

Education  
International  
Research

# The Journey of Hope

Education for Refugee and Unaccompanied  
Children in Italy

Sonia Grigt

“These children are not a problem for us, they are a resource because they provide the input we need to move forward and work at our best to take on new challenges”.

—School principal, Milan

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Cover photo credit: Leonardo Vivona, 2017

Students and teachers taking part in theatre workshop activity (UIL Scuola-IRASE project “The body: the global language”), ICS G. Garibaldi - G.Paolo II, Salemi, Italy.

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# Methodology

The information presented in this report was collated between August and November 2016. Field visits were organised in seven Italian provinces: Milan (Lombardy), Turin (Piedmont), Rome (Latium), Naples (Campania), Catania, Palermo and Trapani (Sicily).

In total, 85 people were interviewed through semi-structured individual (face-to-face and telephone) interviews and focus group discussions:

- Nine representatives of educational authorities: one representative of the education ministry, and eight representatives of provincial/regional offices (*Ufficio Scolastico Regionale/Proveditorato agli studi*)
- 15 social workers from 12 accommodation centres for unaccompanied minors asylumseeking families
- Six representatives of four municipalities
- Three representatives of a prefecture<sup>1</sup>
- 15 experts: two on intercultural education and integration from renowned foundations (*Fondazione ISMU and Centro COME*), three law experts on asylum and international protection (*Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione*), and 10 representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)/associations/social cooperatives working in the field of migration and/or intercultural education (*Dedalus Cooperativa Sociale, Save the Children, ASAI, Il Nostro Pianeta, Federazione delle Chiese evangeliche in Italia*)
- One representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Italy
- 18 teachers and 18 education support personnel (principals, vice-principals and administrative staff) of 19 schools

The panel of 19 schools comprised “regular” schools (including pre-primary, primary, lower and general/vocational upper secondary schools) and eight Adult Learning Centres (*Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti – CPIA*), where most unaccompanied minors aged 16-18 years are enrolled.

In addition to that, informal conversations were held with national and local representatives of the education trade union, UIL Scuola, and the union confederation, UIL.

# Introduction

Unlike other European countries, for many years now, Italy has experienced a significant influx of migrants landing on its southern coasts. However, policy and media discourse has focused on sea arrivals, border control, and “illegal immigration” rather than integration<sup>2</sup>, fuelling the impression of a never-ending “emergency crisis” (“*emergenza migranti*”).

In Italy, media and public discourse usually refers to “migrants” without any clear definition. This term is used as an umbrella term to refer to newly arrived migrants, asylum seekers, and second-generation immigrants.

This research focuses on minors who arrived by sea, a cohort which can be divided in two groups: asylum-seeking “accompanied” minors (accompanied minors not applying for international protection would most likely follow the expelled parent/responsible adult) and unaccompanied minors (either applying for international protection or not). As described later, the second group comprises most of the minors arriving by sea over the most recent period.

In public discourse and in the conservative media, immigration is often associated with a deepening of the economic and employment crisis<sup>3</sup>. Many stereotypes<sup>4</sup> against migrants are to be found on social media and in public discourse, notably concerning the economic conditions offered to asylum seekers in Italy (accommodation, daily pocket money, access to WiFi and mobile phones, etc.)<sup>5</sup>. These criticisms are often described as being part of a “war among the poor”<sup>6</sup>. As far as schools are concerned, the prejudice that migrants bring diseases<sup>7</sup> (particularly strong during the Ebola crisis) has been reported in some interviews with school personnel as a frequent source of anxiety for resident families when newly arrived migrant children are enrolled in their schools.

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- 2 Colombo, A. (2013) Foreigners and immigrants in Italy, penal and administrative detention systems. *European Journal of Criminology*, 10 (6), 746-759.
  - 3 See for example: Cartaldo, C. (2016, October 25), “Tolgono lavoro agli italiani” Ecco le prove sugli immigrati. Il Giornale. Retrieved from <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/i-migranti-ci-tolgono-lavoro-ecco-tutte-prove-1323319.html> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)
  - 4 The website [www.openmigration.org](http://www.openmigration.org) of the Coalizione Italiana Libertà e Diritti civili (CILD) gives a series of analyses dispelling false myths about migration in Italy and disseminating positive messages about migration. See for example: Torrisi, C. (2016, November 11), Il bilancio positivo dell’immigrazione in Italia. Retrieved from <https://openmigration.org/analisi/il-bilancio-positivo-dellimmigrazione-in-italia/> (Accessed on 28 April 2017); and Torrisi, C. (2016, November 21), Immigrazione: non esiste nessuna invasione, solo politiche inadeguate. Retrieved from <https://openmigration.org/analisi/immigrazione-non-esiste-nessuna-invasione-solo-politiche-inadeguate/> (Accessed on 28 April 2017).
  - 5 Genoviva, F. R. (2016, October 11), Quattro stereotipi da sfatare sugli immigrati. OPEN MIGRATION. Retrieved from <https://openmigration.org/analisi/quattro-stereotipi-sugli-immigrati-da-sfatate/> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)
  - 6 See for example an interview of a union leader (Filcams Cgil) in a local newspaper: Versiliatoday Reda (2016, July 17), “Più che guerra tra razze è una guerra tra poveri”. Retrieved from <http://www.versiliatoday.it/2016/07/17/piu-guerra-razze-guerra-poveri/> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)
  - 7 Torrisi, C. (2016, October 27). Come sfatare il mito dei migranti che portano malattie. OPEN MIGRATION. Retrieved from <http://openmigration.org/fact-checking/come-sfatate-il-mito-dei-migranti-che-portano-malattie/> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

The immigration “crisis” is also perceived as another demonstration of “Europe” abandoning Italy<sup>8</sup> and lacking in solidarity towards a phenomenon that is considered continental, breeding further mistrust of Italian citizens towards European Union (EU) institutions. In November 2016, Amnesty International released a controversial report<sup>9</sup> revealing cases of abuse and torture in the newly created “hotspots” (whose mission is to identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants) and incriminating EU leaders for “driving the Italian authorities to the limits – and beyond – of what is legal” (Matteo de Bellis, Amnesty International’s researcher on Italy)<sup>10</sup>.

## Statistics

The starting point of this “emergency crisis” in migration can be dated to 2014, when the number of arrivals by sea in Italy increased by almost a multiple of four. Since then, the number of migrants landing on Italy’s southern coast has remained high and the number of persons applying for international protection has been growing steadily, from 63,456 in 2014 to 123,482 in 2016.

### Minors arriving by sea

Data shows that the number of minors arriving by sea tripled in 2014 and, following a slight reduction in 2015, increased again in 2016, to reach a total of 28,223 arrivals. Minors represent 15.5 per cent of the total incoming flows in 2016.

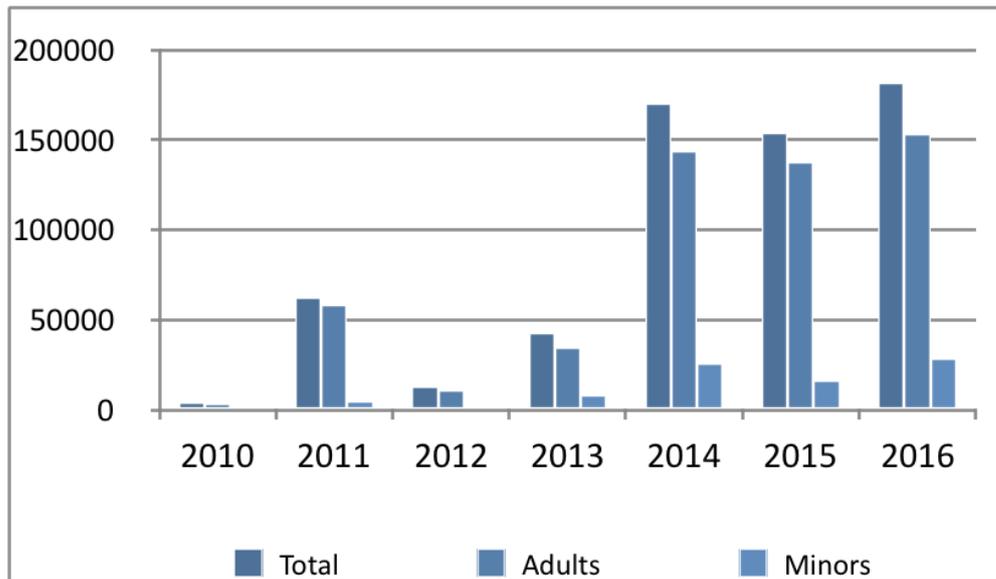
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8 See for example Gatti, F. (2014, July 3). Migranti, l'Europa lascia sola l'Italia. L'Espresso. Retrieved from <http://espresso.repubblica.it/plus/articoli/2014/07/03/news/migranti-l-europa-lascia-sola-l-italia-mentre-l-esodo-e-senza-fine-1.172074> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

9 Amnesty International (2016), *Hotspot Italy: how EU's flagship approach leads to violations of refugee and migrant rights*, November 2016.

10 Italy: Beatings and unlawful expulsions amid EU push to get tough on refugees and migrants (2016, November 3). Amnesty International. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/italy-beatings-and-unlawful-expulsions-amid-EU-push-to-get-tough-on-refugees-and-migrants/> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

Figure 1: Sea arrivals in Italy, 2010-2016



Source: Ministero dell'Interno/UNHCR

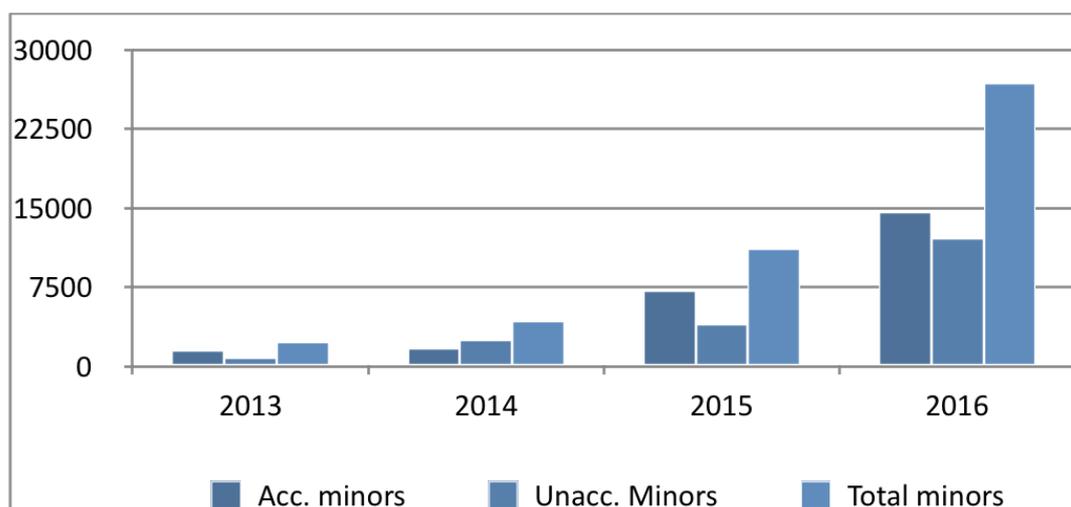
Unaccompanied minors make up an increasingly significant number of the total of minors arriving by sea: from 50 per cent in 2014 to 91.5 per cent in 2016. Except for 2014 (a year in which a particularly high number of Syrian and Eritrean families arrived by sea), the proportion of unaccompanied minors has always been higher than minors arriving with at least a parent or responsible adult.

### Asylum-seeking children

Between 2000 and 2013, the number of applications for asylum in Italy fluctuated between 10,000 and 30,000 yearly (with a peak of 37,350 applications in 2011). Since 2014, the number of applications has grown steadily, both for children and adults. In 2016, the number of children applying for international protection in Italy more than doubled, with a record 26,840 applications. Interestingly, since 2015, the number of accompanied children applying for international protection exceeds that of unaccompanied minors.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Based on the information collected on the ground, a possible interpretation would be that the administrative difficulties facing asylum-seeking minors (cf. part II) may lead unaccompanied minors to opt for an “ordinary” integration path (ie. applying for a “minor” residence permit to be converted in an “adult” permit later on), instead of applying for international protection.

Figure 2: Minors applying for international protection, 2013-2016



Source: Ministero dell'Interno/UNHCR

## Unaccompanied minors in Italy

According to the most recent data published by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy<sup>12</sup>, 17,373 unaccompanied minors were present in Italy as at 31 December 2016. Of these, 93.3 per cent were males. However, the proportion of female unaccompanied minors has grown steadily since 2015 (from 4.6 per cent of the total unaccompanied minors to 6.7 per cent)<sup>13</sup>. More than 80 per cent of these unaccompanied children are aged 16-18 and almost all of them are hosted in dedicated accommodation centres (92.5 per cent). The nationalities most represented to date are Egyptian (15.9 per cent), Gambian (13.3 per cent), Albanian (9.3 per cent), Nigerian (8.3 per cent), and Eritrean (7.7 per cent). Sicily is the main host region (hosting 7,097 unaccompanied minors – 40.9 per cent of the total).

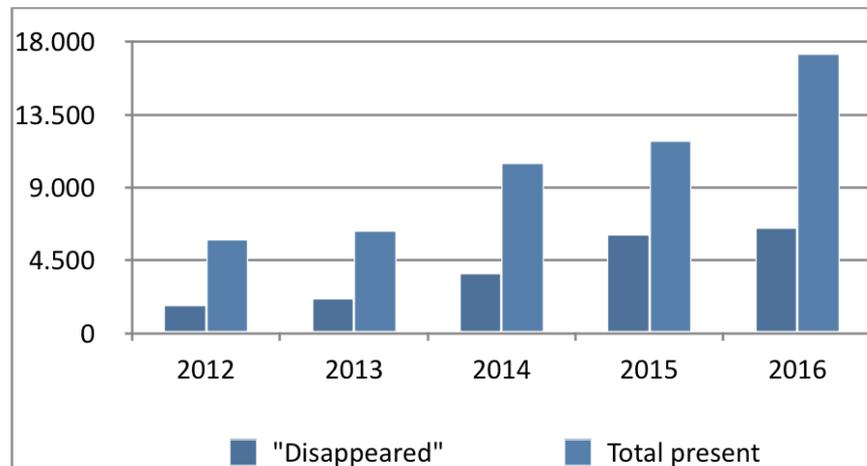
12 The Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (*Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione*) publishes a monthly statistical report on unaccompanied minors and a broader monitoring report three times a year. These publications are available here: <http://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Pagine/Dati-minori-stranieri-non-accompagnati.aspx> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

13 The number of unaccompanied girls has doubled between December 2015 and December 2016. They are slightly younger than their male counterparts and most of them come from Nigeria (45.8 per cent) and Eritrea (19.3 per cent).

### Disappearing minors

As at 30 November 2016, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy estimates that 6,508 unaccompanied minors have disappeared (so-called *minori irreperibili*), representing 27.4 per cent of the total. Most of them are Egyptian (23.2 per cent), Eritrean (20.4 per cent), and Somali (19.1 per cent).

Figure 3: Disappeared unaccompanied minors, 2012-2016



Source: Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, Direzione Generale dell'Immigrazione e delle Politiche di Integrazione

As Figure 3 shows, this complex phenomenon has been growing for the past few years, exposing these children to great dangers - putting them at risk of slavery, human trafficking, sexual abuse, etc<sup>14</sup>. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies<sup>15</sup>, these children disappear for a number of reasons: their desired final destination, family and individual expectations, relatives' networks in other EU countries, etc. Although interviews have confirmed that some minors (especially Eritrean, Somali and Syrian minors) do not want to settle in Italy because they have family, friends and social connections in other EU countries, they also reveal limits in the Italian response to the growing influx of unaccompanied minors (cf. part II). And they highlight the case for improved and more efficient European coordination, in terms of family reunification procedures for unaccompanied minors.

14 For more information concerning this phenomenon and the risks faced by these minors, see Save the Children (2016), *Piccoli Schiavi invisibili. I minori vittime di tratta e sfruttamento: chi sono, da dove vengono e chi lucra su di loro*. Available here: <https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/piccoli-schiavi-invisibili.pdf> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

15 *Report di Monitoraggio. I Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati (MSNA) in Italia*. Dati al 31 dicembre 2015, p. 3: <http://www.lavoro.gov.it/notizie/Documents/Report-di-monitoraggio-31-diciembre-2015.pdf>

# I. National legal framework and education policies

The Italian legal framework guarantees the right to education for asylum seekers and refugees and, over the most recent period, educational initiatives have been launched to promote access to education for displaced children and youth.

## The immigration legal framework

Under Italian immigration law, minors cannot be expelled<sup>16</sup> and have the right to education, regardless of their or their parent's/responsible adult's immigration status. Moreover, they are entitled to obtain a "minor" residence permit (*permesso di soggiorno per minore età*). This may be converted to an "adult" permit<sup>17</sup> when they reach the legal age of majority (18 years old).

In many respects, Italian immigration regulations offer a protective framework for the most vulnerable children travelling unaccompanied, regardless of whether or not they apply for international protection. They provide for the appointment of a legal guardian and the recognition of unaccompanied children's fundamental rights such as the right to protection, health, education, adequate living conditions to ensure their wellbeing and social development, etc. Until 2014, unaccompanied minors were subject to the very same rules applying to Italian abandoned children. This meant that single municipalities were responsible for protecting and assisting them and each region was in charge of defining minimum standards for structures hosting them. However, given the unequal distribution nationally and with certain municipalities overburdened, the Italian authorities introduced new hosting arrangements for foreign unaccompanied minors. In some cases, this new reception scheme has caused violations of unaccompanied minors' fundamental rights (cf. part II concerning the impact on the right to education) and, almost always, led to a deterioration of their integration process<sup>18</sup>.

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16 Unless he/she follows the expelled parent (Legislative Decree 286/98, article 19.2.a).

17 Several types of permits can apply in this case: work, study, prospective employment, or health.

18 For an in-depth analysis of the Italian immigration legal framework concerning unaccompanied minors and its evolution over the recent period, refer to Rozzi, E. (2017) "In primo luogo minori? I diritti violati dei minori stranieri non accompagnati in Italia", in *Il diritto d'asilo. Report 2017. Minori rifugiati vulnerabili e senza voce*, a cura di Delfina Licata e Mariacristina Molfetta, Fondazione Migrantes.

## The right to education

In principle, the Italian school system is very inclusive. According to the Italian constitution (article 34), “the school is open to all” and separate educational tracks or institutions for children with special needs do not exist in Italy. When a school receives an application from a migrant child, no document other than those requested for Italian children should be required and the lack of identity documents, health documentation, and/or school certificates should not preclude the child from being enrolled. If a child is unable to present any identity document, the child will be enrolled on a reserve list, which does not preclude him/her from attending the classes and obtaining the final certification of the course he/she is enrolled in<sup>19</sup>.

Education is compulsory for 10 years between the ages of six and 16 (*obbligo di istruzione*). This covers the first two years of the upper secondary cycle<sup>20</sup>. During this period, children should be enrolled in the class that corresponds to their age, unless the teachers’ board (*collegio dei docenti*) expresses a different view<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, in such cases, the 2014 “guidelines for the enrolment and integration of foreign pupils”<sup>22</sup> stipulate that the child should be enrolled in the previous or next grade<sup>23</sup>, to limit as much as possible the age difference between children in the same class.

From age 16 to 18, all children are entitled to the “right-duty to education and professional training” (*diritto-dovere all’istruzione e alla formazione*), in order to study for a diploma or a professional qualification<sup>24</sup>. Children aged 16 who have not obtained a lower secondary school certificate (*the “esame di terza media”*) can be enrolled in Provincial Centres for Adult Learning (CPIA), to prepare for this diploma<sup>25</sup>. According to the law<sup>26</sup>, minors can be enrolled in CPIAs as of 16 years old but some local agreements allow minors aged 15 under certain circumstances<sup>27</sup>.

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19 Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull’Immigrazione, *Minori stranieri e diritto all’istruzione e alla formazione professionale*. Sintesi della normativa vigente e delle indicazioni ministeriali (aggiornata con le linee guide del MIUR del febbraio 2014).

20 The first cycle lasts eight years (five years of primary education and three years of lower secondary education). Once completed, students can choose from a range of training opportunities. State upper secondary education offers a five-year general (*liceo*) or vocational (*istituto tecnico or istituto professionale*) education, while the Regional Vocational Education and Training system (*Istruzione e Formazione Professionale*) usually offers three-year and four-year vocational education and training courses in vocational training agencies and upper secondary vocational institutes.

21 Presidential Decree 394/1999, article 45. Regional vocational education systems can to a certain extent, differ from these guidelines.

22 Linee guida per l’accoglienza e l’integrazione degli alunni stranieri, MIUR, febbraio 2014.

23 As explained in part II, migrant children are usually enrolled in lower grades.

24 The professional qualification can be obtained through professional training courses or apprenticeships.

25 For that same purpose, some provinces have activated school and training laboratories (*laboratori scuola e formazione*) for children aged 14 to 16 with mixed training paths (lower secondary education and professional training).

26 Ministerial Decree MIUR 139/2007, article 3, comma 3.

27 For example, this applies to students having repeated several grades and who are at risk of becoming early school leavers or to foreign minors with special needs (e.g. illiterate in their mother tongue).

A recently approved law containing protective measures for unaccompanied minors<sup>28</sup> reinforces some aspects of the current legal framework concerning the right to education. In particular, it stipulates that the unaccompanied minor can obtain the final certification of the course that he/she is enrolled in, even in instances where he/she has reached the legal age of majority before completing the course.

## Education policies and programmes for refugees

Over the past few years, education for asylum-seeking and unaccompanied minors has not been addressed as such in education policies or programmes, as it was included in broader integration activities targeting migrant children – and thus including second-generation immigrants. For instance, there is not a specific monitoring process at national or even local level concerning the access to education of these children and no detailed data is available concerning the type of institution they are enrolled in, their gender/age breakdown, etc.

However, national education authorities have recently started developing ad hoc initiatives, targeting asylum seekers/refugees and unaccompanied minors.

In 2015, the Ministry of Education issued two calls for funding of €500,000 each<sup>29</sup>, inviting schools to submit projects aiming to: a) teach Italian as a second language with special attention to newly arrived students, and b) foster integration of and/or provide linguistic/psychological support to unaccompanied minors. Since some projects were extended until the end of 2016, data concerning the outcomes were not available at the time this research was finalised but several similar sources reported during interviews that not all available funds were used. In November 2016, the ministry issued a single call for applications for €1 million in funding to support linguistic and “inclusion” school-based activities targeting both unaccompanied minors and newly arrived students<sup>30</sup>.

In May 2016, the UNHCR and the Italian Education Ministry signed a Memorandum of Understanding to develop joint activities aiming to sensitise all students concerning refugees’ journeys and rights. So far, a website called *Viaggi da imparare* (<http://viaggidaimparare.it/>) has been launched to provide pedagogical resources to secondary school teachers, with a view to raising students’ awareness about migrants’ and refugees’ rights.

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28 At the time of finalising this report, the law had not been implemented yet. It is known as *Proposta di legge “Disposizioni in materia di misure di protezione dei minori stranieri non accompagnati”* (C. 1658-B) and was finally approved on 29 March 2017. Article 14 concerns the right to education and health.

29 Directorial Decree 829 & 830, 24 July 2015.

30 Directorial Decree 1144, 9 November 2016, available here: <http://www.istruzioneveneto.it/wpusr/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/MIUR.AOODPIT.REGISTRO-DECRETI-DIPARTIMENTALI.0001144.09-11-2016.pdf> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

Four additional projects, funded through the FAMI (Fund Asylum, Migration and Integration, managed by the Ministry of the Interior), are being developed by the Ministry of Education to develop teacher and administrative staff training<sup>31</sup>, school-based inclusion initiatives (€13 million), awareness-raising activities around migration and human rights (“Europe begins at Lampedusa” project), and linguistic-cultural mediation (with the objective of training 1,500 mediators).

Several local initiatives have also been identified in the higher education sector. The European University Association (EUA) has listed 15 Italian universities developing actions aiming to improve refugees’ access to tertiary education in Bari, Naples, Rome, Teramo, Siena, Bologna, Turin, Pavia, Verona, and Trieste<sup>32</sup>. In May 2016, Italy was the first European country to adopt the so-called “#U4Refugees” (Universities for Refugees) initiative proposed by the EU Member of Parliament, Silvia Costa, in order to create “educational” corridors for refugee tertiary students and researchers<sup>33</sup>. Finally, the Ministry of the Interior, in collaboration with CRUI (Conference of Italian University Rectors) and ANDISU (the National Association of organisations promoting the right to education at university level), has offered 100 scholarships to students granted international protection, to facilitate access to higher education programmes during the 2016-17 academic year.

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31 This is a €4 million multiyear plan targeting schools with high immigration rates, aiming to train 10,000 teachers, 1,000 school principals and 2,000 administrative staff. It includes the following actions: the launch of 30 Masters in “Management of multicultural schools”, specialised courses in teaching Italian as a second language, an e-learning platform and online training programmes, action research activities and the establishment of regional coordination structures.

32 The complete list and description of each activity is available on the EUA’s website (last consulted on 18 January 2017): <http://eua.be/activities-services/eua-campaigns/refugees-welcome-map>

33 The initiative has not been formalised yet. See <http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/web/ministero/cs030516> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

## II. Local implementation

The analysis of the data collected in the field through individual interviews and focus groups with a broad spectrum of actors and stakeholders illustrates comprehensively the implementation of the right to education for refugee children and unaccompanied minors.

### The impact of migration policies on unaccompanied minors' right to education

While the issues outlined below do not directly relate to the education system itself, they have a direct impact on refugee children's ability to fulfil their right to education and, as such, make the case for a better cross-sectoral collaboration between relevant authorities, as well as the development of a comprehensive rights-based policy framework.

#### The transformation of reception structures for unaccompanied minors

Under Italian law, minors enjoy a specific protection regime, in that they cannot be detained in the so-called "Centres for identification and expulsion" (CIE)<sup>34</sup> and cannot be hosted in the same accommodation structures as adults<sup>35</sup>. Nevertheless, cases of minors being detained in CIEs because they have been wrongly identified as adults have been reported<sup>36</sup> and a significant number of unaccompanied minors have been detained alongside adults in the so-called "hotspots" promoted by the European Commission as of May 2015<sup>37</sup>. They can even stay longer than adults in such structures - weeks or months - as their transfer to accommodation structures for unaccompanied minors may be delayed due to the lack of places. This long "transit" period often prevents them from exercising their most fundamental rights, including access to education and training.

In 2015, a new two-phase accommodation system was introduced by the Italian authorities for unaccompanied minors. In this system, all unaccompanied minors<sup>38</sup> who are hosted in "short-term" accommodation structures (first phase), regardless of whether or not they apply for international protection, should have been transferred within 60 days – 30 days now under

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34 *The Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione* were established by the Law 40/1998 and initially called "*Centri di Permanenza Temporanea e Assistenza*". They were created to detain third-country citizens without a residence permit pending deportation.

35 Legislative Decree 142/15, article 19, comma 4.

36 Rozzi, E. (2017) "In primo luogo minori? I diritti violati dei minori stranieri non accompagnati in Italia", in *Il diritto d'asilo. Report 2017. Minori rifugiati vulnerabili e senza voce*, a cura di Delfina Licata e Mariacristina Molfetta, Fondazione Migrantes.

37 See [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2\\_hotspots\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_hotspots_en.pdf) (Accessed on 28 April 2017). In Italy, there are four hotspots (in Sicily and in Apulia).

38 Legislative Decree 142/15, article 19, comma 1-3.

a 2017 regulation<sup>39</sup> - to dedicated long-term accommodation structures (*comunità di seconda accoglienza, second phase*) under the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati, SPRAR*). Nevertheless, the lack of places in such long-term accommodation structures has kept many unaccompanied minors locked in the first stage. Thus, they are hosted longer than the prescribed time limit in government structures that are unfit for such long stays, with a negative impact on their overall integration process<sup>40</sup>. In August 2016<sup>41</sup>, the decision to facilitate prefects to establish “temporary reception centres” in case of significant and recurring arrivals of unaccompanied minors<sup>42</sup> raised concerns that this will have a similar impact. This is also relevant given that no term limit is envisaged for stays in these structures, contrary to the limits pertaining to government structures cited above. In both cases, these newly created accommodation structures for minors - “*strutture di prima accoglienza*” and “*strutture ricettive temporanee*” - are not prescribed to deliver the same services as long-term accommodation centres, in particular concerning the enrolment of minors in education and training institutes<sup>43</sup>.

## Administrative delays

Considering the high influx of unaccompanied minors in some parts of the Italian territory, the administrative procedures for obtaining identification documents can be subject to serious delays. In some cities, the appointment of a minor’s guardian can take up to 11 months<sup>44</sup>. These delays prevent unaccompanied minors from enjoying their right to education in the absence of a legal guardian. Interviews revealed that this issue is particularly significant for unaccompanied minors applying for international protection:

“Asylum-seeking minors are subject to colossal administrative processes and they remain without any documents for months which prevents them from starting an educational or professional integration process. Now, the document released by the police when the asylum application is submitted can be considered sufficient by education institutions but it sometimes takes months to get this document which is only the starting point of the whole process”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Milan)

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39 Draft Law 1658-B approved on 29 March 2017.

40 Gruppo di lavoro per la Convenzione sui Diritti dell’Infanzia e dell’Adolescenza, “I diritti dell’infanzia e dell’adolescenza in Italia. 9° rapporto di aggiornamento sul monitoraggio della Convenzione sui diritti dell’infanzia e dell’adolescenza, 2015-16, p. 167: <http://www.gruppocrc.net/IMG/pdf/ixrapportocrc2016.pdf> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

41 Legislative Decree , article 19, comma 3-bis.

42 In Sicily, which hosts the highest proportion of unaccompanied minors, a 2014 regional decree authorised the establishment of “temporary” structures in which lower standards apply and where, de facto, minors can stay up to the age of 18 without being involved in any integration process.

43 Rozzi, E. (2017) “In primo luogo minori? I diritti violati dei minori stranieri non accompagnati in Italia”, in Il diritto d’asilo. Report 2017. *Minori rifugiati vulnerabili e senza voce*, a cura di Delfina Licata e Mariacristina Molfetta, Fondazione Migrantes.

44 See European Commission’s infringement decision No 2014/2171 on the situation of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Italy, available here: [https://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/17/DOSSIER/815612/index.html?part=dossier\\_dossier1-sezione\\_sezione117-h2\\_h248?part=&parse=si&spart=si](https://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/17/DOSSIER/815612/index.html?part=dossier_dossier1-sezione_sezione117-h2_h248?part=&parse=si&spart=si) (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

The new 2017 regulation<sup>45</sup> could result in significant progress in this regard as it provides for the possibility of applying for a residence permit or international protection, before the appointment of the legal guardian.

## “Transiting” migrants

Several interviewees mentioned that a significant proportion of unaccompanied minors - especially from Eritrea, Somalia and Afghanistan - arriving by sea in Italy decide to continue their journey towards another European country. This phenomenon is reflected in the data above (figure 3), concerning the number of unaccompanied minors fleeing from the accommodation centres and becoming “invisible”.

While asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors may apply for family reunification, according to the Dublin Regulation III, or relocation to another EU country based on the EU relocation scheme<sup>46</sup>, the poor quality of accommodation centres, the length of administrative procedures<sup>47</sup>, and the lack of awareness concerning the existence of such opportunities were cited as the most common factors leading most (potentially eligible) minors to go underground. For example, as of December 2016, not one unaccompanied minor had benefited from the EU relocation programme<sup>48</sup>. This situation, apart from putting these children in a vulnerable position, also prevents them from exercising their fundamental rights, including their right to education. With the reintroduction of border controls inside the Schengen area, field actors warned that unaccompanied minors might remain exposed to these risks even longer:

“In the past, they wouldn’t have stayed longer than a week [here] but now that borders are closed, they can be blocked up to two or three weeks”.

—Municipality representative (Milan)

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45 Draft Law 1658-B, article 6, comma 3.

46 This scheme only applies to migrants from Syria, Eritrea, Burundi, Mozambique, Bahrain, Bhutan, Qatar, and Yemen. For more information concerning the EU relocation mechanism, see <https://www.easo.europa.eu/what-relocation> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

47 Here again, the newly adopted regulation should accelerate such procedures (see article 6, comma 3), especially in relation to family reunification procedures for unaccompanied minors having relatives residing in another European State as provided for in the Dublin Regulation III.

48 Rozzi, E. (2017) “In primo luogo minori? I diritti violati dei minori stranieri non accompagnati in Italia”, in *Il diritto d’asilo. Report 2017. Minori rifugiati vulnerabili e senza voce*, a cura di Delfina Licata e Mariacristina Molfetta, Fondazione Migrantes.

## The need to develop a systemic and coordinated approach to refugee and unaccompanied minors’ education

*“There are difficulties and there is no doubt that we all make mistakes but as far as we [teachers and school personnel] are concerned, there is commitment and willingness to welcome them and make them feel at home”.*

—Teacher, Lower secondary school (Catania)

### Integrating individual local practices at an institutional level

As a starting point, it is important to underline that, in addition to identifying common challenges facing newly arrived children in relation to fulfilling their right to education, the field data collection revealed that many schools have developed “excellent” practices regarding the integration of asylum-seeking and unaccompanied minors. However, the absence of coordination mechanisms at national or local level seems to constitute a significant and structural limit to the effective implementation of the legal framework, which is very inclusive on paper. Such mechanisms would collect and disseminate or systematise such school practices, as well as provide a coordinated response to recurring obstacles identified below.

*“The critical aspect of the legal framework is that it very often remains a declaration of intent because it is not supported by resources, a clarification of rights and duties, who does what, etc and that leads to a great margin of discretion. Good practices implemented in one place struggle to become a norm for everybody. There is attention paid to these issues, there are initiatives developed on the ground, even excellent ones, but there aren’t common procedures”.*

—Expert in intercultural education

Indeed, the Italian education system values schools<sup>49</sup> and teachers’ autonomy, which has a positive impact when it comes to developing personalised solutions for children presenting special educational needs, such as asylum seekers or unaccompanied children. However, this autonomy may never come to fruition if everything is left to the initiative of individual educational institutions without providing them with the support and guidance on how to integrate these children.

*“It is all left to the good will and judgement of the single institution or teacher, you can never take anything for granted. It all depends on the sensitivity of the school principal and collegial bodies”.*

—Municipality representative (Milan)

49 OECD (2016) Supporting *Teacher Professionalism: Insights from TALIS 2013*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris.

## Establishing common procedures aligned with existing regulations

Whilst local good practices are evident, so too are cases of school personnel being ignorant of some aspects of the legal framework concerning the right to education for migrant children. Such instances were reported by school personnel interviewees and require a determined response from local and national education authorities.

“We’re talking about small numbers but it happens that, sometimes, children are forced to roam from one school to another, because there is no place. This is not the right way. It might happen that a school is ‘full’ but the personnel should make every effort to find an alternative. Even if only 12 children were affected, it is not acceptable!”

—Expert in intercultural education

In particular, the duty of schools to enrol all children aged between six and 16, the right to be enrolled at any time during the school year, and the insertion of the child in a class that corresponds to his/her age were the most cited problematic aspects during the field data collection.

“We have cases of 13/14-year-old teenagers who have been inserted into the last grade of primary school. This is really embarrassing both for the pupils and for local families”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Catania)

The “resistance” from certain schools to enrol refugee children can be overcome by appealing to the provincial educational authority (commonly called “*proveditorato agli studi*”). Nevertheless, many interviewees declared that this solution would only be used as a last resort, to avoid going against the will of the school.

“Turning to the *proveditorato* is not in the interest of the minor. As a result, he or she could be ‘parked’ in a classroom and not receive the needed attention and support or even be suspended at the first occasion. The child is the big loser if he or she is not well accepted”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Milan)

Most often, these cases reflect not only the limited awareness of school personnel concerning the national legal framework and related guidelines but also their sense of “helplessness” in the face of these situations, often raising legitimate concerns about their ability to handle them:

“Between six and 16 years old, schools are required to enrol them but my experience is that, sometimes, they do so reluctantly: ‘We are not equipped, we don’t have mediators or teachers trained to teach illiterate pupils (*docent alfabetizzatori*), etc.’”.

—Responsible adult, Accommodation centre for asylum-seeking families (Milan)

These considerations, combined with the “structural” nature of the migration phenomenon in Southern Italy (considering both global migration perspectives and the geographic position of Italy in the Mediterranean), make a compelling case for developing a more systematic approach to asylum seekers’ and refugees’ education both in terms of disseminating and monitoring the implementation of existing regulations and providing targeted support and assistance to schools where such children are enrolled, in place of the current prevailing emergency short-term approach.

“Schools are absolutely not structured. When numbers are so important, it is necessary to provide schools with tools and resources to deal with these issues. We need 360-degree thinking from the ministry on how to integrate these children in school”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Catania)

## Make education accessible all along the chain

Before examining in more details the needs facing schools enrolling refugee and unaccompanied minors, it is important to highlight issues surrounding access to education, in relation to specific education levels or sectors. The data collected suggest that, of all the education cycles, Early Childhood and Upper-Secondary Education are the most difficult ones to access for refugee and asylum-seeking children<sup>50</sup>. In relation to the latter, this poses challenges related to the concentration of unaccompanied minors in CPIAs.

### Improving access to Early Childhood Education

Although pre-primary education is not compulsory, OECD evidence shows that it is particularly crucial for migrant children’s later academic achievements<sup>51</sup>. In Italy, families can “choose” from three types of early childhood education institutions: State institutes, municipal institutes, and fee-paying private institutes. Interviewees working with refugee and asylum-seeking children aged three to six years old identified difficulties in enrolling these children in pre-primary schools (*Scuole dell’infanzia*).

Most of them emphasised that State institutes are often crowded and, as a consequence, very difficult to access. In addition, access to municipal institutes and related services (school meals, transportation, etc.) is determined by a “residency” criterion that excludes asylum seekers:

“Municipal institutes apply the ‘residency’ criterion, meaning that asylum-seeking children cannot be considered a priority. Even in the unlikely event of getting access as non-residents, they would pay the highest fee for the canteen which is impossible for these families”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for asylum-seeking families (Milan)

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<sup>50</sup> The qualitative data collection of this research did not cover the higher education sector.

<sup>51</sup> OECD (2015) *Helping immigrant students to succeed at school – and beyond*, p. 12. Available here: <https://www.oecd.org/education/Helping-immigrant-students-to-succeed-at-school-and-beyond.pdf> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

## Opening up pathways to upper-secondary education

The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Target 4.1)<sup>52</sup> stipulates that States are responsible for ensuring that all girls and boys complete secondary education. According to the Italian legal framework, all children aged 14 can access upper-secondary education as soon as they have the required competences. In the absence of a recognised lower secondary school certificate, the class board can assess the child's competences and admit him/her if he/she succeeds on the oral and/or written tests. As mentioned earlier, most unaccompanied minors are teenagers aged 16-18 but no data is collected at national level concerning unaccompanied minors' type of schooling. Nevertheless, the field investigation suggests that most unaccompanied minors attend CPIAs and, in some cases, get enrolled in the Regional Vocational Education and Training system in short training courses once they have obtained the Italian lower secondary school certificate. A local survey carried out by the regional educational authorities (*Ufficio Scolastico Regionale*) of Lombardy in 2015-2016 confirms this phenomenon: 93 per cent of unaccompanied minors covered by the survey were enrolled in CPIAs and were thus directed away from mainstream education<sup>53</sup>.

For those able to enrol in an upper-secondary school<sup>54</sup>, the main barrier is that the “protection system” for unaccompanied minors usually ends when the teenager reaches the age of legal majority, with very few exceptions<sup>55</sup>.

“The fact that they have to leave the accommodation structures when they reach the age of 18 is not compatible with completing a three to five-year course”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Catania)

While regional upper-secondary training programmes are usually shorter than those offered in State institutes, administrative obstacles may prevent enrolment<sup>56</sup> (especially for asylum seekers) as “training centres often refuse to enrol unaccompanied minors who do not have a residence permit”<sup>57</sup>.

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52 See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

53 Santagati, M. and Ongini, V. (2016) *Alunni con cittadinanza non italiana. La scuola multiculturale nei contesti locali. Rapporto Nazionale A.s. 2014-2015*. Quaderni ISMU 1/2016, p. 36.

54 See detailed explanation in Part I.

55 Minors' stay in accommodation structures that are part of the National Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati, SPRAR*) can be extended for a six-month duration after they have reached the legal age of majority. Minors applying for international protection can be transferred to adult accommodation centres and stay there up to six months after they obtain the refugee status but, as a result, their integration process is interrupted while moving from one place to the other. The new regulation (Draft Law 1658-B) stipulates that unaccompanied minors who have reached the legal age of majority and need support for a prolonged period in order to successfully complete their social integration process could benefit from the protection system until the age of 21.

56 Nevertheless, these situations might improve with the implementation of the new legal provisions offering the possibility of applying for a residence permit before the appointment of the guardian (Draft Law 1658-B, article 6, comma 3).

57 Rozzi, E. (2017) “In primo luogo minori? I diritti violati dei minori stranieri non accompagnati in Italia”, in *Il diritto d'asilo. Report 2017. Minori rifugiati vulnerabili e senza voce*, a cura di Delfina Licata e Mariacristina Molfetta, Fondazione Migrantes.

Other obstacles identified by the field research relate to the difficulty of having children's previous educational experiences and competences recognised in some cases: “We have seen cases of minors with a nine-year educational background who have been required to obtain the Italian lower secondary certificate because theirs was not recognised at all”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Milan)

In CPIAs, unaccompanied children aged 16 (but in some cases even before) who are not qualified to enrol in upper-secondary institutions are offered two kinds of courses: a first basic Italian language/literacy course and, as a second step, a course preparing them for the lower secondary examination (*Esame di terza media*). While most interviewees praised the long-standing experience of CPIAs in dealing with foreigners and/or illiterate students or in assessing skills acquired in non-formal settings, they also highlighted limitations in this system, both in terms of attending unaccompanied children's needs and providing them with opportunities to integrate into the host society.

## **Making adult learning fit for teenage students**

Although CPIAs – previously called CTPs (*Centri Territoriali Permanenti*) – are also designed for early school leavers who have reached the age of 16, they were initially designed to respond to adult workers' lifelong learning needs. As such, they sometimes fail to respond to unaccompanied minors' needs, both in terms of psycho-pedagogical approach and practical arrangements.

“The approach is very much instrumental: prepare them for the lower secondary examination. Little attention is paid to discipline, it is not a very 'structured' environment. This can be positive for some of them but, generally speaking, CPIAs lack a proper pedagogical and educational thinking around what would be needed in terms of how to approach these teenagers”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Milan)

In some cases, where CPIAs received a lot of unaccompanied minors, teachers and education support personnel established separate classes for the minors. However, most of the time, the unaccompanied minors attend courses alongside adults, although several interviewees stressed that it would be necessary to address children's specific psychological needs, for example. Most of the time, a lack of resources was invoked as the main barrier:

“We would need to dedicate more time and more personnel to these teenagers. Unfortunately most CPIAs don't have the possibility to do so. Despite us doing our best to provide them with opportunities, the truth is that we don't have much to offer at the moment. We would need more teachers, and not only teachers, but an extended multi-disciplinary team of professionals”.

—Teacher, CPIA (Turin)

A major concern that emerged during interviews is the fact that CPIAs are unable to offer a significant number of weekly class hours, as they are initially designed for workers taking classes in the evening.

“School time should be more significant for these unaccompanied minors, especially those who have just arrived and are not yet enrolled in a professional training course because they first need to learn the language and pass the lower secondary examination. But CPIAs cannot offer that, they are set up to provide up to six-eight weekly hours. Here, we manage to offer 10 hours – i.e. two hours per day – to newly arrived unaccompanied minors but this is far from being equivalent to ordinary schooling”.

—Teacher, CPIA (Turin)

On this matter, a representative of local educational authorities (Milan) expressed the following concern:

“This structural limitation de facto excludes unaccompanied minors from a getting a ‘real’ education. Their whole day is almost empty and evening courses are not fit for them. The whole situation is demotivating”.

Indeed, many interviewed teachers and education support personnel in CPIAs also underlined that adult education is undergoing an important transformation process. Certain provisions of the recent reform that transformed CTPs into CPIAs<sup>58</sup> in 2015-2016 still need to be worked out (e.g. the coordination with evening upper-secondary schools, practical arrangements with hosting schools in order to offer classes in the morning, etc.) and once implemented, could impact positively on the education of unaccompanied minors.

## Opening doors to the Italian society

*“Education isn’t only about obtaining academic results but, above all, it is about getting a chance to integrate into the host society. It means that if we are not able to integrate these young people into an ‘ordinary’ environment, we are failing”.*

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Catania)

This quote highlights another major area of concern: the “ghettoisation” of unaccompanied minors in CPIAs, due to the increasingly low attendance of Italian students<sup>59</sup>.

“The main limitation of the CPIA is the fact that unaccompanied minors always stay together, without having any contact with their Italian peers. From this point of view, ordinary schools are more formative, they open doors to the host society”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Milan)

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58 Presidential Decree 263/12 (29 October 2012)

59 Attendance of Italian students may differ from place to place, depending on the levels of unemployment and early school dropout.

Several interviewees mentioned that this issue should be carefully considered and monitored by educational authorities at local and national levels<sup>60</sup>, in order to identify good practices in terms of creating bridges between “regular” schools and CPIAs:

“I’m not saying that unaccompanied minors should be enrolled in upper-secondary schools [when they are not qualified for it], but most of them could easily access ordinary secondary schools in the frame of specific projects and activities, at least for the sake of peer contact”.

—Local Educational Authority (USR) representative (Milan)

## The importance of education support personnel and teachers

All education institutions enrolling asylum-seeking, unaccompanied, or newly arrived children in general highlighted the decisive impact of a sufficient, competent, and diversified workforce as outlined in the following paragraphs, to ensure a successful integration process for these children in the host education system.

### The crucial role of administrative staff

Administrative support staff are at the frontline of the enrolment process of asylum-seeking and refugee children, often representing the first point of contact with the school. Interviewees agree on the importance of training these staff members on how to deal with these children and families.

“The administrative staff is often the ‘face of the school’. They should be trained concerning the rights, the duties, the legal framework but also in terms of interpersonal and intercultural skills”.

—Expert in intercultural education

Above all, school principals’ training is often cited as vital, considering that they lead and manage all aspects related to refugees’ integration in school, from building a competent workforce to identifying needs and related opportunities.

“The principal must take the lead on these aspects and he/she must be trained to do so. It is important that there is an institutional structured approach, not relying on a single teacher’s goodwill”.

—Social worker responsible for migrant education and training, social cooperative (Naples)

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60 Interviewees stressed that this aspect should be considered in light of the Italian approach to migrant students’ education in which inclusion is fundamental. See for example Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (2007), *La via italiana per la scuola interculturale e l’integrazione degli alunni stranieri*. Available here: [http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/cec0709-e9dc-4387-a922-eb5e63c5bab5/documento\\_di\\_indirizzo.pdf](http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/cec0709-e9dc-4387-a922-eb5e63c5bab5/documento_di_indirizzo.pdf) (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

To date, most schools receiving refugee children are forced to apply for external funding to develop integration project-based activities for these students. Administrative staff often play an important role in this regard as they oversee project administration and reporting but, very often, there is no time or resources to help schools develop this aspect of their work appropriately.

“Schools like ours should have a reinforced administrative team. If we consider the ordinary management of the school and the whole project development, implementation and reporting, our administrative staffing is inadequate”.

—School principal, Primary school (Palermo)

## **The presence of external professional experts**

Most of the interviewees deplored the absence of specialised professional figures within schools, particularly around linguistic and cultural mediation. Most of the time, accommodation structures for asylum-seeking and unaccompanied minors have mediators at their disposal but this is not considered a sustainable solution, given the need for linguistic and cultural mediation within the school. Some respondents reported that a few municipalities have developed specific initiatives in that area but it was generally insufficient or short term.

The presence of a linguistic and cultural mediator is deemed crucial during the period immediately following the enrolment of the child, to help him/her become familiar with the new environment, its rules and the people with whom he/she will interact. The mediator could also liaise with teachers and provide background information concerning the newly enrolled child (his/her story, journey, family circumstances, etc.):

“Our experience shows that during the integration process [in the school], the presence of a cultural mediator is fundamental, especially to help mediate nonverbal communication and cultural aspects”.

—Social worker, Accommodation centre for unaccompanied minors (Trapani)

The mediator is also crucial in terms of communicating with families concerning the integration and evolution of the child throughout the year as they often need more time than children to learn the host country's language.

“For non-technical information, we need to communicate directly with the parents without the mediation of the child!”

—Teacher, Primary school (Palermo)

Finally, the importance of providing specialised psychological support to these children through professional psychologists' intervention was highlighted, especially in relation to unaccompanied minors.

“Most of them have a very difficult background; they’re here alone without their family, far away from their country. They have a hard time integrating which is just normal considering their young age. We try to provide them with as much psychological support as we can because it happens that one of us might be qualified to do so but this is not part of what the school is expected to offer them”.

—Teacher, CPIA (Naples)

## Teaching refugees and asylum seekers

The difficulty of educational institutions in effectively integrating asylum-seeking children and unaccompanied minors has also often been linked to the lack of appropriate training for teachers.

First, schools require language teachers who are specialised in teaching Italian as a second language or teaching illiterate students, considering that many unaccompanied minors do not have any educational background in their home country. In this regard, the recent reform “*La Buona Scuola*” (Law 107/2015) has led to substantial progress by recognising academic qualifications to teach Italian as a second language in teacher recruitment processes<sup>61</sup>. Regrettably, none of the 500 candidates who qualified in 2016 to teach Italian to foreigners have been assigned any school so far<sup>62</sup>.

Teaching refugee children requires specific skills regardless of the taught discipline. In addition to Italian language teachers with subject-specific qualifications, schools also need well-prepared teachers in all disciplines who are sensitised to the specificity of learning a second language in the context of migration and trained to adapt their teaching practice to multicultural contexts (e.g. teaching the technical lexicon and using nonverbal communication supports), which is rarely the case.

“To teach foreign students, you need a specialisation. We [teachers] had to adapt, look for resources and advice on the internet”.

—Teacher, Lower-secondary school (Catania)

Interviewees also highlighted the need for training on how to evaluate newly arrived students when they do not speak the local language as key to a successful integration process in school.

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61 *Classe di concorso A23*

62 Concorso A23 (Lingua italiana per discendenti di lingua straniera), Anief: Miur dimentica istituire posti in organico diritto, vincitori senza cattedre (2016, September 28). *Orizzontescuola*. Retrieved from <http://www.orizzontescuola.it/concorso-a23-lingua-italiana-per-discenti-di-lingua-straniera-anief-miur-dimentica-istituire-posti-in-organico-diritto-vincitori-senza-cattedre/> (Accessed on 18 January 2017)

“Another aspect that is missing is everything related to assessing the student’s competences when he/she arrives. The risk is to limit it to deficits and gaps, without valuing existing competences: talents, know-how, linguistic skills, etc”.

—Expert in intercultural education

The recently adopted “National Teacher Training Plan 2016-2019” (*Piano per la formazione dei docenti 2016-2019*)<sup>63</sup> made it compulsory for each school to develop an in-service training plan for its personnel. However, several interviewees said the Plan does not include any specific incentive to focus such training on intercultural education or teaching Italian as a second language.

“This kind of [intercultural] training should be widespread, not delegated to a single teacher in charge of integration. Teaching is increasingly becoming an intercultural job”.

—Expert in intercultural education

In terms of distributing the existing specialised/trained staff to the institutions with the greatest needs, the massive recruitment of precarious teaching staff as tenured teachers following the above-mentioned reform, allowed schools “in need” to benefit from a reinforced staffing (“*organico dell'autonomia*”). But many interviewees qualified this a missed opportunity, because additional staff were randomly assigned, with little consideration to their qualifications and experiences or the specific needs of the school.

“Considering our situation, we had requested a ‘reinforcement’ (*potenziamento*) of the teaching staff with someone specialised in teaching illiterate students or at least an Italian teacher but we only got an additional teacher in physical education...”

—Teacher, Lower secondary school (Catania)

## Financial resourcing

The difficult economic conditions in which schools operate was often cited as a major impediment to ensuring access to quality education for all children. Schools receiving refugee children need extra support to set up appropriate learning conditions and develop ad hoc integration paths.

### Extra linguistic support

The Italian “model” does not support the idea of separate paths for migrant children (e.g. to learn the language first), quite the contrary. Inclusion of all students in regular schools from the outset has always been a fundamental feature of the Italian education system, regardless of students’ special needs and (dis)abilities. Nevertheless, as far as newly arrived children are concerned, the Italian legal framework provides for organising extra linguistic support in small

groups at school level<sup>64</sup> and establishing individualised educational plans and objectives (*Piani Didattici Personalizzati*) for students with special needs due to “socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural disadvantage<sup>65</sup>”, which “applies in particular - but not only - to newly arrived students aged over 16 years and coming from non-Latin countries”<sup>66</sup>.

In terms of initial linguistic support, the Ministry of Education considers that an effective intervention consists of eight to 10 hours weekly of Italian as a second language over three to four months<sup>67</sup>. However, in all the schools visited during the field data collection, the lack of resources has prevented teachers from offering this number of extra hours to newly arrived children. All interventions ranged from two to five hours weekly with, in some cases, teachers working voluntarily in addition to their contractual hours.

“We [teachers] have organised a system to offer a few weekly extra hours of additional linguistic support but these hours are not paid”.

—Teacher, Lower secondary school (Catania)

## Class size

As previously mentioned, crowded classrooms may be invoked in some cases to refuse the enrolment of asylum-seeking or refugee students. Leaving aside illegitimate refusals, most interviewees recognised that this issue should not be neglected, urging local educational authorities (i.e. *Provveditorato*) to support schools in this regard, as small classes are essential to ensure a smooth and successful integration process.

“It’s true that, very often, upper secondary schools – especially vocational institutes – have very big classes with up to 30 students. Enrolling a newly arrived child in such a context does not allow for the individualised approach that these students need”.

—USR representative (Milan)

Huge class sizes can also determine the enrolment in a lower grade than the grade corresponding to the age of the child.

“Since we had crowded classes in the fifth grade, we had to temporarily enrol one refugee boy in the fourth grade. He will return to the right grade when he has acquired a basic language proficiency that will allow him to follow the course in such a big class”.

—School principal, primary school (Milan)

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64 Ministero dell’istruzione, dell’università e della ricerca (2007) “*La via italiana per la scuola interculturale e l’integrazione degli alunni stranieri*”.

65 Ministerial Directive “*Strumenti d’intervento per alunni con bisogni educativi speciali e organizzazione territoriale per l’inclusione scolastica*”, 27 December 2012.

66 Note MIUR Prot. 2563, 22 November 2013.

67 “*Linee guida per l’accoglienza e l’integrazione degli alunni stranieri*”, February 2014.

## Financing refugees' education

For most surveyed schools, the so-called “funds for risk areas<sup>68</sup>” were the only structured annual funding channel dedicated to organising integration activities for refugee children. They all underlined that the amounts made available through this mechanism are too low. As of 2015, the Ministry has dedicated €1 million annually through a call for projects, aiming to support schools organising extra linguistic support for newly arrived children and integration activities for unaccompanied minors. Schools stressed that such funding was not covering existing needs.

However, most schools receiving refugee children and unaccompanied minors have to apply for external project-based funding, a situation deplored by many interviewees in terms of its unsustainability.

“The main issue for our school is the discontinuity of funding. We know that, every year, we face integration issues but we don't have access to a long-term funding source. This means we spend a lot of time and energy looking for funding that is always short-term”.

—School principal, Primary school (Palermo)

Many interviewees also underlined the fact that schools do not have the resources to engage in project-based activities.

“We participate in calls for projects but schools are not equipped to do so. You have to do it out of working hours, taking full responsibility for it, even without technical support to design and manage the project. And you're not even sure of getting the funding - and if you get it once, you might not get it the following year, although we're talking about structural needs for our school”.

—Teacher, CPIA (Turin)

Finally, interviewees highlighted the need for more flexibility that would allow schools to respond effectively to a continuously changing landscape due to fluctuating migration flows.

“Schools should be given the capacity to develop flexible initiatives. For instance, if we hadn't applied last year for extra funding - which is the situation in many schools - how could we deal today with these newly arrived children that we are required to enrol?”

—Teacher, primary school (Palermo)

These various elements make the case for developing substantial, long-term, predictable, and flexible funding channels dedicated to refugees' and unaccompanied minors' education. As outlined in the previous section, it is also an argument for allocating resources to offer staff training in this area and extra working hours to be dedicated to project application and management.

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<sup>68</sup> For more information, visit [http://www.istruzione.it/dg\\_studente/normativa\\_aree\\_rischio.shtml#.WIs2IRvhBPY](http://www.istruzione.it/dg_studente/normativa_aree_rischio.shtml#.WIs2IRvhBPY) (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

## III. Trade union actions

Italian education trade unions have been particularly active in the establishment of the so-called funds for schools located in “areas at risk” mentioned above, that include areas with high rates of immigration. Every year, these funds are subject to collective bargaining both at national and regional levels, to decide the amount available for each region and on which criteria schools can apply. Other public funding sources (e.g. Law 440/1997<sup>69</sup>) are negotiated with union representatives at school level.

Most recently, the education union UIL Scuola, has developed several initiatives to promote the right to education for migrant children.

In collaboration with the union confederation, *Unione Italiana del Lavoro* (UIL), and its patronato, ITAL-UIL<sup>70</sup>, UIL Scuola has published a brochure in several languages (Italian, English, Spanish, Romanian, Arabic, and Chinese) to inform newcomer parents about children’s right to be enrolled in school and to explain the administrative procedures (documents to be provided, etc.).

In addition, a series of initiatives have been carried out at local level. In Rovigo, the union has sensitised local authorities about the importance of cultural and linguistic mediators. In Sicily, in collaboration with its professional training institute, IRASE (*Istituto per la Ricerca Accademica, Sociale ed Educativa*), the union is developing three capacity building projects comprising training and tutoring activities for teachers and education support personnel as well as workshops for migrant and refugee children.

In Palermo, the *Direzione Didattica Edmond De Amicis* (pre-primary and primary school), bringing together students from 15 different nationalities, aims to build a “welcome culture” in the school. In particular, the project will develop a systematised procedure to welcome migrant students upon arrival. It will organise a 30-hour training programme, delivered with the support of a linguistic-cultural mediator, to a specific team of 10 “front-office” administrative staff and teachers (“welcome commission”). Beneficiaries of the training will acquire linguistic and relational competences: basic languages skills, development of multilingual administrative forms, intercultural communication, etc. The project will also include tutoring with a team of external professionals (a cultural mediator, an educator and a psychologist), to support teachers’ communications with the family and, in particular, the development of appropriate individualised educational plans when necessary. Teachers will also benefit from in-service training activities related to intercultural education. Finally, the school will activate a series of workshops for the students, in order to provide linguistic support to newly arrived students and promote cultural exchanges and diversity.

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69 “Istituzione del Fondo per l’arricchimento e l’ampliamento dell’offerta formativa e per gli interventi perequativi”, Legge 18 dicembre 1997, n. 440.

70 In Italy, a Patronato is an institute emanating from a trade union or an employer organisation, that provides assistance to and safeguards the individual rights of all citizens present on the national territory.

In Salemi, the *Istituto Comprensivo Statale G. Garibaldi* – G. Paolo II (pre-primary, primary and lower-secondary school) is carrying out similar training activities in intercultural education for teaching staff.

Students will also be offered artistic workshops (60 hours in total) focusing on body language through mime, music, theatre, and photography as well as a visit to a theatre in Palermo. A video will be produced to disseminate the outcomes of the project and a final performance with all participating students will be organised.

In Trapani, the CPIA will develop training activities for teachers and organise introductory professional training workshops in electricity and cooking for migrant students completing the first cycle (lower secondary certificate). Such initiatives, by building bridges with upper-secondary State institutes, will create an incentive for students who are close to finishing the lower secondary level to continue their education at upper-secondary level. In these workshops, participants will be given a theoretical and practical introduction to each programme, become familiar with the new structure, and interact with teachers and students.

The training modules and materials developed in these three projects will be made available on the IRASE online learning platform<sup>71</sup> and a national seminar will be organised to present the outcomes of the projects and disseminate good practices concerning refugees' education.

The three main Italian union confederations - UIL, *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori* (CISL) and *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL) - are also developing broader activities in the field of international migration. It is worth noting that, in 2016, on World Refugee Day, the three unions issued a joint statement on unaccompanied minors<sup>72</sup>, urging European and Italian authorities to establish "humanitarian corridors" and offer these minors protection and integration opportunities.

UIL has also developed a series of initiatives – mainly humanitarian microprojects - to promote the rights and improve the living conditions of refugee families and children in Greece following the 2015 emergency crisis<sup>73</sup>. In 2017, it also organised an international meeting in Lampedusa, bringing together religious and union leaders from Europe and the Mediterranean region, to open a regional multidimensional dialogue to promote peace and work opportunities in both sending and receiving countries<sup>74</sup>.

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71 <http://online.irasenazionale.it/course/index.php> (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

72 Cgil Cisl Uil: dare un futuro ai minori non accompagnati (2016, June 20). Retrieved from [http://www.uil.it/NewsSX.asp?ID\\_News=6865&Provenienza=1](http://www.uil.it/NewsSX.asp?ID_News=6865&Provenienza=1) (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

73 See [http://www.uil.it/rapporti\\_ong/default.asp](http://www.uil.it/rapporti_ong/default.asp) (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

74 Per un Mare di Pace e di Lavoro (2017, January 20). Retrieved from [http://www.uil.it/NewsSX.asp?ID\\_NEWS=798&Provenienza=2](http://www.uil.it/NewsSX.asp?ID_NEWS=798&Provenienza=2) (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

# Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, the Italian legal framework provides a high level of protection for asylum-seeking and unaccompanied minors and a noticeably inclusive approach concerning the integration of these children into the education system. That said, recent developments of the immigration legal framework concerning unaccompanied minors and its impact on the fulfilment of their rights, and in particular the right to education, should be closely monitored. The phenomenon of migrant children going underground also requires special attention and preventive work from all concerned institutions, including schools, considering the privileged relationship that education personnel have with these young people. Both aspects require stronger cross-sectoral collaboration and information-sharing mechanisms between national and local authorities.

The analysis of the field research data highlights the many challenges facing the Italian education system in fulfilling the right to education of refugee and unaccompanied minors and offering them quality education opportunities. While many of the possible solutions call for more investment in terms of financial and human resources - both quantitatively and qualitatively - it is also obvious from the collected empirical evidence that the excellent practices developed by schools, teachers, and other education personnel on the ground as well as the expertise available among concerned stakeholders, could be better tapped to develop a more effective and coordinated approach to refugees' education. In this regard, the increasing awareness and proactivity of the education authorities recently and the commitment to tackle these issues by education unions and their members have potential to allow refugee and unaccompanied minors to realise their full potential through education and to improve the quality of the Italian education system for all children.

The following list of recommendations aims to contribute to this process, by identifying the priority interventions that are required to tackle the issues identified in this research.

## **Concerning the immigration legal framework and its impact on the fulfilment of the right to education:**

- Develop cross-sectoral consultation and coordination panels at national (including the education ministry, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) and local levels (including regional and provincial education offices, regional authorities in charge of education, municipalities, prefectures and local competent judicial authorities) to identify effective monitoring mechanisms and when relevant, coordinated action, concerning the fulfilment of the right to education of asylum-seeking/refugee children and unaccompanied minors
- Ensure the immediate transfer of identified minors from “hotspots” to dedicated accommodation structures and the transfer from short-term accommodation structures to long-term accommodation structures within the term provided by the law

- Define appropriate standards to guarantee the right to education in short-term accommodation structures hosting unaccompanied minors and monitor systematically the fulfilment of the right to education in all accommodation structures hosting foreign minors
- Ensure the timely appointment of a legal guardian for unaccompanied minors
- Promote the rapid issue of the “minor” residence permit, including before the appointment of the legal guardian
- Guarantee the enrolment in education of all unaccompanied minors and asylum-seeking children, even in the absence of identification documents or residence permits

#### **Concerning “disappearing minors”:**

- Accelerate family reunification procedures for unaccompanied minors whose relatives reside in another European State, as provided for in the Dublin Regulation III
- Automatically inform unaccompanied minors upon arrival in Italy about all available legal avenues to continue their journey to another European State
- Develop awareness-raising initiatives aimed at unaccompanied minors, including in educational settings, concerning the risks associated with going underground to pursue their journey

#### **Concerning the development of a systematic and coordinated approach to the education of refugee and unaccompanied minors:**

- Ensure the dissemination and monitor the implementation of the existing regulation and guidelines for the enrolment and integration of foreign pupils in education
- Set up a consultation process with relevant experts and stakeholders to develop specific guidelines concerning the enrolment and integration of refugee and unaccompanied minors in education
- In collaboration with all relevant authorities, develop a systematic mechanism of data collection and monitoring concerning the enrolment of refugee and unaccompanied minors in education, covering all levels of education (incl. pre-primary, vocational, tertiary, and adult education) as well as State and non-State sectors
- Based on the above-mentioned monitoring process, conduct a systematic mapping of local areas - and related education institutions - presenting structural needs for support, based on the annual enrolment of refugee and unaccompanied minors

- Develop a systematic process to identify, disseminate – and, when relevant, systematise - good practices and initiatives developed by schools and education institutions in all sectors concerning the integration of refugee and unaccompanied minors

**Concerning the barriers facing refugee and unaccompanied minors in accessing education for specific sectors:**

- Ensure access to State pre-primary education institutions for refugee and asylum-seeking children
- In collaboration with relevant local authorities, guarantee access to municipal pre-primary education institutions and related services (including school meals, transport)
- In collaboration with relevant regional authorities, guarantee access to Regional Vocational Education and Training for all unaccompanied minors and asylum-seeking children in the absence of identification documents or residence permits
- Develop and share, with relevant local education authorities, common standards and procedures for the recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas needed to access upper levels of education
- Evaluate nationally the enrolment of unaccompanied minors in CPIAs with a view to identifying sector-specific issues, possible solutions, and local good practices

**Concerning the human resourcing of the education of refugee and unaccompanied minors and in collaboration with trade unions:**

- Conduct a training needs assessment of teachers and administrative staff in schools enrolling refugee and unaccompanied minors and develop (i) a national initial and in-service training plan for all education personnel and (ii) incentives for related schools to include such aspects in their own training plan
- Assign newly recruited teachers with academic qualifications to teach Italian as a second language to schools in greatest need of such skills
- Improve the allocation of reinforced staffing (“*organico dell'autonomia*”) to better match education institutions’ needs and staff qualifications and competences

**Concerning the financial resourcing of the education of refugee and unaccompanied minors:**

- Develop substantial, long-term, predictable and flexible funding channels for schools and education institutions enrolling refugee and unaccompanied minors, giving due consideration to the unpredictability of arrivals throughout the school year, the existence of overburdened geographic areas/education institutions presenting structural needs and the need for allowing individual institutions to develop tailor-made interventions concerning a wide range of aspects (including linguistic support, psychological support, cultural mediation, specialised teaching staff, extra working hours, class size)
- Create scholarship programmes and comprehensive support mechanisms to allow refugee and unaccompanied minors to continue their education at upper-secondary and tertiary levels once they have reached the legal age of majority

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