



Verona, December 4 – 5 2008

“Promoting integration of marginalized children and youth through social inclusion: schooling, vocational training and participation”.

Conference

Summary Strategic Report

Introduction

Migration flows and the EU enlargement are posing new challenges to EU member states. The phenomenon of street children in the European Union is closely linked to that of the challenges and opportunities in the educational systems posed by migration and mobility: in many cases, children are forced to live in the streets due to failed migration projects and runaways from the institutional care system. A phenomenon which is strictly linked to street children is the migration of unaccompanied minors, which is on the rise EU-wide. Unaccompanied children most frequently reach the destination countries with the objective of working and contributing to the income of their families in the origin countries. The school obligation in the destination countries is most often in conflict with the migration projects of these minors and creates runaways from the care centres. This is often the reason that these children end up living on the streets.

In this context, the European Federation for Street Children (EFSC) and Istituto Don Calabria, Verona have organised a two day conference on the 4 – 5th of December in Verona titled, **“Promoting integration of marginalized children and youth through social inclusion: schooling, vocational training and participation”**. The conference aimed to induce an expert discussion on the different aspects of the integration of marginalized children with a migration background, focusing on the exchange of good practices, capacity building effects and methodology development. It explored in particular innovative and successful methods developed in the Southern European EU Member States, facing specific migration challenges, in order to promote the active inclusion and integration of these children and youth with strong exclusion problems.

The conference gathered high level representatives from the Italian national and local authorities, representatives and decision-makers from the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Child protection NGOs and welfare associations, local governments, child and youth authorities, social and street workers and child migration experts.

The conference was articulated along three thematic areas:

1. Intervention for street children in emergency situations;
2. From emergency aid to rehabilitation: giving marginalized children a perspective
3. Trans-European co-operation to protect marginalized children: alliance building between the public and private sector.

In particular, the experiences in these areas were analyzed as a practice-oriented contribution to the analysis of existing social and immigration policies at EU level.

The context

Reinhold Müller, EFSC Director, stressed the strong need to better synthesize the intervention methods carried out during the crucial emergency phases, such as saving street children from a dangerous situation, and the long-term sustainable re-integration of these children into society. The Social OMC and the peer reviews could have a crucial role in this. Motivation and love, feelings of which these children are often experiencing for the first time in their life, are substantial ingredients of any successful rehabilitation. But there is also a strong need of professional methods to translate these values into concretely successful actions towards the young people concerned.

Reinhold Müller and Salvatore Parata, International Federation of Terre des Hommes, stressed the increasingly European dimension of the street children and unaccompanied minors phenomenon, linked to the freedom of movement within the EU territory and to the very specific case of Bulgaria and Romania, which are at the same time EU Member States and origin countries of a significant rate of unaccompanied minors present in Western Europe.

Reinhold Müller stressed that, while the Social OMC increasingly prioritises child poverty, answering to the need for a joint European effort is required for tackling this phenomenon. Legislative measures produced at EU level still prioritise the fight against illegal migration over child protection, while normal intervention methods clearly do not address this growing phenomenon adequately; such as in the current case of the recently passed Return Directive (July 2008), which allows for children to be detained without having committed any crime except staying in the country without entitlement.

Alessandro Padovani, Vice-Director of Istituto Don Calabria, stressed the fundamental role of the juvenile justice system in tackling the special needs of street children and unaccompanied minors, whose life conditions often lead them away from suitable development conditions for adolescents. Jumana Haj-Ahmad from the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre stressed the important role of municipalities in child protection.

1. Emergency relief for street children in Emergency Situations

On the issue of relief for street children in emergency situations, Laura Calvanelli, of Caritas Firenze, highlighted the importance of local actors' networks ability to accompany the children from the emergency situations through the whole process of integration. She also very much stressed the lack of data on minors and in particular on extreme social exclusion of children.

Giuseppe Mattina, from Istituto Don Calabria Palermo, illustrated in particular the action of Don Calabria Palermo in the social inclusion of Roma children, which is carried out through an educational effort that begins in the camps, by listening to the children's concerns and facilitating communication through cultural mediators of Roma origin. Starting with children, social workers reach the families and the wider community and in some cases carry out pre-scholarisation efforts in the community. The "infancy school" is then a first step towards the children's integration in the school system; furthermore, cultural mediators accompany these children in their first years in formal schools. A joint effort between the community and actors involved in the development of didactic strategies – with the relevant incentives for families to take active part and ownership of the process – is again a crucial success and sustainability factor of the intervention.

Erwan Le Mener from SamuSocial stressed the effectiveness of a joint action of different disciplinary profiles (medical, psychological, social) in a mobile unit, with the aim of reaching "those who do not ask for anything anymore" as a useful method for intervening in emergencies, such is the case of SamuSocial, which in addition to emergency intervention provides university curriculum that integrates the medical, psychological, and social

disciplines. Accordingly, the intervention methodology and the interdisciplinary training of the operators is based on a synthesis between the outreach work and a thorough work analysis.

2. From emergency relief to longer-term integration

Regarding ways of bridging from emergency relief to longer-term integration for children of migrant origin and unaccompanied children, ethno-psychiatry and the cross-border collaboration of social workers between countries of origin and of destination, were identified by several speakers as a way to overcome the resistance that marginalised children usually pose to social workers in telling their stories. In this way, better links can be established that are crucial to defining the specific needs of the child and tracking his/her family, which the best re-integration strategy can then be identified for the child.

The participants agreed in stressing that the best interests of the child and his/her needs must always be at the centre of the integration method.

This perspective is very much present in the Mobile Youth Work approach to social reintegration of children and their families, which was presented by Prof. Specht of ISMO. Centred on the child and his/her living environment, this approach is articulated into four fields: individual aid, street work, group work and community work in an holistic approach; considering the role of each of these different fields in the child's socialisation and re-integration in a perspective of ensuring the sustainability of their rehabilitation.

The field visit to the multi-functional centre "Don Calabria" was a concrete example of how a tailored rehabilitation plan for every single child approaching the care institute can be brought to work on a large scale, as well as how children with different inclusion needs can be brought together.

One of the key elements of the sustainability of the integration methodologies, according to most participants and speakers, is this elaboration of an individualised plan which matches the services offered to the specific needs of the child. Individualised plans must be coupled by support measures in the long term, be it in the destination country or in the case of the child being returned to the origin country. While being centred on the child, rehabilitation measures should not be limited to the individual but be combined with group and community work, so as to improve the social capital endowment and promote a more sustainable integration.

Bruno Pio and Isabel Porto, of Instituto de Apoio à Criança, presented the Street Project which has been carried out since 1988 with runaway children. An individualised approach to care, aiming at developing motivation and self esteem in children, is at the core of the action of IAC. On the other hand, inter-institutional partnership is sought after as a way of providing answers to the different social and emotional needs of children. The action is articulated in providing opportunities for children to acquire skills in the personal, psycho-social, theoretical, and practical-professional areas.

Laura Lagi, of Save the Children Italy, on the base of the experience of the "Orizzonti a Colori" project carried out in Rome (2005-2008), showed in particular the importance of social and cultural mediation, ethno-psychologic guidance, peer education and legal advice, in providing the foreign children involved in criminal proceedings with activities and opportunities to reintegrate into the Italian society.

A crucial element of the long-term rehabilitation of the child is education. The participants discussed the complex issue of promoting education as a way to combat the worst forms of child labour, stressing that education should be meant, in a child-centred approach, to accompany the building of the child's identity and to learning to participate in societal relationships. In this sense, it was suggested that some forms of work that have an educational value and that is not exploitative can be considered relevant for the development of the child, as well

as other non-traditional education forms. Still, minimum standards, which take into due account the cultural specificities of different countries, need to be set.

Those present also agreed that a prevention strategy, which would address families both through income support and positive parenting programmes, is not only more sustainable but can also be considered to be cheaper than imprisonment and the costs of police intervention. Coherently, NGO representatives claimed that their projects have to be seen as social investments which are in the long term more profitable and less costly than the penal system.

3. Trans-european cooperation to protect marginalised children

The key policy challenge for the child care system is to successfully solve the conflict between the economic expectations of migrating children and their right to have a childhood, their right to play and have an education. School drop-outs are over-exposed to the risk of entering criminal circles and activities such as drug selling, prostitution, trafficking, etc. The presentation of Mariana Pisarska aimed at showing the stories of some protagonists of this phenomenon, from the point of view of the origin countries, in order to better understand the root causes of migration of unaccompanied minors in Europe.

From the point of view of the trans-national projects involving countries of origin and destination, Ms. Serenella Pesarin, General Director for the Implementation of the Provisions at the Italian Ministry of Justice, presented an Agreement between Italy and Romania aiming at identifying and facilitating the access of unaccompanied minors to social services. She stressed the problematic issue of data collection and different definitions for unaccompanied minors among different countries and called for the establishment of a Juvenile Justice Committee at the EU level to be the leading agency for the resolution of definitional divergences and data collection, promoting a common approach to juvenile justice and child protection.

Conclusions

In the conclusions of Reinhold Müller, the following emerged as common success factors of social intervention strategies for strongly marginalized children, in particular those in the streets:

1. A joint **public-private partnership in order to ensure maximum benefits from the resources of both areas in terms of methodology, networking and funding;**
2. **Round tables, inter-institutional alliances and platforms of all actors involved**, ranging from the public authorities, to the police, to NGOs to volunteers, encouraging coherence between the local and national level in order to ensure a multi-disciplinary and well coordinated approach of all relevant actors;
3. A thorough **analysis on the social context situation** of the children, in order to define the appropriate intervention method based on the specific needs of children case by case;
4. The **reinforcement of the personal identity and self esteem** of high risk children who are all more or less suffering from a strong inferiority complex. This can be achieved through forms of cultural mediation and ethno-psychiatric support, through the involvement of the families in the inclusion process and in particular, through the involvement of the children in games or playing in projects which develop self-initiative, responsibility and stimulate success. This must always start based on an individualised program of the children's needs;
5. **Always put the child's best interests at the core** of the action. The children must "feel well" and like the work done for and with them;
6. Combine individualised intervention with **group work**, which is often a socialisation channel that substitutes the family for street children;

7. **Community work** for the development of the social capital necessary for the social reintegration of street children; Taking into account and involving the key personalities, of the previous socialisation processes, whom the children trust;
8. An **educational and training effort** of the whole community, not necessarily through formal education means, but aiming at building the child's personal identity.

The discussion furthermore highlighted important issues:

- Public authorities in their budget decisions should take into account that prevention of extreme social exclusion phenomena is cheaper than police and prison, and should therefore see the financing of social inclusion projects of NGOs as an investment and a partnership with the private sector. As Ms. Pesarin put it, "investing in children is to win two times".
- Investing in families remains one of the greatest resources, not only of poor societies but all societies. Social work that fully considers the resources of families is an important tool in developing solidarity in the communities.
- The mutual exchange of social workers between the country of origin and of destination of migrant children or unaccompanied minors has brought very good results in terms of reaching the children and overcoming cultural resistances to their social inclusion.
- The participants discussed the complex issue of access to education, in a child-centred approach, as an alternative to child labour, stressing that education should be meant to accompany the building of the child's identity and to learning to participate in societal relationships. In this sense, some forms of work with an educational value and which is not exploitative can be considered as important for the development of the child in the same way as more traditional educational systems, such as the school. Still, minimum standards need to be set which respect the different cultural specificities of the countries, especially if this regards developing countries.
- Finally, the growing issue of marginalised children and children on the run, for whom the main cause of social exclusion is not poverty and whom, on the contrary, come from relatively wealthy families, was raised. This is a sign of a cultural crisis and should be treated with appropriate methods.

EFSC recommendations

- According all participants and to studies conducted in Italy (Parsec 2008), **second chance street education** has proven as an effective response to the conflicting interests of unaccompanied children and care centres, in that it combines a dimension of play, sport and trust-building with the operators, with education. This method proves more effective in attracting children and bringing them back to their condition of children, to the point of changing the migration project of the children involved and including education in it. It should be highlighted that second chance education should be fully integrated in the formal educational system.
- **Individualised guidance, peer education and holistic outreach work** are crucial elements in reaching children who experience extreme social exclusion and whose social situation hinders their access to social services.
- **Social and cultural mediation, intercultural education** and the presence of cultural mediators in **interdisciplinary street teams** are crucial for both saving children from the streets and for their social reintegration. The exchange of street workers from the country of destination with professionals from the countries of origin can improve the capacity of the care system to overcome cultural resistances and improve the effectiveness of the educational programme provided to unaccompanied children, as in the mentioned report of Terre des Hommes.

- Finally, **vocational training** should be considered as an educational method suitable for older children and youth, which facilitates integration in the job market and develops the “life skills” that are crucial in education, while at the same time coming closer to the concrete needs and plans of these children.
- **European Programmes** could contribute to responding to the challenges posed to the educational system, on the one hand, by financing the non-formal educational activities of civil society organisations; and on the other hand, as part of the existing exchange programmes, the Lifelong Learning Programme could support good practice based training programmes in street education. In particular, it could institutionalise the trans-national exchange of street workers between Member States. Ideally these exchanges should be extended to third countries which are often origin countries of the migration of unaccompanied minors.
- The **OMC in Education and Training** could contribute through setting common principles in the field of social inclusion through education, such as “ensuring that access to school is actually guaranteed to all children in school age, including trafficked children, unaccompanied minors and street children by 2015”. This implies addressing the social inclusion of those groups at risk as an explicit part of the OMC in Education and Training and thereby improving the coordination with the **OMC on Social Protection and Social Inclusion**. For the sake of exchanging good practices, peer reviews could be devoted to successful experiences of non-formal education in the integration of unaccompanied minors and should focus on how to mainstream these positive practices into the wider school system.
- The related benchmarks and indicators would have to be investigated and developed. To achieve this goal, a necessary first step would be to imply stronger efforts at national levels for the coordination and **comparability of definitions and data collection** on migrant children, unaccompanied minors, and street children across the EU. As part of setting indicators and benchmarks, due attention must be paid to the controversial point of ethnic reporting; while improving the understanding of the educational attainment gap affecting migrant children, it should not lead to criminalisation of specific ethnic and national groups nor strengthening existing prejudices or stereotypes.
- The **revision of Directive 77/486/EEC**, whose implementation has so far been patchy, partially due to its very general character, could be a powerful instrument to improve the legal protection for street children from a migrant background and street children (in general). The original Directive should be kept as a common basis and adapted to the upcoming policy challenges, with a view to set a common EU-wide approach to the education of migrant children, not limited to migrants originating from EU Member States, but also extending to third party country nationals and undocumented migrants. This is a necessary first step to ensuring that the right to education is respected for every human being independently from his/her ethnic or national belonging. In particular, the Directive does not currently apply to unaccompanied minors and should thus cover this gap, considering in particular the rising dimension of this phenomenon.



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