourful Horizons project, the in-depth understanding of the role and function of both the workers and network of services, as well as daily contact with children, allowed the Cultural-Linguistic Mediators to better assess the needs of beneficiaries and guide the relevant activities for their benefit.
- Street units: by reason of their streamlined and flexible nature, street units provide a highly effective way of monitoring changes and transitions in the operational situation. It is therefore necessary, especially in the case of minors, for the unit not to stick to a specific target for action (Roma children, children exploited for prostitution, etc.) but be prepared with a range of different tools and methodologies, so that the unit can adapt its activities to changes of situation, which might result from different causes (e.g. approval of new laws, which lead to a change in migration flow, which might have an effect on the target concerned).
- Accommodation and care: Save the Children finds that the creation of a network between the various residential care facilities and relevant procedural agreements would ensure the development of an efficient casework system for the assistance and care of children. In particular, minimum reception and care standards should be set at national and regional level, including: keeping children in a safe, secure place, which is welcoming family environment where a child is heard and respected; access to essential items (adequate food, suitable conditions to guarantee personal hygiene in concordance with the maximum number of places provided by law) and social-sanitary services offered on equal terms with Italian minors; protection from any form of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.
- Save the Children hopes for the adoption of the best reception standards possible, especially in consideration of migrant children present: provision of free legal assistance and cultural-linguistic mediation services by the residential care providers, as well as a service which guarantees a child’s regularisation and access to education, including secondary education, professional training and work opportunities. To that end, it is recommended that residential care workers receive further professional training on looking after unaccompanied migrant minors.

The commitment shown by the Juvenile Justice Centre over the years towards residential care in the Rome area is therefore greatly appreciated: its knowledge of those facilities which are suitable for children coming from penal institutes; joint training with social services and other workers; consultation, support and follow up regarding placements in general.

CASE STUDY

Y contacted in the Centro di Pronto Accoglienza Penale, had been arrested for theft with a credit card. Placed at liberty by the judge at the preliminary hearing, he was accompanied by workers from Save the Children Italia to a reception centre for minors. However Y absconded after the admission interview. During the journey, Y had been given the telephone number of the street unit, which operated 24 hours a day, and the address of the Save the Children day centre. Y began to visit the centre, establishing a relationship of trust with the workers. During the interviews with him, they began to learn about his personal history. Y describes how, when he was still living in Romania, he received a telephone call from an adult friend who convinced him to come to work in Italy. When he arrived in Italy and met his friend, he was introduced to the work that he would have to carry out. Y realised that the activity was not legal: it involved going to buy articles in shops, paying with cloned credit cards, receiving a monthly remuneration of 50 euros and the promise of being able to keep for himself some of the articles purchased. After his arrest, Y did not resume his illegal activity but indicated to the workers, with embarrassment and reticence, that he was in serious economic difficulty: within a few days he did not even have enough to eat. Once he had gained the trust and confidence of the workers, they made Y understand the importance of a placement in a reception centre for minors, of regularising his position in Italy and of trying to find a proper job. Y accepted and the project workers once again accompanied him to a reception centre for minors. At present Y continues to attend the Save the Children centre where he has taken part in consultation and peer research meetings, and he has been offered an employment grant, currently being carried out, for a job placement.

CASE STUDY

X was contacted in the Centro di Pronto Accoglienza Penale. He was unable to provide the educators with a telephone contact number for his family. According to the law, if the family does not appear before the judge at the moment of the preliminary hearing, upon their release from a facility with no sentence pending, that is, if the child is otherwise free to go, the foreign child is placed in a secure place, being in a civil reception centre, from which he generally escapes a few hours later. Save the Children workers spoke to X and explained the situation to him. X said that his parents are living in an illegal settlement in the city. The workers went there and met X’s mother. She described how she had been contacted by someone who said that he was a lawyer, who told her that her son was in prison and then demanded a large amount of money to follow the case. The workers explained to the mother that X was not in prison but in the Centro di Pronto Accoglienza and that he would have had the right to free legal assistance for the presentation of the case. However it was important that one of the parents were present at the preliminary hearing. On the day of the hearing, X’s mother appeared and the judge gave her custody of her son. The Save the Children workers fixed an appointment with X at the “Colourful Horizons” project day centre. During the meetings, X told the workers how he spent his days begging at traffic lights in order to obtain money for food and cigarettes and, if he had saved something, also for some clothing and the Nike trainers that he longed for. He also added that he was often approached at the traffic lights by adults who offered him money in exchange for sexual services. The Save the Children workers invited X to join a work group which was carrying out peer research. He was awarded a study grant which enables X to spend less time at the traffic lights and to gain trust in his own abilities to do something else.

## A SYNTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH "OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT MIGRANT MINORS"<sup>8</sup>

by Nicola Mai<sup>9</sup>

### Introduction

This research is part of the "Colourful Horizons" project. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

<sup>8</sup> An English version of the research is available to [www.savethechildren.it](http://www.savethechildren.it), section "pubblicazioni".

<sup>9</sup> Nicola Mai works as researcher (anthropologist) of migratory processes at the Institute for the Study of Social Transformations in Europe, at the London Metropolitan University (London).

### 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.

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 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 Italy

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 selfreliance.

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.

