



European Forum on Street Children 2012

Unaccompanied minors victims of violence: Origins, manifestations, and prevention strategies to overcome the 'hidden' phenomenon of children suffering in the shadow.

A challenge to European and national child rights policies

SUMMARY REPORT



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Welcoming addresses

Alessandro Padovani, *Director of Istituto Don Calabria*, introduced the 2012 edition of the European Forum on Street Children and its focus on unaccompanied minors victims of violence by highlighting the cross-disciplinary nature of the problem. This requires a deep reflection on the policy context regarding migration and asylum seeking, while at the same time the development of individualized intervention strategies based on the individual experiences and expectations of children. The collaboration of the European Federation of Street Children, working on European policy of relevance for socially excluded children, with Istituto Don Calabria, daily involved in the analysis and intervention with vulnerable children and adolescents, provides a promising mix of competences.

Reinhold Müller, *Director of EFSC*, welcomed the participants of the Forum expressing the hope that the conference would constitute an encounter of ideas from different institutions and countries of Europe just as the Verona, has been a key historical node in Europe since the Roman times. He also transmitted cordial welcoming greetings from Mrs. Margaret Tuite, Child Rights Coordinator at the European Commission and Mr. Marco Rossi-Doria, Under-State Secretary at the Italian Ministry of Education both of whom were unfortunately not able to attend the Forum due to prior commitments. Reinhold Müller highlighted the hidden and growing dimension of the phenomenon of unaccompanied minors, which touches all Member States due to the increasing European integration. Recognising the growing challenge, the EU has adopted an EU Agenda on the Rights of the Child in 2011 and an Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors in 2010. Still, compliance with these documents is still insufficient in many Member States. A bottom-up approach centred on a holistic assessment of individual needs, public-private partnerships and inter-institutional networking are required and should be framed in a European-wide perspective.

Edgardo Iozia, *Secretary General of the UILCA, Member of the EESC, and President of Prosolidar*, the solidarity fund of workers in the Italian credit sector that since 2007 has been supporting EFSC projects, expressed his thankfulness to the presents for their daily endeavours to combat extreme child exclusion. He highlighted the fact that he considers the contributions of Prosolidar as reciprocity, where the payback is in terms of the precious work of child protection NGOs.

Jasmina Byrne, *Child Protection Specialist at UNICEF*, greeted the participants on behalf of her organisation. She stressed that unaccompanied minors stand very high on the UNICEF agenda, due to their extreme vulnerability to violence that touches all dimensions of children's

rights envisaged in the UN CRC. They are not protected by their reference adults, are not documented and are denied access to protection, health and other social services. Supporting them in expressing their views is crucial towards improving their enjoyment of their rights.

Anna Leso, Councillor for Social Services, Equal Opportunities and Family in the Municipality of Verona, welcomed the participants on behalf of the mayor of Verona Flavio Tosi and stressed the commitment of the Municipality to the inclusion of unaccompanied minors. The programme for child protection has been potentiated following the inflow of unaccompanied minors from North Africa in recent years.

I. MAKING THE 'INVISIBLE' VISIBLE:

Forms and root causes of violence against unaccompanied minors in Europe. The humanitarian, legal and political dimension of the phenomenon.

Assessing origin families' behavior to better understand the migratory paths and related needs of unaccompanied migrant children once in Italy.

Silvia Spinuso, *Project Officer, International Organisation for Migrations*

The importance of family tracing is envisaged in the Italian legislation. Family tracing follows the identification work on unaccompanied children for which local authorities are responsible. Based on the information provided by the local authorities, the family of origin is contacted. The IOM project on family tracing consists of series of interviews in the places of origin, followed by meetings with the minors aimed at understanding the individual migration project and the plans to return home. The interviews with the family provide very precious information about the children which are useful to implement a more adequate intervention strategy.

The IOM project has so far led to 1500 family tracings and to supporting 17 unaccompanied minors to return to their families – after careful consideration of the children's best interest. It is still ongoing and the feedbacks of children and partners contribute to a continuous revision of the questionnaires used for the interviews.

The profile of the migrating unaccompanied child involved in the project is that of an adolescent (16-17 years), male, originating from Bangladesh, Albania, Kosovo, Senegal, Palestine. The qualitative results of the project show that not all of the unaccompanied minors involved had particular vulnerabilities; in many cases, the decision to migrate was due to the strong influenc-

es of the families. In other cases, the migration decision was to escape from different kinds of abuses. Among these, the few girls were among the most vulnerable: they were escaping early marriage, violence within the families, alcoholism in their families, witnessed violence.

The interviews revealed in particular the heavy burden imposed by families influencing the children's decisions to migrate. The responsibility that children feel towards their families in fulfilling their expectations about the migration is a key aspect in the family tracing project and in the decision to return home. It is worth mentioning that, even if the number of children who reported to escape from abuses was limited, only a tiny minority of them were willing to return home.

The Balkans as a transition region for unaccompanied minors and trafficking of children. Comprehensive protection of children on the move against violence

Nevena Milutinovic, Child Protection Co-ordinator Save the Children North-West Balkans

Save the Children North-West Balkans has recently finalised a consultation process with "children on the move" in Serbia, which is considered in most cases a transition country. "Children on the move" is an umbrella definition for persons under the age of 18 who have left their place of habitual residence and are either on the way towards a new destination, or have already reached such destination. "Children on the Move" may be:

- across State borders or within countries;
- movement can be of a seasonal or more permanent nature;
- movement can be voluntary or forced;
- they can be accompanied by parents, peers or others, or not;
- and children who are, for instance: internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees, migrants, trafficked persons or child soldiers.

Statistical data are lacking; however, through the work of the NGO about 70% of the children who were identified as victims of trafficking are estimated to fall victims of trafficking again and again, after they exit the care system. A key problem in this regard is, according to the Trafficking in Persons Report 2011, the little capacity of the local authorities to implement the agreements they bound themselves to.

Save the Children has investigated children's views on their position and rights through a direct consultation, which included a game reproducing the trip that children had gone through. This methodology allowed a meaningful expression of the experiences the children went through, which represented in many cases the only means

for them to express their traumas. Listening to the children's stories, it becomes evident how important siblings and other children are in building their resilience; but it also becomes clear that among their most urgent needs are practical information about their rights, the legal procedures, and the host country, and even on how to solve simple daily tasks such as washing up their clothes. Children revealed to have a good knowledge of their rights and this highlights the unacceptable differences in the enjoyment of the rights for "children on the move" and children residing in transition countries even more evidently.

Child Trafficking in the Nordic Countries: Rethinking Strategies and National Responses.

Jasmina Byrne, Child Protection Specialist at UNICEF

The UNICEF Report on Child Trafficking in Nordic countries contributed to shed light on child trafficking and national responses policies in Nordic countries who, as a matter of fact, have shown a shared and strong commitment towards addressing child protection especially from trafficking, which has led to the direct incorporation of relevant provisions in the national legislations; yet, the report revealed the need to fine-tune the action to more specific and concrete steps. At the same time, the institutional mandates regarding children victims of trafficking, migrating children and asylum-seeking children are responsibilities of different ministries, in a way that the service provision turns out to be fragmented and in some cases even overlapping. The specific needs of children suffering from multiple forms of discrimination and exploitation risk remaining unaddressed. Categorization of children according to policy concepts is complex; not even all exploited children fall neatly in the definition of trafficked children, so the concept of "potential victim of trafficking" is more recommendable.

Another issue is related to constructing a profile of unaccompanied children that is common across countries, in order to coordinate intergovernmental actions. Besides the great difficulties in the identification of these minors, often travelling with adults with false documents, and of ascertaining their minor age, the development of a profile of these children is complicated by the fact that the analysis of their needs and exploitation patterns is not homogeneous across countries. Moreover, children's resilience to abuses and exploitation can reach the point that they get used to their condition and that their vulnerability does not necessarily show, which requires highly trained personnel and considerable resources to bring problems to light and to intervene.

A further concern of the report is that of child participation. The interpretation of the best interest of the child can vary across contexts and cultures and makes it crucial to listen

directly to the children's perspectives. On the contrary, the report revealed that children are not necessarily consulted before their cases are presented in the courts, and that their options to complain about judgements are very limited.

The discrimination and social exclusion that unaccompanied children suffer from preventing them from accessing as many social services as the children of the host society do. Unaccompanied children in conflict with the law are not necessarily protected in their status of children: the report shows a number of cases where detention is not considered a last resort as it would be recommended by the UNCRC. In some cases children are even detained together with adults, which constitutes a serious risk for them. This occurs most often in the context of detention in identification centres, highlighting the serious limitations of the Dublin II directive, which does not ban the detention of children in such centres and assumes a homogeneous respect of basic standards in these centres that is hard to find in reality.

In spite of the shortcomings identified by the report, the governments have taken the recommendations seriously. However, much work has still to be done to ensure, in particular, especially, that the voices of children be heard as part of their normal practice.

The discussion that followed Ms. Byrne's intervention highlighted that the issue of child participation is problematic in other countries as well, such as in Italy, where the literature on the issue is limited. The distinction between the legal right of children to be heard and the empowerment process required to enable children to get the necessary self-confidence to express their views and to tell their stories was highlighted. A combined action at the macro level of the national (and supra-national) institutional system as well as at the micro-level of the intervention is required to promote safe and meaningful child participation.

Unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers in Italy with a special focus on violence: Facts, main tendencies and national strategies for rehabilitation and integration

Stefania Congia, *Director Department for Integration Policies and Protection of Foreign Minors, DG Immigration and Integration, Italian Ministry of Labour*

The great challenge for institutions is that of moving from the micro, ad hoc intervention level to the impersonal and systemic macro level, to ensure that the context is functional to the protection of children's rights even in the context of emergencies.

The Italian regulation on Immigration, the Testo Unico

sull'Immigrazione, establishes the right for the foreign minor not to be expelled from the Italian territory. In the absence of a reference adult, the minor is in charge of local authorities under standards that are defined by the applicable regional authorities - this implies that the regulations are differentiated across regions.

The enjoyment of the right not to be evicted from the Italian territory is to be protected, first of all, from those irregular immigrants who aim at enjoying the privileges of minors without being minors. In some cases, these are much older than 18 years of age, which generates problems of promiscuity in the reception centres. Thus, the system must ensure effective identification and age-detection techniques. Any body entering into contact with foreign minors must report their presence to a central body, now the General Directorate on Immigration and Integration. This way, the Ministry is able to collect data about all children who enter into contact with the authorities. In recent years, about 6000 unaccompanied foreign minors were registered every year. However, the effectiveness of the data collection and of the first care system depends on the effectiveness of the local authorities, which is very differentiated across regions.

Until recently, the immigration policy regarding minors foresaw that the minor had to spend at least 3 years in Italy and to undergo at least 2 years of care before he/she could get a stay permit when he/she would turn 18. This requirement was impossible to fulfil for the majority of minors, who often enter Italy when they are 16-17 years old; furthermore, many children enter Italy as a transition country and thus are not intentioned to remain in care for two years. This regulation has recently been relaxed: a positive opinion of the DG Immigration is sufficient to award a residence permit if the above conditions are not fulfilled.

The economic crisis and the austerity policies have drastically reduced the funds of the DG Immigration, which is now running its activities with no funds to invest in social policies. To come round these difficulties, the DG is establishing partnerships with European funds such as the European Social Fund and the European Integration Fund, as well as with NGOs and local authorities, in order to work on the employability and qualification of the foreign minors that are presently on the Italian territory, and to address urgent issues such as the trafficking of girls, who in spite of not being a large number (6% of foreign minors) are extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation and other kinds of abuses.

The EU is taking actions on unaccompanied minors and has organised meetings on the issues of the guardianship and of family tracing. However, the effectiveness of this action is limited by the excessive fragmentation

of the competences on the one side, and on the other side by the lack of a common definition and of a similar legal framework for the intervention on unaccompanied minors. A standardisation of the protection levels is difficult to attain as the dimension of the phenomenon is not homogeneously distributed across European countries, and the expenditures in child protection policies that countries like Italy are undergoing cannot realistically be asked to all EU Member States. At the same time, the role of border regions as transit countries is apparent in the data on the requests of asylum: since the approval of the Dublin II Regulation in 2009, by which the asylum seeking child may be transferred to the country where the request for asylum has been lodged, the demands have dropped by 20%. This shows that Italy is in a number of cases considered a transition country and that integrated European action is necessary to ensure that the right to asylum is enforced and that children do not fall into illegal immigration circles.

While willing to address the needs of unaccompanied minors in an integrated way, it is necessary to remain realistic and to ensure the sustainability of the actions: care is extremely costly and raising too much the level of protection may imply that the rights become “non-exigible” for all in the long run.

Key progresses towards the sustainability of the interventions are in terms of improving the transparency in the public budgets and measures, and in terms of a continuous, bidirectional exchange of information across different institutional divisions, with different levels of government as well as with different actors, especially with the civil society, for the constant improvement of data collection.

Another aspect worth a reflection is that of “graduating” the interventions based on the age of the target group. Younger children require quite a different intervention strategy from adolescents, and the budgets involved have very different magnitudes; at present, Italian legislation in a way “averages” the interventions by treating all minors the same way; a possible way to increase the efficiency of public spending could be in studying differentiated policies for different age groups, of the kind that the Emilia Romagna region is experimenting. Similarly, the curricula are often not tailored to the age groups of children and may not always be appropriate.

On the other hand, the policy fragmentation along categorisations of children that often respond to bureaucratic distinctions rather than to the actual needs of children, remind us that it is necessary to look at children, first of all, as children, respecting all of their complexity and cultural background.

The discussion following Ms. Congia’s intervention high-

lighted the need for coordination between origin, transition and destination countries, and of holistic intervention measures that integrate the satisfaction of basic health and accommodation needs with educational, psychological and cultural assistance. It was restated that, unless upon a carefully verified specific request of the minor, any foreign minor in Italy cannot be sent back to his/her origin country.

II. FROM PREVENTION TO INTEGRATION

Best practice approaches of NGOs and local authorities to break the vicious circle of violence and social exclusion for children at risk. Case studies from Italy and other EU countries.

From emergency support to re-integration: the Italian experiences related to legal assistance and representation targeted to unaccompanied minors subject to violence in the country of destination

Aurea Dissegna, Public Guardian for Minors Office for the Protection and Guardianship of Minors in Veneto

In the context of the care and integration responsibility for the legal representation of an unaccompanied child. The function of the Voluntary Guardian, a bridge between the judiciary and the executive systems, is “subsidiary” in that it exclusively serves to bridge between these systems. Besides the representation function, the guardian is in charge of managing bureaucratic procedures on behalf of the child, of monitoring the quality of the care received by the child (but is not in charge of taking care of him/her) and of listening to the child, understanding her migration project and needs to facilitate her integration process. The guardian’s activities are also in turn monitored.

The initiative is also intended to return the civil society its public function and to contribute to inter-institutional networking.

The voluntary Public Guardians are organised around a central office in contact with the judiciary authority; the office works on the identification of standards, the elaboration of national guidelines and the promotion of adequate measures; the link with the local level is ensured by about 50 territorial referents, in charge of the matching of the child with the guardian. Technical competences of the guardian on the case of the child, a sufficient age difference and harmony of the ethical backgrounds enter importantly in the selection.

Guardians are between 30-65 years of age (most of them

between 30-55) and are on average highly educated.

Not all unaccompanied children in the territory of Veneto come so far as to get a guardian. Many of them proceed towards further destinations, either because of previous plans or because of exchanges with other migrants; in sum, many of them disappear from the statistics after identification. The average age of unaccompanied children has dropped in recent years in order to comply with the requirements of the "security package" policies (mentioned above) passed in 2009. At present, 249 unaccompanied children have been registered in Veneto. The protection of these children is made more complex by inhomogeneous treatments and judicial systems across countries, by different bureaucratic requirements to get a stay permit, inhomogeneous data collection mechanisms, and extremely high economic costs.

The function of the guardian needs to adapt to the individual child, meaning that for each minor under his/her guardianship, an individual integration project has to be established together with the minor; importantly, the guardian must be honest and not create false expectations, taking responsibility for being an emotional reference for the child.

process of unaccompanied minors, one of the critical issues concerns the legal representation of minors to all legal purposes connected with their status. In most countries this role has traditionally been attributed to institutional representatives, which satisfied the formal need for representation, but deprived the child from the emotional dimension connected with the guardianship. The UNCRC recognized the importance of the legal representation of minors deprived of a reference adult.

One year before the UNCRC, the Veneto region introduced the institution of the Voluntary Guardian for minors: a citizen who, after appropriate training, voluntarily takes

United for children. From the international to the local and from the local to the international

Nicola Brotto, *UNICEF provincial committee in Verona*

The main objective of UNICEF is to ensure the implementation of the UNCRC worldwide through activities such as advocacy, development of best practices, elaboration of standards and fundraising activities. It is not a field-operating body directly involved with children. The structure of the UNICEF is stratified and composed of regional and provincial committees. The UNICEF provincial committee in Verona, a predominantly voluntary structure, is mainly involved in fundraising activities, awareness-raising campaigns, and inter-institutional coordination, with the aim to fulfil the basic principles of respect for the best interest of the child, protection, non-discrimination, health and participation.

Its involvement the Observatory on Childhood has allowed to work on territorial data with child-rights based lenses; its cooperation with the local educational agency has brought to the development of self-evaluation protocols for professors and other social services providers involved with children. The close coordination with the institutions allows bringing UNICEF claims directly to the attention of the highest institutional representatives of the province; in this process, younger volunteers prove to be the most qualified and professional.

The activities of such committees highlight the importance of a capillary structure in raising awareness in the public about the costs and the needs to raise funds for advocacy activities.

The EFSC project ESCAPE (Daphne III): Prevention of marginalised minors against violence through strengthening of life skills, self-confidence and conflict solving - a trans-national street/peer violence prevention and contrast

Carla Chirico, *Information, PR and Sponsorship Officer, EFSC*

The aims of the ESCAPE project relate to the achievement of a transnational knowledge exchange on methodologies to contrast and to prevent violence against children with a migration/minority background. To these ends, the project has carried out a mapping and analysis of best practices and, based on this and building on the coordination among NGOs involved in child protection EU-wide, is developing a transnational violence prevention programme. After testing the methodology contained in the programme, the project will lead to the development of a practice-oriented toolkit to support the action of NGOs in the field.

The violence prevention programme applies a methodology based on life skills training methods and is organised in a series of sessions held with children. Feedbacks on the pilot implementation of these sessions have been positive, both from the children's and from the social workers' sides, and have contributed to improve social workers' understanding about what children themselves consider as important in a programme: in most cases, anger management and support in being able to say "no". It showed the crucial role of communication between social workers and children in the implementation of violence prevention strategies and, not least, contributed to highlight aspects for improvement. For example, the pilot phase has highlighted the controversial nature of the use of images and movies to convey messages, the need to shorten the sessions and make them more child-friendly in content

and environment. It also highlighted structural problems requiring a deeper reflection, such as the language barriers between children from different ethnic backgrounds and the social workers.

An interesting feedback from children in the implementation of the pilot phase of the programme was that they would appreciate more discipline and the possibility to focus more. Interviews with social workers highlighted the importance of integrated teams including professionals and operators who already developed a trust relationship with kids, of preparatory activities to foster this trust, and of second-line support in terms of psychological therapy also for operators.

Re-valorisation, self-estimation and participation: Key elements for the rehabilitation of children suffering under violence. The process-oriented approach of IAC's juvenile inclusion centres in Portugal

Isabel Porto, Project Officer, Instituto de Apoio à Criança (IAC)

The development and juvenile inclusion centres managed by IAC are intended to support the life inclusion of youngsters and to break the cycle of violence and silence. Their target group is children of 12-18 years of age in a runaway context, suffering from problems of social deviation and mental health, leading in some cases to suicidal tendencies and self-mutilation. They are often in conflict with the law and suffer from extremely low self-esteem. They find it difficult to focus and respect the authorities, and are not prepared to share their emotions. One of the first steps of the intervention is to make children reflect on their own potentialities: this is at first a difficult process even for social workers, as these children at first tend to express behaviours, rather than emotions.

IAC provides an integrated support, which includes accompaniment and psychological support, judicial support, training in personal and social skills, and integrated intervention with partners. In particular the partnership of IAC with institutions in the mental health field has strongly improved in recent years.

In line with what expressed above, IAC, which is in the ESCAPE alliance, recognizes the importance of the problem of trust development and invests much in the investigation and expression of individual potentialities. Besides the individual level, where the focus on potentialities is accompanied by a training to "compromise for the change", the plan includes intervention with the family and other partners. This applies also to cases where IAC is involved, in cooperation with a specialised commission, in the care of children in conflict with the law undergoing alternative

measures to detention.

Panel Discussion

Reinhold Müller, Director of EFSC, based on the debates of the Forum, called on the participants of the panel discussion to reflect on the concept of unaccompanied minors and, provocatively, on whether their definition should be radically modified. The interventions and discussions of the Forum, thanks to their transnational approach ranging from the policy level to the field level have highlighted the difficulties in distinguishing between categories of children according to centrally-imposed definitions responding more to bureaucratic distinctions than to the daily needs faced by social workers. They also highlighted the importance of a proper legal and policy environment to address apparently trivial issues that are likely to importantly affect the lives of children: identification and age detection, data collection, children's perspectives and the change in the protection system as they get 18. The discussions have also highlighted the importance of a standardization of the care, definitions and judicial provisions in matters of unaccompanied foreign minors.

Serenella Pesarin, General Director for the Implementation of Legal Provisions in the Italian Ministry of Justice, is responsible of minors in conflict with the law. Whether foreign children are accompanied or unaccompanied is not a decisive distinction in determining their entrance in the penal system; rather, it is very much associated with the migration process and, often, with the migration policy. Clearly, even children who are accompanied by irresponsible adults are vulnerable not just to abandonment, but also to exploitation.

The response of the institutions to this still relatively new phenomenon is mixed. The result is that, in some cases, children in custody in structured juvenile institutions are offered more guarantees and opportunities than children in first care centres for illegal immigrants. The problems of identification and age detection remain crucial, in the first place, for the protection of children in these contexts. The Ministry of Justice has established a Coordinating Body for Local Authorities, which in Italy are in charge of the care of unaccompanied minors, in charge of the elaboration of an operational protocol to be homogeneous for all local authorities. The currently obsolete identification and age-detection procedures are being revised under the "Ascone Protocol", which among other foresees a multi-disciplinary team composed not just of paediatricians but also of psychologists and cultural mediators in dealing with children. Another important aspect to take into account is the fragmentation of the care: an unaccompanied child has to deal with a series of different institutional representatives; not considering that the disorientation that may arise could increase the sense of abandonment of the child and the difficulties in the re-inclusion process.

The “Ascone protocol” has been approved but not yet ratified in all regions; the EU is best placed to promote a similar harmonisation of the standards across Member States.

Besides the care provided to unaccompanied foreign minors, many other challenges remain up to the institutions that work to promote a society that is inclusive and free from violence. First, a major lack in Italian legislation remains in the fact that the condition of adolescents, from being protected from eviction, suddenly becomes undefined as they get 18. Addressing this question requires important investments, first of all, in the human resources needed to tackle them. Another dynamic that we are observing is that minors from what one would consider “good families” are now increasingly getting into conflict with the law: challenges are not just coming from the most socially excluded children but also from a society that prevents children from receiving love and understanding within their families.

Protecting children, the inventors of humanity, is something that concerns us all.

Stefania Congia, *Director of the Department for Integration Policies and Protection of Foreign Minors, DG Immigration and Integration, Italian Ministry of Labour*, intervened on the crucial point of data collection, emphasizing the fact that there is a legal provision imposing public officers in the local authorities to inform the DG Immigration (in a way that is respectful of the privacy needs of the child, and without prejudice of the guarantee of non-eviction for minors) of any unaccompanied foreign child that enters into contact with their structures. In coordination with civil society organisations, this implies that all children entering into contact with the institutions will be censured. Through the effort to improve the internal transparency of the databases of the Ministry, tracing the minors’ movement across the Italian territory will become more and more feasible, allowing for up-to-date and exact information, for instance on the municipality who “received” the minor as well as on his/her whole migration plan. The database on minors exists and is being potentiated through web-based technologies: establishing networks between all bodies of the different ministries, who will be able to update the database on an ongoing basis, our understanding of the dimension of the phenomenon will increase more and more. This, however, requires that all institutional representatives in the different Ministries take active action together. The data base will be also accessible by all those actors entering in direct contact with unaccompanied minors, such as the police, the juvenile justice structures, the social services, the local health agencies, etc..).

Cesare Moreno, *President of the Maestri di Strada Association*, highlighted the importance for the institutions involved in the education of children to reconstruct an

“educational community”, where everyone takes the responsibility that being a citizen imposes to everyone. Only this way a child can attempt to escape what is otherwise a pre-defined destiny of exclusion and marginalisation. In this sense, the approach of Maestri di Strada is motivated by “human” solidarity, rather than by “social” solidarity, that recognizes human suffering as a communicative resource: recognising that you need the help of others in a “social pact” is functional to create a community, and a nation.

Edgardo Iozia, *President of Prosolidar and Member of the EESC*, called for a holistic approach to be adopted when addressing child protection policies and to improve the synergies between the different EU institutional departments involved. He described the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy as shameful. The social situation is not up to the expectations of children who undertake a migration plan in the hope to find new life opportunities; it is not able to adequately address their traumatic experiences, nor to provide them with sufficient perspectives once in the labour market. An unacceptably high number of children regularly disappears from the public registers and the issue of reception must receive a EU-wide shared response. The civil society is aware of this issue and the EESC has taken a strong stand, in representation of civil society, on this matter, while the response of the European Parliament has not been clear enough. The shortcomings of the EU policy on migration issues are unacceptable, particularly in the light of the recent award of the Nobel Peace Prize, but also more generally considering the EU has, since the Lisbon Treaty, a legal obligation to protect children’s rights, thus. Concerning the joint declaration, emphasis was put on the need to adopt one action plan that must be negotiated with civil society.

Brian De Lord, *Director of Pupil-Parent Partnership, UK*, restated that the right to an identity for unaccompanied children is often challenged in the relations between different cultural backgrounds. The civil society is in charge of promoting an inclusive social model that is open to all cultures and sensibilities, in contrast with an exclusive model that is requiring foreigners to adapt to the mainstream. A particular challenge is the inclusion of children victims of violence, whose living experiences have exposed them to dysfunctional relationships, and whose development of the identity is a complex and difficult process. At the same time, migration is part of a wider phenomenon that is globalisation: this provides opportunities, but also responsibilities, among which our responsibility towards children.

Nevena Milutinovic, *Child Protection Coordinator, Save the Children North-Western Balkans*, reminded that, speaking about data collection, children should be assessed not according to their situation/condition, but simply as children, in line with a child rights-based approach.

The issue of data collection sometimes loses its full relevance: what really counts is the quality of the data rather than a mechanical count of the outputs of an organisation's work – which is usually very important for donors.

In Serbia, violence against children is systematic and often this violence is perpetrated by police, social services, etc... For this reason, parallel work on prevention must always be in place as well as initiatives to empower children to make them more resilient. The principle of the best interest of the child should always be taken as reference for any activity and work.

Aurea Dissegna, *Public Guardian for Minors in Veneto* recognised the high investments made by the Veneto Region to support the identification, tracing and data collection on children. She highlighted the need for continuity in public administrations in order to fully capitalise on these investments, which is particularly difficult in the context of the present economic downturn. In particular, the public spending review in Italy has dramatically reduced the funds devoted to social spending and children in particular. Concerning the joint declaration, among the recommendations to the local authorities, she emphasized the activities related to social mediation, which already exist, but needs to be strengthened. The EU should adopt common standards on the matter.

Conclusions

The multi-level dimension of the debates touched during the European Forum on Street Children 2012 is reflected in key advocacy messages emerging at different levels of intervention.

At the level of the direct involvement with children, the Forum has shown different ways of achieving safe and meaningful child participation: the EFSC ESCAPE project and the "development and inclusion" methodology presented by IAC, together with the mix of game forms with psychological therapy described by Save the Children North-Western Balkans, have shown ways to empower children in order enable them to express their view and to enact their right to be heard in all matters concerning them.

The intervention of the Public Guardian for Minors, on the other hand, has importantly shown what adults can do to actively promote this participation. The Forum restated the role of trust and self-esteem development as indispensable building blocks for the overcoming traumatic experiences of violence and exploitation.

The role of the community and the consideration that children, even unaccompanied, can never be approached in isolation also emerged from different interventions in the Forum. The intervention methodologies presented by

EFSC, IAC, Maestri di Strada and Save the Children highlight the role of the child within a wider community; it should not be forgotten that even unaccompanied children "on the move" are inserted in a social environment, within which the debate has reminded us that often the most important resilience factors are not institutions or social workers, but other children. On the other hand, the IOM family-tracing programme has shown the importance of addressing the child in the complexity of his/her living experience, where reaching back to the families enriches the information available to social workers and contributes to improve the standards of care and the ability for the child to reflect on the migration project and to better correspond to his/her own expectations.

The Italian Ministry representatives have highlighted the complexity of moving from the individual intervention to the provision of institutionalised responses. The capillary co-ordination between all actors involved, together with the centralisation of the data collection and the application of web-based technologies, is improving the availability of data. As recognized, this crucially requires a commitment towards transparency within the institutions. The difficult economic context, marked by a cut in social spending, however constrains the range of activities that can be implemented and imposes a high burden on highly motivated individual representatives.

The debates of the Forum also highlighted on many occasions that the differences between the concepts around which policies are organised not necessarily correspond to differences in needs and intervention measures that are required by children. This applies for example to the fact that foreign minors "on the move" that are unaccompanied are often also at risk of trafficking and exploitation, and that the fact that some of them are accompanied by relatives does not necessarily decrease their vulnerability. At the policy level, however, the Action Plans on unaccompanied children are clearly distinguished from those on trafficked children and, most importantly, the relevant institutional referents are not communicating with each other.

More than an abstract categorisation, what most strongly impacts on children's behaviours is the single combination of the type of violence children suffered from, with the individual cultural and family background, together with the life experiences they have gone through. Key to the improving the well-being of children is enabling NGOs and local institutions to apply an individualised approach that looks at, and listens to the minor in a holistic perspective. This implies adequate training and funding for the social workers, an efficient networking with different service providers and, as mentioned, a careful balancing of the time a minor is required to spend in contact with institutions versus what he/she spends with other chil-

dren. This can only be achieved if Institutions and NGOs join together in a partnership for children. The exchange of EU-wide good practices on intervention methodologies to deal with violence against children remains an important means of knowledge transfer, as the example of the ESCAPE project has shown.

At the same time, an EU-level effort is asked by the civil society in order to set common standards. The differences in definition and data collection on children on the move seriously prevent a more effective coordination between origin, transition, and destination countries; and, on the contrary, positive outcomes can be drawn from intergovernmental agreements between origin and destination countries such as that between Italy and Romania. Common standards are important also to ensure homogeneity of treatment towards minors and thus to avoid migration waves to one Member State or another. On the other hand, it is clear that differentiated needs have generated differentiated first care systems in Europe. A balanced revision of the social services provision for foreign minors at the EU-level, that is realistic and endeavours to achieve a sustainable service provision, is necessary.

The active involvement of the civil society, such as in activities of social mediation, is a resource that must be capitalised on. The EU can work more on the promotion of social mediation and on its diffusion in all Member States. Social mediation is centred around a clear understanding of the children's migration projects which is balanced with the principle of the best interest of the child. The Italian case and the discussion about the difficulties to obtain a stay permit after the 18th birthday reminded of a similar principle. Policies should be grounded in a realistic assessment of the migration projects of children, and oriented towards protecting them from exploitation and invisibility also at a later stage. More generally, the post-emergency phase in the care of foreign children and adolescents

remains a delicate issue, where the mediatisation is less pervasive and the funding is being radically cut.

Different interventions highlighted critically the negative implications of the Dublin II directive on the living conditions of children in first care centres, where they are detained together with adults, and in their access to asylum. As EFSC has stated in a number of occasions, a child-rights based approach is absolutely crucial to readdress migration policies in a way that the blatant violations of their rights and of the EU own obligations to protect children's rights are avoided.

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