



## Interview with a Juvenile Judge: Elena Buccoliero, in the Emilia Romagna Region, Italy

### **1) Given your work experience, what do you think could be considered the most critical points in the reception system of unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy and in Emilia Romagna?**

There are numerous critical points, which have been very well identified I think by the Net for U project, just as the strengths have been identified.

Speaking about weaknesses and threats, one of these is the lack of a national fund, or at least regional, for the reception of unaccompanied foreign minors; the reality shows now a days a “*painful rebound*” of responsibility between the municipalities to decide who should pay the fees of the placement of these subjects. Perhaps this is not the main problem but it gives an idea of how the reception of these minors is considered, at an institutional level, as a burden reflecting on the fact that the principle that Italy is using so “*the responsibility lies with those who found the minor*”.

Then, when for a child/minor/young the condition of uncertainty about a minimum fact as the placement where live is missed everything else is suspended: which doctor can cure them? which school can attend these children? In which territory have been requested the documents? Or other matters relating to the reality marked from the condition of being a migrant.

I also think that a fundamental weakness is in a mode of reception that often, even when not acting by subtraction skills, takes into account most of the “*hic et nunc*” (here and now) than the project life of the individual.

The measures put in place meet the immediate need to give hospitality, education, health care ... but only partially takes into account what the child wanted to realize with his/her trip. Many tell that they left for a better future so giving a very general answer but each social worker knows that each of them are able to detail the objectives, the dreams, the expectations.

If we want to take care of each story that each of these minors brings with him/her we have to “equip” ourselves in a better giving them more stability. The lack of cultural mediators, ethno-psychologists and ethno-psychiatrics in the health services is a very serious matter considering both the rightful difficulties that an operator may encounter in dealing with young people of other cultures and in terms of needs, uncertainties, trauma that many of these children bring with them (long journey, hard situations in the Country of origin, etc.)

### **2) Do you think that family tracing in the case of minors from 13/14 years could be considered a path to pursue with the finality of a reunification?**

I think it is certainly a way to pursue but not always in view of a reunification.

It is to be pursued, in the meantime, to understand the story of the minor since it is essential to recognise and assure him/her rights and needs.





Speaking in detail, there will be cases where it's desirable that the reunification takes place but others where the minors must be protected even from their family of origin because he/she could be sold out or exploited for prostitution.

At the Juvenile Court where I'm working I don't have many opportunities to meet unaccompanied foreign minors, rather, only when they are very young or if they commit crimes.

Despite these few moments, I get from them stories of families that would be better not to meet again or other stories with fragmented families perhaps torn by dramatic events - deaths, violence - but love from these minors: these children do not want to go on without the involvement of their parents regardless of the construction of a life plan.

**3) What do you think are the strengths from which to restart to improve our capacity for the reception of unaccompanied minors at national level? And at the regional level?**

At a national and regional level the strengths are all the actions already functioning in our country: the motivation of the operators, the reception capacity of facilities, the flexibility of volunteering and also some good experimentations funded by European programs or otherwise episodic and term activities.

I think it would be useful and intelligent, perhaps even less expensive in the long run, to put all these actions into a "system" logic creating "stability" because we cannot think that the arrival of these children (and of migrants in general) is concluding itself.

Italy today is going through a crisis, but other countries have more problems than us; moreover we have to remind that Italy is considered as a country of transit and so this process will proceed.

The International Social Service exists and in my experience of contact with workers I have seen that it is perceived as something far away; it seems to me that very little effort has been made to open our vision that goes across the border.

The Italian reality sometimes experiences difficulty in asking for cooperation from another social service in another Italian region.

I am reminded of the case of a girl who lived in a city in my region with an alcoholic mother totally unfit to take care of her; she had the opportunity to be reunited (voluntarily!) with her father in their country of origin and let me say that this happened for reasons completely fortuitous. Her social assistance took part in a European project and she met a colleague coming from the same place of origin of the girl. This chance allowed the reunion with the father, emotionally available, certainly not rich but economically stable nonetheless (more so than the mother in Italy) and therefore able to take care of her and genuinely wanting to do so. This reunion was possible not for a network already implemented and then I wonder why such contacts cannot be stable and well structured.

I would like to point out one last thing.

In our country Catholic volunteer work is widespread and this is certainly a good thing. However I hope to assist with the long-term growth of an Italian volunteer work that can perhaps more easily meet the needs of the children, their culture and the religion.





I know that the Catholic volunteer knows how to be respectful and I'm not referring to "forcing" but I think that, especially in a phase of initial reception, it may be important for the child to feel recognized for their "features".

***Elena Buccoliero*** is a graduate of the University of Bologna in Political Science and Sociology.

*In 1997 she started to work at Promeco or a service of the Department for Youth Policy of the Municipality of Ferrara that carries out activities generally within the Institutes of Secondary Education of first and second degree (education, prevention, conflict to bullying).*

*After a six years' experience at the Office of the Ombudsman of Emilia Romagna, she started to work at the Municipality of Ferrara in 2013.*

*In 2007 she became Honorary Judge of the Juvenile Court of Bologna.*

*She is an expert in the following topics: bullying, smoking prevention, educational relationships in adolescence, alcohol consumption in adolescence, the use of media and cultural integration in the school.*

*She is currently enrolled in a two-year course for psychological counselors organised by the IACP (Istituto per un Approccio Centrato sulla Persona) in collaboration with the University of Verona.*

*Since 2000, she had been the contact person for the project "Ferrara Cities of Peace" for the Department of Youth Policy and International Relations of the City and since 2002, has collaborated with the Office of the Civil Service to train volunteers in the civil service.*

*She also performs journalist and narration activity.*

